

DNR News

Division of Fish & Wildlife

Indiana Department of Natural Resources
402 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2748

For immediate release: April 17, 2025

Nearly 4,000-acre Fish & Wildlife Area opens in southern Indiana

Busseron Creek is Indiana DNR's largest conservation project in 20 years

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has officially opened nearly 3,950 acres of permanently protected land in Sullivan County for visitors to enjoy. Known as Busseron Creek Fish & Wildlife Area (FWA), the land includes forests, woodlands, marshes, swamps, lakes, and grasslands.

Busseron Creek FWA is the largest addition to Indiana DNR-managed property since 2005, when the initial 7,998 acres of Goose Pond FWA were officially acquired.

“Today’s a day for the record books,” said Suzanne Jaworowski, Indiana Secretary of Energy and Natural Resources. “With the addition of nearly 4,000 acres of permanently protected Indiana landscape, Hoosiers and wildlife alike gain an expansive natural place ready for exploration. I’m thankful for the many partners who came together to achieve this record achievement in conservation.”

This permanently conserved land was once part of the former leased Minnehaha FWA. It was protected through a collaboration with the Conservation Law Center, leader of the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape; The Conservation Fund; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation through Walmart’s Acres for America Program; The Nature Conservancy (TNC); and the U.S. Navy, the Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC), Crane Division, and Naval Support Activity (NSA) Crane.

DNR paid \$10.8 million for the property, a total that includes funding support from hunters, trappers, and recreational shooters via the Wildlife Restoration Program. Authorized by Congress in 1937, the program deploys the manufacturer taxes on ammunition, firearms, and archery equipment to restore, conserve, and manage wild birds and mammals and their habitats.

The U.S. Navy paid an additional \$910,000 to support a conservation easement on a portion of the land through the Department of Defense’s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program, and a \$600,000 grant from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation through Walmart’s Acres for America program also supported the acquisition.

“The Conservation Law Center is excited to lead an incredible project like this through the

Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape partnership, which brings together private, state, and federal funding to unite around a common vision of strengthening national security, enhancing conservation, and supporting thriving rural landscapes,” said Michael Spalding, coordinator of the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape.

This land will provide key habitat for wildlife including turkey, deer, waterfowl, rabbit, quail, and numerous species of migratory songbirds. DNR has established hunting units, parking areas, and access trails and will continue adding infrastructure to improve visitor accessibility on site. The property will be a prime spot for wildlife viewing, hunting, trapping, fishing, and foraging, and is expected to be utilized by hunters during the upcoming spring turkey season.

For more than 30 years, DNR leased this property, operating it as Minnehaha FWA. In 2016, the property owner declined to renew its lease with the state, and Minnehaha FWA closed.

In 2022, a small parcel of this property was listed for sale, signaling the potential for securing the entire holding. In partnership, The Conservation Fund and Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape negotiated with American Land Holdings of Indiana, a subsidiary of Peabody Energy, to purchase the full 3,950 acres to maintain the ecological integrity of the land. The Conservation Fund’s pre-purchase of the property for future public ownership allowed DNR to officially purchase the property in December 2024.

“The Conservation Fund was able to act quickly to purchase this at-risk land, valued at over \$12 million, allowing critical time to secure public and private funding for permanent protection,” said Emy Brawley, vice president at The Conservation Fund. “The Busseron Creek Fish & Wildlife Area means so much to so many people, and The Conservation Fund is honored to have played a leading role alongside such great partners to ensure this land benefits communities and the environment forever.”

“The Nature Conservancy is proud to have helped set the wheels in motion for this project, and we’re honored to be here today with this fantastic group of partners,” said Larry Clemens, state director for TNC in Indiana. “As with TNC projects throughout the state, this investment in outdoor recreation and conservation will leave a permanent legacy for the natural heritage of Indiana.”

“Walmart’s Acres for America program is excited to be part of the innovative collaboration that made the Busseron Creek project possible,” said Ryan Pettigrew, senior manager, Walmart U.S. Real Estate and Acres for America. “Acres for America aims to protect vital natural habitat and provide access to outdoor recreation, and this project will do just that in southern Indiana for generations to come.”

The property is located near the Lake Glendora Test Facility, an area of NSA Crane operated by NSWC, Crane Division. The facility’s mission is to support proof of concept testing for risk reduction purposes prior to full scale or open water testing.

To provide an undeveloped land buffer near the military facility, safeguard key natural resources, and ensure compatible land use near the defense operations, the U.S. Navy provided strategic support and funding for a conservation easement on the Busseron Creek watershed and surrounding lands, permanently protecting it from development.

“The tremendous collaboration between the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program and Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape have allowed critical mission support and warfighter readiness to continue at Lake Glendora Test Facility while strengthening community partnerships,” said CDR Luis “Homie” Martinez, installation commanding officer of NSA Crane. “While we celebrate the opening of the Busseron Creek Fish & Wildlife area to enable military encroachment protections, none of this would have been possible without NSA Crane’s Community Planning Liaison Officer, Mark Dobbs, and countless others, who worked tirelessly to make this a reality.”

Visit on.IN.gov/busseroncreekfwa to learn more and access video of the property. More information about Busseron Creek FWA and the land’s history is available [here](#).

[The reference to any company, its products, or services in this document does not imply Navy endorsement.]

To view more DNR news releases, please see dnr.IN.gov.

-30-

Media contact: Kalli Dunn, DNR Fish & Wildlife, 812-512-9148 or kdunn@dnr.in.gov