

Compatibility Determination Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Uses

Wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

Refuge names, establishing and acquisition authorities, and purposes

Each National Wildlife Refuge is established under specific legislation or administrative authority . Similarly, each refuge has one or more specific legal purposes for which it was established. The establishing legislation or authority and the purposes for each refuge in the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Refuge Complex) are given below.

Block Island National Wildlife Refuge

Date Established: 2 November 1973

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities: Block Island National Wildlife Refuge (Block Island Refuge) was established under 16 U.S. Code 667b, Public Law 80 - 537, an Act Authorizing the Transfer of Certain Real Property for Wildlife, or other Purposes.

Purpose(s) for which Refuge was established: Lands acquired under 16 U.S. code 667b, Public Law 80-537 were for. . . “particular value in carrying out the national migratory bird management program.”

Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge

Date Established: 12 August 1970

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities: Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge (Ninigret Refuge) was established under 16 U.S. Code 667b, Public Law 80 - 537, an Act Authorizing the Transfer of Certain Real Property for Wildlife, or Other Purposes. Additions to the refuge were acquired under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 715d.

Purpose(s) for which Refuge was established: Lands acquired under 16 U.S. code 667b, Public Law 80-537 were established for their. . . “particular value in carrying out the national Migratory Bird Management Program.” Additional lands acquired under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. ss 715d) were. . . “for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.”

John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge at Pettaquamscutt Cove

Date Established: 5 November 1988 (originally established as Pettaquamscutt Cove National Wildlife Refuge)

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities: John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge (Chafee Refuge) was established under an Amendment to the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act (102 Stat. 3177) and the National Wildlife Refuge Administrative Act of 1966, as amended (16 USC 668dd - 668ee; 80 STAT 927).

Purpose(s) for which Refuge was established: The purposes for which the refuge was established and managed for are: “(1) to protect and enhance the populations of black ducks and other waterfowl, geese, shorebirds, terns, wading birds, and other wildlife using the refuge; (2) to provide for the conservation and management of fish and wildlife within the refuge; (3) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States respecting fish and wildlife; and (4) to provide opportunities for scientific research, environmental education, and fish and wildlife-oriented recreation” (102 Stat. 3177).

Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge

Date Established: 3 November 1970

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities: Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge (Sachuest Point Refuge) was established under the Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 and the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956.

Purpose(s) for which Refuge was established: Sachuest Point Refuge was established “...for the development, management, advancement, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources” and

for “(1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development; (2) protection of natural resources, and (3) conservation of endangered or threatened species” (Refuge Recreation Act of 1962).

Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge

Date Established: 15 August 1974

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities: The Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge (Trustom Pond Refuge) was established under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, 16 USC 715-715R and by the Refuge Recreation Act, 16 USC c - 1.

Purpose(s) for which Refuge was established: For lands acquired under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, as amended, the purpose of the acquisition is “. . . for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” 16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act) and for “. . . (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development; (2) the protection of natural resources; and (3) the conservation of endangered or threatened species. . .” as authorized by the Refuge Recreation Act, 16 USC. c - 1.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

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 fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Uses

Are the uses priority public uses?

Yes. Wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation were specifically identified as priority, wildlife-dependent recreational uses by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Refuge Improvement Act; P.L. 105-57).

Environmental Education

Where would the use be conducted?

On-refuge environmental education activities would occur on Block Island, Ninigret, Chafee, Sachuest Point, and Trustom Pond refuges, generally within 50 meters of existing trails and other developments such as outdoor classrooms and viewing platforms. Off-refuge programs will occur in local school classrooms or other local community facilities.

Certain areas on refuges may be closed to public access at the Refuge Manager’s discretion to protect sensitive habitats or species of concern, minimize conflicts with other refuge activities, or due to human health and safety concerns.

When would the use be conducted?

Environmental education will occur year-round during daylight hours when the refuge is open; however, most of the field programs will be associated with the fall and spring school year terms.

How would the use be conducted on each of the refuges?

The environmental education program will have three components: on-refuge activities, community outreach, and technical assistance to adjacent landowners. Community outreach and technical assistance will not occur on refuge lands and are further described in the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA) for the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex (December 2000). On-refuge activities will primarily include teacher- or staff-guided field trips exploring topics requested by teachers, “Teach-the Teacher” workshops, or more structured curriculum-based programs specifically designed for use on the refuges. Participants will observe nature from designated refuge trails and viewing platforms, or engage in activities at existing and future outdoor classroom sites.

Additionally, activities will utilize interpretive infrastructures such as kiosks, sign panels, visitor contact Stations, and the future Refuge Complex Visitors Center/Administrative Facility (see Interpretation section).

We will develop a Visitor Services Plan for the entire Refuge Complex by 2004, which will provide more detailed, strategic guidance for the environmental education program by setting objectives, strategies, and evaluation criteria. It will include timelines and priorities for accomplishing the program outlined in refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plans. We will enlist partners to help us identify objectives for the environmental education program, and participate in the design, implementation, and monitoring of specific, curriculum-based programs. A good example is the existing partnership with the Friends Group who design, fund, and implement an endangered and threatened species and barrier beach education program.

All activities will avoid sensitive areas prone to disturbance (e.g. sensitive vegetation areas) or degradation (e.g. soil compaction), and will be designed to minimize impacts to nesting birds or other breeding wildlife. Access to activities will be on foot, snowshoe, or cross-country skis. Access by kayak and canoe will be appropriate for Chafee and Ninigret refuges.

Environmental Education – Block Island Refuge:

Refuge Complex staff have not conducted environmental education programs on Block Island Refuge to date. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) on Block Island has an established program with a part-time educator leading occasional trips with schoolchildren on the refuge. An unknown number of teacher-led school group trips also occur on the refuge.

We will initiate a formal partnership with TNC to conduct environmental education programs on the refuge. This will facilitate the sharing of resources, and assist in curriculum development and implementation. We will also support an environmental education program on the refuge by utilizing the Beane Point facility as a classroom laboratory or for housing seasonal educators. Activities at Beane Point and on refuge beaches will avoid disturbance to nesting and roosting shorebirds and wading birds.

Environmental Education – Ninigret Refuge:

Currently, much of the refuge's environmental education is conducted by the Frosty Drew Nature Center under a Memorandum of Agreement. Frosty Drew is a private, non-profit education facility located adjacent to the refuge in Charlestown's Ninigret Park. The Center's interpretive and environmental education programs consist of outdoor classroom activities held throughout the year for school and scout groups; regularly scheduled public nature tours; and a nature day camp ("Nature Week") for children during the summer.

All environmental education programs on the refuge are conducted by naturalists from this organization and knowledgeable members of the Refuge Complex's volunteer cadre. During the last several years, approximately 2,500 students from local schools have participated in outdoor classroom activities. Group numbers average 42 students per class, but instructors will take up to 50 students. Typically, the Frosty Drew programs use the refuge only for access to Ninigret Pond, where they dip-net and explore salt pond ecology.

The partnership has worked very well and we have not witnessed any adverse impacts to wildlife or habitat. We will continue the cooperative venture with Frosty Drew. We will also develop two low-impact outdoor classroom sites, which will interpret the on-going native habitat restoration work (asphalt runway removal project) and salt pond ecology, and develop resource education stations along the existing "Trail Through Time," which traverses the refuge. We will organize a Volunteer Environmental Education Corps (shared with Trustom Pond Refuge) to help with program implementation and monitoring.

Environmental Education – Chafee Refuge:

Refuge Complex staff have not conducted environmental education programs on Chafee Refuge to date. However, we consider this refuge to have outstanding potential, especially with support from local conservation partners such as: the Narrow River Preservation Association, the Narrow River Land Trust, the South County Land Trust, South County Museum, the University of Rhode Island, and numerous public and private schools. Environmental education would compliment ecotourism-related uses, as well as kayaking and canoeing, which are becoming increasingly popular in the waters on and adjacent to the refuge.

We will cooperate with RI DEM to educate the public on the impacts to native saltmarsh vegetation and wildlife from excessive motorboat and jet ski speeds near the refuge shoreline. Additionally, we will cooperate with local schools and partners to develop an outdoor education curriculum featuring the Narrow River estuary and Pettaquamscutt Cove. We will also develop a formal partnership with the South County Museum to conduct environmental education programs in the area. We will utilize the road in the former Bridgeport Commons subdivision for access, and are evaluating the potential to construct at least one new accessible trail. The final trail location will be designed to avoid sensitive areas and minimize shoreline erosion. No other infrastructure is planned at this time.

Environmental Education – Sachuest Point Refuge:

Environmental education activities at Sachuest Point Refuge include numerous visits by school groups led by either teachers or Refuge staff, or programs conducted by the private, non-profit Norman Bird Sanctuary. Up to 650 students/year have been accommodated. All activities utilize the existing three-mile trail system.

The environmental education program will be greatly enhanced with the planned renovation of the Visitor Center which will increase its effectiveness as an educational facility. Renovations will include improved exhibits and classroom meeting space. We will also develop a formal partnership with the Norman Bird Sanctuary to share resources and cooperatively develop and implement environmental education programs on the refuge. Finally, we will cooperate with local Middletown and Newport schools to develop curriculum-based programs (featuring refuge resources), and establish a Sachuest Point Volunteer Environmental Education Corps. We will develop two low-impact outdoor education sites: one will focus on native upland vegetation restoration, and the second on wetlands restoration. Both sites will be located to minimize disturbance to wildlife and sensitive habitats.

Environmental Education – Trustom Pond Refuge:

Environmental education activities at Trustom Pond Refuge currently include teacher-led school visits or programs led by Refuge staff and volunteers. Up to 17 classes per year have been hosted on the refuge. An outdoor education site on Moonstone Beach educates beach visitors and school children about endangered and threatened species and barrier beach management. The program will continue to be improved, thanks to the efforts of the Friends Group. A second outdoor education site is a very popular school destination site. This site consists of a dock on the old “farm pond.” Students sample aquatic plant and invertebrate communities with dip nets from the dock. These programs have been ongoing and we have not witnessed any impacts to wildlife or habitats. Access to environmental educational activities occurs on existing roads or trails. Two additional outdoor education sites will feature native habitat management and coastal salt pond ecology. Both sites will be located to minimize disturbance to wildlife and sensitive habitats.

As mentioned under Ninigret Refuge, we plan to organize a Volunteer Environmental Education Corps to help with program implementation and monitoring.

Why is the use being proposed on each of the refuges?

The 1997 Refuge Improvement Act states that priority, wildlife-dependent public uses should receive enhanced consideration in planning and be facilitated on refuges to the extent they are compatible.

During public meetings and review for the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Assessment (December 2000), environmental education was identified as the most desirable priority public use to provide on refuges. Environmental education activities promote public understanding and appreciation of the role of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the individual refuges, in the conservation of wildlife, plants, and cultural resources. These programs provide an opportunity to share the missions of the Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System. Another important goal of the program is to teach young people how to take personal responsibility for environmental stewardship throughout their lives. These programs will help us achieve refuge purposes and management objectives, as stated in the final Comprehensive Conservation Plans for each refuge.

Environmental Interpretation

Where would the use be conducted?

On-refuge environmental interpretation activities would occur on Block Island, Ninigret, Chafee, Sachuest Point, and Trustom Pond Refuges, generally on designated trails or at developments such as kiosks and viewing platforms. In addition, the planned Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex Visitor Center/Administrative Facility (RI VC) and the renovations at the Sachuest Point Visitor Center will enhance the interpretive programs for the Refuge Complex and serve as “interpretive centers of excellence”. Off-refuge programs will occur in school classrooms, at campgrounds, or in local community facilities.

Certain areas on refuges may be closed to public access at the Refuge Manager’s discretion to protect sensitive habitats or species of concern, minimize conflicts with other refuge activities, or due to human health and safety concerns.

When would the use be conducted?

Interpretive activities will be conducted year-round, primarily during daylight hours when the refuge is open. Occasional staff- or volunteer-led night programs will occur during the year. Interpretive activities will be stepped up during the summer months, when the refuges receive peak visitation.

How would the use be conducted?

Environmental interpretation activities on-refuges will be both self-guided and staff or volunteer-led. Activities will occur on designated trails or at developed sites. Kiosks at refuge trailheads, refuge trail guides and brochures, and interpretive panels at observation platforms will facilitate self-guided tours on trails. Staff and volunteer-led programs will be more diverse and allow for more interaction with visitors. A seasonally-staffed visitor contact station on Trustom Pond Refuge will continue to be maintained and another will be constructed on Ninigret Refuge to provide information to visitors. Access to activities will be by foot, snowshoe, or cross-country skis. Access by kayak and canoe will be allowed for Chafee and Ninigret refuges.

As with the environmental education programs, we will be developing a Visitor Services Plan by 2004 to further provide detailed, strategic direction for the environmental interpretation program and identify partnership opportunities.

Environmental Interpretation – Block Island Refuge:

In 2002, we plan to coordinate with the Town of New Shoreham and other Block Island conservation partners to develop a public use and access plan for all public and conservation lands on north Block Island. The plan will identify opportunities for a trail network and locations and determine where interpretive infrastructure is best suited. At this time, no infrastructure is planned for refuge lands.

Environmental Interpretation – Ninigret Refuge:

Interpretation of habitat and wildlife values will continue at the trailhead and two parking lot kiosks. The main parking area (off Route 1) has recently been improved to accommodate more visitors and buses, and will be maintained. Self-guided brochures and species checklists are available at the kiosks. The

3.8-mile, handicapped-accessible “Trail Through Time”, once completed, will have interpretive stations along its length. Interpretive panels will be improved at the one existing observation platform and will be developed for the two planned observation platforms. A seasonally-staffed visitor contact station will be constructed to facilitate visitor contacts and distribute information.

Refuge staff and volunteers will continue to lead interpretive programs on the refuge, at the nearby Burlingame State Park campground, in classrooms, and at other local community facilities upon request.

Environmental Interpretation – Chafee Refuge:

No interpretive opportunities currently exist at Chafee Refuge; however, we plan to develop several self-guided opportunities. We are evaluating opportunities to construct a kiosk and accessible trail and observation platform at Bridgeport Commons. Cooperating with RI DOT and the Town of Narragansett, we hope to construct an interpretive kiosk and pullout overlook at Middlebridge. We intend to develop canoe and kayak interpretive, self-guided trail guides. Also, we will coordinate with RI DOT’s construction of an interpretive kiosk on the South County Bike Trail where it traverses the refuge. Finally, we plan to partner with the South County Museum to develop refuge interpretive programs featuring the Narrow River.

Refuge staff and volunteers will lead interpretive programs on the refuge, in local classrooms, or in cooperation with the South County Museum.

Environmental Interpretation – Sachuest Point Refuge:

The Sachuest Point Visitor Center is currently being renovated, including development of new interpretive exhibits. Interpretive information will continue to be posted at the one existing kiosk off the parking lot. As part of an expanded interpretive program, we will develop a self-guided tour on the existing trail system interpreting habitat management, natural history, and cultural resources. At least 3/4 mile of the trail system will be renovated to provide handicapped-accessibility. We would also develop 2 additional interpretive kiosks at strategic points along the trails; provide interpretive information at two observation platforms; improve signage; create “watchable wildlife” pamphlets, and develop multi lingual literature. Off-refuge, we will coordinate with the Town of Middletown to develop interpretive signs, kiosks, or exhibits on the Town’s Second and Third beaches and plan an exhibit for the Newport Visitor Center.

We will continue to provide staff and volunteer-led interpretive programs on the refuge throughout the year. As mentioned above under environmental education, we will continue our partnership with the Norman Bird Sanctuary, cooperating in refuge interpretive programs.

Environmental Interpretation – Trustom Pond Refuge:

A seasonally-staffed visitor contact station and kiosk are established on Trustom Pond Refuge at the main trail head to facilitate visitor contacts and provide interpretive materials. Self-guided trail brochures and species checklists are available at this location. The easternmost branch of the trail will be renovated to provide handicapped-access to the Pond. Interpretive panels will be improved and/or developed at the three existing observation platforms. Refuge staff and volunteers will continue to lead interpretive programs on the refuge, in local classrooms, or at local community facilities upon request. We will improve the existing kiosk at the Moonstone Beach parking area.

Why is this use being proposed on the refuges?

The 1997 Refuge Improvement Act states that priority, wildlife-dependent public uses should receive enhanced consideration in planning and be facilitated on refuges to the extent they are compatible. The overarching purpose of the program is to connect visitors with refuge resources and develop enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation for natural and cultural resources. Visitors will gain an understanding of the missions of the Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the contribution of the Rhode Island refuges to this system. Similar to the environmental education program, another goal is to

develop a sense of stewardship leading to actions and attitudes that reflect concern and respect for natural and cultural resources. These programs will help us achieve refuge purposes and management objectives, as stated in final Comprehensive Conservation Plans.

Wildlife Observation and Photography

Where would the use be conducted?

Wildlife observation and photography would be conducted from Block Island, Ninigret, Chafee, Sachuest Point, and Trustom Pond refuges on designated trails and developed sites, such as observation platforms and photo blinds (see below).

Certain areas on refuges may be closed to public access at the Refuge Manager's discretion to protect sensitive habitats or species of concern, minimize conflicts with other refuge activities, or due to human health and safety concerns. Some restricted areas are described below for each refuge.

When would the use be conducted?

Activities would occur year-round during daylight hours when the refuge is open. Some activities may be allowed after dark under special use permit, or in conjunction with Refuge staff or volunteer-led programs.

How would the use be conducted?

In general, wildlife observation and recreational photography activities will be self-guided on designated trails. Access will be by foot, snow shoe, or cross-country skis. Four wheel drive vehicles are allowed only on Block Island and Ninigret refuge barrier beaches, and only outside of seabird nesting season. Parking is to occur in designated parking areas. No dogs, horses, or bicycles will be allowed on the refuges. Canoe and kayak access is allowed for Chafee and Ninigret refuges. Exceptions to these conditions will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and will require a special use permit at the discretion of the Refuge Manager. Commercial photography requires a special use permit; news photography may require a special use permit at the discretion of the Refuge Manager.

Wildlife Observation and Photography – Block Island Refuge:

Much of the existing refuge is beach with no designated trails. The public use and access plan, to be developed in 2002 with partners on Block Island, will identify and designate trails through upland areas and sand dunes. The need for other infrastructure (e.g. viewing platforms, photo blinds) will be determined in this plan as well. In general, access will be by foot. Four wheel drive vehicles are allowed on the refuge beach outside of a seasonal closure period for nesting and migrating shorebirds from April 1 to September 15. Other refuge areas may be seasonally restricted if the federally threatened piping plover is observed displaying courtship behavior, or to protect sensitive nesting and roosting areas. The access to Beane Point may be restricted seasonally from approximately May 1 to August 1, to minimize disturbance to nesting wading birds and shorebirds.

Wildlife Observation and Photography – Ninigret Refuge:

Wildlife observation and photography will continue along the refuge's "Trail Through Time" or along the barrier beach unit. Infrastructure along the trail to support these activities includes the one existing and two planned observation platforms. Bicycling, which had been allowed on the former asphalt runways, will no longer be allowed on the refuge.

The refuge's 22-acre barrier beach parcel is generally access on foot. Four wheel drive vehicles are allowed on the refuge outside of the seasonal closure period (April 1st to September 15th). Nesting areas are marked on the ground each year, and protective fencing is erected to minimize disturbance.

Wildlife Observation and Photography – Chafee Refuge:

Currently, there is no infrastructure for wildlife observation and photography. We hope to cooperate with the Town of Narragansett and RI DOT to construct a handicapped accessible observation platform at

Middle Bridge. We are also evaluating opportunities to construct a second observation platform at Bridgeport Commons to facilitate wildlife viewing and photography. We will utilize the road in the former Bridgeport Commons subdivision for access, and are evaluating the potential to construct at least one new accessible trail. The final trail location will be designed to avoid sensitive areas and minimize shoreline erosion. Access will be on foot or by canoe and kayak. No other infrastructure is planned.

Wildlife Observation and Photography – Sachuest Point Refuge:

Wildlife observation and photography will continue on three miles of designated trail leading to two observation platforms overlooking the ocean. We will be designating access points down to the water to minimize bank erosion off the headland. We plan to reduce the redundancy in the trail system and will be eliminating portions of Trails 3 and 4 in the future. Additional refuge opportunities are provided on refuge beaches when visitors walk up from the Town of Middletown's Second and Third Beaches; access to these refuge beaches will continue to be on foot only.

Wildlife Observation and Photography – Trustom Pond Refuge:

Wildlife observation and photography will continue on the 3.5 miles of designated trails leading to three observation platforms (two along the shore of Trustom Pond and one on the half-acre farm pond). The parking lot at the visitor contact station will be maintained for trail access. We plan to construct two photo blinds along the pond shore to provide more opportunities for high quality photography. We will be evaluating the redundancy in the trail system and may be eliminating portions of trails in the future. We will also be reconstructing the eastern-most portion of the trail to allow for barrier-free access to the pond.

The Moonstone Beach area of the refuge is open to foot travel only. Above mean high water the refuge is restricted from public access from April 1st to September 15th to protect nesting and migrating piping plover, least tern, and other shorebirds. The closure area is marked on the ground. Parking for Moonstone Beach will continue to be provided and administered by the Town of South Kingstown.

Why is this use being proposed?

The 1997 Refuge Improvement Act states that priority, wildlife-dependent public uses should receive enhanced consideration in planning and be facilitated on refuges to the extent they are compatible. The wildlife observation and photography programs promote refuge purposes and management objectives through activities that increase public knowledge and understanding of wildlife and the importance of habitat protection and management. Wildlife observation and photography are two of the six priority, wildlife-dependent recreational uses for the Refuge System. Through these activities, visitors will gain an understanding of the missions of the Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the contribution of the Rhode Island refuges to this system.

Availability of Resources

Environmental Education and Interpretation, Wildlife Observation and Photography

Refuge Complex Funding Analysis

New Construction

Estimated Costs

Rhode Island Refuge Complex Visitor Center	\$2,000,000*
Sachuest Point Visitor Center Exhibitory	\$ 100,000
Middlebridge Center (Chafee Refuge)	\$ 50,000
New trail (Chafee Refuge)	\$ 10,000
Outdoor Education Sites - 6 new (2 Ninigret, 2 Sachuest Point, 2 Trustom Pond)	\$ 18,000
Kiosks - 4 new (2 Chafee, 2 Sachuest Point)	\$ 12,000
Observation platforms - 3 new, handicapped accessible (2 Ninigret, 1 Chafee)	\$ 30,000**
Photography Blinds - 2 new	\$ 6,000

Total: \$ 2,226,000

* A separate Environmental Assessment was completed for this project (Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Visitor Center/Administrative Facility, Environmental Assessment, January 2001). The project has been approved for construction, and received special funding through the 1997 Transportation Equity Act (TEA-21). Funds reflect the Visitor Contact portion of the center.

** One of these projects may involve an existing platform to a new location at Sachuest Point Refuge.

Predicted Maintenance of Facilities

Estimated Costs

One-time costs:

Beane Point Facility Renovation (Block Island Refuge)	\$ 200,000 +
Sachuest Point Visitor Center Renovation	\$ 1,309,000 +
Renovating existing trails for handicapped accessibility	\$ 100,000

Total: \$ 1,609,000 (one time costs)

Recurring, annual costs:

Regular maintenance of visitor centers:	\$ 25,000
Regular maintenance of kiosks, platforms, education sites, photo blinds, visitor contact facilities, trails, restrooms	\$ 15,000
Equipment, vehicles, and supplies (incl. brochures/trail guides)	\$ 22,000

Total annual recurring costs: \$ 67,000

+ Project has been initiated, primarily funded through Service MMS funds.

New Staffing

The following new positions would be dedicated to planning, implementing, and monitoring the public use programs on the refuge complex, including administration of the Refuge Complex Visitor Center and the Sachuest Point Visitor Center.

One full-time (1.0 FTE) GS-12 Outdoor Recreation Planner (Refuge Complex Program Supervisor):	\$55,000
One full-time (1.0 FTE) GS-11 Outdoor Recreation Planner (Field Programs):	\$46,000
One full-time (1.0 FTE) GS-9 Outdoor Recreation Planner (Visitor Center):	\$38,000
One full-time (1.0 FTE) GS-5/7 Administrative Assistant (Visitor Center Support):	\$31,000
One full-time (1.0 FTE) WG-5 Maintenance Worker	\$33,000

The existing refuge positions of Outreach Specialist and Volunteer Coordinator each dedicate approximately (0.5 FTE) to these public use programs.

Anticipated Impacts of Proposed Actions

On-site activities, particularly group activities, may result in short term impacts by disturbing and displacing wildlife or trampling vegetation. Incidences of littering, vegetation removal, and vandalism may increase as a result of the projected increase in visitation. However, with use restricted to designated trails and other refuge structures, we predict the impacts will be confined to small areas and in areas already affected. We will be reducing the sources of past impacts on wildlife and habitats from dogs, horses, and bicycles, as these will no longer be allowed. Overall, we expect the adverse impacts to be short term and confined to small areas. It is important to note that we have not observed significant resource degradation, long-term consequences, or cumulative effects on any of the refuges with established programs; however, we will develop site specific monitoring criteria to ensure these will not occur. Activities will be modified or curtailed if this is the case. All of the activities are consistent with final Comprehensive Conservation Plans.

New structures will be located with consideration of the long term consequences and cumulative impacts to wildlife and habitats. With the exception of the Rhode Island Refuge Complex Visitor Center, most of the new structures proposed (e.g. kiosks, observation platforms, photography blinds) would each result in habitat losses of less than 1/4 acre. The environmental impacts of the planned Visitor Center/Administrative Office facility were described and analyzed in a separate environmental assessment.

Public Review and Comment

Public review and comments were solicited in conjunction with the planning process for the Draft Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex CCP/EA, December 2000 . A compatibility determination for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation was distributed to the public as an appendix to the draft CCP/EA, complying with the National Environmental Policy Act and Service policies on writing compatibility determinations and comprehensive conservation plans. The draft CCP/EA, along with a compatibility determination for all priority public uses, was released for a 51 day comment period during January and February 2001.

In December 2001, we completed and distributed a document titled "Summary of, and the Service's Response to, Public Comments Received on the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA) for the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex." This document provides a comprehensive summary of comments and our disposition of those comments. The majority of comments regarding wildlife observation and photography and environmental education and interpretation were in support of Alternative B, our Proposed Action. Some concerns were expressed by Block Island residents who did not approve of the proposed infrastructure for Block Island Refuge. In response, as we have noted above, we will be working with our island partners in 2003 to develop a public use and access plan for all of northern Block Island. There were other concerns expressed regarding our proposal to eliminate redundant trails at Sachuest Point Refuge. Our response reiterated our objective to increase the amount of area in contiguous, undisturbed natural habitat to benefit nesting and migratory

birds, while also continuing to maintain wildlife observation and photography opportunities. We pointed out that we would continue to maintain Trails #1, #2, and #5, which provide access along the entire perimeter of the peninsula.

Determination

The uses are compatible X.

The uses are not compatible ___.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

Activities will be held on designated sites where only minimal direct and short term impacts are predicted, and adverse long term, cumulative impacts are not anticipated. Annual monitoring of sites and programs will be conducted to assess whether objectives are being met and to prevent long-term site degradation. If evidence of unacceptable impacts appear, the programs would be modified or curtailed as deemed necessary by the Refuge Manager.

Certain areas on refuges may be closed to public access at any time at the Refuge Manager's discretion to protect sensitive habitats, species of concern, minimize conflicts with other refuge activities, or due to human health and safety concerns.

Off-trail use or use during a refuge's closed hours requires a special use permit unless the activity is in conjunction with a Refuge staff- or volunteer-led program.

Commercial photography activities require a special use permit.

Four wheel drive vehicles are only allowed on Block Island and Ningret refuge barrier beaches, and only outside of the seasonal closure for seabird nesting (April 1 - September 15). All other access to the refuges is by foot, snowshoes, or cross country ski.

Justification

Environmental education and interpretation, wildlife observation and photography are priority, wildlife-dependent public uses identified by the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act. By definition, these activities have been determined appropriate by law and, when compatible, are to be facilitated on refuges. These programs support the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System by promoting an understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural resources and their management within a national system of refuges. Our programs will reach out to all segments of the public to expand support for the refuge system. Individual refuge programs will be consistent with, and fully support, the goals and objectives in refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plans.

Signature – Refuge Manager: 
Charles E. Vandemoer

Date: 3/20/02

Concurrence – Regional Chief: 
Anthony Leger

Date: 5/7/2002

Mandatory 15-year Reevaluation

Date: 5/7/2017

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