

Divestiture of 6 North Dakota Limited-interest National Wildlife Refuges (NWR)

Proposed in the 39 Limited-Interest Refuges Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP)

What are Limited-interest Refuges?

These 39 refuges, which have an overriding purpose for migratory birds, began in the 1930s as flowage and/or refuge easements signed by the state of North Dakota and dozens of landowners. Most agreements were perpetual and today 47,296 easement acres remain inside an approved acquisition boundary of 54,140 acres. After 70 years, 99% of the acres within the approved boundaries remain in private ownership.

As part of the CCP process, the planning team examined the easement agreements and dozens of historical records. The team concluded that the government intended to regulate:

- all hunting and trapping;
- water level management of impoundments;
- any activities that occur on the impoundments or main body of water to minimize or eliminate impacts on migratory birds and other wetland-dependent wildlife.

The government did not intend to regulate the following uses:

- any development or other activities (other than hunting) that occur on the uplands;
- naturally occurring wetlands;
- public access.



Cottonwood Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

Divestiture Proposals

Part of the CCP process was determining which of these refuges should be retained in the National Wildlife Refuge System. A team of managers, planners, and biologists developed a list of criteria used to evaluate each refuge for retention, as follows:

- The ability to achieve one or more of the NWR System goals as stated in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act.
- The ability to achieve the refuge purpose.
- Biodiversity status.
- Other associated conservation lands.
- Current state or other federal management of these areas.

Refuges Proposed for Divestiture

None of the following refuges has any potential to fully function as national wildlife refuges as prescribed in the Improvement Act:

Bone Hill (LaMoure Co.),
Camp Lake (McLean Co.),
Cottonwood Lake (McHenry Co.),
Lake Patricia (Morton Co.),
School Section Lake (Rolette Co.), and Sheyenne Lake (Sheridan Co.) NWRs.

Reasons for divestiture:

- Seventy years of extensive loss of biodiversity due to development for commercial and private uses such as home sites, farming, grazing, and a fertilizer plant.
- The state of North Dakota revoked their easements and are managing two of these refuges as wildlife management areas (WMA).
- The Bureau of Reclamation acquired Sheyenne NWR—managed by the state as a WMA since the 1980s.



Camp Lake NWR—149 cabins surround the lake

The Service will continue to work closely with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and others to ensure that the six refuges proposed for divestiture are reverted to the proper management entity.

The Future of the Remaining 33 Limited-interest Refuges

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would continue management of the remaining 33 limited-interest refuges. The Service would expand efforts to work with *willing* landowners to find opportunities for added habitat protection and visitor services programs. The Service would rehabilitate and manage refuge impoundments to support migratory birds, particularly waterfowl.

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