

FAQs: Proposed Expansion of Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge

What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposing?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to expand the Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge's acquisition boundary to include portions of Bertie, Washington, Martin, Halifax and Northampton counties bordering a 137-mile stretch of the Roanoke River from Weldon to the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina. Under the draft proposal, the Service would establish a Conservation Partnership Area that could protect up to 287,090 acres of bottomland forest habitats, including 93,000 acres already managed for conservation by public and private entities. The draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment proposes that the Service could purchase up to 50,000 acres of land and up to 100,000 acres of conservation easements from willing sellers within the Conservation Partnership Area, to be managed as part of the Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge.

Why is the Service proposing to expand the acquisition boundary of this National Wildlife Refuge?

The proposal reflects numerous regional and national conservation plans and many years of engagement with the state of North Carolina, The Nature Conservancy, and other federal agencies to develop a landscape-scale conservation strategy for the lower Roanoke River Basin. The proposed expansion would help to improve habitat connectivity between the Albemarle-Pamlico peninsula and the Roanoke River floodplain, conserve the most extensive bottomland hardwood forest on the East Coast, improve water quality, and build climate resilience against rising seas, which are expected to inundate much of the Albemarle-Pamlico peninsula in the next 50 to 100 years.

This landscape is home to many rare and at-risk species, including Atlantic sturgeon, cerulean and Swainson's warblers, and bald eagles. The river's floodplain is a key stopover along the Atlantic Flyway for neotropical migratory birds, as well as ducks, wading birds, and raptors. The expansion area supports at least five heron rookeries and habitat for swallow-tailed kites and cerulean warblers. Hickory shad, alewife, and blueback herring utilize the floodplain while American shad, Atlantic sturgeon, and striped bass spawn in the mainstem of the Roanoke River.

What is a Conservation Partnership Area?

A Conservation Partnership Area is a specified area within which the Service has the authority to acquire a limited amount of property from willing landowners for the purposes of a national wildlife refuge. The term "Conservation Partnership Area" reflects the fact that partners within the acquisition boundary have already established ownership and will continue to own and purchase areas that may complement the Service's landscape conservation efforts, even if they are not owned or managed by the Service for the purposes of a national wildlife refuge. Within the Conservation Partnership Area, the Service has the flexibility to acquire and prioritize specific parcels in response to changing landowner interest, conditions, and opportunities.

How am I affected if my land is within the Conservation Partnership Area and/or the Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge acquisition boundary?

Private landowners are not affected by the designation of the Conservation Partnership Area or the expansion of the refuge. Landowners within an approved acquisition boundary retain all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership, even if the Service has acquired interest in the land surrounding them. Private lands remain in control of the owner and subject to local land use regulations unless the owner sells the property to the Service. Service management of access, land-use practices, water management, hunting, fishing, and general use within an approved acquisition boundary is limited to the lands that the Service has acquired from willing sellers as opportunity and funding allow.

How does the Service acquire land?

Throughout the expansion review process, the Service will continue working with willing partners and landowners who are committed to conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The proposed expansion outlines land protection priorities that would inform the Service's interest in acquiring parcels from landowners who are willing to sell property (fee-title) or property rights (conservation easements or cooperative agreements) through purchase or donation.

Will I be able to hunt, fish, hike, and bird watch on refuge lands purchased through fee-title?

Within refuge lands acquired through fee-title purchases from willing sellers only, public uses such as hunting, fishing, environmental education and interpretation, wildlife observation and photography would be allowed if deemed compatible with the refuge. Additional public uses, including such as research, hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, boating and kayaking, could also be considered.

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

The federal government does not pay property tax on land it owns. However, the Service annually reimburses counties to compensate for lost revenue based on a formula that is the greater of: 75 cents per acre; three-fourths of 1 percent of the fair market value; or 25 percent of the net receipts collected from operation and management of refuge lands. Use of these funds must first be approved by Congress. 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. See the following link for more details: [Refuge Revenue Sharing](#)

How would the refuge pay for the purchase of land?

The Service pays fair market value for land and draws funding for land acquisition from [several sources](#). The Migratory Bird Conservation Fund provides funding from the sale of duck stamps. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is derived from the sale of offshore oil leases. The North American Wetlands Conservation Fund comes from congressional appropriations, fines, penalties, and forfeitures collected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and from federal fuel excise taxes on small gas engines collected under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950 and from interest on the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937.

Where can I find more information, including if I want to sell my land to the Service?

To get more information about the Roanoke River NWR, this proposal or selling land or obtaining an easement on a property, visit www.fws.gov/refuge/roanokeriver or contact Matt Connolly, Refuge Manager at (252) 794-3808, ext. 105; matt_connolly@fws.gov; or Rebekah Martin, Project Leader at (252) 473-1131, ext. 222; Rebekah_p_martin@fws.gov.