

WHITE RIVER

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

PUBLIC HEARING

7 p.m., May 25, 1972
CAFETORIUM, DEWITT HIGH SCHOOL
Highway 152 By-Pass
DeWitt, Arkansas County, Arkansas

The purpose of this wilderness hearing is to allow citizens the opportunity to express their views on wilderness designation for parts of the White River Refuge. Your support is needed.

After reviewing the White River National Wildlife Refuge under provisions of the 1964 Wilderness Act, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has initially recommended that none of the refuge be placed in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Conservationists, on the contrary, feel that parts of the refuge do in fact qualify and are recommending them for wilderness designation. Areas ultimately designated by Congress as wilderness would continue to be managed as part of the refuge, but with added protection to insure that they remain wild and unchanged by man.

To facilitate the conduct of the hearing, the Bureau asks that each person planning to testify in person notify the Hearing Officer by letter, c/o Superintendent, White River National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 308, DeWitt, Arkansas 72042 before May 25.

If you cannot attend, but are willing to file a letter or statement, please mail it to:

➡ Regional Director
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife
Peachtree-Seventh Bldg.
Atlanta, Ga. 30323

Although the hearing is scheduled for May 25, the record is kept open for an additional 30 days -- in this case until June 26 -- to receive letters. Request in your letter that your statement be included in the hearing record.

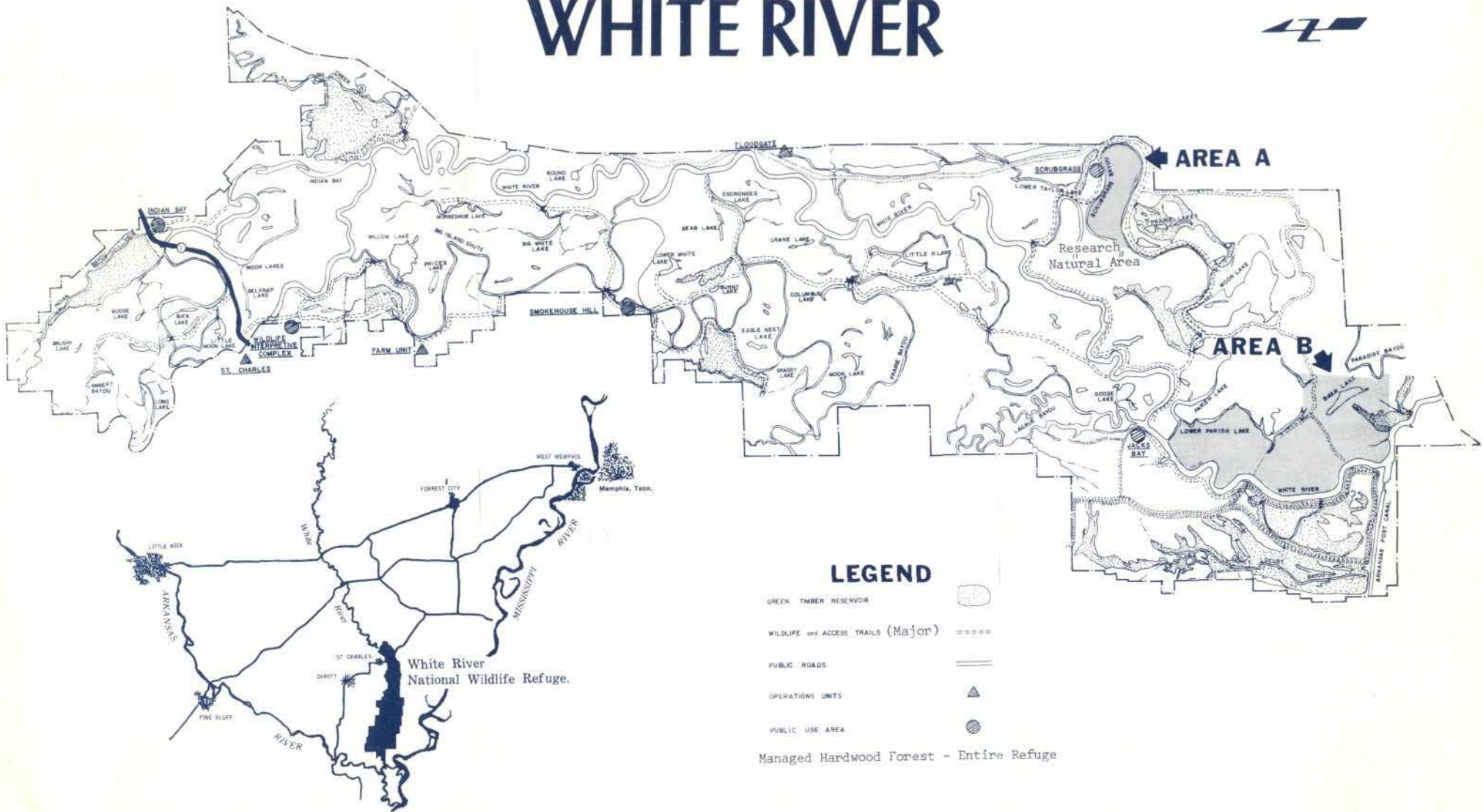
The White River National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1935, is located in southeastern Arkansas. Extending for 54 miles along the lower White River, the refuge serves



Photo by Peter J. Van Huizen

Mallard ducks use the refuge as an annual stopover along the Mississippi flyway.

WHITE RIVER



LEGEND

- GREEN TIMBER RESERVOIR
- WILDLIFE and ACCESS TRAILS (Major)
- PUBLIC ROADS
- OPERATIONS UNITS
- PUBLIC USE AREA
- Managed Hardwood Forest - Entire Refuge

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- Grand Prairie Chapter

- Arkansas Ecology Center
- Environmental Research Society
- Arkansas Group Sierra Club
- The Wilderness Society

as an important stopover and wintering grounds along the Mississippi flyway for many species of birds.

Much of the refuge's 112,400 acres is bottomland hardwood forest, with several oaks, cypress, ash and pecan the dominant species. There are 169 lakes and many miles of bayou running through the refuge. At one time all this region of the lower White River drainage was covered with a rich hardwood forest. Now completely surrounded by agricultural lands, the refuge remains one of the few forested areas in southeast Arkansas.

One of the dominant forces affecting the refuge is the annual flooding by the White River. Approximately 75% of the refuge is flooded two to three months each year, and any part may be flooded almost anytime.

A Wildlife Refuge Managed for Logs?

The management plan calls for the regular and extensive logging of the refuge forest. Timber sales from this refuge currently amount to about 40% of all timber sales in the entire National Wildlife Refuge System. Most of the refuge has been logged during the past dozen years -- not to mention heavy logging in previous decades. Fortunately, under selective cutting and aided by the annual floods, the area recovers at an astounding rate.

Conservationists feel that while wilderness classification is not compatible with logging, it is definitely compatible with the management of wildlife in the refuge. Lands classified as wilderness within the refuge would combine with the logged areas to make a wider variety of habitats available for all wildlife.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife takes the position in its preliminary recommendation that none of the refuge is suitable for wilderness classification. They claim that wilderness classification would conflict with the refuge's management plan, and that the impact of logging and the presence of water control structures prohibit wilderness classification.

Oddly enough, on this wildlife refuge logging is a principal activity of the administering agency. In recent times the value of the refuge timber cut and sold has approached \$500,000 annually. During the past 12 years most of the refuge has been selectively logged as the initial phase of a recurring 15-year cutting cycle. As a timber operation, the logging has been carefully planned and executed. But one wonders how such an intensive and continuous logging program is compatible with the primary objectives of a wildlife refuge. Most certainly the logging program accounts for the very small acreage available for wilderness recommendation by the citizens -- only 5,000 acres (in 2 tracts) out of the 112,000 total acres.

Conservationists Propose Two Areas

Arkansas and other conservation organizations feel that two areas do in fact qualify as wilderness, and should be so classified. These two areas meet all the qualifications for wilderness and deserve the protection that only the Wilderness Act can provide.

Area "A" is approximately 1,000 acres of hardwood forests. The area is almost entirely surrounded by water, making it a manageable wilderness area. Though relatively small, its surroundings make this area an excellent candidate for wilderness classification.

Area "B" is approximately 4,000 acres in the south end of the refuge. Again bounded largely by water courses, this area likewise meets the qualifications for wilderness. Logged many years ago, the area has so successfully recovered that any remaining effect is substantially unnoticeable.

These two areas should be placed in the Wilderness System now.

Much of the 112,000 acres in the White River Refuge is rich, wild bottom land worthy

of protection as wilderness. The almost continuous logging program conducted on the refuge has, for the present, however, disqualified these bottom lands for wilderness designation. Were significant parts of these bottom lands removed from the logging cycle, they could be expected to recover to wilderness condition within a relatively few years. Competent wildlife experts view it as highly desirable to restrict the logging program to limited portions of the refuge and allow natural conditions to restore themselves on the portions removed from logging. From the wildlife standpoint, the logging program is helpful as it increases the numbers of the few species considered game animals. But such a program does not benefit other species which thrive in the unmanaged forest's diverse mixture of old trees, young trees, hollow trees and varieties of ground cover. On a refuge such as the White River only such diversity can assure that the widest range of life adapted to the habitats naturally available continues to thrive on the refuge.

Arkansas conservationists then suggest that one or more selected portions of the refuge should be given administrative protection by the Bureau so their wilderness character may be naturally restored. They would then qualify for wilderness recommendation at some future hearing. You are urged to include such a recommendation in your own statement or letter. More particular study of the refuge would be necessary to determine the boundaries of possible specific areas. However, local persons familiar with the refuge recognize half a dozen different sections of the refuge as having potential wilderness quality, were logging discontinued and nature allowed to dominate.

Summary of Proposals

Conservationists are proposing that:

1. Two units of wilderness be established on the White River National Wildlife Refuge, one of approximately 1,000 acres and the other of approximately 4,000 acres, for a total of 5,000 acres.
2. One or more other suitable tracts should be protected by administrative regulation so that their wilderness character may be naturally restored, thereby making it possible in time to recommend them to the Congress for addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

We urge you to appear at the hearing on May 25, 1972 in DeWitt, Arkansas. If you cannot attend, be sure to mail your letter or statement to Regional Director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Peachtree-Seventh Bldg., Atlanta, Ga. 30323. Ask that your statement be included in the hearing record. And remember--the hearing record remains open for receipt of letters for an additional 30 days, until June 26, 1972.

THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY 729 15th Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20005

Some of you are receiving this alert via third class mail. Please do not feel that to be effective it is essential that you attend the hearing or write a letter prior to the hearing date. Letters received within 30 days after the hearing are included in the official record of proceedings and are just as effective as those submitted earlier.