

CHAPTER 2 - THE PLANNING PROCESS

Given the complexities of the planning and environmental issues associated with this project, it was critical that the planning process be coordinated with federal, state and local agencies and with local organizations that have demonstrated a common interest in the Refuge. Close coordination was also essential from the perspective that the project is beyond the capabilities of any single entity and, as such, the formation of partnerships was and remains an important component of this body of work.

Coordination also involved participation by the local communities. Opportunities for participation in the planning process were available in the following formats:

PLANNING TEAM MEMBERS

Approximately 20 people were asked to serve as Planning Team Members and to help shape the management strategy for the Refuge for the next 15 years. This group met three times to review the progress of the plan and to offer recommendations. Members included staff from The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Citizens Committee to Save the Cache River, Touch of Nature Environmental Center, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Illinois Forest Resource Center, a local farmer, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, a graduate student from Southern Illinois University, and representatives of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service from both the regional office and the Refuge.

It is particularly noteworthy that planning team members participated in a two-day planning workshop designed to discuss and examine future alternatives. Much of the workshop focused on the appropriateness of various uses and the intensity or level of activity at which they should be provided. This two-day event was a very useful technique to evaluate development and management options and to ultimately achieve consensus on the restoration and public use plans outlined in this document.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Broad public involvement was provided through the use of focus group discussions and open public meetings. Each are described in the following text.

FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

On December 4 and 5, 1995, five focus group sessions were held at the Refuge with individuals present representing the interests of hunters, recreationists, educators, farmers and proponents of tourism and economic development. Of the 55 people invited to participate in these sessions, 28 attended and voiced their opinions. Major issues raised include:

- ❖ Concern that private sector hunt clubs would go out of business as a result of the Service's policies related to hunting.
- ❖ Limited access points make hunting on the Refuge difficult.
- ❖ Appropriate steps must be taken to ensure the compatibility of various activities proposed for the Refuge.
- ❖ Boat and motor sizes should be controlled.
- ❖ Special areas should be designated for outdoor education activities and appropriate facilities should be provided.
- ❖ Increased wildlife populations on the Refuge may create problems for local farmers.
- ❖ Information about the Refuge needs to be readily available to the public.

PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting was held December 4, 1995 at Shawnee Community College to solicit comments and to provide answers to questions regarding the Refuge and its short and long range role in the community. This meeting was advertised in local newspapers, and flyers were placed on public buildings throughout the area. Approxi-

mately 20 people attended the meeting (not including Fish and Wildlife Service staff or consultants), and some took time to complete questionnaires that were made available for those who preferred to respond in that manner.

The following newspapers were provided news releases of the event:

- ❖ Marion Daily Republican
- ❖ Dongola Tri-County Record
- ❖ Goreville Gazette
- ❖ Southern Illinoisan
- ❖ Paducah Sun
- ❖ Anna Gazette/The Pub
- ❖ Cairo Citizen
- ❖ Metropolis Planet/
Southern Scene
- ❖ Pulaski Enterprise
- ❖ Vienna Times

***PUBLIC REVIEW OF PRELIMINARY DRAFT PLAN
(JUNE 14 - JULY 15)***

A preliminary Draft of the Comprehensive Management Plan was distributed to the Planning Team members and to the Regional Fish and Wildlife Service office, and copies were placed in local libraries. Most of the comments received have been integrated into this revised version of the Plan. A summary of public comments can be found in Appendix A, Public Comments. The major concerns included:

- ❖ A desire to close half of the Refuge to hunting
- ❖ Opposition to farming and pesticide use on the Refuge
- ❖ Support for the Wetlands Center
- ❖ Recommendation to remove County road closure proposals from the Plan
- ❖ Support for hunting
- ❖ Concerns regarding farming program policy and direction
- ❖ Concerns regarding Big Creek flood events and siltation into Buttonland Swamp

*PUBLIC REVIEW OF FINAL DRAFT PLAN
(OCTOBER 28)*

A final Draft of the Comprehensive Management Plan was distributed to the Planning Team members, Regional Fish and Wildlife Service office, elected officials, and local Farm Bureau offices. Copies were made available at the Refuge office and local libraries. A public meeting was held October 28 to discuss the Plan and receive comment; 39 people attended. In addition, written comment was received through November 15 and 13 responses were received. Again, most of the comments received were integrated into the Plan. A summary of all the public comments can be found in Appendix A, Public Comments.

PLANNING ISSUES

As with any planning process, issue identification is critical to understanding the intricacies of an overall project. Planning has been underway within the Cache River Watershed through the efforts of the Cache River Watershed Resource Planning Committee and the Corps of Engineers. The Cache River Watershed Resource Plan was completed in 1995. The Watershed Plan identifies nine resource concerns and presents possible solutions. The Corps of Engineers is conducting a hydrological feasibility study of the Cache River, concentrating on the Cache River State Natural Area. These planning efforts have helped provide a better understanding of changes and existing challenges within the watershed.

The above studies were taken into consideration when the planning team assembled at the Refuge for two days to further discuss and identify major issues associated with the Refuge and the Cache River Watershed. This process, by considering all issues, will allow for the development of a plan that responds to resource concerns. Issues identified in the planning process and strategies to resolve these issues are outlined under Goals and Objectives - Chapter IV.

HABITAT LOSS AND FRAGMENTATION

The fragmentation and loss of habitat have been profound in and around the Refuge. The last sightings of bear and elk were reported in the late 1850s as habitat declined and hunters gained access to the area. The timber wolf was gone by 1920. Today, forest interior birds are of special concern. Their populations are down and reproductive success in the watershed is poor. Fragmented habitats may be "ecological traps" for breeding birds because they harbor high populations of cowbirds and



nest predators. Use by migrating ducks, particularly mallards, has declined dramatically from what it was historically as a result of the loss of forested wetlands and small open ponds. Populations of many aquatic species, including salamanders, reptiles and game fish, have also declined drastically in the last three decades.

Sedimentation has resulted in a loss of deep water habitat along the Cache River swamps. The existence of Buttonland Swamp is threatened by long term silt accumulation. Siltation occurred most heavily during the land clearing and ditching era, and accumulations of as much as one foot per year were recorded. Today, siltation rates are much reduced but habitat loss is still occurring.

HABITAT RESTORATION

Given the complex environmental history of the Refuge, it is a monumental task within limited budgets to restore large areas of altered vegetation and hydrology. The Refuge alone cannot solve the complex problems of restoring an ecosystem. Only through active coalitions of land management agencies and organizations backed by adequate research and financial resources can the Service and its partners restore the ecological values of the Refuge.

WATERSHED ISSUES

The Refuge represents less than 8% of the total area covered by the Cache River Watershed. The success of Refuge restoration efforts is highly dependent upon the environmental practices that are carried out in the watershed. Sub-issues that are of concern throughout the watershed are: water quality, erosion and sedimentation, drainage, and incompatible development and land use.

COORDINATION OF ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

Given all of the environmental issues and problems that exist, both within the Refuge and the watershed as a whole, it is critical that they be addressed in a coordinated fashion. For example, water quality within the Refuge will not be substantially improved without some measures being taken throughout the watershed to control stream bank erosion, agricultural runoff, and sedimentation. Therefore, watershed planning within the Refuge, without a coordinated plan of attack, will have limited value.

ADEQUATE STAFF AND FUNDING TO MANAGE THE REFUGE

Managing the Refuge requires providing staff and capital resources to effectively carry out and control the many activities within the Refuge. For some local residents, this is a particularly important issue. For example, concern has been expressed that budgetary cuts may leave the Refuge staff ill-equipped to manage a 35,000-acre tract of land. The federal budget crisis of 1996 rather dramatically illustrated this point.

LOCAL CITIZEN SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

A major component related to the success of the Cypress Creek Refuge is and will remain the support of local citizens and elected officials. Communication, education and outreach are key elements in developing an environmentally enlightened and supportive constituency.

COMPATIBLE PUBLIC USE

The impacts of increased tourism, outdoor recreation and related economic activities could have undesirable effects on area wildlife. Compatible use of the Refuge by the public is a major concern of many of the groups involved. Special consideration will be given to locating public use, access, and facilities near ecologically significant sites. Monitoring impacts of public use should be a priority.

ONGOING RESOURCE CHALLENGES - COORDINATION OF ACTIVITIES

Many resource issues within the Plan have been addressed with specific strategies. However, for other resource concerns specific strategies or resolutions could not be identified at this time. These concerns or challenges will require ongoing attention from the Refuge, as well as, the Joint Venture Partners. It is recognized that future resolutions to these issues are critical to the success and overall health of the Cache River Wetlands. Future strategies and actions are dependent upon data collection and monitoring results, involvement from other agencies and organizations, ongoing research, funding, and land acquisition. Ongoing resource challenges within the Cache River Wetlands include:

Hydrology - The St. Louis District Corps of Engineers is currently conducting a hydrological and habitat restoration study of the Cache River (Alexander/Pulaski Counties, Illinois Feasibility Study). The water level and the affects of flooding have been a significant point of concern for land owners for over 100 years. The regulation and drainage of the Cache River has greatly affected the plant and animal species and indeed the entire ecosystem of the Cache River Watershed.

Post Creek Cutoff - This 1915 dug ditch causes eastward flow of the Lower Cache River and unnaturally drains swamps during dry periods. Measures to reduce this unnatural flow and to put some water back into the Lower Cache from the Upper Cache River during dry periods would be desirable. This is part of the Corps of Engineers study.

Big Creek Sedimentation - Heavy precipitation results in high silt laden flows of water down Big Creek and into the Cache River floodplain. Alternatives to handle the silt laden flood water and reduce the impact upon Buttonland Swamp and the Frank Bellrose Waterfowl Reserve are being studied as part of the Corps of Engineers study.

Weed Control - As agricultural lands are converted from farm land to forested areas, weed growth will inevitably appear prior to full canopy establishment. This can cause problems with adjacent agricultural lands when weed growth such as Johnson grass appears. Weed control is considered an established ongoing program that is not affected by this plan.

Mosquitos - The threat of disease to humans from insects as a result of this Plan's recommendations is currently not known. Discussions with health authorities and Environmental Protection Agency personnel need to take place to assess this situation and formulate a strategy for control of any disease outbreaks before they occur.

The preceding discussion of planning issues is intended to set the stage for the remaining sections of this document. It provides broad statements or messages regarding the general views and attitudes of the Planning Team relative to each issue.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

The planning effort that was organized for this project included the review of over 20 separate reports and numerous private publications dealing with the Cache River Watershed, the Cypress Creek Wetlands, and/or the Refuge. A bibliography containing these materials is provided at the end of this document. In addition, the planning process followed U. S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge Management guidelines, Part 602, FW 1-1 FWM 201, Writing Refuge Management Goals and Objectives; and a handbook (602 FW 1-3) dated March 1996.