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Buck Island start of trail launched

Ceremony caps 6-year campaign

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The first leg of a new Lower Mississippi River Water Trail has been established through the conservation of Buck Island near Helena-West Helena, the American Land Conservancy announced this week.

The trail is a partnership of the American Land Conservancy, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and others.

A ceremony commemorating the event Wednesday capped a six-year campaign to protect the wildlife-rich island and create the public-access launching point for the trail, an American Land Conservancy news release said.

Buck Island has 880 acres

of native forests, 620 acres of large white sand beaches, five miles of hiking trails and a three-mile side channel.

It's open for wildlife viewing, camping, hiking, paddling, swimming, fishing and eventually hunting.

The island also is a stop-over along the Mississippi Flyway, used by 65 percent of North American migratory bird species. Buck Island is a three-minute boat trip from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's public boat ramp in Helena Harbor.

Public access to Buck Island extends upstream water trails into Arkansas for the first time, linking Helena-West Helena to the Choctaw Island Wildlife Management Area 106 miles downstream near Arkansas City.