

FISH POINT WATERFOWL HABITAT
IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, TUSCOLA CO.

A survey has been in progress throughout the state to locate potential waterfowl habitat development sites.

Several marshy areas on Saginaw Bay have been investigated and may be considered potential projects, but at the present time acquisition in most of them appear difficult. The Fish Point marsh in Tuscola County, a part of our Saginaw State Game Area, may be considered as the most feasible project from both an acquisition and development standpoint.

Fish Point is a marshy peninsula marking the southern extremities of a series of bars and islands separating Sebawaing Bay from Saginaw Bay. Except for a little high land forming the outer barrier beach, this peninsula and the adjacent shore line is a wet to semi-wet marsh. The water levels are greatly influenced by the direction of wind and the levels of the Great Lakes for any particular season. With an on-shore wind the marsh is flooded, but with an off-shore wind much of the marsh becomes sufficiently dry to sun-scald duck foods and consequently reduce the value of the area for waterfowl. Old spoil banks left by dredging operations in attempts to drain parts of this marsh land are numerous. This marsh land is proven waterfowl habitat, and in the writer's opinion it can be intensively developed as a waterfowl habitat restoration project and waterfowl sanctuary.

The area considered for this development project involves about 1,700 acres of land and marsh. The boundary is shown in the attached map - Exhibit A. There are 1,196 acres to be purchased from seven owners. The most important parcels containing 733 acres are owned by the Begle Estate and Akron Township Board of Supervisors. Five other owners hold small parcels not essential but desirable for the project. The remaining 463 acres are in state-owned parcels or in lake-bottom lands. Acquisition possibilities for the major portion of these parcels appear good.

The type of development considered for this area differs somewhat from the inland flooding projects previously submitted, and for this reason a discussion of the general plans is presented. The objective is to improve hunting in the heavily hunted Saginaw Bay Area by providing resting and feeding grounds through controlled waterlevels, and raising special crops for waterfowl.

Three types of development are considered. The initial development requires construction of a dike and weir across the mouth of the Bay in the central part of the marsh to impound a body of water. An old spoil bank of the abandoned Wiscoggin drain extends out into Sebawaing Bay to form the west shore of the proposed impoundment. The new dike and weir would permit water to enter the Bay with on-shore wind as the water raised and would retain the impounded water at a favorable level during off-shore winds. Approximately 400 acres of marsh would be stabilized in this permanent impoundment. This area is affected adversely during low lake levels. Preliminary estimates of construction costs are \$20,300 or approximately \$51.00 per acre. Refer to attached map - Exhibit B - for location.

The second type of development provides for manipulating habitat through control of water levels in small units of marsh land enclosed by spoil banks of existing drains in the intermediate zone of the marsh. Refer to attached map for location of Exhibit B.

By constructing small water control gates and using portable pumps, in combination with natural changes in water levels of the lakes and drains, it will be possible to flood or drain these units independently. The present channels and existing dikes with the help of some additional equipment and construction will make it possible to control the water to create the habitat desired. Millets, smartweed and other high value duck foods can be produced in these sites. When drained sufficiently by pumping, this land may be tilled for planting, or the cover can be burned and later reflooded to provide special feeding areas to hold and attract waterfowl.

The third type of development would provide special feeding and grazing areas for ducks and geese on tillable lands generally too wet to be economically farmed. The cost of installing gates, pumps and putting in food patches is not available at this time.

While the cost of development and maintenance will be high, there is a great need for intensive development of this type in this particular area. A marked increase in hunting pressure in the Saginaw Bay marshes in recent years has been directly responsible for poor duck hunting. The disturbance from this increased hunting pressure is driving waterfowl from the marshes, forcing them to concentrate in the unprotected waters far from shore and probably hurrying them along in their southward migration. Aerial censuses provide proof that hunting pressure is driving birds from their inland feeding areas. Additional protection from the gun, in sites providing food and cover, are essential in this important concentration area.

Sanctuaries together with an abundance of choice food has proven successful in various parts of the United States in holding ducks and geese, and there is every reason to believe the same technique can be applied here.

Developing a major portion of this area as a refuge is highly desirable. Waterfowl would benefit as they would have a place to rest and feed during migration. Hunters would also benefit as ducks would be encouraged to remain in the vicinity of the public shooting grounds of Sebewing and Wildfowl Bays. The restless movements of wildfowl from this refuge would provide targets for the gunners on approximately twenty square miles of public marsh. Under this plan an intensively developed sanctuary will be provided without taking a large area of public shooting grounds from the hunter. Waterfowl food plants can be economically provided and the habitat can be kept under control. This type of management has proven successful on many private marshes along the southern shore of Lake Erie and along the Illinois River. Although intensive development has not been encouraged in Michigan in the past, we feel that present conditions warrant such a program as outlined for this heavily hunted wildfowling area. Engineering data is being gathered at the present time. While findings are not conclusive, this development program appears feasible.

It is recommended that the following lands in Akron Township, Tuscola County, described as follows and shown within the boundary of attached map, are acquired and developed for waterfowl:

30 acres, SW corner of Section 12
125 acres, Section 13, all of fri. Section 14
all of fri. Section 15
South 89 acres Section 10
all fri. Section 9
all fri. Section 16
N $\frac{1}{2}$ fri. Section 22
NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Section 23
all in T 15 N, R 8 E, Tuscola County.

Since this is strictly a habitat restoration and development project, it is recommended that Pittman-Robertson funds are used to finance this project.

HJM:pb
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