



Wednesday
March 19, 2003



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News

The News-Herald

A Heritage Newspaper
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Army Corps donates 168 wetland acres to refuge

By Paula Evans Neuman, *The News-Herald*

BROWNSTOWN TWP. — Only one gift was given during a 100th birthday celebration of America's National Wildlife Refuge System on Friday.

But it was a doozy.

It came without wrapping, ribbons or cards, but nobody minded.

Besides, how do you wrap 168 acres of wetland, complete with a bald eagle's nest?

The land south of Pointe Mouillee State Game Area in Monroe County has been owned by the Army Corps of Engineers for about 25 years, said Lt. Col. Thomas Magness, commander of the corps' Detroit Group.

He turned over a five-year permit to the property to the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge at Friday's party.

The permit is an interim measure to give the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, managers of the refuge, immediate control of the property while the steps for a permanent land transfer are taken.

More than 100 community leaders gathered at Lake Erie Metropark to celebrate the 100th birthday of the refuge system founded by President Theodore Roosevelt, and to witness the donation of the land.

U.S. Rep. John Dingell (D-15th District), who wrote the legislation that created the Detroit River refuge, beamed as he praised the Army Corps.

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"They have seen to it that a lot of important areas on the Detroit River have been saved," Dingell said.

Magness said he knows the corps often is unpopular.

"Everything we do is about what is best for the nation," he said, adding that what is best for the nation isn't always what communities believe is best for them individually.

"It doesn't always endear us to communities," Magness said.

Barry Christenson, supervisor of wildlife refuges for a four-state region including Michigan, spoke to the dignitaries about the refuge system.

"There's a refuge area one hour's drive of every large metropolitan area in the country," he said. "Most people are aware of the National Park System ... but the refuge system is just as wonderful, unique in the world."

The Detroit River refuge also is unique.

Established by law on Dec. 21, 2001, it is the first international refuge in North America.

It includes all of the islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals and riverfront land in Canada and the United States along 18 miles of the lower Detroit River from Zug Island in River Rouge through Sterling State Park in Monroe.

The refuge comprises public and private land, and private landowners are encouraged to sell, donate or lend their shoreline property through conservation easements or "cooperative management arrangements," Dingell said.

But there is no duress, and no taking of public or private property.

The National Wildlife Refuge System administers more than 95 million acres in more than 540 refuges for conservation.

The refuge system is the world's largest collection of lands and waters specifically managed for fish and wildlife — and the people who care about them.

It began on March 14, 1903, when Theodore Roosevelt set aside three-acre Pelican Island in Florida as a sanctuary for herons, egrets, pelicans and other birds.

Before he left office, Roosevelt had set aside 54 more wildlife refuges.

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The News-Herald, A Heritage Newspapers Twice Weekly Publication
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