1 Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has developed this comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) to provide a foundation for the management and use of three national wildlife refuges located in the Souris River basin in north-central North Dakota (figure 1).

The CCP is intended to be a working guide for management programs and actions over the next 15 years for the following national wildlife refuges (known collectively as the "Souris River basin refuges"):

- Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge (NWR); 19,500 acres—extends south from the Canada border along 28 miles of the Des Lacs River in Burke and Ward counties, North Dakota
- J. Clark Salyer NWR; 58,700 acres—extends southeast from the Canada border along 75 miles of the east arm of the Souris River in Bottineau and McHenry counties, North Dakota
- Upper Souris NWR; 32,092 acres—extends south-southeast along 35 miles of the west arm of the Souris River in Renville and Ward counties, North Dakota

NOTE: This CCP covers management of three national wildlife refuges—Des Lacs, J. Clark Salyer, and Upper Souris, which are part of the Souris River Basin NWR Complex. This CCP does not address the other units of the refuge complex: J. Clark Salyer Wetland Management District (WMD) and seven, small, national wildlife refuges (Buffalo Lake, Cottonwood Lake, Lords Lake, Rabb Lake, School Section Lake, Willow Lake, and Wintering River).

The CCP specifies the necessary actions to achieve the vision and purposes of the refuges. Wildlife is the first priority in refuge management; public use (wildlife-dependent recreation) is allowed and encouraged, as long as it is compatible with the purposes of the refuges.

The Service developed the CCP in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) and Part 602 (National Wildlife Refuge System Planning) of the "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manual." The actions described in this CCP also meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Compliance with the NEPA is being achieved through involvement of the public and inclusion of an integrated environmental assessment (EA) in the previous draft document (see environmental compliance documents in appendix A).

Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

Habitats at the Souris River basin refuges support the gadwall and many other migratory ducks.

A planning team of representatives from various Service programs, North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF), and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) prepared the CCP. In developing this plan, the team used input from local citizens and organizations.

The evaluation of management alternatives for the refuges was documented in the "Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environment Assessment—Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge, J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge, Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge." In August 2007, the regional director of region 6 of the Service selected alternative B as the preferred alternative for the CCP for the Souris River basin refuges. Implementation of the CCP begins on signature and publication of the final CCP.

The planning process and public involvement are further described in "The Planning Process" section of this chapter.

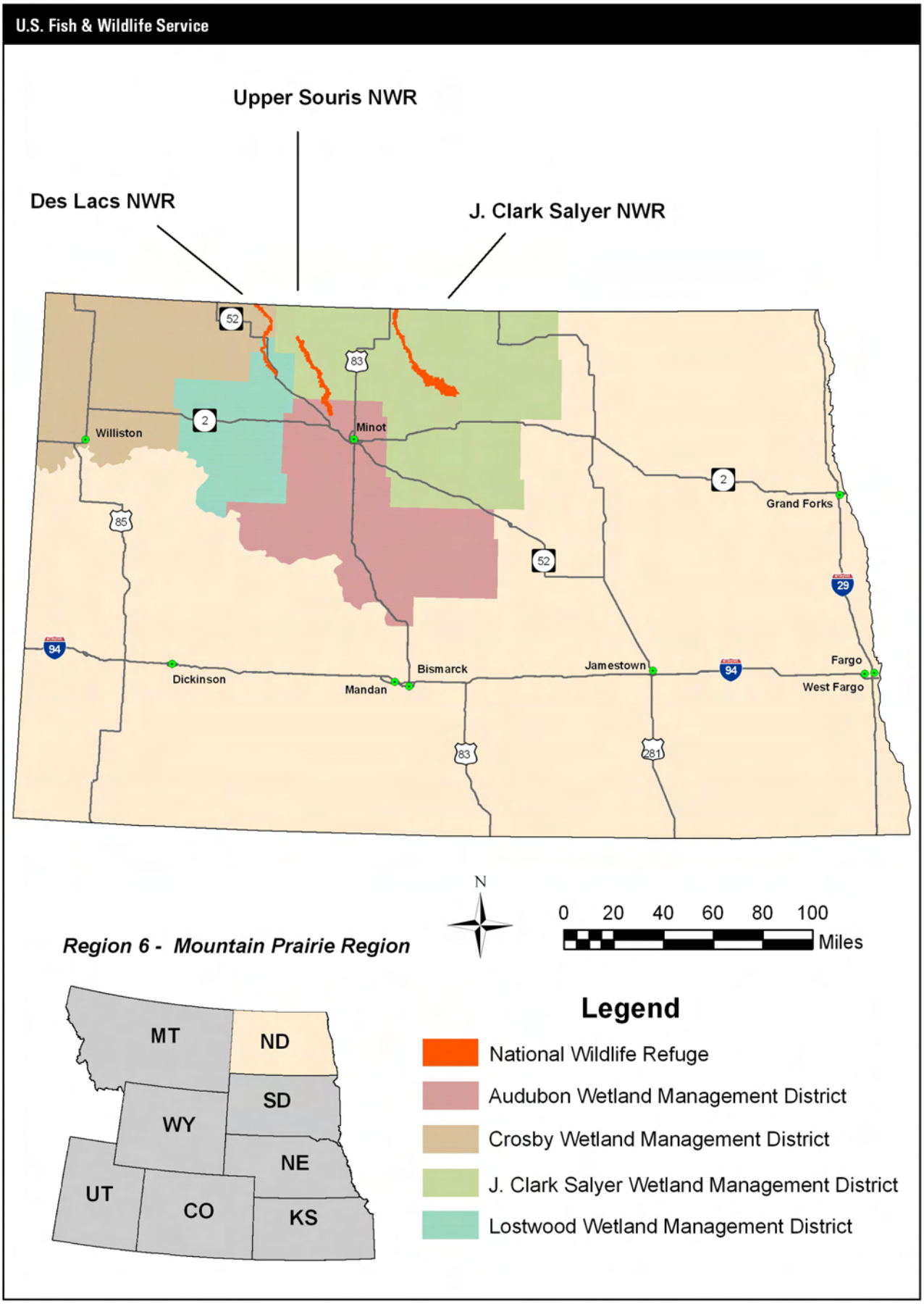

Figure 1. Vicinity map for the Souris River basin refuges, North Dakota.

Purpose and Need for the Plan

The purpose of this CCP is to identify the role that the three Souris River basin refuges play in support of the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) and to provide long-term guidance for managing refuge programs and activities. The CCP is needed

- to provide a clear statement of direction for the future management of the refuges;
- to ensure that the Service's management actions are consistent with mandates governing management of the Refuge System;
- to ensure that management of these refuges is consistent with federal, state, and county plans;
- to provide a basis for development of budget requests for the refuge's operation, maintenance, and capital improvement needs;
- to provide neighbors, visitors, and government officials with an understanding of the Service's management actions at and around these refuges.

Sustaining the nation's natural resources is a task that can be accomplished only through the combined efforts of governments, businesses, and private citizens.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Refuge System

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for fish, wildlife, and plant conservation. One of the major programs of the Service is the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

About a century ago, America's fish and wildlife resources were declining at an alarming rate. Concerned citizens, scientists, and hunting and angling groups joined together to restore and sustain America's national wildlife heritage. This was the genesis of the Service.

Today, the Service enforces federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores vital wildlife habitat, protects and recovers endangered species, and helps other governments with conservation efforts. In addition, the Service administers a federal aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars to states for fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, and related programs across America.

Service Activities in North Dakota

Service activities in North Dakota contribute to the state's economy, ecosystems, and education programs. The following activities were reported in the 2000 briefing book, "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Presence in North Dakota":

- employed 242 people in North Dakota
- 497 volunteers donated more than 17,990 hours to help Service projects
- contributed 13.4 million fingerlings to North Dakota waters
- managed 62 national wildlife refuges encompassing 296,000 acres (0.7% of the state)
- managed 12 wetland management districts
- managed 254,000 acres of fee, waterfowl production areas (0.6% of the state)
- hosted more than 478,500 annual visitors to Service-managed lands in North Dakota
- provided education programs for more than 17,000 school children participants
- provided $2.7 million to NDGF for sport fish restoration and $2.1 million for wildlife restoration and hunter education
- helped about 2,500 landowners enhance wildlife habitat on 162,000 acres since 1987
- paid North Dakota counties $427,400 under the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act (funds that are used for schools and roads) in 2000

The National Wildlife Refuge System

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt designated the 5.5-acre Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first wildlife refuge for the protection of brown pelicans and other native nesting birds. This was the first time the federal government set aside land for the sake of wildlife. This small but significant designation was the beginning of the Refuge System.

One hundred years later, this Refuge System has become the largest collection of lands in the world specifically managed for wildlife, encompassing more than 96 million acres within 545 refuges and more than 3,000 small areas for waterfowl breeding and nesting. Today, there is at least one refuge in every state in the nation including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In 1997, a clear mission was established for the Refuge System through the passage of the Improvement Act.

> *The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.*

The Improvement Act further states that each refuge shall be managed

- to fulfill the mission of the Refuge System;
- to fulfill the individual purpose of each refuge;
- to consider the needs of fish and wildlife first;
- to fulfill the requirement of developing a CCP for each unit of the Refuge System and fully involve the public in the preparation of these plans;
- to maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System;
- to recognize that wildlife-dependent recreation activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation are legitimate and priority public uses;
- to retain the authority of refuge managers to determine compatible public uses.

In addition to the overall mission for the Refuge System, the wildlife and habitat vision for each national wildlife refuge stresses the following principles:

- Wildlife comes first.
- Ecosystems, biodiversity, and wilderness are vital concepts in refuge management.
- Refuges should ensure biological integrity and environmental health.
- Growth of refuges must be strategic.
- The Refuge System serves as a model for habitat management with broad participation from others.

Following passage of the Improvement Act, the Service immediately began efforts to carry out the direction of the new legislation, including the preparation of CCPs for all refuges. The development of these plans is now ongoing nationally. Consistent with the Improvement Act, all refuge CCPs are being prepared in conjunction with public involvement, and each refuge is required to complete its own CCP within the 15-year schedule (by 2012).

People and the Refuge System

The nation's fish and wildlife heritage contributes to the quality of American lives and is an integral part of the nation's greatness. Wildlife and wild places have always given people special opportunities to have fun, relax, and appreciate the natural world.

Whether through bird watching, fishing, hunting, photography, or other wildlife pursuits, wildlife recreation also contributes millions of dollars to local economies. In 2002, approximately 35.5 million people visited a national wildlife refuge, mostly to observe wildlife in their natural habitats. Visitors are most often accommodated through nature trails, auto tours, interpretive programs, and hunting and fishing opportunities. Significant economic benefits are being generated to the local communities that surround the refuges. Economists have reported that national wildlife refuge visitors contribute more than $792 million annually to local economies.

Ecosystem Description and Threats

The Souris River basin lies near the junction of two ecosystems currently defined by the Service as the "Mississippi Headwaters/Tall-grass Prairie" and "Main stem Missouri River" ecosystems. However, neither ecosystem, as defined and delineated, includes or adequately describes the Souris River basin area.

The Souris River basin is 15–80 miles north of a continental divide formed by a major moraine, the Missouri Coteau. Drainage of the basin is neither east-southeast toward the Mississippi River nor south toward the Missouri River. Instead, the basin drains north into the Assiniboine River–Red River–Hudson Bay system. Furthermore, the Souris River basin area is mixed-grass prairie, not tall-grass prairie. The area is characterized here more appropriately as the "Hudson Bay headwaters/mixed-grass prairie ecosystem" (figure 2).

In the United States, the Hudson Bay headwaters/mixed-grass prairie ecosystem includes north-central North Dakota north of the Missouri Coteau and east to the edge of the Red River Valley. In Canada, it includes southern Manitoba and southeastern Saskatchewan. The Souris River basin lies within a major physiographic subregion known as the "Drift Plain," which generally is characterized by flat to gently rolling, moderately deep, loamy soils that originated from glacial till. The basin is at

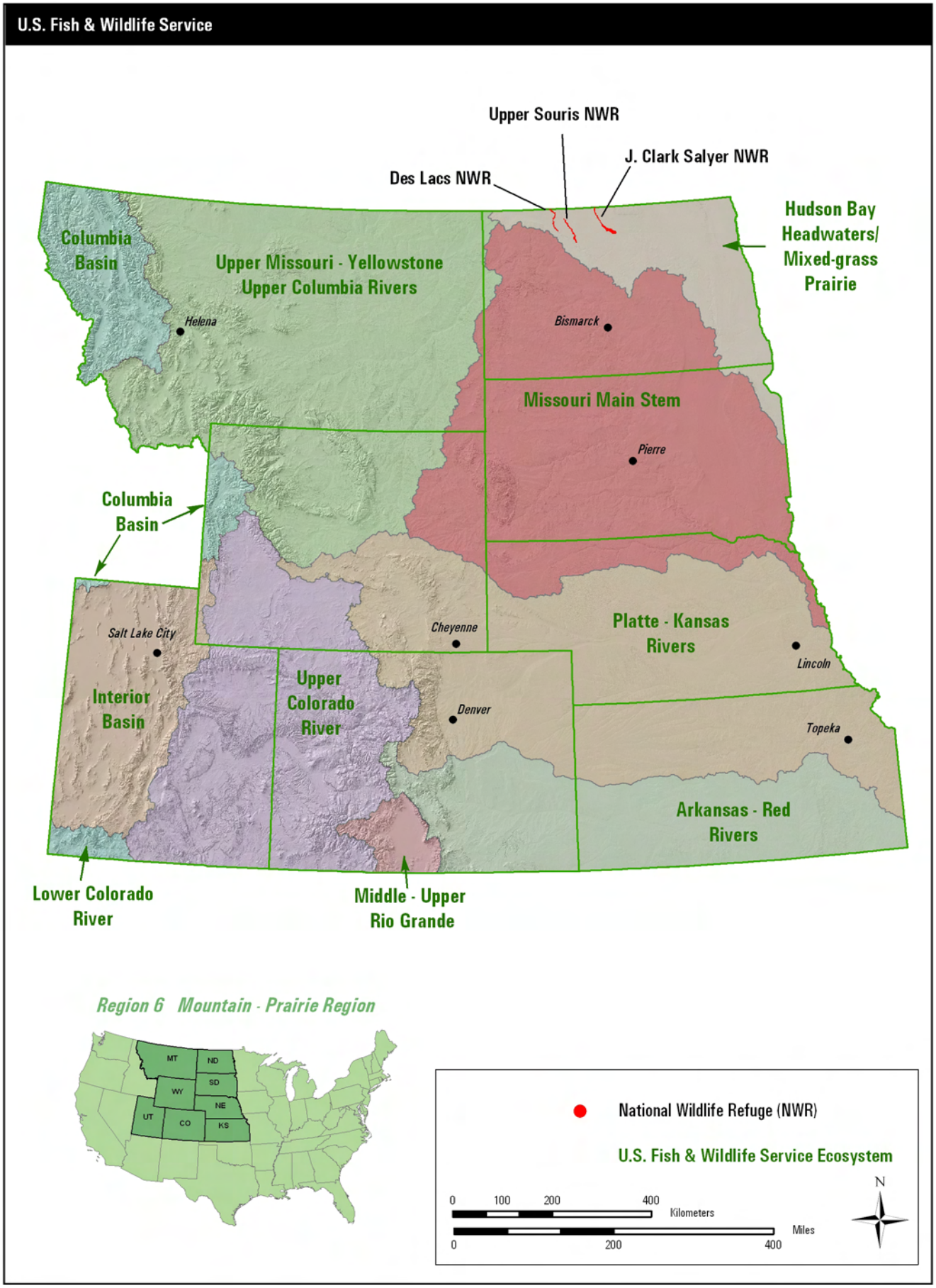

Figure 2. Ecosystem map.

the center of North America's extensive Prairie Pothole Region, which annually produces 20–25% of the continent's ducks and geese.

Until widespread cultivation of prairie soils beginning nearly a century ago, the major ecological community of the Hudson Bay headwaters/mixed-grass prairie ecosystem was northern mixed-grass prairie. Characteristic plants were grasses, especially needlegrasses, wheatgrasses, and big bluestem. Bur oak and quaking aspen dominated the Turtle Mountains, along the present-day Manitoba border. Woodland also occurred along much of the Souris River; some stunted bur oak and aspen was scattered among sandhills of present-day McHenry County (includes the southern one-third of J. Clark Salyer NWR); patches of trees and shrubs were infrequently encountered at Des Lacs NWR; and woody vegetation was rare elsewhere.

The contemporary landscape of the Souris River basin is dominated by annually tilled cropland (figure 3). Major crops include cereal grains, principally wheat, and various oilseeds. Some cropland areas classified as "highly erodible" have been seeded to perennial, herbaceous cover ("old cropland in seeded herbaceous cover" in figure 3) under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Hay is harvested from seeded upland areas once annually, usually in early to midsummer. Native meadows along the Souris River also supply annual hay crops. In addition, some seasonally flooded wetland basins supply hay (typically late summer). There is almost no irrigated cropland. Ranching for beef cattle, usually cow-calf operations, is common locally especially in the hilly, sandy area of McHenry County (southeastern part of the basin) and along the lower half of the Souris River.

Population growth is not an important issue in the area. Rural towns are small (populations are typically less than 1,000) and widely scattered. Most people are concentrated in the south-central part of the area—in a small city (Minot) and the nearby Minot Air Force base, totaling about 40,000 people.

Major threats to the ecosystem's natural resources mostly are related to agriculture. Before Euro-American settlement, the basin was a vast mosaic of prairie and broad, shallow wetlands. Most of this landscape has been drained and cultivated to produce crops. Elevated levels of wind- and waterborne sediments enter the Souris and Des Lacs rivers via intermittent streams. This sedimentation is a major threat to the ecological function and biodiversity of riverine wetlands. Scientists currently are assessing the magnitude of this threat.

Pesticides are widely used in the area (especially for oil seed crops) and, along with heavy metals and other contaminants, may enter the rivers.

Invasion by introduced and woody plant species is a major threat to the area. Trees and tall shrubs have expanded, fragmenting most remnant prairie that provides breeding habitat for grassland birds (most of which are exhibiting continental population declines). Leafy spurge has garnered most attention in the area as a noxious weed species of management concern. However, smooth brome (an introduced grass) probably is the most significant, long-term threat to the floristic diversity of remnant native prairies in the area.

The ecological function and productivity of the Souris River is significantly compromised by three major dams along its course. Historically, the Souris River was a broad, temporally dynamic river, heavily braided along much of its course in present-day North Dakota. The meandering main river channel often was indistinct, characterized by overbank flooding and the development of oxbow ponds. Today, the river system is more static than dynamic. A major reservoir occurs behind a dam at Upper Souris NWR. Water levels of this reservoir have been largely regulated for flood control and water storage. However, the timing of water releases from this and upstream reservoirs does not coincide with that of historical spring flood events, with negative implications for nesting by migratory birds downstream. Much of the midriver section is channelized. Natural processes such as streambed scouring and silt transport are inhibited.

National and Regional Mandates

This section presents highlights of legal mandates, Service policy, and existing resource plans that directly influenced development of this CCP.

Refuges are managed to achieve the mission and goals of the Refuge System and the designated purpose of the refuge unit as described in establishing legislation or executive orders, or other establishing documents. Key concepts and guidance of the Refuge System are provided in the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (Administration Act), Title 50 of the "Code of Federal Regulations," the "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manual" and most recently through the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.

The Improvement Act amends the Administration Act by providing a unifying mission for the Refuge System, a new process for determining compatible public uses at refuges and a requirement that each refuge will be managed under a CCP. The Improvement Act states that wildlife conservation is the priority of Refuge System lands and that the Secretary of the Interior will ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental

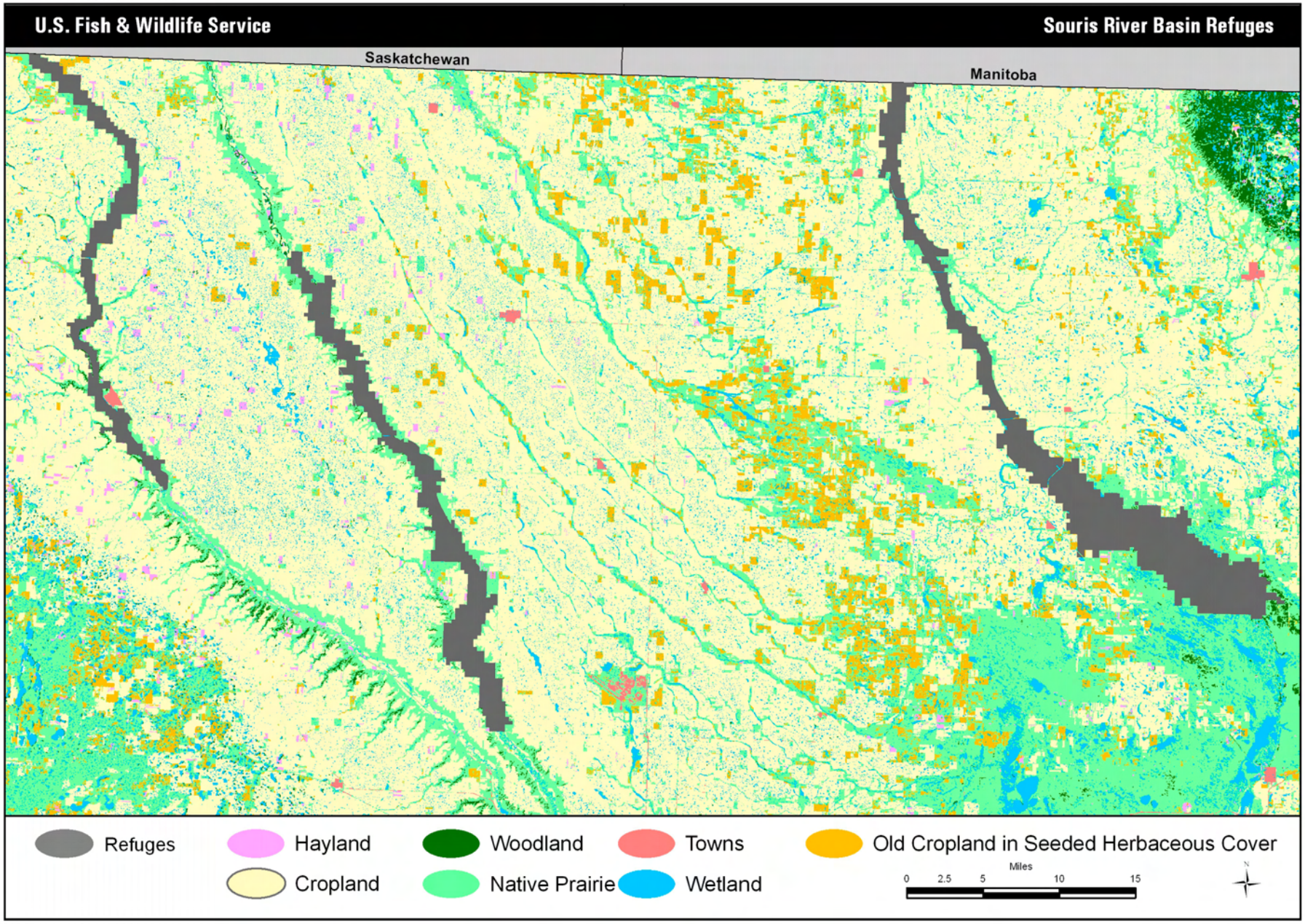

Figure 3. Landscape of the Souris River basin in north-central North Dakota. (Des Lacs NWR, Upper Souris NWR, and J. Clark Salyer NWR are represented west to east by long, gray polygons.)

health of refuge lands are maintained. Each refuge must be managed to fulfill the Refuge System mission and the specific purposes for which it was established. The Improvement Act requires the Service to monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants at each refuge.

The Improvement Act declares that compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are legitimate and appropriate, priority public uses of the Refuge System. Six uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation) are to receive special consideration, in planning and management, more than all other general public uses of the Refuge System.

A detailed list of these and other laws and executive orders that may affect the Souris River basin refuges' CCP or the Service's implementation of the CCP is provided in appendix B.

Service policies providing guidance on planning and the day-to-day management of a refuge are contained within the "National Wildlife Refuge System Manual" and the "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manual."

Refuge Contributions to National and Regional Plans

The Souris River basin refuges contribute to the conservation efforts described here.

Fulfilling the Promise

A 1999 report, "Fulfilling the Promise, The National Wildlife Refuge System" (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 1999), is the culmination of a year-long process by teams of Service employees to evaluate the Refuge System nationwide. This report was the focus of the first national Refuge System conference in 1998—attended by refuge managers, other Service employees, and representatives from leading conservation organizations.

The report contains 42 recommendations packaged with three vision statements dealing with wildlife and habitat, people, and leadership. This CCP deals with all three of these major topics and the planning team looked to the recommendations in the document for guidance throughout the plan.

Partners in Flight, Conservation of the Land Birds of the United States: *Northern Mixed-grass Prairie*

The "Partners in Flight" program began in 1990 with the recognition of declining population levels of many migratory bird species. The challenge, according to the program, is managing human population growth while maintaining functional natural ecosystems. To meet this challenge, Partners in Flight worked to identify priority land-bird species and habitat types. Partners in Flight activity has resulted in 52 bird conservation plans covering the continental United States.

The primary goal of Partners in Flight is to provide for the long-term health of the bird life of this continent. The first priority is to prevent the rarest species from going extinct. The second priority is to prevent uncommon species from descending into threatened status. The third priority is to "keep common birds common."

There are 58 physiographic areas, defined by similar physical geographic features, wholly or partially contained within the contiguous United States and several others wholly or partially in Alaska. The Souris River basin refuges lie within the northern mixed-grass prairie, which is physiographic area 37 (figure 4).

The area includes almost the entire eastern half of South Dakota and central North Dakota, from the Red River Valley on the east, to the Missouri River and Montana border on the south and west. In Canada, it includes a small portion of southern Manitoba and a swath that crosses Saskatchewan and extends into Alberta. The southern edge of this physiographic area is the terminus of a glacial moraine parallel to the course of the nearby Missouri River. To the north, prairie gives way to aspen parkland.

Precipitation declines and evaporation rates increase from east to west across the northern mixed-grass prairie, resulting in differences in the height of dominant grasses. To the east, the mixed grass begins as topography rises out of the tall-grass prairie of the Red River Valley. Grass height gradually decreases toward the western boundary of this physiographic area.

Because of the glacial history of the northern mixed-grass prairie and the relationship between precipitation and evapotranspiration, the area is dotted with thousands of depressions that range from permanently to periodically wet. This area is the area known as the Prairie Pothole Region. Internally, the various moraines are particularly rugged and marked by potholes.

Priority bird species and habitats of the northern mixed-grass prairie include:

Grassland

- Baird's sparrow
- greater prairie-chicken
- McCown's longspur

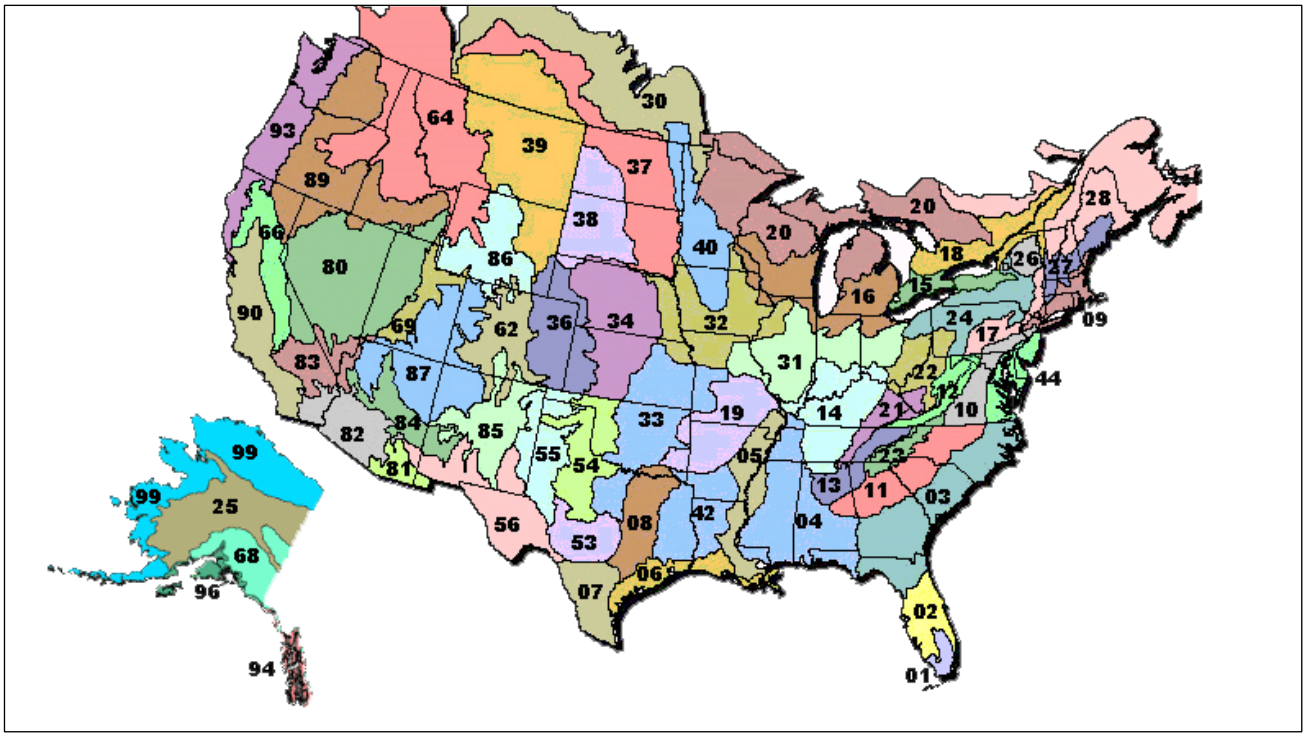

Figure 4. Physiographic areas of the United States.

Sprague's pipit

Le Conte's sparrow

Wetland

yellow rail

Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow

marbled godwit

Riparian Woodland

Bell's vireo

River Sandbars

piping plover

waterfowl

shorebirds

Several high-priority species of shorebirds breed in the northern mixed-grass prairie, and huge numbers of more northerly breeding bird species pass through during migration. This includes most of the global population of very high-priority species such as buff-breasted sandpiper and Hudsonian godwit.

Maintenance of large, unfragmented, grassland ecosystems is the conservation objective for areas such as the Missouri Coteau where agriculture is not dominant. On the drift prairie and other agricultural areas, conservation of discrete blocks of grassland-wetland complexes is recommended.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) was originally written in 1986. The plan envisioned a 15-year effort to achieve landscape conditions that could sustain waterfowl populations. Specific NAWMP objectives are to increase and restore duck populations to the average levels of the 1970s—62 million breeding ducks and a fall flight of 100 million birds.

By 1985, waterfowl populations had plummeted to record lows. Habitat that waterfowl depend on was disappearing at a rate of 60 acres per hour. Recognizing the importance of waterfowl and wetlands to North Americans and the need for international cooperation to help in the recovery of a shared resource, the United States and Canada governments developed a strategy to restore waterfowl populations through habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement. Mexico became a signatory to the plan in 1994.

The plan is innovative because of its international scope, plus its implementation at the regional level. Its success depends on the strength of partnerships called "joint ventures," involving federal, state, provincial, tribal, and local governments; businesses; conservation organizations; and individual citizens.

Joint ventures are regionally based, self-directed partnerships that carry out science-based conservation

through a wide array of community participation. Joint ventures develop implementation plans focusing on areas of concern identified in the plan.

To date, the NAWMP contains 12 habitat joint ventures and 2 species joint ventures with a wide variety of public and private partners. As of the end of 2003, plan partners have invested more than $3.2 billion to protect, restore, or enhance more than 13.1 million acres of habitat. The Souris River basin refuges lie within the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV).

Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Implementation Plan

The Prairie Pothole Region remains the most important waterfowl-producing region on the continent, generating more than half of North America's ducks. Nearly 15% of the continental waterfowl population comes from the PPJV region (Montana, the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Iowa). As many as 10 million ducks and 2 million geese use this region during migration or for nesting. The wetlands and associated grassland in the PPJV region provide breeding habitat to more than 200 species of migratory birds.

The PPJV implementation plan was prepared in 2005, and outlined a mission, vision, goals, objectives, and strategies for joint venture activities. Individual state action groups and steering committees prepared state action plans that "stepped down" joint venture activities to the state and local level.

The goal of the PPJV is to increase waterfowl populations through habitat conservation projects that improve natural diversity across the prairie pothole landscape of the United States. The joint venture attempts to carry out landscape-level habitat projects so that waterfowl populations increase during the wet years and stabilize under moderate wetland conditions. Since little can be done to stabilize breeding populations across the Prairie Pothole Region during extended drought, joint venture strategies are designed to carry out actions that take advantage of years when precipitation is at least normal.

Wetland Protection Objective

Protect in perpetuity 1.4 million acres of high-priority wetlands at risk, including 1.2 million acres through perpetual easements and 200,000 acres through fee-title acquisitions.

Grassland Protection Objective

Protect in perpetuity 10.4 million acres of priority (over 55 acres in size) native prairie, including 10 million acres through perpetual easements and 400,000 acres through fee-title acquisitions.

Wetland Restoration Objective

Restore wetlands sufficient to carry an additional 492,000 total breeding duck pairs over the capacities identified in table 1 of the "Prairie Pothole Joint Venture 2005 Implementation Plan, Section II—Waterfowl Plan."

Grassland Restoration Objective

Restore 393,000 acres of grasslands associated with high-density wetland communities.

Recovery Plans for Federally Listed Threatened or Endangered Species

Where federally listed threatened or endangered species occur at the Souris River basin refuges, management goals and strategies in their respective recovery plans will be followed. The list of threatened or endangered species that occur on the refuges will change as species are listed or delisted, or as listed species are discovered on refuge lands.

Edward Henry/USFWS

Lake Darling at Upper Souris NWR is within the area designated as critical habitat for the federally listed piping plover.

At the time of plan approval, Upper Souris NWR is following the draft recovery plan for piping plovers in the northern Great Plains (USFWS 1994). The Service conducted a biological evaluation of the actions in this CCP per section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (see appendix C).

State Comprehensive Conservation Wildlife Strategy

Over the past several decades, documented declines of wildlife populations have occurred nationwide. Congress created the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program in 2001. This program provides states and territories with federal dollars to support conservation aimed at preventing wildlife from becoming endangered and in need of protection under the Endangered Species Act. The SWG program represents an ambitious endeavor to take

an active hand in keeping species from becoming threatened or endangered in the future.

According to the SWG program, each state, territory, and the District of Columbia must complete a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy (CWCS) by October 1, 2005 to receive future funding.

These strategies will help define an integrated approach to the stewardship of all wildlife species, with additional emphasis on species of concern and habitats at risk. The goal is to shift focus from single-species management and highly specialized individual efforts to a geographically based, landscape-oriented, fish and wildlife conservation effort. The Service approves CWCSs and administers SWG program funding.

The State of North Dakota CWCS was reviewed and information was used during development of the CCP. The goals and objectives of the State of North Dakota CWCS are supported by the CCP through implementation of habitat goals and objectives.

The Planning Process

This CCP for the three Souris River basin refuges is intended to comply with the Improvement Act, NEPA, and implementing regulations of the acts. The Service's policy establishes requirements and guidance for Refuge System planning, including CCPs and step-down management plans to ensure that planning efforts comply with the Improvement Act. The planning policy identifies several steps of the CCP and EA process (also see figure 5):

- Form a planning team and conduct preplanning.
- Initiate public involvement and scoping.
- Draft the vision statement and goals.
- Develop and analyze alternatives, including the proposed action.
- Prepare the draft CCP and EA.
- Prepare and adopt the final CCP and EA and issue a "finding of no significant impact" (FONSI) or determine if an environmental impact statement is needed.
- Implement the CCP; monitor and evaluate.
- Review the CCP every 5 years and revise it every 15 years.

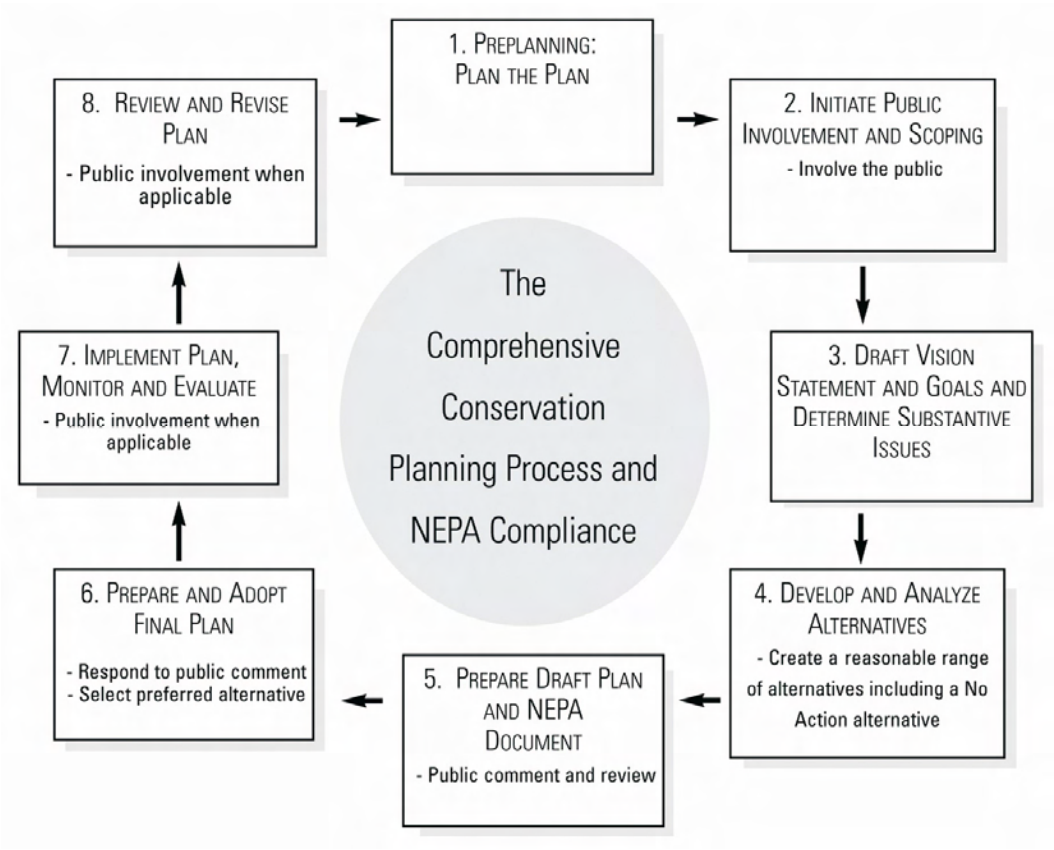

Figure 5. The Planning Process

The Service began the preplanning process for the refuges in June 2002. A planning team was developed shortly after an initial kickoff meeting, which included the following team members:

- Service personnel from the refuges and division of refuge planning (region 6, Lakewood, Colorado)
- Personnel from NDGF
- Personnel from USGS's biological resources division

A list of planning team members and other major contributors to development of this CCP is in appendix D. Several items were addressed during preplanning including the development of a mailing list, planning schedule, and public involvement plan. Internal scoping was conducted by identifying refuge qualities and issues over a course of several meetings.

The Service developed four unique management alternatives based on the issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed during the scoping process.

The evaluation of the alternatives was documented in "Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environment Assessment—Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge, J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge, Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge," which was published in February 2007. After the public comment period for the draft CCP and EA, the Service finalized the CCP.

Coordination with the Public

Public scoping began January 17, 2003, with publication in the *Federal Register* of the notice of intent (NOI) to prepare a CCP and associated environmental document for the three refuges.

A mailing list of more than 220 names was created and includes private citizens; local, regional, and state government representatives and legislators; other federal agencies; and nonprofit organizations (see appendix E).

In March 2003, the Service sent a planning update to each individual on the mailing list. Information was provided on the history of the Refuge System and the CCP process, along with a schedule of and invitation to upcoming open houses. Open houses were announced in local newspapers, on radio stations, and on television stations. Flyers were posted at local businesses throughout the region. Announcements were made at local organizations including, Minot City Council, Bottineau County Wildlife Club, and Rotary Club meetings.

The Service held six open houses March 24–27, 2003. At each meeting, the CCP planner or refuge personnel gave a presentation on the history of the program along with an overview of the CCP and NEPA processes. Attendees were encouraged to ask questions and offer comments. The Service invited attendees to submit additional thoughts or questions in writing and gave each a two-page comment form to complete. The turnout was mixed, from a few attendees to 18 individuals at a single-refuge meeting.

In addition to holding scoping meetings, the Service sent postage-paid comment forms to everyone on the mailing list with an April 30, 2003, response deadline.

The Service sent a second planning update (with comment form) to each individual on the mailing list in November 2003. This update provided information on the ongoing public involvement effort and a summary of the public comments received during the open houses.

The Service considered the input gathered from open houses, planning updates, and public comments during development of this CCP.

State Coordination

In July 2002, an invitation letter to participate in the CCP process was sent by the Service's regional director (region 6), to the director of the NDGF. Local NDGF wildlife managers and refuge staff maintain excellent and on-going working relations that precede the start of the CCP process. An NDGF representative is part of the core CCP planning team and has been a participant in each workshop. The NDGF's mission is to "protect, conserve, and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for sustained public consumptive and nonconsumptive uses." The NDGF is responsible for managing natural resource lands owned by the state, in addition to enforcement responsibilities for the state's fish, wildlife, and endangered species. The state currently manages about 78,000 acres in support of wildlife, recreation, and fisheries.

In November 2002, an invitation letter to participate in the CCP process was sent by the regional director to the state engineer of the North Dakota State Water Commission. A commission representative is part of the CCP planning team, but the commission was not a participant in the planning workshops.

The refuge managers initially contacted elected officials in January 2003. They were contacted again via two planning updates that provided information on the CCP process, outlined the public meeting schedule, and included a summary of public comments received.

Coordination with other Federal Agencies

In July 2002, an invitation letter to participate in the CCP process was sent by the Service's regional

director to the colonel of the St. Paul District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). A representative was assigned to the core planning team. Input has been provided to the CCP through attendance at planning workshops and review of planning documents.

Tribal Coordination

On July 26, 2002, six Native American tribal governments in North Dakota and South Dakota (Sisseton–Wahpeton Sioux, Spirit Lake Tribal Council, Standing Rock Sioux, Three Affiliated Tribes [Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara], Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board, and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) were contacted through a letter from the Service's regional director. The letter provided information about the upcoming CCP and invited recipients to serve on the core planning team. Responses were as follows:

- The Service received a response from the chair of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewas and a tribal representative was assigned to the planning team. Tribal input has been obtained through review of CCP documents.
- The Service received a response from the Three Affiliated Tribes and two tribal representatives were assigned to the planning team. A tribal representative attended the vision and goals workshop. Additional input was obtained through review of CCP documents.

Results of Scoping

Table 1 shows the planning process activities. The Service used comments collected from scoping meetings and correspondence to help develop key issues. The Service determined alternatives that could most appropriately address these issues (as documented in the draft CCP and EA). Chapter 2 provides a summary of these issues and the associated resource ramifications.

"Appendix E, Public Involvement" includes comments received during the public review of the draft CCP and EA, along with responses by the Service.

Plan Amendment and Revision

The Service will review this CCP annually to determine the need for revision. A revision will occur when significant information becomes available.

Detailed step-down management plans (see chapter 4) that address the completion of specific strategies will support achievement of goals and objectives for the Souris River basin refuges.

Revisions to the CCP and the step-down management plans will be subject to public review and NEPA compliance.

At a minimum, the Service will evaluate the CCP every 5 years and revise the CCP after 15 years.

Table 1. Planning process summary for the Souris River basin refuges, North Dakota.

Date	*Event*	*Outcome*
June 3–6, 2002	CCP kickoff meeting.	Toured refuges. Kickoff meeting (CCP overview; establishment of planning team; identified purpose of the refuges, history, and establishing authority; developed planning schedule).
January 2003	NOI (to prepare the CCP) published in the *Federal Register*.	Notified the public of the upcoming preparation of the CCP.
January 14–15, 2003	Vision and goals workshop.	Conducted internal scoping by developing initial issues and qualities lists. Developed a vision statement and goals.
March 18–20, 2003	News releases for public meetings sent to local newspapers, and radio and television stations.	Notified public of opportunities for involvement in the CCP process.
March 24, 2003	Public open house in Mohall, North Dakota.	Opportunity for public to learn about the CCP.
March 25, 2003	Public open house in Bowbells, North Dakota.	Opportunity for public to learn about the CCP.
March 26, 2003	Public open houses in Bottineau and Kenmare, North Dakota.	Opportunity for public to learn about the CCP.

Table 1. Planning process summary for the Souris River basin refuges, North Dakota.

Date	*Event*	*Outcome*
March 27, 2003	Public open houses in Towner and Minot, North Dakota.	Opportunity for public to learn about the CCP.
March 2003	Site visit to refuges by USGS–Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center.	Toured refuges. Met with refuge staff. Collected data for an assessment of wetland conditions at the refuges.
April 2003	Site visit to refuges by Fort Collins Science Center (policy analysis science assistance branch).	USGS researchers met with refuge staff to understand refuge needs, visitation, and management issues to design a public use survey.
August 2003–August 2004	Survey distributed to refuge visitors.	Conducted research to assess (1) visitor experience, perceptions, and preferences, and (2) visitor spending in relation to recreation.
September 2–4, 2003	Wetlands biological workshop; field assessment.	Planning team toured refuges with representatives from Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center and discussed wetland conditions.
December 2003	Assessment of wetland conditions complete.	Report issued by USGS–Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center: A Biological Assessment of Wetland Conditions on the Souris River National Wildlife Refuges.
January 25–26, 2005	Alternatives workshop.	Developed a range of alternatives for the refuges.
March 15–16, 2005	Environmental consequences workshop and identification of the proposed action.	Reviewed the anticipated environmental consequences. Identified alternative B as the proposed action.
May 26, 2005	Objectives workshop.	Reviewed the proposed objectives, strategies, and rationale for implementation of the proposed action (i.e., draft CCP).
June 2006	Internal review of the draft CCP and EA.	Received comments on the draft CCP and EA.
February 2–March 19, 2007	Release of the draft CCP and EA for public review.	Received comments on the revised draft CCP and EA.
March 6, 2007	Public open house in Minot, ND.	Increased public understanding of the draft CCP and EA. Received public comments about the draft CCP and EA.
August 2007	CCP approval.	Selection of the preferred alternative (“B”) for the final CCP.