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PRESS RELEASE

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US Fish and Wildlife Service Leaves out Public While Making Plans to pollute Reelfoot Lake

Draft plan outlines activities that destroys pristine habitat for sportsmen

Location – Reelfoot Lake, Tennessee, Kentucky

The US Fish and Wildlife Agency (USFWS) completed its Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (Draft Plan) for the Reelfoot Lake and Isom Lake Wildlife Refuge. This draft plan will direct activities on Reelfoot Lake for the next 20 years. The Reelfoot Lake, Lake Isom Wildlife Refuge was created in 1941 in a lease agreement with the State of Tennessee to create a sanctuary for migratory birds. TCWN provided comments to the draft illustrating a shift in the designated use of Reelfoot Lake would jeopardize the water quality and ruin Reelfoot Lake’s unique and pristine habitat

“The Network is disappointed in the Fish and Wildlife Service,” Says Renée Hoyos, Executive Director of the Tennessee Clean Water Network. “The Fish and Wildlife Service changed the designed use of the Refuge without properly notifying residents of Reelfoot and disregarded Reelfoots Lake’s Tier III water quality protection status in this draft plan.”

Given Reelfoot Lake’s Tier III protection status no pollution, or degradation, is allowed to the lake under the law. However, TCWN provided eleven pages of comments showing the USFWS draft plan will be moving away from protecting migratory birds to allowing construction, logging and land acquisition around and in the refuge. TCWN determined many of the proposed actions will negatively effect water quality and migratory bird habitat. Furthermore, the document is silent on issues that are within the USFWS authority that also impact water quality such as herbicide spraying and managing the lake water level and coordinating with the other two agencies that manage the lake, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. Nor is there any mention of how the USFWS will obtain the necessary water quality permits required for these activities.

“We want the USFWS to reopen the process to allow an open dialogue with the residents of Reelfoot Lake.” Explains Hoyos. “We also want the USFWS to uphold Reelfoot Lake’s protection status by publicly addressing TCWN’s comments and making the suggested changes to the draft plan.”

By neglecting their duties, the USFWS is setting the stage for further destruction of Reelfoot Lake that is the hunting and fishing destination for thousands of people each year. Local residents and resort owners want a say in the new plan because it will affect their livelihoods.

"I have talked with several landowners and sportsman in the last three weeks, including resort owners around Reelfoot Lake, which will be effected by plan, very few knew anything about or were aware that the USFWS was writing a long range plan effecting them." Says Al Hamilton, of the Reelfoot Lake Watch Group. "The purpose and stated intent of the August 28, 1941 lease and cooperative agreement between the State of Tennessee and USFWS is being altered without being subject to regulatory processes that are required under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).

Background

Formed by a series of earthquakes in 1811-1812, Reelfoot Lake is Tennessee's only natural lake. It was recognized by the Tennessee Legislature in 1997 as an Outstanding National Resource Water given the highest protection from pollution under the law.

Unfortunately, dredging and toxic herbicide spraying on this lake are causing serious degradation and adding pollution to Reelfoot Lake where no pollution is allowed. The **Tennessee Clean Water Network** is working with the Reelfoot Lake Watch Group to protect this precious natural resources and hold the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation accountable to the laws set up to protect Reelfoot Lake.

The deadline for commenting on the EA and Draft Plan was January 30, 2006. TCWN's comments can be viewed at www.tcwn.org/

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