



A Rare Opportunity

Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge

Private Landowners Frequently Asked Questions

Landowners and Refuge Partnerships

- Development of the proposed Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge will respect individual property rights by offering multiple mechanisms to landowners who choose to become part of the refuge system through conservation easements, management agreements, and voluntary habitat improvement of privately owned lands.
- The proposed refuge incorporates partnerships in a mutually beneficial relationship between private landowners, local business interests, conservation groups, state and local units of government, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Are there any benefits to a landowner whose property is within the refuge boundary?

- One benefit to landowners is that the property is eligible for acquisition by the USFWS. The USFWS will not seek to purchase every property within the refuge boundary – that will depend on the characteristics of the particular property and the funding available for acquisitions.
- Property owners within the refuge boundary may also have the opportunity to donate all or a portion of their land to take advantage of tax benefits or as a lasting memorial.
- Another benefit generally recognized by most private landowners within a refuge boundary is the value of owning property near large tracts of protected public land. Many purchasers will pay a premium for property that overlooks protected lands or is located near lands available for recreation.

Is private land within the refuge boundary subject to additional restrictions?

- Privately owned land within the refuge boundary is not subject to any more restrictions than land outside the boundary.
- Privately owned land within the refuge boundary may be used for any purpose allowed by local land use regulations, and it may be sold to anyone else or inherited by heirs.
- Privately owned land within the refuge boundary may be annexed by an adjacent municipality and developed just like land outside the boundary.

Does the federal government acquire all of the land within the refuge boundaries?

- Once the area is studied by the USFWS and qualifies for refuge status, the USFWS will recommend a refuge boundary. All of the land within the established boundary of the refuge is *eligible* for federal acquisition, but the USFWS will prioritize which lands are most important for federal acquisition.
- The lands actually acquired by the federal government are what are commonly referred to as the actual refuge. Other public entities can purchase land or easements within refuge boundaries for conservation purposes as well, with the involvement and approval of the USFWS.

How does the federal government acquire land for the refuge?

- Over the last few decades, the USFWS has found condemnation to be counter-productive to conserving refuge lands. The federal government only acquires land from willing sellers.
- If a private landowner within the refuge boundary is interested in selling land to the USFWS, then the property will be appraised to determine its fair market value. If the amount offered by the federal government is not acceptable to the landowner, the landowner is free to retain the property or sell it to anyone else.

What types of land interest does the United States Fish and Wildlife Service acquire for the National Wildlife Refuge System?

Fee, easement, and lease are the three types of acquisition generally used by the USFWS when acquiring lands for inclusion in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

- Acquisition of fee title: Involves purchase of the full ownership of the property. In some fee title acquisitions, the fee title of property is sold with certain reservations of interest, such as mineral rights, which are retained by the seller.
- Acquisition of an easement: The easement holder, such as the USFWS, would have partial use or the right to restrict a use(s) of the property either for a specified period of time or in perpetuity.
- Lease: A lease involves a partial or full possession of the land for a specified period of time for a specified rent. At the end of the specified period of time, full possession of the land returns to the owner.