United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
1875 Century Boulevard
Atlanta, Georgia 30345

MAR 22 2013

In Reply Refer To:
FWS/R4/RF/PL

To: Recipients of the Draft Land Protection Plan and Draft Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Expansion of Felsenthal and Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuges

The public review period for the Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment (Draft LPP/EA) for the proposed expansion of Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Bradley, Union, and Ashley Counties, Arkansas, and Upper Ouachita NWR in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana, has been extended from March 22, 2013 to April 22, 2013.

We welcome any comments or recommendations you may have concerning this Draft LPP/EA. In order to be considered in the preparation of the Final LPP/EA, your comments must be received by April 22, 2013. Comments or requests for additional information should be sent to: Tina Chouinard, 49 Plainsbrook Place, Jackson, Tennessee 38305. The Draft LPP/EA is also available on our website: *http://www.fws.gov/southeast/ouachitafelsenthal/.*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold an open house meeting on Thursday, April 4, 2013, from 3:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. at the Felsenthal NWR Visitor Center, 5531 Highway 82 West, Crossett, AR 71635.

Thank you again for your interest in our fish and wildlife conservation efforts.

Sincerely yours,

for Cynthia K. Dohner
Regional Director

Enclosure

Land Acquisition Planning FAQ:

Q: What does the expansion of a refuge's acquisition boundary mean?

A: The initial consequences of a refuge's acquisition boundary expansion are not as drastic as many people believe. Essentially, an acquisition boundary is merely administrative lines on a map delineating areas in which the Service may consider negotiations with **willing sellers only** for acquisition of an interest in land. 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 only when they are purchased from willing sellers or placed under agreements with willing participants. Some landowners choose not to sell, and they continue to manage their lands as before. Others choose to sell, donate, or enter into special agreements, and their lands are then added to the refuge.

Q: What happens if my property is included in an acquisition boundary and I don't want to sell?

A: It is the policy of the Service to purchase lands **only** from willing sellers. You will be unaffected by the expansion of the refuge's acquisition boundary, except for the fact that a national wildlife refuge may now be one of your neighbors.

Q: Will private landowners adjacent to the refuge have additional restrictions placed on the use of their land?

A: Private landowners both within and adjacent to the refuge acquisition boundary would not be subject to any refuge regulations or jurisdiction unless and until an interest in real property is acquired by the Service through a conservation easement, lease, donation, or purchase from a willing landowner.

Any landowner, who is within an approved acquisition boundary, even though the surrounding parcels may have been purchased by the Service, retains all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership. This includes, the right to access, hunting, vehicle use, control of trespass; the right to sell the property to any other party; and the responsibility to pay local real estate or property taxes.

Q: How does the refuge planning process work?

A: The proposed project is initially assessed biologically and then recommended as a proposal site based on ecosystem values. A Preliminary Project Proposal is then completed which provides a conceptual overview of the project. Once this proposal has been approved by the Service Director, detailed planning and the National Environmental Policy Act (Environmental Assessment) process begins. This portion

of the process includes public review and comment. After this phase is completed, funding could be provided through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) and/or non-governmental partners to acquire lands from willing landowners.

The LWCF and MBCF are not derived from traditional tax revenues. The LWCF is derived from the sale of offshore oil leases. The MBCF is collected from the sale of federal duck stamps, entrance fees from certain national wildlife refuges and import duties on arms and ammunition. Both the LWCF and MBCF are intended for land conservation and may be used to purchase the land and/or permanent conservation easements.

Q: Will land-use and zoning change within the acquisition boundary?

A: Zoning and land-use regulations continue under the jurisdiction of local government. The Fish and Wildlife Service acts as a landowner and manages only its own property, or property in which it has acquired an interest.

Q: If I want to sell my land or otherwise make it part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, what options do I have?

A: The Service acquires interest in lands in a variety of ways: fee-title purchase, donation, lease, conservation easement, and cooperative agreement/memorandum of understanding. In all fee title acquisitions, the Service is required by law to offer 100 percent of the property's appraised market value, as set out in an approved appraisal that meets professional standards and federal requirements. If you are interested in any of these options and your land is inside an acquisition boundary, please contact us and we will explain the possibilities.

Q: How will tax revenues be affected if lands become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System?

A: It's true that the federal government does not pay property tax on its own lands. Two factors help offset this potential hardship to communities. First, refuge lands demand very little in the way of expensive services or infrastructure from county government. Second, under the provisions of the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act (Public Law 95-469), the Service annually reimburses counties to compensate for revenue lost as a result of the acquisition of private property. This law states that the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) shall pay to each county in which any area acquired in fee title is situated, the greater of the following amounts:

- An amount equal to the product of 75 cents multiplied by the total acreage of that portion of the fee area which is located within such county.

- An amount equal to three-fourths of 1 percent of the fair market value, as determined by the Secretary, for that portion of the fee area which is located within such county.

- An amount equal to 25 percent of the net receipts collected by the Secretary in connection with the operation and management of such fee area during such fiscal year. However, if a fee area is located in two or more counties, the amount for each county shall be apportioned in relationship to the acreage in that county.

There have been occasions when payments to the counties have been less than the legislated amounts because of funding deficits. Congress may appropriate, through the budget process, supplemental funds to compensate local governments for any shortfall in revenue sharing payments. The Refuge Revenue Sharing Act also requires that Service lands be reappraised every five years to ensure that payments to local governments remain equitable. Payments under this Act would be made only on lands which the Service acquires in fee title. On lands where the Service acquires only partial interest through easement, all taxes would remain the responsibility of the individual landowner.

Q: What other impacts do National Wildlife Refuges have on the local economy?

A: The presence of a National Wildlife Refuge in a community has been repeatedly shown to contribute substantially to the local economy. In 2010, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contributed about $4.2 billion in economic activity and supported more than 32,000 jobs through its management of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Researchers have also determined that homeowners near parks and protected areas are repeatedly seen to have property values more than 20 percent higher than similar properties elsewhere.

In Arkansas, a recent study showed that every refuge dollar spent returned four dollars to the local economy. In 2011, hunters, anglers and wildlife viewers (16 years and older) spent over $691 million in trip-related expenses in Arkansas. Total expenditures by these participants totaled over $1.8 billion.*

* Source: 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation - (USFWS 2012)

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
1875 Century Boulevard
Atlanta, Georgia 30345

In Reply Refer To:
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MAR 22 2013

Ms. B. Cheryl Smith, Chief
Jena Band of Choctaw Indians
14025 Highway 84
West Trout, Louisiana 71371

Dear Chief Smith:

The public review period for the Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment (Draft LPP/EA) for the proposed expansion of Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Bradley, Union, and Ashley Counties, Arkansas, and Upper Ouachita NWR in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana, has been extended from March 22, 2013 to April 22, 2013.

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Sincerely yours,

for Cynthia K. Dohner
Regional Director

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Atlanta, Georgia 30345

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In Reply Refer To:
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Mr. Kevin Sickey, Chairman
Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana
P.O. Box 818
Elton, Louisiana 70532

Dear Chairman Sickey:

The public review period for the Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment (Draft LPP/EA) for the proposed expansion of Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Bradley, Union, and Ashley Counties, Arkansas, and Upper Ouachita NWR in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana, has been extended from March 22, 2013 to April 22, 2013.

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In Reply Refer To:
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Mr. Earl J. Barbry, Sr., Chairman
Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe of Louisiana
P.O. Box 1589
Marksville, Louisiana 71351

Dear Chairman Barbry:

The public review period for the Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment (Draft LPP/EA) for the proposed expansion of Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Bradley, Union, and Ashley Counties, Arkansas, and Upper Ouachita NWR in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana, has been extended from March 22, 2013 to April 22, 2013.

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In Reply Refer To:
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MAR 22 2013

Ms. Phyliss J. Anderson, Chief
Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
101 Industrial Road
Choctaw, Mississippi 39350

Dear Chief Anderson:

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Mr. John Paul Darden, Chairman
Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana
P.O. Box 661
Charenton, Louisiana 70523

Dear Chairman Darden:

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