

**Summary of Major Topics Discussed at Public Meeting
Presentation of Draft Management Alternatives
Wapack National Wildlife Refuge - Comprehensive Conservation Planning
March 6, 2007**

-----PRESENTATIONS-----

- First, Lelaina Marin (Lead Planner) went over the benefits of a CCP, the 8-step planning process, and the timeframes for the planning project for the next year or so.
- Second, Jimmie Reynolds (Refuge Manager) went over current refuge management
- Third, students (Conway School of Landscape Design) presented the draft management alternatives
 - Sean Roulan gave a brief introduction to the Conway School of Landscape Design, went over the main components of the refuge vision statement, and presented the public use goal, issues and alternatives.
 - Andrew Ward presented the biodiversity goal, issues, and alternatives.
 - Brian McGowan presented the partnership goal, issues, and alternatives.

-----DISCUSSION PERIOD-----

1. **Clarification on Refuge boundaries and surround conservation areas** (Referred to a map of the Temple to Crotched corridor)
 - It was requested that we point out some of the different key areas on the map such as the refuge, Crotched Mountain, and Temple Mountain. Clarification was needed on the land surrounding the refuge. Is it private land? Is it under conservation easements?
 - **USFWS response** – We specifically pointed out Crotched Mountain, Temple Mountain and the location of the refuge. Then went over the other land conservation ownerships in the area. Also highlighted some of the partners in the area that we would hope to coordinate with. Surrounding land is privately owned. Some of the land is under conservation easement.
 - Clarification was also needed on the status of the refuge. Is the national wildlife refuge an existing entity or is this planning project to establish the refuge? Who owns the refuge?
 - **USFWS response** - The refuge is owned by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. It is an existing entity.
 - Interest in what was located south of the Temple Mountain area (this southern area was not represented on the map shown at the meeting).
 - **USFWS response** – Another land conservation project south of Temple Mountain is the Wapack Wilderness project. The Hampshire Country School has offered to sell a 1400-acre conservation easement on the school’s property to the Northeast Wilderness Trust (Friends of the Wapack, Inc. explained a little more about the status of this project). The USFWS pointed out some of the conservation areas south of the refuge boundary (Miller State Park and the TNC – Joanne Bass Bross Preserve).

2. Potential Partnerships

- Suggested a partnership for providing wildlife surveys, monitoring and education. This is already being done in the area, so there is no need to pay someone to do them on the refuge. Many potential partnerships exist in the area and they need to be highlighted in the CCP. It is important to consider the Harris Center for Education as a potential partner (for education, possibly lead field trips to the refuge). The Harris Center is very effective in fundraising.
- Why pay people to conduct bird surveys? Use the NH Audubon Society since they are well-trained and will provide their services for free. This is another example of an effective partnership.
- It is important to list specific partners in the plan such as: Monadnock Conservancy, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Harris Center for Education, Town conservation commissions, local land trusts, etc.

3. Law Enforcement

- Asked Conservation Officer from NH Fish and Game Department about the possibility of a partnership with the refuge for law enforcement.
- **Conservation Officer response** – It is difficult to enforce law enforcement regulations on the refuge for two main reasons. First, the posting of the refuge regulations are inadequate. For example, there are no signs on the refuge that say “no hunting”. Hunters can’t distinguish where they are allowed to hunt and where they are not allowed. Second, state statute says that boundary signs have to be placed no farther than 300 feet apart, common entrances have to be posted, and the signs must have at least 2-inch lettering. Wapack NWR does not comply with any of these statutes.
- **USFWS response** – The Service and the NH Fish and Game Department (NHFG) have a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for law enforcement. This MOA includes the entire state. In the MOA, the regional director has authorized NHFG law enforcement officers the authority to enforce Federal laws including Lacey Act, Migratory Bird Treat Act, Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act, Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, Airborne Hunting Act, National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, Endangered Species Act, and Marine Mammal Protection Act. Under the Refuge Administration act, NHFG can enforce general trespass on refuges without the state requirement on boundary sign posting. This MOA allows state conservation officers to help enforce refuge regulations at Great Bay NWR.
- **Conservation Officer response** – I haven’t yet received regulations for Wapack NWR. It would be difficult to enforce the regulations without proper signage of prohibited activities and a parking lot area.
- **USFWS response** – We plan to address both the signage and the parking lot issue in the CCP.

4. Trail Accessibility

- Is there any discussion about providing greater accessibility on the refuge section of the Wapack trail for people with disabilities?

USFWS response – We are working to formalize a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Friends of the Wapack Trail, Inc. in order to improve trail maintenance. Given the primitive nature of the trail, there is probably little opportunity on the refuge for improving accessibility. We do strive to have accessible trails for people with disabilities on all our refuges when we can, but the rough and mountainous terrain of the refuge would make it difficult in this case. We will definitely take a look and see if there is anything we can do. Miller State park does have accessible trails (Miller is wheelchair accessible from the parking lot to the hawk viewing area), so there are other opportunities in the area. We can direct people with disabilities to the State Park (provide information at the trailheads).

5. Parking Lot

- For the proposed parking lot, what are you thinking in terms of scope and size?
- **USFWS response** – We are discussing a lot of possibilities based on where and how many people are currently parking at the Old Mountain Road area. Considering the number of cars we see parked on Old Mountain Road at a given time, we are thinking that a 12-car parking lot might be a good size. There is not enough room on the refuge side of Old Mountain Road to build a 12-car parking lot, which is why we would consider a partnership with the Town of Greenfield. One possibility would be to acquire a parcel of land on the Town of Greenfield side of Old Mountain Road (by working with the Town and abutting landowners) to accommodate a 12-car parking lot. Another consideration is to establish a pull-off. We might be able to fit this on the refuge side of Old Mountain Road. We are also researching the possibility of applying for grants in order to obtain funds to construct the parking lot and to acquire the needed acreage for the parking lot. Donation of land is another possibility for obtaining the land necessary to accommodate the parking lot. Over the next few months we will pursue these considerations further by making contacts with the Town of Greenfield, abutting landowners, researching grants, etc.

7. Planning Process

- Wondering about the planning process? Hearing somewhat the same information and comments as the first meeting and the Service sounds like it has a pretty good idea of what they are planning. Curious as to why it will take until December 2007 to complete the draft CCP.
- **USFWS response** – There are still a lot of steps to complete before we can release the draft CCP to the public. After tonight we are going to take your comments and information and work over the next few months to finesse and make any changes to our alternatives. We also need to mold our alternatives into objectives and strategies. Tonight we just presented the major topics and ideas for each alternative, but we need to specify in a more detailed format, through objectives and strategies, exactly what we are proposing under each alternative. It can take some time to formulate these objectives and strategies. We also still need to do additional work and research to decide how exactly we are going to resolve issues we have identified for the refuge. For example, we have considered several different opportunities for the parking lot, but have not yet decided on any one option. Also, there are several chapters that have to be written in addition to just

the management alternatives chapter. The Affected Environment chapter will describe current refuge management, species observed on the refuge, public use, refuge staffing, budget and administration. The Environmental Consequences chapter will explain the environmental effects of implementing either alternative on the refuge. We also have to include several appendixes in the document as well. One example is a species list appendix that lists all the species observed on the refuge and identifies species of concern. Another example is an appendix that includes the compatibility determinations for all the public use activities on the refuge. We have to determine if each activity on the refuge is compatible with the mission of the Refuge System, the purpose for which the refuge was established, the refuge goals, etc. We also have to complete what is called an internal review draft, before we can release the draft to the public. This “internal review draft” is reviewed by refuge program managers, ecosystem managers, refuge staff and other appropriate Service programs and divisions, as well as other agency partners. Also, before we can release the draft to the public, we have to submit it to the Washington Office for their approval. Sometimes it can take months to get this approval. This is something we have no control over.

- Wondering about the length of the document?
- **USFWS response** – the length of the document can vary greatly depending on the particular project. A guess would be around 300 pages. This is including all the appendixes and other reference material. 300 pages might sound like a lot, but the appendixes are really there for your reference.
- Has heard lots of details and substance laid out already in two meetings and would hate to see it get lost in the process. Feels that the public has already said their opinion and would hope that the process could be expedited.

6. Miscellaneous Topics

- What is the status of the Temple Mountain proposal?
- **Response from Friends of the Wapack** - The vote to create the 352-acre Temple Mountain State Reservation was on the floor today (March 7, 2007).
- Be reasonable with goals and objectives. Why do we need a timber inventory or forest health survey if the deed restricts any active forest management? We also can't expect the state to fill the entire law enforcement need for the refuge. They are already spread thin.
- Need to fully explain what the limitations are for state and town support.
- **USFWS response** – When developing a CCP we try to be visionary while at the same time realistic.
- If planning additional meetings – this is a good meeting place. If you hold another meeting in the summer, you might want to consider using the Harris Center, so we can see first hand opportunities for education partnerships.