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TEXANS CHEER APPROVAL OF REFUGE ON NECHES RIVER

25,000 acres along the Neches River to be protected

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Monday approved the creation of the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge in Anderson and Cherokee Counties, laying the basis for eventual protection of 25,000 acres of bottomland wildlife habitat along the Neches River.

"We commend the Fish and Wildlife Service for standing up and doing what is right," said Susan Kaderka of the National Wildlife Federation. "This refuge is good news for the wildlife of the Neches River basin—the wood ducks and the wild turkeys, the river otters and the raccoons. And it is equally good news for the people of Texas."

A coalition of conservation groups had long lobbied for the refuge and had gathered close to 10,000 signatures from across the state supporting creation of the refuge.

Gina Donovan of the Texas Committee on Natural Resources said the refuge would benefit more than just area wildlife. "The refuge will be an economic boon to East Texas. The beauty of the Neches River bottoms will draw nature lovers of all stripes—hunters, anglers, paddlers, photographers, birdwatchers and others—from across the country."

The US Fish and Wildlife Service first identified the area as ecologically important in 1985. Recently, water planners in the Dallas area proposed a reservoir for essentially the same site, which delayed final approval of the refuge.

The Fish and Wildlife Service reviewed numerous other potential sites for the refuge and found no other site that would serve as well. Fish and Wildlife spokesperson Elizabeth Slown told the *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, "There's not a place like that area in terms of wildlife. It's just a real gem."

"These bottomlands are simply too precious to flood for a water supply reservoir. We are confident the Dallas area will find other, better ways to meet their water needs," added Kaderka.

The DFW metroplex is one of the fastest-growing areas of the country and it has some of the highest per-capita water use in the state.

"The water planners' own projections show that this water wasn't necessary—even with the high rates of water use," said Janice Bezanson, executive director of Texas Committee on Natural Resources. "The reservoir was being planned as a cushion. Of course, the best and most reliable cushion is to simply use less water. It's something most cities have been working on for over twenty years."

Land for the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge will be purchased from willing sellers only. Neighboring landowners will retain full rights and access to their properties.

In *Paddling the Wild Neches*, Lufkin-based author and naturalist Richard Donovan wrote, "The Neches, our river, is more than a river. It is a special realm, almost out of place in our urbanized world...All those who have ever known the Neches and its wildness will carry the song of its water forever in their hearts."

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