



**Schedule for the  
Proposed Refuge Expansion**

*May – June 2011:*

Public scoping meetings to gather feedback on the preliminary proposal.

*September 2011:*

Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment detailing alternatives for expansion to be completed and released for a minimum 30-day public comment period.

*December 2011 – January 2012:*

Final decision expected from the Service Director.

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# Proposed Expansion of Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge



*These oak and cedar covered islands string along the coastline of the refuge, © Tom Carlisle.*

## The Proposal

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to expand the Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Mississippi and southwestern Alabama by a total of 8,166 acres. The refuge, established in 1992, currently manages 10,216 acres.

The refuge and the proposed expansion are in the coastal zone of Jackson County, Mississippi and Mobile County, Alabama. The area has tremendous biological diversity. Swamps, wet pine savannas and flatwoods, riverine corridors, estuarine



*Box turtle at Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR, © Tom Carlisle.*

tidal marshes, and nearshore coastal waters are home to waterfowl, grassland birds, the tricolored heron and other wading birds, the American oystercatcher and other shorebirds, white-tailed deer, American alligator, and gray fox, as well as spotted sea trout, flounder, oysters, blue crab, brown shrimp and white shrimp.

By expanding the refuge, the Service could meet multiple goals:

- Improve water quality and quantity. Conserving the landscape would help reverse the degradation of the Escatawpa River system. It would also maintain an important groundwater recharge area that supplies high quality water to the regional aquifer and the commercially productive estuarine waters of the Gulf of Mexico, where more than 80 species of fish have been reported.
- Maintain and enhance economic productivity and recreational opportunities in the region. Public use opportunities include hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and environmental

education and interpretation.

Importantly for duck hunters, about 20 percent of the coastal waterfowl in Alabama and Mississippi winter in this area, including the lesser scaup, redhead, ring-necked and mallard ducks.

- Manage populations of migratory birds.
- Restore and protect key habitats for wildlife. The primary threat to wildlife in the central Gulf Coast is residential and commercial development, and intensive short-rotation silvicultural operations.
- Assist the recovery of threatened and endangered species, including the gopher tortoise, piping plover, Mississippi sandhill crane, yellow-blotched map turtle, Alabama red-bellied turtle, and gulf sturgeon.

## A Unique Place

The Grand Bay refuge and proposed expansion areas are special. Studies indicate species richness in the savannas is among the highest of any natural

community in temperate North America, with up to 40 species per square meter measured at Grand Bay. The area also includes the westernmost occurrence of Atlantic white cedar and pocosin, as well as bald cypress, swamp tupelo, pitcher plants and orchids.

The savannas support a suite of declining grassland and open pineland birds, including yellow rail, Henslow's sparrows, Nelson sparrow, LeConte's sparrow, northern bobwhite, prairie warbler, red-headed woodpecker, loggerhead shrike, northern harrier, and brown-headed nuthatch.

Offshore, a string of islands protect large and productive oyster reefs and seagrass beds. The habitats provide cover and food for a host of estuarine and marine species.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, and The Nature Conservancy have significant investments in Grand Bay, with both research and conservation efforts.



*Corn snake on Grand Bay NWR, © Tom Carlisle.*

### The Public and Grand Bay Today

For the public, the Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge offers something for everyone, from students and researchers, to hunters, anglers and weary travelers. Hunters pursue deer, squirrel, and ducks. Anglers flock to the area in spring and fall, chasing crappie, bream, bass, redfish, speckled trout and flounder. Birders walk the ¾-mile Oak Grove birding trail, especially in April when migratory songbirds fill the trees. The Escatawpa trail adjacent to the I-10 welcome center provides travelers a one-mile hike and the opportunity to see wet pine savanna and the beautiful Escatawpa River itself.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How would the Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge be expanded?

If the expansion to the acquisition boundary is approved, the Service would work only with willing landowners to acquire an interest in the land through several methods, including fee simple purchases, conservation easements, leases, lands set aside through habitat conservation plans, and/or cooperative agreements. All lands and waters acquired would be managed by the Service as part of the Grand Bay NWR.

### What is an acquisition boundary?

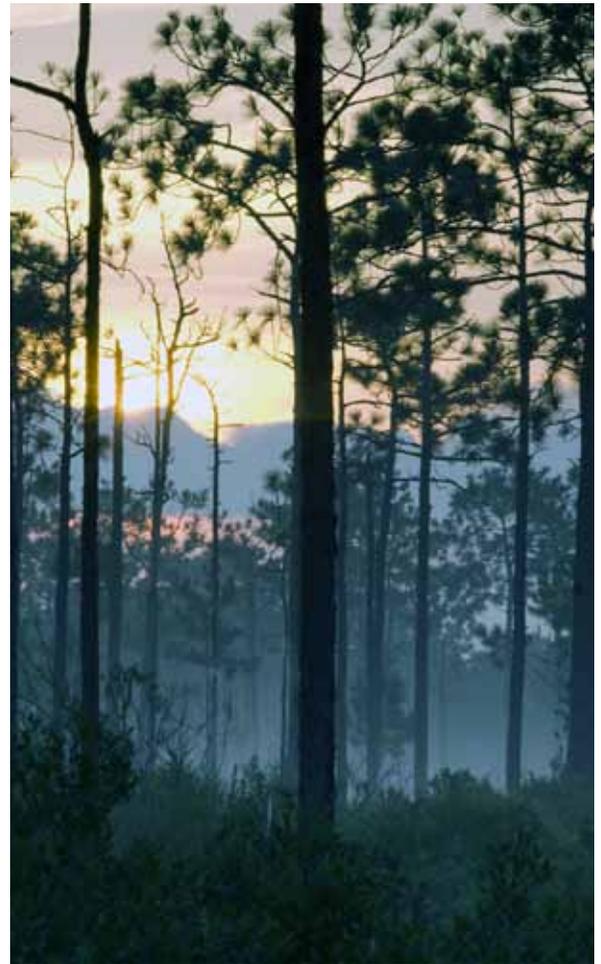
An acquisition boundary is the area within which the Service is authorized to negotiate with landowners willing to sell interest in their properties. Acquisition boundaries for refuges are typically approved by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The U.S. Congress may also approve them if specific legislation is involved.

The boundary itself does not give the Service any special jurisdiction or control over these lands. Lands become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System when they are purchased from willing sellers. Landowners who choose not to sell continue to manage and use their lands as before.

The Service is proposing to expand the Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge acquisition boundary by 8,166 acres.



*This grasspink orchid, Calopogon tuberosus, is one of many orchids and carnivorous plants that carpet the wet-pine savanna, Larry Dees.*



*Sunrise through the piney woods at Grand Bay, © Tom Carlisle.*

To date, the Service has purchased a total of 10,216 acres within the currently approved acquisition boundary of 17,742 acres.

### What if my land is within the approved acquisition boundary and I do not want to sell?

You maintain every right to your land, including the right to sell your land to whomever you choose. It is the policy of the Service to purchase lands only from willing sellers. An approved acquisition boundary does not require you to sell your property to the Service.

### If the refuge is expanded, will I be able to hunt, fish, hike and bird watch on lands acquired?

Most likely. The Service gives priority consideration to six wildlife-dependent public uses on national wildlife refuges: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation. If these uses are determined to be compatible with the refuge purposes, and funds are available to manage them, they would be allowed.



The yellow-fringed orchid, *Platanthera ciliaris*, is an amazingly flashy fall bloomer; Doug Hunt/USFWS.

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

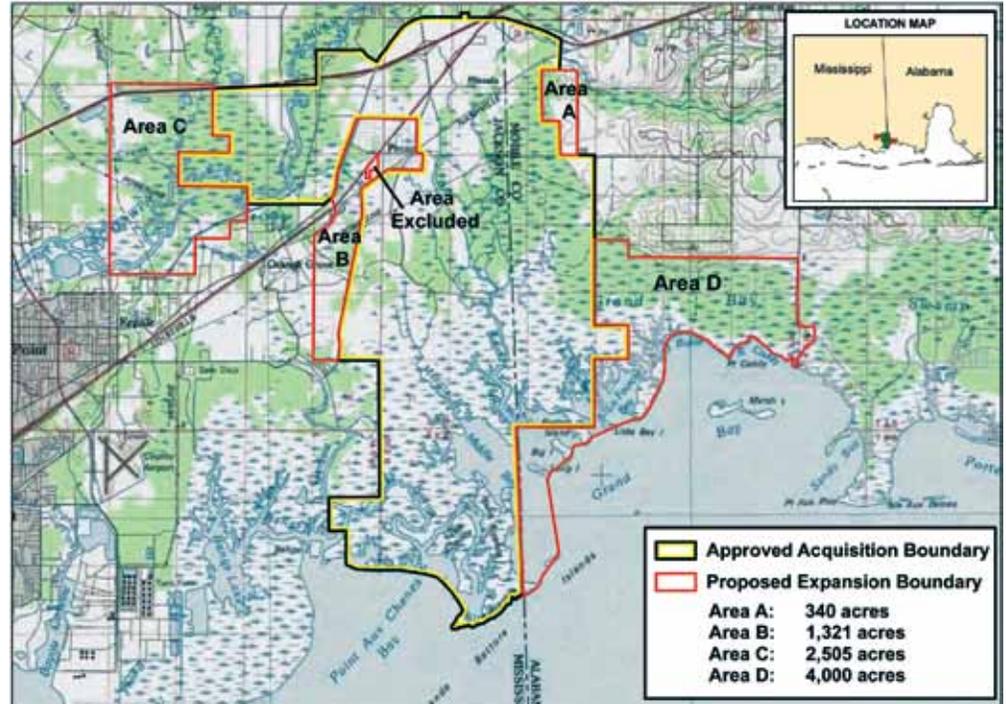
Lands acquired by the Service are removed from the tax rolls. However, through the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act (Public Law 95-469), the Service offsets the tax losses by annually paying county and other local governments an amount that often equals or exceeds that which would have been collected from taxes if the land was in private ownership. This law requires that the revenue sharing payments to the counties for the Service's land will be based on the greatest of:

- ¾ of 1 percent of the market value;
- 25 percent of the net receipts; or
- 75 cents per acre.



Seaside sparrow © Tom Carlisle.

**Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge Acquisition Boundary and Proposed Expansion Areas**



Funding for the payments comes from income generated on national wildlife refuges. If there is not enough revenue, Congress is authorized to appropriate money to make up the difference. Service lands are reappraised every five years to ensure that payments to local governments remain equitable. On lands where the Service acquires only partial interest through easements, all taxes would remain the responsibility of the individual landowner.

**How would the Service acquire funds to purchase additional refuge land?**

It is anticipated that funding for this project would be provided through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The MBCF includes monies collected from the sale of Federal Duck stamps, entrance fees from certain national wildlife refuges, and import duties on arms and ammunition. The authority for the use of these funds for land acquisition is the Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

The LWCF includes monies collected from the sale of offshore oil leases. It is the principal source of funding for land acquisition for the purpose of outdoor recreation by the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service. Congress typically identifies which lands are to be purchased with the funds it provides.



The extraordinary plant diversity of the wet-pine savanna, © Tom Carlisle.