



National  
Wildlife Refuge  
Association

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## **Bear River Watershed Conservation Area Established as 565<sup>th</sup> Unit of the Refuge System**

(BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH) – Today, the National Wildlife Refuge Association is joining with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Ferry family of Corinne, Utah to celebrate the donation of a 30-acre conservation easement by the Ferry Ranch and Farm. This conservation easement is the first to be received by the Service in the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area, which was created in 2013 after a lengthy public outreach and planning effort.

**“The Ferry family’s donation embodies the goals of the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area,” said David Houghton, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “While maintaining ownership of their working ranchland, the Ferrys are permanently protecting its wildlife habitat and watershed protection values for the future. Only through public-private partnerships like this can true landscape-scale conservation be successful.”**

The Bear River Watershed Conservation Area authorizes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire conservation easements, which are a permanent end to certain rights on private lands, in this case the sale of development rights. Through a 2010-2012 public planning process that involved the states of Utah, Idaho and Wyoming, the Service prioritized 920,000 acres within the 4.5 million-acre watershed. These are areas of exceptionally high habitat value for wildlife species such as American avocet, white-faced ibis, sagebrush thrasher, greater sage-grouse, and Bonneville cutthroat trout – and include important migratory routes for pronghorn and mule deer. This region is also of continental significance for migratory waterfowl such as Northern pintail and cinnamon teal.

In these prime areas, the Service is now authorized to work in partnership with private landowners to conserve wildlife habitat through conservation easements. Aside from existing refuge units within the watershed, the Service is not authorized to acquire additional fee interest in land. Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Wyoming, Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Oxford Slough Waterfowl Production Area in Idaho, and the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in Utah are established refuges within the watershed, and their boundaries are unchanged by the creation of the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area.



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**“The Ferry Family’s leadership in stepping forward to donate a conservation easement is both generous and bold,” added Houghton. “They are demonstrating an admirable spirit of trust and conservation ethic by entering into a partnership with the federal government. We are very excited to recognize this gift and we hope it’s the first of many partnerships to come that strike a balance between wildlife, water management, and working lands.”**

The Service has prioritized the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area as an area worthy of funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). In future years, LWCF funds would allow the Service to purchase conservation easements at fair market value from willing sellers.

The Bear River originates in the Utah’s Uinta Mountains and flows north through the sagebrush steppe and wet meadows of western Wyoming and the Thomas Fork area of Southeastern Idaho, before meeting Bear Lake and turning back southward through Utah’s Cache Valley and through the expansive Bear River delta into the Great Salt Lake. It is the largest surface water source in the Great Salt Lake ecosystem, and this region plays a unique role as a meeting point of the Great Basin and the Southern Rockies.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association played a role in the local outreach and planning work to create the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area over the period from 2009-2013, and continues to support requests for funding for conservation easement acquisition. Today’s celebration marks the culmination of many years of collaborative work, and we look forward to many more to come.

Learn more about this announcement [here](#), and read more about the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area [here](#).

Discover more about the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area by checking out our Fact Sheet [here](#).

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*The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to conserve America’s wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect, enhance, and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries.*