

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

February 20, 1963

Dear Governor Carvel:

The Department of the Interior welcomes this opportunity to inform the citizens of Delaware of its plans for the preservation of wetlands in the Primeshook area of Sussex County, Delaware. As you are aware, we have an approved and authorized acquisition project actively under way in the area as a part of the national effort to safeguard important waterfowl habitat for the benefit and enjoyment of the citizens of the future. We are confident that by means of meetings such as this the high value and significance of this and similar projects will become well known to all of the concerned people of your State.

The Department of the Interior, through the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, is obligated by international treaties to acquire and administer lands within the United States for the protection and preservation of the continental waterfowl resources. Areas so acquired are managed for the benefit and enjoyment of all classes of people, with primary emphasis placed on the goal of meeting requirements of our migratory waterfowl, but considering also the economic, recreational, aesthetic, and scientific needs of the public.

Areas selected for acquisition were identified by an inventory of wetlands remaining in the United States in 1954 capable of sustaining the waterfowl resource. Of the estimated original 127 million acres of wetland there remained then only 22.5 million acres having high or moderate value to waterfowl. It was apparent that concerted, aggressive action by the State and Federal conservation agencies was needed to halt the destruction of and encroachment upon the remaining wetlands. Responsible waterfowl administrators estimated that 12.5 million acres of the remaining wetlands must be placed in public ownership to provide the essential land and water habitat base for the waterfowl resource.

Great impetus was given the acquisition of wetlands in 1961 with passage of Public Law 87-383, which authorized the loan or "advance" of \$105 million to speed the wetland acquisition program, and preserve vital areas before they were destroyed or before rising land prices reduced our efforts. This accelerated acquisition program was the

subject of our exchange of correspondence of a little more than a year ago. Your support for wetland preservation in Delaware, as indicated by your letter of January 10, 1962, is most appreciated.

Following several months of concentrated study by Federal and State waterfowl technicians in 1961, the Primshook marshes were determined to be among the highest priority wetlands remaining on the Atlantic coast. In addition, because of conversion of extensive marsh areas to industrial uses on Delaware Bay, this area was considered to be highly vulnerable to destruction. By acquisition of some 11,000 acres of this marsh and adjacent buffers of Delaware Bay beach shore on the east and upland on the west, a substantial preservation objective could be realized.

Strategically located within the Atlantic Flyway, this area provides excellent feeding and resting habitat for transient waterfowl, especially ducks, and is of equal importance in normal winters as a wintering area. Once a large production center, waterfowl breeding has declined in the Primshook marshes. With effective management we believe the area has the potential to regain its former productivity.

Our surveys and studies of the Primshook area have shown that there are possibilities for expansion of public recreational opportunities. In establishing the boundary of the acquisition project, existing developed beach properties on Delaware Bay were excluded, but the remaining barrier beach frontage on the Bay was included to assure preservation of this shore for permanent public enjoyment. Recreational management of the Primshook Refuge will provide, in addition to retention of the public roads across the marsh to Delaware Bay, regulated public use for picnicking, surf bathing, and surf fishing on the public beach shore. Additionally, as marsh management progresses, there will be opportunities for public trails and boat channels through portions of the marsh to benefit students of nature, hunters, and fishermen.

On August 21, 1962, we requested the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission to authorize our acquisition of the Primshook area. This Commission was established by Congress for the purpose of approving Federal land acquisition for waterfowl conservation purposes. A representative of the Delaware Fish and Game Board participated in the Commission meeting in an ex-officio capacity, and voiced the State's approval of the project. After due consideration the Commission approved the project for acquisition as the Primshook National Wildlife Refuge.

The acquisition of private lands for public purposes, as indeed almost any public project, results in some opposition. As the world becomes more densely crowded conflicts become more intense. We endeavor to determine causes of opposition to a project of such high national import, and find that most stems from the local problems one might expect in any project involving shifts in land titles and established patterns of land use. At Primehook we have identified these factors as follows:

1. Landowner objections to being displaced.
2. Fears that the project will adversely affect the interests of adjacent landowners.
3. Fear of the loss of tax revenue.
4. Resistance to loss of private rights to public use.

Of the land included in the approved boundaries of the Primehook Refuge 18 percent, or 2,022 acres, is devoted to agriculture (crop or pasture land), and the remaining 82 percent, or 9,211 acres, is non-agricultural (brush, marsh, or beach land). There are approximately 85 individuals of record owning lands within the project. Of the 85 owners only 29 are operable farm units, and of these only 6 are to be bought in full. Four ownerships are rural dwellings without farms. These will be acquired. The remaining 52 ownerships are composed of marsh, brush, or other non-agricultural property.

We are working closely with the Farmers' Home Administration and the Federal Land Bank in an effort to relocate displaced landowners. One family has already been relocated and opportunity for relocation of others is encouraging. In all displacement cases the Federal Government pays for an equitable share of moving costs.

Landowners actively engaged in farming within the Primehook drainage area have expressed fear that development and management of the Primehook marshes would jeopardize their agricultural activities. We are fully cognizant of the long-standing conflict amongst present and past landowners in the area regarding drainage and water use. On August 30, 1962, Regional Director Gottschalk assured you of our awareness of this problem, and that we have no plan or intention to damage lands adjacent to the refuge. Further, he advised you that prior to our development of water control and water management facilities on the refuge we would review such plans with the Soil Conservation Service and your State Drainage Engineer. Mr. Gottschalk

re-affirmed this statement at the public hearing in Milton on September 20.

You have been advised that we have met with and are actively working with the Soil Conservation Service and your State Drainage Engineer in the development of a water management concept for the Primehook marshes. We believe there is agreement on the basic concept, pending gathering of needed field data to substantiate the plan's feasibility.

Most land acquisition by governmental entities causes varying degrees of tax loss and shifting of the tax burden. Acquisition of the Primehook Refuge will cause an estimated total annual net tax loss to Sussex County of approximately \$1,000, or less than two-tenths of one percent. The Milford School District will have a total net loss of approximately \$475, or less than one percent. The Milton School District will have a total net loss of slightly more than \$600, which is slightly less than a seven percent loss to the district.

We return to each county 25 cents on each dollar of revenue received from the sale of products and privileges of the land within national wildlife refuges. On only a few of the refuges does the resource management program permit a revenue return commensurate with the basic tax loss. However, there are now before the Congress proposals aimed at equalizing tax loss on wildlife refuge lands. If enacted, the result would be a material increase in payments made to counties.

It is regrettable, but true we believe, that much of the local opposition to the Primehook Refuge comes from duck hunters who object to the loss of shooting privileges. They, among all groups, should recognize that without the marshes our waterfowl are doomed, and without public ownership our marshes are doomed. We manage the waterfowl resource for the public enjoyment of the greatest number of people without consideration of the privileges of a few. If we are not already too late we can look forward to the day when the Primehook marshes under public ownership will provide hunting opportunity for the many rather than the few.

We have dwelt at length on these matters because we recognize that they reflect real fears and problems of the people affected. That is not to say, however, that this project lacks support. On the contrary, we have received widespread encouragement throughout the State, and locally find a definite sentiment in favor of the preservation of the marshes. Our negotiators report that only a few of the landowners themselves are hostile, the majority having adopted a "wait-and-see" attitude toward the project.

In the final analysis this project cannot be judged on the basis of the present or on purely local grounds. We must be willing to think in terms of our responsibility to those who will follow us in the future.

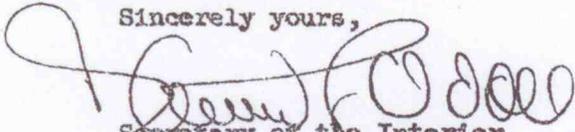
In addition to its role in waterfowl management the Primehook Refuge will bring obvious corollary benefits through public ownership to the local community, State of Delaware, and to the Nation. The important economic and recreation marine fisheries and shellfisheries of Delaware Bay are dependent upon a total estuarine environment that is inseparable from the tidal marsh. Destroy one and you have destroyed the other.

Business Analysts record the current and expected human and economic growth rate in Delaware as one of the highest in the Nation. Geographers forecast by the year 2000 the land area between Boston, Massachusetts, and Norfolk, Virginia, will be one vast sprawling urban area - the megalopolis of the 21st Century. Resource planners and sociologists as well point to the need for preservation of open space and green belts to relieve the tensions arising from life in the congested city. Public ownership of Primehook will help insure that a part of southern Delaware will not become the industrial complex with its pollution of air and water that characterizes other areas where marshlands have been laid waste.

The Primehook National Wildlife Refuge is an important and strategically located wetland area of high value to waterfowl. In public ownership it will make a substantial contribution to the preservation of the Nation's waterfowl resource, other wildlife, the fisheries, and to public recreational opportunities for the people of Delaware. This project takes nothing away from the people of Delaware; it guarantees a public trust to them and their descendants.

The Department of the Interior and its constituent Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife are moving forward in the Primehook acquisition. We expect to work cooperatively with the people of Delaware in their economic, social, and recreational growth. We sincerely hope that we will have the cooperation of all Delawareans, especially those neighbors in Sussex County, to make possible the realization of this most significant project.

Sincerely yours,



Secretary of the Interior

Honorable Elbert N. Carvel  
Governor of Delaware  
Dover, Delaware