

Groundbreaking at Deep Fork National Wildlife Refuge

Transcript

After more than 10 years of hope and speculation, the Deep Fork National Wildlife Refuge outside of Okmulgee, Oklahoma will finally be receiving an onsite administration building next year.

On May 27th, Refuge staff got together with friends and neighbors of the refuge to celebrate the groundbreaking of the new Deep Fork NWR Administration building. Deep Fork is an almost 9,000 acre facility founded in 1993 that offers a variety of different outdoor activities to the public unparalleled elsewhere in Central Oklahoma.

Steven Highers, a staffer for U.S. Representative Dan Boren of Oklahoma, feels that the Recovery Act funded project is good for the district.

Steven Highers, Staffer, U.S. Rep Dan Boren, Oklahoma: It's a good day to see the fruits of the stimulus to be here, to see that the money is coming back to the 2nd district of the state of Oklahoma, and that people are working and projects are being done.

Refuge manager Darrin Unruh, one of the spearheading influences bringing the administration building to Deep Fork, feels that this is a positive step not only for the refuge staff, but also for the 35,000 to 50,000 visitors to Deep Fork National Wildlife refuge yearly.

Darrin Unruh, Refuge Manager, Deep Fork NWR: We will be much more reachable for the public, they'll be able to come out here. When they come out here to walk the trails or to hunt or fish or whatever, we'll be much closer to where they're conducting their activity on the refuge.

Visitors who currently want to meet with refuge staff must now go to the Okmulgee post office in downtown Okmulgee 10 miles away. Further complicating things for refuge staff, most of the heavy equipment is housed in a warehouse complex known as “the shed” halfway between the Post office and the refuge grounds. Unruh hopes an onsite facility will alleviate some of the commuting.

***Unruh:* We’ll have a better facility for people to come in and get brochures and there will be some interpretive panels that people can see inside of the lobby there, and so I think that it’s a benefit to the public. It’s not just a benefit to the staff that will be using it. Currently, we are housed in GSA space in the town of Okmulgee and it’s very difficult for the visiting public to identify with us being associated with the refuge, so this construction of this facility will put us on the refuge and we’re down here at an area that is close to a lot of our facilities, such as our boardwalks, our hiking trails, photo blinds and that sort of thing. So it puts us out on the refuge where we’re much more available to the public.**

The Deep Fork National Wildlife Refuge is scheduled to be open at the end of February 2011. Kelly K. Mensah, US Fish and Wildlife Service.