

Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge

Release of Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Greetings!

This newsletter describes the progress the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we) has made in developing a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge (Montezuma Refuge, refuge). It also summarizes the different alternatives the planning team evaluated for the refuge in the accompanying Environmental Assessment (EA). Additionally, we include information about how to obtain and comment on the draft CCP/EA.

The Refuge

Montezuma Refuge lies in central New York, in Cayuga, Seneca, and Wayne Counties, between the cities of Rochester and Syracuse. The Service currently owns interests in 9,184 acres of the 19,510 acres in the approved acquisition boundary. The refuge is part of the Montezuma Wetlands Complex (MWC), whose mission is to protect and restore wildlife habitat for the long-term benefit of wildlife populations. Refuge habitats include emergent marshes and shallow-water mudflats, open water, bottomland floodplain forest, old fields and shrublands, croplands, grassland, and successional forest.

Comprehensive Conservation Planning

In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) Improvement Act. Its main components include



Doug Racine

Northern Harrier at the Main Pool



Doug Racine

Knox-Marsellus Marsh, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge

a unifying mission for the Refuge System, a new process for determining compatible uses of refuges, and a requirement to prepare CCPs for each refuge in the Refuge System.

A CCP is a 15-year strategic plan guiding management for all refuge programs. Service policy requires that CCPs be revised at least every 15 years, or sooner if significant new information becomes available.

Draft Plan Available for Public Review

The CCP process for Montezuma Refuge officially began in February 2010. The core planning team includes refuge staff, a representative from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and Service planners. We have now completed a draft plan which we are distributing for public review and comment through June 21, 2012.

An EA, required by the National Environmental Policy Act, accompanies the draft plan. The EA describes in detail the three management alternatives we evaluated for Montezuma Refuge to

achieve the refuge's purposes, vision, and goals (see highlights below). It also provides an analysis of the potential effects on the environment from implementing each alternative.

We have identified alternative B as the Service-preferred alternative for the refuge. Please see the following section for a brief description of the alternatives evaluated for the refuge. For more detailed descriptions, please refer to chapter 3 of the draft CCP/EA.

Management Alternatives Considered

Below are brief descriptions of the alternatives we evaluated for the refuge. These are followed by more detailed highlights in the table. Please refer to chapter 3 of the draft CCP/EA for the complete descriptions of each alternative.

Alternative A - Current Management

This alternative describes our current management priorities and activities and is considered the "No Action" alternative. It serves as a baseline for comparing and contrasting alternatives B and C.

Montezuma Refuge Draft Goals

Goal 1: Provide, enhance, and restore where possible, freshwater emergent marsh, open water wetland, and mudflat habitats to benefit native wildlife and plant communities, particularly migrating waterfowl and shorebirds and breeding marshbirds.

Goal 2: Restore and maintain forested wetlands, riparian forests along the Seneca and Clyde Rivers, and upland forests to benefit priority native species, including songbirds, bats, and important plant communities.

Goal 3: Manage grassland and shrubland habitats primarily to benefit bird species of conservation concern.

Goal 4: Ensure visitors of all abilities and varied interests participate in and enjoy the refuge's opportunities for wildlife observation, interpretation, photography and environmental education. Motivate them to value, support, and contribute to the refuge, Montezuma Wetlands Complex, and National Wildlife Refuge System. Increase their understanding of wetlands and wetland functions, and help them become better environmental stewards.

Goal 5: Provide opportunity for hunters and anglers to enjoy and support hunting and fishing on the refuge and increase their understanding of the regional environmental importance of the refuge and of the greater Montezuma Wetlands Complex.

Goal 6: Increase awareness and cooperation among state and federal agencies, local communities, environmental organizations, universities and other partners. Help them understand the role of the refuge and the Montezuma Wetlands Complex in the community, and encourage participation in achieving the vision of the complex.

On Montezuma Refuge, habitat management for plant and wildlife communities would remain our highest priority. We would continue to offer our current level of high-quality, wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, including wildlife observation and photography, environmental interpretation, and hunting. Partnerships with Federal, State, and local agencies would continue to emphasize the role of the refuge in the community.

Alternative B - Service-preferred Alternative

This is the Service-preferred alternative because it combines the actions we believe would best achieve the refuge's purposes, vision, and goals.

Under this alternative we would expand wetland restoration efforts to benefit priority species. We would expand public use opportunities on the refuge, including expanding the refuge's trail system and developing discovery areas. Alternative B also proposes collocating refuge staff and the Service's New York Ecological Service office.

Alternative C - Less Active Habitat Management

Alternative C would convert much of the emergent marsh habitat on the refuge to bottomland floodplain forest. We would also expand hunting opportunities to include a spring and fall turkey hunt.

How to Obtain a Draft Plan

You may view and download the draft CCP/EA online at:

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Montezuma/ccphome.html>

You may request a paper copy or CD-ROM of the draft plan from the Montezuma Refuge headquarters.
Phone: 315/568-5987

Email: Andrea_VanBeusichem@fws.gov

How to Provide Comments

We invite you to share your comments about the draft plan either in writing or in person at our public meetings (see below). We will accept letters, faxes, phone calls, and emails. To be considered, all comments must be emailed or postmarked by June 21, 2012.

Please put "Montezuma Refuge CCP" in the subject line of your email.

Email: northeastplanning@fws.gov

Mail: Lia McLaughlin
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035

Phone: 413/253-8575

Fax: 413/253-8468

Public Meetings

You may also participate in public meetings at the refuge on June 4, 2012. We will have both an afternoon and evening session. At each session, there will be a short presentation on the draft plan, followed by an open house with refuge and planning staff. We will record any comments and suggestions you would like to provide.

Date and Location

June 4, 2012

Afternoon Session: 2-4 p.m.

Evening Session: 6-8 p.m.

Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge
3395 US Route 20 East
Seneca Falls, NY 13148

For directions, please visit the refuge Web site.

People with disabilities who need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact refuge staff at 315/568-5987 or the Federal Relay Service at 1-866-377-8642. Requests for accommodations should be made at least 5 business days in advance.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov>

May 2012



A White Trillium on the refuge.

Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge: Comparison of Alternatives

Alternative A: Current Management	Alternative B: Service-preferred	Alternative C: Less Active Habitat Management
Freshwater Emergent Marsh and Wetland Habitat Management		
Continue to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance up to 22 acres of dry marsh. Restore up to 188 acres of emergent marsh, open water wetland, and mudflat habitat. Annually provide a minimum of 1,500 acres of habitat for breeding marshbirds and migrating waterfowl. 	In addition to alternative A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annually provide a minimum of 2,000 acres of habitat for breeding marshbirds and migrating waterfowl. Restore 132 additional acres of emergent marsh, open water wetland, and mudflat habitats. Map the bathymetry of previously unmapped impoundments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annually provide a minimum of 800 acres of habitat for breeding marshbirds and waterfowl habitat. Where possible, establish connectivity to the New York State Canal System by breaching or removing dikes.
Forested Wetland, Riparian and Upland Forest Habitat		
Continue to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote reforestation by planting native tree species. Maintain 3,432 acres of mature forested wetland and riparian forest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain and restore 3,757 acres of mature forested wetlands and riparian forests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restore and maintain at least 5,833 acres of mature forest Allow refuge impoundments to convert to forest except the Main Pool, Tschache Pool, and the Visitor Center Wetland. Allow most early successional habitat to convert to forest.
Grassland and Shrubland Migratory Bird Habitat		
Continue to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide at least 401 acres of shrubland habitat and 363 acres of grassland habitat. Manage grasslands to provide larger areas of habitat with less surrounding forest and more surrounding open habitats. 	Same as A, except: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a minimum of 291 acres of shrubland habitat dominated by native species. Provide 287 acres of grassland habitat. Use mowing, prescribed fire, and herbicides to maintain shrub and grassland habitats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide 66 acres of shrubland habitat. Provide 68 acres of grassland habitat in one patch.
Public Use		
Continue to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for wildlife observation and photography. Maintain current visitor facilities, and wildflower and native plant gardens. Provide interpretive programs and materials, and accommodate school groups. 	In addition to alternative A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand and add new trails. Construct new visitor center. Develop discovery areas. Extend visitor center hours. Open Wildlife Drive to other uses. Within 5 years, develop an Environmental Education Program that meets State learning standards. Develop new environmental interpretation programs and materials. 	In addition to alternative A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide additional opportunities for wildlife observation and photography. Expand existing visitor center by 25 percent. Evaluate the need for an amphitheater or outdoor pavilion to facilitate outdoor environmental education.
Hunting and Fishing		
Continue to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for waterfowl and white-tailed deer hunting, and fishing. Promote waterfowl hunting opportunities on the refuge via press releases, the Web site, information boards, email, phone, and personal communication with the public. 	In addition to alternative A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open a portion of the refuge to resident Canada goose and snow goose hunting. Develop one to two universal access points for waterfowl hunters. Allow access for turkey hunting during the youth and fall hunt seasons. Expand deer hunting opportunities. Open at least 2 new areas to fishing. 	In addition to Alternative A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow spring and fall turkey hunting. Expand deer hunting.

Alternative A: Current Management	Alternative B: Service-preferred	Alternative C: Less Active Habitat Management
Partnerships and Outreach		
<p>Continue to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, The Nature Conservancy, and other partners, to promote nature-based, public use opportunities on the refuge. • Implement volunteer programs. • Share refuge news and management projects with local media outlets, partners, Friends, and visitors. 	<p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new partnerships and provide offsite programs to a broad variety of civic organizations. • Work with partners to reinvigorate the Montezuma Research Institute. • Work with the Friends group and MWC partners to form volunteer committees to help meet management and public use needs. • Increase outreach with local news media. 	<p>Same as alternative B.</p>

