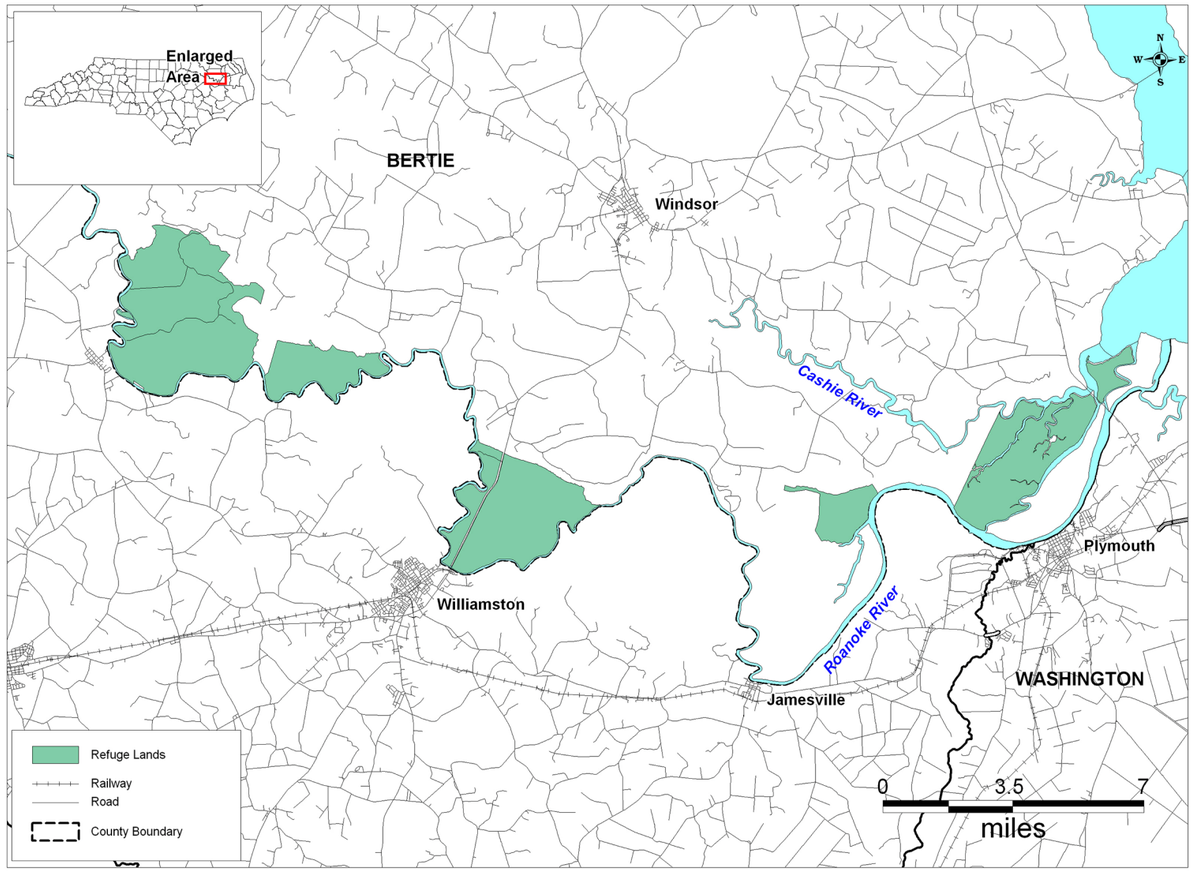
Current Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge Boundary



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Proposed Expansion for Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge

Devil's Gut Cypress/Tupelo swamp, by USFWS

Purpose

The USFWS is proposing an expansion of the acquisition boundary of the Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge (RRNWR) to conserve and restore fish and wildlife habitat while helping to preserve a rural landscape, protect water quality and support public recreational and educational opportunities. If approved, the Service would increase the boundary of the RRNWR by working solely with willing landowners to conserve land through a combination of fee-title purchase and conservation easements.

Goals

- Provide future habitat for wildlife in the event of population growth and sea level rise;
- Preserve the most natural river flow possible for benefit of wildlife and habitats;
- Maintain the rural and agricultural legacy of the region;
- Partner with Federal, State, County and private agencies and organizations to conserve and promote the natural resources of the Roanoke River.

Significant Features of Roanoke River

The land along the Roanoke River is a mosaic of habitat types including agricultural property, hardwood forest communities, tupelo-cypress forest, and stands of mature and young pine forests.

- Important habitat for migratory waterfowl including mallards and wood ducks;
- One of the largest populations of wild turkey in NC;
- Active heron rookeries;
- Home to bald eagles, Swainson's warbler, Kentucky warbler, wood thrush, Mississippi and Swallow-tailed kites, prothonotary warbler and cerulean warbler;
- Important to migratory fish like alewife, American eel, American shad, Atlantic sturgeon, blueback herring, hickory shad, sea lamprey, and striped bass.

National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is: "...to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plan resources of their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Roanoke River NWR Today

Roanoke River NWR established August 10, 1989. Located in Bertie County, NC includes 20,978 acres along lower extent of Roanoke River. The existing acquisition boundary is 33,000 acres. The Roanoke River is a 442-mile-long river with 9,875 square miles of drainage in North Carolina and Virginia.

Growing Concerns over Sea Level Rise and Population Growth

Next Steps

This is the beginning of detailed planning for the project. Public input is a vital part of this process. Public meetings will be held in areas throughout the counties included in the study area in the fall and winter of 2016.

Swainson's warbler, by Laurie S. Johnson

Flow of Process

- Public Scoping
- Writing the Land Protection Plan
- Public Review
- Final Plan

Facts about the Proposal

- Purchases only from **willing** sellers;
- **No** condemnation;
- Limited to no more than 50,000 acres in fee title purchase and 100,000 acres in conservation easements;

Bald eagle, by USFWS/Rock

- Will **not** affect property rights on non-service owned lands;
- Service required to pay appraised value for land;
- No changes to use of private lands, service has no authority on adjoining lands;
- Continued hunting, fishing wildlife observation, environmental education, interpretation and wildlife photography on existing and new refuge land;

Photos/Graphs/Maps

- Refuge Revenue Sharing Payments to counties for refuge land.
- Projected urban growth over coming 100 years.
- Currently projected 1 meter sea level rise in northeastern North Carolina over the next 150 to 200 years.

Questions You May Have

What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposing?

The Service has proposed the expansion of the acquisition boundary for Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge located in Bertie County, North Carolina. Under the draft proposal, the Service would be able to purchase from willing sellers up to 50,000 acres of land and up to 100,000 acres of conservation easements along the Roanoke River from Weldon to the mouth of the river at Albemarle Sound. By focusing on the area along the river that represents the current day flood plain, the Service would be able to work with partners to connect the existing protected lands for the benefit of people and wildlife.

What is a national wildlife refuge?

National wildlife refuges are areas of land and water set aside for fish, wildlife, and plant conservation, and managed by or in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Collectively, refuges across the nation comprise the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's premier system of public lands and waters set aside to conserve fish, wildlife and plants. Since President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida's Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge in 1903, the System has grown to more than 150 million acres, 553 national wildlife refuges and other units of the Refuge System, plus 38 wetland management districts.

Why is the Service proposing to expand the acquisition boundary of the Roanoke River NWR?

Population growth and sea level rise anticipated over the next 50 to 100 years will add pressure to wildlife in northeastern North Carolina to find adequate and quality habitat. As the nation's leading conservation agency for wildlife and habitat protection, the Service seeks to work with public and private land managers to create a cohesive vision for the landscape.

Wood duck, by Mark Buckler Photography

What is a refuge acquisition boundary?

It's a line on a map within which the Service would be authorized to negotiate with willing sellers. The boundary itself does not give the Service any special jurisdiction or control over these lands. Lands become part of the Roanoke River NWR only when they are purchased from willing sellers or placed under agreements with willing participants. Some landowners may choose not to sell, and those landowners would continue to manage their lands as before. Others may choose to sell, donate, or enter into special agreements, and their lands are added to the refuge. These lands can then be managed for the conservation of wildlife and habitat.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

What happens if my property is included in a refuge acquisition boundary and I don't want to sell?

Nothing. The Service will only purchase lands and conservation easements from willing sellers. You would be largely unaffected by the establishment of the new boundary, except for the fact that you would have a new neighbor. Even if refuge lands surround private property, legal access to the property would be maintained.

Will I be able to hunt, fish, hike and bird watch on lands acquired by the refuge?

Most likely. The Service gives priority consideration to six wildlife-dependent public uses on National Wildlife Refuges: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. If these uses are determined to be compatible with refuge purposes, and funds are available to manage them, they would be allowed within the proposed refuge. During the planning process, lands proposed for acquisition would be evaluated for the priority recreational uses. Some areas could be open to all six uses, while few or no uses might be allowed on other areas of the refuge.

Great egret and chicks, by Mary Ellen Urbanski

Would land use and zoning change within the refuge boundary?

Zoning and land use regulations would continue under the jurisdiction of the appropriate local government. The Fish and Wildlife Service would act as a landowner and manage only its own property, or property in which it acquires an interest.

Can I still hunt, fish and farm on my property?

Your rights to hunt and fish on, and farm your property are not affected by its inclusion in the acquisition boundary. You can still use or lease your property for use by others. Current laws and regulations regarding hunting and fishing will still apply to your property.

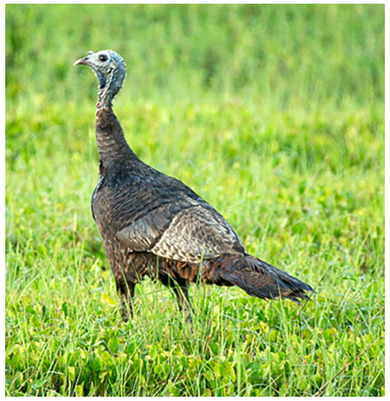
How would tax revenues be affected if lands become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System?

The federal government does not pay property tax on land it owns, but two factors help offset this potential hardship to communities. First, refuge lands demand very little in the way of expensive services or infrastructure from local government and they generate tourism. Second, under the provisions of the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act (Public Law 95-469), the Service annually reimburses counties to compensate for revenue lost as a result of acquisition of private property. This law requires that payments be made to counties, for all land purchased by the Service in fee title. These payments will be based on the greatest of:

- ¾ of 1 percent of the fair market value, or
- 25 percent of the net receipts collected for products or services on the land, or
- 75 cents per acre.

Payments under this Act would be made only on lands which the Service acquires in fee title. On lands where the Service acquires only partial interest through easement, all taxes would remain the responsibility of the individual landowner. Assessments on Service owned lands will change just like the assessments on your local tax rolls change. The Service reappraises the market value of these areas at least once every five years.

Payment In Lieu of Taxes may also be paid to Counties on land that was public land before becoming part of the Refuge and had never been private land. It is calculated based on 25% of the net receipts collected from this public domain land.



Wild turkey, by Mark Buckler Photography

How would the refuge pay for the purchase of land?

The Service draws funding for land acquisition from several sources. The Migratory Bird Conservation Fund provides funding from the sale of duck stamps. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is derived from the sale of offshore oil leases. The North American Wetlands Conservation Fund comes from Congressional appropriations, fines, penalties and forfeitures collected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and from federal fuel excise taxes on small gas engines collected under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950 and from interest on the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937.

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