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## McConnell proposes wildlife refuge

### Refuge will be 15 miles west of LBL

By AMY WILSON  
Staff Writer

U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell is proposing to create a national wildlife refuge 15 miles west of TVA's Land Between the Lakes.

"The legislation I'm proposing will authorize the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to purchase up to 20,000 acres in western Kentucky located on the East Fork of

the Clarks River," McConnell said in a statement. "This site, located near Benton, is the only major bottomland hardwood area remaining in western Kentucky."

He revealed his plans at a press conference Saturday at Moor's Resort Lodge.

McConnell emphasized that in addition to the environmental and educational benefits of the site, the designation of the Kentucky Wildlife Refuge will also provide a significant economic boost to the area.

"The creation of Kentucky's first refuge will help keep tourist dollars in the state," he said. "By creating a Kentucky wildlife refuge, people who are interested

in outdoor activities would have an opportunity here in Kentucky — something that nature lovers and the state would benefit from."

Today, the National Wildlife Refuge System is made up of 571 refuges in 49 states and U.S. territories, totaling nearly 92 million acres of the nation's best wildlife habitat. Kentucky has been the only state without its own independently-managed refuge.

The estimated cost for acquisition would be \$12 million to \$18 million.

"Once established, the Kentucky National Wildlife Refuge will showcase a unique ecosystem, protecting wildlife and

offering a variety of educational opportunities for the public," McConnell said. "This refuge will also provide recreational activities including bird watching, hiking, hunting and fishing."

TVA's Land Between the Lakes, which consists of 170,000 acres, was designated a national recreational area by President John F. Kennedy in 1963. Through the use of eminent domain by the federal government, residents on that land were required to move.

For the past several years, LBL has been struggling for additional funding. Under a mandate by TVA to become self sufficient, LBL officials have launched a

public planning process to lay the framework for the future.

McConnell was instrumental in securing operational funds for the LBL recreational/environmental education area for fiscal year 1996.

According to McConnell, both agricultural and conservation interests can exist side-by-side under his proposal for a national wildlife refuge.

"I have worked hard to ensure that my proposal is fair and protects the rights of individual land owners, while preserving this important habitat," he said. "Contained in my bill is language to

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ensure that the acquisition of the refuge land will be from willing sellers, donations or exchanges only.

"I am sensitive to the property rights and concerns of local landowners and for this reason, I will closely follow the project to ensure that their rights are protected," he said.

The refuge area would be situated on a migratory fly-way and breeding area for a variety of

waterfowl. A large number of migratory birds including wood ducks, song birds, and the threatened bald eagle could make their home there.

The hardwood forests would be a habitat for numerous woodpeckers, hawks and the eastern wild turkey. Other wildlife which would thrive in the area include deer, beavers, otters and bobcats.

The refuge would be located five miles southeast of Paducah, 20 miles north of Murray and 10 miles northeast of Mayfield.

A public meeting will be held at 7 p.m. March 26 in Benton to explain the proposed refuge plan, to provide information on the target area and procedures and to answer questions.

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