

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Introduction

Located in Chariton County near the town of Sumner, Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) bounds more than 11,000 acres of bottomland forest, grasslands, and wetlands within the Grand River floodplain of north central Missouri. Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Refuge in 1937 through Executive Order. In 1938, Company 1727 of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) began work on levees to impound the waters flowing into the Refuge from Elk Creek, Turkey Creek, and Tough Branch. The CCC completed its work in 1942 and left behind several thousand acres of freshwater marsh and open water within Silver Lake and Swan Lake, the Refuge namesake. This change to the landscape caught the attention of migrating waterbirds, especially Canada Geese, which shifted their wintering grounds north to the Refuge with a steady annual increase that peaked at more than 180,000 birds in 1977. Fewer geese winter on the Refuge today, but its mixture of habitats are home to a diverse wildlife community that attracts hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers.

Refuge Purposes

“Refuge purposes” is a term that refers to the purposes specified in or derived from one or more legal authorities used for establishing, authorizing, or expanding a national wildlife refuge, national wildlife refuge unit, or national wildlife refuge sub-unit. Below are the purposes of Swan Lake NWR and their sources:

- “as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife” Executive Order 7563, dated Feb. 27, 1937)
- “for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” 16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)
- “... particular value in carrying out the national migratory bird management program.” 16



Waterfowl on Swan Lake NWR. Photo credit: USFWS

U.S.C. § 667b (An Act Authorizing the Transfer of Certain Real Property for Wildlife)

Refuge Vision

The Refuge vision is a concise, descriptive statement of what the planning unit should be, or what we hope to do, based primarily upon the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) and specific Refuge purposes, and other mandates. We established the following vision statement for Swan Lake NWR:

Diverse and abundant wildlife flourishes within a mosaic of grass, trees, and wetlands recalling an earlier era when the Grand River meandered across its broad, open floodplain. Visitors enjoy recreation dependent on wildlife and show their appreciation by supporting conservation and Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Refuge Goals

Considering the purposes of the Refuge and our vision for the future, we have established the following goals for Swan Lake NWR:

Figure 1: Location of Swan Lake NWR



Habitat: Wetlands, grasslands, and bottomland forests providing habitat for migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and other wildlife within the Grand River floodplain.

Wildlife: Diverse wildlife teeming within native habitats of the Grand River floodplain.

People: Visitors enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation and understand the natural and cultural resources of the Refuge and its role in their conservation.

Purpose and Need for Plan

This Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) identifies the role Swan Lake NWR will play in supporting the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and provides primary management guidance for the Refuge. The Plan articulates management goals for the next 15 years and defines objectives and strategies that will achieve those goals. Several legislative mandates within the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 have guided the development of this Plan. These mandates include:

- Wildlife has first priority in the management of refuges.
- Wildlife-dependent recreation activities of hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education and interpretation are the priority public uses of the

NWRS. These uses will be facilitated when they do not interfere with a refuge’s purposes or the mission of the NWRS.

- Other uses of the refuge will only be allowed when they are determined to be appropriate and compatible with the refuge purposes and mission of the NWRS.

Following the recommendations of this CCP will enhance management of Swan Lake NWR by:

- Providing a clear statement of direction for future management of the Refuge.
- Giving Refuge neighbors, visitors, and the public an understanding of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s management actions on and around the Refuge.
- Ensuring that the Refuge’s management actions and programs are consistent with the mandates of the NWRS.
- Ensuring that Refuge management considers federal, state, and county plans.
- Establishing long-term Refuge management continuity.
- Providing a basis for the development of budget requests for Refuge operations, maintenance, and capital improvement needs.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Swan Lake NWR is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). The Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. It oversees the enforcement of federal wildlife laws, management and protection of migratory bird populations, restoration of nationally significant fisheries, administration of the Endangered Species Act, and the restoration of wildlife habitat such as wetlands. The Service also manages the Refuge System.

The National Wildlife Refuge System

Refuge lands are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which was founded in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated Pelican Island in Florida as a sanctuary for Brown Pelicans. Today, the System is a network of about 545 refuges and wetland management districts covering about 95 million acres of public lands and waters. Most of these lands are in Alaska, with approximately 16 million acres located in the lower 48 states and several island territories.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest collection of lands specifically managed for fish and wildlife. Overall, it provides habitat for more than 5,000 species of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and insects. As a result of international treaties for migratory bird conservation and other legislation, such as the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929, many refuges have been established to protect migratory waterfowl and their migratory flyways.

Refuges also play a crucial role in preserving endangered and threatened species. Among the most notable is Aransas NWR in Texas, which provides winter habitat for the highly endangered Whooping Crane. Likewise, the Florida Panther Refuge protects one of the nation's most endan-



Swan Lake NWR offers wildlife viewing opportunities. Photo credit: USFWS

gered predators. Refuges also provide unique recreational and educational opportunities for people.

When human activities are compatible with wildlife and habitat conservation, refuges are places where people can enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and environmental interpretation. Many refuges have a visitor center, wildlife trails, an automobile tour, and environmental education programs. Nationwide, approximately 30 million people visited national wildlife refuges in 2004.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 established several important mandates aimed at making the management of national wildlife refuges more cohesive. The preparation of comprehensive conservation plans (CCPs) is one of those mandates. The legislation directs the Secretary of the Interior to ensure that the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and purposes of the individual refuges are carried out. It also requires the Secretary to maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System are to:

- Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats, including species that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
- Develop and maintain a network of habitats for migratory birds, anadromous and interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations that is strategically distributed and carefully managed to meet important life history needs of these species across their ranges.
- Conserve those ecosystems, plant communities, wetlands of national or international significance, and landscapes and seascapes that are unique, rare, declining, or under-represented in existing protection efforts.
- Provide and enhance opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation).
- Foster understanding and instill appreciation of the diversity and interconnectedness of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.

Existing Partnerships

Working with others via intra- and interagency partnerships is important in accomplishing the mission of the Service as well as assisting Swan Lake NWR in meeting its primary objective of providing a resting and feeding area for migratory birds and other wildlife. Partnerships with other federal and state agencies and with a diversity of other public and private organizations are increasingly important. Other agencies can provide invaluable assistance in research and maintenance. Private groups and non-profit organizations greatly enhance public involvement in the Refuge, building enthusiasm and support for its mission.

Besides the partnerships that the Service holds on a national level, Swan Lake NWR maintains informal partnerships with several organizations:

- Friends of Swan Lake NWR
- Missouri Department of Conservation
- Missouri Department of Natural Resources
- Missouri Department of Transportation
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Farm Service Agency
- Ducks Unlimited

Legal and Policy Guidance

In addition to the legislation establishing the Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, other federal laws, executive orders, and regulations govern the administration of Swan Lake NWR. See Appendix G for a list of the guiding legislation and executive orders.