

# Patuxent Research Refuge

## Comprehensive Conservation Planning Update

### Moving Forward

This newsletter updates the progress of comprehensive conservation planning efforts for Patuxent Research Refuge. In 2010, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) began developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the refuge. This CCP will provide strategic management direction for the next 15 years, and explain the refuge's priorities and plans for wildlife and habitat management, public use, staffing, and facilities.

In the past year, the planning team, which includes representatives from refuge staff, FWS regional office staff, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, FWS Migratory Bird Program, and Maryland Department of Natural Resources, has been working to develop refuge goals, objectives, and strategies. The team has also developed three draft management alternatives that aim to achieve the refuge purposes and respond to issues. Refuge management issues include hunting and fishing opportunities, refuge operating hours, deer management, land acquisition, climate change impacts, historic resources, and forest management. In this newsletter we would like to share with you our draft goals and highlights from our preliminary alternatives.

### Summarizing the Draft Alternatives

The three alternatives in the draft CCP/EA address key issues identified by the planning team and the public. Alternative A is the "No Action" alternative, which continues current refuge management.



Lake Redington

Steve Noyes

Alternative B is the Service "Preferred Alternative," which presents our recommended actions and strategies. Alternative C presents actions and strategies that maximize interior forest management and public activities that coordinate with those management strategies.

The draft CCP/EA will compare the three alternatives in detail. Each will identify objectives and strategies for meeting refuge management goals. Here we present a very brief overview of the alternatives. For a more detailed matrix of the alternatives, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/patuxent/ccphome.html>.

### Alternative A

- Continue to manage current habitats, including forests, forested wetlands, dry savannah, grasslands, scrub-shrub, and impoundments, on the refuge.
- Continue to provide opportunities for wildlife research through special use permits.
- Continue current hunting seasons for upland game, migratory game birds, and white-tailed deer.
- Continue current fishing opportunities.
- Continue to provide public opportunities for wildlife

observation and photography on the North and South Tracts, including 25 miles of trails, Wildlife Drive, observation towers, and viewing blinds.

- Provide interpretive materials at kiosks.
- Provide interpretive, school, and scout programs at the National Wildlife Visitor Center and at the North Tract.
- Maintain present levels of refuge staffing.

### Alternative B

- Increase the number of forested acres on the refuge by converting 110 acres of impoundments and 150 acres of grassland.
- Create an additional trail on the North Tract.
- Open Blue Heron Pond for fishing.
- Increase environmental education programs by 10%.
- Allow no-impact geocaching along trails, if found compatible.
- Eliminate woodchuck hunting.
- Open multiple trails on North Tract during the bow and small game hunting seasons with a 50-yard buffer.
- Strengthen research partnerships with U.S. Geological Survey, other agencies and organizations.

George Gentry/USFWS



Northern Pintail

## Draft Refuge Vision

*Situated in a sea of urban development near the center of the Baltimore-Washington Corridor, Patuxent Research Refuge is an island of green. This large contiguous block of forest, meadows, and wetlands provides a unique opportunity for wildlife research on a local and landscape level scale. Patuxent provides a critical corridor for species as they migrate naturally or that may need to move in response to climatic changes. As the only National Wildlife Refuge established for wildlife research, the refuge serves as the home of the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Staff and partners are able to conduct cutting edge wildlife research and provide passionate interpretation of the natural world in the shadows of protected historic and cultural resources. The North Tract and the National Wildlife Visitor Center provide opportunities for local children, national decision-makers, and individuals from around the world to develop a conservation ethic and learn about the refuge, the National Wildlife Refuge System, the importance of science, and the benefits that green spaces provide for wildlife and people alike. Consisting of lands with a wide variety of past uses and owners, this important component of the green infrastructure of the Mid-Atlantic provides improved air and water quality for the surrounding areas while fostering a sense of wonder and connectedness to natural areas.*

Ron Laubenstein/USFWS



Red Fox

### Alternative C

- Restore an additional 300 acres of forest through conversion of impoundments, scrub-shrub, and grassland.
- Explore opportunities for fee-based programs or a refuge entry fee.
- Prohibit horseback riding, dogs and dog training, and search and rescue training.
- Open the Little Patuxent River Trail during hunting seasons with a 50-yard buffer.
- Eliminate January hunting, except the January firearms deer hunt.

### Draft Refuge Goals

**Goal 1:** Protect, maintain, and restore, where possible, the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of Chesapeake Bay Lowlands forested ecological communities to provide habitat for species of conservation concern, including migratory birds, forest mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates.

**Goal 2:** Protect, maintain, and restore, where possible, the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of refuge aquatic habitats, including the Patuxent, Little Patuxent, and Anacostia River watersheds, and impoundments to provide habitat for species of conservation concern, including fish, invertebrates, and plants.

**Goal 3:** Manage refuge non-forested upland communities to provide ecological structure, composition, and function to support native plants and wildlife, including species of conservation concern. Where appropriate, restore the biological integrity and diversity of these habitats.

**Goal 4:** Provide high quality recreation, environmental education and interpretive programs for refuge visitors to promote an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife conservation.

**Goal 5:** Provide high quality hunting and fishing opportunities for hunters and anglers.

**Goal 6:** Enhance partnerships with local communities and various organizations to garner support and promote refuge programs and resources.

**Goal 7:** Accommodate research and inventory and monitoring to support adaptive management decisions on the refuge and throughout the Refuge System and that improves techniques of land management or conservation of priority species for the FWS.

### Planning Timeline

This fall and winter, we will continue to fine-tune objectives and strategies, create maps, and format the document. We are working toward releasing the draft CCP and Environmental Assessment (EA) in the spring of 2012. The draft will be available on CD-ROM, the Web, and in print. Soon after its release, we will provide opportunities for the public to comment, including at public meetings. After the public comment period we will make any necessary changes to the draft. We hope to have a final CCP by the summer of 2012.

### Contact Information

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### U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



<http://www.fws.gov>

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Bill Thompson/USFWS



Cedar Waxwing