



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ONE OF LARGEST CONSERVATION GIFTS IN HISTORY CROWNS FIRST YEAR OF NATIONAL WETLANDS PROJECT

Nearly 120,000 acres of prime wetlands and forest lands in Dare and Tyrell Counties, North Carolina, valued at more than \$50 million will be preserved as a part of the National Wildlife Refuge System as a result of action taken by The Prudential Insurance Company of America, headquartered in Newark, New Jersey, it was announced today by Interior Secretary William Clark and The Nature Conservancy, a private national nonprofit conservation organization.

The Prudential's donation to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of all its non-agricultural landholdings on North Carolina's Pamlico-Albemarle Peninsula will be added to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Nature Conservancy has been working with the Prudential since 1980 in an effort to secure the land as a natural wildlife area.

Secretary Clark said this gift by The Prudential "is one of the largest and most significant in the history of American conservation. This area represents an exceptionally wide range of wetland habitats and includes some of North Carolina's best examples of non-riverine swamp forests, pocosin, and salt and fresh water marshes.

"The area is used by migratory wildfowl, constitutes excellent bear, deer, and bobcat habitat, and is the northernmost limit of the American alligator," Clark added.

"This is an outstanding example of corporate responsibility and effective public/private partnership. The Nature Conservancy once again has been the catalyst for a significant conservation achievement because of its unique ability to bring the public and private sectors together and to build a bridge between ecology and economics," Clark said.

Charles J. Hedlund, chairman of The Nature Conservancy said, "With this gift The Prudential has taken a leadership role in philanthropic support of conservation. This is a shining example of how industry, government, and a private conservation organization can work together for the benefit of the company, the environment, and the general public."

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Mr. Robert A. Beck, chairman and chief executive officer of The Prudential stated, "We are delighted to be making this gift to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The gift is the culmination of several years of discussions between The Prudential, First Colony Farms and The Nature Conservancy. The Prudential has always been acutely aware of both the private and public value of these lands. It has never been our intention to develop all of our North Carolina holdings for commercial purposes. We believe we have now maximized the private value of this resource and that the timing is right to seek a highest and best alternative use. We hope that this donation, which becomes part of the Conservancy's National Wetlands Conservation Program, will go a long way towards aiding the Conservancy in achieving its ambitious wetlands conservation goals and will also encourage other corporations to look at conservation as an alternative highest and the best use for some of their holdings."

The National Wetlands Conservation Program was initiated in January 1983 with a \$25 million challenge grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation. The Conservancy must raise an additional \$50 million over the next four years.

William deBuys, director of The North Carolina Nature Conservancy, one of the Nature Conservancy's 32 State offices, explained, "The gift by The Prudential is an important part of our effort to protect the wetlands surrounding the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, which together form one of our Nation's largest and most productive estuarine systems."

The Prudential acquired its North Carolina holdings in 1980 when it acquired an 80 percent interest in 82,000 acres from First Colony Farms, Inc., a subsidiary of McLean Industries. The partnership created by this transaction was named Prulean Farms. It has since been reorganized and its landholdings increased so that The Prudential is now the sole owner of the land to be donated.

In addition to providing critical habitat for abundant wildlife and waterfowl, The Prudential's donation will help support the goals of the oldest Federal conservation program for wetlands, the Duck Stamp program, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.