

# Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter:

[The Process and the Plan](#)  
[The District](#)  
[Purpose of and Need for the Plan](#)

This chapter provides introductory material that explains the process for developing as well as the purpose and need for the plan and provides background information about the district.

## The Process and the Plan

The planning process to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP, Plan) for the Iowa Wetland Management District (WMD, district) includes eight steps (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [FWS, Service], 2000):

1. Preplanning: Planning the Plan
2. Initiate Public Involvement and Scoping
3. Review Vision Statement and Goals and Determine Significant Issues
4. Develop and Analyze Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action
5. Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA Document
6. Prepare and Adopt Final Plan
7. Implement Plan, Monitor, and Evaluate
8. Review and Revise Plan

In general, scoping reveals issues that drive alternative ways of managing the district. Implementation of each of those alternative management styles (including the no action alternative) may have different effects on the physical, biological, and socio-economic environment. Analysis of these effects reveals the alternative that best:

- Achieves the district purposes, vision, and goals;
- Fulfills the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS, Refuge System) mission;
- Maintains and where appropriate restores ecological integrity of the district and the Refuge System (of which the district is a part);
- Addresses significant issues and mandates; and is
- Consistent with principles of sound fish and wildlife management.

This alternative is preferred and therefore constitutes the CCP. The CCP includes goals, objectives, and strategies for the district to guide overall management for the next 15 years. Monitoring and evaluation of implementing the plan provides a basis for eventual review and revision (as necessary). Public, partner, tribal, and other stakeholder input guides the planning process and, in turn, the long-term management decisions of the district. The plan primarily applies to fee title properties; however, it also applies to all easement types within the district if

legally allowed with the general exception of management direction regarding visitor services. An environmental assessment (EA) was written to document the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) planning process for developing this CCP.

Per the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) (Public Law, 1997), the CCP must identify and describe the following:

- Purposes of the district
- Fish, wildlife, and plant populations, their habitats, and the archeological and cultural values found in the district
- Significant problems that may adversely affect wildlife populations and habitats and ways to correct or mitigate those problems
- Areas suitable for administrative sites or visitor facilities
- Opportunities for fish and wildlife-dependent recreation

More specifically per Service Manual direction (FWS, 2000), the CCP includes the following:

- A vision for the district, which is a concise statement of what the district should be, or what it is desired to be, based primarily upon the Refuge System mission and specific district purposes, and other mandates
- Goals, which are broad statements of desired future conditions
- Objectives, which are concise statements of what, how much, when, and where to achieve something and who is responsible for the work
- Strategies, which are specific actions, tools, techniques, etc. to meet the objectives

Finally, the CCP for the Iowa WMD focuses on the following aspects of management:

- Focal species group and life cycle
- Prolonged decline of grassland-dependent bird populations due to the decline of grassland habitat
- Upland habitat quality
- Focal wetland type
- Wetland quality
- Food plot use
- Decreasing purchasing power of existing funds and priority areas for acquisition
- District awareness and understanding
- Appropriate recreational opportunities

## **The District**

The Iowa WMD consists of scattered tracts of habitat (both wetland and upland grassland) known as Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs). As of 2011, there are 75 WPAs in 18 counties

in north-central Iowa totaling 24,712 acres in fee title and 575 acres in wetland and habitat easements (FWS, 2011a) (figure 1-1). While the federal Duck Stamp funds used to purchase the land are federal, the agency primarily responsible for restoration and management of the habitat is the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Even though district acquisition has only occurred in 18 counties to date, a larger 35-county boundary is approved. This boundary follows the historic range of the poorly drained Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) (figure 1-2) in Iowa, an area known for its waterfowl production due to its prime “pothole” wetland habitat. Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge) in Titonka, Iowa administers the district, which also includes 18 tracts (434.6 acres) of Farm Service Agency (FSA) conservation easements on private land (figure 1-3). This plan was prepared with the intent that the strong partnership with the Iowa DNR will continue over the next 15 years.

## **Easements**

The district currently inspects 44 wetland easements, one habitat easement, and 18 FSA conservation easements annually. These inspections include a visual search of aerial photography to look for tile drainage, ditches, filling, excavation, dumping, or any other violation. Field evaluations are also completed to make recommendations for habitat improvements and to discuss weed control and other general management issues. Letters are also sent to easement owners reminding them of its provisions and importance for waterfowl production.

Violations are typically addressed by Service law enforcement staff seeking voluntary compliance. Some of the most common easement violations in the district are crop encroachment, rock dumping, and excavation (consolidation drainage). Finally, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program biologist at Union Slough NWR prioritizes habitat enhancement projects and works with landowners to repair/replace dikes and other water control structures.

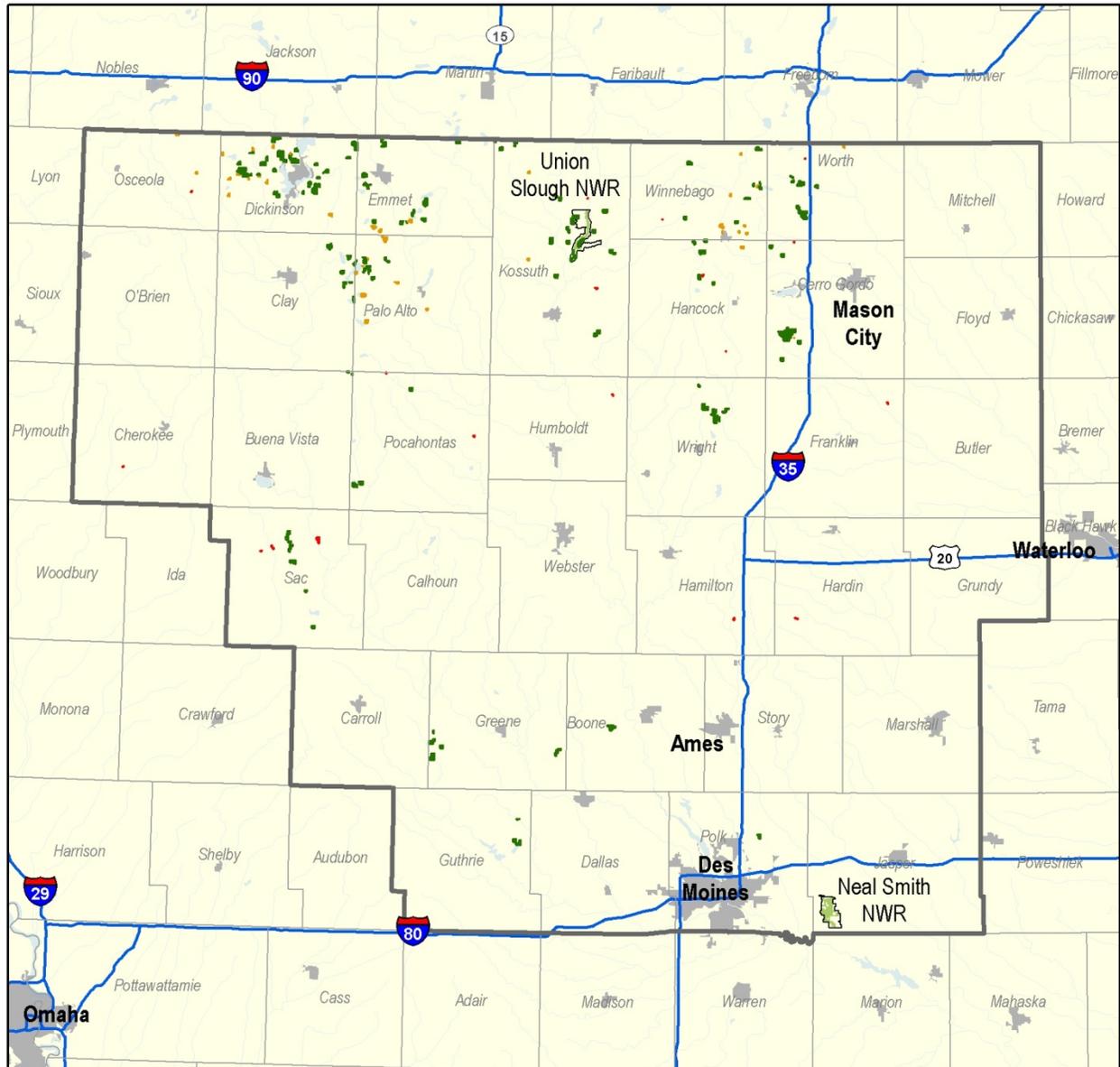
## **Purpose of and Need for the Plan**

The Improvement Act requires the development of a CCP for each refuge/district of the Refuge System. These CCPs are to be completed within 15 years of the Improvement Act (i.e., October 2012). No CCP currently exists for the district, so there is a need to develop one. The purpose then, of the proposed action is to determine the desired future conditions of the Iowa WMD and develop long-range guidance and management direction to achieve the purposes of the district. This management direction will provide for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their related habitats, as well as opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses (FWS, 2000) especially in the face of a changing climate (temperature/moisture changes may alter the entire PPR’s available waterfowl habitat).

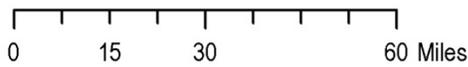
Per the Service Manual (FWS, 2000), the CCP for the district will not only describe the desired future conditions and management direction to achieve those conditions but will also:

- Help fulfill the NWRS Mission, which includes WMDs;
- Maintain and where appropriate restore the ecological integrity of the district and the greater Refuge System of which it is a part;
- Help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System; and
- Meet other mandates, especially Secretarial Order 3289 Amendment 1: Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change on America’s Water, Land, and Other Natural and Cultural Resources of 2010.

**Figure 1-1: The Iowa WMD**



-  Counties
  -  Iowa Wetland Management District
- Iowa WMD Managed Areas**
- Ownership Type**
-  Fee
  -  Easement
  -  FSA Easements (managed by Iowa WMD)
  -  National Wildlife Refuge Approved Acquisition Boundary
- NWR Owned Land**
-  NWR Owned Land



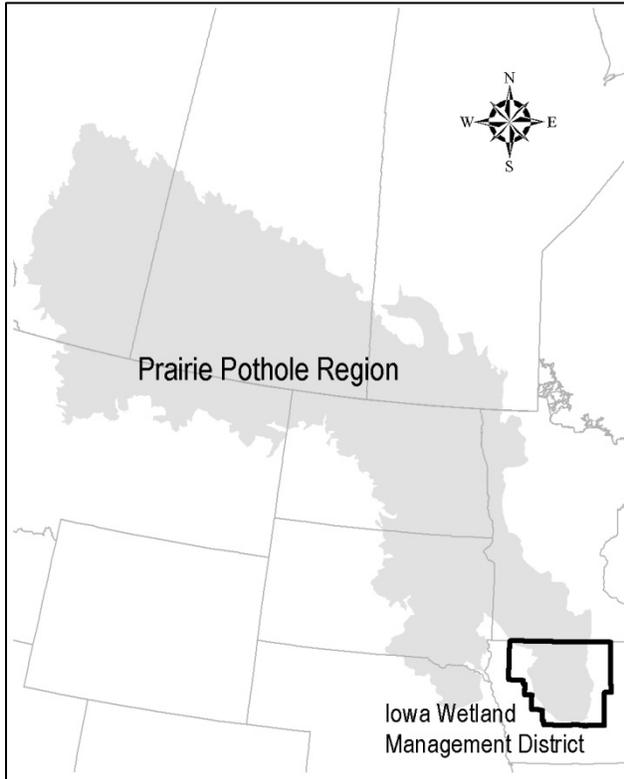
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Data depicted in  
UTM NAD 83, Zone 15 meters



**Figure 1-2: The Prairie Pothole Region**



**Figure 1-3: Farm Service Agency Conservation Easements (black dots) and Area of Responsibility (gray shading) Managed by the Iowa WMD**

