



Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and Izaak Walton League of America Celebrate 100 Years and Look Towards the Future

What is the Refuge?

- Authorized by Congress as a refuge and breeding place for migratory birds, other wildlife, fish and other aquatic animal life, and the conservation of wildflowers and aquatic plants
- Covers 250,000 acres in: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa & Illinois
- 261 river miles between Wabasha, Minnesota & Rock Island, Illinois



Credit: USFWS

By June 1924, Dilg and the League had successfully convinced Congress to pass legislation creating the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

Role of the League

- Drainage of Winneshiek Bottoms in Iowa motivated League founder Will Dilg to lead the newly-formed League to combat the “drainage crime of the century”
- Dilg rapidly grew the League and propelled the League to national prominence with a campaign to save the Upper Mississippi
- Campaign began with effort to halt drainage of 13,000 acres of wetlands and evolved into a proposal to create the refuge
- Dilg focused League’s new-found grassroots power on Washington and quickly secured the blessing of President Coolidge for creation of an Upper Mississippi refuge

A Critical Biodiversity and Economic Engine

- Refuge is home to 306 species of birds, 119 species of fish, 57 species of mammals and 44 species of freshwater mussels
- Designated a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- Hosts more than 3.7 million annual visits for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and other outdoor recreational activities
- Located in the middle of the Mississippi Flyway, the Refuge is critically important for migrating waterfowl, particularly canvasbacks and tundra swans; 40% of all North American ducks migrate down the Mississippi flyway
- Anglers fish year round for walleye, sauger, largemouth and smallmouth bass, yellow perch, bullhead, channel catfish, crappie and sunfish below the dams, in sloughs and channels between islands. In the winter months, the river becomes its own village as ice shanties and tents cover the frozen water
- The Refuge is an economic powerhouse for the region with a nearly \$125 million total impact that supports more than 1,400 jobs up and down the river

Looking to the Future

The League believes that the threats faced by the Refuge must be addressed at the source:

- Soil health practices that keep topsoil in the fields where it belongs can fix siltation issues along the upper Mississippi, reducing the need for dredging and other forms of active management
- Invasive species must be controlled and regulated before they overtake native habitats and ecosystems while existing invasives must be rigorously managed to reduce overall impacts
- Climate change exacerbates existing threats to the Refuge as well as the entire Mississippi River, worldwide emissions of greenhouse gasses must be reduced and Refuge managers must have access to the resources they need to implement sufficient adaptation practices



Credit: USFWS

For more information, visit:
www.iwla.org/uppermiss

Izaak Walton League of America
707 Conservation Lane
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20878
info@iwla.org