

Chapter 2



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The Planning Process

- The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process
- Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

Service policy establishes an eight-step planning process that also facilitates compliance with NEPA (602 FW 3), as illustrated in figure 2.1. Our planning policy and CCP training materials describe each step in detail. Although the figure suggests those steps are discrete, two or three steps can happen concurrently. For more details on the planning process, please visit <http://policy.fws.gov/602fw3.html>.

Effective conservation usually begins with effective community involvement. To ensure that our future management of the Rachel Carson refuge will reflect the issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed by the public, we used a variety of public involvement techniques.



Figure 2.1. The Comprehensive Conservation Planning process and its relationship to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

An Early Planning Effort

- We developed and kept updating mailing lists of refuge neighbors, friends, professional contacts, and others for sharing information and updates about this CCP.
- In May and June 1998, refuge staff invited visitors to a series of morning coffees to discuss current refuge operations and the planning process. We sent four press releases about the CCP to 15 newspapers in Maine and New Hampshire. Local public access cable stations also ran notices. The York County Coast Star, southern Maine's primary local newspaper, raised public awareness by publishing a long article about our refuge planning. We designed and distributed leaflets about the morning coffees and our upcoming Issues Workbook.

- In summer 1999, we distributed to the public 500 copies of a 12-page Issues Workbook, the backbone of this plan's important public participation component. The workbook provided background information about the planning project and a means for interested citizens to share their concerns and thoughts on important refuge issues. A refuge volunteer recorded and tallied the responses in the more than 100 workbooks returned. In July 1999, we sent to our CCP mailing list an update summarizing the responses, and distributed it from the refuge.
- We also held several information-gathering workshops in 1999. They included a gathering of the Extended Planning Team in March, a Public Use and Community Goals meeting in June, and a Biological Resources meeting in June. Fifteen stakeholder representatives gathered at our facilitated all-day Alternatives Workshop in August. Refuge staff and 10 observers, including congressional representatives and Service administrators, assisted participants with setting goals in the topical areas of wildlife, community, public use, and water quality. We mailed a complete summary of the comments and the materials the workshop generated to participants and observers soon after.
- Refuge planning team members met several times per month to synthesize information and prepare the draft CCP, and briefed the Regional Office in September 1999. We provided additional updates to our Regional Office in 2001 and 2003. Other staff commitments delayed further work on the draft CCP until 2004.

Our Recent Planning Effort

The planning process restarted in the summer of 2004. This coincided with the development of a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) that lays the biological foundation for managing habitats, wildlife, and plants on the refuge. We also considered the refuge role in the larger network of conservation lands in southern Maine. Habitat management objectives and strategies were determined for lands now in refuge ownership using updated vegetation maps prepared by Sewall, Inc., in 2004. The Service evaluated lands proposed for acquisition using National Land Cover Data (NLCD) and a GIS watershed habitat analysis by the USFWS Gulf of Maine Coastal Program.

The core planning team included the refuge staff, regional office planning and GIS staff, a regional biologist, and a representative from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. Our staff continually gathers input from partners at management and conservation meetings and workshops.

We conducted a Wilderness Review of the refuge in November 2004. Humans have influenced this region for more than 400 years, most recently with dense settlements of roads and houses. As a result, neither the lands that compose the current, approved refuge acquisition boundary nor the lands within the preliminary project proposal are suitable for designation as wilderness. We have concluded that none of the wilderness inventory areas at the refuge meet the minimum criteria defined by the Wilderness Act to qualify as wilderness study areas, and, that no further investigation into wilderness designation is needed. For more details on the wilderness review, see appendix C.

In August 2006, we completed Step E, "Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA Document" and released a draft CCP/EA for a 30-day public review and comment. In addition, we held two public meetings/open houses on August 29 and September 7, 2006. We summarize those public meetings, the public comments we received, and our responses to those comments in appendix M. In some cases, our responses resulted in modifications of alternative B, our preferred alternative. Those included additions, corrections, or clarifications which we have incorporated into this final CCP.

Our Regional Director has signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), which certifies that this final CCP has met agency compliance requirements, will achieve refuge purposes, and help fulfill the Refuge System mission (appendix N). It also documents his determination that implementing this CCP will not have a significant impact on the human environment and, therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

We must formally revise this CCP every 15 years, or earlier, if conditions affecting the refuge have changed significantly. We will periodically monitor the plan to ensure that its strategies and decisions are being accomplished. We will use the data collected in routine inspections or programmatic evaluations to continually update and adjust management activities.

We will make these documents available to all interested parties. Implementation can begin immediately.

Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

From the Issues Workbook, public and focus group meetings, and planning team discussions, we developed a list of issues, opportunities, or other items requiring a management decision. We concentrated further on the issues, as those drove the analysis and comparison of alternatives found in chapter 2 of our draft CCP/EA. In chapter 4 of this final CCP, we present the general refuge management actions and the goals, objectives, and strategies that we designed to address those issues. Planning issues were generated by the planning team or were brought to our attention by our State or other partners or the public during scoping activities. Refuge staff also identified other issues and management concerns for address.

Planning Issues

1) How will we provide habitat to protect trust species?

Federal law charges the Service with sustaining populations of migratory birds, anadromous fish, and species listed as threatened or endangered, collectively referred to as “trust species.” In response, the Service seeks to provide habitat to support their life cycles. The Service and its partners who protect wildlife habitat—State agencies, local land trusts, the Maine Audubon Society, and national organizations including The Nature Conservancy and Trust for Public Land—have identified thousands of acres of unprotected habitat in southern coastal Maine that support 43 trust species whose populations are declining. In the preferred action, the Service seeks to protect an additional 5,558 acres of important salt marsh, tidal rivers, shrublands, freshwater wetlands, riparian areas, forests, and grasslands as part of the Rachel Carson refuge (See appendix A). The refuge also actively engages in watershed- and landscape-scale initiatives with conservation partners to support additional land conservation in this region of Maine. Generally, the lands we identified for protection are large blocks that provide habitat for the declining species as well as a diverse array of other wildlife. Coastal habitats are in smaller blocks, due to heavy settlement and the paucity of large, undeveloped tracts. All the lands we propose for acquisition are vulnerable to changes in land use that threaten to degrade, fragment, or eliminate their wildlife values.

2) How will we manage fish and wildlife populations and habitats?

The Rachel Carson refuge hosts large numbers of plant species and resident and migrant wildlife. Some of them, including the federal-listed endangered piping plover, Nelson’s and saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrows, and the New England cottontail, among others, depend on the refuge for breeding, feeding, or resting habitat. Targeted field surveys, such as annual breeding bird surveys, or research by university and state partners monitor and assess the abundance and distribution of wildlife populations. Wildlife species sensitive to predation or human disturbance, such as piping plover, receive targeted management that includes

seasonal beach closures and predator control. We manage some habitats to provide the range of habitat conditions necessary to support the suite of native wildlife on the refuge. The habitat goals, objectives, and strategies described in chapter 2, and in more detail in the Habitat Management Plan, provide a framework for guiding our decisions on managing habitat and wildlife.

- 3) How will we ensure the integrity of water quality and quantity to protect aquatic-dependent species?

All species, including humans, require water to stay alive. Water is at the center of most management decisions at the Rachel Carson refuge—protecting water quantity and quality to sustain healthy populations of fish, wildlife, and plants that depend on aquatic habitats. Nearly one-third of North America’s bird species use wetlands at some time during their life cycle; many of those use the refuge at some time during the year. Freshwater, estuarine, and marine wetlands, considered some of the most productive ecosystems in the world, all occur on the refuge.

Despite great improvements in water quality in Maine’s rivers and other aquatic environments, our understanding of the dynamics of those ecosystems is limited. The increasing land fragmentation and development close to wetlands in coastal Maine adds uncertainty about the health and sustainability of aquatic habitats for wildlife and humans. Baseline information is needed on the quantity and quality of water flowing through the refuge and the habitat requirements of the aquatic species (e.g., anadromous fish) that depend on it. The refuge will partner with watershed groups and government entities to develop and implement water monitoring initiatives and assess the impacts of land uses (e.g., stormwater runoff) on aquatic systems. The refuge also monitors and controls invasive aquatic species, where feasible.

- 4) How will we build community partnerships to protect and manage coastal wildlife habitats?

We believe that the Rachel Carson refuge has more neighbors than any other national wildlife refuge in the System. The refuge has 10 divisions, and owns land in 11 towns: Kittery, York, Ogunquit, Wells, Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, Biddeford, Saco, Old Orchard Beach, Scarborough, and Cape Elizabeth. Our opportunities to work with municipalities are expanding. To achieve its mission, the refuge must remain engaged in the land use and public use decisions of neighboring municipalities and conservation groups.

We have established many valuable partnerships to protect wildlife and their habitats in southern and coastal Maine. Southern Maine has been continuously settled since 1630, and is now experiencing record growth. The refuge lends its technical expertise to landscape-scale and watershed initiatives on identifying, protecting, and managing important wildlife habitats. Land protection by the refuge and its conservation partners contributes to the quality of life by controlling the demand for town services such as road maintenance, schools, and fire and police protection, providing places for the public to understand and appreciate their natural surroundings, and protecting water quality.

- 5) How will we provide and maintain high quality programs for the six priority public uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation)?

We allow hunting on eight divisions by permit only. More than 300 people buy permits each year from refuge headquarters. About 60 percent are white-tailed deer hunters. The refuge is open to deer, waterfowl, pheasant, and other upland

game hunting, and participates in Maine's special archery season. We have two youth hunt days; youth hunt areas allow falconry and are open for the late falcon-hunting season. The refuge follows state regulations, although it is more restrictive on some issues. We open new areas to hunting as we acquire them, provided they are sufficiently isolated from developed areas and no biological conflicts exist. We review and usually modify the hunting program each year. Due in part to a long tradition of hunting in the area, the refuge hunting program is generally well accepted. However, refuge neighbors and other landowners contact us each year with their concerns about some hunters' behavior and sometimes, about our regulations.

After completing the required process in September 2000, we formally opened the refuge for sport fishing. After a long consultation with the State of Maine, fishing groups, and anglers, we opened eight bank fishing and access areas on seven of the ten refuge divisions. Those areas were selected to minimize adverse impacts on habitat and wildlife resources, minimize conflicts with other existing public uses, and accommodate existing angler interest as much as possible. Most anglers pursue either sea run brown trout or striped bass, although other species occasionally are caught. In addition to the bank fishing areas, each of the 10 refuge divisions has a waterway that is accessible by watercraft. Those waterways provide additional opportunities for anglers to access the sections of rivers not open for bank fishing.

A traveler through coastal southern Maine likely will encounter at least one division of the refuge. However, many visitors and residents who pass may see only our boundary signs, "unauthorized entry prohibited." We have an opportunity to bring thousands of travelers and residents onto the refuge to learn about its operations, its wildlife and habitats, the Refuge System, and Rachel Carson's legacy. The refuge has informational kiosks and signs at a few trail heads with small parking areas. Responders to our issues workbook favored increasing visitor opportunities for watching wildlife in balance with the protection of wildlife and their habitats. We also seek to expand the number of informational kiosks to enhance understanding of refuge habitats, convey its messages, build support for its programs, and attract wildlife-oriented volunteers.

Responders to our workbook suggested we vastly increase our environmental education and interpretation program by establishing partnerships with educators and developing cooperative education programs with local schools and private organizations.

6) How will we build and maintain an active volunteer program?

The Friends of Rachel Carson was established in 1988. That small yet effective group has been instrumental in supporting the protection of important coastal habitats by the refuge. Volunteers are essential in implementing effective refuge programs and bolstering understanding and support among refuge neighbors and communities. The need for a committed, multi-talented, and geographically dispersed volunteer force is especially important at the Rachel Carson refuge because its units are spread across a 50-mile area. We believe strongly that program management and guidance from refuge staff are the keys to building and sustaining a committed, well-trained volunteer force.

7) How will we manage non-native, invasive species on refuge lands?

Most people recognize that non-native, invasive plants and animals can displace native species, degrade wetlands and other natural communities, and reduce natural diversity and wildlife habitat values. Non-native plants out-compete native

species by dominating light, water, and nutrient resources. We are concerned because, once established, invasive plants are expensive and labor-intensive to eliminate; they are able to establish easily, reproduce prolifically, and disperse readily, making their eradication difficult. Preventing new invasions is extremely important in maintaining biological diversity and native plant populations.

The refuge began to identify, locate, and map invasive plant species systematically on refuge lands. We will use that information to develop an integrated pest management program to guide projects to monitor, evaluate, and control invasives. Twenty non-native, invasive plant species are affecting the quality of native habitats on the refuge. In addition, hemlock woolly adelgid is documented on Gerrish Island near the Brave Boat Harbor Division. That insect pest has decimated hemlock stands in some areas south of New England. Little is known about the presence or the effect of aquatic invasive species such as the green crab. Further research is needed to understand the effects of all invasive species on the natural habitats of coastal Maine.

Other Issues to Address

1. How will we resolve potential conflicts in managing wildlife habitats and protecting historical resources?

The refuge is required by law to comply with the Section 106 of the National Historical Preservation Act (NHPA), which requires federal agencies to consider the effects of their undertakings on historical properties that are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The Refuge System Improvement Act establishes a mission for the System: “The mission of the 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.” That mission enables us to contribute to fulfilling U.S. obligations under international treaties.

Current management practices on the refuge take into consideration possible historical resources. Projects and habitat management plans routinely receive NHPA review from the historic preservation officers of our region and the state, who perform archaeological or historical studies as required.

The Maine State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) has led the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to decline issuance of two 404 wetland permits the refuge needs to authorize the restoration of its salt marsh. The SHPO contends that the salt marsh ditches are a historic landscape eligible for inclusion on the National Register, and that restoration work would have an adverse impact on that landscape. Although we disagree with the SHPO impact opinion, the Service, at SHPO request, has carefully recorded through photographs and measurements the dimensions and configurations of the ditching, and the SHPO recognizes that as sufficient mitigation. However, the Corps still declines to issue the permits without a Memorandum of Agreement between the Service and SHPO. The Service will seek a Solicitors review and opinion on the legitimacy of the Corps’ declining this permit. In addition, indications are that the Corps has issued 404 permits for similar activities conducted by other federal agencies and Service offices in Maine; the Solicitor’s review will include an examination of consistency in permit decisions by the Corps. The Solicitor’s opinion will establish a basis upon which the refuge will proceed with marsh restoration activities in the event we cannot resolve this permit matter with the Corps.

2. How will we respond to harbor dredging and beach nourishment that affect the refuge?

Currently, only one harbor dredge project is ongoing in the refuge, in the Webhannet River in Wells. It is a controversial one.

Several controversial beach nourishment projects have occurred along the southern Maine coast. That involves dredging sand from one location and placing it onto a beach, almost always in front of homes, to replace beach that has eroded.

Both of those practices fail to address the dynamic nature of beach and tidal river systems, where natural processes create constant change in beach conditions. Shoreline home development and its associated rock jetties limit the natural dynamics of those barrier beaches and prevent the natural movement of sand up or down the coast.

The refuge will work with others to review dredging and beach nourishment projects, and will not support new dredging projects in the existing waterways of the refuge. We will encourage towns to adopt more sustainable development patterns that limit or prevent beach development.