



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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TEXAS REFUGE LANDS TRANSFERRED TO NAVY FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE

Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton announced today the transfer of jurisdiction of some 464 acres of United States lands in Cameron County, Texas, from the Department of the Interior to the Department of the Navy. This will permit the enlargement of a Naval Auxiliary Air Station near Port Isabel.

These lands are located in the southeast corner of the 41,174-acre Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, administered by the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service. They will be used by the Navy to extend the runways of the existing airfield adjacent to the refuge.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has agreed to the use of these lands for national defense purposes since the order provides that control of the area will revert to the Department of the Interior when it is no longer needed by the Navy. The Department of the Navy has agreed to cooperate with the Service in relation to its flight plans, both arrivals and departures, over the adjoining refuge lands.

As a condition of the transfer, the Navy will provide for fencing the revised boundary of the refuge and will construct a new roadway along the new boundary where any alterations to the old roadway take place. The Navy will also survey and monument the new boundary of the refuge.

The land involved is part of 8,486 acres acquired by the Department of Defense during World War II as an Air Force training station. The airfield and machine gunnery range were in the southwest corner. When this land became excess to defense needs after the close of the war, it was transferred without cost to the Fish and Wildlife Service under the provisions of Public Law 537, 80th Congress, to be administered as part of the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

The transfer of the area was approved by the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries on the basis that it "will not prove detrimental to wildlife values in that area." Last March, the Department agreed not to relinquish any refuge land without first presenting the proposal to the Committee.

The Department of the Interior has already granted permission to the Navy for the temporary use of 241.7 acres of land on the Laguna Atascosa refuge as a borrow pit. This area will be returned to the Service as soon as construction of the air station has been completed.

The action to issue this public land order was requested by the Fish and Wildlife Service, and approved by the Bureau of Land Management.

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