

Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Planning Update

This planning update describes the progress the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we) has made in developing a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge. It also summarizes three alternatives the planning team considered for managing the refuge and includes information about how to obtain and comment on the draft CCP.

The Refuge

Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1962 for the purpose of protecting and conserving migratory birds. Due to its location at the confluence of the Chester River and the Chesapeake Bay, the refuge serves as important migrating and wintering waterfowl habitat. The 2,286 acre island-refuge contains a diverse variety of habitat types including tidal marshes, open water, fields, and forests.

Comprehensive Conservation Plans

In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. Its main components include a unifying mission for the Refuge System, a new process for determining compatible uses of refuges, and a requirement to prepare CCPs for each refuge in the Refuge System by 2012.

A CCP is a 15-year strategic plan guiding management for all refuge programs. Service policy requires



Jonathan Friday/USFWS

Canada geese on the refuge

that CCPs be revised at least every 15 years, or sooner if significant new information surfaces.

Draft Plan Available for Public Review

We began preparing a CCP for this refuge in 2002. We have now completed a draft plan which we are distributing for a 30-day public review and comment period.

An environmental assessment (EA), required by the National Environmental Policy Act, accompanies the draft plan. The EA describes the three alternatives that we evaluated in detail to achieve the refuge purposes, vision and goals (see highlights below). It also provides an analysis of their effects on the environment.

We have identified alternative B as the Service-preferred alternative.

How to Obtain a Draft Plan

You may request a hard copy or CD-ROM of the draft plan by contacting our office at Eastern Neck refuge via phone or email.

Telephone: 410/639-7056

Email: northeastplanning@fws.gov

You may also view and download the draft CCP/EA online:

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Eastern%20Neck/ccphome.html>

How to Provide Comments

We invite you to share your comments about the draft plan either in writing or in person at our public meeting. We will accept letters, faxes, and emails (see below). To be considered, all comments must be emailed or postmarked by October 30, 2009.

Mail: Nancy McGarigal
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035

Phone: 413/253-8562

Fax: 413/253-8468

Email: northeastplanning@fws.gov
(Please put "Eastern Neck NWR" in the subject line)



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Canvasback duck

Public Meeting

You may also wish to participate in our open house/public meeting in Rock Hall, MD. We will hold both an afternoon and an evening session. At each session there will be a short presentation on the draft plan, and then we will record any comments you would like to provide.

September 24th 2009 - Rock Hall, MD

3:30 pm - 5:00 pm & 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

Rock Hall Municipal Building

5585 Main Street

Rock Hall, MD 21661

Phone: 410/639-7611

For directions, please visit:

<http://www.rockhallmd.com/directions.php>

Highlights of Alternatives Evaluated

Alternative A (Current Management)

This alternative describes our current refuge programs on 2,286 acres for habitat management, wildlife inventories and monitoring, administration, and visitor services.

Shoreline Protection

- Continue to work with partners to maintain existing breakwaters and on-shore armoring and minimize public access where it impacts shoreline

Habitat Management

- Continue to protect 856 acres of tidal marsh through management of invasive species and planting of native marsh grasses
- Continue to maintain 3 moist soil units (MSUs) on 28 acres to provide forage and resting habitat for waterfowl
- Continue to manage BayScape Garden and up to 30 acres of grasslands for butterflies and grassland dependent birds through



Diamondback terrapin

Ryan Hagerly/USFWS

Draft Goals

We developed the following goals to describe the desired future conditions of the refuge and to establish a framework within which to develop management objectives.

Goal 1: Protect and enhance Service Trust Resources, species and habitats of special concern in the Chesapeake Bay region.

Goal 2: Maintain a diversity of community types comprised of native plants and animals to pass on to future generations of Americans.

Goal 3: Conduct effective outreach activities and develop and implement quality wildlife-dependent public use programs, with an emphasis on wildlife observation and photography, to raise public awareness of the refuge and Refuge System, and promote the enjoyment and stewardship of natural resources in the Chesapeake Bay.

mowing, prescribed burning, and native grass seeding

- Continue to maintain 708 acres of forest habitat to benefit songbirds and raptors; invasive plant control is a priority

Croplands for Waterfowl

- Continue managing 557 acres of cropland to provide food for wintering waterfowl through a cooperative farming agreement

Visitor Services

- Continue to offer current levels of outreach, interpretation, and environmental education and maintain 5 walking trails and 1 water trail for wildlife observation and photography
- Continue to provide regulated deer hunting, a 2-day youth turkey hunt and recreational crabbing and fishing.

Refuge Administration

- Maintain existing facilities and current staffing, including three positions based at Eastern Neck Refuge

Alternative B (Focus on Tidal Wetlands & Waterfowl; Service-preferred)

This alternative focuses on the protection and restoration of the refuge's shoreline and tidal marsh. As the Service-preferred alternative, it represents the array of management actions the Service believes will work best toward achieving refuge purposes, goals and objectives.

Shoreline Protection

- In addition to alternative A, develop three new off-shore breakwater projects to protect



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Eastern Neck NWR Youth Fishing Day

shoreline from erosion; protecting Hail Point is a priority

Habitat Management

- Expand tidal marsh restoration program on an additional 108 acres
- Increase the number of MSUs to 7, encompassing a total of 50 acres, to provide additional resting and foraging habitat for migrating and wintering waterfowl
- Increase forest habitat on the refuge by 173 acres to enhance nesting and stopover habitat for migratory birds and raptors; promote larger, contiguous stands

Croplands for Waterfowl

- Reduce to 372 acres and consolidate croplands into fewer, larger fields to increase use by waterfowl

Visitor Services

- Enhance quality of existing interpretation, education, wildlife observation and photography programs
- Enhance outreach to visitors and local and regional communities

Refuge Administration

- Add two new positions: Park ranger/law enforcement position to conduct outreach and enforce regulations; and, full-time

Draft Vision Statement

“Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge will sustain diverse and healthy tidal marsh, aquatic and uplands habitats so the refuge supports robust populations of Federal trust species and remains an essential link in the network of conserved lands in the Chesapeake Bay. Our successes will be supported by the strong partnerships we develop with other Federal agencies, State agencies, conservation organizations, land managers, and neighboring communities. Working with those partners will provide the opportunity to showcase and demonstrate a science-based, adaptive management approach, with emphasis on the protection and restoration of shoreline and tidal marsh.

We will continue to reward all who visit with an opportunity to immerse themselves in the natural sights and sounds of the Chesapeake Bay. The thrill of observing more than 100,000 migrating and wintering waterfowl moving in and out of the refuge each year, including the rare tundra swan, is an experience that forms a lasting impression about the wonders of nature. Visitors will also be delighted by the refuge’s healthy populations of bald eagles and ospreys as they dive for fish and attend to their young. They will also enjoy the opportunity to observe the phenomenon of over 100 species of birds migrating through each fall. We will enhance these and other refuge experiences by providing exceptional interpretive and visitor programs about the Chesapeake Bay and its rich diversity of natural and cultural resources.

We hope residents of neighboring communities on the Delmarva Peninsula will value the refuge for enhancing their quality of life. Within the National Wildlife Refuge System, the refuge will be treasured for conserving the Chesapeake Bay’s Federal trust resources and providing inspirational outdoor experiences for present and future generations of Americans.”

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BayScape Garden on the refuge

permanent biological technician to support the refuge’s biological program.

Alternative C (Focus on Tidal Wetlands and Forest Habitats)

Alternative C is distinguished by its emphasis on managing upland forest habitat to benefit forest-dependent species.

Shoreline Protection

- Same as alternative B

Habitat Management

- Expand tidal marsh restoration program same as alternative B
- Continue to manage 2 of the currently existing MSUs, and allow the remaining MSU to succeed to native forest vegetation
- Eliminate grassland management and allow to succeed to shrubland and forest; only exception is to maintain the BayScape Garden
- Allow 611 acres of grasslands and fields (for a total of 1,320 acres) to succeed to mature, mixed

deciduous forest, to support nesting and stopover habitat for migratory songbirds and raptors.

Croplands for Waterfowl

- Eliminate management of croplands allowing fields to naturally transition to shrubland and forest.

Visitor Services

- In addition to alternative B, develop an additional trail and further enhance environmental education program to include teacher workshops and senior programs, such as Elderhostel
- Expand turkey hunt

Refuge Administration

- Same as alternative B

Next Steps

1. Distribute draft CCP/EA for public review and comment until October 30, 2009
2. Hold public meeting in Rock Hall, MD on September 24, 2009
3. Evaluate all public comments and revise the CCP as warranted.
4. Submit final CCP for Regional Director approval.
5. If approved, publish a notice of availability in the Federal Register and distribute final plan.
6. Begin implementation of approved plan.

Contact Information

To learn more about Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge, please visit our website: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/easternneck/>.

You may reach refuge staff by telephone at 410/639-7056.

To learn more about the planning process contact:

Nancy McGarigal, Refuge Planner
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035
413/253-8562
413/253-8468 Fax



Monarch butterfly

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

September 2009



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
NWRS - Refuge Planning
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035

