

STATEMENT OF JOHN KYL, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, CONGRESSIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, HOUSE INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, ON H.R. 3508 AND H.R. 5893, BILLS TO DESIGNATE CERTAIN LANDS IN AGASSIZ NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AS WILDERNESS, July 22, 1976.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to support enactment of appropriate sections of H.R. 3508 which would establish 4,000 acres of wilderness on the Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge.

The Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge was established on March 23, 1937, and presently comprises 61,487 acres and is located in eastern Marshall County in northwestern Minnesota. Formerly known as Mud Lake Refuge, it occupies a bay of prehistoric Lake Agassiz, for which the refuge was renamed in 1961.

In the early 1900's attempts were made to drain the area now occupied by the refuge; however, quick run-off through the ditches produced severe flooding and little additional land came into cultivation. Developments were commenced on the refuge in 1937 and water was again impounded. Presently 14 pools have been developed through the construction of dikes and water control structures. These pools encompass about 24,000 acres of water and marsh.

The primary objective for the Agassiz Refuge is to provide optimum conditions for the production of waterfowl. An annual production of ducks now approaches nearly 12,000. The principle nesting species are mallards, blue-winged teal, gadwalls, shovelers, ring necks, redheads and ruddy ducks.

A nesting population of Canada geese has also been established on the refuge with about 500 goslings produced each year; many of them from some artificial nesting structure.

Large concentrations of migrant waterfowl also stop at the refuge. Peak populations of 60,000 and more have been recorded with up to half the numbers being mallards.

In order to provide for waterfowl, water levels in the pools are carefully controlled. Most of the pools are drawn down about once in six years on a rotation basis and left dry for a year. This rejuvenates the marsh and encourages growth of cattails, bullrush and other marsh plants. Such cover is essential for diving duck and coot nesting and also for brood cover for all waterfowl.

In order to supplement naturally produced foods for migratory birds, about 600 acres of the refuge are farmed with resulting production made available to waterfowl during their southward migration. In addition, 10,000 to 15,000 bushels of grain are fed each year to waterfowl to help reduce crop losses which occur as a result of waterfowl feeding off the refuge.

The area proposed for wilderness is in the northern portion of the refuge. The area is a spruce-tamarac bog with two lakes, Kuriko and Whiskey, within the bog. The area is bisected by an old drainage ditch and spoil bank that are presently maintained as a four-wheel drive vehicle trail. Because of the very conspicuous nature of the ditch and spoil, they have been excluded from the wilderness proposal. There is, and has been, no management of the area, and there are no plans to alter the habitat in the future. The proposed wilderness is currently used by environmental education groups and big game hunters, and these uses would not be affected by wilderness designation.

H.R. 5893 (Sec. 1(a)(1)), like H.R. 3508 (Sec. 1(a)(15)), designates 4,000 acres in Agassiz as wilderness, but H.R. 5893 differs from the Administration's proposal as contained in H.R. 3508 in that it does not contain language withdrawing the area from disposition under the mining laws. Even though the mining laws are not applicable to this area, withdrawal language was included in the Administration's proposal to clarify that refuge wilderness areas would not be subject to the mining and mineral leasing provisions of the Wilderness Act applicable to national forest lands. Therefore, we recommend enactment of appropriate sections of H.R. 3508 and not H.R. 5893.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Refuge: Agassiz

Location: Marshall County, Minnesota

Total Acreage: 61,487

| | <u>Administration Proposal</u> | | <u>Bills Introduced 94th Congress</u> | |
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| <u>Wilderness Proposal Introduced</u> | 6/17/74 H.Doc. 93-403 Pt. 4 | S. 1046 by Haskell, et.al. 3/7/75 | H.R. 3508 (Sec.1(a)(15)) by Steiger, et.al. 2/20/75 | H.R. 5893 (Sec.1(a)(1)) by Udall 4/10/75 |
| <u>Provisions</u> | | | | |
| --Wilderness Acreage | 4,000 | same as adm. proposal | same as adm. proposal | same as adm. proposal |
| --Special Provisions | Withdrawal from mineral leasing & mining laws | same as adm. proposal (reference to BSF&W should be changed) | same as adm. proposal | withdrawal from mineral leasing |
| <u>Legislative Status</u> | | Hearings by Senate Interior Com., Subcom. on Environ. & Land Resources, 3/11/76 (witness:L.Greenwalt) | Hearings House Interior Com., Subcom.Public Lands, 7/22/76 witness:John Kyl) | |