



Trempealeau

National Wildlife Refuge

Summary

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

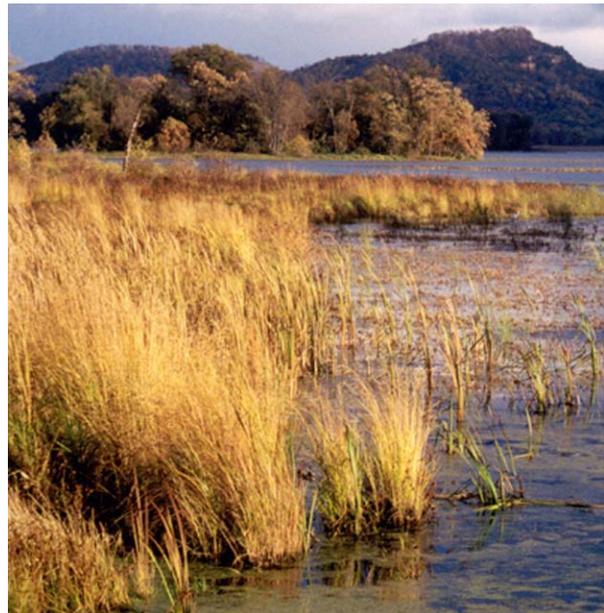
August 2008

Comprehensive Conservation Plan Approved!

A planning effort that involved neighbors, non-government organizations, local officials and interested citizens has concluded with the completion of a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in south-western Wisconsin. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service completed an Environmental Impact Statement in May 2008 and a Record of Decision was signed June 17, 2008.

The comprehensive conservation plan lays out management goals for the next 15 years and specifies the objectives and strategies needed to accomplish these goals.

While comprehensive conservation plans guide management and are used in strategic planning and prioritizing programs, they do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases or operational and maintenance increases that may be detailed in the plan.



Trempealeau Mountain. © Sandra Lines

Where to Find the CCP

The CCP is available in a variety of formats and places.

A limited number of paper copies are available for individuals who want one. The CCP is also available as a pdf document on compact disk. To request either one, please call the Refuge at 608/539-2311.

If you have access to a computer, you can see the plan in portable document format (pdf) at the Refuge's planning website:

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/planning/Trempealeau>

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Location of Trempealeau NWR





Aerial view of Trempealeau NWR pools adjacent to the Upper Mississippi River. © Robert Hurt.

Paper copies and an electronic version of the plan are available at the Shirley M. Wright Memorial Library in Trempealeau, Wisconsin, and the La Crosse Public Library in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

The Planning Process

Scoping of issues began in September of 2002 with a public meeting in Centerville, Wisconsin to identify issues. Key issues identified at the meeting and by Refuge staff, were summarized in 12 “fact sheets” that provided the basis for discussion groups at an all-day workshop in March of 2003. Workshop participants were “managers for a day” making tough decisions about how to balance often conflicting Refuge uses. A website was maintained with up-to-date news about the process. Follow-up meetings with Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and briefings with various commissions, associations, and Congressional offices occurred throughout the process.

The Draft EIS/CCP was released for public review in June 2007 with a 60-day comment period. Summaries were mailed to 250 people, and full copies were provided to 52 people, agencies, and non-government organizations. Paper copies were also distributed to eight libraries in the area surrounding the Refuge.

The full EIS/CCP was posted on the Refuge’s planning website.

Twenty-six people participated in a public meeting hosted by the Refuge on June 28, 2007, in Trempealeau, Wisconsin. The purpose of the meeting was to give people an opportunity to comment in person on the Draft EIS/CCP. Comments were also

accepted through the mail and via e-mail. Topics discussed included:

- The history of Trempealeau NWR management and current land conditions.
- The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the purpose of Trempealeau NWR.
- The comprehensive conservation planning process and development of alternatives.
- Objectives and strategies of the preferred alternative, Alternative C .

In addition, on July 10, 2007, the Refuge hosted a workshop focused on the waterfowl hunting objective (Objective 3.5) in the preferred alternative. Two people not associated with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service attended the workshop.

Substantive comments from the public, agencies, and other groups that were received on the Draft EIS/CCP were included in the Final EIS, along with a Service response.

The Final EIS/CCP was distributed to local libraries and persons who requested the full document. The document was also posted on the Region’s planning website. A Notice of Availability of the Final EIS/CCP was published in the Federal Register by the Environmental Protection Agency on April 25, 2008.

One comment, which restated concerns that had been expressed in the Draft EIS comment period and had been responded to in the Final EIS, was received during the 30 days following publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register.

Following the publication of the Final EIS/CCP in April 2008 and a 30-day waiting period, the Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Twin Cities, Minnesota, determined that Alternative C, the preferred alternative in the Final EIS, would become the Final CCP. This decision has been recorded in a formal Record of Decision included in the final documents.

The Regional Director signed a Record of Decision on June 17, 2008.

Vital Statistics

Trempealeau NWR was established by Executive Order in 1936 as “a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.” The 6,226 acre Refuge is a backwater of the Mississippi River and is strategically located within an important migration corridor, providing resting and feeding habitat

for thousands of waterfowl and other birds during spring and fall. The Refuge also includes more than 700 acres of native prairie and oak savanna, habitat types that are scarce in Wisconsin.

An estimated 70,000 visitors enjoy birding, hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, or photography at the Refuge. Over 2,000 young people learn about their environment each year through educational programs. A dedicated force of volunteers contributes to the quality of the visitor experience, as well as successful habitat management.

Who We Are

Trempealeau NWR is part of a system of refuges administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. The National Wildlife Refuge System was founded in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated Pelican Island in Florida as a sanctuary for Brown Pelicans.

Today, the Refuge System is a network of 547 refuges in all 50 states.

Our Vision for the Refuge

“Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge is enjoyed and appreciated by the people of America as a beautiful, scenic place where a diversity of native plants and animals thrive in healthy prairies, forests, and wetlands.”



Sunset at Trempealeau NWR. USFWS

Our Refuge Goals

We have established the following goals for Trempealeau NWR. They set the direction for the Refuge over the next 15 years.

Landscape

We will strive to maintain and improve the scenic and wild character, and environmental health of the Refuge.

Wildlife and Habitat

Our habitat management will support diverse and abundant native fish, wildlife, and plants.

Public Use

We will manage public use programs and facilities to ensure sustainable, quality hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, interpretation, and environmental education opportunities for a broad cross-section of the public; and provide opportunities for the public to use and enjoy the Refuge for traditional and appropriate non-wildlife dependent uses that are compatible with the purposes for which the Refuge was established and the mission of the Refuge System.

Neighboring Landowners and Communities

We will communicate openly and work cooperatively with our neighbors and local communities to help all benefit from the aesthetic and economic values of the Refuge.

Administration and Operations

We will seek adequate funding, staffing, and facilities; and improve public awareness and support to carry out the purposes, vision, goals, and objectives of the Refuge.

Highlights From the Plan

Over the course of the next 15 years, management will focus on returning upland areas to pre-European settlement habitats, increasing flexibility in wetland management within impoundments, and increasing public use opportunities.

Boundary issues will be addressed with annual inspections, new surveying and installation of an automatic gate at the main entrance. The remaining

Future Landcover, Trempealeau NWR



340 acres within the approved acquisition boundary and 12 acres outside the current boundary will be purchased as opportunities arise.

Prairie and oak savanna restoration will be a high priority. Increased efforts to control invasive species will be made using biological, mechanical, and chemical methods. Prescribed fire and mowing will be used to manage 11 prairie units totaling 435 acres. Half of the trees in the pine plantations will be removed through selective thinning.

Additional dikes and water control structures will be placed within existing impoundments. The C2 impoundment will be divided into three separate units to allow for moist soil management. The remaining three impoundments (Pools C1, D, and F) will reduce the size of Pool B to a manageable unit as well as create additional emergent habitat. Islands will be built in Pools A and B. Water level management in Pools A and E will continue on their present course. Rough fish, particularly carp, will be managed in specified pools using commercial fishing and water level management.

Researchers will be actively sought to conduct studies that will determine effects of management strategies. Grasslands, aquatic vegetation, and the extent of invasive plant species will be monitored.

The deer hunt will continue as in the past, except harvest levels will be based on population and habitat monitoring. Furbearer trapping will continue and the number of beaver and muskrat taken will be determined based on annual monitoring of harvest and of dike damage and interference with water control structures.

Public use opportunities will be expanded. Environmental education programs will be promoted at local schools and to community groups and the general public. A multi-purpose room will be added to the office/visitor contact station to accommodate larger groups and provide a place for orientation. Waterfowl hunting opportunities will be expanded by opening the area west of the Canadian National Railroad dike to a limited hunt. Ski trails will be maintained when conditions permit. Options to alleviate flooding of the entrance road to provide year-round access to the Refuge will be explored.

Use of volunteers will be expanded in all programs. A Trempealeau NWR Friends Group will be started. Outreach will be expanded to provide opportunities for awareness and understanding of



Forest opening, Trempealeau NWR. USFWS

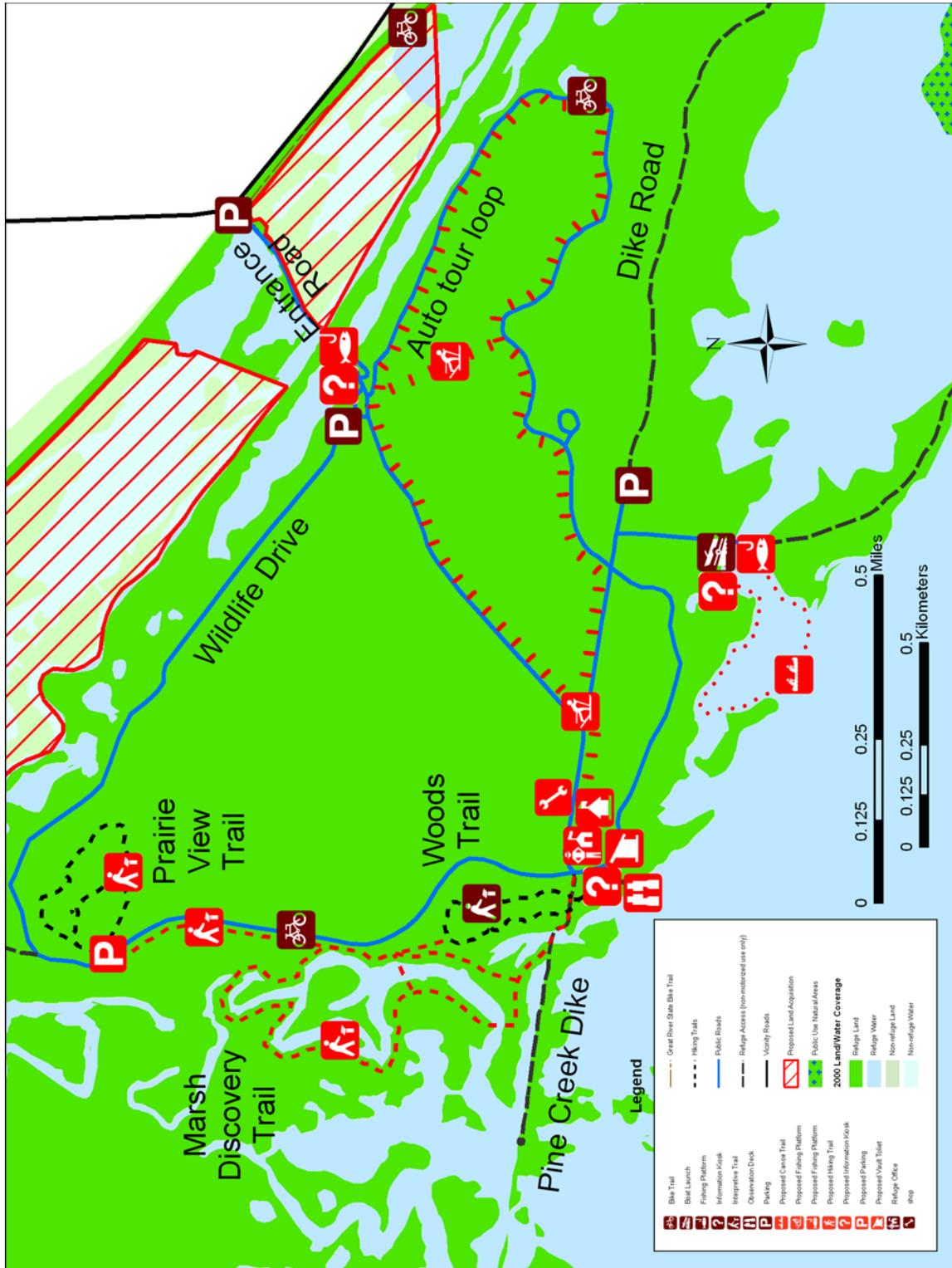
Refuge management and the National Wildlife Refuge System. Traveling exhibits that bring the Refuge to the people will be developed.

The staff will include the addition of three seasonal positions, including a biological technician, a tractor operator, and a park ranger. Law enforcement duties will be covered by a new position shared with Winona District. A private lands biologist will also be shared with Winona District.

Plan Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

The CCP outlines an ambitious but achievable course of action for the future management of Trempealeau NWR. Pursuing and ultimately achieving goals set out in the CCP will require considerable staff and partnership commitment. Throughout the life of the CCP we will monitor our progress in achieving the goals, objectives and strategies. On a periodic basis, the Service will evaluate Refuge activities in light of the CCP. Additional “step-down” management plans will also be necessary to provide more details on Refuge programs such as visitor services, hunting, habitat management, water management and law enforcement.

Future Public Use Facilities, Trempealeau NWR





Environmental Education, Trempealeau NWR. USFWS

Into the Future

Throughout the comprehensive conservation planning process, many people have contributed time and ideas to make the Trempealeau NWR a better document. We are grateful to everyone who cared enough about the Refuge and its future to participate in this planning effort. We will continue to welcome your thoughts on Refuge management.

To succeed, a refuge management plan has to adapt to nature's ever changing conditions. Although the plan is complete, we expect to review it and, if needed, update it every 5 to 10 years in response to conditions that could not be anticipated in planning.

Trempealeau NWR is a place for both wildlife and people to use and enjoy, now and in the future. We hope that you will continue to care about and participate in conserving the Refuge's wildlife and habitat.