

NEW LAW INCREASES NATIONAL FOREST ACREAGE IN OKLAHOMA

By Gerry Cherry
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Tuesday, President Clinton signed HR4236 into law. The "Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996" profoundly affects Oklahoma's forests, as well as parks, forests, trails, rivers or historic sites in 40 other states.

A land swap between the U.S. Forest Service, Ouachita National Forest, and Weyerhaeuser Corporation was part of the bill. "We were dealing right up to the last minute, trading value for value," Deputy Forest Supervisor Dave Hammond said Wednesday. Weyerhaeuser Corporation owns and manages pine forests for renewable sources of wood and paper products.

In the exchange 47,500 acres of National Forest land in southeast Oklahoma and Arkansas was traded to Weyerhaeuser for 180,500 acres of land in the same region. In Oklahoma, the Forest Service swapped 28,000 National Forest acres for 115,000 Weyerhaeuser acres, of "watershed around Broken Bow Lake, some pine plantations, 15 miles along the Glover River and some land in McCurtain County," Hammond said. The Glover River is southeast Oklahoma's last free-flowing river, he added.

One parcel in Arkansas, 24,000 acres along the Cossatot and Little Rivers will become the 501st National Wildlife Refuge.

Some of the land acquired by the U.S. Forest Service is cut-over; but Hammond said some of it is already good wildlife habitat and foresters will be working to improve other newly-acquired parcels. "Our work is just beginning," Hammond added.

More than 100 resources are included in the new law, some natural, some manmade. On the west coast, provisions in the law would improve the management of the Presidio in San Francisco. This military post, dating from 1776, includes both beautiful open spaces appropriate for National Park Service management and hundreds of unused buildings requiring a more innovative approach, President Clinton said when he signed the bill. This Act establishes a government corporation, known as the Presidio Trust, to refurbish and lease these buildings quickly and efficiently, but in a manner consistent with overall park management requirements.

Another laudable provision, the President said, authorizes appropriations of \$17.5 million to help the New York-New Jersey Palisades Interstate Park Commission to acquire lands within the Sterling Forest Re-

serve, just 40 miles from midtown Manhattan. This is one of the last areas of pristine forest in the Northeast and the area is critical for supplying safe drinking water to northern New Jersey.

The Act also establishes the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas. The North American continent was once covered by over 400,000 square miles of tallgrass prairie. Today, less than 1 percent remains. This Act will help to restore 11,000 acres of tallgrass prairie, an ecosystem of grass as tall as 9 feet, and includes trees, flowers, birds and other wildlife. This ecosystem is nationally significant and the Preserve is a welcome addition to the National Park System.

The Act also provides for ten separate nonfederal national heritage areas in Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Iowa, Ohio, and New York. Other provisions would help to preserve the Nation's cultural heritage by authorizing memorials, protecting historic areas, designating the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail in Alabama, and authorizing the establishment of a Martin Luther King, Jr., memorial in the District of Columbia.

Park boundary adjustments, land exchanges (including the Arkansas/Oklahoma deal), and provisions to assist agencies in protecting national parks, forests, and public lands are also included in the new law.

Excluded from the bill, President Clinton said, were provisions "that would have adversely affected the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, the Shenandoah National Park and Richmond Battlefields National Park in Virginia, the Sequoia National Park in California, and other national parks and Federal lands.

"Unfortunately, the Act still includes a few objectionable provisions. Among them is a provision that changes the status of about 70 acres of fragile land that was previously protected as part of the Coastal Barrier Resources System. Prior to my signing of the Act this land could only be developed at private expense. Now, this land will be eligible for Federal development subsidies in the form of infrastructure funding and flood insurance. The taxpayer should not bear the risk of development in these damage-prone areas. . .

"I must also note," President Clinton continued, "that two sections of the Act require careful construction and application to avoid violating the Appointments Clause of the Constitution. First, to avoid an unconstitutional limitation on the President's power to appoint officers, I will regard the limitations on my ability to make appointments to the Board of Directors of the Presidio Trust as advisory. The second issue involves officers of the National Park Service (NPS). To avoid an unconstitutional congressional removal of an officer, I will not construe the Act to require that the current NPS Director be subjected to the new appointment process established by the bill. Further, appointments to the NPS Deputy Director positions created by the Act must be made in a manner consistent with the Appointments Clause in order for them to exercise significant governmental authority."

Clinton closed his statement with a quote from a far-sighted former President who was the first to set aside land in the U.S. for future generations to enjoy. President Teddy Roosevelt said: "The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, not impaired, in value."

WILLIAMS DONATES PIPE FOR HACKBERRY FLAT

From The Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) The Williams Companies, Inc. has agreed to donate approximately 16 miles of steel pipe to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation for use in its Hackberry Flat wetland restoration project. The pipe will be used to deliver 2,352 acre feet of water supplied by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Mountain Park Conservancy District of the Hackberry Flat basin in Tillman County, Oklahoma, from a supply source located approximately 16 miles north of the state.

"This generous pipe donation is an important link in our effort to restore these wetlands to their original prominence," said Greg Duffy, director, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. "Williams is a leader in pipe donations for wetlands conservation and an important partner in Oklahoma's efforts to provide habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds."

Hackberry Flat is a 3,750 acre natural basin in southwest Oklahoma that was at one time the largest isolated wetland in the state. Prior to its drainage and conversion to farmland, it

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