



# LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

*The voice of Louisiana's wildlife and natural resources since 1940.*

P.O. Box 65239, Baton Rouge, LA 70896-5239  
337 S. Acadian Thwy, Baton Rouge, LA 70806

(225) 344-6707  
lawildlifed.org

October 21, 2020

Secretary Jack Montoucet  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries  
PO Box 98000  
Baton Rouge, LA 70898

Col. Robert A. Hilliard, District Engineer  
U. S. Army Corps of Engineers  
4155 E. Clay Street  
Vicksburg, MS 39183

Mr. Leopoldo Miranda, Regional Director  
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1875 Century Blvd. NE  
Atlanta, GA 30345

Dear Sirs,

Louisiana Wildlife Federation has followed the Catahoula Lake situation for several years and in 2019 filed an amicus brief in which we raised issues about the impact of the *Steve Crooks and Era Lea Crooks vs. The State of Louisiana* case decision on the management of the lake and its important wetlands for wildlife habitat.

The final decision by the Louisiana Supreme Court not to rehear the case means the lower court decision that much of what had been considered public land is now -- subject to detailed surveying -- deemed private property. In the face of this regrettable decision, our concern continues to be the maintenance of this superb wetland system for waterfowl, as envisioned decades ago and managed for by the Catahoula Lake Water Level Management Agreement (Tri-Party Agreement) among your agencies.

In this uncertain environment, we agree with and applaud the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' decision to continue managing the lake's water levels as stated in the Tri-Party Agreement and the amendments thereto. This will maintain the habitat necessary for fall and winter waterfowl populations and for summer/late fall shorebird and wading bird populations. The extent and quality of this habitat was the primary motivation for Catahoula Lake and vicinity to be named a wetland of international significance in the early 1990s. Specifically, the fact that the lake winters a substantial portion of the North American Canvasback population has been noted as an important factor in maintaining this species whose population has reduced in recent decades.

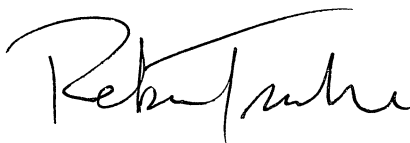
Until the final determination of the boundaries of private property in the lakebed, we are concerned that the mid-lake refuge (no hunting or boat traffic permitted) be maintained. This rectangle of several thousand acres is critical to keeping the Canvasbacks and several other species of ducks in the area, thereby providing hunting opportunities throughout the entire lake and surrounding areas. We have heard reports in the last few years of increased intrusions into the refuge, and it is unclear which of your agencies is responsible for enforcing the boundaries.

We urge you to step up to that responsibility and to provide sufficient personnel to assure the continued integrity and benefits of the refuge.

Once final ownership boundaries are determined in the lake bottom, which we assume will include some public land due to the adjacency of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service properties on the entire east side of the lake, LWF urges you to maintain a refuge. This may mean relocating it to the areas that remain public or entering into agreements with any newly stipulated private owners who are willing to recognize the need for the refuge to be a permanent feature of hunting management on Catahoula Lake.

We appreciate your attention to this important wildlife management issue to maintain the quality and quantity of this unique waterfowl habitat and the associated hunting.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Triche  
Executive Director

cc: Colonel Chad Hebert, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries; Mr. Drew Smith, Chief of Water Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Mr. Randy Wilson, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.