LAKE OPHELIA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX

Marksville, Louisiana

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT

Calendar Year 1989

U.S. Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

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2. Gary Juenger, Asst. Refuge Manager, GS-09/02, EOD 03/12/89 PFT
3. Brent Bordelon, Tractor Operator, WG-07/01, EOD 06/04/89 Temporary

Review and Approvals

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Refuge Manager Date

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Refuge Supervisor Date

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Regional Office Approval Date

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INTRODUCTION

The Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge Complex consists of two National Wildlife Refuges in Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, and over 20 easements associated with FmHA tracts in eight central Louisiana parishes. Avoyelles Parish is the northernmost stronghold of the unique Acadian (Cajun) culture. Cajun French is commonly spoken on the street and indeed the "specials" in Wal-Mart are even announced in French. Traditions associated with this culture permeate day to day life and make for a most interesting place to live. Accordingly refuge management opportunities and problems are also unique. Where else could there be a demand for recreational crawfishing on a National Wildlife Refuge or gros bec (night heron) poaching activity?

Lake Ophelia NWR was born in 1988 and named for the dominant water body on the area. The total planned acreage is 30,000. The first land at Grand Cote (Big Ridge) NWR was acquired in 1989. The Service intends to purchase 12,000 acres here. Both refuges were established to preserve wintering habitat for mallards, pintails and wood ducks and production habitat for wood ducks to meet goals presented in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

The present refuge office is located on the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Reservation in Marksville. Other than a large metal equipment shed at Lake Ophelia, there are no other functional facilities on the Complex.

For the purpose of this first annual narrative report, both refuges are often discussed together within the text. In some sections such as Land Acquisition or Croplands, it was more appropriate to discuss the areas separately.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

A. HIGHLIGHTS 8

B. CLIMATIC CONDITIONS 9

C. LAND ACQUISITION

1. Fee Title 11
2. Easements 14
3. Other 15

D. PLANNING

1. Master Plan 15
2. Management Plan 15
3. Public Participation. 16
4. Compliance with Environmental Mandates. 16
5. Research and Investigations 16

E. ADMINISTRATION

1. Personnel 17
2. Youth Programs. 17
3. Other Manpower Programs 18
4. Volunteers Program. 18
5. Funding 19
6. Safety. 19
7. Technical Assistance. . . . . .NTR
8. Other Items 20

F. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

1. General 22
2. Wetlands. 22
3. Forests 25
4. Croplands 27
5. Grasslands. . . . . .NTR
6. Other Habitats. . . . . .NTR
7. Grazing 30
8. Haying. 30
9. Fire Management 30
10. Pest Control. 30
11. Water Rights. 31
12. Wilderness and Special Areas. . . . . .NTR
13. WPA Easement Montoring. . . . . .NTR

G. WILDLIFE

		Page
1.	Wildlife Diversity	31
2.	Endangered and/or Threatened Species	32
3.	Waterfowl	32
4.	Marsh and Water Birds	33
5.	Shorebirds, Gulls, Terns and Allied Species	34
6.	Raptors	34
7.	Other Migratory Birds	34
8.	Game Mammals	35
9.	Marine Mammals	NTR
10.	Other Resident Wildlife	35
11.	Fisheries Resources	35
12.	Wildlife Propagation and Stocking	36
13.	Surplus Animal Disposal	NTR
14.	Scientific Collections	NTR
15.	Animal Control	36
16.	Marking and Banding	36
17.	Disease Prevention and Control	NTR

H. PUBLIC USE

1.	General	37
2.	Outdoor Classrooms - Students	NTR
3.	Outdoor Classrooms - Teachers	NTR
4.	Interpretive Foot Trails	NTR
5.	Interpretive Tour Routes	NTR
6.	Interpretive Exhibits/Demonstrations	NTR
7.	Other Interpretive Programs	NTR
8.	Hunting	37
9.	Fishing	37
10.	Trapping	38
11.	Wildlife Observation	NTR
12.	Other Wildlife Oriented Recreation	38
13.	Camping	NTR
14.	Picnicking	NTR
15.	Off-Road Vehicling	NTR
16.	Other Non-Wildlife Oriented Recreation	NTR
17.	Law Enforcement	39
18.	Cooperating Associations	NTR
19.	Concessions	NTR

I. EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

1.	New Construction	40
2.	Rehabilitation	41
3.	Major Maintenance	41
4.	Equipment Utilization and Replacement	44
5.	Communications Systems	44
6.	Energy Conservation	NTR
7.	Other	NTR

J. OTHER ITEMS

		Page
1.	Cooperative Programs	NTR
2.	Items of Interest	45
3.	Credits	46

K. FEEDBACK 47

A. HIGHLIGHTS

--Precipitation extremes impact all aspects of refuge operations. (Section B)

--Lake Ophelia NWR grows by 600 percent. Grand Cote NWR is born. (Section C)

--Refuge office established at Tunica-Biloxi Indian Reservation in Marksville. (Section E.8)

--National leaders participate in refuge dedication ceremonies. (Section E.8)

--Extensive reforestation efforts begin. (Section F.3)

--Refuge manages what may be largest co-op farming program in the system. (Section F.4)

--Staff begins assessing wildlife resources of the new refuges. (Section G)

--Public use program initiated by opening of Lake Ophelia to sport fishing. (Section H.9)

--Major accomplishments made in construction of moist soil impoundments. (Section I.1)

B. CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

No temperature records are available at this time. The Corps of Engineers at Red River Lock and Dam No. 1, located about five miles northwest of the shop at Lake Ophelia, keeps precipitation records which are included below. Records for Marksville are more indicative of conditions at Grand Cote and are also included.

January weather was generally dry and very mild. On February 5, temperatures near 20 degrees combined with moisture to bring a massive ice storm which blacked out most of the parish for three days. March and April were cooler than normal, with heavy rains at Lake Ophelia in late March. April was virtually without precipitation, delaying spring crops. May and June saw record rainfall amounts, with around 40 inches received over a six week period. One 45 minute storm in early June dumped six inches of rain on an already soaked parish. Little California Road at Grand Cote was inundated and impassable for several days. These rains kept us virtually "swamped" for most of July. Then, the rains quit and it was almost precipitationless until November. No rain fell in September or October causing crop damage to previously water-logged crops. An early frost on October 19 foretold of a cold winter to come. The drought held the remainder of the year, with almost no water impounded except for that pumped on rice fields at Grand Cote. Bitter cold arrived at Christmas with temperatures reaching down to five degrees on two consecutive nights. For five days the high temperature remained well below freezing. Around three inches of rain fell on December 6 and 7, but no runoff occurred as the ground was very dry. By year's end, virtually no water was present at Grand Cote while impoundments at Lake Ophelia held less than 20 percent of capacity.

PRECIPITATION AT MARKSVILLE, LA AND RED RIVER LOCK # 1 1989
(from National Weather Service, New Orleans)

	Marksville			Lock # 1		
	diff. from average	amount	greatest 24 hr.	diff. from average	amount	greatest 24 hr.
January	+ .13	4.73	1.24	+1.30	5.90	1.65
February	- .56	3.96	3.31	- .19	4.33	2.95
March	+2.32	7.55	2.50	+ .70	5.93	1.05
* April	-4.29	1.04	.46	-2.93	2.40	1.25
May	+4.81	10.03	4.29	+3.14	8.36	2.00
June	+7.92	12.71	2.11	+4.27	9.06	2.10
July	+1.34	6.61	1.30	- .23	5.04	1.16
* August	- .40	3.97	1.74	-3.65	.72	.43
* September	-5.02	.16	.10	-2.07	3.11	2.60
* October	-4.36	.23	.18	-4.39	.20	.20
* November	- .35	4.39	1.49	-1.82	2.92	.90
* December	-3.11	4.30	1.63	-3.71	3.70	1.12
	-1.57	59.68	4.29	-9.58	51.67	2.95

* denotes a month in which below normal precipitation adversely affected growing conditions or waterfowl habitat conditions

June rains flood winter wheat at Lake Ophelia NWR. 6/89. LO3/89/GJ

C. LAND ACQUISITION

It is no secret that establishing new National Wildlife Refuges requires a great deal of time and effort dealing with land acquisition matters at the field level. Such was the case here in 1989. We coordinated, coerced, congratulated, and cussed appraisers, landowners, realty personnel from RO, The Nature Conservancy, and ourselves. We realigned acquisition boundaries on paper and searched for real boundaries on the ground. We conducted inspections and composed wish lists. Government land acquisition does certainly promote patience.

1. Fee Title

Lake Ophelia NWR

The original Lake Ophelia acquisition proposal (48,000 acres) was identified by the Service in 1977. Preliminary acquisition information was gathered and the proposal was accepted by the Regional Office Land Acquisition Review Committee on December 5, 1977. Prior to this approval, decision documents and realty actions such as appraisals were undertaken. Field decision documents were completed prior to May 1, 1977, because of the urgency that prevailed at that time due to the imminent threat of land clearing by agricultural speculators.

Preservation of this property, which had been rated in the top five bottomland hardwood tracts for wintering waterfowl in Louisiana by the Service, was supported by the Louisiana Congressional delegation, the State of Louisiana, and several conservation groups.

On August 16, 1978, the Director of the Service gave approval for the purchase of the Lake Ophelia tract. Unfortunately a 20,000 acre "core" tract, owned by Elder Lumber Company, was purchased by Albert Prevost (Bayou Lafourche, Inc.) and the proposed Service acquisition boundary was revised to include 38,000 instead of 48,000 acres. Of the 20,000 acre core tract, approximately 13,000 acres were cleared by Mr. Prevost and sold to a number of agricultural speculators primarily to grow soybeans. Toward the end of this massive clearing operation, the Avoyelles Sportsman's League in concert with the Environmental Defense Fund filed suit against Mr. Prevost in Federal Court (the Western District of Louisiana). The basis for this suit and the subsequent ruling by Judge Nauman Scott addressed the question as to whether land clearing constituted a regulated activity under Section 404 of the 1977 Clean Water Act. The opinion issued by Judge Scott in June 1979, held that land clearing included the deposition of fill material and, therefore, was a regulated activity when occurring in wetlands. This hallmark wetland decision was hailed by environmentalists, but it had come too late for several thousand acres of Red River bottomland hardwoods. Fortunately the ruling did preserve the natural ridge-slough land configuration in the cleared agricultural areas.

Service acquisition interests continued and acquisition was scheduled for Fiscal Year 1982. The loss of the core tract, unwillingness of some owners to sell, limited funding by the Service for land acquisition and emphasis on purchasing bottomland hardwoods as opposed to converted (cleared) wetlands, and speculation that the Court's decision and a drop in soybean prices would protect the remaining woodland relegated the project to a lower priority until 1987. By this time the property cleared by Prevost had been conveyed to the Federal Land Bank (8,647 acres) for indebtedness and a poor agricultural economy made other private lands available for Service acquisition. At the same time the Service refocused attention on the need to acquire waterfowl wintering habitat for pintails as well as mallards in the lower Mississippi River delta. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan further highlighted and recognized this need. In April 1988, Director Dunkle approved the Preliminary Project Proposal to acquire approximately 40,000 acres at Lake Ophelia.

The first land was acquired by the Service on June 30, 1988, with the purchase of the 1,536 acre Point Bass tract. In the mean time the Federal Land Bank sold 7,874 acres of the core tract to the Kennedy group from northeast Louisiana. On February 13, 1989, The Nature Conservancy bought this entire

tract and on the same day the Service in turn purchased 5,150 of these acres from TNC and leased all surface rights with an option to purchase the remaining 2,724 acres. This brought the total of lands under management at Lake Ophelia to 9,410 acres.

A lease/option agreement was finalized on the 3,200 acre Northwestern Mutual Insurance tract in July. We took over management immediately and posted the entire tract that month. The 5.42 acre Buford Smith tract was purchased on September 21, 1989, and culminated land acquisition for the year. As of December 31, 1989, the Service owned or leased about 12,615 acres at Lake Ophelia.

In October 1989, Senator Bennett Johnston confirmed that the President signed the FY 90 Interior appropriations package which contains $3 million earmarked for land acquisition at Lake Ophelia. Present plans are to use these funds to purchase the 3,200 acre Northwestern Mutual Insurance tract, the 1,800 acre Hansco (John Hancock Insurance Co.) tract, and the remaining 2,724 acres held by The Nature Conservancy.

Grand Cote NWR

Compared to Lake Ophelia NWR, the birth of Grand Cote was fast with few complications. The significance of the area to waterfowl was not formally recognized by the Service until 1988 when it was included as a component of the Three Rivers Waterfowl Habitat Conservation Plan, a project initiative of the Lower Mississippi River Valley Joint Venture of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The Acting Service Director signed the Preliminary Project Proposal on December 15, 1988.

The refuge acquisition area consists of two units separated by State Highway 114. The Chatlin Lake Unit is located south of U.S. Highway 1 and west of highway 114 along the Avoyelles/Rapides Parish line. The Choctaw Bayou Unit (Coco Farms) lies between highway 114 and the town of Marksville. The size of the selection area is approximately 18,000 acres. Within this area a refuge of 10,000-12,000 acres is planned.

The establishment of Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge was assured on January 17, 1989, when The Nature Conservancy purchased 5,940 acres of Coco Farms. The landowner of this principal tract within the Choctaw Bayou Unit was in the midst of bankruptcy when TNC acquired the property for about $355 per acre. On April 27, 1989, the Service leased all rights to the area for $10 per acre until funds to purchase the land could be appropriated. Management began immediately.

As fee title owners of Grand Cote, The Nature Conservancy began working on several land trades advantageous to the new refuge. It is important to consummate these deals before the

Government takes title to the property when such transactions would necessarily become mired in bureaucracy. By late summer these negotiations came to a standstill as a result of the Little Pecan Island flap. Understandably TNC began seeking more concrete assurances before acquiring property for the Service. Regional Office Realty folks seemed gunshy. As a result key tracts offered by willing sellors went unpurchased. How long will it take us to learn when acquiring new refuges that we had better tie up the property fast given the opportunity? History has proven that landowners have a new perspective of the value of their property when suddenly 50,000 ducks are sitting next door.

2. Easements

At the field level it seemed that confusion reigned supreme within USDA and USDI in regards to policy and administration of the most recent Farm Bill. Our work with Farmer's Home Administration involving conservation easements and fee title transfers of FmHA inventory property to the Service seemed just as helter-skelter. Criteria for establishing easements were such that nearly any tract of land in Louisiana could be brought into the National Wildlife Refuge System. Many tracts with extremely limited resource values were recommended and more than a few accepted into the System. Those making such decisions, though well intended, had little comprehension of the burdens these parcels would place on bona fide refuges. In July a change in guidelines determining easement selection put the entire monkey on Refuge Managers' backs--perhaps where it should have been all along. At this point Manager Ouchley began rejecting some incoming easement recommendations much to the consternation of folks in Wildlife Enhancement. At year's end the Lake Ophelia NWR Complex was responsible for 20+ conservation easements in the parishes of Avoyelles, Evangeline, Grant, Natchitoches, Rapides, Red River, St. Landry, and Vernon.

Although many of the potential easement areas were small with limited value, others offered superb habitat and were requested in fee title. A series of four adjacent tracts (collectively called the Voinche/Brouillette tract) located just southwest of Lake Ophelia NWR is a prime example. This 960 acre parcel has already proven to provide excellent wintering habitat for thousands of waterfowl.

One particular 13.7 acre FmHA parcel (Orval Meadors tract) lies within the acquisition boundary of Lake Ophelia NWR. The Service requested fee title transfer. This seemed only logical as one government agency (FmHA) owned the property and didn't want it while another agency (FWS) actively sought it. However, the local FmHA office balked and ran ads in local newspapers listing the land for sale. It seemed as though a brother-in-law deal between the local office and an adjacent landowner was imminent. This action precipitated a

congressional inquiry from Senator John Breaux's office and Senator Bennett Johnston intervened directly on behalf of the Service by asking FmHA to take the property off the market. This entire scenario was singled out in a blistering editorial in the October issue of Outdoor Life magazine. Additionally, Refuge Manager Ouchley apprehended the director of the local FmHA office and two other subjects on January 6, 1990, with 17 ducks. Canvasback and lead shot were involved. To date the property remains on FmHA inventory.

3. Other

In September, Manager Ouchley met with the Red River, Atchafalaya and Bayou Boeuf Levee Board to discuss long term leasing of levee board property. The board voted to lease to the Service an 80 acre tract within the acquisition boundary at Grand Cote NWR and two tracts (160 acres and 40 acres) at Lake Ophelia NWR. The terms of the lease were $1 for 50 years. The Louisiana Nature Conservancy paid $300 to a Mr. Harvin Bordelon to terminate his three year hunting lease on the 160 acre tract.

D. PLANNING

1. Master Plan

This refuge complex has not been scheduled for formal master planning. The following tentative refuge objectives have been established:

1. To provide and maintain optimum habitat for migratory waterfowl consistent with the overall objectives of the Mississippi Flyway.

2. To provide habitat and protection for endangered species including the Arctic peregrine falcon and bald eagle.

3. To provide habitat for a natural diversity of plant and wildlife species.

4. To provide opportunities for wildlife-oriented recreation and environmental education when compatible with other refuge objectives.

2. Management Plan

A great deal of time was spent on business related to planning for the new areas. Throughout the year baseline data was gathered to be used later in the formulation of various management plans. Hydrology, soil types, vegetation, wildlife

and public use patterns were studied. A sport fishing plan was submitted and approved early in the year. A resident game hunting plan was submitted in December. Fisheries Biologist John Forestor visited on August 8, to sample Lake Ophelia and collect data needed for the fisheries management plan.

3. Public Participation

In December of 1988 the Service released and solicited comments on the Environmental Assessment For The Purchase Of Lands For The Establishment Of Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge, Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana. In July 1989, the Environmental Assessment For The Purchase Of Lands For The Establishment Of Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge, Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana was released. The few comments received supported establishment of the refuges.

On January 12, 1989, Biologists Ray Aycock, Mike Dawson and Manager Ouchley met with a citizens action group in Marksville to update the community on the refuges' progress and solicit input.

4. Compliance with Environmental Mandates

An environmental assessment for the purchase of lands to establish each of the two refuges was prepared. Environmental assessments were also developed as part of decision document packages to open Lake Ophelia NWR to sport fishing and resident game hunting.

Section 7 consultations were completed on each of the four above mentioned projects. Another was compiled for road and boat ramp construction at Lake Ophelia and a fourth was required for development on the Voinche/Brouillette FmHA tract.

404 Permits were obtained from the Corps of Engineers in Vicksburg for construction work at Lake Ophelia and the Voinche/Brouillette FmHA tract. A water quality permit was required from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Qualilty for the Voinche/Brouillette FmHA tract work.

Dr. Jon Gibson from the University of Southwestern Louisiana conducted archaeological surveys of four construction sites at Lake Ophelia and three sites on the Voinche/Brouillette FmHA tract. No evidence of significant cultural resources was found.

5. Research and Investigations

No formal research was conducted, however personnel in the wildlife and biology departments at Northeast Louisiana University and Louisiana State University were contacted and made aware of the potential study sites on the new refuges.

E. ADMINISTRATION

1. Personnel

On October 9, 1988, Refuge Manager Kelby Ouchley transferred from Tensas River NWR to become the first person stationed at the new Lake Ophelia NWR Complex. Gary Juenger, formerly at Buffalo Lake NWR in west Texas, was selected as the primary Assistant Manager and entered on duty March 12, 1989. For several months the entire refuge staff consisted of Texas Aggies. Then we hired a Cajun. Brent Bordelon from Brouillette, Louisiana, was selected as the Laborer Foreman to oversee the four YCC enrollees. After the YCC camp Brent was retained throughout the fall to assist waterfowl habitat development projects. In December he was selected to fill a NTE one year Tractor Operator position.

In November we received the green light to begin staffing the Complex in earnest. Paperwork to fill five positions was submitted to the Regional Office. At year's end we were actively recruiting for the following positions: GS-5 Office Assistant, GS-5 Range Technician, GS-6 Refuge Law Enforcement Officer, WG-6 Tractor Operator, WG-7 Tractor Operator.

	Permanent		Temporary
	Full-Time	Part-Time	
FY 89	7 (5 vacant)	0	1

2. Youth Programs

We hosted the first YCC program at the Lake Ophelia NWR Complex this year. The four enrollee program consisted of two boys and two girls. Brent Bordelon was hired as temporary crew leader. With virtually no tools or supplies on hand, we still managed to field a very successful and accident free program.

Major accomplishments included boundary posting, installation of 40 wood duck nest boxes, rebuilding a well house, installation of a water control structure, and improvements to the new boat ramp at Lake Ophelia. As a bonus, the YCC'ers spent one week on a spike camp to the new Cameron Prairie NWR in southwest Louisiana where they completed the boundary posting chores.

Having a youth program the first summer was beneficial in establishing community recognition for our efforts at the new refuges.

YCC enrollees Carey Lemoine, Sherri Rabalais, Ron Bordelon, Blaine Bordelon and leader Brent Bordelon install wood duck boxes. 7/89. LO4/89/GJ

3. Other Manpower Programs

A JTPA youth was offered us during the summer, but we declined the offer as we could only transport our four youths and crew leader in the 1978 Jeep Cherokee.

4. Volunteers Programs

We entered into one formal volunteer agreement in 1989. Harvin "Bab" Bordelon signed on to help with wood duck box construction and installation at Duck Lake. He also proved invaluable as a tractor operator in our reforestation efforts this year. A total of 45 hours was logged by Mr. Bordelon this year, with many more to follow. He will continue with his wood duck program on a newly acquired Levee Board tract, where he raised over 650 wood ducks from 50 boxes in 1989.

Amy Ouchley volunteered as a Project WILD instructor for our YCC group, and acted as a liason between us, the local newspaper and Scout organizations. In addition she served as an ever gracious receptionist while the refuge office was located in her residence.

Volunteer Harvin "Bab" Bordelon. 6/89. LO5/89/GJ

5. Funding

FY 89 funding came in spurts but was adequate for the refuges' first year. Most of the funds were earmarked for waterfowl habitat development on the refuges and FmHA tracts.

	1261	1262	8421	8441	1120	TOTAL
FY 89	$15,100	$103,900	$18,600	$18,600	$10,000	$166,200

In June we received word that Senator Bennett Johnston had requested $900,000 for start-up operations and maintenance and $4 million for land acquisition at Lake Ophelia in FY 90. These were "add-on" funds. As it turned out the final Interior appropriations bill contained $325,000 for O&M and $3 million for land acquisition. The $325,000 is certainly not sufficient to purchase the needed start-up equipment and pay salaries too, but it's a beginning and hopefully more will be coming down the line. As of this writing we have not received confirmation of the station's FY 90 budget.

6. Safety

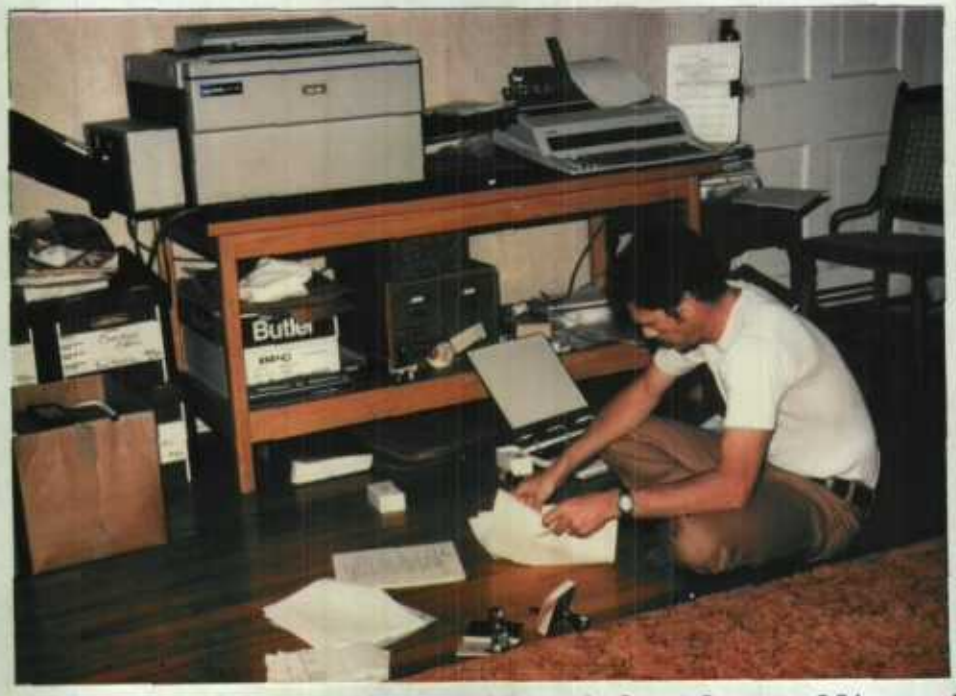
Assistant Manager Juenger was designated the station safety officer. The station self-inspection package was completed in February.

Only one reportable accident occurred this year, fortunately with no injuries. On November 13, Brent Bordelon was

operating our 1962 Huber Warco grader at Lake Ophelia. He got too close to the edge of a ditch and the machine slid off the road shoulder, coming to rest on its side. The ROPS prevented a complete rollover which could have been fatal for Brent. The machine remains out of service pending repairs to the ROPS.

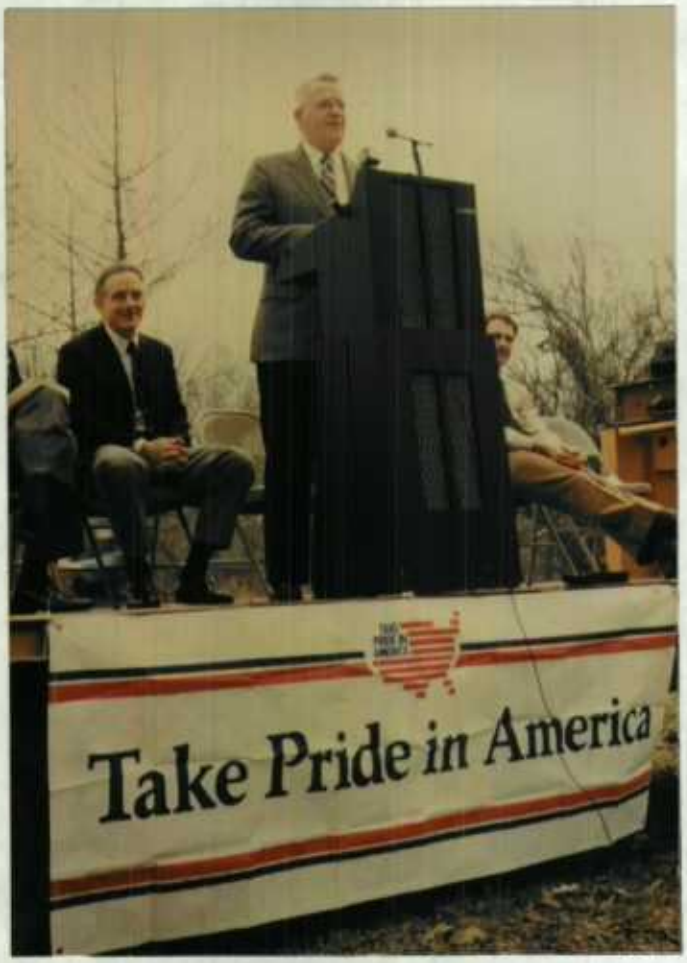
8. Other Items

One of Manager Ouchley's first chores was to establish a refuge office. Anticipating normal GSA sloth procedures, he set up the office in his personal residence in October 1988. Suitable space was soon located on the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Reservation in Marksville and the required field paperwork was submitted. From that time on commitments were made and broken by GSA and/or CGS almost on weekly basis. Even specific orders by Director Dunkle (after he visited the Manager's residence) resulted in no progress. After five months we finally received clearance to establish a temporary office on the Indian Reservation. The lease was for three months with a 30 day renewal option. For $300 per month the Service received three very nice offices, secretarial and janitorial services, warehouse space, use of photocopy and Fax machines, a large conference room, and free utilities. The fact that it took so long to embrace this opportunity should make it worthy of the Golden Fleece Award. We moved into this facility on May 10 and a long-term lease for $420 per month was entered into later in the year.



Manager Ouchley and the residential refuge office. 4/89.
LO6/89/AO

On January 24, Senator Bennett Johnston's Washington office advised us that a dedication ceremony for the new refuges would be in order--on February 14, just three weeks away. The one man staff began preparations. Invitations were printed and sent out, news releases were issued, programs developed, and coordination with volunteers continued to the last minute. Director Dunkle and Regional Director Pulliam arrived the day before and were given a cursory tour of both refuges. Assistant Director Sam Marler and numerous state and local dignitaries attended. The event was held at the Mansura Bank camp on Old River just south of Marksville. Turnout was excellent for a week day morning as over 200 people attended. The Master of Ceremonies was Senator Johnston. Other speakers included Congressman Clyde Holloway, Director Dunkle, State Representative Raymond Laborde, and Nancy Jo Craig of the Louisiana Nature Conservancy. After the speeches the dignitaries unveiled entrance signs for the two new refuges. The event ended with a cochon de lait (Cajun pig roast) feast unparalleled in quality and quantity.



Senator Johnston and Director Dunkle at refuge dedication ceremony. 2/89. LO7/89/AO

The first refuge revenue sharing check in the amount of $3,476 was presented to the Avoyelles Parish Police Jury on May 3. They were pleasantly surprised as the windfall was not expected until next year.

On January 23, Associate Manager Sam Drake conducted a formal refuge inspection. There was little to actually inspect but development plans and work projects were constructively discussed.

On November 28, we provided an orientation tour and briefing for Cindy Shade from Senator Johnston's Washington office and Ross Atkins from his Baton Rouge office. These staffers were very knowledgeable of the intricacies of refuge land acquisition and extremely interested in the continued success of the program here.

F. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

1. General

As we were constantly in a land acquisition status this year, and expect to be for several years to come, no exact acreage figures for different habitat types are available. The following are estimates of habitat types as of the end of 1989:

Grand Cote NWR	TOTAL 5,940 ac.
--Active cropland or in crop rotation	950 ac.
--Abandoned cropland replanted to hardwoods in 1989	362 ac.
--Abandoned cropland planned for reforestation	540 ac.
--Active cropland planned for reforestation	350 ac.
--Abandoned cropland in moist soil units	3,653 ac.
--Crawfish ponds to be converted to sport fishing	85 ac.

Lake Ophelia NWR	TOTAL 12,615 ac.
--Active cropland	1,600 ac.
--Active cropland planned for reforestation	2,800 ac.
--Active cropland planned for moist soil units	2,000 ac.
--Bottomland hardwoods, cypress/tupelo swamp	3,500 ac.
--Cleared land converted to moist soil units	1,965 ac.
--Permanent water	750 ac.

2. Wetlands

Grand Cote NWR

Water was removed from the large impoundments south of Little California Road and on both sides of Choctaw Bayou for the first time in two years. It was August before local water levels permitted much draining. Shorebirds and wading birds feasted on invertebrates, crawfish, small fish, and frogs as the water levels dropped.

Four water control structures were installed this year. Much levee rehab, water well rehab, and subdivision of large impoundments is needed to enhance moist soil management. Lift pumps already in place need to be reversed to allow for pumping on instead of pumping off.

Currently there four water wells on the refuge. Two were used this year and the other two need to be worked over to become operable. A fifth well is located just off the refuge, but rights may be purchased in the future to allow its use to flood old crawfish ponds north of Little California Road.

Smartweed and sedges responded well to the de-watering, especially west of Choctaw Bayou. Willow invasion was evident on the southern third of the easternmost unit south of Little California Road. Cockleburs proved troublesome on both units east of Choctaw Bayou. Japanese and browntop millet planted on both sides of the bayou failed due to drought conditions from August through November.

Virtually no water was back on Grand Cote until late December except for that which was pumped onto rice stubble by co-op farmers. If possible, future years' management will require pumping from wells to begin in October if such drought conditions occur again. Hopefully this will not be needed in most years, as local precipitation and runoff from Coulee des Grues can be used for flooding fields. In general, the moist soil units will have water retained until mid-summer. If desired plants do not appear upon de-watering, disking may be used to control undesirable plants and stimulate others to germinate and mature before frost.

Lake Ophelia NWR

This refuge has high potential for moist soil units due to its ridge-slough configuration. Fifteen water control structures were installed in 1989, and several more were planned on the Kennedy tract alone. The area south of the cross-levee on this tract is considered the best for waterfowl, and it will be managed for both cropland hot foods and native millets, smartweeds, and sedges.

Water levels were very high through July. Corn planted in April suffered from too little, then too much rainfall.

Aerial millet and rice plantings failed due to drought after July.

Nutsedge did very well in general, while smartweed seed production was generally poor. By the time we could have disked the sloughs to stimulate smartweeds and kill cockleburs, it was too late in the year to allow for a seed crop to mature. Some disking is needed to control willow and buttonbush in core moist soil units.

Water management is keyed to four large water control structures along the Bayou Jeansonne levee. These structures impound the majority of the water on the Kennedy tract. At least 20 more smaller structures can be placed on this tract. While the Northwest Mutual and John Hancock tracts also have potential for structures, theirs is not as great as the Kennedy tract. Much of the Northwest Mutual, John Hancock and Point Bass tracts will be reforested.

Our discovery of an illegal pit associated with the only oil well on Lake Ophelia NWR resulted in major problems for the well owner. The 100' square pit was filled to the brim with oil. The remains of wood ducks were floating on the surface. We called in the Dept. of Environmental Quality and the Office of Conservation as several state violations had occurred. Several hundred barrels of oil were removed from the pit which was cleaned and filled in. Numerous other problems associated with the facilities were remedied. The extensive clean up operation cost the owner over $10,000.

Cleanup at illegal oil pit at Lake Ophelia. 4/89. LO8/89/GJ

Voinche/Brouillette FmHA Tract

This 960 acre tract lies some six miles west of Lake Ophelia and is a prime candidate for fee title transfer to the Service. We installed five water control structures which created three impoundments on this tract in 1989. The tract has been totally cleared but obviously is too low and wet for annual cropland. Future management will include partial reforestation, water level manipulation on moist soil areas, and restricted hunting.

3. Forests

Bottomland hardwood reforestation occurred on 482 acres, utilizing all the seed we were able to obtain. Tensas River NWR donated the acorns and use of a two-row planter.

Reforestation by acorn planting at Grand Cote. 10/89. LO9/89/GJ

Grand Cote NWR

A total of 362 acres were planted. Of these, 92 acres were south of Little California Road; the remainder were north of the road, east of the crawfish ponds, and west of Choctaw Bayou.

Two hundred eighty-two acres were planted with Nuttall oak at 6.75 pounds per acre. Eighty acres were planted with water/willow oak at 2.40 pounds per acre.

Lake Ophelia NWR

A total of 120 acres were planted east of the road from the shop to Bayou Jeansonne. Seventy-two acres were planted to Nuttall oak at 8.50 pounds per acre, and 48 acres were planted to water/willow oak at 3.30 pounds per acre. Plans are to reforest 2,500 acres in 1990.

On November 26, we advertised locally to purchase acorns from 1-4 PM on November 30, for next year's reforestation. People began lining up at 8:30 on the buying day. By 1 PM there was a line several hundred feet long and blocking traffic. To make a long story short, we were caught with our pants down. We floated, weighed and purchased nearly 8,500 pounds of acorns in three hours, emptied three purchase order books and turned many people away. It was Lake Ophelia's Woodstock.

Our second day of acorn buying was an enlarged replay of the first. On December 7, approximately 19,000 pounds of acorns were bought from the public in a steady rain. Two hundred twenty-seven purchase orders were issued. Personnel from Yazoo NWR assisted at this carnival and carried most of the acorns back to Mississippi. Quite a savings was realized by the Government as Mississippi prices were $2.00 per pound, while people here were thrilled to get the 70 cents per pound we offered. The 10,000 pounds of acorns we kept were placed in a refrigeration truck loaned by a local optometrist and kept at 40 degrees F.

Acorn buying party. 11/89. LO10/89/GJ

4. Croplands

1989 was a very busy year with respect to cropland management. Most of the property acquired at Grand Cote and Lake Ophelia consists of cleared land, formerly bottomland hardwoods. Although farming such vast acreages is certainly not desirable from a wildlife management aspect, it is a necessity to keep the land "clean" until it can be reforested. We were faced with developing cropland management plans, pesticide use proposals, and co-operative farming agreements on some 6,650 acres. Educating and indoctrinating co-op farmers to the joys of refuge farming, i.e. not dumping crankcase oil on the ground, prudent use of pesticides, etc. was a challenging task. Due to good communications on both sides, there were only a few instances of head-butting. Plans are to continue some farming but to reduce the total acreage substantially as soon as reforestation can be implemented (see Section F.3).

There were four co-operative farming agreements in 1989, two at each refuge. This number will increase to eight in 1990 due to acquisition at Lake Ophelia. Farming agreements were tailored to provide a high degree of flexibility with respect to wildlife management plans. In general, the agreements called for partial crop shares and specified crop types. We did not want shares of soybeans; instead we required that refuge shares be planted as corn, Japanese or browntop millet. Additional values based on $25.00 per acre rent were placed on the farm land when the full 25 percent crop share was not needed for wildlife. This rent was taken as specified

Corn and wading birds at Lake Ophelia. 9/89. LO11/89/GJ

services such as disking, mowing, seed bed preparation for reforestation, providing water control structures, etc. A total of $34,375.00 worth of this type compensation was received and applied directly to the wildlife mission of the refuge.

The weather played havoc with both farmers' and Government shares of crops (see Section B). Crops were striken by drought in April and again from July until December with severe flooding in the interval.

Lake Ophelia NWR

Crop acreages under co-op farming agreements were as follows:

	1988 Wheat	Soybeans	Corn	Millet	1989 Wheat
Kennedy Tract		4,925	325	150	2,000
Point Bass Tract	50	500			125

Soybeans suffered severely from excess rainfall. Yields were poor, with a lot of 15 bushel acres. Some beans were replanted twice. Fortunately the bulk of this wet farmland will be returned to swamp forest under refuge management plans.

Corn was taken as 100 percent refuge share. Planted in April, which is late for this locale, it suffered from drought early and flooding in June and July. However, corn made two to three short ears per plant at a high plant density (greater than 40,000 per acre). All things considered, we were happy with this yield.

Millet plantings did well early, as 125 acres of Chiwapa Japanese millet was aerial seeded in late July. These plants faded under the ensuing drought. Some rice was also aerial seeded with the same result. Wheat was looking good at year's end despite fears that record cold at Christmas may have caused some damage.

Grand Cote NWR

Crop acreages under co-op farming agreements were as follows:

Soybeans	Rice	Corn	Millet
250	300	50	275

Affectionately known as "the little farm" due to its substantially smaller crop acreage, Grand Cote provided feeding and rest areas for waterfowl in 1989 thanks to its 300 acres of rice which was flooded after the 80 percent harvest.

Excellent stands of Japanese millet succumbed to drought. 9/89. LO12/89/KO

Bountiful rice harvest at Grand Cote. Twenty percent was left for the birds. 9/89. LO13/89/KO

Yield was good at 28 barrels per acre. Plans are to maintain 300 to 500 acres of rice each year, with a 20 percent unharvested share for the refuge. Two wells and a lift pump were used to flood the fields. Two other wells will need work before they can be used for rice farming.

Only 300 acres of land north of Little California Road was farmed this year; 250 acres of soybeans and 50 acres of no-till corn. All of the corn was retained as a refuge share. Soybean farming will be discontinued at Grand Cote by 1992 as all fields north of Little California Road will be reforested. Except for rice, fields south of Little California Road will be managed as moist soil units.

About 125 acres south of Little California Road were aerially seeded to Japanese millet as mud flats appeared. Another 150 acres of browntop millet were broadcast seeded on disked ground. While these plantings started well, drought negated most seed production.

7. Grazing

Grazing is not permitted on the refuges, nor is any planned. All cattle trespass problems were settled by Spring after several contacts and letters were sent to neighbors reluctant to leave the good old days behind. Since then, trespass has been infrequent and limited to downed fence episodes. Recovery by the owners has been timely.

8. Haying

A haying contract was offered on about 60 acres on the Grand Cote hill in order to control grass growth and reduce fire hazard. Because of the rank nature of the vegetation, no takers were found. Co-op farmers ended up mowing the site.

9. Fire Management

A fire management plan has not been completed. Our fire management efforts will be concentrated primarily on protection and suppression in seedling hardwood stands. A slip-on pumper unit, expected in 1990, will be the mainstay of refuge fire-fighting equipment.

10. Pest Control

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries hyacinth control personnel sprayed parts of Lake Ophelia on four occasions in 1989. The refuge will likely have to assume hyacinth control responsibilities in the future.

Beavers and nutria cause problems around water control structures and levees on both refuges. Several problem animals were shot during the year.

A long list of pesticides were requested by co-op farmers. Of those chemicals approved the following were actually used.

Chemical	Target Pest	Crop	Acres Treated
Canopy	Broadleafs	Soybeans	1,260
Round-Up	Grass	Soybeans	707
Classic	Broadleafs	Soybeans	4,500
Basagran	Broadleafs	Soybeans	570
Blazer	Broadleafs	Soybeans	420
Dithane	Rust	Wheat	2,205
Dual	Grass	Soybeans	550
Ordram	Grass	Rice	300
Stam	Broadleafs	Rice	300
Lannate	Stinkbugs	Soybeans	550
Manzate	Rust	Wheat	2,155
Arena	Johnson grass	Corn	350
Atrazine	Grass	Corn	350
Scepter	Broadleafs	Soybeans	1,220
Treflan EC	Johnson grass	Soybeans	1,620
Cobra	Broadleafs	Soybeans	2,977
Assure	Johnson grass	Soybeans	1,027
Fusilade 2000	Johnson grass	Soybeans	590
Poast	Johnson grass	Soybeans	996
Scout	Stinkbugs	Soybeans	1,500
Triton	Stinkbugs	Soybeans	1,500

Heavy rains during the early part of the soybean growing season stimulated profuse weed growth and diluted the effects of herbicides. This plethora of chemicals encouraged our resolve to curtail co-op farming as soon as possible through reforestation.

11. Water Rights

We are looking into the possibility of leasing an off-refuge well at Grand Cote to provide water for impoundments north of Little California Road.

G. WILDLIFE

1. Wildlife Diversity

The varied habitats on both refuges provide for a wide diversity of animal species. Croplands, fallow fields, moist-soil units, bottomland hardwoods, cypress-tupelo brakes in various stages of inundation or bone-dry occur at some time during the year. Meandering bayous, pristine lakes, extensive levee systems, the Red River, and batteur lands all mesh into life cycles of many species. Intensive reforestation will provide new and ever-changing successional stages for even more.

2. Endangered and/or Threatened Species

The only endangered species known to use the refuges are the bald eagle and peregrine falcon. Historically, ivory-billed woodpeckers, red wolves, Florida panthers, and the Louisiana black bear inhabited the area. A lone bald eagle was observed at Lake Ophelia on November 28, and December 25. Both sightings were of immature birds.

3. Waterfowl

The year began with excellent water conditions at both refuges, and waterfowl numbers were respectable. At least 10,000 ducks, mostly mallards, teal, and ring-necks, were on the Kennedy tract which became part of Lake Ophelia NWR in February. Around 5,000 pintails were present on the soon to be Grand Cote NWR in January.

Waterfowl numbers declined as expected in February and March with blue-winged teal lingering until April. Mottled ducks were confirmed nesters at Grand Cote this year. Pairs were seen in May; a nest was found near the rice fields.

Over 600 wood ducks hatched from the 53 boxes at Duck Lake in 1989. This area will become part of Lake Ophelia NWR in 1990. Harvin Bordelon, who works the boxes as a hobby, was enlisted as a formal volunteer to continue this remarkable production program. An additional 40 boxes were installed by YCC enrollees at the Kennedy and Point Bass tracts.

Assistant Manager Juenger checking wood duck boxes on Duck Lake. 6/89. LO14/89/RD

In August, blue-winged teal reappeared at both refuges. Drought conditions throughout the fall resulted in very little waterfowl use at either refuge. Pumping began in November, as we instructed co-op farmers to flood rice stubble and our share of standing rice for waterfowl use at Grand Cote. By December, up to 2,000 puddle ducks and 7,200 snow and white-fronted geese were using this oasis. Lake Ophelia had about 1,500 ducks as a peak in December with impoundments estimated at less than 20 percent capacity. A bonus of 80 Canada geese used the Lake Ophelia corn fields for several weeks.

The Voinche/Brouillette FmHA tract held about 2,000 ducks at year's end with impoundments estimated at 40 percent capacity.

Manager Ouchley authored an article entitled "Unusual Snow Goose Mortality in Southwestern Louisiana" in the premier issue of the Journal of Louisiana Ornithology.

*Note: As of this writing the waterfowl situation has improved considerably with the arrival of tardy winter rains. See CY 90 annual narrative for details!

4. Marsh and Water Birds

This group of birds had a field day at Grand Cote in August as the two large impoundments south of Little California Road and the crawfish ponds north of the road were drained for the first time in several years. Great egrets, snowy egrets, little blue and great blue herons, green-backed herons, and wood storks concentrated in the receding pools of crawfish and fish infested water.

As many as 1,000 wood storks and perhaps twice as many great egrets were present at the peak period. Black crowned night herons showed up in August. Sightings of interest included anhingas, double crested cormorants, white pelicans, and American bitterns at Lake Ophelia. Up to seven roseate spoonbills were observed at Lake Ophelia while nine were seen at Grand Cote.

A large rookery at the Point Bass swamp at Lake Ophelia contained great egrets, snowy egrets, little blue herons, and yellow crowned night herons (gros becs to the local folks). The open cypress lakes were used for nesting by great blue herons, anhingas, and green-backed herons.

Seven lesser sandhill cranes were observed on February 23, 1989, at the Choctaw Bayou Unit of Grand Cote. In December, 80 were counted on the proposed Chatlin Lake Unit. This flock reportedly numbers 200-300 birds and is the only known group of wintering cranes in Louisiana.

Wading birds in Lake Ophelia impoundments. 9/89. LO15/89/KO

5. Shorebirds, Gulls, Terns, and Allied Species

Shorebirds arrived en masse in the spring. Lesser yellowlegs, various sandpipers, killdeer, and black necked stilts dominated the scene as mud flats appeared throughout the summer. An immature black skimmer, rarely found inland, was observed at Grand Cote on August 24.

6. Raptors

Northern harriers, red-shouldered hawks, and red-tailed hawks are seasonally abundant. American kestrels, merlins, turkey and black vultures, and Cooper's hawks were observed in lesser numbers. An osprey was observed at Lake Ophelia proper on September 17.

As reported in Section G.2, a bald eagle was sighted at Lake Ophelia on two occasions. No peregrine falcons were observed this year but we expect a few to use the refuge during migration.

7. Other Migratory Birds

Mourning doves, snipe and woodcock were present on both refuges during the fall and winter. Rails were abundant during the spring at the Grand Cote impoundments. Resident and migratory passerines are abundant on both refuges.

The staff began efforts to compile a refuge bird list.

Assistance was solicited from the Louisiana Ornithological Society. The first Christmas Bird Count is planned for 1990.

8. Game Mammals

White-tailed deer, gray squirrels, fox squirrels, cottontails, swamp rabbits, and raccoons are the primary game mammals in Louisiana. All are present in suitable habitat on both refuges. Deer are most abundant on the forested areas of the Northwest Mutual and Point Bass tracts at Lake Ophelia. A few are found in the fallow fields at Grand Cote. Poaching has severely limited deer populations on both refuges. The herd is expected to increase rapidly with intense management and law enforcement efforts.

Limited public hunting is planned for parts of Lake Ophelia NWR in 1990. There are no plans for a hunting program at Grand Cote in the near future.

10. Other Resident Wildlife

Bobwhite quail are present in small numbers at Lake Ophelia and Grand Cote. Wild turkeys were observed on several occasions at Lake Ophelia but are by no means common.

Alligators from three to ten feet long have been observed in several water bodies at Lake Ophelia. A cursory night survey via airboat at Grand Cote turned up no 'gators. Formal surveys will be attempted at Lake Ophelia NWR in 1990.

Small mammals are abundant at both refuges. Beaver, otter, mink, raccoon, opossum, nutria, skunk, flying squirrel, and armadillos can be found at one time or another.

Feral hogs are common on Lake Ophelia NWR (see Section G.15).

11. Fisheries Resources

Lake Ophelia itself is the primary sport fishing area in the complex. Closed to the public for years, it was opened on June 24, after construction of an access road and boat ramp. Turnout was good, nice catches of bass were reported and the program was considered quite successful. A sport fishing season from March 1 through October 15 will be offered at Lake Ophelia. Other smaller lakes are being evaluated as potential public fishing areas.

Fisheries Biologist John Forester visited in August to collect data for the Fisheries Management Plan. Electrofishing in Lake Ophelia revealed a severe overpopulation of buffalofish. Commercial netting to mitigate this problem is planned for early 1990. On October 24, John released into Lake Ophelia 3,100 Florida bass approximately six inches in length. In addition to providing recreation it is hoped that these

predators will help alleviate the overabundance of buffalo by feeding on their young.

Three commercial crawfishing permits were issued at Grand Cote. In spite of the area's reputation as a prolific crawfish producer, the permittees had virtually no luck. The fact that the impoundments had not been drawn down for several years likely contributed to the bust.

Fishery Biologist John Forester stocking Lake Ophelia with Florida strain largemouth bass. 11/89. LO16/89/KO

12. Wildlife Propagation and Stocking

As mentioned in the section above, Lake Ophelia was stocked with Florida strain largemouth bass.

15. Animal Control

Three types of nuisance animals here warrant control measures. These are beaver, nutria and feral (fe[de]ral) hogs. Eight beaver and several dozen nutria were removed this year. Approximately 20 hogs were shot and donated to needy families in the area.

16. Marking and Banding

A master station banding permit was applied for and received. No banding was conducted this year. The refuge quota for 1990 includes 200 pre-season wood ducks.

H. PUBLIC USE

1. General

Developing a prudent, carefully thought out public use program on new refuges is one of the most important challenges of our profession. History has proven that early mistakes are often long-lived. OMB is presently reminding us of this. With this in mind we set about assessing the new areas for potential compatible wildlife-oriented public use activities.

The locations, physical and biological characteristics of the Grand Cote and Lake Ophelia NWRs seem to offer a unique opportunity to separate consumptive and "non-consumptive" uses. Grand Cote is located three miles from town via fair all-weather roads. This refuge has excellent sites for a visitor center, nature trails, observation towers, etc. While the potential exists to develop sport fishing, compatible hunting opportunities are very limited. On the other hand, Lake Ophelia is located 15+ miles from town and access is limited to four-wheel drive vehicles during parts of the year. The elevation is too low (within the 100 year floodplain) for construction of permanent facilities. However, hunting and fishing opportunities abound and with careful time and space zoning these popular activities can be permitted and compatible.

Eight news releases were issued during the year. Two television, four radio, and several newspaper interviews were conducted. Stories about the refuges appeared in several state and national outdoor magazines. An article on the Lake Ophelia NWR Complex written by Assistant Manager Juenger was published in the Fish and Wildlife Service News.

8. Hunting

The demand for hunting opportunities is high locally. Parts of the recently purchased refuges were leased by hunting clubs. In December, a decision document package to open Lake Ophelia to resident game hunting was submitted to Regional Office for approval. We plan to allow limited small game and deer hunting on Lake Ophelia NWR beginning in the fall of 1990.

9. Fishing

In May an access road and launch ramp were constructed and a canal was dredged at Lake Ophelia proper. After several delays due to weather the lake was opened to sport fishing on

June 24. The season was closed on October 15. Future seasons will run March 1 - October 15 and virtually eliminate fishing related waterfowl disturbance. Outboard motors are limited to those with a maximum of 25 horsepower. Many people enjoyed the opportunity to fish this beautiful lake long closed to the public.

In February, Special Use Permits to allow commercial crawfishing on Grand Cote NWR were developed and issued to three individuals who held these rights before our management began. The permittees were required to provide the refuge with millet seed, fertilizer, aerial seeding services, etc. in the amount of 30 percent of the value of their catch. No crawfish were caught however, probably because the impoundments had not been drained in the previous year. There are no plans to issue these type permits in the future.

10. Trapping

Trapping is prohibited on the refuges at this time.

12. Other Wildlife Oriented Recreation

The first regional Boy Scout camperee conducted in this area in many years was held at Grand Cote NWR, October 20-22. The event was a great success as over 200 Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and their leaders reaped the benefits of this new refuge. Assistant Manager Juenger oversaw the activities and spent hours coaching the Scouts in fish and wildlife management rank requirements.

Assistant Manager Juenger preaching our gospel to local Cub Scouts. 4/89. LO17/89/AO

17. Law Enforcement

Louisiana has recently been depicted as leading the nation in per capita poachers. Within the state, Avoyelles Parish is often regarded as the most infamous in these matters. Our experience during the first year would not repudiate this claim. The problem is likely a result of three factors: (1) a large rural populace with strong cultural ties to wildlife-oriented activities (poaching), (2) abundant natural resources which provide ample opportunities to violate the law, and (3) a state wildlife enforcement and court system mired in apathy and political favoritism.

Approximately 40,000 people live in the parish and most reside in small rural communities. Most are of Acadian or Parisienne French descent. Until relatively recently subsistence hunting and fishing were important to many.

Much of Avoyelles Parish was once a vast bottomland hardwood swamp until massive land-clearing in the 1970's. The area supported tremendous wildlife resources year round. There was always something "in season". In addition to traditional game species which were hunted throughout the year, robins were shot by the hundreds on late winter roosts and "gros bec" (night heron) hunting was possibly more common than dove hunting. We are learning that traditions die hard.

Tales of corrupt state game wardens are common as are those of negligible penalties from judges for wildlife violations. Apparently poachers had little to fear especially if they knew the right person.

With this background, we implemented a refuge law enforcement program. Our turf consisted of the extensive acquisition areas of four refuges and numerous FmHA easements and their immediate vicinities. Our goal was to thoroughly familiarize a virgin constituency with refuge regulations and indeed to bend over backwards to promote a good neighbor policy but then to give no quarter to violators.

Relatively few violations were noted throughout the year probably because of our "orientation period", a mortal fear of the Feds by locals, and a dry fall and winter which severely limited available waterfowl habitat. The following violations were detected during 1989 and January 1990:

-Exceed field possession limit of waterfowl	6
-Hunting waterfowl with lead shot	6
-Trespass on refuge	5
-Take non-game migratory birds (night herons, etc.)	3
-Take migratory birds with aid of motor vehicle	2
-Failure to maintain custody of bagged ducks	2
-Possession of firearm on refuge	2
-Possession of uncased, loaded firearm on refuge road	1
-Possession of canvasback in closed season	1
-Hunt waterfowl without Federal stamp	1
-Take geese with rifle	1
-Shooting from public road	1
-Unauthorized take of wildlife (dove) on refuge	1
-Take waterfowl after legal shooting hours	1
-Hunting in violation of probation stipulations	1
	34

Alleged violators in Louisiana must appear before a U.S. Magistrate. There is no forfeiture of collateral system. While at times inconvenient, a mandatory court appearance is in itself a deterrent. The two charges involving taking migratory birds with the aid of a motor vehicle were dismissed. All other defendents processed to date were found guilty. Penalties ranged up to several hundred dollar fines and 30 days imprisonment.

Vandalism associated with the new refuges was less than we anticipated. A few boundary signs were shot or stolen; batteries and parts were stolen from two pumps belonging to co-op farmers at Grand Cote.

Manager Ouchley and Assistant Manager Juenger attended law enforcement refresher training in Quincy, Florida, March 19-24, and firearms requalification in Baton Rouge on October 5.

I. EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

1. New Construction

Construction of the road, boat ramp and dredging of the boat run to provide access to Lake Ophelia began in May. We borrowed personnel and equipment from Catahoula and Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWRs. A track-hoe was used to dredge the boat canal and a dozer to build the road. Felsenthal NWR donated a 10' x 24' aircraft landing mat to use as a boat ramp and Catahoula anted pipe for culverts. We had hoped to complete the project in time to open the area during National Fishing Week but the monsoons severely restricted dirt work. The project was completed in June with the delivery and spreading of 480 yards of gravel.

Boat ramp and access canal construction at Lake Ophelia. 6/89. LO18/89/GJ

After months of chomping at the bit because of the weather, we were finally able to begin construction of moist soil impoundments in August. Former YCC foreman Brent Bordelon was retained to assist Equipment Operator Van Evans from Catahoula. We rented a backhoe/loader, commandeered a bulldozer and went to work. Twenty-four water control structures were installed at Lake Ophelia, Grand Cote, and the Voinche/Brouillette FmHA tract. This included four large primary structures on Bayou Jeansonne which regulate the entire Lake Ophelia system. 7,800 feet of levees were built to create 1,800 acres of moist soil impoundments. These accomplishments would have been impossible without the extreme dedication of the refuge personnel involved.

2. Rehabilitation

About three miles of the Bayou Jeansonne levee at Lake Ophelia were reworked and seeded to ryegrass.

The pump shed at Lake Ophelia was re-sided, painted and placed on a concrete slab by the YCC crew.

3. Major Maintenance

The 1985 Chevy diesel truck borrowed from Tensas River consumed some $4,000 in repairs to keep it running for ten months.

Unloading water control structures at Lake Ophelia. 9/89. LO19/89/KO

Installing structures at Lake Ophelia. 9/89. LO20/89/KO

Some risers were banded to existing smooth steel pipes. 9/89.
LO21/89/KO

PVC structures were placed on the V/B FmHA tract. 10/89.
LO/22/89/KO

4. Equipment Utilization and Replacement

Like flea market gypsies we scrounged equipment and supplies wherever possible. The following list contains major items and their sources:

-1962 Huber Warco grader	Tensas River NWR
-John Deere 301 tractor	Tensas River NWR
-1978 GMC 2.5 ton tilt-bed truck	Noxubee NWR
-1978 AMC Cherokee	Noxubee NWR
-Ford 6600 farm tractor	U.S. Air Force
-M151A1 Military Jeep	Holla Bend NWR
-Office Furniture	Wheeler NWR, BLM

The following items were purchased new:

-John Deere diesel pump power units (2)
-Polaris ATV
-Suzuki ATV
-15' tunnel boat w/ 40 HP outboard and trailer
-12' aluminum boat w/ 8 HP outboard and trailer
-Dell computer system
-Portable high band radios (2)
-Binoculars (2)
-Remington 870 shotguns (2)
-Canon 35 mm camera (2)
-Lawn mower
-Surveying level
-Miscellaneous hand and power tools

We gratefully acknowledge the loan of the following equipment, often for extended periods of time.

-1985 Chevy pickup	Tensas River NWR
-Computer system	Tensas River NWR
-John boat and 25 HP outboard	Div. of LE
-1985 Dodge 4x4 pickup	Cameron Prairie NWR
-JD 750 bulldozer	Catahoula NWR
-Link-Belt backhoe	MSC NWR

5. Communications Systems

Our radio system consists of several begged and borrowed standard Service 100 watt low band mobile units and a new Radio Shack scanner. The bureaucracy involved in obtaining frequency assignments is deserving of the Coelocanth Award. Because of the time element involved in obtaining the required approvals, $5,000 worth of excellent Corps of Engineers radio equipment went to a more efficient agency.

Two portable Midland high band units were purchased this year. We intend to establish an exclusive high band system here if red tape and funding hurdles can be overcome.

Inherited equipment shed at Lake Ophelia. 10/89. LO23/89/KO

J. Other Items

2. Items of Interest

In May a situation developed at Grand Cote NWR involving the Avoyelles Fish and Wildlife Federation, an affiliate of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation. A very small number of individuals decided that the best use of Grand Cote would be to serve as a sump to filter turbid runoff originating in a several hundred square mile watershed. Their demands to tear down existing levees on the refuge would preclude critical water level management of the area. The group also wanted us to immediately cease all co-op farming activities. Co-op farmers were being utilized to assist reforestation.

In June the Federation re-elected officers. One presidential candidate ran on the platform of stopping farming and tearing down levees at Grand Cote. He won. Several board members promptly resigned.

In July the new president stepped up his irrational attack on Grand Cote with continued demands to cut levees and halt farming. Manager Ouchley responded to a particularly confrontational newsletter by writing to all 21 members of the organization's board of directors. Most soon called or wrote to pledge their support of the refuge and Service activities. A meeting was held on July 27, with the president and nine key board members to again explain Service objectives and priorities relative to the new refuge. After two hours

everyone left smiling and satisfied except the president who didn't want the meeting in the first place. Truth and common sense prevailed.

The meeting seems to have resolved conflicts with the organization. Contacts with the formerly hostile president since that time have been very positive and cordial. Relevant congressional offices were kept informed of this matter. All were most supportive of the Service.

3. Credits

Gary wrote Sections B, E.2,3,4,6,8, F, G and I. Kelby wrote the remainder, edited, and typed this report.

Senator Johnston's aides plan future acquisition. 12/89. LO24/89/GJ

K. FEEDBACK

I am very fortunate in having been able to work on five National Wildlife Refuges, and I think especially so because three of them were new (Felsenthal, Tensas River, Lake Ophelia). Although work on older refuges is certainly very challenging, the birth and adolescence of a National Wildlife Refuge offers opportunities, problems, and rewards not unlike those of raising a stepchild.

Fertilization, a lengthy gestation, and birth has usually occurred when the first Refuge Manager arrives on the scene. He or she then assumes the responsibility of nurturing the infant through its most formative years. Tracts are prioritized and land acquisition decisions are made that will determine the physical makeup of the area. Background data on natural resources is general and a "get acquainted" period is required to obtain specifics of flora, fauna, and physiography.

Rudimentary management decisions that will affect the destiny of the refuge for years are pondered, implemented and evaluated. Where shall we begin reforesting 20,000 acres that should never have been cleared? How many and how large should the moist soil impoundments be? On which hill should we construct the office/visitor center complex?

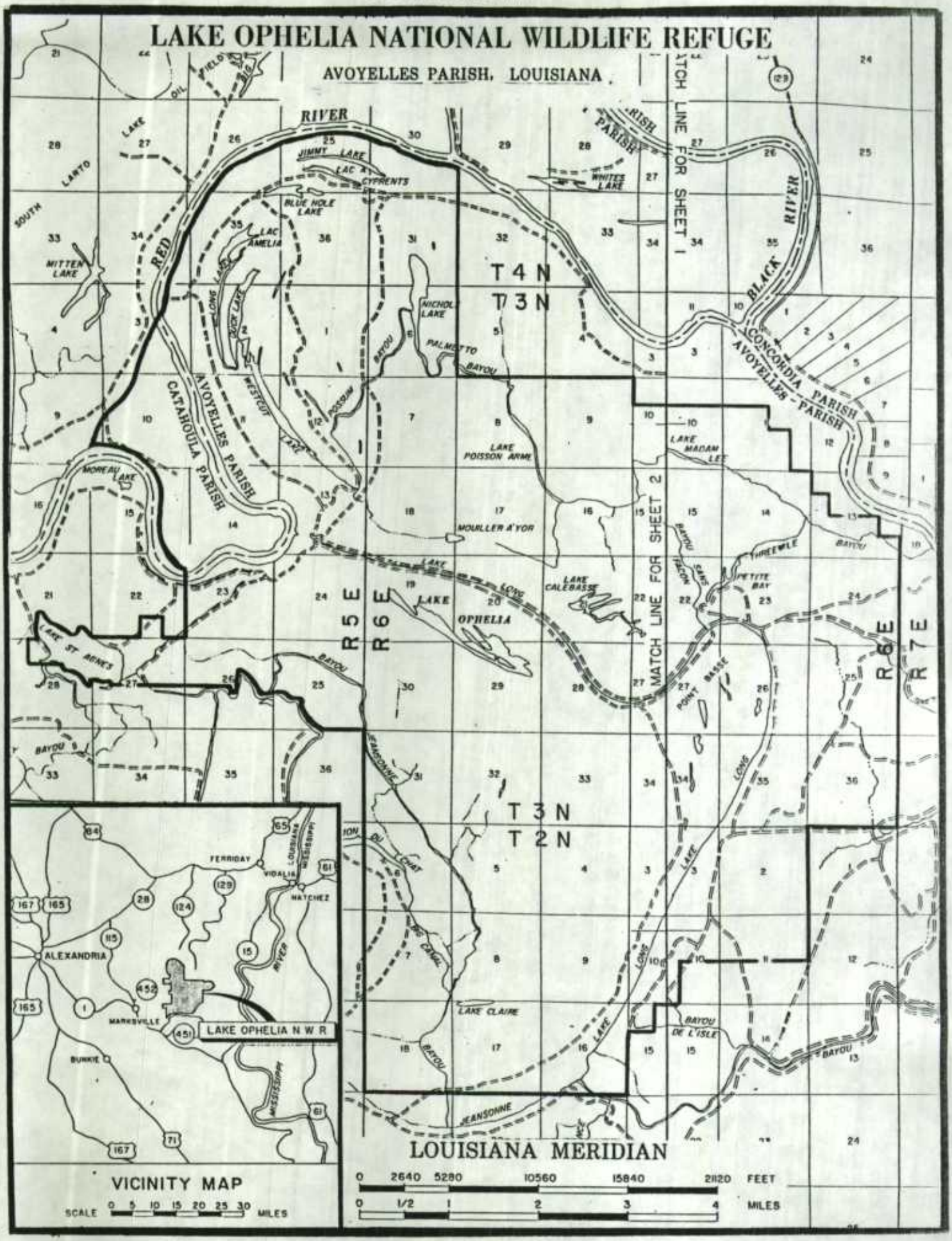
A successful introduction of the youngster to the public is crucial. Clothed in threatening Federal laws, she is often viewed as a land hungry depriver of rights. And deprive she does, a few with special interests. We must strive to communicate Service and refuge objectives and rationale to our constituents via consistent soft-sell sermons.

Discipline in the form of law enforcement is mandatory. Thoughtful development of new refuge specific rules is equally important as unbiased enforcement of all regulations.

She will always be a dependent. Clerical, technical and maintenance personnel will monitor and groom her all her life and most of theirs. As "selecting officials" we can do little that is more important than ensuring that these are the <u>right</u> people.

I receive lessons daily in tact, discretion, and the necessity of "homework". I've made some bad decisions and a few that turned out well. I've made many good friends and a couple of good enemies in 1989. Mostly though, I just had a good time. If you've a pioneering spirit and always wanted a red-headed stepchild, try a new refuge.

UNOFFICIAL MAP



ACQUISITION BOUNDARY

Copy mailed to Wash. 2-26-90 rfk
Copy of approval sheet mailed to refuge 2-26-90 rfk