

Chapter 5: Plan Implementation

New and Existing Projects

This Comprehensive Conservation Plan calls for considerable staff commitment and funding to maintain and develop quality visitor facilities and wildlife habitat. The Refuge will need appropriate operations and maintenance funding to implement the strategies in this plan.

The following paragraphs describe the highest priority Refuge projects that will be implemented if staffing and funding allow.

Minimum Refuge Operations Needs

Provide funds to operate the Refuge office including expenses for heating, air conditioning, required safety inspections, electrical expenses, and safety improvements. These funds will also allow for upkeep of Refuge facilities including parking lots, interpretive kiosks, interpretive trails, and water control structures. It is important to provide a quality experience for the visitors who come to the Refuge each year. The project will help pay fuel bills, electric bills and the day-to-day costs of operating a refuge. (First year cost: \$136,000, Recurring annual cost: \$126,000)

Prepare a Forest Management Plan

Rice Lake NWR is in need of forestry expertise to produce a Forest Management Plan that is based on Refuge objectives and the 1997 Landscape Plan. The original forest management plan from 1984, though dated, contains excellent management guidelines for much of the Refuge forest. Forest fragmentation in northern Minnesota is a problem and an updated plan is imperative to proper management of the Refuge as well as assisting adjacent landowners with their management concerns. Preliminary inventory of forest types has been completed. Production of such a plan could be



Great Grey Owl, Rice Lake NWR

contracted if Service personnel with the required expertise are not available. (One-time cost: \$70,000)

Private Lands/Refuge Biological Technician

An additional biologically trained staff member would enable a more intensive effort in Private Lands as well as contribute to on-Refuge habitat restoration and protection, provide assistance with surveys and censuses and provide better visitor services and outreach. The Refuge currently uses seasonal STEP students to fill this role. (First year cost: \$118,000, Recurring annual cost: \$53,000)

Increase Public Education and Outreach (Visitor Services Specialist)

Provide a visitor services specialist to respond to current and anticipated demand for visitor services and outreach. The Rice Lake Headquarters/Visitor

Center is located along a major highway that leads tourists to the central Minnesota lakes, Duluth, and Lake Superior north shore areas. Highway signs direct visitors to the Refuge and have helped to increase visitation by over 50 percent in the last few years. Interpretation/education/outreach will be paramount to the continued public support of the Refuge System. A visitor services specialist position would fill a demand for professional wildlife-dependent recreation programs and opportunities, provide programs on Service activities, and produce news releases. This would also allow weekend visitor contacts, increased coordination with our Friends Group, and increased volunteer recruitment and retention. (First year cost: \$71,000, Recurring annual cost: \$45,000)

Prepare a Cultural Resources Management Plan

Contract with a cultural resources professional to complete a cultural resources management plan. The plan would include the Section 14 and Section 110(a)(2) surveys and analysis of all cultural resources including pre-historic and historic wild ricing locations by Indians and Euro-American inhabitants, early Refuge facilities such as dams, water control structures, and CCC activities, as well as a determination of whether any significant conservation or wildlife activities occurred on the Refuge. An element of the cultural resources survey will be to examine the past and present impacts to the culturally sensitive area known as Indian Point. A detailed survey and analysis of Indian Point will be essential in determining the effects of building removal. Additional upland areas adjacent to the Wildlife Drive and Highway 65 will also need a detailed survey and analysis to assist in determining the effects of constructing new buildings. (One-time cost: \$60,000)

Expand Wildlife Observation and Interpretation Opportunities on Refuge

Provide accessible towers, viewing scopes, interpretive signs, auto tour guide, orientation kiosk and trailhead signs to improve services for visitors. The Rice Lake NWR Office is located along a major highway that leads tourists to the central Minnesota lakes, Duluth, and Lake Superior north shore areas. Highway signs direct visitors to the Refuge and have helped to increase visitation by over 50 percent in the last few years. Interpretive facilities will allow the Refuge to educate the public about Rice Lake NWR, a Globally Important Bird Area that hosts up to one million Ring-necked Ducks during fall migration. (One-time cost: \$97,000)

Increase Management Capability with a GIS / GPS System (Biological Technician)

Management of habitats on Rice Lake NWR would be enhanced by the computer technology of a Geographic Information System supported by a Global Positioning System. Purchase of this system, addition of a Biological Technician and the development of forest inventory, vegetation classification, soil mapping and overlays of human and cultural resources will lead to best long-term management decisions and long-term health of the ecosystem. (First year cost: \$104,000, Recurring annual cost: \$53,000)

Remove/Relocate all Buildings and Facilities from Indian Point

Conduct cultural resource surveys on sites located near State Highway 65 that have suitable soils, sufficient size to accommodate the relocation of all Refuge maintenance facilities and housing requirements, and not significantly add to habitat fragmentation concerns. Removal of all buildings from Indian Point will eliminate further degradation of this important cultural site due to future new con-



Rice Lake NWR

Table 4: Existing Staff and Proposal Additional Staff, Rice Lake NWR

Position	Existing	Proposed New
Refuge Manager	1 FTE	
Park Ranger/Visitor Services	1 FTE vacant	
Refuge Operations Specialist		1 FTE
Biologist	1 FTE	
Biological Technician		1 FTE
Biological Technician	0.6 FTE	0.1 FTE
Park Ranger/Visitor Services		0.6 FTE
Administrative Technician	1 FTE	
Maintenance Mechanic	1 FTE	
Maintenance Mechanic	.75 FTE	0.25 FTE

struction and expansion requirements. The present age and condition for several of the buildings will soon require new construction:

- # Quarters No. 2 was constructed in 1941 and has a basement wall that is buckling.
- # The six-stall garage has no electrical service.
- # The quonset storage building built in 1956 is in serious decay.
- # The three-stall garage/bunkhouse was built in 1952 and fails to meet Service standards for health and safety. (One-time cost: \$3.9 million.)

Future Staffing Requirements

In order for the Refuge to be fully successful in completing the strategies of the goals and objectives in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan and the priority RONS projects, the positions noted in Table 4 are considered essential future staffing requirements.

This staffing plan requires 9.3 full-time employees, compared to the 6.35 FTEs currently approved for the Refuge. While 6.35 FTEs may be the approved staffing level, there is currently a vacancy that is unfilled due to steady or declining budgets within the National Wildlife Refuge System. The position will, unfortunately, remain vacant for an undetermined length of time.

Existing hiring programs will be looked at as a way to provide employment opportunities to qualified Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe/American Indian youth (e.g. Student Career Enhancement Program).

Partnership Opportunities

Partnerships are essential to the successful implementation of this CCP. We plan to foster existing partnerships and develop new ones when opportunities arise. The Minnesota DNR will continue to be an important partner in bog management on approximately 8,000 contiguous acres along the Refuge's north border. The Aitkin County Land Department will be an important partner in developing forest management objectives along the Refuge's south border. The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe will continue to be an important partner in the management of Mille Lacs NWR. The Refuge staff will continue to contribute expertise and other resources, where possible, to individuals and groups requesting assistance with activities beneficial to Service trust resources.

The Refuge's volunteer program will be vital to the fulfillment of the Refuge vision. Volunteers will continue to assist the Refuge in nearly every aspect of its operation. We expect the special partnership with the Friends of Rice Lake Refuge to flourish and bring the Refuge and community closer together.

Step-down Management Plans

Step-down management plans help meet the goals and objectives of the CCP. Some step-down plans are required by Service policy and others are used to specify strategies and implementation schedules beyond the detail of the CCP. The following list shows the step-down management plans we intend to prepare or revise to realize the intent of the CCP.

The Habitat Management Plan, Visitor Services Plan, and Inventory and Monitoring Plan are essential to describe forest management, wildlife-dependent recreation programs, and credible evaluation of management. The Fire Management Plan, approved in 2002 and revised every 5 years, provides direction and establishes procedures to guide various wildland fire program activities. The Fire Management Plan covers the historical and ecological role of fire, fire management objectives, preparedness, suppression, fire management actions and responses, fire impacts, use of prescribed fire, and fire management restrictions.

Table 5: Step-down Management Plans, Rice Lake NWR

Step-down Management Plan and Subplans	Plan Date Completed/ Updated	Anticipated Completion/ Revision ¹
<i>Habitat Management Plan</i>	1997 (Landscape Plan)	2008
Marsh and Water Management Plan	1981	
Forest Management Plan	1984	
Grassland Management Plan	1989 (Cropland Management Plan)	
<i>Visitor Services Plan</i>	New	2009
Hunting Plan	1990	
Fishery Management Plan	1987	
Law Enforcement Plan	1987	
Accessibility Plan	New	
Visit Quality Monitoring Plan	New	
<i>Wildlife and Habitat Inventory and Monitoring Plan</i>	1996	2008
<i>Fire Management Plan</i>	2002	2008
<i>Cultural Resources Management Plan</i>	New	2010
Museum Property Inventory and Scope Statement	New	
<i>Furbearer Management Plan</i>	2000	2009
Trapping Plan	Annual	

1. Includes all subplans.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is critical to successful implementation of this plan. Monitoring is necessary to evaluate the progress toward objectives and to determine if conditions are changing.

Accomplishment of the objectives described in this CCP will be monitored annually by the Refuge Manager and his or her supervisor. The public will be informed about the activities of the Refuge staff through periodic mailings to persons on the mailing list and published on the Refuge website. The tech-

niques and details for monitoring related to specific objectives will be specified in the Inventory and Monitoring Step-down Plan.

The direction set forth in this CCP and specifically identified strategies and projects will be monitored throughout the life of this plan. Periodically, the Regional Office will assemble a station review team to visit the Refuge and evaluate current Refuge activities in light of this plan. The team will review all aspects of Refuge management, including direction, accomplishments and funding. The goals and objectives presented in this CCP will provide the baseline from which this field station will be evaluated.

Archeological and Cultural Values

As part of its larger conservation mandate and ethic, the Service, through the Refuge Manager, applies historic preservation laws and regulations to ensure historic properties are identified and are protected to the extent possible within its established purposes and Refuge System mission.

The Refuge Manager early in project planning for all undertakings, informs the RHPO (Regional Historic Preservation Officer) to initiate the Section 106 process. Concurrent with public notification and involvement for environmental compliance and compatibility determinations if applicable, or cultural resources only if no other issues are involved, the Refuge Manager informs and requests comments from the public and local officials through presentations, meetings, and media notices; results are provided to the RHPO.

Archeological investigations and collecting are performed only in the public interest by qualified archeologists or by persons recommended by the Governor working under an Archeological Resources Protection Act permit issued by the Regional Director. In addition, the Refuge Manager has found this third-party use of Refuge land to be compatible, (The requirements of ARPA apply to Service cultural resources contracts as well: the contract is the equivalent of a permit.) and issues a special use permit. Refuge personnel take steps to prevent unauthorized collecting by the public, contractors, and Refuge personnel; violators are cited or other appropriate action taken. Violations are reported to the Regional Historic Preservation Officer.

The Refuge Manager will, with the assistance of the RHPO, develop a step-down plan for surveying lands to identify archeological resources and for developing a preservation program to meet the requirements of Section 14 of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and Section 110(a)(2) of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The Refuge Manager should have and implement a plan for inspecting the condition of known cultural resources on the Refuge and report to the RHPO changes in the conditions.

The Refuge Manager will initiate budget requests or otherwise obtain funding from the 1 percent Operations and Maintenance program base provided for the Section 106 process compliance:

1. Inventory, evaluate, and protect all significant cultural resources located on lands controlled by the FWS, including historic properties of religious and cultural significance to Indian tribes.
2. Identify and nominate to the National Register of Historic Places all historic properties including those of religious and cultural significance to Indian tribes.
3. Cooperate with Federal, state, and local agencies, American Indian tribes, and the public in managing cultural resources on the Refuge.
4. Integrate historic preservation with planning and management of other resources and activities. Historic buildings are rehabilitated and adapted to reuse when feasible.
5. Recognize the rights of American Indian to have access to certain religious sites and objects on Refuge lands within the limitations of the NWRS mission.

factors, the recommendations in the CCP will be reviewed periodically and, if necessary, revised to meet new circumstances. If any revisions are major, the review and revision will include the public.

Plan Review and Revision

The CCP is meant to provide guidance to the Refuge manager and staff over the next 15 years. However, the CCP is also a dynamic and flexible document and several of the strategies contained in the plan are subject to natural, uncontrollable events such as windstorms and droughts. Likewise, many of the strategies are dependent upon Service funding for staff and projects. Finally, the CCP was developed using the best information available at the time of preparation. As new and better information emerges, the direction and strategies of the CCP may need to be re-evaluated. Because of these