

# Big Slough Waterfowl Production Area

## *A Half Century of Protecting Prairie Habitat*

Looking for places to hunt, bird watch, photograph wildlife, see rare native prairie plants or just enjoy the outdoors? Well, when you buy a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (a.k.a. “Duck Stamp”) 98 percent of your \$15 purchase goes toward ensuring that Midwesterners—and all Americans—can do just that.

Your Federal Duck Stamp dollars go toward creating waterfowl production areas, often called WPAs. These WPAs are either acquired as public land, or protected through perpetual easement, as part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Wildlife Refuge System.

All WPAs provide habitat for a vast variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, grassland birds, plants, insects and wildlife. They also help reduce erosion, clean and protect ground water and reduce flooding. WPAs owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also provide ample opportunities for public access and wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, wildlife watching and photography.

In the 50 years since the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began protecting these waterfowl production areas, more than 695,000 acres have been acquired and an additional 2.1 million acres are perpetually protected by easements through what the Service calls its Small Wetlands Program. Approximately 95 percent of all waterfowl production areas are located in the Prairie Pothole states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and Montana.

But the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cannot take all the credit for this conservation success as countless partners have joined together to help make this program a success. Waterfowl hunters, bird watchers and other wildlife and outdoor enthusiasts have become part of this conservation legacy through the purchase of Federal Duck Stamps. Next year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Small Wetland Program. It is also the first time the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold the Federal Duck Stamp Contest in the Twin Cities – making 2008 a truly landmark year for wildlife conservation and waterfowl in the Midwest.

For information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Midwest, visit our website at <http://midwest.fws.gov> or call us at 612-713-5360.

### **Partnerships Help Make Waterfowl Production Areas Successful**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service relies heavily on partnerships with state and local governments, along with conservation organizations and private citizens to successfully manage waterfowl production areas. Big Slough WPA is a wonderful example of how these organizations and individuals can work together to improve and protect our natural resources.

When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquired the property in 1997, a great deal of work needed to be done to restore the wetlands and grasslands. We also knew that we couldn’t do it all alone. Thankfully there were many partners willing to join the effort and help us restore this area.

The first support came from the local government; the Murray County Board of Commissioners approved the sale of the property and agreed to remove a portion of the county ditch system that drained the area. The Slayton Township Board approved the completion of several road improvement projects to accommodate increased traffic in the area.

With required approvals and infrastructure in place, habitat restoration began. Ducks Unlimited has long been a valuable partner of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. At Big Slough, Ducks Unlimited surveyed, designed, constructed and partially funded the dike and water control structure that reestablished the wetlands. Pheasants Forever, another valuable partner, chipped in with help from the Murray County Chapter. Wildlife Forever, a national conservation organization based in Minnesota, donated funds for the water control structure and the Minnesota DNR also provided funding and assistance.

Without the assistance of the partners mentioned here, and many other organizations and local individuals, restoration projects such as Big Slough WPA would be difficult to complete.

**Respect private property:**

The boundaries of this waterfowl production area are clearly marked. Please act responsibly and honor the WPA boundary. Straying onto private land without permission is trespassing and can harm relationships with our private landowner neighbors. Positive, constructive relationships with these neighbors play an important role in the well-being of wildlife and the future of hunting.

**Please act responsibly**

In addition to wetlands, grassland vegetation for nesting is also critical to waterfowl. Parking in designated areas limits damage to this critical vegetation and reduces travel lanes for predators (red fox, skunk and raccoon) preying on ground-nesting birds. All outdoor enthusiasts — including hunters, bird watchers and hikers — should use the same parking areas.

Follow good hunting courtesy, safety rules and ethics. If one waterfowl production area is saturated with hunters, try another. Never hesitate to stop hunting short of a limit. Concentrate on taking only drakes; increasing hen numbers improves the prospect of higher waterfowl production for years to come. Report violators! They are detrimental to all and are a threat to the future of hunting. Pick up your empty shotshells and remove any trash you find as you enjoy your hunt. Return often, and bring a friend to enjoy the outdoor wonders waterfowl production areas offer to everyone.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

**BIG SLOUGH WPA, MURRAY COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

Big Slough WPA is located approximately three miles southeast of Slayton in southwestern Minnesota. The WPA is managed by the Windom Wetland Management District, which encompasses 65 waterfowl production areas, totaling more than 13,000 acres in Brown, Cottonwood, Faribault, Freeborn, Jackson, Martin, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Rock and Watonwan counties.

This 800-acre WPA shares its northwestern border with the Minnesota DNR's Hiram C. Southwick Wildlife Management Area. Numerous wetlands, including several large wetlands, on the WPA provide excellent resting, nesting and feeding habitat for waterfowl.

In the 1940s the wetland was drained and the area was converted to row crop production. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquired the area in the 1990s and began restoring wetlands and converting the land into native habitat. A 1,900 foot dike and a water control structure were installed in order to manage water levels on both the WPA and the WMA. Restoration of three large wetlands and nine smaller wetlands on the WPA were completed in 1997. That same year, 400 acres of uplands on the WPA were seeded with a mixture of native grass.

For more information about Big Slough WPA or any other waterfowl production area in the Windom Wetland Management District, visit our website at <http://midwest.fws.gov/windom> or call us at 507-831-2220.

This waterfowl production area is open for hunting in accordance with all Minnesota hunting regulations and seasons. An additional requirement for all waterfowl production areas is that non-toxic shot must be used in shotguns for ALL hunting. The use, or possession, of any shotgun shells that are not listed as a federally-approved non-toxic shot is illegal on all waterfowl production areas.

### **Hunting and Recreational Opportunities**

There are many opportunities for waterfowl hunting on this WPA. Boat access to several wetlands can be found on 173rd Avenue (see map). The Minnesota DNR maintains several boat launches that can easily handle canoes and small boats. Parking is also available here.

Additional access to several wetlands is from parking area 3. Hunters can carry a canoe from parking area 3 and launch into the small stream located about 50 feet from the parking area. This stream flows along the western boundary of the WPA and provides access to several wetlands in both the WPA and state WMA. Many smaller wetlands are located throughout the WPA and are accessible by foot.

Pheasants can be found throughout the entire waterfowl production area. Wetland edges, stands of trees, temporary wetlands, brush plots and hundreds of acres of upland grasses provide significant habitat and plenty of room for hunting groups to share the waterfowl production area without interfering with each other.

Excellent opportunities to view and photograph wetland birds, as well as other wildlife, can be found along 173rd Avenue. The roadway is actually a dike that is closed to vehicle traffic beyond the boat launch. However, you can walk along the dike and enjoy the scenery.

The WPA also provides habitat for white-tailed deer and many small game species. Areas with trees provide your best opportunity to find deer.

Permanent hunting or observation stands or blinds are prohibited, as is the use of nails, wire, screws or bolts to attach a stand to a tree or hunting from a tree into which a metal object has been driven to support a hunter. Portable or temporary hunting blinds or stands are permitted, but must be removed at the end of each day's hunt.

### **Finding the WPA**

From Slayton, Minn., take State Highway 59 south for approximately three miles and then turn right onto County Road 34 (also called 180<sup>th</sup> Avenue). Travel south on County Road 34 for approximately one mile to parking area 1.

The Minnesota DNR maintains a boat launch along the northwestern edge of the WPA. This boat launch provides access to both the Big Slough WPA and the adjacent Hiram C. Southwick Wildlife Management Area. To find the boat launch, take State Highway 59 south from Slayton for approximately 2.5 miles and watch for 173rd Avenue (173rd Avenue is a single lane gravel road on the south side of State Highway 59). Follow 173rd Avenue for approximately 3/4 of a mile to the boat launch.

For those with plat maps, Big Slough WPA is located in Murray County, Slayton Township, Section 25, T106N R41W.





# Big Slough Waterfowl Production Area Murray County, Minnesota



Slayton 3 miles

U.S. Highway 59



173rd Avenue

County Road 34  
180th Avenue

Boat Launch

P1

P2

P3

71st Street



**P#** Parking Area

**Waterfowl Production Area  
Open to the public**

