

REVIEW AND APPROVALS

WALNUT CREEK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Prairie City, Iowa

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT

Calendar Year 1990

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Refuge Manager      Date      Refuge Supervisor Review      Date

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Regional Office Approval      Date

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U.S. Department of the Interior  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

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*Qued J. Owen*      3/5/91      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_  
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## INTRODUCTION

Walnut Creek National Wildlife Refuge is located 15 miles east of Des Moines, Iowa in southwest Jasper County. It was established on September 1, 1990, 30 days after release of an environmental assessment and signing of the Finding Of No Significant Impact by Regional Director Jim Gritman. Authority for establishment was the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956.

Authorized size of the refuge is 8,626 acres. The core of the project is 3,658 acres owned by Redlands Corporation, a subsidiary of Iowa Power and Light Company. The primary purposes for establishing the refuge are: (1) to restore native tall grass prairie, wetland, and woodland habitats for breeding and migratory waterfowl and resident wildlife, (2) to serve as a major environmental education center providing opportunities for study, (3) to provide outdoor recreation benefits to the public, and (4) to provide assistance to local landowners to improve their lands for wildlife habitat.

Topography within the refuge is rolling, and it contains lands which are highly erodible with steep slopes draining into Walnut Creek. Current habitat is 70% corn and soybeans, 14% pasture and small grain, 9% forest, and 7% administrative and other. Forested areas are mostly oak savannahs and riparian corridors along Walnut Creek.

The Fish and Wildlife Service first received notification of a proposed refuge in the Walnut Creek watershed on March 12 when U.S. Representative Neil Smith of the 4th District of Iowa met with Director John Turner in Washington, D.C. He proposed the project with land to be purchased from willing sellers only and the core of the project to be the 3,658 acres owned by Iowa Power. Iowa Power had purchased the land during the 1970's as a site for a nuclear power plant. The power plant was never built. The representative also proposed bison and elk be stocked on the area and major facilities such as a visitor center and public drive be constructed.

A preliminary investigation and subsequent discussions yielded less than an enthusiastic response from the Service. The area did not appear to support the primary mission of the Service and therefore was not considered high priority. However, the Service was notified on May 29 of U.S. Representative Smith's success in getting a \$6 million Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) appropriation included in a supplemental fiscal year 1990 appropriation bill. A preliminary project proposal was quickly prepared and was approved on June 26. The inclusion of buffalo and elk was deleted from the approved proposal.

A planning team was hastily formed and the necessary preliminary planning completed. Following difficult negotiations with Iowa Power, an agreement was executed on September 26 for the sale of 3,658 acres at a price of \$4 million. Problems remained, however, and closure could not be completed in 1990. This report attempts to document the events which occurred during the year.

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#### A. HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights for the year include:

- Notification in late May of a \$6 million supplemental mid-year appropriation to establish a new refuge in fiscal year 1990.
- Completion of a management concept plan and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance requirements in what may be a record 30-day period.
- Tentative agreement to purchase the 3,658-acre Redlands property in late September.
- Selection of a planning firm and initiation of the master planning process.

#### B. CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

No data or information to report.

#### C. LAND ACQUISITION

##### 1. Fee Title

In early June when the Service learned of the midyear \$6 million appropriation, an appraisal was ordered for the 3,658-acre Redlands property. Upon receipt of the appraisal in late August, an offer was made and negotiations started. Iowa Power had purchased the land when the market was high and apparently paid an inflated price to avoid condemnation. They felt any new appraisal should recognize linkage of the properties. However, federal appraisal theory does not recognize this value and negotiations became very difficult.

The agreement finally reached was \$4 million. The Fish and Wildlife Service appraisal reflected a value of \$2.8 million. The difference could not be negotiated within existing authorities and required special legislation be passed to allow condemnation. This was accomplished in HR 5021 where language was included to permit the use of condemnation if both parties agree. With the Department of Justice now involved, the sale could not be closed by the end of the year, and the agreed price remains subject to change.

One aspect of the sale involved the approximate 549 acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. In order for Iowa Power to avoid the risk of having to pay back money and to avoid any future management constrictions, language was included in HR 5769 that specified no refund of CRP payments or cost sharing payments shall be required when property is acquired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In addition to the Iowa Power lands, at least seven additional appraisals were requested and offers made. These landowners appear to be awaiting the outcome of the Iowa Power transactions prior to making a decision.

#### 4. Farmers Home Administration Conservation Easements

A Fish and Wildlife Management District has been proposed in the south and central portions of the state. There is no management activity to report for this year.

### D. PLANNING

#### 2. Management Plan

A preliminary management concept plan was prepared in July by a team led by Regional Biologist John Ellis. This document was extremely helpful in conducting meetings and guiding the ascertainment portion of the project through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

A major planning effort guided by regional facility design team leader Dave Shaffer was then initiated. Working through the Denver Engineering Center an indefinite quantities contract was established with the consulting firm of Sellards and Grigg of Denver. One million dollars in fiscal year 1990 funds were obligated to fund this effort. Planning firms in Seattle, St. Louis, and New Orleans were interviewed in September and the firm of Eskew/Filson Associates (EFA) from New Orleans was selected to lead the planning effort. The goal is to produce a master plan and Environmental Impact Statement.

Additional meetings followed. The first meeting was held at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge on November 22. It was a one-day workshop to review the preliminary work plan developed by EFA. Attendance was limited to a few Service and contractor representatives. Guidelines for level of services such as resource inventories, hydrology studies, facilities programming, etc. were given.

A second workshop was held December 12-14 in Des Moines, Iowa to further define the project. Attendance was expanded to include U.S. Representative Neil Smith and other parties and individuals who have a particular interest in the project. From this meeting a statement of work evolved which detailed the master planning effort. It will include an Environmental Impact Statement to fulfill NEPA requirements.

#### 3. Public Participation

Public participation was required as part of the environmental assessment process. Because of the sudden nature of the project, a meeting was called with the estimated 50-60 landowners within the study area boundary on July 7. This meeting was held in the Cardinal Inn meeting room in Prairie City, Iowa.

It was followed by a public meeting in the Prairie City middle school auditorium on July 19. Meetings with other groups such as the Jasper County Farm Bureau, Jasper County Board of Supervisors, Prairie City Business Association, etc. were also held.

A general range of concerns were expressed at the meeting, but people were generally resigned to the fact something was going to happen to the Redlands property and a refuge was probably better than a nuclear plant. However, the 8,000 to 10,000-acre project being proposed was larger than expected and was a major concern. Prairie City citizens felt they would absorb the negative economic impacts and the positive impacts would accrue elsewhere. Economic impact assessments were completed by Southern Illinois University and Iowa State University using the "IMPLAN" procedure. They indicated negative impacts on the agricultural segment but offsetting positive impacts from recreation and refuge operations with an overall "no change". There would be some diversification. However, the economic studies were done on a regional basis and did not "home in" on the local community. An economic study done for Prairie City business sectors by Iowa State University indicated there could be a dramatic negative impact. A similar study done specifically for the Prairie City Farmers Coop likewise indicated a severe negative impact.

The other major concerns appeared to be loss of tax base and anticipated road closures. The tax issue was not major because of refuge revenue sharing and the Prairie City - Monroe School consolidation which took place during the summer. The new school district appears to be relatively well funded. The road issue can be dealt with and should be supported by the County Board of Supervisors who could gain by relinquishing control of some substandard roads and bridges.

#### 4. Compliance with Environmental and Cultural Resource Mandates

The environmental assessment for establishment of the refuge was prepared in July. Jeannie Wagner, Ascertainment Biologist in the Twin Cities Regional Office was the major author responsible for its preparation and editing. Andrew French from the same office was the assistant author and was responsible for the public contacts. Both did a remarkable job. The finding of no significant impact (FONSI) was signed by Regional Director Jim Gritman on August 1.

A scope of service for an archeological field survey was prepared but no contract awarded due to lack of funds. The area appears to have low potential for significant archeological resources.

Level I and II contaminant surveys were completed on the Redlands property and six additional potential willing seller properties. There does not appear to be any areas where contaminants are of concern except the three to five-acre Beener property. This is an auto body shop with a lot of miscellaneous debris and a leaking underground storage tank. A Level III contaminant survey is needed here.

## 5. Research and Investigations

A research proposal to develop an evaluation plan using Geographic Information System (GIS) techniques was submitted by the Iowa Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and approved. Fiscal year 1990 funds in the amount of \$86,800 were obligated. The study should provide useful information for management purposes but will not be available in time for initial master planning efforts.

## E. ADMINISTRATION

### 1. Personnel

Richard Birger, Refuge Manager at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, was selected as Project Leader but will not report until February 10, 1991. Gerald L. Clawson, Refuge Manager at Mingo National Wildlife Refuge, served as Acting Project Leader from mid-June through the end of the year. Judy McClendon, Administrative Assistant at Mingo, provided administrative support for the project by ordering office equipment and supplies, setting up computers, preparing travel vouchers, and handling all the many details associated with setting up a new office.

Two positions, a Wildlife Biologist, GS-9/11 and an Office Assistant, GS-5/6 were advertised. The Wildlife Biologist position was subsequently canceled due to other impending staff changes. The Office Assistant position received only two applications and will be readvertised. Selections should be made early in 1991.

### 5. Funding

The Service learned on May 29 of the Representative's success in getting a \$6 million Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) appropriation included in a supplemental fiscal year 1990 appropriation bill. All funds were successfully obligated primarily for land acquisition, planning, and equipment purchases.

Fiscal year 1991 funding has not been finalized but preliminary indications are \$3.1 million for construction, \$3 million for acquisition, and \$300,000 for operation and maintenance may be available.

### 8. Other

Temporary office space was acquired in a building shared with Iowa Concrete Products at 101 South West Street on the west side of Prairie City, Iowa. The rental agreement became effective November 1, and the office was equipped and furnished in late November.

## H. PUBLIC USE

### 1. General

A meeting with representatives from school districts in a 15-county area surrounding the refuge was called by Representative Neil Smith on December 7. The purpose of the meeting was to gather input from the education community for use in refuge planning. The meeting was met with considerable enthusiasm and an educational advisory group has been formed.

A 10-minute introductory video was produced by Scott Bates, Audio-visual Specialist from Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge. The video illustrates proposed plans and concepts for development of the refuge and has been useful for promoting the project.

## I. EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

### 4. Equipment Utilization and Replacement

Equipment purchased for this refuge includes the following:

- Dual rubber tracked ATV with trailer, fire pump and tank - 2 each
- Agricultural tractor, 100 H.P. - 2 each
- Truck/tractor with lowboy
- Dump truck, 10-yard
- Dozer tractor, Komatsu dresser, D505T
- Wheel tractor with front end loader and backhoe
- Tracked excavator
- Grass drill
- 4 X 4 pickup
- 4 X 2 pickup - 4 each

### 5. Communications Systems

A Merlin telephone system from AT&T was purchased and installed.

### 6. Computer Systems

Two IBM compatible (Compu Add) computer systems along with two Hewlett Packard laserjet series III printers and a Hayes smartmodem were purchased and installed.

### 8. Other

Other equipment purchased for this refuge includes the following:

- Ricoh fax machine
- Savin photocopier, with stand
- Swintec 7000 SC typewriter
- Minolta X700 35mm camera, with case
- 70-210 zoom lens, with case

- Camcorder, model VL-L280, with case
- Recorder, video cassette, Sharp, model XA-305
- Monitor, Sharp, model 25 RT 59, with stand
- Slide projector, with remote and screen
- Two calculators

Office furniture was obtained primarily from excess regional office inventory in storage at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge.

## J. OTHER ITEMS

### 1. Cooperative Programs

Boundaries of the Des Moines Recreational River and Greenbelt area were expanded in 1990 to include Walnut Creek National Wildlife Refuge. Since refuge personnel have and will continue to work closely with the Greenbelt committee, a brief description of the concept is provided.

The Greenbelt concept was proposed by U.S. Representative Neil Smith and enacted into law in 1985. It basically covers the area along the Des Moines River and two major tributaries between and including Saylorville Lake and Lake Red Rock. Its purpose is to develop and manage natural and cultural resources, outdoor recreation facilities and environmental education programs in a manner that attracts outdoor recreational use and economic development. The concept is to coordinate projects of various governmental agencies to enhance opportunities for recreation and provide environmental protection of scarce river bottom timberlands.

The Greenbelt committee has 45 authorized representatives who are appointed by various mayors and County Board of Supervisors. The governor appoints five representatives which include the Director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources who chairs the meetings. The overall project is administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in consultation with the Advisory Committee. Certain recreational projects are eligible for cost sharing between local sponsors and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

### 4. Credits

The report was prepared by Acting Refuge Manager Gerald L. Clawson and typed by Mingo National Wildlife Refuge Biological Technician Judy Greenlee and Information Receptionist Brenda Foster.