



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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NATION'S NEWEST WILDLIFE REFUGE LOCATED IN HEART OF BOTTOMLAND HARDWOODS

Portions of one of the last remaining large tracts of bottomland hardwood habitat in Arkansas will become the Nation's newest National Wildlife Refuge. The Federal Migratory Bird Conservation Commission recently approved the initial purchase of approximately 2,600 acres of forested bottomlands in Jackson, Woodruff, and Monroe counties for the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, a vital wintering habitat for waterfowl situated in the heart of the Mississippi Flyway.

The Cache River basin is nationally significant for its wintering habitat for mallards and its nesting and rearing habitat for wood ducks. More than 400,000 mallards winter in the basin and the wood duck population has been estimated as high as 35,000.

The lands approved by the Commission for acquisition will bring the National Wildlife Refuge System to 434 units. The Cache River refuge will be established using funds appropriated by Congress under the Wetlands Loan Act which represents an advance of funding from the sale of Duck Stamps. These revenue stamps are a required purchase for all migratory waterfowl hunters age 16 or older. Duck Stamps are also purchased by many nonhunters who wish to contribute to the conservation of wetland areas such as the Cache River.

The new refuge will eventually include up to 35,000 acres of bottomland hardwood habitat within the Cache River and Bayou Devew basins. This unit will be acquired through the use of fee title acquisition and easements.

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The new Cache River NWR will complement approximately 22,000 acres of nearby bottomlands already in public ownership. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission owns and manages a total of 14,000 acres in its Dagmar and Rex Hancock Wildlife Management Areas and 8,000 acres are owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The area is characterized by meandering channels, shallow sloughs, oxbow lakes, and wooded and shrub swamps. It is one of the few areas in the Lower Mississippi floodplain that has not been significantly altered by extensive flood control projects.

From a biological perspective, bottomland hardwood forest is considered very productive. It provides excellent habitat not only for waterfowl but for white-tailed deer, squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, and many other wildlife species.

The loss of wooded wetlands in the lower Mississippi Valley has been extensive. What was once a virtually contiguous complex of wetlands estimated at 24 million acres along the Mississippi River had been reduced to about 5 million acres by 1978. The current annual loss is estimated at about 285,000 acres, more than half of the nationwide annual wetland loss of more than 400,000 acres.

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission was established by Congress in 1929 to study and approve the establishment of national wildlife refuges for migratory birds. The Commission is chaired by Interior Secretary Don Hodel. Members of the Commission include Senator David Pryor (Ark.), Senator Thad Cochran (Miss.), Congressman John Dingell (Mich.), Congressman Silvio Conte (Mass.), Agriculture Secretary Richard E. Lyng, and Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Hanford Dole.