

Originating Committee: Public and Private Lands

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Intended Recipients: United States Secretary of the Interior, Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service; Refuge Manager, Middle Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters, Representative Jason Smith (Missouri CD-8), Representative Michael Bost (Illinois CD-12), Executive Director of the Nature Conservancy, Executive Director of Ducks Unlimited, St. Louis and Memphis Districts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, HeartLands Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, National Wildlife Federation

Support Expansion of the Middle Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge

WHEREAS, the Middle Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established as an individual refuge on May 31, 2000, and consists of seven island divisions with 8,103 current acres that lie within the portion of the Middle Mississippi River, between the mouths of the Missouri and the Ohio Rivers, where river levels are not regulated by the lock and dam system; and

WHEREAS, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service approved a plan on September 7, 2023, to expand the Middle Mississippi NWR up to 90,000 acres, with the additional acreage to be purchased from willing sellers; and

WHEREAS, according to the Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri has lost over 87 percent of the state's original wetland habitat due to farming, road-building, and urban development; and

WHEREAS, in 2019, an article in the journal *Science* reported the net loss of North American birds since 1970, finding that in the last 50 years we've lost 2.9 billion, or 29 percent, of North American birds, and estimated that currently the total number of birds flying, eating, and breeding is nearly 3 billion fewer than 50 years ago; and

WHEREAS, this refuge was designated as an Important Bird Area in 2008 and expanding the Middle Mississippi NWR will increase important habitat for migrating birds who use the Mississippi Flyway; and

WHEREAS, expansion of this refuge will provide additional land and river access for hunters and anglers; and

WHEREAS, healthy nature activities such as wildlife observation, photography and hiking, interpretive and education programs, boating, and birdwatching will be significantly increased with the addition of acreage to the Middle Mississippi NWR; and

WHEREAS, this NWR provides access to the floodplain for native fish during high water stages and creates a corridor of floodplain forest habitat for migratory birds and resident wildlife, restoring connectivity to the floodplain and helping river fish species like the sturgeon and paddlefish; and

WHEREAS, an expanded refuge will help protect communities from catastrophic flooding by storing flood waters and decreasing peak flows; and

WHEREAS, in January 2021 President Biden signed Executive Order 14008, “Tackling the climate crisis at home and abroad”, which charged the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, to recommend how the United States can achieve the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our lands and water by 2030 (30x30); and

WHEREAS, the HeartLands Conservancy has acquired nearly 1,000 acres on Rockwood Island that they subsequently deeded to the US Fish & Wildlife Service for inclusion in the Middle Mississippi River NWR; and

WHEREAS, in the 2024 Federal Budget the Department of the Interior requested \$500,000 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund on the FY 2024 President’s Budget – Project Data Sheet working with “Cooperators” The Army Corps of Engineers, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, local municipal entities, and the States of Missouri and Illinois, to acquire a 350-acre tract in the Dogtooth Bend area of the Refuge bringing the total acres in the NWR to about 10 percent of its goal with only six years remaining until 2030; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Conservation Federation of Missouri assembled at Lake Ozark, Missouri, this 2nd day of March 2024, calls upon the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to work with identified partners in the HeartLands Conservancy, and the “Cooperators” to identify willing sellers and acquire the land to meet its goal to protect 90,000 total acres, as soon as practical and with the 30x30 goal in mind.

Searchable Keywords: Mississippi, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, wildlife, refuge, 30x30, America the Beautiful, birds, hunting, fishing, floodplain, wetlands, habitat, flyway

EXPIRES: March 2, 2029