



Seney
National Wildlife Refuge

Summary

Draft

**Comprehensive Conservation Plan and
Environmental Assessment**

August 2008

Introduction

Seney National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) 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 Refuge’s future – neighbors, outdoor recreationists, local government officials, American Indian Tribes, the State of Michigan, and non-government organizations – an opportunity to review what the Refuge 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 Seney NWR.

Written comments can be sent via e-mail or mail; addresses are provided on page 8 of this summary.

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



Red Squirrel, Seney NWR. Photo credit: Igor Drobyshev

Contents

Introduction	1
Where to Find the Draft CCP.....	1
Vital Statistics	2
Who We Are and What We Do	3
Refuge Vision Statement	3
Refuge Management Goals	4
The Planning Process	4
Issues Addressed in the Plan	4
What’s Proposed	5
Other Management Alternatives Evaluated	7
Tell Us What You Think	8
Open House Set September 17.....	8

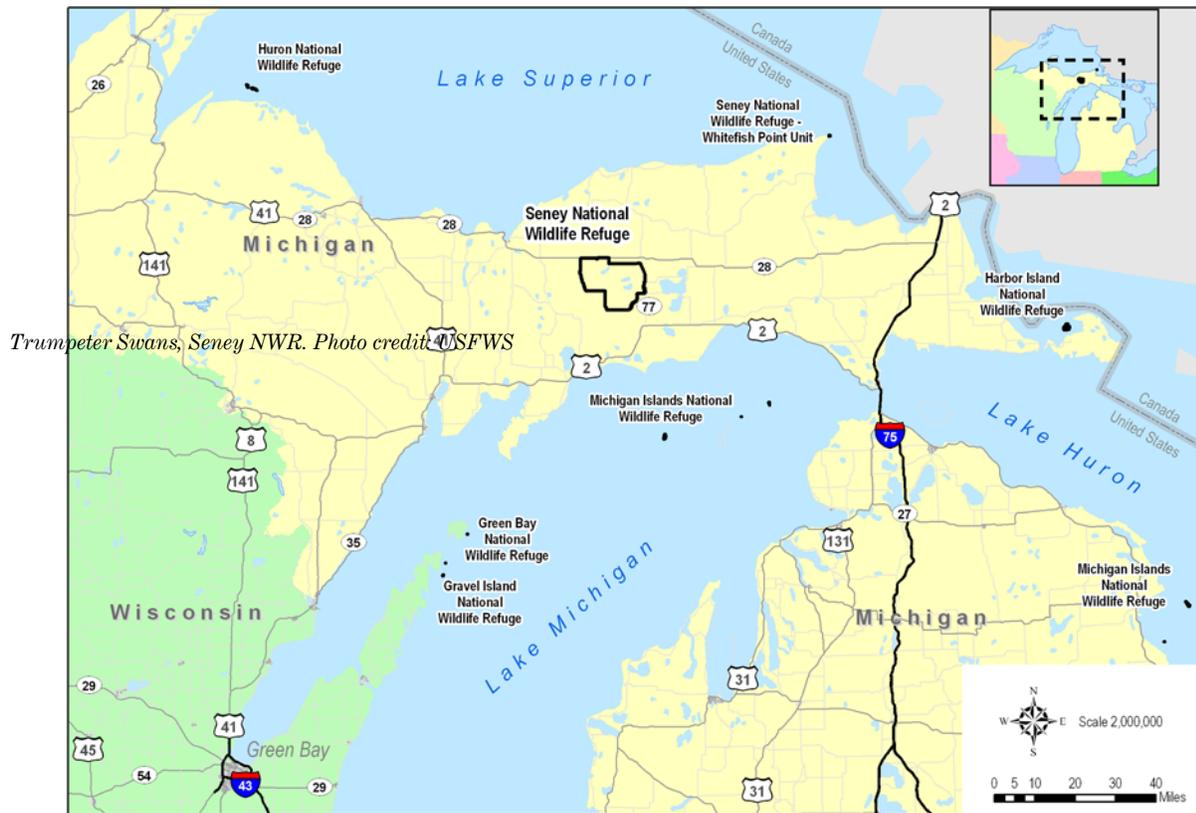
Refuge System’s wildlife, habitat and public use goals. The plan will articulate management goals for the next 15 years and specify the objectives and strategies needed to accomplish these goals.

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.

Location of Seney National Wildlife Refuge



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/seney>

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

- Manistique Public Library, Manistique, Michigan
- Tahquamenon Area Public Library, Newberry, Michigan
- Peter White Public Library, Marquette, Michigan

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 Refuge Headquarters at 906/586-9851.

Vital Statistics

Seney NWR was established in 1935 by Executive Order under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act for the protection and production of migratory birds and other wildlife. The Refuge encompasses approximately 95,238 acres; 25,150 acres comprise the Seney Wilderness Area in which is contained the Strangmoor Bog National Natural Landmark.

While management for migratory birds is paramount, the Refuge provides habitat for a diversity of wildlife species, both migratory and non-migratory. Approximately 20 species of reptiles and amphibians, 48 species of mammals, 26 species of fish, and over 200 species of birds have been documented on the Refuge. Many of these species are Conservation Priorities for the Midwest Region of the Service.

Whitefish Point Unit

Under the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 1996, the USFWS received 33 acres of the former Coast Guard Station at Whitefish Point, in Chippewa County. The remaining 11 acres were split between the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society, which received 8.3 acres, and the Michigan Audubon Society, which received 2.8 acres.

The USFWS property is administered as part of Seney NWR and managed as a stop-over location for migratory birds. Currently there are no permanent buildings or designated trails on the property and the USFWS does not administer any programs on-site. However, Michigan Audubon Society conducts migratory bird research and provides natural resource programs at the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, which is adjacent to the Refuge's property. Parking and restroom facilities are provided by the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society, which administers the former Coast Guard buildings, including the lighthouse, and interprets the maritime significance of Whitefish Point.

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.



Daisies, Seney NWR. Photo credit: USFWS

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.

Refuge Vision Statement

The planning team considered the past vision statements and emerging issues and drafted the following vision statements as the desired future state for the Refuge:

Seney National Wildlife Refuge will continue to be a place of excitement and wonder where wildlife comes first. It will be a place where management decisions are made in the best interest of wildlife and their habitats, and people are encouraged to explore and learn about the natural world.

The Refuge's rich mosaic of habitats and ecosystems will be viewed as part of the greater eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan ecoregion. Priority will be given to managing for those species, habitats, and ecosystems of regional concern that are best suited to Seney's unique environment. Management will maintain Refuge-level biological diversity while preserving ecological integrity. Habitats will be managed for an array of ecological conditions, including the preservation of Wilderness character. When and where appropriate, an emphasis will be placed on preserving or restoring historic habitat conditions and ecosystem functions.

As part of a holistic approach to natural resource stewardship, people will be welcomed to use the Refuge to learn about the natural



world. The public will be invited to participate in wildlife-dependent experiences that are in concert with the relatively undeveloped nature of the Refuge. Students and researchers will be encouraged to use the Refuge as an outdoor laboratory for biological and ecological research that focuses on understanding natural patterns and processes and developing habitat management techniques.

Seney NWR will continue to be a source of pride for the staff, those who visit, and the local community. It will showcase biological and ecological diversity, habitat management, and wildlife-dependent public use. It will add to the richness of the broader community by holding in trust a portion of the natural heritage of the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan for the continuing benefit of the American people.

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 Seney NWR and will form the direction for the Refuge over the next 15 years.

1. Goal 1: Wildlife – Preserve, conserve, and (where and when appropriate) restore the diversity of wildlife native to the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan; with an emphasis on Region 3 Conservation Priority Species.
2. Goal 2: Habitat – Conserve the range of habitat conditions now found within the Refuge and (where and when possible) restore pre-

European conditions once characteristic of the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

3. Goal 3: People – Provide visitors and the community with opportunities to experience quality, wildlife-dependent activities and to understand and appreciate the rich mosaic of wildlife and habitats found within the Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The Planning Process

The CCP process began in March 2006 with a meeting between Refuge staff and regional planners from the Service's office in St. Paul, Minnesota. The participants in this "internal scoping" exercise reviewed the Refuge's vision statement, goals, existing baseline resource data, planning documents, and other pertinent information. In addition, the group identified a preliminary list of issues, concerns, and opportunities facing the Refuge that would need to be addressed in the CCP.

Initial public scoping for the Seney NWR CCP began in August 2006 with an open house event held at the Refuge Visitor Center. The event drew about 15 people. Comment forms were available at the event and made available at the Refuge Headquarters and Visitor Center during the following weeks.

People interested in making written comments were asked to submit their comments by October 2006. Comments could be sent by U.S. mail, e-mail, or via the Seney planning website on the Internet. Approximately 30 comment forms and other written comments were submitted to the Refuge during the scoping process.

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 following list of issue topics was generated by internal Refuge scoping, the public open house sessions, and program reviews.

Habitat Management:

- Wetland and upland habitat preservation, conservation, and restoration

- Invasive plant species impacts and management
- Prescribed burning and the Refuge's Fire Use Program
- Stream restoration
- Wilderness management
- Role of the Refuge in the landscape

Aquatic Resources:

- Protection of waterbodies from human disturbances and invasive species
- Predator and native fish populations

Wildlife Management:

- Wildlife research
- Carrying capacity for Trust species

Visitor Services:

- Hunting
- Fishing
- Visitor capacity
- Outreach
- Access
- A developed picnic area
- Horseback riding and a snowmobile route

What's Proposed

Based on the issues, concerns and opportunities we heard during the scoping process, the Planning Team developed three alternative management scenarios that could be used at Seney NWR. These alternatives and the consequences of adopting each are presented in the Environmental Assessment. Each of the alternatives is designed to fit within the scope of operations of similar-sized refuges in the Midwest. The alternatives were formulated under the assumption that staffing and budgets would remain constant or grow slowly throughout the life of the Plan.

The three management alternatives were developed to address most of the issues, concerns, and opportunities identified during the CCP planning process. Specific impacts of implementing each alternative will be examined in five broad issue categories:

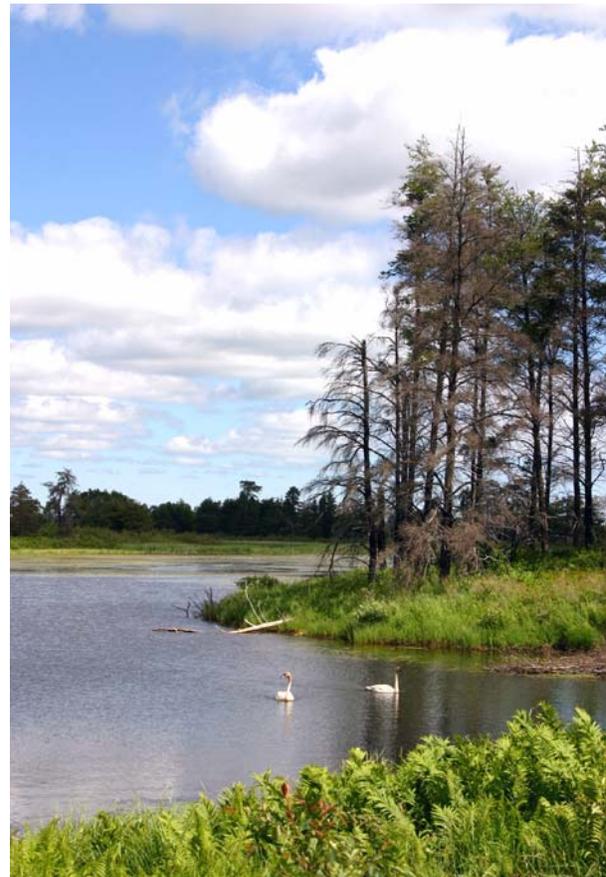
Habitat Management: What is an appropriate mix of habitats within this region in the 21st century, and what level of habitat restoration and maintenance

is feasible given the constraints of funding and ecological succession? What is the role of the Refuge in the surrounding landscape? Do we need to adjust habitat restoration measures such as prescribed burning and management of invasive plant species?

Aquatic Resources: How can the Refuge best protect rivers, streams and impoundments from invasive aquatic species? Do Refuge waters support an appropriate number of predator and native fish populations?

Wildlife Management: Should the Refuge adjust the quantity or quality of on-site wildlife research projects? What is the carrying capacity for trust species such as Trumpeter Swans and Common Loons?

Water Management: Landscape and Watershed: What changes in the surrounding landscape threaten Refuge resources and how can we mitigate the impacts?



Seney NWR. Photo credit: USFWS

Visitor Services: Should additional wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities be made available or are the existing opportunities for wildlife observation and photography, hunting, environmental education and interpretation adequate?

Access: Should the Refuge provide additional access opportunities such as a developed picnic area, horseback riding or a managed snowmobile route?

Alternative 1

Current Management Direction / Opportunistic Conservation, Restoration, and Preservation (No Action)

The current management direction of Seney NWR would be maintained under this alternative. For National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) purposes, this is referred to as the “No Action” alternative, a misnomer as some changes will occur over the next 15 years. Management includes conservation, restoration and preservation but occurs opportunistically as budgets allow. Some programs, especially environmental education and outreach, would see improvements only if budgets increase in the future.

Alternative 2

Management Gradient of Conservation Emphasis (Unit 1), to Conservation-Restoration Emphasis (Unit 2), to Restoration-Preservation Emphasis (Unit 3 and Wilderness Preservation (Unit 4) (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative 2 would segment the Refuge into four general units and apply a management strategy to each unit. The units would follow a general gradient of management from low intensity (wilderness) to higher manipulation (managed impoundments and visitor use). Some high and low intensity management actions would occur in all units except the designated Wilderness (Unit 4). Wildlife needs always receive priority when in conflict with visitor services.

Unit 1: Conservation – This unit contains 14 managed pools, the Visitor Center/Headquarters compound, the Marshland Wildlife Drive and the Fishing Loop. Habitat management would maintain areas for species that the visiting public enjoys, including Trumpeter Swans, Common Loons, wading birds and game fish. Upland habitats would be managed to provide for a diversity of native cover types.

Unit 2: Conservation and Restoration – This unit contains four managed pools, significant mixed pine uplands, and two large old field openings (Diversion



Osprey, Seney NWR. Photo credit: USFWS

Farm and Chicago Farm). The focus of management on this unit would include maintaining seasonal rotation of water levels in the managed pools, natural regeneration of upland forests, and the gradual restoration of the Chicago Farm field to a forested habitat.

Unit 3: Restoration and Preservation – Unit 3 is the largest of the three non-wilderness units. It contains natural and forested wetlands but only three managed pools. A large opening, the Walsh Farms old field, is found on the north end of this unit. Management efforts on this unit would include allowing a greater percentage of natural processes, such as beaver-constructed wetlands, wildfires, and seasonal floods to shape the landscape.

Unit 4: Wilderness: The Federally-designated wilderness would be managed to maintain natural habitats and processes according to the existing Wilderness Management Plan. Visitor and Refuge staff entry would be limited to foot traffic only. Active habitat manipulation would only occur in emergency situations and the minimum tools necessary would be used to complete tasks.

Whitefish Point Unit: Under the preferred alternative, the Refuge would work with a Joint Committee consisting of the Michigan Audubon Society, the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society and the Service to implement provisions of the Human Use Natural Resource Management Plan for Whitefish Point. Specifically the Refuge would take the following actions on its lands to protect the fragile habitat at the Point for the wildlife that depend upon it.

- Designate trails to allow public access while protecting environmentally sensitive areas. One

trail would lead from the parking lot to the tip of the Point. The second would run along an old cobble road in a southeasterly direction.

- Close the southeast beach from April to August to promote nesting of Piping Plovers.
- Work with the GLSHS to route visitors to the beach via their boardwalk and revegetate the cut-through from the parking lot to the beach.
- Hire a Refuge Manager trainee with a major responsibility for on-site work, mitigation approvals and coordination with partners.
- Occupy a portion of a second keeper's quarters if the building is re-constructed. The building would also be used by other partners to the Whitefish Point Plan.

Alternative 3

Management to Emphasize Historic Patterns and Processes through Restoration and Preservation (All Anthropogenic Habitats Removed in Units 2 and 3), and Wilderness Preservation (Unit 4)

Alternative 3 would include the Refuge striving to manage its forests and water to allow unfettered succession to take place. Dynamic events such as windstorms, insect and tree disease outbreaks, flooding and wildfire would play a more substantial role in shaping habitats. Natural events may lead to limitation or closure of some exiting visitor use areas or services. However, crucial Refuge infrastructure such as roads and dikes would be protected from or repaired after destructive circumstances.

Under this alternative, it would be difficult to set specific acreage goals for some habitat types as natural forces would guide coverage. Refuge staff would consult soil and historic landcover maps and use them as a guide to evaluate results.

The main differences between Alternative 3 and the other alternatives is that ditches and dikes and water control structures would be filled in or removed in Management Units 2 and 3 and prescribed fire would not be used. This would result in an increase of acres of scrub-shrub. Deciduous forest would also increase in both Units 2 and 3 by eliminating all old fields on hardwood-favorable soils.

Other Management Alternatives Evaluated

The CCP planning team also considered the alternative of returning the Refuge to its original, presettlement condition everywhere. Attempting to restore Seney NWR's pre-settlement condition would mean restoring it to the state it was in prior to large-scale logging, settlement and draining by Euro-American homesteaders beginning in the late 1800's and continuing into the early 20th century. At that time, according to historical accounts, the lands that now comprise the Refuge were covered by sedge meadows, mixed pine stands, and scattered deciduous forests. To implement this alternative and meet its goals, all impoundments and dikes would have to be removed and ditches filled in on all Refuge units.

The planning team dismissed this alternative on the grounds that it would be contrary to the established purposes of Seney NWR "...as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife" (Executive Order 7246, dated December 10, 1935) and "... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds" (16 U.S.C. 715d, Migratory Bird Conservation Act). While reverting to pre-settlement conditions would undoubtedly benefit some wildlife, probably those species that favor forest and shrub/scrub, it would not allow the Refuge to meet its primary obligation to serve as a breeding ground for migratory birds. This alternative would be very costly, at least at first, and would severely disrupt long-established management institutions and infrastructure in Upper Peninsula Michigan.



Seney NWR. Photo credit: USFWS



Seney NWR. Photo credit: USFWS

Open House Set September 17

The Refuge will host an open house at the Refuge Visitor Center from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Wednesday, September 17. The Visitor Center is located at 1674 Refuge Entrance Road, Seney, Michigan. 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.

Tell Us What You Think

Seney 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 October 8, 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:

Seney National Wildlife Refuge
Attention: CCP Comment
1674 Refuge Entrance Road
Seney, MI 49883

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