



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge

*Planning Update 1 - March 2007*

### Mark Your Calendar

Public scoping meetings  
will be held on  
April 3, 2007.

### Inside this update:

About the Fish & Wildlife Service . . .	2
About the Refuge System. . . . .	2
What is a CCP. . . . .	3
Compatibility of Refuge Uses. . . . .	3
About the Seal Beach NWR. . . . .	3
Map/Refuge Boundaries. . . . .	4
Refuge Purpose. . . . .	4
The CCP Process. . . . .	6
Issues for Consideration. . . . .	7
What's in a Name. . . . .	7
Contact Information. . . . .	7
CCP Timeline. . . . .	8

### Greetings From the Refuge Manager

Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is about to embark on an important multi-year process to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). This plan will provide guidance on how the Refuge should be managed over the next 15 years. Your ideas and comments will be an important part of the process. We therefore encourage you to look over the information provided in this Planning Update, so you can get involved and stay informed throughout the process. Also included within this Planning Update is information about Seal Beach NWR, the CCP process, and the management partnership between the Refuge and Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach, which is also updating its natural resources management plan.

Additional Planning Updates will be sent to you throughout the process to keep you up-to-date on our progress

and to let you know how you can continue to be involved. Your first opportunity to provide comments begins with our initiation of the public scoping process. Your concerns and suggestions for how the Refuge should be managed can be sent to the address provided on page 7 or presented verbally at our April 3 public scoping meetings. To be sure your comments are considered, we should receive them no later than April 27, 2007.

You are encouraged to contact us at any time throughout the process to ask questions or provide input. I look forward to your participation in the CCP process.

Kirk Gilligan  
Refuge Manager  
Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge

## Notice of Public Scoping Meetings

**Both an afternoon and an evening scoping meeting have been scheduled in an effort to accommodate as many people as possible. These meetings will be held on:**

**April 3, 2007**

**Afternoon Meeting 1:30 PM to 3:30 PM**

**Evening Meeting 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM**

**at the Murdy Community Center, 7000 Norma Drive, Huntington Beach**

Directions: From Pacific Coast Highway, go east on Warner Avenue to Goldenwest Street. From I-405, take the Warner Avenue exit and go west on Warner Avenue to Goldenwest Street. Go north on Goldenwest Street, then right on Norma Drive. The Murdy Community Center is on the right side of Norma Street. We will have signs to guide you.

**For more detailed directions, contact Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner, or Kirk Gilligan, Refuge Manager.  
(See page 7 for contact information.)**

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Who are we?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the nearly 96 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) and 8,000 waterfowl production areas encompassing 1.9 million acres. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices, and 78 ecological services field stations.

The Service enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, and helps foreign governments with their wildlife and habitat conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance Program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and game agencies. Many of the Service programs directly benefit both wildlife and citizens of California.

## What is the National Wildlife Refuge System?



In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt protected an island with nesting pelicans, herons, and roseate spoonbills in Florida's Indian River from feather collectors who were decimating their colonies. In doing so, he established the nation's first bird sanctuary, known as Pelican Island, and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his tenure. This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand, later becoming the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). Today, a little over 100 years later, the Seal Beach NWR represents one of more than 545 National Wildlife Refuges encompassing over 96 million acres.

The Refuge System is the largest system of lands in the world dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. It is spread across 50 states, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and several Pacific Islands. These refuges are home to more than 700 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 reptile and amphibian species, and more than 200 species of fish. They provide habitat for more than 250 Federally listed threatened and endangered plants and animals.

In 1997, Congress passed the NWRS Improvement Act, which provided significant new guidance for the management of the Refuge System. The Improvement Act included a new statutory mission statement and directed the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to conserving wildlife and maintaining the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of ecosystems.

The Improvement Act states that compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation) are legitimate and appropriate general public uses of the NWRS. However, this statement is not intended to imply that all of these uses will be allowed on every refuge. After being



**Observing wildlife at SBNWR**

evaluated for compatibility with refuge resources and purposes, as well as the mission of the NWRS, the uses permitted on a refuge may be further tailored to take into account such issues as legal commitments, community traditions, or constraints within a given location. In the case of the Seal Beach NWR, the underlying property owner is the U.S. Navy, therefore, the mission of Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach must also be taken into consideration in creating a public use plan for the Refuge.

## Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System

*"The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is 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."*

This mission of "wildlife first" differs from other Federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, which focuses on forest stewardship and sustainable forest uses; the Bureau of Land Management, whose efforts are directed toward the productivity and multiple use of the land; and the National Park Service, which conserves scenery, wildlife, and historic objects for people's enjoyment. As we move forward to develop a CCP for Seal Beach NWR, we must ensure that all of our proposals are consistent with the mission of the Refuge System.

## What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, and Why is it being Prepared?

A Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is a “blueprint” for how a specific refuge should be managed. It is intended to provide a clear vision of the desired future conditions for that refuge and to ensure consistent management of the refuge over a 15-year period. A CCP contains the Refuge goals, objectives, and management strategies that when implemented will assist in achieving the mission of the System, reflect the purposes for refuge establishment, maintain the refuge’s biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health, and provide opportunities for compatible public uses. The CCP also provides the public with an understanding of how and why specific management directives were developed and includes opportunities for public involvement.

We prepare CCPs in accordance with the provisions of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) Improvement Act. When Congress passed the Improvement Act, it included a requirement that a CCP be prepared for each refuge in the Refuge System. A CCP is to be completed for every refuge by 2012. Once a CCP has been approved for a refuge, the refuge is to be managed in accordance with the approved CCP.

*“Wild beasts and birds are by right not the property merely of people who are alive today, but the property of unknown generations whose belongings we have no right to squander.”*

*President Theodore Roosevelt*

## About Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge



### Refuge Location

Seal Beach NWR consists of about 965 acres and is located about 25 miles south of downtown Los Angeles in northwestern Orange County, California (Figure 1, page 4). Situated between Seal Beach to the north and Huntington Beach to the south, the entire Refuge is included within Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach (NWSSB).

### Refuge History

In 1944, the Department of the Navy (Navy) acquired about 5,000 acres of land in and around Anaheim Bay from the Alamitos Land Company. Although the Navy purchased the land, the underlying mineral rights were retained by the former owners. Following the purchase of this property, all of the submerged lands (areas below the Mean High Water Mark) within the Station were excluded from the deed and are now held in public trust by the California State Lands Commission.

The estuary portion of NWSSB was designated a Navy Wildlife Refuge in 1964 in an effort to stop the proposed extension of a freeway across the Station and through the estuary. In another attempt to stop the freeway proposal, the Navy, California Department of Fish and Game, and the Service entered into a three-party cooperative agreement in 1970 to preserve and protect the fish and wildlife resources within the Navy Wildlife Refuge. None of these actions however provided the authority necessary to stop the freeway extension.

Public opposition to the freeway proposal continued and ultimately triggered political intervention by then U.S. Congressman Craig Hosmer and State Senator Dennis Carpenter. Through the efforts of Congressman Hosmer, Public Law 92-408, authorizing the establishment of a National Wildlife Refuge on the NWSSB, was approved by the U.S. Congress on August 29, 1972. That same year, State Senator Carpenter was successful in amending the State Freeway Master Plan to delete the portion of the freeway that was shown to extend through NWSSB. The Secretary of the Interior, with the consent of the Secretary of the Navy, officially established the Seal Beach NWR on July 11, 1974. (Continued on page 4.)

## Refuge Purpose

The purpose of Seal Beach NWR is to provide for the conservation, protection, and propagation of native species of fish and wildlife, including migratory birds that are threatened with extinction.

## Wildlife and Habitat Management

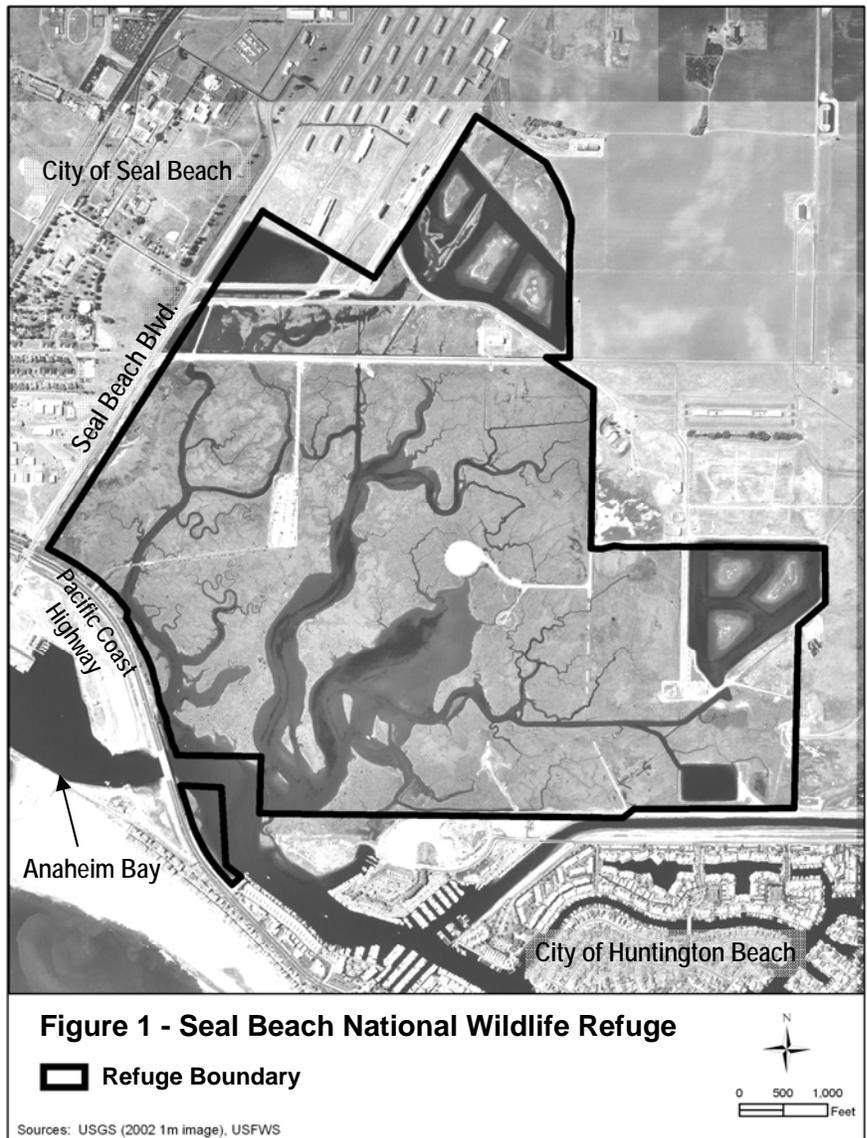
Since its establishment in 1974, Seal Beach NWR has been managed with a principal focus on protecting the federally listed species that occur on the Refuge. Other management actions address the protection of the Refuge's important coastal wetlands for foraging and resting migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors that travel along the Pacific Flyway. Because of the significance of these coastal wetlands to migratory birds, the Refuge has been designated as an Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy.

About 740 acres of the Refuge are subject to regular, unobstructed tidal influence, supporting 565 acres of salt marsh vegetation, 60 acres of intertidal mudflats, and 115 acres of tidal channels and open water. Another 160 acres of the Refuge have been restored, providing a combination of coastal salt marsh, mudflat, open water, and upland habitats.

The restored coastal wetland areas, which experience some degree of tidal muting, support a diverse array of marine and avian species. The remaining portions of the Refuge (about 65 acres) consist of uplands, developed areas, and roads. A few of the Refuge's upland areas are considered potential sites for salt marsh restoration, while other areas may provide opportunities for restoring native wetland/upland transition areas that would benefit a variety of bird and sensitive plant species.

The extensive subtidal habitat on the Refuge supports a diverse array of fish, benthic invertebrates, and other marine organisms. These species provide important food sources for migratory birds and marine organisms, including species important to commercial and recreational fishing interests.

The Refuge supports three federally listed species including the endangered California brown pelican, light-footed clapper rail, and California least tern. Clapper rails and least terns, as well as the state listed endangered Belding's savannah sparrow, nest and raise their young within the boundaries of the Refuge.



Belding's Savannah Sparrow

## Protecting Wildlife Resources in Partnership with the Navy

As a refuge that overlays a Naval Weapons Station (NWSSB), Seal Beach NWR must be managed in a manner that will achieve the mission of the NWRS and the purpose for which the Refuge was established, as well as the mission of NWSSB. Unlike the "wildlife first" mission of the NWRS, the mission for NWSSB is to provide ordnance loading, storage, and maintenance support to the U.S. Pacific Fleet and other Department of Defense and Homeland Security organizations. While the primary focus of the activities at NWSSB are directed toward achieving its mission, there are also various actions taken at NWSSB to conserve the Station's natural resources. Existing laws and regulations, such as the Sikes Act Improvement Act of 1997 (Sikes Act), provide assistance in achieving a balance on military lands between protecting natural resources and ensuring the continued support of the military mission. In addition, the Commanding Officer of NWSSB and the Regional Director of the Service have worked together since the late 1960s to establish management practices that will ensure the protection of fish and wildlife resources on NWSSB. The Navy also provides funding to support various management actions taken on the Refuge to protect listed species. In an effort to continue cooperative management of these resources, the Service will be coordinating with the Navy in the development of the CCP for Seal Beach NWR. At the same time, the Navy, in accordance with the Sikes Act, will be completing its Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) for NWSSB.

The purposes of an INRMP and a CCP are similar in many ways. Both provide a framework for managing natural resources on lands owned or controlled by the installation preparing the plan. Just as CCPs are required for all NWRs, the Sikes Act has committed the Department of Defense to develop INRMPs for all of its military installations. An INRMP is intended to help installation commanders manage their natural resources in a manner that is consistent with sustainability of those resources and to ensure continued support of the military mission. An INRMP is ecosystem based and is developed in cooperation with the Service and the California Department of Fish and Game.

## Public Uses

Although the Refuge Improvement Act requires that the six wildlife-dependent recreational uses of the NWRS (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation) receive priority consideration in refuge planning, the fact that this Refuge is located on a military weapons station will necessarily limit the types of activities permitted. Currently, the Refuge provides opportunities for wildlife observation, environmental education, and interpretation. These uses are generally conducted in association with guided tours supported in part by the Friends of Seal Beach NWR. All visitors must be granted clearance by the Navy prior to participating in activities conducted on the Refuge.



**Seal Beach NWR provides opportunities for wildlife observation and interpretation.**

## Partnering with Our Friends

The Friends of Seal Beach NWR are an essential part of our Refuge management team. Consisting of local citizen volunteers, the Friends devote countless hours to habitat restoration, endangered species monitoring, environmental education programs, public outreach, and much more. This group of dedicated individuals has been involved in the stewardship of the Refuge for several decades. It is through their efforts that we are able to spread the word about the Seal Beach NWR, the NWRS, and wildlife and habitat conservation.



**Traveling throughout Orange County in their unique Pelican Van, the Friends of Seal Beach NWR bring the message of wildlife and habitat conservation directly to the classroom.**

## The CCP Process

The CCP process involves a number of key planning steps, as illustrated below. Up to this point, we have been involved in the pre-planning steps of the process. Pre-planning consists of establishing a planning team, compiling data, identifying information and data needs, and beginning internal scoping to identify management concerns, issues, and opportunities. The preparation of this Planning Update and the publishing of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register represent the initiation of the public scoping phase of the CCP process. During this phase, the public is encouraged to assist us in identifying potential issues, management actions and concerns, significant problems or impacts, and opportunities or alternatives to resolve them. Public scoping will continue until we prepare a draft CCP/NEPA document.

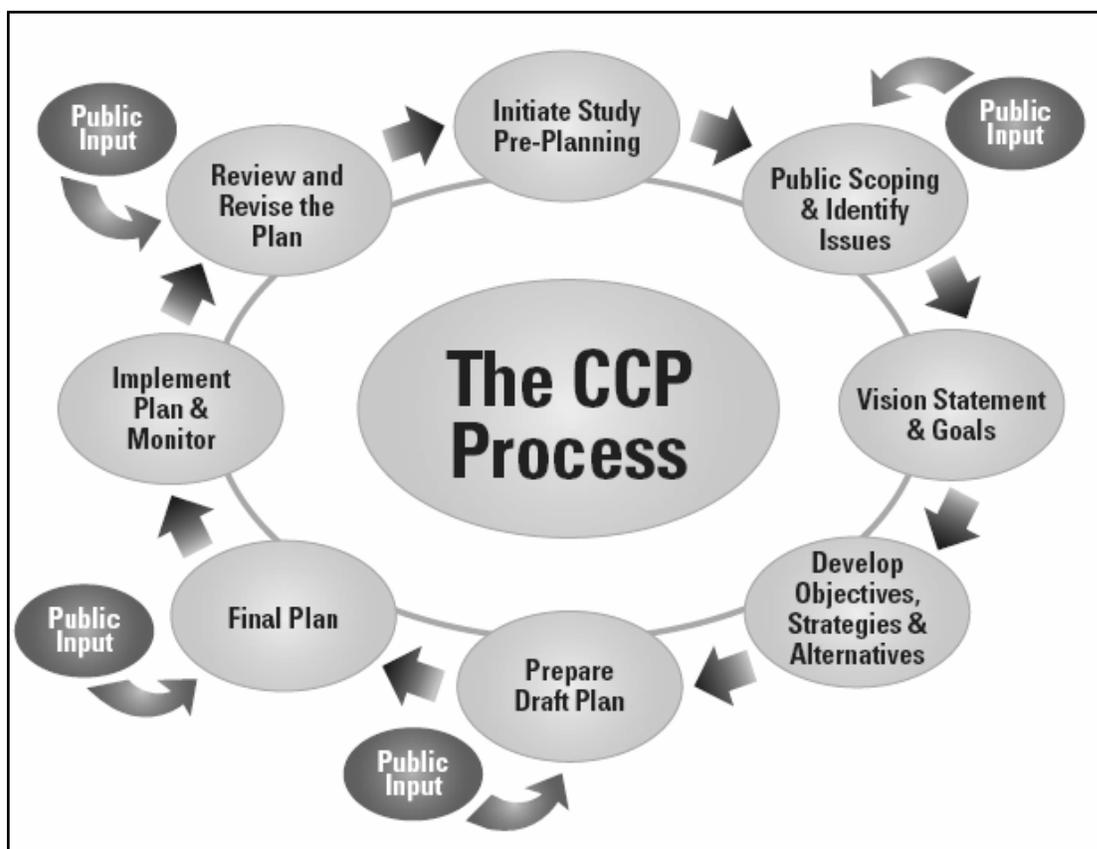
Throughout the CCP process, the following goals of CCP planning should be considered: decisions of the Refuge should be based on an ecosystem approach that considers the broader goals and objectives of the refuge's ecosystems and watersheds; management decisions and their rationale should be supported with a thorough assessment of available science derived from scientific literature, on-site refuge data, expert opinion, and sound professional judgment; the six priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses should receive priority consideration during the preparation of the plan; and a forum for the public to comment on the type, extent, and compatibility of uses on the refuge, including priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses, should be provided.

Public involvement is also an important goal of the CCP process. To ensure public involvement in refuge management

decisions, a process for effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with affected parties, including Federal agencies, State conservation agencies, tribal governments, local governments, conservation organizations, adjacent landowners, and interested members of the public will be provided.

Finally, each CCP must comply with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through the concurrent preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The CCP process integrates NEPA compliance requirements directly into the CCP process by providing a combined draft CCP/EA or EIS. Following completion of the final CCP/NEPA document, the product of the planning process will be a stand-alone CCP, separate from the EA or EIS.

The key planning steps listed below will be described in greater detail in future Planning Updates so you can understand and follow our progress throughout the planning process.



## Issues for Consideration in the Plan

During the initial pre-planning phase of the CCP process, the planning team identified a number of issues of concern that should be addressed in the CCP. Presented below are just a few of those issues.

- 1) **Habitat Management:** The Refuge's coastal salt marsh habitat is influenced by such factors as subsidence, limited freshwater flows, and sea level rise. Taking into account a changing coastal environment, what measures can be implemented to preserve or improve the quality of this habitat?
- 2) **Endangered Species Recovery:** Several federally listed species nest on the Refuge including the California least tern and light-footed clapper rail. What additional management actions could be taken to improve the reproductive success on the Refuge for these species?
- 3) **Erosion:** Refuge staff has identified ongoing erosion problems along some of the banks and tidal channels of restored salt marsh habitat on the Refuge. What adverse effects to wildlife resources could occur if erosion continues at its current pace? What actions can be taken to remediate these problems?
- 4) **Public Use:** As an overlay refuge, public uses must be provided on the Refuge that do not compromise the mission of NWSSB. Keeping these limitation in mind, what opportunities are available for expanding the current wildlife-dependent recreational use programs on the Refuge and in the surrounding communities?



**Signs provided along a pathway identify the many native plants that occur within the Refuge's salt marsh habitat.**

During the scoping process, we will expand this list to include those Refuge issues that you have identified as important to you. All we need are your comments. You can provide them at the public scoping meeting (see the cover page), or by sending us a letter, email, or fax (see contact information on this page). We look forward to hearing from you!

## What's in a Name?

Many people confuse Federal and State fish and wildlife agencies because their names are similar. The Service is a Federal agency within the U. S. Department of the Interior. The State fish and wildlife agency in California is the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), included within the California Resources Agency. Our names are similar and so are our missions: both agencies are dedicated to wildlife conservation for the benefit of present and future generations. Our jurisdictions are different. The Service is the lead agency responsible for Federally listed species and migratory birds, whether they are located on Federal, State, or private lands. The Service is also the agency responsible for managing National Wildlife Refuges, including the Seal Beach NWR. The DFG has primary responsibility for resident fish and wildlife on State and private lands, and oversees State-listed species and streambed alteration issues throughout California. The Service coordinates with DFG during the CCP process to ensure that management actions proposed for the refuge will also assist in achieving the State's habitat and species conservation goals.

## Please feel free to contact us!

We are available to provide additional information about Seal Beach NWR and to answer any questions you might have about the planning process. You can contact us by phone, mail, or e-mail.

### Please send your scoping comment to:

**Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner**

San Diego NWR Complex

6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, CA 92011

760-431-9440 ex. 349 (phone), 760-930-0256 (fax)

Email: Victoria\_Touchstone@fws.gov

### Direct inquiries about Refuge operations to:

**Kirk Gilligan, Refuge Manager**

Seal Beach NWR

800 Seal Beach Blvd., Bldg. 226,

Seal Beach, CA 90740

562-598-1024 (phone), 562-799-3827 (fax)

Email: kirk.gilligan@navy.mil

**Visit our Seal Beach NWR CCP webpage!**

**Go to: <http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov>  
and look for the Refuge Planning Box.**



**United States Department of the Interior  
Fish & Wildlife Service  
San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
6010 Hidden Valley Road  
Carlsbad, CA 92011**

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of the Interior  
Permit G-77**

### **Planning Schedule**

<b>March 2007</b>	<b>Initiate Public Scoping</b>
<b>April 3, 2007</b>	<b>Public Scoping Meetings - Afternoon 1:30 -3:30 PM, Evening 7-9 PM (See page 1 for details.)</b>
<b>June 2008</b>	<b>Issue Draft CCP/NEPA Document</b>
<b>January 2009</b>	<b>Publish Final CCP</b>

**We have set up a webpage for the Seal Beach NWR CCP at our San Diego NWR Complex website. You can visit this site throughout the CCP process to keep up-to-date on our progress and to learn more about Seal Beach NWR. Go to: <http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov> and look for the Refuge Planning box.**

**If you did not receive this *Planning Update* through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, or if you would like to be removed from the list, contact the Refuge Planner (see page 7 for contact information). Please feel free to pass this *Planning Update* along to anyone you think might be interested in the CCP process for Seal Beach NWR. Thank you!**