

APPENDIX VI

Newsletters

Wild

NEWS *from the National Wildlife Refuge System*

PROPOSED GRAND KANKAKEE MARSH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Newsletter 1 October 1997

REFUGE PLANNING CONTINUES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is evaluating the feasibility of developing a new National Wildlife Refuge in northwestern Indiana and northeastern Illinois. If approved, the new refuge would consist of approximately 30,000 acres scattered within the 3.3 million acre watershed of the Kankakee River (Figure 1).



Using a landscape-scale approach and involving multiple Federal, state, local, and private partners, the Refuge would be developed to: (1) preserve, restore, and enhance all animals and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered; (2) restore and preserve a natural diversity and abundance of flora and fauna; (3) perpetuate the migratory bird resource; and (4) provide the public with additional high quality wildlife-dependent public use and environmental education opportunities.

Partners such as The Nature Conservancy, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and others, along with the Service, would seek voluntary partnerships with landowners to restore and preserve approximately 100,000 acres of bottomland hardwood forests, prairies and oak savannas, watershed wetlands, and riparian woodland corridors. Of this total, the Service would restore and preserve roughly 30,000 acres.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EXTENSIVE

Service staff from the Bloomington Indiana Field Office, the Patoka River Refuge, and the Regional Office hosted three public meetings June 17-19, 1997, in Knox and Enos, Indiana, and Bradley, Illinois, to exchange information on the refuge proposal. Approximately 300 people turned out to hear about the project and offer their planning suggestions. Informational meetings continue to be held at the request of the general public, government agencies, conservation organizations, and Congressional staff.

OPPORTUNITIES AND ISSUES

Questions raised in conversation and correspondence with the public and others indicate the following opportunities and issues currently face the refuge proposal: If established, what effect would the refuge have on water quality in the Kankakee River, biological diversity and abundance, drainage and flood control within the watershed, county tax revenues and refuge revenue sharing payments, the agricultural economy, and the rights of landowners in the project area?

composed of warm and cool season grasses like big bluestem, porcupine grass, prairie dropseed, little bluestem, Indian grass, and prairie cordgrass and is among the most biologically productive of all ecosystems. It includes a diversity of forbs such as lead plant, Maximilian's sunflower, prairie coneflower, and several others. Beneath them are shade-tolerant grasses such as Scribner's panicum, able to flourish even as other plants dominate nearly all the sunlight. A full 75 to 85 percent of the prairie's biomass is underground, contained in the roots that extend anywhere from 12 to 20 feet beneath each main stem. Each plant species within the prairie attracts its own species of insects, invertebrates, and other organisms that provide the food base for birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Conversion of the prairie through plowing, drainage, and other development has resulted in the loss of more than 99 percent of the original 25 million acres.

☛ THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is to provide Federal leadership to conserve, protect and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitat for the American people. The Service is the primary Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing America's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats. It shares this responsibility with other Federal, state, tribal, local, and private entities. However, by law and treaty, the Service has national and international management and law enforcement responsibilities for migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, interjurisdictional fish, and certain marine mammals.

☛ THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations. The Service operates over 500 National Wildlife Refuges nationwide which represents the world's largest collection of lands and waters specifically managed for fish and wildlife.

☛ GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

On March 25, 1996, President Clinton released new guidance on the management and general use of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Order affirmed four guiding principles for the National Wildlife Refuge System. These include:

Habitat. Fish and wildlife will not prosper without high quality habitat, and without fish and wildlife, traditional uses of refuges cannot be sustained. The Refuge System will continue to conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of fish and wildlife habitat within refuges.

Public Use. The Refuge System provides important opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

Partnerships. America's sportsmen and women were the first partners who insisted on protecting valuable wildlife habitat with wildlife refuges. Conservation partnerships with other Federal agencies, state agencies, Tribes, organizations, industry, and the general public can make significant contributions to the growth and management of the Refuge System.

Public Involvement. The public should be given full and open opportunity to participate in decisions regarding the acquisition and management of our National Wildlife Refuges.

☛ PARTICIPATION ENCOURAGED

The Service is attempting to reach as many people as possible to gather input on this Refuge proposal. Please take a few moments to complete the enclosed questionnaire. Your input helps us improve our planning and serve you better. If you have any suggestions or would like additional information, please contact Mr. Dave Hudak, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 620 South Walker Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47403-2121 or telephone (812) 334-4261.





Wild

PROPOSED GRAND KANKAKEE MARSH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Newsletter II October 1997

REFUGE PLANNING UPDATE

As most of you know, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is evaluating the feasibility of establishing a new National Wildlife Refuge in northwestern Indiana and northeastern Illinois. If approved, the new Refuge would consist of approximately 30,000 acres scattered within the 3.3 million acre watershed of the Kankakee River.

NEED FOR THE PROJECT

The need for wildlife habitat restoration, preservation, and management by the Service in the Kankakee River watershed has been made clear by the declining status of numerous grassland and wetland-dependent species (Service Trust Resources) and studies that indicate habitat loss and degradation are common causal factors in those declines.

The last 100 years have seen dramatic declines in wetland and grassland habitats critical to fish and wildlife populations, water quality, and biological diversity. Of the estimated 5,600,000 acres of wetlands that existed in Indiana prior to European settlement, a mere 13 percent remain, and few of these support the full array of plants and animals which existed in this habitat originally. Likewise, of the 8,212,000 acres of wetlands that existed in Illinois, only 15 percent remain. Tallgrass prairie habitat once dominated the landscape from western Indiana to the eastern portions of Kansas, Nebraska, and North and South Dakota and south to Oklahoma and Texas and comprised roughly 25 million acres. Today less than 1 percent remains.



Last month we issued our first newsletter which included information about the proposed project and asked you for your opinion of the project and your input on issues and/or opportunities that you felt needed to be addressed during this planning effort. This newsletter attempts to do just that - provide responses to your questions and concerns voiced in your letters, completed questionnaires, and verbal statements. To date, we have received over 300 responses to our first newsletter, news articles, and public open houses held last June.

For years following the initial conversion of native Midwestern prairies, many prairie dependent wildlife populations remained relatively stable by their ability to colonize agricultural grasslands. However, since the 1950's, the acreage of agricultural grasslands has significantly declined, and in many parts of the region, is at its lowest level in more than 100 years. Consequently, grassland-dependent birds have shown steeper and geographically more widespread declines than any other group of North American birds.

would be forced into willing seller status. The Service recognizes this policy would greatly extend the time frame for acquisition and project completion. However, based on past landowner surveys and recent local contacts, land availability from willing sellers within the proposed project area already exceeds the initial acquisition funds anticipated by the Service if the project is implemented.

☛ SOURCE OF FUNDS TO ACQUIRE REFUGE LANDS

Acquisition funds for the Project would come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). This fund was established and is maintained in accordance with the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965. These funds are derived from a tax on motorboat fuels, the sale of surplus Federal real property and from outer continental shelf oil and gas leases, and are to be used exclusively for the purchase of lands for conservation purposes. Congress annually authorizes the amount of LWCF monies that will be available, and annual appropriations for individual projects are requested based on their ranking on a national priority list.

☛ PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS

If this project is approved, landowners within the project area retain all their present individual freedoms as well as all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership. The presence of this project would not afford the Service any authority to impose restrictions on any private lands. Service control of access, land use practices, water management practices, hunting, fishing, and general use is limited only to those lands in which the Service purchases an appropriate realty interest. Landowners adjacent to lands acquired by the Service retain all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership, including the right of access, control of trespass, right to sell, and taxes.

☛ REFUGE REVENUE SHARING PAYMENTS AND POTENTIAL EFFECTS ON REAL ESTATE TAX REVENUES

Since 1935, the Service has made revenue sharing payments to counties for refuge lands under its administration. The monies for these payments come

from two sources: (1) net receipts from the sale of products from National Wildlife Refuge lands (oil and gas leases, timber sales, grazing fees, etc.) and (2) annual Congressional appropriations. Payments to the counties are calculated based on the following three formulas which provides the largest return to the county: (1) \$.75 per acre, (2) 25 percent of the net receipts collected from refuge lands in the county, or (3) 3/4 of 1 percent of the appraised value. In the state of Indiana, 3/4 of 1 percent of the appraised value brings the greatest return to the counties. Using this method, lands are re-appraised every five years to reflect current market values.

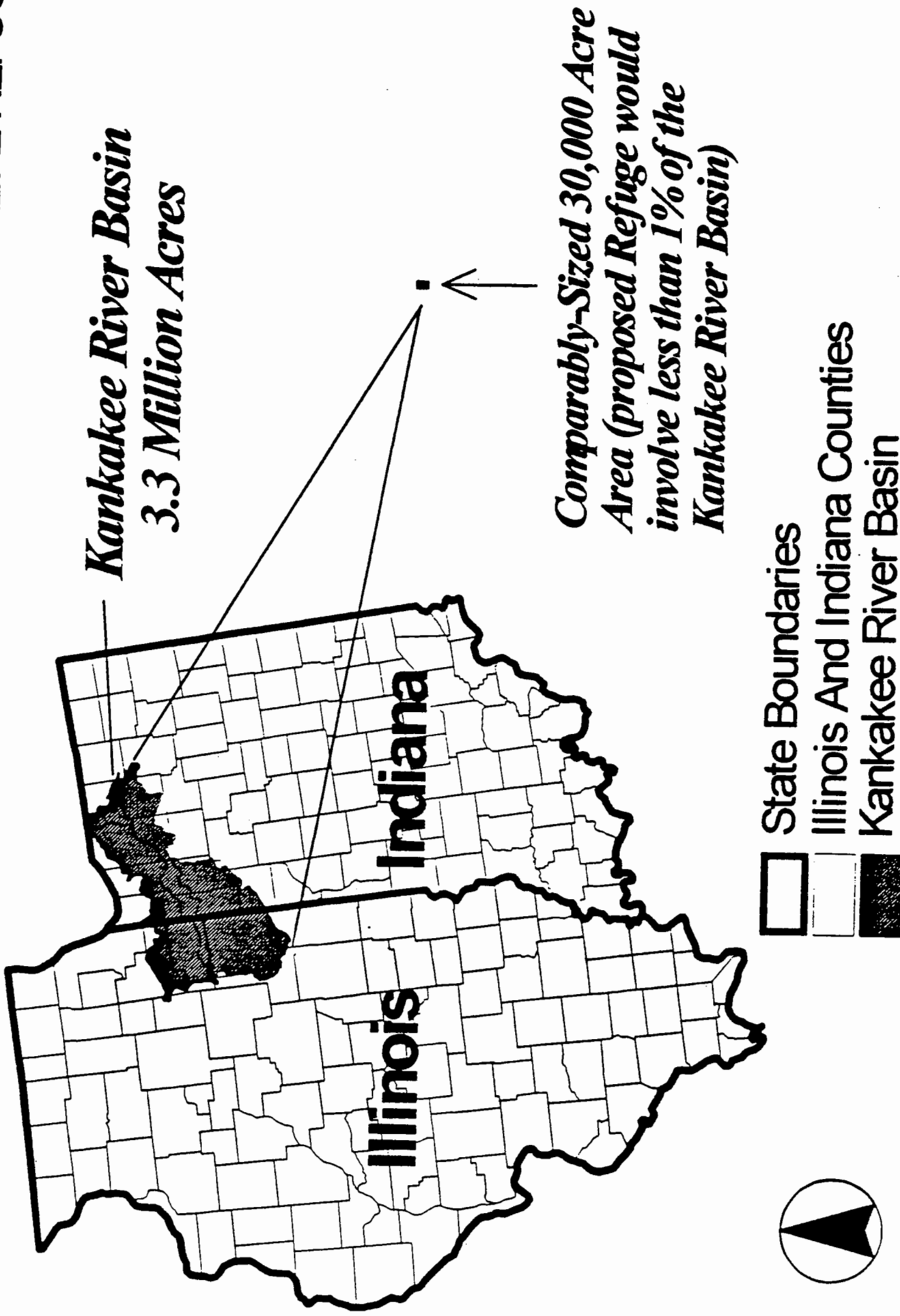
In November and December of 1994, the Service canvassed all 141 counties in the 8 state area of Region 3 where refuge revenue sharing payments are made on National Wildlife Refuge System lands. The counties were asked to estimate the real estate taxes on these lands had they remained in private ownership. In Indiana, 2 of the 3 counties that receive refuge revenue sharing payments from the Service responded to the survey. In Illinois, 8 of the 18 counties surveyed responded. Based on their estimates, the refuge revenue sharing payment at full entitlement for these 2 states is 164 percent (Indiana) and 99 percent (Illinois) of what taxes would be if the lands had remained in private ownership.

According to the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act which authorizes the Service to make these payments, "Each county which receives payments....shall distribute, under guidelines established by the Secretary, such payments on a proportional basis to those units of local government (including, but not limited to, school districts and the county itself in appropriate cases) which have incurred the loss or reduction in real property tax revenues by reason of existence of such area." In essence, the Act directs the counties or lowest unit of government that collects and distribute taxes to distribute refuge revenue sharing payments in the same proportion as it would for tax monies received.

☛ OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDITIONAL WILDLIFE-DEPENDENT PUBLIC USE

Approximately 98 percent of the land in the National Wildlife Refuge System is open to the public. National Wildlife Refuges provide outdoor recreation

FIGURE 1 - SIZE COMPARISON OF THE KANKAKEE RIVER BASIN AND THE PROPOSED 30,000 ACRE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



Wild

NEWS *from the National Wildlife Refuge System*



PROPOSED GRAND KANKAKEE MARSH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Newsletter III December 1997

REFUGE PLANNING UPDATE

As you know, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is evaluating the feasibility of developing a new National Wildlife Refuge in northwestern Indiana and northeastern Illinois. If developed, the new Refuge could consist of roughly 30,000 acres scattered within the 3.3 million acre watershed of the Kankakee River (Figure 1).



Figure 1 - Kankakee River Basin

Over the past several months we have attempted, through a series of public meetings, briefings, newsletters, and media releases, to provide timely, accurate, and detailed information to the public concerning this planning process. The purpose of this newsletter is to 1) summarize the progress made on the draft environmental assessment, and 2) address some recent questions raised by the public regarding the proposed Refuge and this Refuge planning effort.

First of all we would like to assure everyone that the graphic to the left of the Kankakee River Basin is not the "Refuge boundary". The Kankakee River Basin totals over 3.3 million acres. If a Refuge is developed in the Basin, it would involve approximately 30,000 acres scattered within the 3.3 million acre Basin (less than 1 percent). To put 30,000 acres in perspective, consider this example. Assume this 8.5 X 11 piece of paper you are reading from were equal to the size of the Kankakee River Basin (3.3 million acres). If you were to spread it out flat and placed a quarter (25 cents) anywhere on the paper, the area covered by the quarter (25 cents) would roughly equal 30,000 acres, compared to the size of the 3.3 million acre Basin.

THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

A Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) has been prepared for this project in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The purpose of the DEA is to identify and publicly disclose the possible environmental consequences that establishment of the proposed Refuge could have on the quality of the physical, biological, and human environment.

To assist this effort, the Service contracted with Purdue University to prepare an Economic Impact Assessment (EIA) to determine the direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts that could arise from changes in land use that could accompany the development of the Refuge. Both the DEA and the EIA will be made available for public review and comment in early 1998.

Information about the project has been provided to the public through news releases, presentations, interviews, newsletters, and one-to-one briefings. Three public scoping meetings were held June 17-19, 1997, in Knox and Enos, Indiana, and Bradley, Illinois, to exchange information on the new Refuge proposal. Approximately 300 people turned out to hear about the project and offer their planning suggestions.

Comments from the scoping process have covered a wide range of potential opportunities and concerns. Many comments encouraged the development of a new National Wildlife Refuge, while others cited conflicts that would need to be resolved before the proposal moved forward.

From questions raised in conversations and correspondence with individuals and organizations, the Service identified several opportunities and issues currently facing this proposal. If developed, what effect would the proposed Refuge have on:

- 1) water quality in the Kankakee River?
- 2) biological diversity and abundance (Service trust resources)?
- 3) drainage and flood control within the watershed?
- 4) county tax revenues and refuge revenue sharing payments and apportionment?
- 5) agricultural land and the economy?
- 6) private property rights of landowners within the watershed?

☛ Formulation Of Alternative Strategies For The Service's Proposed Action

Five alternative strategies were formulated for the Service's proposed action (four Action and one No Action). The four Action alternatives are all aimed at restoring and preserving habitat in an area where such habitat has been largely removed. The No Action alternative reflects the current state of conservation activity (status quo) within the Kankakee River watershed.

The process of developing the four action alternatives involved input from partner organizations, the public, and the use of geographic information system (GIS) technology. The GIS data, acquired in part through the Indiana Gap Analysis Project, the Illinois Natural History Survey, and the Illinois and Indiana

Departments of Natural Resources, helped the Service identify a set of "focus areas" which constitute smaller subsets of the watershed. In this regard, focus areas are the "first cut" in this Refuge planning process and represent ecologically rich landscapes that the Service and its partners would further evaluate for potential Refuge development. They do not represent "refuge boundaries".

If a Refuge is developed, the Service would work with partner organizations and the public to further evaluate these broadly defined focus areas and where appropriate, identify and develop portions of them into specific management units. Each Refuge unit would contain a set of goals, objectives, and strategies directed at a desired future condition or position to be achieved. In addition to continued public involvement, this step-down process would involve detailed hydrologic and ecologic planning to ensure Service activities would not adversely impact other landowners in the watershed.

☛ Description of Alternatives

Alternative 1 - No Action, the Service would not establish the Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. Restoration and preservation activities in the watershed on behalf of Service trust resources would be expected to proceed at the status quo.

Alternative 2 - through voluntary partnerships, easements, and land acquisition, restore and preserve approximately 30,000 acres (primarily wetlands) in the watershed. This alternative would focus mainly on existing and restorable wetlands.

Alternative 3 - through voluntary partnerships, easements, and land acquisition, restore and preserve approximately 30,000 acres (primarily prairie and oak savanna) in the watershed. This alternative would focus mainly on existing and restorable grasslands and important oak-savanna habitats.

Alternative 4 - through voluntary partnerships, easements, and land acquisition, restore and preserve approximately 30,000 acres (primarily endangered species habitat) in the watershed. This alternative would focus on the protection of federally endangered and candidate species habitat across the watershed.

Alternative 5 - through voluntary partnerships, easements, and land acquisition restore and preserve approximately 30,000 acres within the watershed.

not only to provide a net increase in the amount of habitat preserved in the Basin, but also increase the ecological value of the existing lands in the Basin.

4) *Once scattered sites are acquired, how much priority does the Service place on making them contiguous?*

Acquisition of lands for the proposed Refuge would occur over an extended period of time and would be from willing sellers only. Undoubtedly the acquisition process would lead to sites scattered throughout the Basin since lands would only be acquired from willing sellers and annual funding is limited. In some cases it may be desirable for the Service to connect scattered sites, such as the case of restoring a 1,000 acre block of prairie habitat, one ownership at a time. In other circumstances, however, small scattered sites may be the appropriate treatment for a particular landscape, such as restoring a mosaic of scattered prairie wetlands surrounding a permanent water body for the benefit of nesting waterfowl. Our intent is to determine what lands within each focus area would be desirable to restore and preserve and then, articulate that vision to the public. At that time we would ascertain what mechanism would be most appropriate to achieve restoration and preservation, given each parcel's unique circumstances.

5) *How will acquisition of lands by the Service or management of lands in voluntary partnership with the Service affect the ability of neighboring farmers to establish or expand livestock production facilities or operate waste management systems?*

We would expect no conflict with livestock production facilities or waste management systems that are in conformance with existing regulations governing those operations.

6) *What guarantee do existing taxing districts have of the continued existence of the Refuge Revenue Sharing "replacement tax" for Service acquired property which is moved off the tax rolls?*

Since 1935, the Service has made revenue sharing payments to counties for refuge lands under its administration. The monies for these payments come from two sources: (1) net receipts from the sale of

products from National Wildlife Refuge lands (oil and gas leases, timber sales, grazing fees, etc.) and (2) annual Congressional appropriations. Payments to the counties are calculated based on the following three formulas which provide the largest return to the county: (1) \$.75 per acre, (2) 25 percent of the net receipts collected from refuge lands in the county, or (3) 3/4 of 1 percent of the appraised value. In the state of Indiana, 3/4 of 1 percent of the appraised value brings the greatest return to the counties and usually equals or exceeds what property taxes would be on those lands had they remained in private ownership. Using this method, lands are re-appraised every five years to reflect current market values. Any change to the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act would require an Act of Congress.

7) *What are the tax consequences to local taxing districts of the restoration of the proposed 100,000 acres in voluntary partnership with landowners? (i.e. will this result in the land receiving a lower equalized assessed value and returning less money in the form of property taxes)?*

First, to distinguish between the proposed Refuge and other agency efforts in the watershed, the proposed Refuge would contain roughly 30,000 acres (less than 1% of the watershed). The 100,000 acre figure is an estimate of what other agencies, non-government organizations, and private partners have identified as resource needs for the Basin over the next 50 years.

As for lands in which the Service would have to obtain an interest (30,000 acres), the impact to local taxing districts would vary, depending on county and state. In November and December of 1994, the Service canvassed all 141 counties in the 8 state area of Region 3 where refuge revenue sharing payments are made on National Wildlife Refuge System lands. The counties were asked to estimate the real estate taxes on these lands had they remained in private ownership. In Indiana, 2 of the 3 counties that receive refuge revenue sharing payments from the Service responded to the survey. In Illinois, 8 of the 18 counties surveyed responded. Based on their estimates, the refuge revenue sharing payment at full entitlement for these 2 states is 164 percent (Indiana) and 99 percent (Illinois) of what taxes would be if the lands had remained in private ownership.

in the Kankakee River is one of the main objectives of this project and is a major concern of the public.

15) *What is the Service's policy regarding crop damage to adjacent lands resulting from increases in the wildlife population? Does the Service intend to make wildlife food plots part of its management plan?*

The Service policy is to use tools such as hunting, lure crops, and habitat manipulation to assure that wildlife, particularly local Canada geese, do not cause depredation problems on neighboring farmland. While the development of wildlife food plots is not a primary objective of this Refuge, it does remain an option, depending on the site, type of wildlife, and type of food plot. Service policy is to use the most natural means available to meeting wildlife objectives. If a localized depredation problem were to arise, the Service, working in concert with the USDA Animal Damage Control Division, would be available to assist in developing a damage abatement program.

16) *Would this project effect my ability to drain my lands?*

No. If this project is approved, detailed hydrologic planning would be undertaken for all water-related activities planned for potential Refuge lands. These plans would ensure that the Service would not alter drainage in any way that would cause increased flooding to private lands. The Service would not cause any artificial increase of the natural level, width, or flow of waters without ensuring that the impact would be limited to lands in which the Service has acquired an appropriate realty interest from a willing seller (e.g., fee title ownership, flowage easement, cooperative agreement). The Service would comply with all Federal and state regulations regarding development, some of which are specifically intended to ensure that the actions of one landowner do not adversely affect another. If Service activities inadvertently created a water-related problem for any private landowner (flooding, soil saturation or deleterious increase in water table height, etc.), the problem would be corrected at the Service's expense.

17) *Would this project effect my rights as a private landowner in the watershed?*

No. If this project is approved, landowners within the focus areas retain all their present individual freedoms as well as all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership. The presence of Refuge lands in the watershed would not afford the Service any authority to impose restrictions on any private lands. Service control of access, land use practices, water management practices, hunting, fishing, and general use is limited only to those lands in which the Service purchases an appropriate realty interest. Landowners adjacent to lands acquired by the Service retain all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership, including the right of access, control of trespass, right to sell, and payment of taxes.

18) *If I own land in one of the focus areas, would I ever be forced to sell?*

No. All habitat restoration and preservation by the Service would be on a voluntary basis (willing buyer/willing seller only) and only lands in which the Service acquires a realty interest would become part of the Refuge.

19) *If this project is approved, how would the Service pay for the lands it may purchase?*

Funding for Service land acquisition would be from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (proceeds from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps).

☛ MORE PARTICIPATION ENCOURAGED
Public input helps us improve our planning and serve you better. Please, if you have any suggestions, questions, or would like additional information on this project, please contact Mr. Dave Hudak, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 620 South Walker Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47403-2121 or telephone (812) 334-4261.



NEWS *from the National Wildlife Refuge System*



PROPOSED GRAND KANKAKEE MARSH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Newsletter IV February 1998

REFUGE PLANNING UPDATE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is evaluating the feasibility of developing a new National Wildlife Refuge in northwestern Indiana and northeastern Illinois. If developed, the new Refuge could consist of roughly 30,000 acres scattered within the 3.3 million acre Kankakee River Basin.



The purpose of this newsletter is to inform you of the forthcoming release of our draft Environmental Assessment for the proposed Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. Also included is a summary of our planning process and schedule.

Copies of the draft EA will be distributed in 2-3 weeks. Summary copies of the document will be sent to everyone on our mailing list. Full copies of the document (approximately 250 pages) will be available in public libraries throughout the Basin, and upon request. To request a full copy, contact the Service at (812) 334-4261. A 30 day review and comment period will follow.

PLANNING PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

| STEP | PLANNING ACTIVITY |
|------|---|
| 1 | <i>Pre-Planning Phase.</i> Developed a Preliminary Project Proposal (PPP) seeking the Director's approval to initiate a refuge planning project in the Kankakee River Basin. (Summer-Fall 1996) |
| 2 | <i>Project Start-Up.</i> Assembled the planning team, determined scope of the project, developed project goals, designed a process and schedule for planning the project. (Winter 1997) |
| 3 | <i>Identify The Planning Context.</i> Identified opportunities and issues through public involvement, gathered and analyzed information. (Spring-Summer-Fall 1997) |
| 4 | <i>Publish Draft Environmental Assessment (draft EA) and Conceptual Management Plan (CMP).</i> The draft EA will describe the purpose and need for the project, management alternatives, and potential environmental consequences of each alternative. The CMP will present a general framework for how a new national wildlife refuge could be managed if developed by the Service. (Winter 1998) |
| 5 | <i>Revise And Publish Final EA/CMP or Publish Notice of Intent (NOI) To Prepare An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).</i> The Regional Director, Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region, will use the draft EA to make a decision on whether the project significantly impacts the quality of the human environment. If no significant impact is determined a final EA/Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared and made available to the public. If a significant impact is determined, the Service will issue a NOI to prepare an EIS. (Spring 1998) |

PARTICIPATION ENCOURAGED

We appreciate your continued support of our planning effort and value the many ideas and thoughts you have shared with us. If you have any suggestions or would like additional information, contact Mr. Dave Hudak, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 620 South Walker Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47403-2121 or telephone (812) 334-4261.



**PROPOSED
GRAND KANKAKEE MARSH
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

Newsletter V May 1998

REFUGE PLANNING UPDATE

As you know, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is evaluating the feasibility of developing a new 30,000 acre National Wildlife Refuge in the Kankakee River Basin



In March 1998, we issued a Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) to publicly disclose the possible environmental consequences that development of the Refuge by the Service could have on the quality of the physical, biological, and human environment. To date, approximately 2,500 DEA's have been distributed for review and comment. Numerous comment letters have been received as a result of the DEA. Due to intense interest and at the request of the public, the Service extended the DEA review and comment period for an additional 60 days. Reviewers have until June 20, 1998, to review and comment on the document.

In addition, the Service is planning to hold two additional public meetings to encourage additional public comment on the draft environmental

assessment. Meetings will be held May 26, 1998, in Wheatfield, Indiana, and May 27, 1998, in Kankakee, Illinois.

On May 26, the meeting will be held at the Kankakee Valley High School in Wheatfield, Indiana. On May 27, 1998, the meeting will be held at the Joint Armed Forces Reserve Center in Kankakee, Illinois.

Each meeting will begin at 4:00 PM with an "open house" where visitors can speak with Service personnel, gather information, and ask questions. At 6:00 PM a public meeting will begin with a presentation by the Service followed by an opportunity for individuals to present oral and written comments. Oral and written comments will also be accepted during the open house, which will run concurrently with the public meeting for those who prefer to provide comments in that session.

MORE PARTICIPATION ENCOURAGED

We appreciate your continued support of our planning effort and value the many ideas and thoughts you have shared with us. If you have any suggestions or would like additional information, contact Mr. Dave Hudak, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 620 South Walker Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47403-2121 or telephone (812) 334-4261.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The developing environmental justice strategy of the Service extends this mission by seeking to ensure that all segments of the human population have equal access to America's fish and wildlife resources, as well as equal access to information which will enable them to participate meaningfully in activities and policy shaping.

Conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats also provides opportunities for Americans to encounter their natural national heritage. The role of the national wildlife refuge system has evolved beyond protecting waterfowl to providing recreational and educational experiences as well. National wildlife refuges enrich people in a great variety of ways and these benefits should be equitably distributed among all segments of society.

Although many social or experiential benefits of refuges are not easily quantified, it can be demonstrated that recreational visits to national wildlife refuges generate substantial economic activity. In 1997, the Service initiated a multi-phase study to determine the impact of national wildlife refuges on their surrounding local economies. Eco-tourism refers to the relatively recent phenomenon where approximately 30,000,000 people visit refuges annually. Eco-tourism is one way to derive economic benefits from the conservation of fish and wildlife habitat. Non-resident refuge visitors pay for food, lodging, fuel, and other purchases from local businesses to pursue their recreational experience, thereby generating substantial local economic activity.

Can the Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers work together on flood control and ecosystem restoration?

Yes. Over the past six months the Service and the Corps have been working together developing a cooperative partnership agreement. The agreement will help the agencies consolidate resources focused on finding ways to reduce flood damage to property and natural resources, preserve ecosystem structure and function, and the protect prime farmland soils in the Basin. The Corps and the Service agree that sharing staff and information will better serve the needs of local communities and agricultural interests.

Besides being fiscally smart, the combined resources of both agencies will help eliminate the duplication of effort in each agencies respective planning processes. The Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan and the Corps feasibility study should begin this spring and proceed on a parallel track with numerous public meetings to help identify appropriate management strategies.

What happens next if a national wildlife refuge is ultimately approved? Once a refuge is approved, a management team (which includes local citizens) will develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, or CCP. The CCP will determine specific management direction necessary to meet Service objectives for the Basin. With community input, the CCP will establish refuge goals and objectives, and specific management strategies for achieving those goals and objectives. Specific issues, such as cleaning up a contaminated area, the presence of an endangered species, where and how much land would the Service acquire, or managing an overabundant deer herd, would be addressed in the CCP.

If the refuge is developed, is the planning process the only opportunity I will have to provide input into what goes on at the refuge?

No. Community involvement is important in refuge planning and refuge management. The Service encourages public participation in developing new refuges as well as detailed management plans for individual refuge units. Many refuges have citizen or "friends" groups that support the refuge through actively participating in refuge activities and operations.

How can I find out more about the National Wildlife Refuge System?

You can request information by writing to us at: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ascertainment and Planning, 1 Federal Drive, Ft. Snelling, MN 55111. You can call us at 1- 800-247-1247. If you have access to the Internet, you can read about us at: <http://bluegoose.arw.rq.fws.gov> or at: <http://www.fws.gov>

AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES...
where wildlife comes naturally!