

Planning Update

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Issue 1, May 2007

The National Wildlife Refuge System

The Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge Complex (MT) is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

The Refuge System began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first bird sanctuary and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife. This small network of sanctuaries expanded and became the National Wildlife Refuge System—the largest system of lands in the world dedicated for the conservation of wildlife.



Kathy Tribby/USFWS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) administers the Refuge System.

What is a comprehensive conservation plan?

In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Improvement Act). This legislation provides clear guidance for management of the Refuge System including a new mission statement.

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.

To support and fulfill this mission, the Improvement Act requires that, by 2012, the Service will have developed a comprehensive conservation plan for

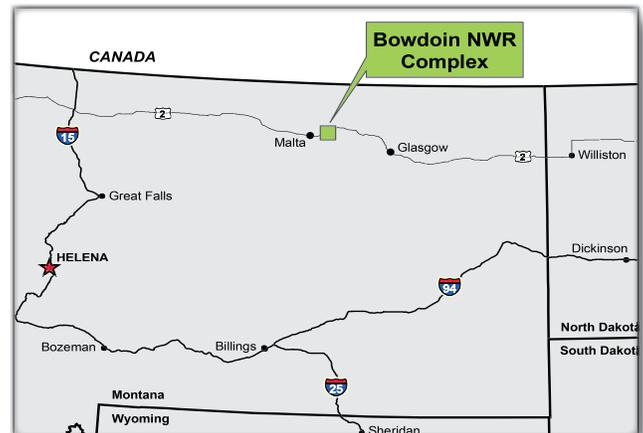
each land unit in the Refuge System at the time of the act.

To meet this requirement, the Service has started work on a comprehensive conservation plan for Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge Complex (refuge complex). This 15-year plan will provide long-range guidance and management direction for all of the refuge complex's programs. The plan will outline a vision statement and supporting goals, objectives, and strategies. It is a "living" document that will be updated every 15 years.

The accompanying environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), will describe management alternatives considered and their effects on the environment.

In summary, the comprehensive conservation plan will do the following:

1. Outline a vision
2. Guide management decisions
3. Outline goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve the refuge complex's vision and purposes



4. Provide other agencies and the public with an understanding of the management strategies to be carried out at the refuge complex

Refuge Complex Planning Area

National Wildlife Refuges
Bowdoin, Creedman Coulee, Black Coulee, Hewitt Lake, Lake Thibadeau

Bowdoin Wetland Management District
—7 waterfowl production areas
—refuge, flowage, wetland, and grassland easements

75,521 Total Acres
— 26,261 acres in fee title
— 49,260 acres in conservation easements



Ducks at Pearce Waterfowl Production Area, Montana.

James Graham/USFWS

Purposes for Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge [NWR], Black Coulee NWR, Creedman Coulee NWR, and Lake Thibadeau NWR—*“As a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.”*

Bowdoin NWR—*“That such part of said lands as the Secretary of Agriculture may deem proper be reserved for use as a shooting area to be operated under a cooperative agreement or lease with the Montana State Game Commission or such other operating agency as may be approved.”*

“The reservation of these lands as a migratory waterfowl refuge is subject to the use thereof by [the Department of Interior] for irrigation and other incidental purposes.”

Bowdoin NWR and Bowdoin Wetland Management District—*“For any other management purpose, for migratory birds.”*

Bowdoin Wetland Management District—*“As Waterfowl Production Areas subject to ... all of the provisions of such Act [Migratory Bird Conservation Act] ... except the inviolate sanctuary provisions.”*

Black Coulee NWR, Creedman Coulee NWR, Hewitt Lake NWR, and Lake Thibadeau NWR—*“Water conservation, drought relief, and migratory bird and wildlife conservation purposes ... wildlife conservation demonstration unit and closed refuge.”*

Hewitt Lake NWR—*“Water conservation, drought relief, stock water, and migratory waterfowl and wildlife conservation purposes ... and maintain a closed refuge ... wildlife conservation demonstration unit and closed refuge.”*

“Purposes of land-conservation and land utilization program.”

“For use and administration under applicable laws as refuges for migratory birds and other wildlife.”

“As a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife ... nothing herein shall affect the disposition of the oil and gas deposits therein.”



James Graham/USFWS

A wetland easement in Phillips County.

Facts About the Refuge Complex

- Historically managed for migratory birds, with an emphasis on waterfowl and shorebirds
- In the Prairie Pothole Region
- Habitat includes grassland (short- and mixed-grass prairie) and freshwater and saline wetlands
- Public use includes wildlife observation, wildlife photography, hunting, fishing, interpretation, and environmental education
- 2,500 visitors annually



Patience Wiederrick/USFWS

Bowdoin Lake, Montana

What are the steps and estimated completion dates for this planning process?

1. Preplanning, October 2006–June 2007
2. Public scoping, April 2007–June 2007
3. Develop vision statement and goals, May 2007
4. Develop and analyze alternatives for addressing issues and achieving goals, November 2007
5. Prepare the draft comprehensive conservation plan and NEPA document, December 2007–July 2008
6. Public reviews the draft comprehensive conservation plan and NEPA document, August 2008
7. Develop the final comprehensive conservation plan, September 2008

Why did the Service send you this update?

The Service is widely distributing this planning update to generate interest in the planning process and collect ideas and thoughts from the public, state and local governments, organizations, and other partners.

You are receiving this update because you were identified as someone who

may want to be kept informed or share ideas about the future management of the refuge complex.

How can you participate in this process and provide comments?

There is an enclosed a comment form and return envelope for you to share your ideas with the planning team. The Service will also accept emails and other written formats. All written comments must be postmarked by June 30, 2007 to be considered.

You may also wish to participate in the upcoming public meeting on May 22, 2007 from 7–9 p.m. at the Great Northern Hotel (downstairs meeting room) in Malta, Montana. There will be a short presentation and planning team members will record your issues and ideas related to the refuge complex.

For directions to the meeting place, please contact the refuge complex office at 406/654 2863.

Will you be getting future planning updates?

If you would like to continue to receive periodic planning updates, please complete the enclosed “mailing list consent” form and return it in the envelope provided.

Since this mailing list is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, the Service needs your permission to place your name on the permanent mailing list. If you do not return this form, you will not receive any further updates.

Additional Information and Contacts

To learn more about the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge Complex, please visit the Web at www.fws.gov/bowdoin.

For questions or to provide comments by email, please contact the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge Complex at 406/654 2863 or bowdoin@fws.gov.

You may fax or mail your written comments to

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