

## Brief Refuge History and Purposes

The creation of the Refuge was largely the result of the Izaak Walton League, and in particular, the efforts of its founder and leader, Will Dilg. Dilg, an advertising executive in Chicago and an avid angler and lover of the outdoors, formed the Izaak Walton League in 1922. For nearly two decades, Dilg had spent much of the summer fishing and enjoying the Upper Mississippi River. In the summer of 1923, he learned of a plan to drain a large portion of the river backwaters and came up with an ambitious solution to the drainage scheme: turn the entire stretch of river into a federal refuge. Remarkably, one year later, due to Dilg's determination, Congress passed the Upper Mississippi River Wild Life and Fish Refuge Act on June 7, 1924. The act authorized the acquisition of land for a refuge between Rock Island, Illinois and Wabasha, Minnesota.

The Refuge name was changed administratively to the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in 1983 by adding the word "National" and changing the two-word Wild Life to the accepted and widely-used single-word "Wildlife" (Regional Director Bulletin, February 28, 1983). The new name was affirmed legislatively by Congress in 1998 through amendment to the original act (Public Law 105-312, October 30, 1998).

The 1924 act set forth the purposes of the Refuge as follows:

- "...as a refuge and breeding place for migratory birds included in the terms of the convention between the United States and Great Britain for the protection of migratory birds, concluded August 16, 1916, and
- to such extent as the Secretary of Agriculture<sup>2</sup> may by regulations prescribe, as a refuge and breeding place for other wild birds, game animals, fur-bearing animals, and for the conservation of wild flowers and aquatic plants, and
- to such extent as the Secretary of Commerce<sup>2</sup> may by regulations prescribe as a refuge and breeding place for fish and other aquatic animal life."

The 1924 Act also had stipulations that would prove to have management implications to this day. First, the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois had to give their consent before land acquisition could occur. This consent was granted, with varying conditions, by all the states in 1925. Second, the act specifically prohibited any interference with the operations of the War Department in carrying out any project now or in the future for the improvement of the river for navigation. Land acquisition proceeded rapidly beginning in

1925 using funds appropriated by Congress, and from the withdrawal of public domain or federally owned islands and other lands in the floodplain. Approximately 90,000 acres were acquired. In 1930, Congress authorized the 9-foot navigation project on the Upper Mississippi River, and the Bureau of Biological Survey (precursor to the Fish and Wildlife Service) soon suspended most acquisition. The Corps of Engineers acquired approximately 106,000 acres within the generally accepted boundary of the Refuge that was needed for the construction of a series of locks and dams and subsequent raising of water levels. Management jurisdiction over much of the Corps of Engineers-acquired land was transferred to the Service, with reservations, through a series of cooperative agreements in 1945, 1954, and 1963. The agreement was simplified and language updated in a 2001 amendment. The agreement is discussed more fully below.

Spanning 80 years, the history of the Refuge is varied, storied, and complex, and shaped by organizational, political, and social influences. Surprisingly, there is no consolidated history of the Refuge and historic information remains a mostly disjointed collection of notes, memos, files, and reports. The most complete legal history is contained in a report done by law intern Michael Fairchild in 1982 titled "The Legal and Administrative History of the Upper Mississippi River Wild Life and Fish Refuge." This report is available at Refuge headquarters in Winona. Today, the Refuge encompasses more than 240,000 acres of land and water as determined by Geographic Information System, or GIS, analysis. The Refuge remains perhaps the most important corridor of fish and wildlife habitat in the central United States, an importance which has increased over time as habitat losses or degradation have occurred elsewhere.