

*Proposed Expansion of the Acquisition
Boundary*

For

White River National Wildlife Refuge

*Public Scoping Meetings
May 13, 14, 16, 2013*

George Willson



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National Wildlife Refuge System

- First Refuge - Pelican Island, **1903**
- Largest system of lands & waters in the world dedicated to wildlife conservation - **over 560 refuges and 150 million acres**



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What the Refuge System does

- **Conserve, restore, and manage habitats for wildlife, fish, and plants**
- **Invite wildlife-dependent recreation**



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Establishing Authorities-White River NWR

"... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife ..." (Executive Order 7173);

"... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." (Migratory Bird Conservation Act);

"... conservation, maintenance, and management of wildlife, resources thereof, and its habitat thereon..." (Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act); and

"... (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species ..." (Refuge Recreation Act).



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White River NWR Vision

- Protect and enhance the **bottomland hardwood forest ecosystem** of the Lower White River
- Become a model for wise **landscape management and conservation**
- Provide for compatible wildlife-dependent **public uses**.

White River NWR

- Wetland of International Importance
- Most important wintering area for mallards in North America
- Integral component of Arkansas's "Big Woods"
- America's Great Outdoors Landscape
- White River National Blueway



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What is this meeting about?

To discuss **developing a
Land Protection Plan**
to expand the
acquisition boundary
for
White River NWR



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What is Land Protection Planning?

Two Step Process

- Preliminary Planning
- Detailed Planning



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Preliminary Planning

America's Great Outdoors - addressing
**conservation/restoration needs on a
landscape-scale**

Identified **high priority areas**

Talked with **partners, potential willing sellers**

Composed **preliminary expanded boundary**

Developed **Preliminary Project Proposal (PPP)**
approved by USFWS Director in July 2012



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Detailed Planning

Approval of PPP allows us to work with the public and our partners to further develop the project - resulting in a -
Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment

Project Planning Timeline

- Preliminary Project Proposal (July 2012)
- Internal (Agency and Partner) Scoping
- **Public scoping (May 2013)**
- Draft LPP & Draft EA (July 2013)
- Comment period - 4 weeks (August 2013)
- Finalize documents - Fall 2013
- Approval/Denial of LPP - **December 2013**
 - If approved, acquisition could begin from willing sellers within expanded boundary



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What is the proposal?



What is the proposal?

Current refuge
160,756 acres

Current boundary
172,457 acres

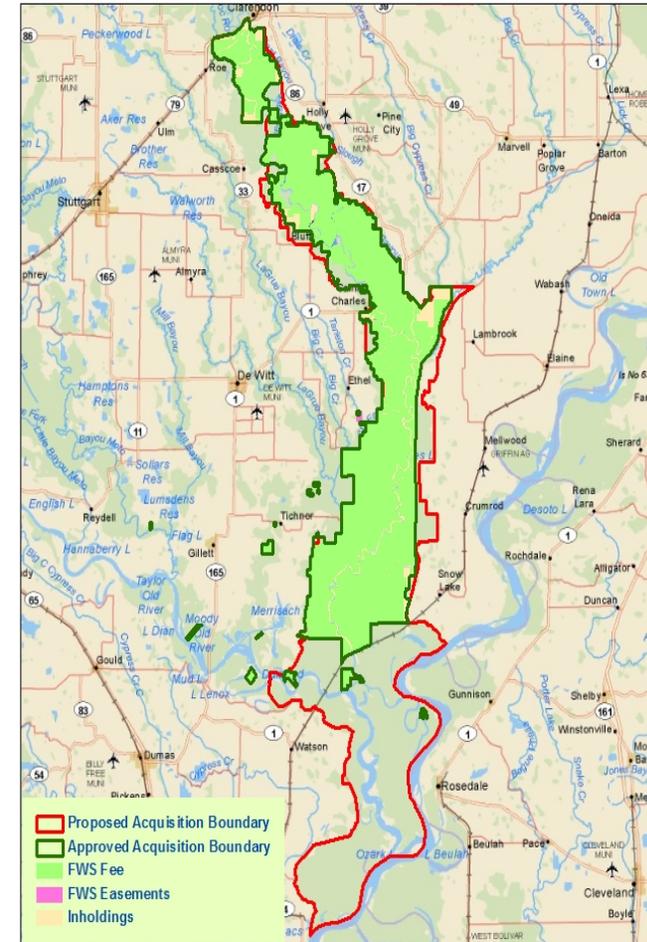
Proposed expansion
125,349 acres

Proposed total boundary
297,806 acres



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White River NWR



Scale: 1:550,819



Important facts about the proposal

Land area by County (acres)

Arkansas	17,343
Desha	89,277
Monroe	5,513
Phillips	12,124
Bolivar, MS	1,091



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Important facts
about the proposal

Cover Types in
Expansion Area

Hardwood Forest

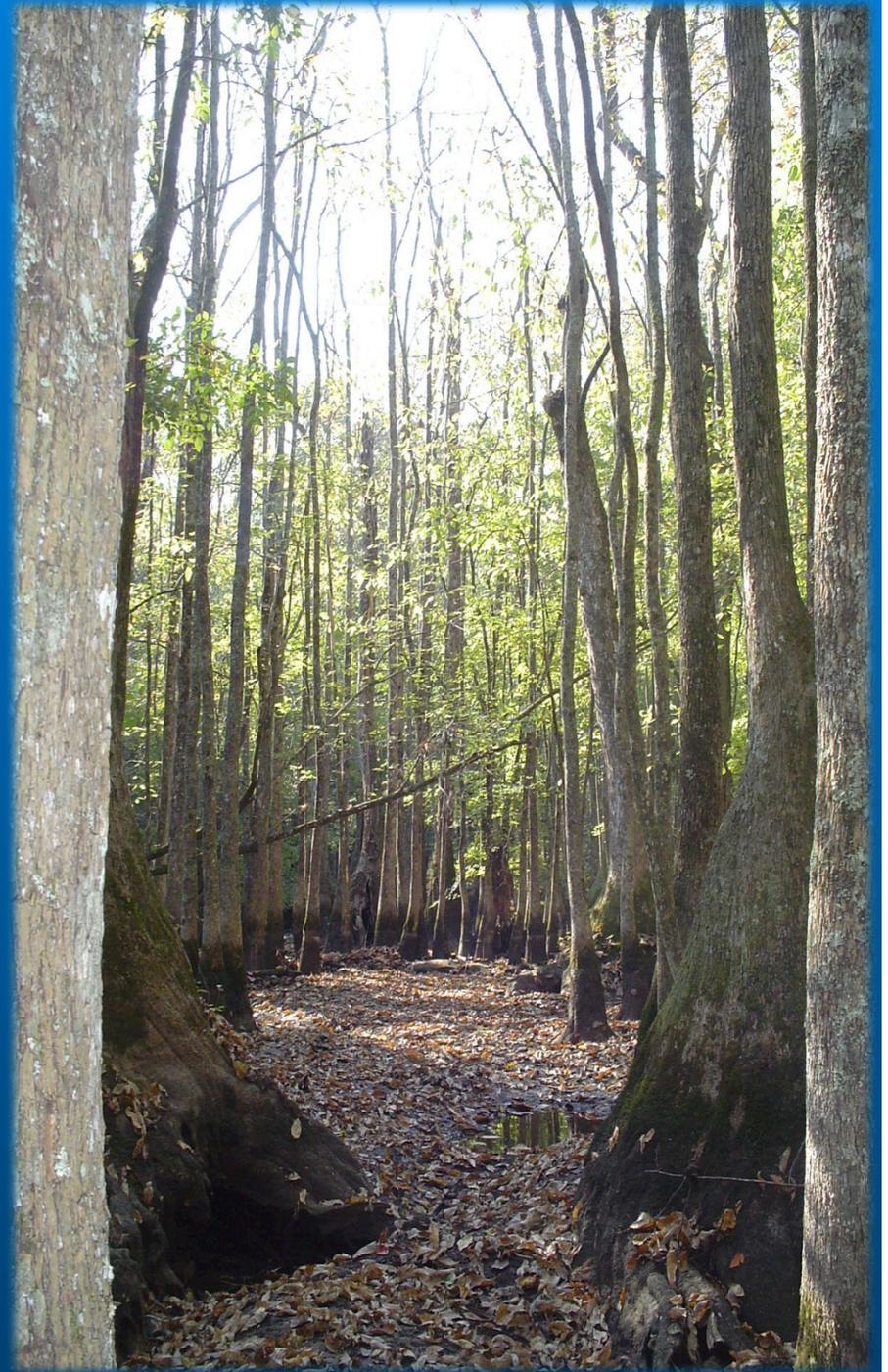
90%

Row Crop, WRP

7%

Other

3%



Important facts about the
proposal

Proposed Acquisition Boundary
is

DRAFT.



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Important facts about the
proposal

Acquisition Boundary
is

Non-regulatory

and

Non-restrictive



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Important facts about the proposal

Land is purchased from

willing sellers

ONLY!!



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Important facts about the proposal

This is a

long-term vision.

National Wildlife Refuge System is
110 years old and still growing



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Land acquisition process

- Identify interested landowners (willing sellers only)
- Appraise property to determine **Current Fair Market Value**
- Prepare written offer (**CFMV**)
- No obligation /no cost to landowner
- Decision up to willing landowner



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Important facts about the proposal

This program could involve both
fee-title acquisition
and
conservation easements.



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What about conservation easements?

- Landowner **maintains ownership**, access, and responsibilities
- **Development rights** usually relinquished
- Other landowner rights **negotiable**
- **Easement payment** based on which rights acquired
- **Perpetual**
- **Public use may not be allowed ??**



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Important facts about the proposal

Where does the money come from?

Land Acquisition funding does NOT come from public tax base.



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Where does the money come from?

- **Migratory Bird Conservation Fund**
- **Land and Water Conservation Fund**
- North American **Wetlands Conservation Act**

These monies will be spent somewhere -
why not in Arkansas?



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Why is the Service interested?

- Strategic effort (AGO) to **conserve and restore** lands:
 - (a) adjacent to the White River NWR and to the confluence of the White and Mississippi Rivers
 - (b) the lower 26 miles of the Arkansas River to its confluence with the Mississippi River.
- Enhance **connectivity** among 4 NWRs, 10 AR/MS WMAs, 4 Natural Areas, and numerous private conservation easement lands.



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Why is the Service interested?

- Some **adjacent landowners** wish to sell land of strategic value to the Refuge and the public, but their land is **outside the current Acquisition Boundary**.
- Expanding the Acquisition Boundary also will benefit these **willing sellers**.



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Why is the Service interested?

Increased opportunities for:

- public access,
- recreation,
- education,
- community benefit.



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A sunset over a body of water with reeds in the foreground. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a bright orange and yellow near the horizon. The water reflects the colors of the sky, and the reeds in the foreground are silhouetted against the water.

Important facts about the proposal

This program will **complement existing conservation projects** in the landscape
(e.g. WMAs, Natural Areas, WRP, WREP, CRP)

Who are some of the key landscape partners?

- National Wildlife Refuge Association
- The Conservation Fund
- The Nature Conservancy
- Ducks Unlimited
- Mississippi Wildlife Fisheries and Parks
- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission
- USDA - NRCS
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



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A large flock of birds, likely waterfowl, is captured in flight over a body of water. The birds are scattered across the sky and the water's surface. In the background, there is a dense forest of bare trees, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The overall scene is dynamic and natural.

Benefits of this proposal

Increased opportunities
for
habitat management for
fish and wildlife



Benefits of this proposal

Create Larger blocks of
contiguous forest habitat for
wildlife

Benefits of this proposal

Conserve, restore, manage,
terrestrial and aquatic habitat
corridors for wildlife from the
Ozark foothills to the Mississippi
River





Benefits of this proposal

Implement wildlife forestry
management practices

"Desired Forest Conditions"

12/03/2012

Benefits of this proposal

Reforestation of marginal agricultural lands



Benefits of this proposal

Future forests will provide forest commodities



Benefits of this proposal

A green tractor with a red implement is working in a field. The tractor is moving from left to right, leaving a trail of dark soil behind it. The field is lush green with some patches of brown soil. In the background, there is a dense forest of green trees under a blue sky with white clouds.

Moist-soil Management 09/01/2010

Benefits of this proposal



Wetland Management



Benefits of this proposal

Cooperative Farming



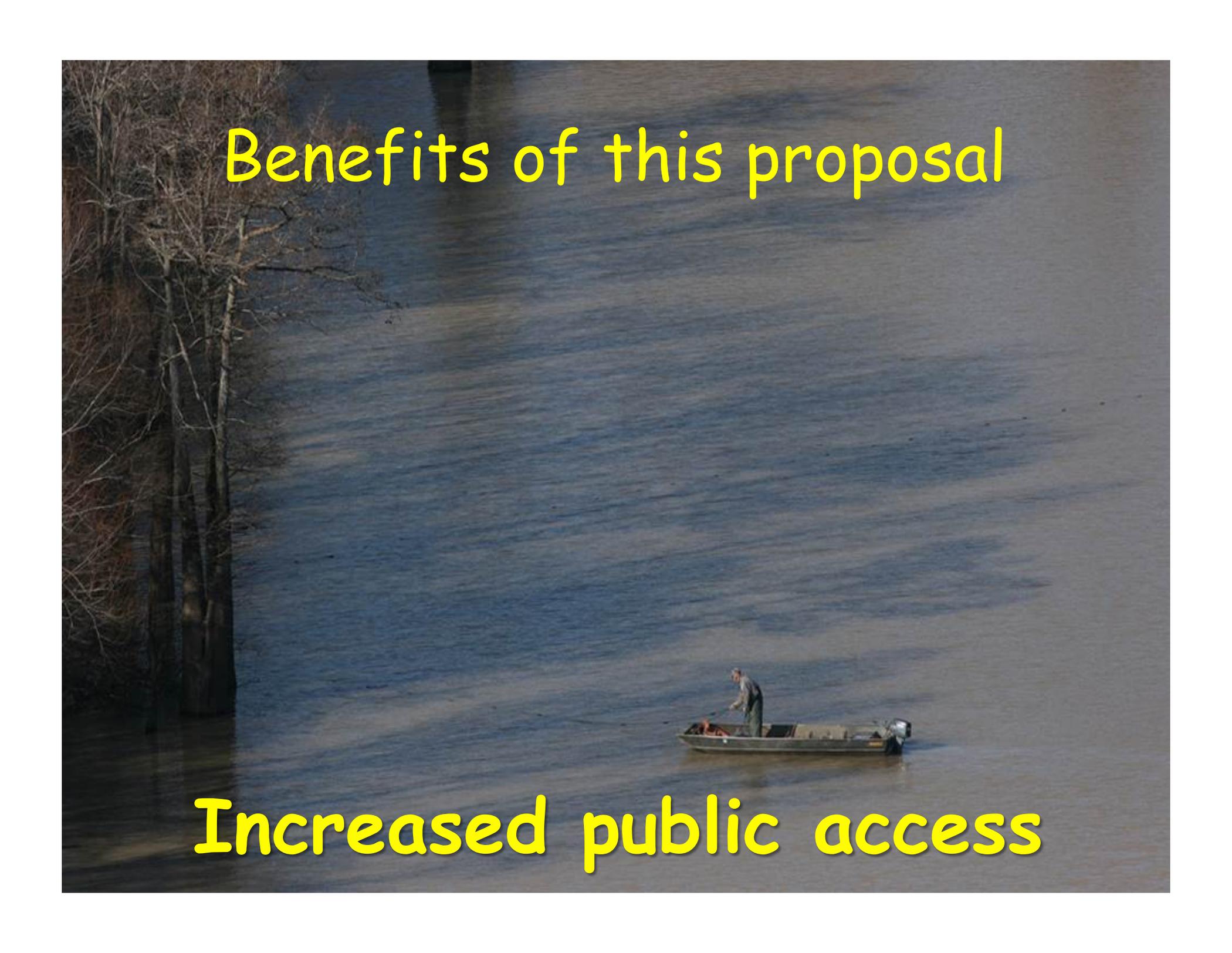
Benefits of this proposal

Decreased erosion and sedimentation in streams



Benefits of this proposal

Improved **water quality** in
White, Arkansas,
Mississippi Rivers

A photograph of a wide, calm river with a person in a small motorboat in the lower right. The riverbank on the left is lined with bare trees. The text "Benefits of this proposal" is overlaid in yellow at the top.

Benefits of this proposal

Increased public access



Boat Ramps

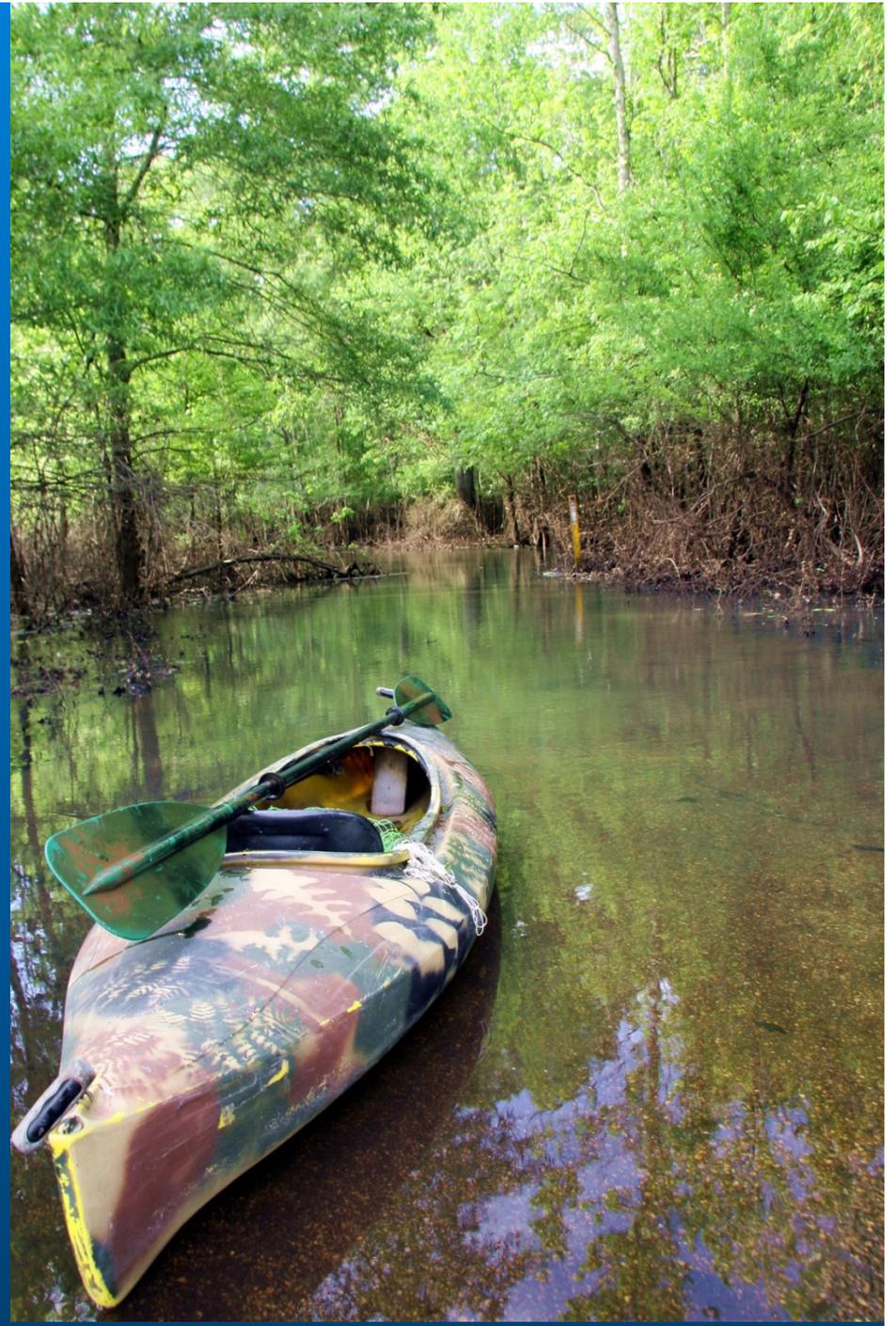


Roads/ATV Trails

Benefits of this proposal

Increased public
ownership +
Increased access =

Increased public
use



Hunting



Fishing





Wildlife Observation

Wildlife Photography



Environmental Education



03/01/2012



Interpretation

Benefits of this proposal

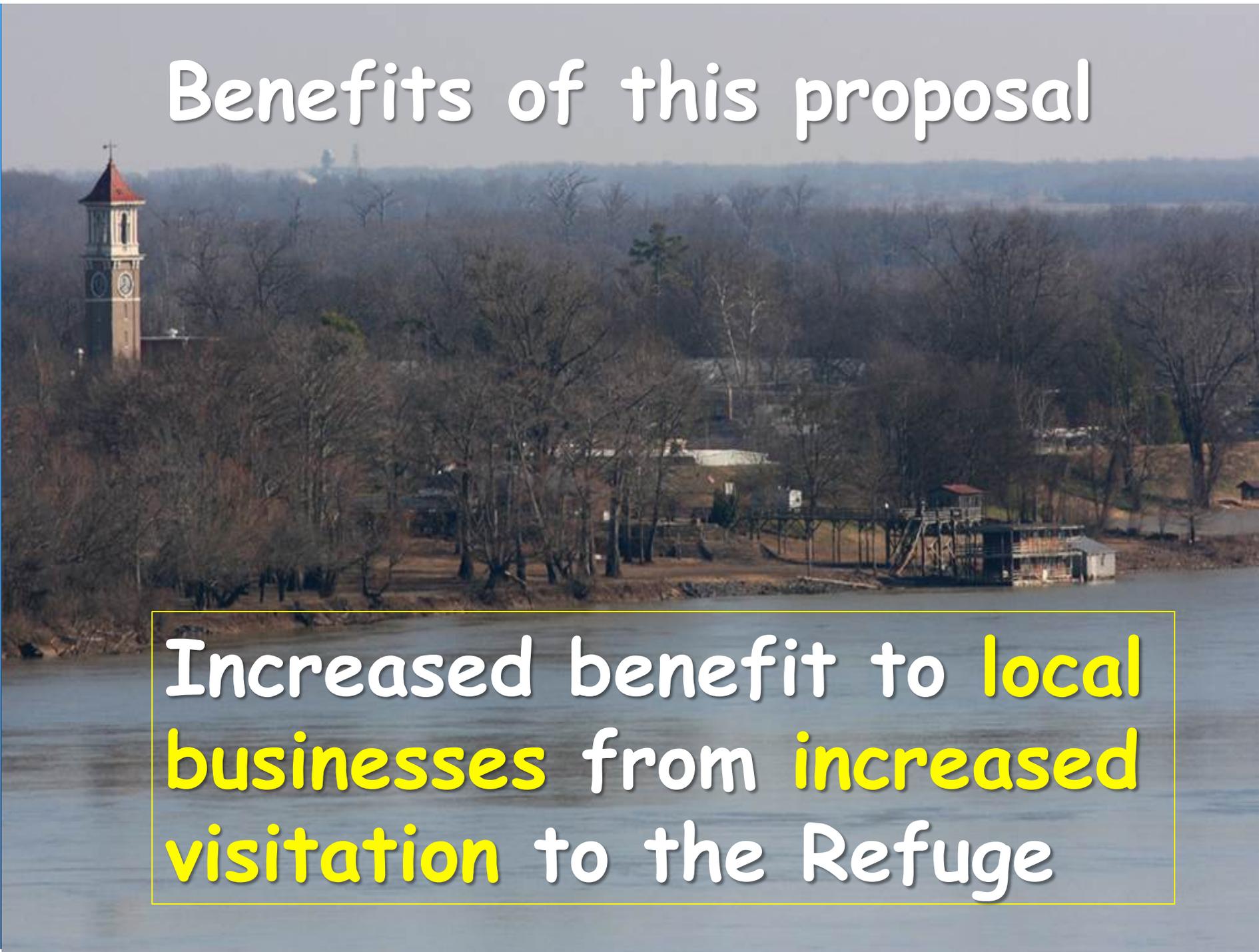
2012 **Refuge Revenue Sharing**

payments to counties -- offset loss in
tax revenues

RRS payment per acre forestland vs. private

	<u>Tax</u>	<u>RRS</u>
Arkansas	\$0.86	\$1.69
Desha	\$0.78	\$1.68
Monroe	\$1.31	\$1.69
Phillips	--	\$1.68

Benefits of this proposal

A scenic view of a river with a clock tower in the background and a wooden structure on the riverbank. The clock tower is a tall, brick structure with a red roof and a cross on top. The river is in the foreground, and the background is filled with trees and a hazy sky.

Increased benefit to **local businesses** from **increased visitation** to the Refuge

Benefits of this proposal

In Arkansas in 2011 (16 yr. old +)

363,000 **hunted**,

555,000 **fished**,

852,000 **observed wildlife**.

About **174,000 children** (ages 5-16)
participated in at least one of these
activities. (USFWS 2012)



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Benefits of this proposal

- In 2011, hunters, anglers, and wildlife viewers (16 yrs. old +) spent over **\$691 million in trip-related expenses in Arkansas** (FWS 2012)
- Total expenditures in Arkansas by these participants totaled over **\$ 1.8 billion** (FWS 2012)



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A scenic view of a river flowing through a forest. The trees are in autumn colors, with many showing shades of yellow, orange, and red. The river is calm and reflects the sky. The sky is blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

White River National
Wildlife Refuge is a
national treasure - this
proposal is an opportunity
to increase its value.

2005 11 3

Take Home facts about the proposal

- Proposal is **DRAFT**
- Acquisition boundary is **NON-REGULATORY**
- Acquisition boundary is **NON-RESTRICTIVE**
- Service seeks to be “at the table” “**IF & WHEN**” (Plan approval and seller)
- Service deals with **WILLING SELLERS ONLY**
- It takes **MONEY** to buy land
- This is a **LONG-TERM VISION**



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A bald eagle is perched on a large, intricate nest made of dry sticks and twigs. The nest is situated high within the branches of a tree with green, needle-like foliage. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The eagle has a white head and neck, a yellow beak, and dark brown feathers on its body.

Questions?

and

Let's Look at the Map!