



Proposed Green River National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposes to establish Kentucky's second national wildlife refuge to protect high quality wildlife and fish habitats near the confluence of the Green and Ohio Rivers.

The Proposal

With support and direction from the U.S. Congress, the Service is proposing to establish Green River National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) in Henderson County, Kentucky. The area has long been valued for its diverse system of bottomland hardwood forests, wetlands, upland bluffs and agricultural lands that provide high quality habitat for waterfowl, migratory birds, and sport fish.

Because the proposed refuge is at the confluence of two rivers, it has the potential to provide habitat for an array of fish and wildlife. For decades, the area has been recognized as important for migrating waterfowl. As a refuge, it would abound with recreational opportunities, including hunting and fishing. This proposal would help establish wildlife corridors and restore ecological function to the area.

The proposed Green River National Wildlife Refuge has numerous goals:

- Establish a second national wildlife refuge fully administered in Kentucky;
- Protect and manage wetlands and bottomland forest habitats to support waterfowl, migratory birds, at-risk species, and threatened and endangered species;
- Provide hunting and sport fishing opportunities;
- Provide opportunities for public use and environmental education and interpretation;



Forested wetlands within the conservation partnership area for proposed Green River National Wildlife Refuge, credit USFWS/Lee Andrews.

- Collaborate with partners to protect and enhance biodiversity and water quality and quantity within the Ohio River and Green River watersheds, benefiting both humans and wildlife; and
- Ensure healthy wildlife populations for the benefit of Kentuckians and all Americans.

The Service has developed a Draft Land Protection Plan and Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft LPP/EA) for the establishment of the proposed refuge. The Draft LPP/EA was developed in coordination with a diverse set of stakeholders, including the Commonwealth of Kentucky, other federal agencies, tribes, local agencies and elected officials, conservation organizations, and local landowners. The Service is proposing an approximately 53,000-acre Conservation Partnership Area, from which the Service will assemble 24,000 acres of land through donation and the acquisition of easements and fee title ownership from willing sellers to create the refuge.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a national wildlife refuge?

National wildlife refuges are areas of land and water set aside for fish, wildlife, and plant conservation, and managed by or in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Collectively, refuges across the nation comprise the National Wildlife Refuge System, a network of public lands and waters devoted to the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats. Since President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida's Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge in 1903, the System has grown to 567 national wildlife refuges and other units of the Refuge System, plus 38 wetland management districts. In Kentucky, the National Wildlife Refuge System includes Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge near Benton, Kentucky.

What is the proposed Green River National Wildlife Refuge?

In 2018, Congress directed the Service to establish a second national wildlife refuge that would be fully located within in Kentucky's boundaries (two other refuges include some land in the state).

The proposal would designate a Conservation Partnership Area (CPA) within which the Service would have the ability to work with willing sellers or partners to purchase or protect approximately 24,000 acres as part of the Green River National Wildlife Refuge.

What is the process for establishing the refuge and opportunities for public input?

The Service has developed a draft Land Protection Plan (LPP) and an Environmental Assessment (EA). Comments on these documents will be accepted through August 30, 2019. All comments will be considered and may be integrated into the final LPP as appropriate.

Once the final LPP and a Finding of No Significant Impact is determined, the Service will negotiate with landowners to acquire land (fee-title or interest such as an easement) to establish the refuge.

What is the Land Protection Plan (LPP)?

The LPP informs landowners and interested stakeholders of the proposal to establish the approximate 24,000-acre refuge within the larger CPA, which totals nearly 53,000 acres. The LPP outlines the resource protection needs; presents the methods the Service could use in working with conservation partners and interested landowners to accomplish these needs; and details a layout of the lands that could be included in the project.



Early spring herbaceous understory, credit USFWS/Kimberly Sykes



Mature wetland forest in Henderson County, Kentucky, credit USFWS/Kimberly Sykes

The Service prepared the associated EA as required by the National Environmental Policy Act to analyze different strategies for land protection in the area. The EA analyzes the anticipated impacts of the alternatives, addresses public comments and identifies the proposed action.

Why did the Service choose Henderson County for the refuge?

The Service has recognized the Green River area in Henderson County as providing diverse habitat for waterfowl and migratory birds since 1958. In 2001 and 2010, the Service submitted proposals to establish the Green River National Wildlife Refuge, but these proposals were ultimately unsuccessful due to higher priorities nationally.

How will the refuge be created?

The Service and its partners will work with willing landowners to establish the Green River National Wildlife Refuge through several methods, including purchasing land at fair market value and development rights through conservation easements. The Service is developing a CPA in Henderson County where it will focus efforts to protect lands for the benefit of fish and wildlife. The planning target is to protect approximately 24,000 acres for the refuge.

What is the Conservation Partnership Area (CPA)?

The CPA is the area within which the Service would have the ability to work with willing sellers or partners to purchase or protect land. The proposed CPA totals nearly 53,000 acres in Henderson County. The Service will only acquire approximately 24,000 acres within the identified 53,000-acre CPA. By identifying a larger area than needed for the 24,000-acre refuge, the Service would be able to respond to changing landowner interests, conditions and opportunities.

The designation of a CPA would not give the Service any special jurisdiction or control over lands. Lands would become part of the conservation area only when and if they are purchased from willing sellers or placed under agreements with willing participants. Some landowners may choose not to sell conservation easements or other partial interest in their lands, and those landowners would continue to own and manage their lands as before. Others may choose to sell, donate, or enter into special agreements, and their lands would be added to the conservation area and managed by the landowners under the conditions of their easements or other agreements.

My land is within the CPA, what does that mean?

The rights of a private landowner are not affected by the designation of the CPA or the establishment of the refuge. The Service will work with willing sellers to acquire lands as opportunities and funding allow. Landowners have no obligation to sell their land or otherwise participate in the proposed refuge at any time.

How does the Service acquire land for the refuge?

These land protection strategies will occur by working with willing sellers of lands within the CPA only. Neither the CPA boundary nor the establishment of the refuge affects the rights of private landowners. **The Service will buy land from willing sellers only.** Conservation easements will also be considered if a landowner desires it.

What if the Service wants to buy my land, and I do not want to sell?

You don't have to sell your land as part of this proposal. You would be unaffected by the establishment of the refuge.

What is the timeline for completing the refuge?

This is a long-term effort that may take decades to complete. The number of willing sellers and availability of funding will determine the timeline for completing the purchase of approximately 24,000 acres for the refuge.

Will I be able to hunt, fish and bird watch on lands acquired as part of the refuge?

The Service gives priority consideration to six wildlife-dependent public uses on national wildlife refuges: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation.

How does the refuge's establishment affect the proposed I-69 Ohio River crossing project?

The Service is working closely with the Federal Highway Administration and the Kentucky and Indiana transportation agencies to minimize any potential issues or conflicts with the proposed I-69 Ohio River crossing project.

How would tax revenue be affected if lands become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System?

The Federal Government does not pay property tax. However, the Service annually reimburses counties to



Yellow-crowned night herons are found in the conservation partnership area for the proposed Green River National Wildlife Refuge, credit Cletus Lee CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

compensate for lost revenue, based on a formula that is the greatest of:

- 75 cents per acre;
- $\frac{3}{4}$ of 1 percent of the fair market value; or
- 25 percent of the net receipts collected from operation and management of the refuge.

Congress must first approve these funds' use. Also, Congress may appropriate additional funds to compensate local governments. Other economic benefits

typically associated with refuge lands include tourism, improved property values adjacent to the refuge, and access to federal grants to name a few.

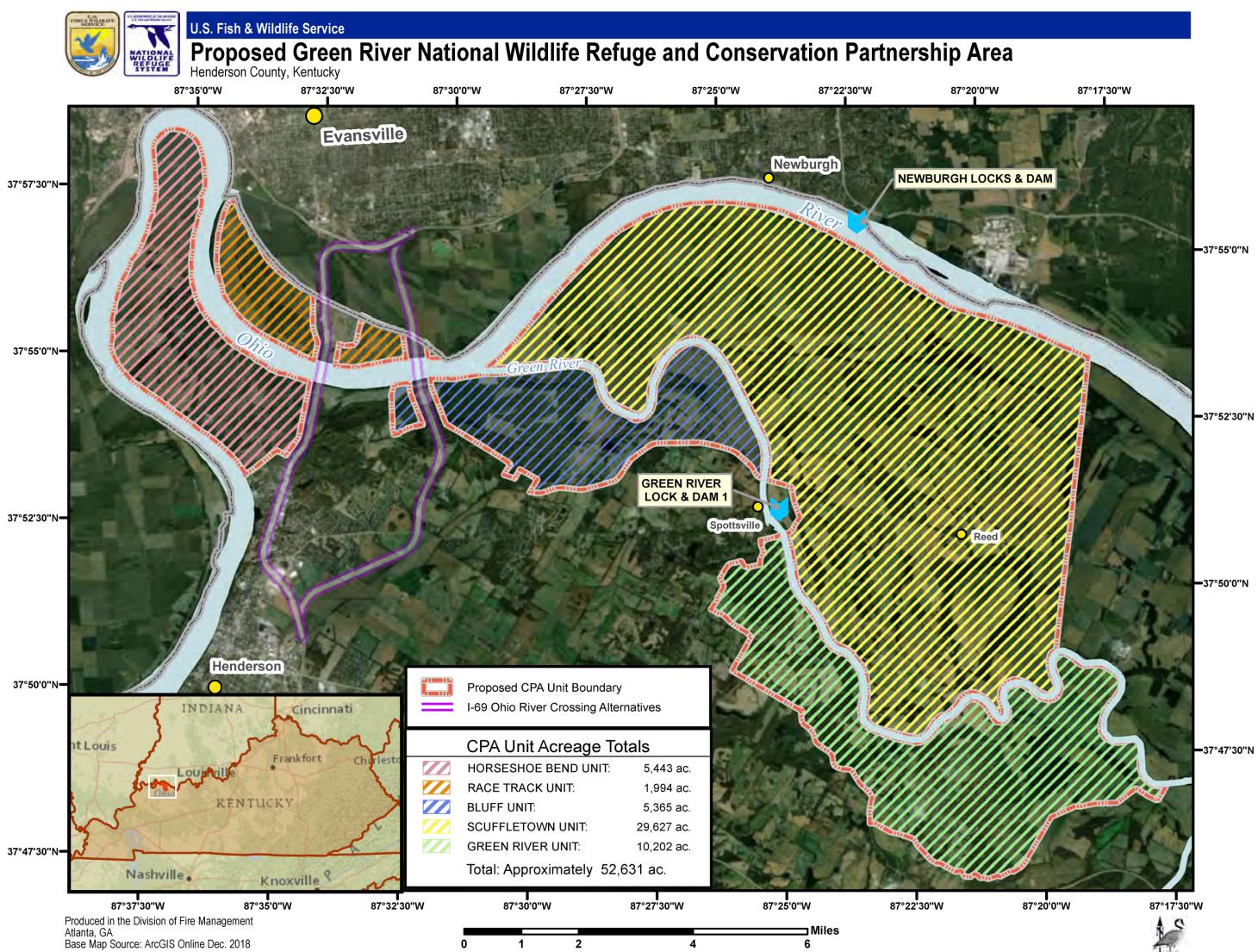
Where does the money come from to buy private land in a time of tight budgets?

The Service anticipates funding for this project will be provided through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. These funding sources are not derived from traditional tax revenues but are collected from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps, entrance fees from certain national wildlife refuges, import duties on arms and ammunition (Migratory Bird Conservation Fund), and from the sale of offshore oil leases (Land and Water Conservation Fund). Funding from these sources is intended to support conservation of land across the nation.

The proposed I-69 Ohio River crossing project is likely to affect native fish and wildlife and result in habitat loss and fragmentation. As a result, land may be acquired for the refuge using Federal Highway Administration funds for offsets of these impacts and habitat restoration efforts.



Flooded swale subsequent to spring floods, credit USFWS/Kimberly Sykes



What are the next steps?

The Service is seeking public comment on the proposal. Once the public review and comment period ends, the Service will evaluate the comments and make any changes needed before developing a final plan, which will be approved by the Service Director. The final plan is expected to be completed this fall.

Schedule for the Proposed Green River National Wildlife Refuge

Develop Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment

Fall 2018-Summer 2019

Conduct Public Review and Comment on Proposal

July-August 2019

Evaluate the Comments and Develop Final Plan for Approval

Fall 2019

View/download the draft LPP/EA:

www.fws.gov/southeast/national-wildlife-refuges/green-river-national-wildlife-refuge/

To submit comments or questions:

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