



## **Proposal to Establish Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### ***What is the Service proposing?***

The Service proposes to create a new Refuge to be named the Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The Refuge would consist of four watershed-based units in Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George's and St. Mary's counties: the Lower Patuxent - Calvert Unit, Nanjemoy - Mattawoman Unit, Zekiah – Wicomico Unit, and McIntosh Run - St. Mary's Unit. The total area encompassed by the proposed Refuge acquisition boundary is approximately 577,420 acres, of which the Service could acquire a maximum of 40,000 in fee-title acquisitions or conservation easements from willing sellers. Within the remaining acreage, or Conservation Partnership Area, the Service will make a concerted effort to apply Coastal Program and Partners for Fish and Wildlife funding and staffing resources, and coordinate and pool funds and other resources with the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance and other partners to implement on-the-ground restoration and conservation projects.

#### ***What are national wildlife refuges?***

The National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) is managed by the Service on behalf of the American people and is the largest assemblage of lands and waters devoted to fish and wildlife conservation in the world. It consists of 570 refuges across all 50 states and 5 U.S. territories, encompassing 95 million land acres, 760 million acres of submerged lands and waters, 38 wetland management districts, and 5 marine national monuments. Of the total number of refuges, 63 contain and protect designated wilderness areas.

#### ***Why is the Service proposing to establish a new national wildlife refuge in Southern Maryland?***

The Chesapeake Bay and the forests, rivers and wetlands of Southern Maryland provide important habitat for birds that migrate and overwinter along the Atlantic Flyway, as well as important nursery habitat for nearly 350 species of finfish. Over the past 15 years, extensive research, data collection and analysis by the Service and its partners have shown that currently unprotected habitats in these counties support significant populations of fish and wildlife, primarily threatened and endangered species such as the dwarf wedgemussel, Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, Puritan and Northeastern tiger beetles and the northern long-eared bat; waterfowl; and migratory birds of conservation concern including shorebirds, forest-interior birds and grassland-dependent birds. These species face the threat of habitat loss from land use changes, climate change, competition from invasive species and other external population stressors. Southern Maryland contains tens of thousands of acres of unprotected habitats that support these species, which are priority conservation targets for the Service, and the loss of these habitats would have severe consequences for those species that depend on them.

***What is a Conservation Partnership Area and how is it different than an approved acquisition boundary?***

A Conservation Partnership Area is a specified area within which the Service has the authority to acquire a limited amount of property from willing landowners for the purposes of a national wildlife refuge. The term “Conservation Partnership Area” reflects the fact that partners within the acquisition boundary have already established ownership and will continue to own and purchase areas that may complement the Service’s landscape conservation efforts, even if they are not owned or managed by the Service for the purposes of a national wildlife refuge. Within the Conservation Partnership Area, the Service has the flexibility to acquire and prioritize specific parcels from willing sellers in response to changing landowner interest, conditions, and opportunities.

An approved acquisition boundary identifies important and sensitive resource areas that the Service is looking to protect in perpetuity. Landowners within an approved acquisition boundary retain all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership. After the Director approves an acquisition boundary and funding is secured, the Service can make offers to purchase land, or enter into management agreements with landowners wishing to add their lands to the Refuge System. Lands do not become part of the Refuge System unless they are purchased from a willing seller or are placed under a management agreement with the individual landowner.

***Why is the Service proposing to establish a new national wildlife refuge, rather than expanding Patuxent Research Refuge’s acquisition boundary?***

The purpose, scope and geographic reach of the proposed Southern Maryland Woodlands NWR are sufficiently different and distant from those established for Patuxent Research Refuge. For this reason, the Service believes that the new refuge is best administered as a standalone refuge.

***What is the process for establishing a new national wildlife refuge and will there be opportunities for public input?***

The Service is following its internal policy and guidance from the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Service policy requires preparation of a Land Protection Plan to inform landowners and interested stakeholders about the details of the proposal. This document will be combined with an Environmental Assessment (EA) as required by NEPA. The combined document will be developed in draft and will be made available for a public comment period of at least 45 days. The draft document will describe the purpose and need for action, a description of the affected environment, alternatives including the Service’s proposed action and a “status quo” alternative, the predicted environmental consequences of each alternative, and a description of consultation and coordination efforts. Public input will be incorporated into the final document. The Director of the Service has the authority to approve or disapprove the proposal.

***My land is within the proposed refuge boundary. What does that mean?***

The rights of a private landowner are not affected by the designation of a refuge boundary or the establishment of the refuge. Landowners within an approved refuge acquisition boundary retain all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership, even if the Service has acquired interest in the land surrounding them. Private lands remain in control of the owner and subject to local land use regulations unless the owner sells the property to the Service. Service management of access, land-use practices, water management, hunting, fishing, and general use within an approved acquisition boundary is limited to the lands that the Service has acquired from willing sellers as opportunity and funding allow.

Landowners have no obligation but may be eligible to sell their land or otherwise participate in the proposed refuge. The Service will work with willing sellers to acquire lands as opportunities and funding allow.

***How does the Service acquire land?***

The Service works with willing partners and landowners who are committed to conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people and who are willing to sell property (fee-title) or property rights (conservation easements or cooperative agreements) through purchase or donation.

***What if the Service wants to buy my land, and I do not want to sell?***

You do not have to sell your land as part of this proposal. The Service would only purchase land from willing sellers.

***What is the timeline for completing the refuge?***

This is a long-term effort that may take decades to complete. The number of willing sellers and availability of funding will determine the timeline for completing the purchase of up to 40,000 acres for the refuge.

***What types of activities will be allowed on the refuge?***

The Service supports wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation. All of these visitor activities and more are offered at the existing Patuxent Research Refuge, which also houses the National Wildlife Visitor Center.

***How would tax revenues be affected if lands become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System?***

The Federal Government does not pay state or local taxes. However, the Service annually reimburses localities to compensate for the lost revenue of real estate tax, based on a formula that is the greater of: 75 cents per acre; three-fourths of one percent of the fair market value; or 25 percent of the net receipts collected from operation and management of the refuge. Payments to localities are subject to annual appropriations by Congress. In Fiscal Year 2022, Congress appropriated \$13,228,000 for Refuge Revenue Sharing, which allowed the Service to pay localities 21.7% of what would constitute full payment under the formulas described above. Congress may appropriate additional funds to compensate local governments. More information can be found at <https://www.fws.gov/program/land-acquisition-and-realty/revenue-sharing>.

***Will Service land acquisition help or hurt my community?***

Communities benefit from Service lands in many ways. Nearby refuge lands enhance the quality of life for local residents by preserving the region's aesthetic beauty, providing open space, and offering numerous wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities on fee-title lands. Bird watchers, photographers, educators, researchers, hunters, anglers, and hikers visit fee-title lands that allow their particular use. Public use programs attract visitors each year to national wildlife refuges. Public uses of refuge lands must undergo public assessment and be compatible with the refuge's purpose.

Nearly 500 national wildlife refuges and wetland management districts are open to the public across the United States, hosting some 65 million visits every year – almost all offering free

admittance year-round. These visitors can be an important source of revenue for the local economy. In doing so, they support regional economies to the tune of \$3.2 billion dollars per year and support more than 41,000 jobs.

Large-scale restoration programs, which often occur as Service lands are being established, can infuse millions of federal dollars into the local economy. A high percentage of those funds stay within the local economy and recirculate as local contractors are brought in, equipment is purchased, and workers are hired who spend their paychecks in the local economy. These dollars can add significant benefit to local economies and increase tax receipts for local governments.

***Where does the Service obtain funding to purchase land?***

The Service receives funding for land acquisition from two major sources: the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. These funding sources are not derived from traditional tax revenues but are collected from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps, entrance fees from certain national wildlife refuges, import duties on arms and ammunition (Migratory Bird Conservation Fund), and from the sale of offshore oil leases (Land and Water Conservation Fund). Funding from these sources supports conservation of land across the nation.

***What are the next steps?***

The Service now invites public review and comment on the draft proposal. Once the public review and comment period ends on April 22, the Service will evaluate the comments and make any changes needed before developing a final plan, which will be submitted to the Service Director for approval and then be made available to the public.

For more information:

Jennifer Greiner  
Refuge Manager, Patuxent Research Refuge  
301-497-5582  
[jennifer\\_greiner@fws.gov](mailto:jennifer_greiner@fws.gov)

Daniel Murphy  
Chesapeake Bay Field Office  
410/980-6053  
[dan\\_murphy@fws.gov](mailto:dan_murphy@fws.gov)

Questions/Comments can also be sent to [FW5southernmarylandplan@fws.gov](mailto:FW5southernmarylandplan@fws.gov)

Project Website  
<https://www.fws.gov/project/proposed-new-refuge-lands-southern-maryland>