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DUCKS AND FISH GET BETTER BREAK ON SOURIS RIVER, NORTH DAKOTA

Recent Executive orders have established two neighboring refuges in North Dakota that when complete will total 80,000 acres and which together bid fair to become one of the largest duck-producing areas in the United States. These sanctuaries, designated the Upper Souris and the Lower Souris Migratory Waterfowl Refuges, says the Biological Survey, are important in the national program of wildlife restoration and development. Both are being improved by CCC workers.

The two refuges lie on the Souris River, a stream that comes out of Saskatchewan and meanders through North Dakota for 358 miles, cuts a valley 170 miles long through the heart of one of the great hereditary nesting areas of the Northwest, and then goes north into Manitoba. Prior to the disastrous drainage activities of the early 1900's, hundreds of duck hunters came to this region every fall and the prosperity the locality enjoyed at that time came in part from catering to the wants of these sportsmen.

The Upper Souris Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, a 30,000-acre tract in Ward and Renville Counties, not far northwest of Minot, will contain a large storage reservoir to furnish a more uniform water supply for that area and also for the Lower Souris Migratory Waterfowl Refuge. The principal dam for the storage reservoir will be about 27 feet high, requiring 302,000 cubic yards of earth fill, with concrete and steel outlet works and a separate spillway of rubble and re-inforced concrete.

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The Upper Souris dam will have a storage capacity, at normal water level, of about 112,000 acre-feet and will provide water for flood-irrigating parts of the valley that have never been agriculturally productive since the costly drainage activities of 30 years ago. Flood storage, says the Bureau, will also improve the sanitary conditions of several valley towns, which in the past have not had enough flowing water at most months of the year to flush treated sewage effluent from the river channel. Paradoxically, the officials point out, these same towns, with the melting snows and heavy rains of spring, suffer from serious floods due to the slight fall of the valley and the meandering course of the river. The new storage dam is large enough so that it would have controlled all but three of the floods known to have come down the valley, and a dam of its size would have minimized the damage done by these three.

Two CCC camps, located on the upper refuge, are constructing smaller dams, dykes, ditches, spillways, and two outlet structures in the development of an 8,000-acre marsh area in the valley. Their duties further include the planting of food and cover and the construction of firebreaks, roads, fences, and buildings.

Lower Refuge Important Breeding Area

The Lower Souris Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, a 50,000-acre sanctuary 70 miles down the river from Upper Souris, is in Bottineau and McHenry Counties and northeast from Minot. This refuge, says the Biological Survey, has greater potentialities for geese and duck production than any other area now administered by the Survey. The refuge is a strip of original marsh 40 miles long and varying from 1 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles in width. The natural depressions are filled when the spring run-off occurs, and, in the restoration, the 40-inch annual summer evaporation will be counteracted by water drawn from the large storage dam at Upper Souris. This assured water supply means that the necessary marshes always will be providing food for young ducks until they are well on the wing.

A CCC camp is also established on Lower Souris, rip-rapping the combination

earth fill and rubble masonry dams, building and grading nesting islands, planting food and cover, developing a local recreation area, building patrol and service roads and other trails, and doing many other kinds of work.

Both Refuges Have Upland Game

In addition to their ducks and geese, the Souris Refuges winter thousands of sharp-tailed grouse that migrate from Canada with the onset of the northern blizzards. The food supply is abundant, and the sanctuaries now have a large population of pheasants, Hungarian partridges, pinnated grouse, and sharp-tailed grouse, as well as three species of rabbits, some lynx, a number of beaver, and an occasional deer. A private herd of buffalo, of 60 to 80 animals, is at present maintained on Upper Souris.

Upper Area to Provide Recreation Also

So that the surrounding countryside may receive maximum benefits from these restoration activities, the Federal Government has set aside a recreational area along part of the 30-mile reservoir on Upper Souris, for swimming, canoeing, fishing, and picnicking. This will not defeat the purpose of the refuge, the Bureau explains, because the deep area of any body of water has small waterfowl value except for resting, and there are ample resting zones nearby.

By fall, most lakes and ponds have shrunk so that much of the duck food and the fish are destroyed when ice forms. If the water does not freeze clear to the bottom, it is so sealed by surface ice that the oxygen, when consumed by the animal life, cannot be replenished. The new reservoir will carry fish, great numbers of fish, including bass, perch, pickerel, sunfish, and bullheads.