

# Chapter 2: The Planning Process



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The planning process for this CCP began with a “kick-off” meeting in July 1999. Initially, members of the CCP planning team and Refuge staff identified a list of issues and concerns that were associated with management of the Refuge. These preliminary issues and concerns were based on staff knowledge of the area and association with citizens in the community. The planning team, consisting of Refuge staff and Service planners, then invited Refuge neighbors, organizations, local government agencies and local staff of national and state government agencies, schools, and interested citizens to share their thoughts in a focus group meeting on August 18, 1999. Nineteen

people attended the meeting. An open house was held on September 14, 1999, and 12 attended. The planning team accepted oral and written comments at the open house. Five written comments were received.

In October 1999, the planning team met for an intensive three-day workshop to develop and consider four management alternatives that addressed the issues and concerns in different ways. The alternatives generally describe levels of management varying from near passive to more intensive. Once alternative levels of management were selected, methods for achieving that level were developed.

Subsequent planning team meetings in November of 1999 and January of 2000 were held with Region 3 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials and biologists in Fort Snelling, Minnesota, to critique and revise these draft alternatives and associated goals and objectives. In February 2000, the planning team again met for two days at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge to further refine goals, objectives, and strategies. The planning team met at Squaw Creek NWR in February 2003 to continue this process.

The draft CCP and EA were released for public review on June 28, 2004, with the comment period closing on August 27, 2004. Eleven people attended a public open house on August 4, 2004. A total of 43 comments were received (see Appendix L) during the public review period.

## 2.1 Issues and Concerns

The issues and concerns presented in this section evolved through discussions among Service staff both at the Refuge and in the Regional Office, discussions with representatives of the State of Missouri, and public involvement.

As might be expected, the public participants at the focus group meeting and the open house meetings offered both positive and negative views to the issues; i.e, some supported Refuge expansion or on-refuge hunting while others were opposed.

The planning team considered all expressed views, written and oral, in its development of alternative actions and the goals and objectives presented in Chapter 4.

### **2.1.1 Wildlife Habitat and Resource Management**

Extraordinary measures may be required to preserve the marsh environment that has historically attracted migratory waterfowl and other wildlife. Erosion from the steep slopes on the river side of the Loess Bluffs and intensive agriculture result in heavy silt loads in Squaw Creek and Davis Creek. The creeks deposit considerable amounts of silt in the managed marsh units of the Refuge, making them steadily more shallow. These marsh areas could eventually fill completely and disappear. Adequate renovation and conservation might require dredging, raising dike elevations, stream diversion, or other expensive landscape modifications.

### **2.1.2 Land Management within the Watershed Impacts Refuge Water Quality and Quantity**

Beyond Refuge boundaries, land management practices within the watershed influence the quality and quantity of water that flows into the Refuge. Unrestricted surface runoff in the watershed depletes top soil and soil moisture conditions. The deposition of top soil and agricultural chemicals in the Refuge marshes during flood stages has an adverse cumulative effect. While neither the Refuge nor the Fish and Wildlife Service has any interest or authority to interfere with private lands management, we have the responsibility to conserve the public resources placed in our care. The Service can provide advice to landowners as well as assist more directly through existing cost share programs available to landowners aimed at improved soil and moisture conservation.

### **2.1.3 Snow Goose Management**

The mid-continent population of Snow Geese is experiencing “a perilous abundance.” The peril is their numbers: 900,000 in 1969 and 6 million in 1998, exceed the capacity of their Arctic breeding/ nesting habitat in the vicinity of Hudson Bay. Recovery of damaged Arctic tundra vegetation is extremely slow and tends to continue towards self destruction once the moisture and chemical balance is upset. High Snow Geese survival rates over the last 20 years and quality wintering grounds has contributed to the over population. Action plans recently proposed by Canada wildlife experts, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and State and Provincial agencies focus on reducing the Snow Goose population, mainly through increased harvest. Concentrations of 300,000 to 400,000 Snow Geese at Squaw Creek NWR during the fall migration have become a site-seeing tradition that attracts thousands of Refuge visitors. The Snow Geese are also welcomed by waterfowl hunters in an area from Sioux City, Iowa to Kansas City, Missouri.



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## **2.1.4 Refuge Expansion**

Floodplain wetlands similar to those within Squaw Creek NWR have been preserved and managed as private and commercial waterfowl hunting clubs. High operations costs have caused some owners to consider selling their property to the Refuge. Some people feel that the Refuge marsh restoration and preservation problems associated with watershed management and runoff could be lessened if some of the adjacent agricultural land was added to the Refuge and converted to other uses. However, hydrological or biological data supporting this is incomplete or lacking. Approximately 400 acres of private land remain within the authorized Refuge boundaries.

## **2.1.5 Public Use**

Public use at the Refuge has focused on non-consumptive uses and wildlife dependent recreation, but some people have suggested that the Refuge's public use program should be changed to allow other compatible uses that might include hunting waterfowl and deer. Currently there is a special 2-3-day, muzzle loader deer hunt with a specific number of permits issued. Angling is allowed where the roads cross the creek ditches. Historically, environmental education has been emphasized at Squaw Creek NWR.

## **2.1.6 Public Service**

The staff at Squaw Creek NWR want to be good neighbors and contributors to the welfare of the community. As the Refuge strives to be of service to the public and the community, are there new or better ways it can be successful in its efforts? Public service activities now include environmental education programs for schools and special groups both on and off the Refuge, disaster assistance with staff and equipment, operations budgets that boost the local economy, annual payments to counties to offset losses of real property tax revenues, and cost share programs for environmental improvements on private lands. The Refuge attracts visitors to the area who patronize local businesses. The Refuge staff will continue to seek innovative ways to be of service to the public and the community.