

Iowa Wetland Management District Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan Executive Summary

Introduction

The Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP, Plan) for the Iowa Wetland Management District (WMD, district) is now complete. A separate environmental assessment (EA) and Draft CCP documents the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) process for developing the CCP. In general, scoping revealed issues that drove alternative ways of managing the district. Implementation of each of those alternative management styles (including the no action alternative) had different effects on the physical, biological, and socio-economic environment. Analysis of those effects revealed the “preferred” alternative, which constitutes the CCP. The Plan includes goals, objectives, and strategies for the district to guide overall management for the next 15 years. The document can be viewed and downloaded at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/planning/iowawetlands/index.html>. A CD or paper copy of the Plan can be requested through:



Iowa Wetland Management District

- E-mail at r3planning@fws.gov (Please include “Iowa WMD CCP” in the subject line); or
- Mail at Union Slough NWR, Attn: Iowa WMD CCP, 1710--360th Street Titonka, Iowa, 50480; or
- Telephone at (515) 928-2523.

The Iowa WMD consists of scattered tracts of habitat (both wetland and upland grassland) known as Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs). Currently, there are 75 WPAs in 18 counties in north-central Iowa totaling 24,712 acres in fee title primarily managed by 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) in Iowa, an area known for its waterfowl production. The district also includes 575 WPA acres and approximately 434 Farm Service Agency acres in conservation easements on private land. This plan was prepared with the intent that the strong partnership with the Iowa DNR will continue over the next 15 years.

District Vision

Waterfowl and other winged wildlife herald the richness of resilient, productive wetlands and tallgrass prairies, bringing appreciation and satisfaction to visitors, the rewards of enduring commitments across ownerships throughout the Prairie Pothole Region of Iowa.

District Goals

Wildlife: In partnership with the Iowa DNR and others, restore a natural diversity and abundance of waterfowl, migratory birds, and other native fauna within the Iowa WMD.

Habitat: In partnership with the Iowa DNR and others, conserve, restore, and expand grassland and wetland habitat managing for a natural diversity of native flora within the Iowa WMD.

People: In partnership with the Iowa DNR and others, promote understanding, appreciation, and support for the Iowa WMD as well as stewardship and understanding of the southern Prairie Pothole Region and its native ecosystems to visitors and local residents.

Public Involvement



Public Open House Meeting

Initial conversations about comprehensive planning for the district began mid-year of 2009; however, the official kick-off was in December 2011. In addition to identifying information essential to the planning process, district staff also developed a communication plan and a preliminary list of issues to be addressed in the CCP. The public scoping period began on January 30, 2012 and lasted for 30 days. The public was contacted through letters, news releases, and four open house meetings. The open houses gave the public an opportunity to discuss issues with district and Iowa DNR staff and regional planners. The public was also given 30 days to review and comment on the EA and Draft CCP document. This review period began on Monday August 19th, 2013 and was announced through postcards, news releases and two open house meetings.

Initial conversations about comprehensive planning for the district began mid-year of 2009; however, the official kick-off was in December 2011. In addition to identifying information essential to the planning process, district staff also developed a communication plan and a preliminary list of issues to be addressed in the CCP. The public scoping period began on January 30, 2012 and lasted for 30 days. The public was contacted through letters, news releases, and four open house meetings. The open houses gave the public an opportunity to discuss issues with district and Iowa DNR staff and regional planners.

Issues

Scoping produced ten issues that were addressed when developing alternative ways of managing the district:

- What species group and life cycle is the focus of district management?
- How should the district address the decrease in populations of grassland-dependent birds due to the decline of grassland habitat?
- How can the district improve/maintain upland habitat quality?

- What wetland type is the focus of district management?
- How can the district improve/maintain wetland quality?
- How can the district manage food plot use?
- How will the district address the decreasing purchasing power of existing funds?
- What are the district's priority areas for acquisition?
- How can the district promote awareness and understanding of WPAs as well as educate the public on the importance of their management?
- What public uses can the district allow that are appropriate and compatible with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS, Service) and National Wildlife Refuge System mission and meet the public demand for more recreational opportunities?

Implementation

The following statements will apply to the district over the next 15 years:

- The general management direction in this plan will apply to all district properties in which the Service has acquired an interest across the 35 counties.
- Existing WPAs or other district properties will be inventoried as necessary; any new techniques implemented will be monitored as necessary to allow for adaptive management; and research will be designed when and where it was needed to support and/or guide management.
- Since one of the goals of refuge/district planning is, "to provide a basis for adaptive management by monitoring progress, evaluating plan implementation, and updating refuge plans accordingly" (FWS, 2000), the adaptive management process will be utilized in the district.
- The portions of three WPAs—Jemmerson Slough (Dickinson County), Elk Creek Marsh (Worth County), and Rice Lake (Winnebago and Worth Counties)— currently closed by state regulation as waterfowl refuges will remain closed.
- Within two years of CCP approval, it will be proposed through the federal rulemaking process to implement the following regulation on the Service's fee title property within the Iowa WMD: "You may only use or possess approved nontoxic shot shells while in the field, including shot shells used for hunting wild turkey." This requirement would be in line with current regulations at 50 CFR 32.2(k).
- The district will attempt to reduce its contribution to climate change as well as monitor the effects of climate change in the district.

The following objectives will guide management of the district over the next 15 years:

- Over the 15-year life of the CCP, increase the breeding population of Mallard by 450 pairs and Blue-winged Teal by 450 pairs on protected wetlands (permanent state and federal ownership) in the PPR of Iowa, and develop strategies, as part of the district's Inventory and Monitoring Plan, to set recruitment goals for these species in the PPR of Iowa.

- Over the 15-year life of the CCP, increase native grassland habitat by 7,500 acres with a plant diversity of 100 or more species, and provide more suitable habitat (in terms of vegetative structure as will be defined in the district's Habitat Management Plan) in existing grassland for a wide variety of grassland-dependent birds within the Iowa WMD.
- At the end of the 15-year life of the CCP, perennial grassland, preferably native, is present on at least 97 percent of the uplands of the Iowa WMD.
- At the end of the 15-year life of the CCP a variety of wetland types (75 percent temporary and seasonal, 15 percent semi-permanent, and 10 percent permanent) exist across the Iowa WMD as representative of the pre-Euro-American settlement landscape.
- Over the 15-year life of the CCP, wetlands within the Iowa WMD are restored and managed to provide breeding waterfowl pair densities of at least 0.9 pairs per wetland acre.
- During the 15-year life of the CCP, food plots are present on no greater than three percent of the upland acres within the Iowa WMD.
- Over the 15-year life of the CCP, continue to pursue perpetual protection of wetland and grassland of up to 112,000 acres in the PPR of Iowa in collaboration with county, state, and other federal governments, conservation organizations, private businesses, and concerned citizens. Landscape-level planning tools (i.e., four-square mile survey, restorable wetlands layer, etc.) utilized by Iowa DNR and the Service's Habitat and Population Evaluation Team office will guide partners as to where strategic land acquisition should occur.
- Within 15 years of CCP approval, provide the infrastructure on three WPAs (such as trails, kiosks, pull-offs, etc.) and information (brochure, website, Facebook page, etc.) necessary for visitors to appreciate resources in the Iowa WMD, as defined in the Visitor Services Plan.
- Upon implementation of the CCP, allow uses required by regulation (hunting, recreational fishing, and recreational trapping—all in accordance with state regulations) as well as other public uses deemed appropriate and compatible across the Iowa WMD. Within four years of CCP approval, appropriate and compatible uses will be clearly articulated to the public through uniform signage, brochures, and Iowa DNR and Iowa WMD websites as identified in the Visitor Services Plan.

Iowa Wetland Management District

1710 360th Street
 Tiptonka, Iowa 50480
 (515) 928-2523
http://www.fws.gov/refuge/iowa_wmd

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov>

Region 3, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest>

