



February 17, 2009

The Honorable Brad Ellsworth
U. S. House of Representatives
P. O. Box 62
Evansville, IN 47701

Dear Congressman Ellsworth:

Subject: Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge Funding – FY10

We at Evansville Audubon thank you for your past efforts on behalf of Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge (PRNWR) and look forward to your continued efforts to obtain Interior Appropriations funding for expansion of the property through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

The situation regarding the 1150 acres of land known as the Columbia Mine has become critical. This is the tract within the refuge purchase boundary that you may recall having toured with refuge manager Bill McCoy. We at Evansville Audubon share Bill's view that this property is critical to the future viability of the refuge - not only because it provides habitat for a wide range of wildlife but because it has the potential to become a significant asset for the economy of southwestern Indiana. We stand to lose this critical component of the envisioned refuge if the property is sold to outside interests.

The refuge currently is very fragmented which puts it at a serious disadvantage compared to other refuges. Adding this tract of land will result in a much larger contiguous block, which will dramatically enhance PRNWR's value, both in terms of the refuge's objectives for benefiting wildlife and for the regional need for venues for outdoor recreation – and the attendant economic benefits. The great majority of refuge visitors expect an "auto tour" route, something that is currently difficult due to the prevalence of privately held property within the refuge boundaries. Adding this property should make it possible to establish a recommended route, with a portion controlled by the refuge, provided with scenic and interpretive turnouts, and not subject to the needs of commercial and residential traffic.

We at the Evansville Audubon Society are appreciative of your past efforts on behalf of the refuge and are hopeful that this time these efforts will pay off and we will see a brighter future for southwestern Indiana's environment, quality of life and economy.

Sincerely,

Richard Vernier, President
Evansville Audubon Society, Inc.