U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Muscatatuck
National Wildlife Refuge

Summary
Draft
Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

March 2009

Introduction

The future described in Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge's (NWR) Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan calls for more forest and fewer constructed wetlands, with wildlife habitat created more by natural processes than human engineering.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) completes a comprehensive conservation plan, or CCP, for every refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The plans outline how a refuge will fulfill its legal purpose and contribute to the National Wildlife Refuge System's wildlife, habitat and public use goals. Comprehensive conservation plans articulate management goals for the next 15 years and specify the objectives and strategies needed to accomplish these goals.

Review and comment on Muscatatuck NWR's Draft CCP by people who care about the Refuge's future – neighbors, birders and wildlife watchers, sports people, local government officials, American Indian Tribes, the State of Indiana, and non-government organizations – are vital parts of the planning process. The purpose of the Draft CCP is to give everyone interested in the Refuge's future an opportunity to review management alternatives and to comment on the plan. Have we overlooked opportunities for improving habitat? Have we missed an issue that should be addressed in the planning process? Sharing your views will contribute to a meaningful document that meets the needs of wildlife as well as the Refuge's visitors and neighbors.

Muscatatuck NWR. Photo credit: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Written comments can be sent via e-mail or mail; addresses are provided on page 12 of this summary.

Many factors will influence the Service's ability to fully implement the CCP, from drought to flooding to the availability of funding. Comprehensive conservation plans outline management direction, but they do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.

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Location of Muscatatuck NWR

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/muscatatuck

Paper copies and an electronic version of the plan are available at libraries throughout the area, including:

- Jackson County Public Library, 303 West Second Street, Seymour, Indiana.
- Crothersville Library, 120 East Main Street, Crothersville, Indiana
- Medora Library, 27 West Main Street, Medora, Indiana.
- Jennings County Public Library, 2375 North Highway 3, North Vernon, Indiana.
- Monroe County Public Library, 303 East Kirkwood Avenue, Bloomington, Indiana.
- Ellettsville Branch, Monroe County Public Library, 300 West Temperance Street, Ellettsville, Indiana.

Limited numbers of paper copies are 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 Refuge Headquarters at 812/522-4352.

Vital Statistics

Established in 1966, Muscatatuck NWR manages 7,802 acres in Jackson, Jennings, and Monroe Counties of Indiana. The Refuge also administers nine conservation easements totaling 130.5 acres in five Indiana counties.

The Refuge consists of wetland, grassland, woodland, and riverine communities (see the map on page 3). The Refuge provides habitat for many avian species including ducks, geese, non-game grassland and forest birds including many neo-tropical migrants, shorebirds, wading birds, birds of prey and Wild Turkey. A variety of reptiles and mammals, including the copperbelly water snake, Kirtland's snake, river otter, and white-tailed deer, many fish species and a broad range of terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates also inhabit the Refuge.

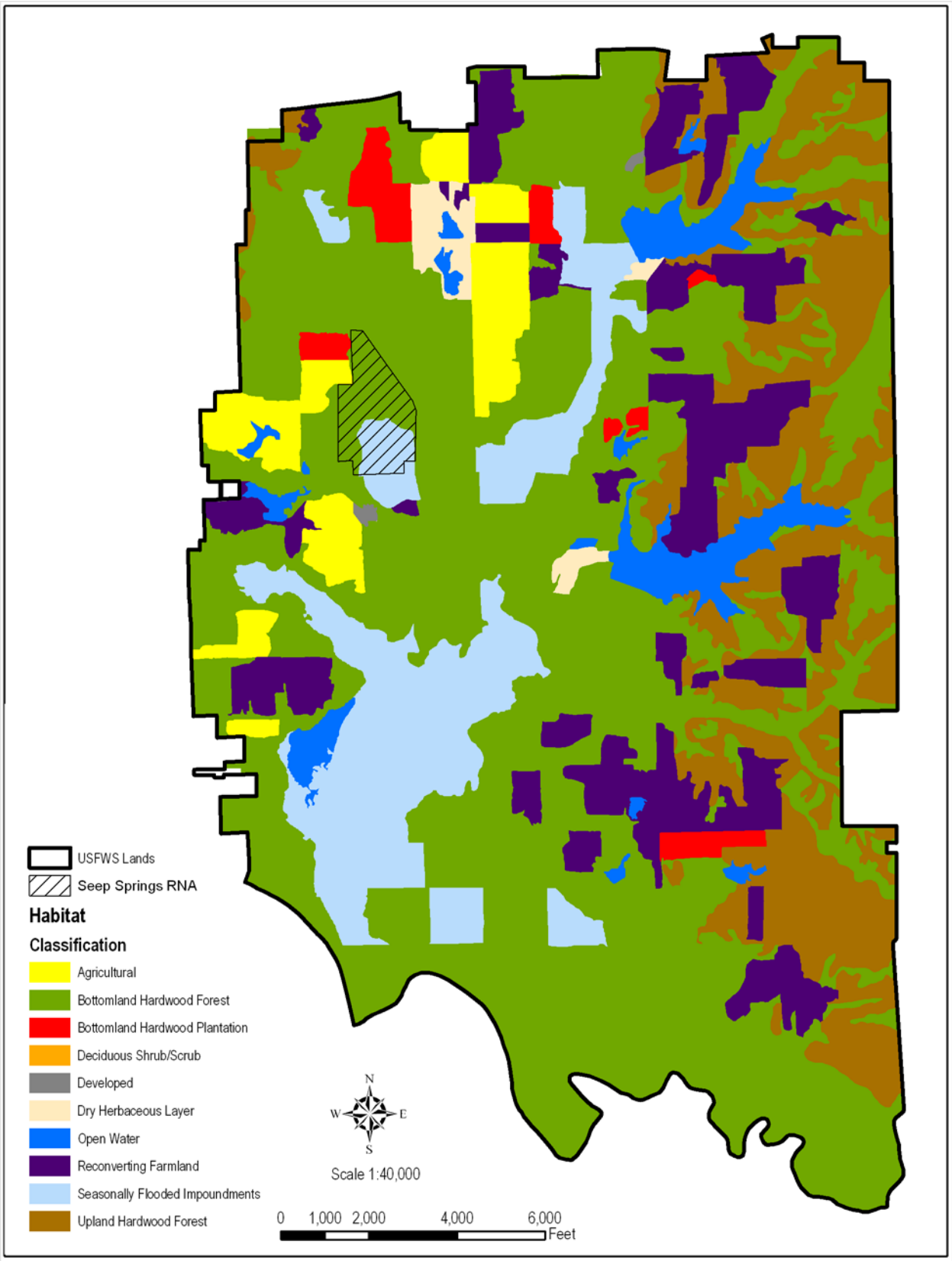
The diverse assortment of wildlife and plants found on the Refuge include several federally listed species, including the federally listed endangered Indiana bat, and many more state-listed species.

Who We Are and What We Do

The Refuge 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 548 refuges and 7,000 waterfowl production areas covering more than 96 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.

Current Land Cover, Muscatatuck NWR



Refuge 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 Refuge:

> As the land of winding waters, treasured for generations, Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge honors its heritage and connects visitors with the natural environment by conserving a rich mosaic of sustainable habitat for a diversity of wildlife and plants.

Refuge Management Goals

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

Goal 1: Habitat – A dynamic mosaic of vegetation that includes an expanse of upland and floodplain deciduous forest similar to that historically present along with lakes, marshes, and moist soil units.

Wild Turkey. Photo credit: Mark Traube

Goal 2: Wildlife – Support the maximum sustainable breeding and post-breeding populations of cavity-nesting waterfowl, neotropical migratory birds, Indiana bats, and a diversity of migratory, rare wetland, and resident species.

Goal 3: People – Visitors understand and appreciate the natural environment and its processes through participation in high-quality, wildlife-dependent recreation and educational opportunities.

The Planning Process

The planning process for this CCP began in March 2007. Initially, members of the regional planning staff and Muscatatuck NWR staff identified a list of issues and concerns that were associated with the management of the Refuge. These preliminary issues and concerns were based on staff knowledge of the area and contacts with citizens in the community.

Refuge staff and Service planners then asked Refuge neighbors, organizations, local government units, and interested citizens to share their thoughts in an open house and through written comments. In May 2007, people were invited to an open house at the Refuge's visitor center through local papers and a project update sent to the Refuge's mailing list of 1,067. Twenty-five people attended the open house. Comments were received from approximately 35 individuals during the comment period, which ended June 30, 2007. Following the public comment period, an additional meeting was held in the Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office to review the public comments and identify concerns from subject specialists.

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 while evaluating the consequences of managing under these alternative approaches. The issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed during the first phase of planning have been organized under the following headings.

Habitat and Wildlife: There is a need to prioritize wildlife species of management concern and their habitats and, within budget constraints and other limitations, manage according to those priorities. A strategic management direction is needed for wetlands, grasslands, forests, croplands, and the conversion of open lands to forests. Visitors see the current diversity of habitat as valuable, because it provides an opportunity to see a large number of bird and resident wildlife species.

Visitor Services: Visitors and staff recognize a tremendous potential in wildlife-dependent recreation, a popular and valued use of the Refuge. There is a need to weigh the delivery of visitor services within the wildlife mission of the Refuge and seek creative means for expanding wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, outreach, and education.

Refuge Roads: The public recognizes the value of Refuge roads for access. There is a wide spectrum of opinion on how the roads should be maintained. Some like the roads as they are now; others would like to see improvements in the roads and associated facilities such as parking lots and wildlife overlooks.

Recreational Issues: Some individuals would like to see recreational opportunities expand on the Refuge to include dog training, an archery range, and horseback riding. These activities typically do not occur on refuges and many are not wildlife-dependent in nature. The planning process presents an opportunity to evaluate the requests and reach a decision on their appropriateness and compatibility.

Threats and Conflicts: The public and staff recognize the challenges increasing development around the perimeter of the Refuge will create for Refuge management and wildlife conservation in the area. There is also recognition of the need for aggressive management of invasive species.

Support: There is wide support for the Refuge and its management among visitors. They note the value of the Friends Group, volunteer, and intern programs.

What's Proposed

Four management alternatives are considered in the Environmental Assessment that accompanies the Draft CCP. One alternative, Alternative C, has been identified as the preferred alternative and developed more fully into the draft comprehensive conservation plan. The four alternatives that were considered are briefly described in the following paragraphs and a table comparing the alternatives that begins on page 7.

Alternative A, Current Management Direction (No Action)

Under this alternative, the activities of the Refuge would continue as in the past with current staffing levels and resources. Wildlife monitoring and surveys would be limited and conducted by Refuge staff and others.

Alternative B, Increased Restoration of Natural Process; Maintain Focus on Priority General Public Uses

Under this alternative the Refuge would increase the size of its forests and manage fewer acres of constructed wetlands and increasingly rely on natural processes to provide wildlife habitat. There would be increased attention to surveys, monitoring and habitat restoration, and a portion of the Refuge would be treated as more remote and primitive. There would be grater emphasis placed on monitoring and surveys of Indiana bats, cavity-nesting waterfowl, neotropical migratory birds, and secretive marsh birds and shorebirds. A biological technician would be added to the staff to accomplish increased survey and monitoring activities, and an equipment operator would be required to support habitat restoration efforts and control invasive plants.

Muscatatuck Marsh, Muscatatuck NWR. Photo credit: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

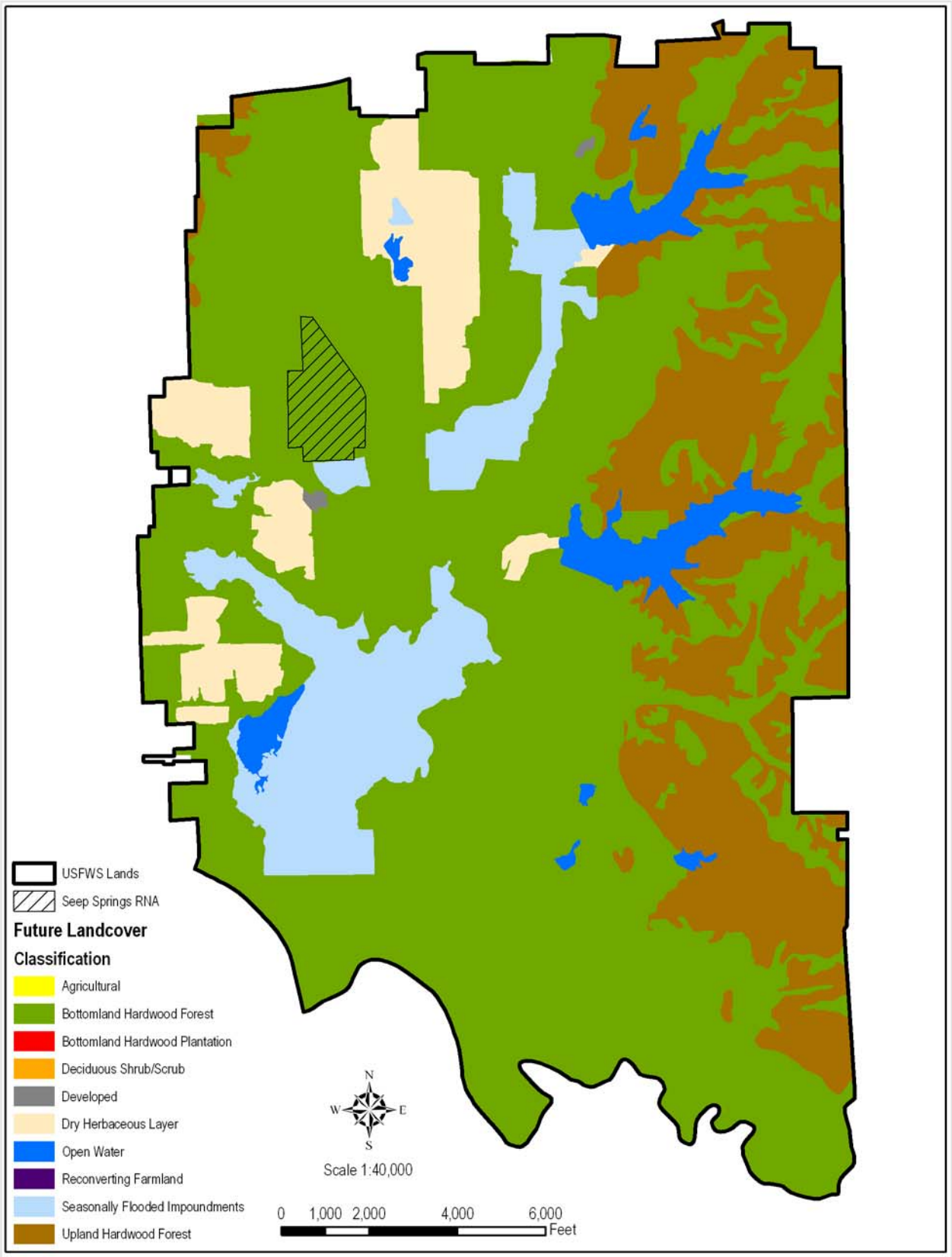
Alternative C, Balance Natural Processes and Constructed Units; Increased Focus on High Quality Priority General Public Uses (Preferred Alternative)

Under this alternative the Refuge would increase the size of its forests and manage fewer acres of constructed wetlands and increasingly rely on natural processes to provide wildlife habitat (future conditions envisioned under this alternative are shown in a map on the next page). There would be increased attention to surveys, monitoring and habitat restoration. There would be increased attention to raising the quality of wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities. Two biological technicians would be added to the staff and one existing but vacant equipment operator position would be filled to accomplish increased survey and monitoring activities and increased habitat management demands under this alternative.

Alternative D, Intensified Management of Constructed Units; Expanded Priority General Public Uses

Under this alternative the Refuge would increase the size of its forests and manage its constructed wetlands more intensively. There would be increased attention to surveys and monitoring. A biological technician, an equipment

Future Conditions Envisioned Under the CCP, Muscatatuck NWR



Comparison of Key Points in Draft Management Alternatives for Muscatatuck NWR

Topic	**Alternative A** Current Management Direction (No Action)	**Alternative B** Increased Restoration of Natural Processes; Maintain Focus on Priority General Public Uses	**Alternative C** Balance Natural Processes & Constructed Units; Increased Focus on High Quality Priority General Public Uses (Preferred Alternative)	**Alternative D** Intensified Management of Constructed Units; Expanded Priority General Public Uses
Upland Hardwood Forest	Conversion of former cropland to forest through natural succession and limited tree planting. (670 acres)	Conversion of former and current cropland to forest through natural succession and limited tree planting. (920 acres)	Same as Alt. B with acreage changed to 670 acres.	Conversion of most of former cropland into forest with 67 additional acres returning to agriculture.
Bottomland Hardwood Forest Natural Constructed	Water control on two greentree reservoirs and Moss Lake.	Convert greentree reservoirs to naturally flowing. Manage for more naturalistic hydrology to Moss Lake, (more variation in water level).	Same as Alt. B.	More effective control of water on two greentree reservoirs and Moss Lake. Includes reforestation, control of muskrats and beavers.
Open Water	Maintain current acreage as depicted on the current landcover map shown on page 3.	Except for Stanfield and Richart Lakes, allow or assist open water areas to naturally revert to forested wetlands or other/same habitat adjacent to them.	Maintain Stanfield Lake and the deepwater portion of Richart Lake, and existing fishing areas, except for Mallard and Display Ponds, which will be closed to fishing. Water levels in some areas of Richart Lake may vary. Allow all other ponds to revert to forested wetlands.	Maintain current acreage as depicted in the "Envisioned Future Conditions" map (page 6) with more active management of structures and higher maintenance.
Seasonally Flooded Constructed Impoundments	383 acres under moist soil management, which includes water and vegetation manipulation. 576 acres in Moss Lake.	Fewer acres under moist soil management through conversion of moist soil units 7, 8, 9, and 10 to bottomland forest through removal of dikes. Moist soil units 1-6 are managed. Also, McDonalds North and South, Sue, and Endicott North and South are managed as seasonally flooded impoundments. Reduce disturbance to migrants on northern seasonally flooded and managed units through limitation of public access during peak duck use periods.	Same as Alt. B, but retain moist soil unit 7, if possible, to keep dual function of control and flow through.	Manage all current moist soil units more intensively. Reduce disturbance to migrants on northern seasonally flooded and managed units through limitation of public access during peak duck use periods.
Reconverting Farmland/ early successional habitat	Allow natural succession and planting trees for conversion to forests.	Active conversion through planting, timber stand improvement, and natural succession.	Same as Alt. B. Endicott area (108 acres), kept open to benefit bird viewing. Area in 180-acre wildlife viewing area also kept open to benefit cranes and other species.	Same as Alt C plus return approx. 67 acres into crop rotation for wildlife viewing, crane habitat, and wildlife food.

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Agricultural	250 acres in rotation.	No acres in agriculture.	Same as Alt. B. Use mowing, haying, or prescribed fire to maintain open acres for wildlife viewing and crane habitat.	Approximately 350 acres in rotation for crane habitat and wildlife viewing.
Invasive Plant Species	Approximately 220 acres treated per year.	Comprehensive inventory of all invasive plants within 5 years of plan approval.	Same as Alt. B	Same as Alt. B
Seep Springs Research Natural Area	No change in management, (some attempt to move water from area as time and resources permit)	Maintain optimum hydrology for the community. Requires detailed hydrological study.	Same as Alt. B	Same as Alt. B
Restle Unit	Maintain 30 acres of seasonally flooded impoundment and 48 acres of bottomland hardwood forest. Closed to all public use	Alternative A plus: Develop water management plan to support water bird feeding, resting, and breeding through cycles in moist soil mgt.	Same as Alt. B	Same as Alt. B
Hunting	Hunt rabbit, quail, squirrel, turkey, and deer (Portions of the state season; portions of the Refuge). No waterfowl hunting allowed. No hunting of any kind in the Waterfowl Sanctuary.	Same as Alt. A., and: Expand hunt times for rabbit, quail, squirrel, and archery deer hunting. Hunting program will be monitored for biological and safety effects. Early archery by State season starting after National Wildlife Refuge Week. Squirrel, rabbit, and quail hunts continue during deer hunts. Late Archery following closure of muzzleloader season for the remainder of the State season. Muzzleloader by special permit drawing during State Season. Hunter orange required for all hunts except turkey. Reduce disturbance to migrants on northern seasonally flooded and managed units through limitation of public access during peak duck use periods.	Same as Alt B., and: Offer state youth hunts in conjunction with cooperators in addition to current program. Also with partners, recruit under-represented populations to participate in hunting programs.	Same as Alt. C.

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Fishing	Year round fishing by state regulations on designated lakes and ponds –Richart and Stanfield Lakes, Lakes Sheryl, Linda, and Sand Hill, and Persimmon, Mallard and Display Ponds. Boating allowed on one lake. No motors allowed. Float tubes allowed in all fishing areas. Three accessible fishing facilities. Kids' fishing event once a year.	Same as Alt. A, except that Mallard and Display Ponds would be removed from the fishing program. Additionally, create more accessible sites around current fishing locations. Reduce disturbance to migrants on northern seasonally flooded and managed units through limitation of public access during peak duck use periods. Improve quality of fishing areas.	Same as Alt. B, and: Designate a kid's only fishing pond with catch and release only. Allow electric trolling motors on Stanfield Lake after several years of monitoring of fish populations to develop baseline population values, but no gasoline powered engines may be attached to boats. Develop regulations to manage take based on monitoring. (ex.: Slot limits, aggregate creel limits). Establish fishing ethics educational program.	Fish all available waters excluding waterfowl sanctuary, and seasonally flooded impoundment units. Allow electric trolling motors, but no gasoline-powered engines may be attached to boats, and permit canoes etc. on all other floatable water bodies – would include development of an additional boat access point. Reduce disturbance to migrants on northern seasonally flooded and managed units through limitation of public access during peak duck use periods.
Observation & Photography	Auto tour route (4 miles). Seven hiking trails. Observation deck at Endicott Marsh. Overlook structure on Richart Lake. Nine miles of roads. Two annual photo contests. Annual migratory bird days. Refuge week activities. Maintain observation platform at Restle Unit with the rest of the unit closed to all public uses. Bicycling is permitted only on gravel/paved roads. Riding on hiking trails is prohibited.	Developed trails limited to area north of the intersection at Stanfield Lake. Vehicle access maintained to Stanfield Lake. South of Stanfield Lake Refuge roads limited to service vehicles. Public access limited to foot traffic and bicycles. East and West River Trails not maintained and allowed to revert back to habitat. Reduce disturbance to migrants on northern seasonally flooded and managed units through limitation of public access during peak duck use periods. Maintain observation platform at Restle Unit with the rest of the unit closed to all public uses. Bicycling is permitted only on gravel/paved roads. Riding on hiking trails is prohibited.	East and West River Trails not maintained and allowed to revert back to habitat. Improve surfacing of all remaining trails. Blacktop auto tour route (contingent on funding). Build an observation structure to facilitate wildlife viewing near the shop area. Modify or remove Hackman Overlook structure. Reduce disturbance to migrants on northern seasonally flooded and managed units through limitation of public access during peak duck use periods. Maintain observation platform at Restle Unit with the rest of the unit closed to all public uses. Bicycling is permitted only on gravel/paved roads. Riding on hiking trails is prohibited.	Same as Alt. C, and: Retain East and West River Trails in program and blacktop all Refuge roads. Build an observation structure to facilitate wildlife viewing near the shop area. Modify or remove Hackman Overlook structure. Reduce disturbance to migrants on northern seasonally flooded and managed units through limitation of public access during peak duck use periods. Maintain observation platform at Restle Unit with the rest of the unit closed to all public uses. Bicycling is not allowed on trails.

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Interpretation	Provide 25 interpretive programs per year to schools and the public. Interpretation on auto tour route and Chestnut Ridge Trail. Myers Cabin interpretation. Keep six brochures updated and stocked at visitor contact points. Maintain an accurate website.	Same as Alt. A.	Same as Alt. A, and: Improve quality of interpretation at all current facilities and throughout all media. Improve website to higher currency.	Same as Alt. C.
Environmental Education	Partnership with special group at Hayden School and annual internship program. Host annual Indiana Junior Duck Stamp Program and contest. Host annual Conservation Field Days for Jackson and Jennings County Schools' third-graders.	Same as Alt. A and: Modify current program to satisfy the Service's definition of environmental education.	Same as Alt. B	Same as Alt. B and: Expand current program to additional school(s) (additional staff required).
Recreational fees	None.	Entrance fee collection with an iron ranger. Admission with daily fee, an annual pass, a current Duck Stamp, or an interagency pass. Daily admission fee of $5. Restle Unit exempt.	None.	Same as Alt. B.
Coop Association/ Friends	One active Friends Group, The Muscatatuck Wildlife Society. Membership based. 400 members. Other partnerships include the National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited, and the Audubon Society.	Same as Alt. A and: Expand partnerships to include other non-government organizations.	Same as Alt. B.	Same as Alt B.
Volunteer Program	Approximately 11,000 hours contributed by 200 volunteers.	Same as Alt. A and: Continue support and expand programs as staff and resources permit	Same as Alt. B	Same as Alt. A and: Expand participation from additional groups and audiences. (additional staff required)

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Law Enforcement	One shared position with Big Oaks and Patoka River NWRs. Cooperative support from state police, sheriff's departments, and IDNR. Additional support through zone resources.	Same as Alt. A	Same as Alt. A	Same as Alt. A with possible funded cooperation with Indiana DNR.
Public Access / Roads	Open from sunrise to sunset. All acres open except closed areas. Nine miles of roads with two public entrances.	Open 1 hour before sunrise to 1 hour after sunset. Limit vehicle traffic to roads north of intersection. Close west entrance. West Entrance may have to remain open, or be reopened to use during the Highway 50 widening project, which will begin sometime during the period covered by this CCP.	Same as Alt. A, plus: Open 1 hour before sunrise to 1 hour after sunset. Close west entrance. Blacktop auto tour route. Improve maintenance of gravel roads and parking lots. West Entrance may have to remain open, or be reopened to use during the Highway 50 widening project, which will begin sometime during the period covered by this CCP.	Same as Alt. A, plus: Open 1 hour before sunrise to 1 hour after sunset. Blacktop Refuge roads. Close west entrance. West Entrance may have to remain open, or be reopened to use during the Highway 50 widening project, which will begin sometime during the period covered by this CCP.
Outreach	Maintain a website. Staff a booth at the annual FFA Career Fair. Refuge newsletter published three times a year. Staff provide a limited number of off-site programs to schools and organizations.	Same as Alt. A	Same as Alt. A and: Expand appeal to under-represented populations. Improved website. (Purpose is increased participation and environmental stewardship, attendance and volunteers)	Same as Alt. C
Facilities ***(continues to next page)***	No change.	Dikes removed from Moist Soil Units 7, 8, 9 and 10. Roads south of Stanfield Lake and east of the auto tour loop would be maintained for Service vehicle access only. The west entrance to the Refuge would be closed. Additional accessible fishing sites would be developed at ponds and lakes with public road access.	Dikes would be removed from Moist Soil Units 8, 9 and 10. The auto tour route would be paved. Existing gravel roads and parking lots would be improved. The west entrance to the Refuge would be closed. The East and West River Trails would not be maintained and would revert to natural land cover. The surface of the remaining trails would be improved.	Maintenance of water control structures would increase. All Refuge roads would be paved and parking lots improved. Both Refuge entrances would be maintained. All trails would be maintaind and trail surfaces improved. A wildlife observation structure would be built near the shop area.

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Facilities (continued)			A wildlife observation structure would be built near the Refuge shop area. The Hackman Overlook structure would be evaluated for modification or removal. Additional accessible fishing sites would be developed at current fishing locations to supplement the existing facilities.	The Hackman Overlook structure would be evaluated for modification or removal. Additional accessible fishing sites would be developed at current fishing locations to supplement the existing facilities.

operator, and a park ranger (interpretation) would be added to the staff to accomplish increased survey and monitoring activities, the more intensive management of moist soil units, and expanded public use activities.

Tell Us What You Think

Muscatatuck NWR and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service want the Refuge'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 May 6, 2009.

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:

Muscatatuck NWR
Attention: CCP Comment
12985 East U.S. Highway 50
Seymour, IN 47274

Comments are also welcome via e-mail: r3planning@fws.gov (please specify "Muscatatuck NWR CCP Comment" in the subject line).

Open House Slated April 23

The Refuge will host an open house at the Refuge Visitor Center from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Thursday, April 23, 2009. The Visitor Center is located at 12985 East U.S. Highway 50 in Seymour, Indiana. Refuge Staff will be available during the open house to visit with you about the Draft CCP and future management direction for the Refuge.

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

River otter. Photo credit: Dan Kaiser