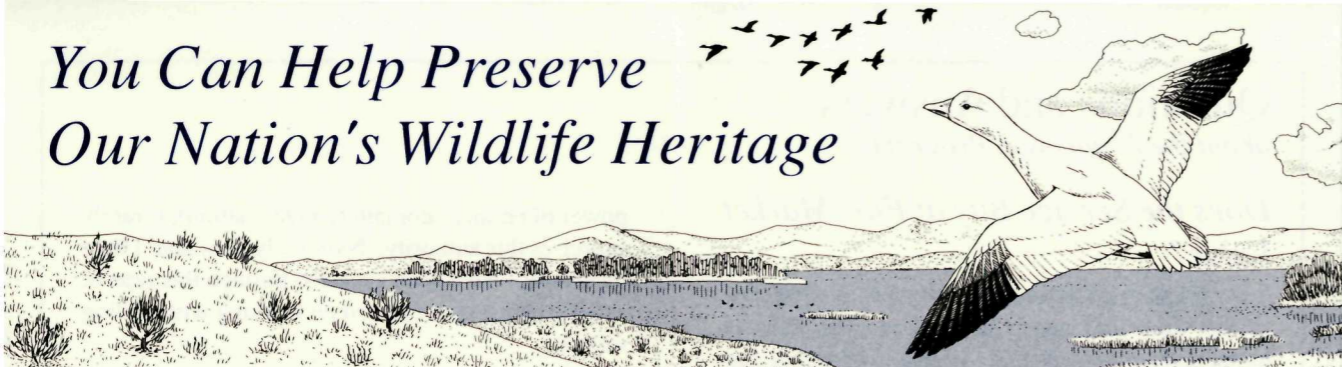


# You Can Help Preserve Our Nation's Wildlife Heritage



**The National Wildlife Refuge System** is a network of federally acquired lands and waters dedicated to the protection and conservation of our nation's fish and wildlife. Since the first Refuge was established in 1903, the system has expanded to over 450 units, covering 90 million acres in all 50 states. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquires new lands and easements through the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) Acquisition Program, outlined in this brochure.

## Wetlands--An Endangered Habitat

As human activities continue to encroach upon wild lands, the role of national wildlife refuges in preserving natural habitat has become increasingly important. Nowhere is this more true than in the case of wetlands, which are being lost at an alarming rate to development and agricultural conversion. Of all habitats in the U.S., wetlands are the most productive and rich in species. Many birds, particularly ducks and geese, use wetlands as refueling stops during migration, or as breeding grounds. Wetlands also serve people, filtering contaminants from water and moderating the impact of both torrential rains and drought.

Due to their ecological importance and need for protection, the Service has given wetlands and their associated upland borders top priority for acquisition. If you choose to sell or donate wetland habitat to the Refuge System, you are making a valuable contribution to our nation's wildlife resource--a legacy for the future.



## What Can I Do?

- Get involved—by participating in public reviews of proposed refuge projects.
- Contact your local refuge office and volunteer to help with education and conservation programs.
- Work with your local Planning Department to identify critical wildlife habitat and preserve it for future generations.
- If you have any questions about a proposed refuge project or the acquisition process, get in touch with the Service at the address below.

For additional information on Service acquisition, please contact:



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



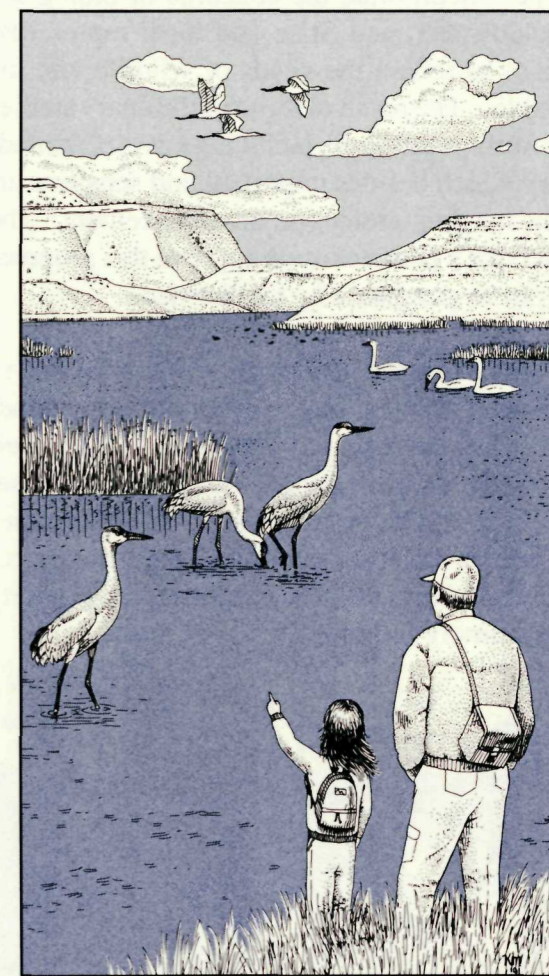
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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# A Legacy for the Future:

## The National Wildlife Refuge Acquisition Program



A guide for landowners

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

# The Acquisition Process

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) identifies areas which have potential for wildlife refuges through preliminary resource studies. Researchers evaluate many factors in determining the proposed refuge boundary. They incorporate the concerns of biologists, landowners, and State and local representatives to reflect the needs of wildlife and the public. The result of these preliminary studies is a refuge proposal, including a project boundary which defines important and sensitive areas needing protection or enhancement. The Service's Director must approve this proposal prior to purchases by the Service.

Service representatives will contact landowners who have holdings within the project boundary. If they are interested in selling their property, a professional real estate appraiser will complete an appraisal. If both parties agree on the price, they sign a purchase agreement and initiate steps to transfer the property in a timely fashion.

Generally, the Service acquires property by fee simple purchase (full ownership). Other options may be available such as conservation easements, leases, and life-use reservations. In the latter, the owner reserves the right to live on and use part of the property for the remainder of his/her life. Owners sometimes choose to donate all or a portion of their land because of tax advantages or as a lasting memorial.

Funds for the acquisition of National Wildlife Refuges come from three accounts established by law: the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund. Sources of revenue for these accounts include the sale of duck stamps, refuge entrance fees, Fish and Wildlife fines, import taxes on arms and ammunition, offshore oil and gas leases, and Congressional appropriations.

## Questions and Answers

*about the Acquisition Program*

### *Does the Service Buy at Fair Market Value?*

Yes, the Service is required by law to offer fair market value for lands to be acquired. This value is based upon a professionally-prepared appraisal that is reviewed and approved by an experienced review appraiser. This review assures that the price offered is reflective of the sale prices of comparable properties in the vicinity.

### *Will I Be Reimbursed for Expenses Incurred in Selling?*

Yes. The Service strives to minimize or eliminate any adverse impact on the landowner due to the acquisition process. The Service pays for title evidence, mortgage pre-payment penalties, mortgage releases, boundary surveys, recording fees, relocation assistance, and moving costs (if applicable) and other expenses incidental to the transfer of title. However, it cannot pay for realtor brokerage fees or for fees charged by attorneys retained by the landowner.

### *What If I Don't Want to Sell My Land?*

Acquisition boundaries merely identify important and sensitive resource areas. Private land remains in the control of the owner until the property has been sold to the Service. Although the Service has the

power of eminent domain (condemnation), it rarely exercises this authority. Nationally, less than 1% of ownerships have been acquired through this type of action. Emphasis is placed on working with willing sellers.

### *Will Federal Acquisition Help or Hurt My Community?*

Although land acquired by the Service is removed from tax rolls, the affected county or other taxing authority receives annual revenue sharing payments. These are equal to one of the following, whichever is largest: 75 cents per acre, three-quarters of one percent of the fair market value, or 25% of net refuge receipts. The fair market value is updated every five years. If refuge receipts do not meet the full authorized payments to counties, the payments will be reduced proportionately unless Congress appropriates additional money.

Refuges can benefit communities in many ways. Wildlife refuges in the U.S. are visited 34 million times a year, by birdwatchers, photographers, educators and researchers, hunters, fishers, and hikers. These visitors can be an important source of revenue for the local economy. Nearby refuges also enhance the quality of life for local residents, both preserving the region's aesthetic beauty and affording numerous recreational and educational opportunities.

