



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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SECRETARY WATT ANNOUNCES NEW NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE ON NORTH CAROLINA'S CURRITUCK OUTER BANKS

Secretary of the Interior James Watt today announced the establishment of a new national wildlife refuge on the Currituck Outer Banks, North Carolina.

The 5,175-acre Currituck National Wildlife Refuge was approved August 2 by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, which Watt chairs. With the addition of Currituck, there will be 417 refuges in the 90 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System.

"The Currituck Sound area is one of the most important wildlife habitats on the Atlantic Coast," Secretary Watt said. "Establishment of the Currituck National Wildlife Refuge will protect this valuable wildlife area from being destroyed by high-density development. This is in keeping with this Administration's belief that we should protect our wetlands and encourage the protection of coastal barriers like the Outer Banks that are highly vulnerable to storm damage. The key to the success of this effort is the cooperation of the State of North Carolina and private interests such as The Nature Conservancy."

Watt noted that the Carter Administration proposed in 1980 to establish a 15,880-acre refuge on Currituck Outer Banks at an estimated cost of \$94 million. That proposal was opposed by local landowners and never received the necessary Congressional approval.

"The refuge that the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission has approved will accomplish much the same goal of habitat protection at a small fraction of the cost of the previous Administration's proposal," Watt said. "It is a reasonable compromise that will not deny access to property owners, but will serve to restrict further development and damage to the area's wildlife resources."

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The new refuge consists of two tracts known as Swan Island and Monkey Island that are located between the Virginia State line and the village of Corolla, N.C., to the south. Both tracts are now held by The Nature Conservancy. To establish the refuge, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission authorized the fee acquisition of 512 acres of Monkey Island wetlands at an estimated cost of \$500,000, and The Nature Conservancy will donate a 4,600-acre conservation easement on Swan Island. The Nature Conservancy would retain the right to grant private access easements through a corridor on Monkey Island. Property owners will retain their current right to travel along the beach. This arrangement will protect Currituck Sound from pollution and other adverse environmental effects that would result from high-density development. The ecosystem will be further protected by the State of North Carolina's proposal to purchase the southern portion of the uplands on Monkey Island as an Estuarine Sanctuary.

The Currituck Sound area supports up to 150,000 wintering waterfowl including a major portion of the Atlantic Coast population of the black duck, a species that has been declining and is currently the subject of a major Federal-State conservation program. The area is used by 246 species of birds including large numbers of raptors, and is popular with fishermen because of its fine largemouth bass fishery.

Secretary Watt said during the August 2 meeting that future refuge acquisitions approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission will be hampered if the Wetlands Loan Act expires as scheduled on September 30, 1983. "At that time, we will have to begin using three-quarters of our annual Duck Stamp receipts to repay the loan," Watt said. "We have introduced the Protect Our Wetlands and Duck Resources (POWDR) legislation in Congress to extend the Wetlands Loan Act, eliminate some Federal subsidies for programs that destroy wetlands, and provide more funding for wetlands protection. The President would sign this legislation if it is passed by Congress. I hope that Congress, while considering the urgent need to act on the Wetlands Loan Act, will also address the larger issue of the importance of protecting our wetlands."

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission was established in 1929 to consider areas proposed as migratory bird refuges by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and to decide which areas should be acquired and added to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Commission is chaired by the Secretary of the Interior and includes the Secretaries of Agriculture and Transportation, two members each from the Senate and House of Representatives, and the chief conservation officer of each State where a land acquisition is proposed. Acquisitions approved by the Commission are funded by receipts from the sale of Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps ("Duck Stamps") and by funds advanced by Congress under the 1961 Wetlands Loan Act.

In addition to Secretary Watt, the August 2 meeting of the Commission was attended by Senator Thad Cochran (R-Miss.); Representative Silvio Conte (R-Mass.); R. Max Peterson, Chief of the Agriculture Department's U.S. Forest Service; Joseph Canny, Deputy Director for Environment and Policy Review, Department of Transportation; and W. Vernon Beville, Executive Director of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

