

Pocosin Lakes Wildlife Refuge Wildlife Sanctuary—Not Aircraft Landing Field

In September, 2004, the Navy proposed the construction of a new outlying landing field (OLF) in eastern North Carolina. The proposed site is only 3.5 miles from the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge—a haven for waterfowl and other wildlife. Locating a major aircraft landing field so close to a wildlife refuge will have serious impacts on the local wildlife as well as the local farming families who will be displaced. The site is in the heart of the Atlantic Migratory Flyway, where large numbers of birds pose a serious threat of aircraft collisions and an unacceptable risk to pilots. These concerns prompted Air Force Col. Jeffrey Short, former Bird Hazard Strike Team Leader, to state:



“I cannot recall a worse place to situate an airfield for jet training.”

The Facility Would Harm Wildlife and Local Communities



- The \$186.5 million facility would be located on 30,000 acres in Washington and Beaufort counties, a rural, low income, high minority agricultural area that will not receive any financial benefits from the new landing field. There is widespread local opposition to the proposal.
- The Navy would acquire all land within 50 miles of the field, reducing the tax base, disrupting farming and related businesses in the area, and displacing over 70 farm families from their homes. Many of these families are descendants of the earliest settlers of this country and have worked the land for generations.
- Every year, there would be an estimated 31,650 air-craft landings and take-offs, which translates to about 90 flights a day, or one every 15 minutes. The proposed holding patterns would route planes at low altitudes over the Refuge and surrounding communities, including the town of Roper near the end of the proposed runway.
- Near-constant flight approaches, departures, and fly-overs would generate high noise levels of at least 50-60 decibels, disturbing wildlife, degrading local quality of life, and impacting an economy based on guided hunting and fishing, eco-tourism, and business and retirement relocation.

“An Inviolable Waterfowl Sanctuary”

The Pocosin Lakes Refuge is one of the most important waterfowl wintering grounds in the country. Every year, 25,000 tundra swans (25% of the US eastern population), 65,000 snow geese, and tens of thousands of ducks and other migratory birds winter at the Refuge, providing ample hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities. Established in 1963 as an inviolable waterfowl sanctuary, the Pungo Lake Unit closest to the proposed field is especially critical habitat.

The constant noise and disturbance caused by the heavy air traffic at the proposed field will degrade the quality of the Refuge’s wildlife habitat, and seriously impact the waterfowl that rely on the delicate wetland. High noise levels could disturb the birds, causing them to expend energy they need to accumulate in order to survive the winter and complete the spring migration. It could also cause them to abandon the area altogether, potentially affecting the overall health of Atlantic populations.



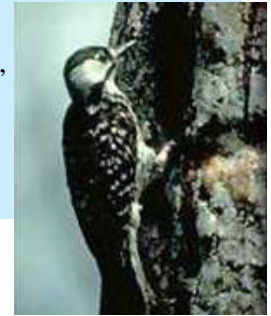
Pocosin Lakes: A Wet and Wild Wonderland

The Pocosin Lakes Refuge is a water-lover's paradise. Predominantly a southeastern shrub bog (also known as *pocosin*), most of Pocosin Lakes Refuge is characterized by a dense growth of broadleaf evergreen shrubs with scattered pond pines (below). The wetlands, swamps, fields, and areas of open-water that make up the Refuge comprise a unique and diverse habitat that is an ideal haven for waterfowl and other wildlife.



Besides the huge aggregations of waterfowl, Pocosin Lakes is home to black bears (above), deer, a variety of reptiles and amphibians, fish such as catfish and sunfish, as well as many other non-migratory birds including bald eagles and endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers (right). The Refuge is also one of the few areas where the endangered red wolf, formerly extinct in the wild, has been successfully reintroduced.

The Refuge currently totals 110,106 acres, and receives 34,000 visitors every year. The Refuge provides excellent hunting for deer, quail and rabbits, and opportunities for raccoons, ducks, opossums, woodcocks, squirrels, rails, snipes and fox. Noise and disturbance generated by the landing site would completely undermine the outdoor experience sought by hunters and other visitors.



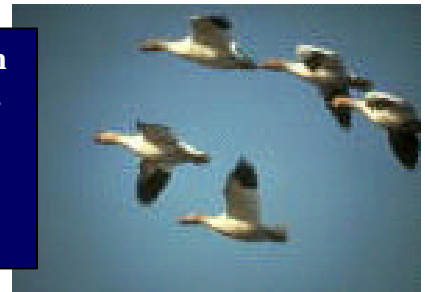
An Unacceptable Risk of Bird Collisions

Building a major landing field right next to a bird sanctuary just isn't a good idea. The huge numbers of tundra swans, snow geese, and other waterfowl that flock to the Refuge represent a severe and unacceptable risk to low-flying aircraft. Bird collisions are extremely serious accidents that have been responsible for substantial losses of aircrafts and lives of pilots and passengers. In a draft environmental study released last year, the Navy concluded that pilots would face a "severe" risk of a bird strike during the winter and spring. In order to lower the risk of a bird strike, the Navy is planning to use both "lethal and non-lethal" methods to remove waterfowl from the area. Refuge officials and the regional Fish and Wildlife Service have publicly opposed the military's selection of the field site, stating that the proposed developments would result in significant disruption to Refuge operations and calling the chosen landing field site "unacceptable."



"[T]he bird strike issue was minimized in the Environmental Impact Statement. ... There are very few places in the United States where this level of threat exists."

- Ronald L. Merritt, former Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard Team leader, US Air Force



A Better Landing Site Is Needed

North Carolina Wildlife Federation and other environmental groups have sued to oppose the Washington County OLF site, challenging that the environmental impact studies minimized impacts to the Refuge and underestimated the risk of bird collisions. The judge found for the plaintiffs and issued an injunction against constructing the site, but the Navy has appealed.

Now is the time to encourage the Navy to find a better site for the landing field—one that is safe for birds and pilots, and does not displace local farm families or disrupt local communities.

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(all photos from FWS unless noted)



Birds and Fighter Jets Don't Mix! Protect Pocosin Lakes Wildlife Refuge!