

Appendix N

John & Karen Hollingsworth/USFWS



Refuge landscape

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Finding of No Significant Impact Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

In August 2006, we published the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA) for the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The refuge spans over 5,293 acres and comprises ten divisions between the towns of Kittery and Cape Elizabeth in York and Cumberland Counties, Maine. That draft evaluates three alternatives for managing the refuge over the next 15 years, and carefully considers their impacts on the environment and their potential contribution to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) and refuge purposes and goals. Its appendixes provide additional information supporting the assessment. A brief overview of each alternative follows.

Alternative A: The Council of Environmental Quality regulations on implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require this “No Action” alternative. It would not change our resource management programs on refuge lands. Partnerships with federal, state, county, town, and non-governmental organizations and volunteers will continue to form the core of management activities. The priorities of the biological program will continue focusing on piping plover and least tern management, salt marsh monitoring and restoration, waterfowl management, limited fall shorebird surveys, sharp-tailed sparrow ecology, invasive plant evaluation and eradication, shrubland, thicket, and grassland management for migratory birds and New England Cottontail, and rare plant and animal conservation. Hunting and fishing opportunities will remain as they are. Other priority public use programs will continue – primarily wildlife observation, nature photography, and interpretation. Those will focus on the divisions in the refuge that offer such visitor facilities as parking, nature trails, and information kiosks. Continue to pursue acquisition from willing sellers of the 3,833 acres of land that remains privately owned in the approved acquisition boundary. Selecting this alternative would maintain the status quo in refuge management over the next 15 years. Thus, it provides a baseline for comparing or contrasting the two “action” alternatives.

Alternative B: The draft CCP/EA identifies this alternative as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)-proposed action. Selecting this alternative will protect the remaining 3,833 acres within the approved acquisition boundary and expand the refuge by 5,558 acres beyond its current approved boundary, help increase our protection and management of endangered, threatened or other species of concern, including migratory wildlife, build a new administrative complex including office space, maintenance facilities, and visitor contact station, combine the Moody, Lower Wells, Upper Wells, and Mousam River divisions into one Wells Bay Division, incorporate a pilot recreation fee program to support public use activities, enhance outreach and partnerships with local communities, expand the role and numbers of our Friends Group, and strengthen our relationships with neighbors and elected officials, and develop the Rachel Carson NWR as an outstanding center for research and demonstration emphasizing land management techniques for restoring and sustaining healthy estuarine ecosystems in concert with the National Land Management Research and Demonstration program. It is designed to expand and improve opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, including additional hunting and fishing, improve the availability and quality of interpretive signs and kiosks, nature trails, and parking areas, and to allow the refuge to benefit from its proximity to Portland and urban communities.

Alternative C: This alternative expands on alternative B, under the premise that more funding and staffing would allow us to implement more extensive biological programs, more than double the land in the approved acquisition boundary, and appreciably increase the number and quality of our priority public use programs. This alternative protects and manages more acres of most habitat types, and the strategies involve a greater commitment of resources. The protection of coastal habitats will remain a top priority. This alternative greatly expands the protection of contiguous upland habitat. Finally, our biological inventory and monitoring program would expand even beyond what is proposed in alternative B.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

We distributed the draft CCP/EA for a 31-day period of public review and comment from August 17 through September 18, 2006. We received 23 written responses, plus 18 additional oral comments at public meetings. Appendix J in the final CCP includes a summary of those comments and our responses to them.

After reviewing the proposed management actions, considering all public comments and our responses to them, I have determined that the analysis in the EA is sufficient to support my findings, described below.

I am selecting draft CCP/EA Alternative B (the Service-proposed action) as the final CCP for implementation, with these clarifications.

(1) The majority of the comments were enthusiastically supportive of the land expansion proposal. Several reviewers suggested that we consider the land expansion proposal in alternative C, which identifies 5,839 additional acres for a total of 11,397 acres. The land expansion proposal in the Service's preferred alternative represents what the Service can realistically accomplish in 15 years. We will work with our conservation partners to protect these additional lands.

(2) Several comments suggested that the refuge should not charge fees to access the refuge. The refuge will institute a pilot recreation fee program to charge and collect an entrance fee for the refuge. Our trial recreation fee program will help generate important revenue needed to support public use activities established under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA). We realize that the new recreation fee program will require an adjustment period. The REA directs the Secretary of the Interior to publish advance notice in the Federal Register six months before new recreation fee areas are established. We will post a notice at the collections sites informing the public of the anticipated entrance fees. We may adjust fees periodically to reflect changes in administrative costs, management goals, or public comment, and will notify the public at least six months before any such adjustment.

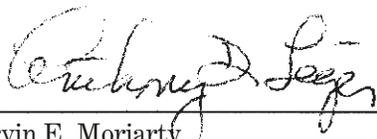
(3) One reviewer would like us to consider having as a goal the establishment of one interpretive trail in each of the towns that the refuge has lands within. This alternative will provide the public an opportunity to get out onto every unit in almost of every town within the refuge for wildlife observation/photography. Additional public uses are also provided on many other units for hunting and fishing. Extending and adding trails at Rachel Carson NWR will be carefully considered. We must first detail, inventory and map the archaeological and cultural features, sensitive habitats and species currently present before we can determine the appropriateness and compatibility of new trails on the refuges. Safety will be another important consideration. The Service understands the public's desire to be able to view plants and wildlife in representative natural landscapes, and we will explore ways to be able to facilitate future compatible access.

(4) The Service will strive to increase public awareness of the refuge. We will work with our partners to explore ideas to enhance the refuge's presence and visibility, and promote a positive effect on protecting the resources.

(5) Region 5 has recently identified "areas of emphasis" with regards to the six priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses for every refuge. The Rachel Carson NWR has been identified for environmental education and interpretation. Thus, we will further consider this recognition as we implement the strategies of the CCP over the next 15 years.

I have selected Alternative B as modified for several reasons. It helps fulfill the mission of the NWRs; best achieves the refuge purpose, vision, and goals; maintains and, where appropriate, restores the ecological integrity of the refuge; addresses the major issues identified during the planning process; and is consistent with the principles of sound fish and wildlife management.

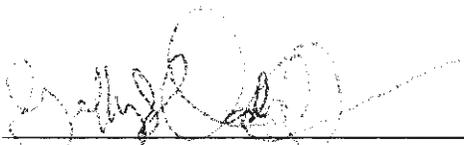
I find that implementing Alternative B adheres to all legal mandates and Service policies, and will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment, in accordance with Section 102(2)(c) of the NEPA. Therefore, I have concluded that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and this Finding of No Significant Impact is appropriate and warranted.



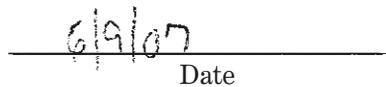
Marvin E. Moriarty
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Date



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Date