



# LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

"... conserving our natural resources and your right to enjoy them since 1940."

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Resolution No. 4, 2019

## **SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CATAHOULA LAKE**

WHEREAS, Catahoula Lake is part of a unique wetland ecosystem that provides approximately 25,000 acres of outstanding waterfowl habitat utilized by tens of thousands of canvasbacks, pintails, and other species in the fall and winter and by numerous species of shorebirds during the summer; and

WHEREAS, Catahoula Lake has been called "the most important inland wetland for water birds and shorebirds in Louisiana" by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is recognized as a Ramsar wetland of international importance for its unique example of a lower Mississippi River wetlands providing critical migratory bird and freshwater fisheries habitat; and

WHEREAS, Catahoula Lake has for generations been considered a public lake and hence has been open to duck hunters, fishermen, birders, and other outdoor enthusiasts, thereby becoming a significant driver in the central Louisiana economy and a major component of Louisiana's Sportsmen's Paradise brand; and

WHEREAS, Catahoula Lake's water levels have been managed and improved with public funds for 50 years to maximize the wetland's value for waterfowl, shorebirds, fisheries, and other wildlife; and

WHEREAS, Catahoula Lake contains a mid-lake refuge area that holds tens of thousands of waterfowl in the vicinity and is especially significant for holding up to 20% of the continental canvasback population; and

WHEREAS, in the case of *Steve Crooks and Era Lea Crooks v. The State of Louisiana* filed in the Ninth Judicial District Court, the presiding judge sided with the plaintiffs' expert testimony in his decision to declare that Catahoula Lake was a flooded river basin and a man-made lake and therefore not a publicly owned waterbody, and the lower court's decision was upheld by the Third Circuit Court of Appeal; and

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case on appeal and Louisiana Wildlife Federation submitted an amicus brief supporting the Louisiana Attorney General's position that the lower court decisions should be reviewed; and

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Supreme Court will likely rule on the matter in 2019 or early 2020.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Louisiana Wildlife Federation supports the State of Louisiana's historic ownership of Catahoula Lake and citizens' rights to access and enjoy the lake as they have for generations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Louisiana Wildlife Federation supports continued management of the lake by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as has been the case since 1969.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED if the Louisiana Supreme Court overturns the lower courts' decisions and restores the lake to unambiguous public ownership, the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, with policy guidance from the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission, should take immediate steps to assert control and management of water levels (subject only to input from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as required by previous agreement), vegetation, hunting and fishing activity, and enforcement of the mid-lake refuge in order to assure that this resource achieves its maximum potential as a wetland and a recreational resource.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED if the Supreme Court maintains the lower courts' decisions, Louisiana Wildlife Federation supports immediate action by the State of Louisiana to purchase the privatized water bottoms and thereafter manage the ecosystem for waterfowl and shorebird conservation, hunting, fishing and other public recreational activities under policy direction of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

*Adopted by Louisiana Wildlife Federation in Convention Assembled on August 17, 2019 in West Monroe, Louisiana.*