



NEWS RELEASE

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McPherson Valley Wetland Project Receives Koch Money *The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, and state to receive \$400,000 to acquire and restore historical wetland habitat*

Topeka, Kan.—December 5, 2000--A plan by two of the state's largest private conservation organizations and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to acquire and protect critical wetland habitat near McPherson will receive \$400,000 from Koch Pipeline Company.

Ducks Unlimited, Inc., the Kansas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks will use the money for acquisition of some 600 acres, as well as for restoration of wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl, shore birds, and wading birds in an area called the McPherson Valley Wetlands. Already, nearly 1,650 acres of historical wetlands have been purchased near McPherson, with 1,418 of those acres being returned to their natural wetland state.

Funding of the project, which will provide a critical and timely enhancement to the McPherson Valley Wetlands restoration effort, is the result of a settlement agreement with the EPA under the oil spill program. As a result of the agreement, Koch Pipeline Company has provided over \$1.5 million for important conservation projects in both Kansas and Oklahoma.

In addition to the Koch money, the three groups said today that they would contribute up to \$800,000 of their own money to support the project. The multi-year effort is expected to cost as much as \$3.5 million, which will be split between acquisition and restoration efforts. All of the land is being acquired from willing sellers.

Ross Melinchuk, Director of State and Federal Coordination for Ducks Unlimited, said the McPherson Valley Wetlands, which were drained by the early 1900s, had been a key migration stopover in the Central Flyway for hundreds of thousands ducks, geese, and other wetland-dependent birds.

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“As our restoration efforts continue, the citizens of Kansas, especially those in communities near the McPherson Wetlands, will benefit from the extraordinary aesthetic, recreational, and economic values of these restored areas,” Melinchuk said. “It really is an exciting project, and with Koch’s assistance, we have the opportunity to make McPherson Valley Wetlands ‘a crown jewel of the Central Flyway’.”

“The Koch investment will give our on-going efforts a tremendous boost,” said Alan Pollom, State Director of The Nature Conservancy. “Ecologically, these historic wetlands have been one of the most important landscapes in the state. They provide a source of food and a resting place for migrating waterfowl and more than 112 species of birds, including rare species like the whooping crane, white-faced ibis, peregrine falcon, snowy plover, piping plover, and the least tern.”

Koch executives said they received dozens of proposals for potential projects in Kansas. They said the McPherson Valley Wetlands project was chosen because of its national significance and the extensive wetland expertise of the organizations involved. The funds have already been transferred to the Conservancy and are available for immediate use.

“Historically, wetlands in the McPherson area, along with Cheyenne Bottoms in Barton County and the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in Stafford County, formed the most essential zone of migratory bird habitat in the state,” said Roger Ramseyer, Kansas Director of Community Affairs for Koch Industries. “It is no exaggeration that these three areas represent some of the most crucial migratory bird habitat in North America. Koch Industries is proud to play a part in restoring the McPherson piece of this golden triangle within the Central Flyway.”

Experts say that nearly 50 percent of the original wetlands in Kansas had been lost by the mid-1980s, mostly due to drainage for agriculture. The McPherson wetlands, once stretched over 9,000 acres in an area encompassing approximately 126 square miles in McPherson County. They remained largely drained until the early 1990s, when restoration efforts began.

Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy will ultimately transfer any acquired lands to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, where a management team with extensive wetland experience will coordinate all management of the area. This will provide a single point for decision making and eliminate any possibility of conflicting management goals.

According to Steve Williams, Secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, the new funds may have a double impact on efforts in the McPherson Valley. “We’re very hopeful that the Koch funds, together with the additional commitment of resources by the three partners, can be used as leverage to secure a significant matching federal grant through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act next year.”

Ramseyer also indicated a second Kansas project to receive support from Koch was the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, near Strong City. A plan to improve water quality and enhance the streamside riparian habitat of Fox Creek, the preserve’s principal watercourse, will receive approximately \$157,000.

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