

Poultry Producers Oppose National Wildlife Refuge
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A proposed National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Indiana has been met by heavy opposition from the poultry industry. The area in question includes about 25,000 acres of hardwood bottomlands along the Patoka River in Gibson, Pike, and Dubois counties. It would be managed primarily for wood duck habitat and as a winter stopover for ducks and geese on the edge of the Mississippi Flyway. The poultry producers in this area attended preliminary hearings on the proposed refuge and voiced strong objections to the refuge because they perceived an increased disease risk, particularly from avian influenza. In response to these comments, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service appointed an Avian Disease Task Force composed of outside consultants with strong credentials in avian influenza and other poultry diseases. The Task Force met September 17-18, 1987, in Madison, Wisconsin, to evaluate the disease potential that the refuge would pose to the poultry industry. The Task Force acknowledged that with the projected increases in both wild waterfowl and domestic poultry in the area there would be increased risk of disease transmission between the two groups. The magnitude of the increased risk was not likely to be proportional to the increase in populations, and while there was no precise means to predict the level of risk, it was the judgment of the Task Force that the amount of risk to the poultry industry would be minimal. The position of the Task Force will be incorporated into the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Environmental Assessment that will soon be available for public comment. Wildlife managers should pay close attention to this controversy since the point in question could have an impact on the development and operation of waterfowl refuges throughout the Nation.