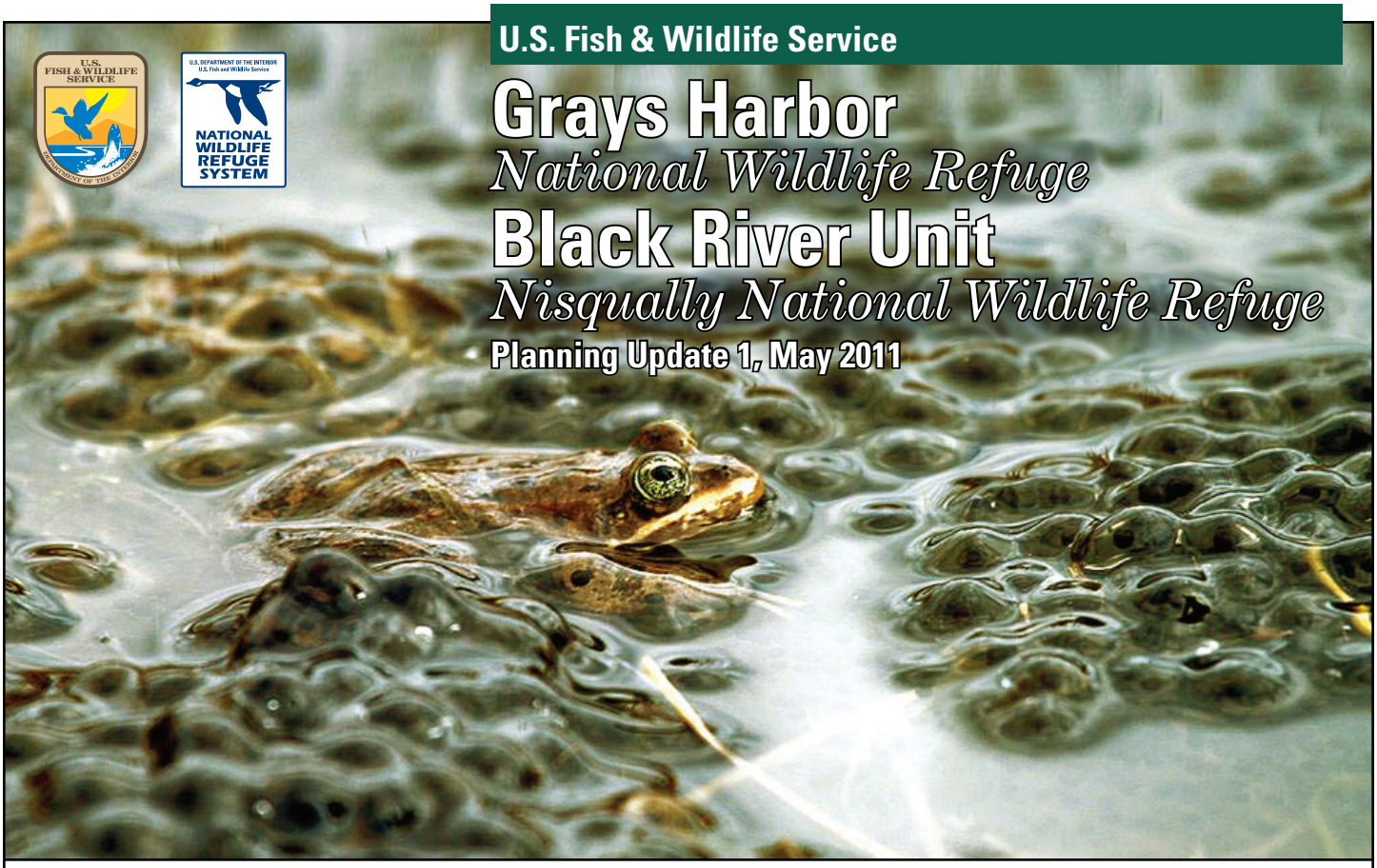
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Grays Harbor
National Wildlife Refuge
Black River Unit
Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 1, May 2011



The imperiled Oregon spotted frog—a Federal candidate species—occurs at three sites within the Black River Unit / Jan Wieser, USFWS

Planning Begins at two National Wildlife Refuges

Greetings

The Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex) is initiating a planning process to develop Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP) for Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge or NWR) and the Black River Unit (Unit) of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge (collectively Refuges). The CCPs will guide management of these Refuges over the next 15 years.

During the next year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will be seeking input from the public, interested agencies, Tribes, and organizations regarding their interests, concerns, and viewpoints about important Refuge management issues. This is the first in a series of planning updates we will distribute to keep you informed and invite your participation in the planning process for these Refuges.

Help Us Plan for the Future

As we begin this process, we have the opportunity to plan the future of habitat management and public use programs on the Refuges, with input from conservation organizations, natural resource agencies, the public, and other interested parties.

The Refuges' primary purposes will remain the same as when the areas were originally established to protect and restore habitat for wildlife. However, through the planning process, we will review our management of a variety of habitats including estuarine and freshwater wetlands, riparian areas, and forested uplands; and evaluate the public use programs.

Your insights and participation are needed to provide a more complete and thoughtful process. We invite you to share your ideas with us by attending upcoming open house meetings (see page 7 for details) or by submitting written comments to the Refuge Complex (see page 8 for contact information).

Provide Input at our Public Open House Meetings

Public Open House Meetings are planned for May 18 and 19 in Aberdeen and Olympia, see page 7 for details.

Your input is critical to the success of this effort–we want to hear from you!

Refuges Overview

Grays Harbor NWR

The Refuge is located in the northeast corner of the shallow, 94-square mile Grays Harbor estuary on the southwestern Washington coast (see the map on page 3). It encompasses an area known as Bowerman Basin and consists of about 1,500 acres of tidal water, intertidal mudflats, tidal salt and brackish marshes, and upland forest.

The Refuge was established by Congress in 1990 to "(1) Conserve fish and wildlife populations and their habitats, including but not limited to those of western sandpiper, dunlin, red knot, long-billed dowitcher, short-billed dowitcher, other shorebirds, and other migratory birds, including birds of prey; (2) Fulfill international treaty obligations of the United States with regard to fish and wildlife and their habitats; (3) Conserve those species known to be threatened with extinction; and (4) Provide an opportunity, consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraphs (1), (2), and (3), for wildlife-oriented recreation, education, and research."

From late April through early May each year, hundreds of thousands of shorebirds concentrate on the muddy tide flats of the greater Grays Harbor estuary as they migrate north to Alaska to breed. Grays Harbor estuary is one of four major staging areas for migrating shorebirds in North America and hosts one of the largest concentrations of shorebirds on the Pacific coast, south of Alaska. In 1996, it was designated as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Site of International Significance and a Globally Important Bird Area. The Refuge also provides important habitat for a variety of waterfowl, waterbirds, and raptors, among other wildlife.

Black River Unit

The Unit is located five miles southwest of Olympia, Washington, and is managed as part of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. The Unit's approved boundary encompasses approximately 3,860 acres (see the map on page 6). Currently, the Service owns and manages more than 1,300 acres, and land acquisition is ongoing.

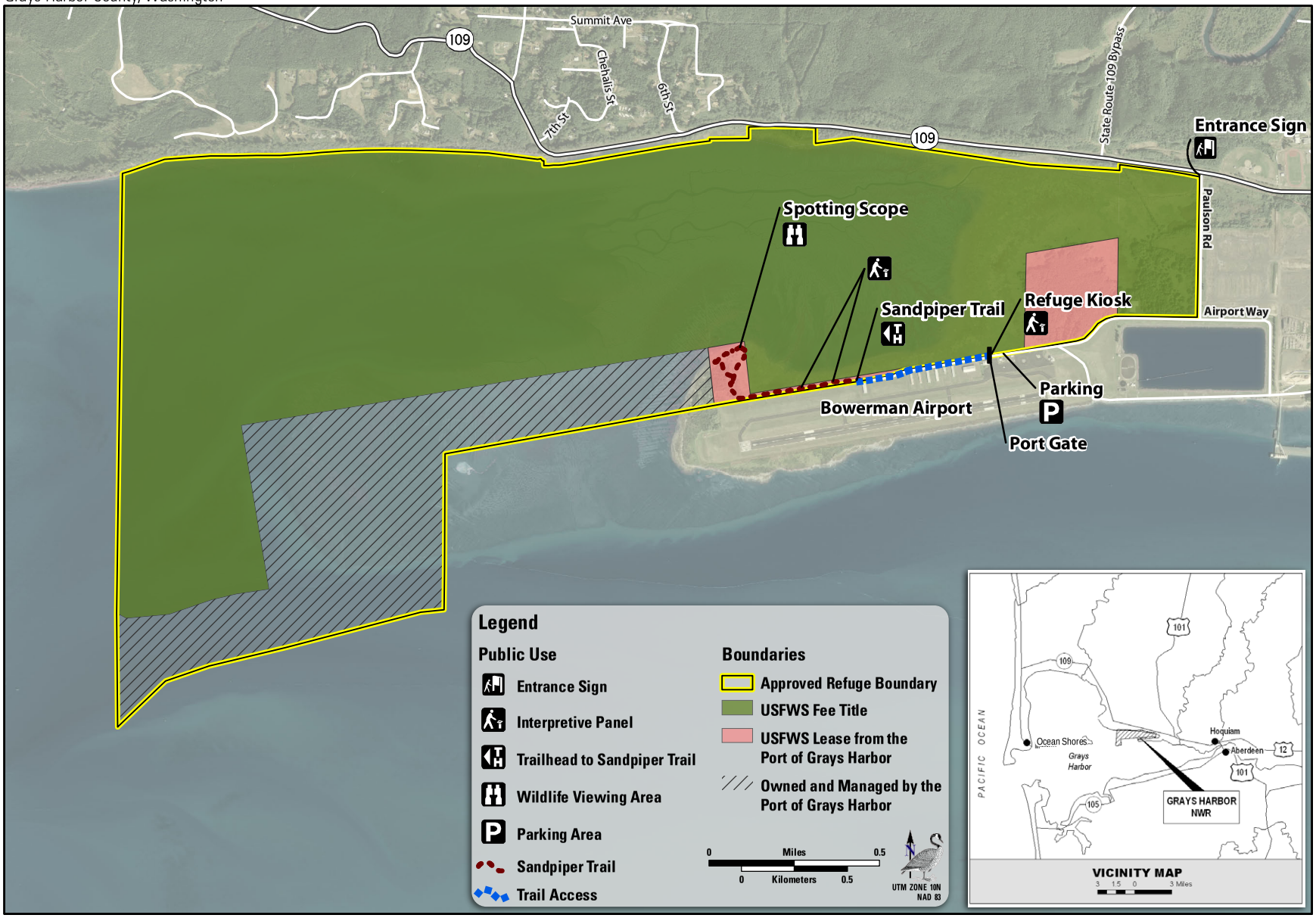
The Unit was established in 1996 by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission for "use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds" and "the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources" under the acquisition authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1956.

The Black River Unit consists of a large, complex mosaic of wetland, riparian, and some upland habitats surrounding the low lying, slow moving river. The Unit's diverse habitats include bog, emergent marsh, wet meadow, shrub swamps, riparian forest, fir-hemlock forest, and dry meadow.

The Unit contains spawning and important rearing habitat and migration corridors for steelhead and cutthroat trout and Coho and Chinook salmon. At least 150 species of migratory birds, including waterfowl and neotropical songbirds, use the wetland and riparian habitats. A Federal candidate species, the Oregon spotted frog (which is also State listed as endangered), is found within the Black River Unit. The Oregon spotted frog is only known to occur at eight sites in Washington, three of which fall within the boundary of the Black River Unit. Locally rare bog habitat is also found there.

Shorebird predator avoidance behavior at Grays Harbor NWR / © Sharon Ely

Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge
Grays Harbor County, Washington



Preliminary Goals

Grays Harbor NWR

- Protect, maintain and restore estuarine habitats representative of the Grays Harbor ecosystem, for the benefit of shorebirds, other migratory birds, fish, and a diverse assemblage of other native species.
- Protect and maintain upland habitats representative of the Grays Harbor ecosystem for the benefit of migratory passerines and other wildlife.
- Contribute to the protection and long-term environmental health of the greater Grays Harbor watershed and ecosystem.
- Enhance the quality of habitats for fish and wildlife by identifying and controlling invasive plants and animals.
- Gather scientific information (surveys, research, and assessments) to support adaptive management decisions.
- Provide quality opportunities for visitors to observe and photograph a diversity of wildlife and habitats to enhance their understanding and appreciation of the Refuge's natural resources, and foster a connection with nature.
- Provide environmental education opportunities that initiate a sense of wonder and foster a connection with nature and the Refuge for students.
- Support and strengthen an active volunteer work force and Friends Groups to assist in providing quality visitor services programs and outreach.

Black River Unit

- Protect, maintain, and restore wetland habitats characteristic of the upper Black River watershed while maintaining historical characteristics of the north Puget Trough lowlands for the benefit of native fish, amphibians, migratory birds, and a diverse assemblage of other native species.
- Protect and maintain upland habitats characteristic of the upper Black River watershed.
- Contribute to the protection and long-term environmental health of the greater Black River watershed and ecosystem.
- Enhance the quality of habitats for fish and wildlife by identifying and controlling invasive plants and animals.
- Gather scientific information (inventory, monitoring, and research,) in support of adaptive management decisions.
- Provide scientifically-based environmental education, wildlife observation, and interpretation programs to the public and school groups to foster a connection with nature and the Refuge.

Two western sandpipers roosting at Grays Harbor NWR / Jan Wieser, USFWS

Preliminary Issues to be Considered

As part of the CCP process, a range of alternative management approaches will be explored and evaluated, including current management practices. The effects of the various alternatives on the biological resources and local communities will be evaluated in an environmental assessment that is prepared concurrently with the CCP, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

The planning team has identified some potential issues to be considered during CCP development. We encourage you to attend our public open house meetings (see page 7) and provide your feedback on these issues and other Refuge management concerns. If you are unable to attend, please submit your comments in writing to the Project Leader by June 10, 2011 (see page 8 for contact information).

Grays Harbor NWR

Habitat Management and Restoration. What actions are needed to sustain and restore priority species and habitats over the next 15 years? How is sedimentation impacting shorebird habitat quality? What will the effects of climate change and sea level rise have on Refuge habitats and species?

Invasive Species Control. Invasive plant species degrade habitat quality for shorebirds, migratory birds, and many other fish and wildlife. Invasive animals may compete with native fish and wildlife for limited resources. How can we reduce the incidence and spread of invasive species?

Visitor Services and Education Opportunities. Wildlife observation, interpretation, photography, and environmental education are provided at Grays Harbor NWR. How can we improve these services and programs? What visitor services facilities are needed or planned? What volunteer programs and partnerships can be developed or strengthened to improve outreach and education? Trespassing, vandalism, and other illegal activities take place at the Refuge. What can be done to reduce these activities and improve wildlife and habitat protection?

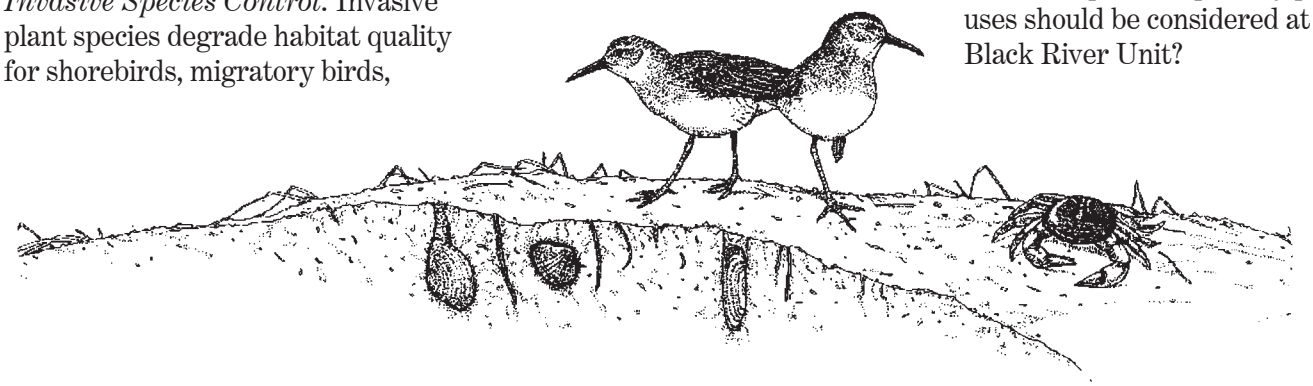
Black River Unit

Land and Water Protection. What actions are needed to sustain and restore priority species and habitats over the next 15 years? How can we help improve habitat protection and connectivity, and reduce habitat fragmentation? How can we improve water quality and quantity in the Black River system for fish and wildlife?

Habitat Management and Restoration. Most habitats have been altered by human actions and are in need of management and restoration to increase value as fish and wildlife habitat. What actions will help provide important information on key species, habitat composition, and the management prescription needed for the Black River Unit? What will the effects of climate change and sea level rise have on Refuge habitats and species? How can we enhance Oregon spotted frog recovery?

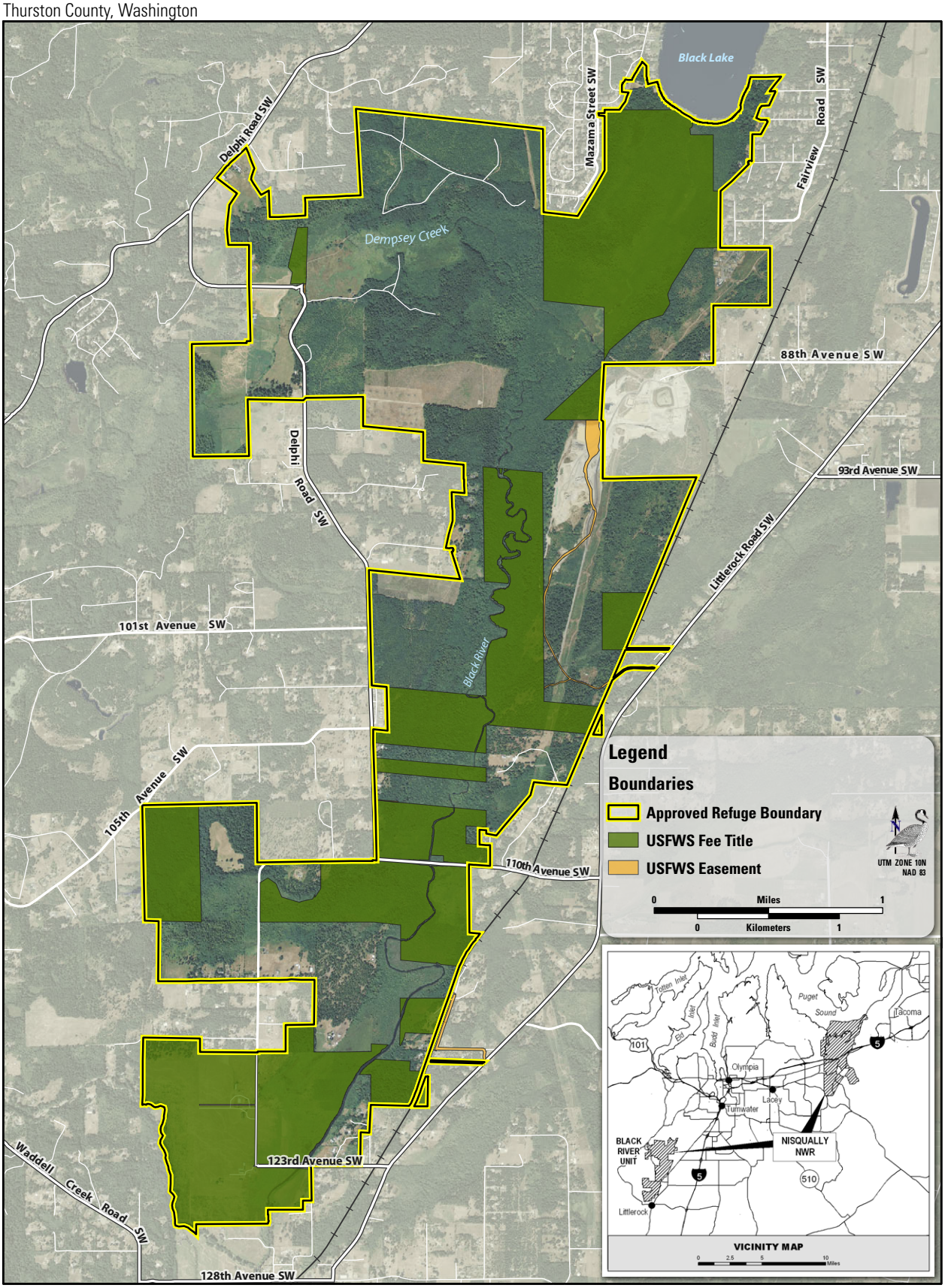
Invasive Species Control. Invasive plant species degrade habitat quality for migratory birds, fish, amphibians, and many other forms of fish and wildlife. Nonnative animals may compete with native fish and wildlife for limited resources. How can we reduce the incidence and spread of invasive species? Possible actions include invasive plant monitoring and management to protect and restore native wetland and upland habitats.

Visitor Services and Education Opportunities. The Black River Unit has remained largely closed because of the fragmented nature of current Refuge land ownership. Trespassing, vandalism, and other illegal activities take place at the Refuge. How can we reduce these activities and improve wildlife habitat and protection? What wildlife dependent priority public uses should be considered at the Black River Unit?



Black River Unit of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge
Thurston County, Washington

Refuge Overview



You Are Invited

We are holding two Public Open House Meetings, join us!

We welcome your comments and questions about the Refuges and the CCP planning process. The following public open house meetings are opportunities for you to help us identify the issues to be addressed in the CCPs and to have your questions answered about Grays Harbor NWR and the Black River Unit. Both meetings will include the same information about both Refuges. The meetings are scheduled at different locations for your convenience, details follow.

Aberdeen
Date: Wednesday, May 18, 2011
Time: 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Location: Port of Grays Harbor Building Commission Chambers
111 South Wooding Street
Aberdeen, WA 98520

Olympia (near Littlerock)
Date: Thursday, May 19, 2011
Time: 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Location: Littlerock Elementary School
12710 Littlerock Road Southwest
Olympia, WA 98512-0990

A north to south aerial view of the Black River Unit /
Sheila McCartan, USFWS

Planning Schedule

Planning Update 1 issued.....May 2011

Public Meetings.....May 2011

Planning Update 2
Results of Public Scoping.....Fall 2011

Planning Update 3
Preliminary Alternatives.....Winter 2011/2012

Draft CCPs/EAs
Public Comment Period.....Spring 2012

Final CCP Decision.....Summer/Fall 2012

(*Dates are tentative and may change as the planning process progresses.*)

Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge
100 Brown Farm Road
Olympia, WA 98516

Help us plan for the future of Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge and the Black River Unit of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge.

Visit the Refuges' Web sites

Grays Harbor NWR: www.fws.gov/graysharbor/

Black River Unit: www.fws.gov/nisqually/management/bru_general.html

Project Contacts

Send comments by any of the following methods

U.S. Mail:
Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Attn: Project Leader Jean Takekawa
100 Brown Farm Road
Olympia, WA 98516

Fax:
(360) 534-9302

E-mail:
FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov

Please send your comments to us by June 10, 2011

Salt marsh and mudflats of Grays Harbor NWR / Marian Bailey, USFWS