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NEW FEDERAL WATERFOWL REFUGE ESTABLISHED ALONG LOWER COLORADO RIVER

The Department of the Interior today announced approval of a plan for establishing the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge in California and Arizona on the Lower Colorado River. The refuge will be created by a public land order withdrawing from entry 9,800 acres of public land. Eventually, it is proposed that the total area of the new refuge be approximately 16,200 acres.

The refuge was originally proposed in this area to mitigate losses in the Cibola Valley resulting from the Bureau of Reclamation's channelization of the Colorado River.

Cibola Refuge is on both sides of the mainstem of the Colorado River, about 50 miles upstream from Imperial Dam. It is considered one of the most important wildlife facilities in the Pacific Southwest.

The Palo Verde-Cibola Valley portion of the Lower Colorado long has been recognized as having an outstanding potential for preserving and developing waterfowl resources, and for years establishment of a refuge in the area has been on high priority with the Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

Establishment of the refuge is vital to maintaining and conserving the Great Basin Canada Goose, whose existence is threatened by the continuing loss of wintering grounds. The Department said the refuge will play a vital role in offsetting losses resulting from continuing development of lands in the lower reaches of the river.

Historically, the Lower Colorado has been an important wintering ground for waterfowl. Ducks and geese produced in 11 Western States and three Canadian

Provinces contribute to the waterfowl population spending the winter there. Canvasback and redhead ducks, the pintail, green-winged teal, gadwall, and many other species were formerly abundant, but there has been a drastic population reduction in the area in recent years. Cibola Refuge is expected to aid in rejuvenating many of these populations.

Bureau of Reclamation plans for channelizing this reach of the river include construction of facilities to maintain water levels in the old river channel. Control structures also will be built in existing Cibola Lake to manage both fish and wildlife resources. Fresh water inlets will prevent stagnation in the two bodies of water. Levees will be constructed where necessary and boat ramps will be built along the river and lakeside levees at Cibola and Three Fingers Lakes.

Fish and wildlife experts estimate that the new refuge will have a peak waterfowl population of about 150,000 ducks and geese and that it will provide 8,800,000 waterfowl-days of use each year. They added that this use will contribute to the waterfowl populations of both the Pacific and the Central Flyways and will benefit thousands of hunters in many parts of the West.

Facilities are to be planned and developed on the refuge to provide considerable fishing and other outdoor recreation as a secondary use.

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