



# Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex

## *Planning Update Spring 2002*



Fishing at Oxbow NWR.

### What is the Plan?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is in the final stages of developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for four of the eight refuges in the Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex. This plan will outline management direction and strategies for Assabet River, Great Meadows, Massasoit, and Oxbow National Wildlife Refuges. The EA presents three different alternatives we are considering for management and evaluates their consequences. We present highlights of these alternatives on pages 2-6 to provide

you with a better idea of what you will see in the CCP/EA.

When we began the planning process, we intended to release a Draft CCP and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for all the refuges in the Complex. After assessing the scope of the issues for each refuge, we decided to release two documents rather than one. A Draft CCP/EA for Great Meadows, Assabet River, Oxbow and Massasoit will be released later this year. A CCP/EIS for the Cape and Island refuges will be released at a later date.

### National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

*"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."*



Frog at Great Meadows NWR.

### Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex

- Oxbow NWR*
- Assabet River NWR*
- Great Meadows NWR*
- Massasoit NWR*
- Mashpee NWR*
- Nomans Land Island NWR*
- Nantucket NWR*
- Monomoy NWR*



## More about planning



Volunteer leading a program. *Volunteers are a big help on our refuges. They assist staff with biological fieldwork and environmental education and interpretive programs.*

### What's next?

We are in the final steps of editing our CCP/EA which will be released for a 30 day public review and comment period. You will receive an Executive Summary in the mail, which will outline three different alternatives we are considering, including our Proposed Action. Each alternative provides a detailed analysis of its management directions. Full documents will be distributed to Federal, State, and local offices and conservation organizations on compact disc. Full documents will also be available upon request by anyone.

We encourage you to stay involved in this process. We hope you will take time to look over the document when it arrives, and provide us with your comments.

### How have we involved the public in the planning process?

We began planning in 1999 with an intensive public scoping effort. As part of this effort, we held Open Houses in ten different communities. We sent out over 8,000 Issues Workbooks to collect comments. Over 650 workbooks were returned and additional comments were collected at meetings with local planning boards, State and Federal agencies, conservation organizations, sporting groups and interested community members. We used the information and comments collected to identify issues and formulate draft goals, objectives and different alternatives for management.

A number of you learned about the planning process through refuge programs and requested to be on the mailing list. We appreciate your interest in the project and look forward to hearing from you again.

### State Agency Involvement

Personnel from the Massachusetts Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and Department of Environmental Management have been involved in the planning process from the beginning. State biologists provided input early in the process and other state representatives from these agencies have participated in alternative briefings. We plan to work with these agencies even more in the future. In addition, we will continue to work with our many conservation partners.

### Compatibility Determinations

Draft Compatibility Determinations will be included in the CCP/EA. They ensure that refuge uses do not interfere with refuge purposes or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. We will write them for each use allowed under the Service's Proposed Action.

### Highlights of the Draft Alternatives

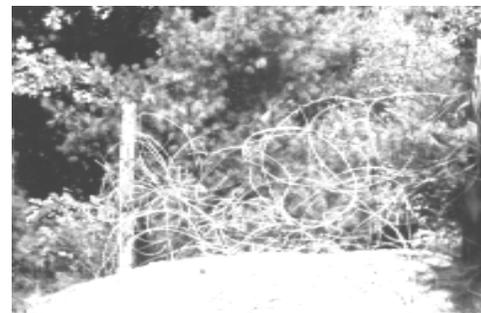
The following pages show how our three alternatives will address some key issues identified by the planning team and public. The draft CCP/EA will address more issues than we have included here. Alternative A is the "No Action" alternative, which represents our current management. Alternative B is the "Service's Proposed Action," representing our recommended actions and strategies. Please note that many actions and strategies in the No Action alternative are also part of our Service Proposed Action, but may not be listed again under the Proposed Action in this update. Alternative C addresses only those issues we felt needed to be addressed in a third option.

# Comprehensive Conservation Plans

## Highlights of the Draft Alternatives for *Assabet River NWR*

### **Alternative A (Current Management, The “No Action” Alternative)**

- Conduct limited number of surveys and obtain information from partners
- Remove some existing roads and trails not required for refuge maintenance or visitor use as well as portions of exterior fence
- Restore degraded wetlands where possible
- Evaluate and reuse ammunition bunkers which prove suitable for bat habitat
- Monitor known stands of invasive plants and control when possible
- Maintain closure to all public access except for special organized tours and guided events
- Support existing Friend’s Group which assists in outreach and management activities
- Maintain outreach through the Complex website
- Continue to share staff with the Complex and Oxbow NWR
- Continue to evaluate whether lands near the refuge, available from willing sellers, should be included in the Refuge System. If so, initiate the public notification and acquisition process.



*Assabet River NWR. Under the Proposed Action, the refuge would be opened after safety hazards, like this wire, are removed.*

### **Alternative B (The Service’s Proposed Action)**

- Inventory habitats and species; evaluate population status of key species
- Inventory and manage invasive and overabundant species
- Assess management of grassland and forest habitats in Habitat Management Plan; restore those habitats impacted as a result of military activity
- Establish new access points for public use as safety hazards are removed
- Provide deer, upland game birds, turkey, and small game mammal hunting opportunities
- Provide fishing opportunities at Puffer Pond
- Provide foot trails on old roads, a wildlife viewing platform and photography blind
- Develop new environmental education and interpretive programs (including kiosks and self-guided trails)
- Increase outreach effort to local communities
- Provide additional biological and public use staff
- Conduct assessment of historical and cultural resources
- Work with partners toward funding and construction of visitor contact station

### **Alternative C**

- Conduct limited habitat and wildlife management programs
- Open refuge only after all safety hazards are removed
- Provide limited hunting opportunities
- Provide fishing opportunities on westerly shore of Puffer Pond only
- Conduct limited outreach to local communities
- Open foot trails opened only on Patrol and Old Marlboro Roads



*Puffer Pond. The Service’s Proposed Action would include opportunities for fishing.*

# Comprehensive Conservation Plans

## Highlights of the Draft Alternatives for *Great Meadows NWR*

### Alternative A (Current Management, The “No Action” Alternative)

- Inventory breeding birds, marsh birds, woodcock, amphibians, waterfowl, and shorebirds annually
- Band waterfowl and monitor wood duck boxes through partners
- Assist with reintroduction and survey efforts for anadromous fish in Concord and Sudbury Rivers
- Maintain existing acres of fields by mowing
- Manage Concord impoundments for waterfowl and shorebirds
- Control invasive species through mechanical, chemical and biological controls
- Maintain hunting closure
- Provide fishing opportunities provided along the river
- Continue to offer wildlife observation and photography and environmental education opportunities
- Maintain refuge law enforcement presence
- Support existing Friend’s Group which assists in outreach and management activities
- Maintain outreach through the Complex website
- Maintain refuge headquarters and maintenance shop in Sudbury
- Continue to evaluate whether lands near the refuge, available from willing sellers, should be included in the Refuge System. If so, initiate the public notification and acquisition process.



**Urban Education.** *These students from Boston and Worcester schools are learning about turtles. The refuge’s Urban Education Program gives inner-city kids an opportunity to learn about wildlife.*

### Alternative B (The Service’s Proposed Action)

- Inventory habitats, and species; evaluate population status of key species
- Inventory and manage invasive and overabundant species
- Eliminate cooperative farming
- Maintain and develop water control structures
- Open limited portions of the refuge to archery deer hunting and waterfowl hunting
- Provide additional fishing opportunities provided along the river
- Provide new photo blinds, observation platforms, habitat demonstration areas and signage for wildlife observation and photography opportunities
- Develop new environmental education and interpretive programs (including kiosks and demonstration sites)
- Increase outreach effort in Boston metropolitan area (Urban Education Program)
- Eliminate non-wildlife dependent uses (dog walking, jogging)
- Provide additional staff
- Construct a new visitor center in the Concord/Lincoln area, renovate existing exhibits and space in headquarters
- Designate the Sudbury Unit of Great Meadows NWR as Sudbury River NWR



### Alternative C

- Conduct limited habitat and wildlife management programs
- Conduct limited invasive species control
- Provide expanded hunting opportunities beyond Alternative B

**Purple Loosestrife.** *The refuge continues to combat purple loosestrife with biological control techniques. The Service’s Proposed Action expands the invasive species control program for a more comprehensive and aggressive approach.*

# Comprehensive Conservation Plans

## Highlights of the Draft Alternatives for *Massasoit NWR*

### Alternative A (Current Management, The “No Action” Alternative)

- Maintain nesting habitat periodically for Northern red-bellied cooter (previously called the Plymouth redbelly turtle) and cooperatively manage with State
- Support inventory effort by partners; Refuge conducts some inventories
- Maintain year-round closure; no hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education or interpretation opportunities exist
- Maintain turtle interpretive exhibit in Complex Headquarters in Sudbury
- Continue outreach opportunities through the Complex website
- Continue to evaluate whether lands near the refuge, available from willing sellers, should be included in the Refuge System. If so, initiate the public notification and acquisition process.
- Refuge managed from Complex headquarters, no on-site staff



Northern red-bellied cooter. *Massasoit NWR* was created to protect the Federally endangered Northern red-bellied cooter. Some of you may be familiar with its previous name, *Plymouth redbelly turtle*.

### Alternative B (The Service’s Proposed Action)

- Conduct additional research, monitoring, and management for the Northern red-bellied cooter, develop long-term cooter plan
- Inventory habitats, and species; evaluate population status of key species
- Inventory and manage invasive and overabundant species
- Provide opportunities for deer, upland game bird, and small game hunting seasonally according to State regulations
- Create trail along existing road for wildlife observation and photography opportunities
- Develop new environmental education and interpretive programs (including programs centered around the Northern red-bellied cooter, signs and brochures)
- Increase outreach effort to local communities
- Construct a headquarters and visitor contact station in Plymouth area
- Remove existing cabin on Crooked Pond
- Provide new staffing on site

### Alternative C

- Expand biological programs to include baseline inventories and surveys
- Continue cooter research and develop long term cooter plan
- Expand environmental education opportunities similar to Alternative B, plus additional programs in schools
- Expand outreach effort opportunities similar to Alternative B, plus develop permanent display at Route 3 rest area and conduct local cooter festival
- Provide additional staff



Headstart Program *Massasoit NWR* participates in the Northern red-bellied cooter headstart program. The refuge raises hatchlings until they are big enough to survive on their own and then releases them into their habitat. The headstart program would continue under all the alternatives.

# Comprehensive Conservation Plans

## Highlights of the Draft Alternatives for *Oxbow NWR*

### Alternative A (Current Management, The “No Action” Alternative)

- Conduct limited biological surveys and obtain information from partners
- Support blanding's turtle monitoring program by partners, continue habitat manipulation
- Maintain existing old field and wetland habitat acres
- Restore degraded wetland acres where possible
- Selectively remove existing roads and trails not required for refuge maintenance or visitor use
- Monitor known stands of invasive species and control when possible
- Maintain deer hunting closure
- Allow upland game bird, turkey and woodcock hunting in some areas
- Allow fishing on Nashua River by boat only; no wetland pools open for fishing
- Maintain canoe launch and foot trails
- Continue on and off-refuge environmental education and interpretive programs provided for Worcester schools
- Maintain outreach through the Complex website
- Support existing Friend's Group which assists in outreach and management activities
- Continue to evaluate whether lands near the refuge, available from willing sellers, should be included in the Refuge System. If so, initiate the public notification and acquisition process.
- Continue to share staff with the Complex and Assabet River NWR



**Habitat Management.** *The refuge will be writing a Habitat Management Plan to address management objectives and strategies for wetland, grassland and forest management specifics.*

### Alternative B (The Service's Proposed Action)

- Inventory habitats and species; evaluate population status of key species
- Inventory and manage invasive and overabundant species
- Assess management of grassland, wetland and forest habitats in Habitat Management Plan
- Open portions of the refuge to deer, upland game bird, turkey, woodcock, and small mammal hunting
- Provide fishing opportunities along the shoreline of the river
- Provide additional canoe launch and landing, wildlife viewing platform, and photography blind
- Develop new environmental education and interpretive programs (including kiosks and self-guided trail), expand Urban Education Program
- Increase outreach effort to local communities
- Work with partners toward funding construction of a visitor contact station at Jackson Gate
- Provide additional staff

### Alternative C

- Provide limited habitat and wildlife management programs
- Provide limited access for public use to a few select areas
- Inventory and document all invasive and exotic species; monitor rate of spread
- Provide hunting opportunities similar to Alternative B, but in limited areas
- Continue limited outreach

**Lindsay Krey, Assistant Planner  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
300 Westgate Center Dr.  
Hadley, Massachusetts 01035**