



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service:

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**COMMISSION APPROVES REFUGE ACQUISITIONS AND
\$5.3 MILLION FOR WETLANDS PROJECTS IN CANADA AND MEXICO**

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt today announced approval by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission of the purchase of 2,333 acres for addition to three national wildlife refuges.

Secretary Babbitt chairs the Cabinet-level Commission, which also approved \$5,329,913 in grants for 14 wetland conservation projects in Canada and Mexico. The grants are being provided under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, which stipulates that at least 50 percent of available funding should be spent in Canada and Mexico because of the importance of the breeding and wintering habitat for migratory birds in those two countries. The grants are to be matched by \$8,791,885 in funds and services contributed by public and private partners who pool their resources and expertise in recognition of the fact these wetlands projects also contribute to the local economy.

"I am delighted with this innovative partnership approach that is safeguarding and improving vital wetlands ecosystems throughout the continent," Secretary Babbitt said. "I applaud the high degree of international cooperation and commitment fostered by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and its companion funding source, the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund. Together, they demonstrate that what's good for the environment is also good business and good for our future."

The additions to three national wildlife refuges include 796 acres at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Kent County, Delaware; 36 acres at the Back Bay NWR in Virginia Beach, Virginia; and 1,501 acres at the Roanoke River NWR in Bertie County, North Carolina.

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The refuges are strategically located along the Atlantic coast and provide important wintering and migrating habitat for a great diversity of migratory birds, particularly waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as other fish and wildlife species. Funds for these acquisitions come from the sale of Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps, popularly called Duck Stamps, that must be purchased by all waterfowl hunters 16 years and older, together with funds from other wildlife-related accounts.

The North American Wetlands Conservation Fund grants approved by the Commission include restoration of the Chuburna Harbor dike in the State of Yucatan that was destroyed by Hurricane Gilbert. Salt water has intruded into the once-rich estuary zone, killing aquatic vegetation and destroying waterfowl habitat. The area is a main wintering site for flamingos, waterfowl, and other migratory birds. The \$67,407 grant will be doubled by partner funds. The second grant of \$140,960 in the State of Sonora will be matched by \$331,201.

In Canada, eight projects in the eastern provinces will protect and improve a stable habitat base for black ducks and a large variety of other waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, songbirds, and fish nursery areas. Grants of \$959,646 will be combined with \$3,055,156 in contributions. Four projects in the prairie pothole region, the most productive waterfowl area in Canada, will increase the diversity, stability, and productivity of the entire wetland ecosystem for all breeding waterfowl and other wetland-dependent wildlife. Partners will match the \$4,161,900 grant with another \$5,338,020.

Funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act comes from appropriations and wildlife-related interest and fines. Projects are recommended to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission by a nine-member, public and private council established by legislation in support of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and other wetlands projects. The Plan is a 15-year program to conserve wetlands and enhance waterfowl populations in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Representative Curt Weldon of Pennsylvania is the newest member of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, joining Secretary Babbitt, Representative John Dingell of Michigan, U.S. Senators Thad Cochran of Mississippi and David Pryor of Arkansas, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy, and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol Browner.