

News Release



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Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Receives \$2.2 Million to Protect Waterfowl and Other Bird Species

Cambridge, Md. – The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (Commission) has approved more than \$2.2 million in funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners to acquire 758 acres at [Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge](#).

The funding is part of more than [\\$27 million in funding](#) approved by the Commission on Sept. 9 to purchase, lease or otherwise conserve nearly 200,000 acres of wetland and associated upland habitats for waterfowl, shorebirds and other birds across the United States. Of that amount, the Commission approved nearly \$6.5 million from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to conserve 3,274 acres for five national wildlife refuges through fee title land acquisitions and easement acquisitions.

The Blackwater properties are currently being used for recreation and timber harvest. As part of the refuge, they will be managed for waterfowl, other migratory birds, and public uses, including public hunting.

“With support from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, we can help conserve this important waterfowl habitat for the future while also supporting Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge’s contribution to the local community,” said Service Northeast Regional Director Wendi Weber. “The addition of this land will help sustain wildlife and provide important recreational opportunities to the more than 500,000 visitors who hunt, fish, observe wildlife and photograph at Blackwater each year.”

Located on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, the 27,000-acre wildlife refuge includes a third of Maryland’s tidal wetlands and some of the most important habitat for birds along the critical migration highway called the Atlantic Flyway. Blackwater also contains the largest breeding population of bald eagles on the East Coast north of Florida and shelters many other species.

"The Blackwater Refuge is one of the Eastern Shore's unique treasures," said U.S. Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.). "Investment in our environment is an investment in the future of our state. It helps with jobs in the tourism industry by providing an engaging environment for residents and visitors, and it helps with the environment by providing a complex habitat for many species. I have always been a strong supporter of federal funding for this important migratory bird habitat, and I will continue to work to protect it so that it will be preserved for future generations of Marylanders."

“The natural resources and wildlife habitats protected by Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge are invaluable to ensuring clean water and flourishing waterfowl populations, so today’s announcement that the refuge will be able to expand the reach of its stewardship by more than 750 acres is tremendously significant,” said U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin (D-Md). “These new acquisitions will allow even more of the Eastern Shore’s highly productive ecosystems to be managed for the public’s benefit and accessible to the American people.”

The acquisition area includes tidal marsh and freshwater creek habitats. It borders freshwater marsh, as well as shrub wetlands and forested wetlands vulnerable to marsh migration and the effects of sea-level rise. According to Service reports, Blackwater has lost approximately 8,000 acres of wetlands to erosion and sea-level rise and loses more than 300 acres of marsh each year.

Elizabeth Zucker with the Maryland/DC chapter of The Nature Conservancy, a key partner in the land purchase, said the funding helps support an ongoing effort to protect critical Chesapeake Bay wildlife habitats and water quality.

"We are truly appreciative of the Commission's decision, because it provides a major boost for Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge to expand upstream and ensure that quality habitats for migratory birds and public access for people are available despite concerns of sea-level rise," Zucker said.

The Chesapeake Conservancy is a leading advocate for national wildlife refuges and national parks in the Chesapeake region. President and CEO Joel Dunn said the acquisitions will make critical additions to the network of protected lands along the river corridor, allowing wildlife to migrate and adapt to climate change.

"We are grateful that the Commission has provided this funding to protect key properties at Blackwater and along the Nanticoke River," Dunn said. "We remain hopeful that Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) monies will also be appropriated by Congress for additional tracts of land that are critical to protecting wildlife habitats and maintaining recreational opportunities along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail."

The \$6.5 million from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund was raised partially through the sale of Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps (Duck Stamps), which help provide habitat for wildlife and increased opportunities for refuge visitors who hunt, bird-watch, photograph and view wildlife.

For every dollar spent on federal Duck Stamps, 98 cents goes toward the acquisition or lease of habitat for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since 1934, the Federal Duck Stamp Program and Migratory Bird Conservation Fund have provided more than \$800 million to acquire more than 5.7 million acres for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Commission is chaired by the Secretary of the Interior. Its members include U.S. Senators Thad Cochran of Mississippi and Martin Heinrich of New Mexico; Representatives Robert J. Wittman of Virginia and Mike Thompson of California; U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack; and Gina McCarthy, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency.

For more information, visit: <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/more-27-million-funding-approved-protect-waterfowl-and-other-bird-species-0>.

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