



Leopold Wetland Management District

Summary

Draft

Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

July 2008

Introduction

Leopold Wetland Management District (WMD) has completed a Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) that describes management goals and objectives for the next 15 years.

The purpose of the Draft CCP is to give everyone interested in the District’s future – neighbors, sports people, local government officials, American Indian Tribes, the State of Wisconsin, and non-government organizations – an opportunity to review what the District is proposing and to comment on the plan. Public involvement in the planning process is vital to making the CCP a meaningful document that addresses the needs of wildlife as well as the concerns of people who care about the Leopold WMD.

Written comments can be sent via e-mail or mail; addresses are provided on page 6 of this summary.

The comprehensive conservation plan is intended to outline how the District will fulfill its legal purpose and contribute to the National Wildlife



Baraboo Waterfowl Production Area, Leopold Wetland Management District. Photo credit: USFWS

Refuge System’s wildlife, habitat and public use goals. The plan will articulate management goals for the next 15 years and specify the objectives and strategies needed to accomplish these goals.

While comprehensive conservation plans outline management direction, they do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.

Where to Find the Draft CCP

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

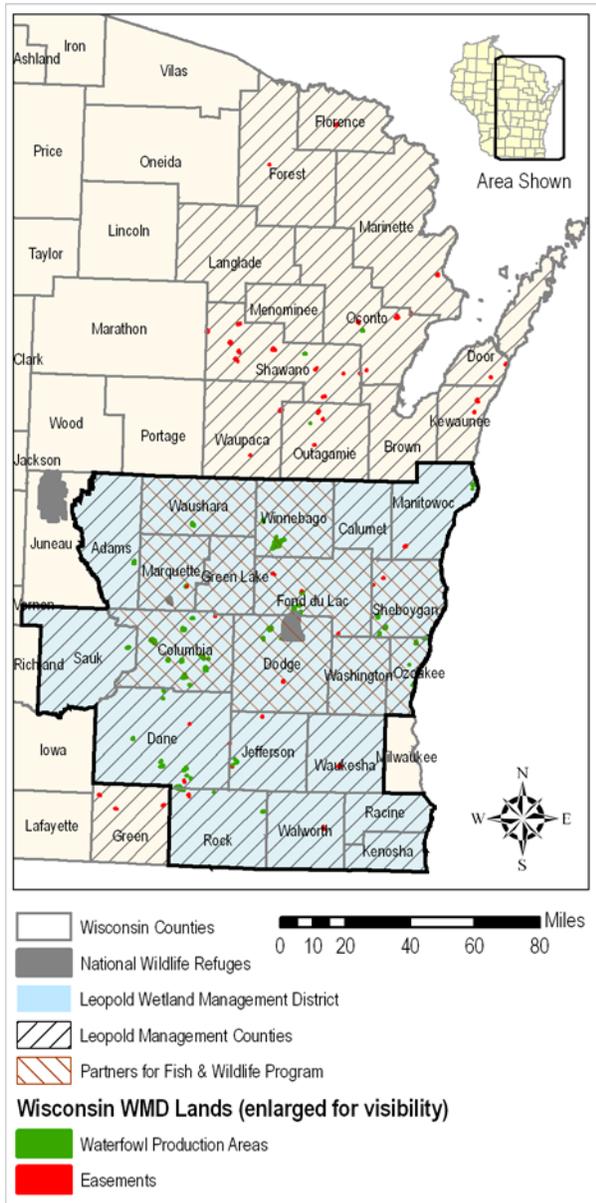
If you have access to a computer, you can see the plan in portable document format (pdf) at the Refuge’s planning website:

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

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Location, Leopold Wetland Management District



Paper copies and an electronic version of the plan are available at the Portage Public Library in Portage, Wisconsin. The library is located at 253 W. Edgewater Street.

Limited numbers of paper copies are also available for individuals who want one. The Draft CCP is also available as a pdf document on compact disk. To request a copy, please call the District Headquarters at 608/742-7100.

Vital Statistics

Established in 1993, the Leopold WMD manages over 12,000 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) in 17 southeastern Wisconsin counties, covering some of the most important waterfowl areas of Wisconsin (see Figure 1). The District also administers 45 conservation easements, totaling 3,000 acres in 21 eastern Wisconsin counties. WPAs consist of wetland habitat surrounded by grassland and woodland communities. While WPAs are managed primarily for ducks and geese, they also provide habitat for a variety of other wildlife species such as non-game grassland birds, shorebirds, wading birds, mink, muskrat, wild turkey, and deer.

The Leopold WMD is named after Aldo Leopold, who is widely acknowledged as the father of wildlife conservation in America. In tribute to his philosophy, the Leopold WMD is dedicated to preserving, restoring, and enhancing wildlife habitat in Wisconsin for the benefit of present and future generations.

Who We Are and What We Do

The District is 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 Service oversees the enforcement of federal wildlife laws, management and protection of migratory bird populations, restoration of nationally significant fisheries, administration of the Endangered Species Act, and the restoration of wildlife habitat such as wetlands. The Service also manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, which 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 over 545 refuges and 7,000 waterfowl production areas covering more than 95 million acres of public lands and waters. Most of these lands (82 percent) are in Alaska, with approximately 16 million acres located in the lower 48 states and several island territories. Overall, the Refuge System provides habitat for more than 5,000 species of birds, mammals, fish, and insects. Refuges also provide unique opportunities for people. When it is compatible with wildlife and habitat conservation, they are places where people can enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation such as

hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and environmental interpretation.

District Vision Statement

The planning team considered past vision statements and emerging issues and drafted the following vision statement as the desired future state of the District:

Waterfowl and other migratory birds find District lands isles of refuge in a landscape of increasing residential development. Native plants and animals, amazing in their diversity, flourish on District and private lands from the efforts of many active partners. Neighbors and visitors enjoy and value District land and work to conserve the region's natural heritage.

District Management Goals

The goals are designed to meet the purposes of the District and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The following goals were established for Leopold WMD and will form the direction for the District over the next 15 years.

1. Preserve, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity of wetlands, grasslands, and native flora of District lands to support the conservation of breeding habitat for waterfowl, grassland birds, and other wildlife.
2. Preserve, restore, and enhance the diversity and abundance of migratory birds and other native wildlife with emphasis on waterfowl, grassland and wetland-dependent birds.



Blue-winged Teal brood. Photo credit: USFWS

3. A broad cross section of the public enjoys and appreciates District lands.
4. Protect the integrity of biological resources within the District and the cultural resources and health and safety of visitors and Service staff on WPAs.

The Planning Process

The planning process for the CCP began in July 2006. The Wisconsin Wetland Management Districts, which include Leopold WMD and St. Croix WMD, shared a planning process that included similar timelines and key meetings held jointly. The planning was conducted jointly because the Districts face the same issues, and it makes sense to address the issues consistently and share knowledge and experience between Districts.

Initially, members of the regional planning staff and District staff identified a list of issues and concerns that were associated with the management of the Districts. These preliminary issues and concerns were based on staff knowledge of the area and contacts with citizens in the community.

District staff and Service planners then asked District neighbors, organizations, local government units, and interested citizens to share their thoughts at open houses and through written comments. In September 2006, three open houses were held in New Richmond, Portage, and Waukau, Wisconsin. The meetings were advertised through news briefs in local papers. Total attendance for the three open houses was 30.

In January 2007 a biological review of the Districts' biological programs provided technical comments and recommendations. In addition to personnel from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel, the review team consisted of a panel of experts and partners from the U.S. Geological Survey, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Science Support Team, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The review team considered the programs of both Districts.

A visitor services review was independently conducted for each District. The visitor services review of Leopold WMD was held March 29-31, 2006, and helped clarify visitor services issues and identified potential actions to consider in formulating alternatives. The visitor services review

team included regional and refuge visitor services specialists, a planner from the Service's Regional Office in Minneapolis, and District staff

Issues Addressed in Planning

Issues play an important role in planning. Issues focus the planning effort on the most important topics and provide a base for considering alternative approaches to management and evaluating the consequences of managing under these alternative approaches. The issues and concerns expressed during the first phase of planning have been organized under the following headings.

Habitat Management: With more than 12,000 acres spread over several counties, managing and administering the WMDs is a big undertaking. Habitat management, control of invasive species, biological monitoring, and community outreach require staff and funding for programs, facilities, and equipment. Plans and planning need to articulate these needs and ensure they are represented in databases and other documents used in budget decision-making.

Habitat Loss and Fragmentation: Residential development is occurring around existing WPAs, which may be reducing their value for waterfowl production. Habitat loss and fragmentation are best dealt with at a landscape level, where there is an opportunity for improved coordination among responsible entities.

Land Acquisition: Residential development in rural Wisconsin is contributing to loss of habitat and a rapid rise in property values. In this rapidly changing and uncertain condition care must be used to judge where land should be purchased, if the public's limited resources are to be spent wisely.

Visitor Services: Higher quality experiences and greater satisfaction among visitors may be possible with improved visitor facilities. Better habitat conditions and less wildlife disturbance would result from a reduction in unauthorized uses.

Service Identity: An opportunity exists to increase public awareness and, ultimately, well-being of WPAs by increasing the public understanding of the purpose and mission of the WPAs.

What's Proposed

Four management alternatives are considered in the Environmental Assessment that accompanies the Draft CCP. One alternative, Alternative 4, has been identified as the preferred alternative and developed more fully into the draft comprehensive conservation plan. The four alternatives that were considered are described in the following paragraphs.

Alternative 1, Waterfowl Emphasis – Current Management Direction

Under Alternative 1 the activities of the District would continue as in the past with current staffing and resources. The target for the District would be to restore 150 acres of grassland per year. The 15-year target for wetland restoration would be to restore 50 percent of the drained wetlands. Up to 20 percent of the woodlands and oak savannah would be inventoried with the objective of restoring approximately 25 percent of the identified potential savannah. Invasive species would be inventoried and treated with the recognition that only a small portion of the affected acres would be dealt with. Land acquisition would continue as funds were available with the intent of establishing larger complexes of wetlands and grasslands. An objective



Monarch butterfly. Photo credit: USFWS



Lee Prairie at Leopold Wetland Management District. Photo credit: USFWS

would be to raise the quality of the visitor services programs over time, reaching a higher level of rating within 5 years. Five WPAs would be more fully developed with visitor services facilities. The volunteer and partnership programs would continue at 2008 levels.

Alternative 2, Waterfowl Emphasis with Increased Consideration for Other “Priority” Species and Low/Moderate Consideration for Visitor Services

Under Alternative 2, the types of habitat management activities of the District would continue, but with more acres affected. Monitoring of habitat and wildlife would increase compared to the current direction. Visitor services would improve about at the rate and extent of the current direction. The target would be to restore 200 acres of grassland per year. The 15-year target for wetland restoration would be to restore 75 percent of the drained wetlands. Up to 90 percent of the woodlands and oak savannah would be inventoried with the objective of restoring approximately 75 percent of the identified potential savannah. Invasive species would be inventoried on 100 percent of the District and control applied to 25 percent of District lands. Land acquisition would continue as funds were available with the intent of establishing larger complexes of wetlands and grasslands. An objective would be to raise the quality of the visitor services programs over time,

reaching a higher level of rating within 5 years. Five WPAs would be more fully developed with visitor services facilities. The volunteer and partnership programs would increase. Full implementation of this alternative would require the addition of 1.5 full-time equivalents to the current staff.

Alternative 3, Waterfowl Emphasis with Low Increase in Management for Other Wildlife and Increased Consideration for Visitor Services

Under Alternative 3, the types and amounts of habitat management activities undertaken by the District would be similar to Alternative 1. Visitor services would expand and improve in quality compared with Alternative 1. Outreach activities would also be greater. An objective would be to raise the quality of the visitor services programs over time, reaching two higher levels of rating within 5 years. Seven WPAs would be more fully developed with visitor services facilities. The volunteer and partnership programs would increase. Full implementation of this alternative would require the addition of 1.5 full-time equivalents to the current staff.

Alternative 4, Waterfowl Emphasis with Increased and Balanced Consideration for Other “Priority” Species, Their Habitats, Visitor Services and Neighborhood Relationships (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative 4 incorporates components of Alternatives 2 and 3. Under this alternative the types of habitat management activities of the District would continue, but with more acres affected. Monitoring of habitat and wildlife would increase compared to the current direction. Visitor services would expand and improve in quality compared to the current direction. Outreach activities would also be greater. The target would be to restore 200 acres of grassland per year. The 15-year target for wetland restoration would be 75 percent of the drained wetlands. Up to 90 percent of the woodlands and oak savannah would be inventoried with the objective of restoring approximately 75 percent of the identified potential savannah. Invasive species would be inventoried on 100 percent of the District and control applied to 25 percent of District lands. The District would develop



Blue dasher at Leopold Wetland Management District. Photo credit: USFWS

a monitoring program to determine waterfowl recruitment. Land acquisition would continue as funds were available with the intent of establishing larger complexes of wetlands and grasslands. Seven WPAs would be more fully developed with visitor services facilities. The volunteer and partnership programs would increase. Full implementation of this alternative would require the addition of 3.5 full-time equivalents to the current staff.

Other Management Alternatives Evaluated

As the planning team thought about possible management alternatives, ideas were freely exchanged and evaluated. Two alternatives were considered, discussed, and evaluated but were not developed in detail.

One alternative we discussed was the possibility of devoting resources to intensive management for waterfowl. The possibility of providing nest structures, planting crops, constructing moist soil units, and intensive predator control were discussed as options that have been used in the past in an attempt to optimize waterfowl production. This alternative was not pursued because the resource demands for this kind of management have less probability of long-term, sustainable success than an approach that increases the size and quality of habitat. It is thought that long-term success will more likely be achieved when management supports the historical functioning of the land than attempts to force the land and its processes in a different direction.

Another alternative that was considered centered on the idea of what would be possible with a lot more resources. In this alternative the team thought about all that management could do for waterfowl, other wildlife, and visitors with unlimited resources. This “pie-in-the-sky” alternative was interesting to talk about, but ultimately judged unrealistic. The team could not imagine a scenario in which considerable staff and budget increases would occur in the next 15 years.

Tell Us What You Think

Leopold WMD and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service want the District’s comprehensive conservation plan to be a visionary and practical document that improves habitat for wildlife and connection to the environment for its visitors.

Your thoughts are an essential part of accomplishing this. Have we missed an issue? Have we overlooked an opportunity? Let us know during the 30-day public review period. In order for your comments to be considered during preparation of the Final CCP, we need to receive your comment by August 25, 2008.

You have a variety of opportunities to communicate your thoughts on the Draft CCP. First, you are welcome to write us a letter. Address written comments to:

Leopold Wetland Management District
Attention: CCP Comment
W10040 Cascade Mountain Road
Portage, WI 53901

Comments are also welcome via e-mail: r3planning@fws.gov (please specify “Leopold WMD Comment” in the subject line).

Open House Slated August 13

An open house is scheduled from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Wednesday, August 13, 2008, at the John Roche Community Room in the Columbia County Law Enforcement Center, which is located at 711 East Cook Street, in Portage, Wisconsin. District Staff will be available during the open house to visit with you about management issues.

Written comments are preferred, but staff will record any oral comments that are provided during the open house.