

**CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS BY PARTICIPATING
IN THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT at BIG OAKS NWR**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Big Oaks NWR

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The Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) calls upon volunteer birders and nature enthusiasts in Indiana to participate in Audubon's longest-running wintertime tradition, the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Volunteer birders of all skill levels are needed to count birds. The Big Oaks NWR count will be held on **Saturday, December 30, 2023**. Volunteers may sign up to count birds for a half-day (until noon, or noon to sunset) or all day. We will meet at 8:00 am at the Big Oaks NWR office. The Big Oaks Conservation Society, a not-for-profit refuge support group, will provide lunch for volunteers at the refuge office. If you are interested in participating in the Big Oaks NWR count, preregister with the refuge at 812-273-0783. Weather for the Christmas bird count can be variable, but warm and/or waterproof clothing is recommended.

The CBC began over a century ago when 27 conservationists in 25 localities, led by scientist and writer Frank Chapman, changed the course of ornithological history. On Christmas Day of 1900, the small group posed an alternative to the "side hunt," a Christmas day activity in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and small mammals. Instead of shooting birds, Chapman proposed to identify, count, and record all the birds they saw, founding what is now considered to be the world's most significant citizen-based conservation effort and a more than century-old institution.

Apart from its attraction as a social and competitive event, the CBC reveals valuable scientific data. Each count group completes a census of the birds found during one 24-hour period between December 14 and January 5 in a designated circle 15 miles in diameter—about 177 square miles. Now in its 123rd year, the CBC is larger than ever with more than 2000 individual counts scheduled, expanding its geographical range and accumulating information about the winter distributions of various birds. It is vital in monitoring the status of resident and migratory birds across the Western Hemisphere. The data, 100% volunteer generated, have become a crucial part of the U. S. Government's natural history monitoring database. Count results from 1900 to the present are available through Audubon's website: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>.

Big Oaks NWR consists of 50,000 acres on the former Jefferson Proving Ground (JPG) located in Jennings, Ripley, and Jefferson Counties in southeastern Indiana. The local refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and provides public use opportunities, such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation and environmental education. The refuge has one of the largest contiguous forest blocks in the southeastern part of the state as well as one of the largest grassland complexes; both provide wonderful wildlife viewing opportunities for refuge visitors. Information about the refuge is available at the website <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/big-oaks>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 150-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses nearly 550 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts.