

Chapter 5: Plan Implementation

Introduction

The efficacy of any management plan is dependent on a multitude of factors that change over time. This chapter describes a number of these factors in further detail, including the funding, projects, human resources, coordination, monitoring, and additional planning associated with CCP implementation. Adaptive management will also be necessary to meet new, unforeseen challenges, and to take advantage of new opportunities.

As noted in the inside cover of this document, this plan does not constitute a commitment for additional staffing or increases in operational and maintenance resources. These decisions are at the discretion of Congress in overall appropriations, and in budget allocation decisions made at the national and regional levels of the Service.

Funding

In the preceding chapters, the Crane Meadows NWR CCP has outlined a vision for the future management of the Refuge and included the objectives and strategies needed to realize that vision. Current financial resources available to the Refuge will not adequately provide the means to protect habitat and wildlife, and improve the condition of visitor services through the life of the plan. In fact, the operating and maintenance budget for the Refuge over the past 6 years has slightly decreased overall (see Table 15 on page 81.) Similarly, pre-plan staff levels do not allow adequate interactions with the public for welcoming, education, interpretation, information, safety, or enforcement purposes; nor are the habitat management strategies described in this plan achievable at minimum staffing levels.

The rate at which each refuge achieves its full potential of contributing to local, regional, and national conservation goals depends on the resources provided for those purposes. Increased



Crane Meadows NWR. Photo credit: Arthur Groinus

funding and staffing will result in long-lasting protection, maintenance, and enhancements to Refuge habitats, visitor facilities, and programs.

The operations and maintenance budget provide funds for routine, day-to-day costs on the Refuge. These costs include utilities, upkeep of offices and structures, required safety inspections, and the maintenance of Refuge facilities including parking lots, restrooms, informational kiosks, and trails. Currently, the operations and maintenance costs for the Refuge are fairly moderate because of the Refuge's small size, and because habitat in many acquisition areas is still relatively intact. However, land acquisition funds and other options to protect identified lands occur outside the normal operations and maintenance funding process for refuges. On a national level, Crane Meadows NWR ranks low in the Service's objective based Land Acquisition Priority System (LAPS), which requires considerable collaborative efforts with local landowners, conservation organizations, and political interests to coordinate land protection on the Refuge.

In fact, of the 48 refuges in the Midwest Region with boundaries that are proposed for complete acquisition, Crane Meadows NWR owns the small-

Table 22: New Project List, Crane Meadows NWR

Project Number	Rank	Project Description	Estimated Cost (First Year)
FY08-4200	1	Protect one of the largest unaltered wetlands in Minnesota	\$141,984
FY08-4201	2	Conduct Strategic Habitat Planning	\$97,911
FY08-4202	3	Provide administrative support for critical Refuge programs	\$80,046
FY08-6880	4	Connecting Kids With Nature	\$75,901
FY08-6886	5	Protect and enhance Crane Meadows wetland complex	\$110,901
FY08-6888	6	Collect biological information	\$85,901
FY08-6890	7	Restore upland and wetland habitats	\$4,000

est percent of its proposed acquisition boundary at only 13 percent. Refuge staff remain committed to seeking new opportunities for acquisition support and options for land protection – both from within the Service and from external sources.

New and Existing Projects

This CCP outlines an ambitious course of action for the future management of Crane Meadows NWR. The Refuge will need appropriate and consistent operational and maintenance funding to implement the objectives and strategies outlined in this plan. A full listing of unfunded Refuge projects and operational needs predating this plan can be found in Table 22. Included are land protection efforts, habitat restoration projects, research and planning initiatives, youth education programs, general maintenance and rehabilitation of existing buildings, and the resurfacing of roads, parking lots, and trails.

Staffing

Current staffing at Crane Meadows NWR includes two positions:

- Private Land Biologist/Refuge Operations specialist (provided by Sherburne NWR)
- Maintenance

Full implementation of the vision set forth in this CCP will require changes in the work force of the Refuge. Existing staff will direct their time and energy in new directions, and new staff members will be needed to assist in management and operations.

In March of 2008 a national team of Refuge System professionals developed a staffing model to estimate the personnel required to effectively operate

and manage the 589 existing field stations of the Refuge System. Fifteen factors were used in the evaluation, covering the following topics:

- total acres, acres actively managed, and number of easement contracts
- endangered and invasive species populations
- biological management and monitoring, threats and conflicts
- wilderness management
- visitor services: visitation, education programs, volunteers, Friends
- maintenance needs and existing assets

The model attempts to project staffing levels in a systematic, qualitative manner. Although a model provides only an estimate or theoretical measure and may not depict staffing needs with 100 percent accuracy, this modeling application is useful for supporting personnel actions and making consistent staffing decisions. The 2008 model projects the total maximum number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions needed at each station, but does not determine the individual disciplines or specialties. Law enforcement, fire, and private lands positions were not included in the assessment. To implement the staffing model, the final report recommends that each Region adjust the final personnel numbers as necessary and identify the most appropriate position descriptions for each station.

The 2008 staffing model results for Crane Meadows NWR included a total of five FTE positions, with a subsequent adjustment at the regional level to four. Using a 2008 baseline staffing of one FTE position, the Refuge was asked to identify three additional positions and rank them from greatest to least priority (see Table 23 on page 107). These are the same three positions covered in objective 3.10 of

Table 23: Current and Proposed Staffing as Indicated by the 2008 NWR Staffing Model

Position Title	Status	Priority
Maintenance	Existing	n/a
Wildlife Refuge Specialist	Currently provided by Sherburne NWR, but proposed for Crane Meadows NWR	1
Biologist	Proposed	2
Administrative Assistant	Proposed	3

Chapter 4. The three additional positions would replace the existing wildlife refuge specialist that is currently provided by Sherburne NWR for general management of the Refuge; to augment the biological program; to increase research and monitoring activities, habitat restoration, and land protection efforts; and to address Refuge needs related to hospitality, outreach, volunteerism, and visitor services oversight.

The results of the staffing model illustrate full staffing at Crane Meadows NWR under optimum conditions. Due to the reality of financial constraints and operating budgets within the Service, it may not be possible to reach full staffing levels immediately. However, the amount and quality of management on a Refuge is highly dependent on the personnel resources available to implement the CCP.

Partnerships

Partnerships are an essential element for the successful accomplishment of goals, objectives, and strategies at Crane Meadows NWR. The objectives outlined in this CCP need the support and the partnerships of federal, state, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individual citizens. Refuge staff will continue to seek creative partnership opportunities to achieve the vision of the Refuge.

The importance of cooperation, collaboration, and partnerships in the successful implementation of this CCP is heavily emphasized throughout this document, including the current management section (Chapter 3, see “Partnerships” on page 107) and in Chapter 4 (see “Objective 3.6 Outreach and Partnerships” on page 102). With only 13 percent of the acquirable Refuge lands in Service ownership, Refuge staff spend a great deal of time and effort communicating with and supporting adjacent landowners in their stewardship of the land. State partners own just under 7 percent of the land within Refuge acquisition boundary and manage all of its open waters, making them a valuable ally for local conservation. Furthermore, local hunters and anglers – both private individuals and organized

groups, control a substantial amount of land within the boundary. With a shared vision for conservation these individuals and groups can play an important role in keeping natural habitat on the landscape. Only through the combined efforts of a multitude of agencies, organizations, groups, and individuals with complementary conservation values can a healthy local ecosystem be retained over the long-term. Crane Meadows NWR will continue to be an engaged and committed partner in the community of support for this important vision.

Step-Down Management Plans

The CCP is a plan that provides general direction for Refuge management over short- and long-term timeframes. It also begins to describe specific wildlife, habitat, and people related objectives and strategies. Step-down management plans build on the over-arching framework provided by the CCP and develop management concepts in greater detail. This process provides managers and employees the opportunity to identify the specific implementation actions that will be carried to meet the requirement of the CCP. The Refuge staff will revise or develop the following step-down plans within the established timeframes:

- Fire Management Plan (1 year)
- Visitor Services Plan (2 years)
- Habitat Management Plan (5 years)
- Inventory and Monitoring Plan (5 years)

Monitoring and Evaluation

The direction set forth in this CCP and specifically identified strategies and projects will be monitored throughout the life of this plan. On a periodic basis, the Regional Office will assemble a station review team whose purpose will be to visit Crane Meadows NWR and evaluate current activities in light of this plan. The team will review all aspects of Refuge management, including direction, accomplishments and funding. The goals and objectives presented in this CCP will provide the baseline for evaluation of this field station.

Plan Review and Revision

While comprehensive conservation plans are designed to provide guidance for Refuge management over a 15-year period, they are also dynamic and flexible documents that are reviewed regularly and modified when plan review or other Refuge monitoring and evaluation determines that it is necessary.

Service policy calls for an annual review of these plans and revision when significant events or new information necessitate change in order to achieve the refuge purposes, vision, and goals. The policy calls for revision, "...when significant new information becomes available, ecological conditions change, major refuge expansion occurs, or when we identify the need to do so during plan review" [602 FW 3]. Plan revisions follow the same procedures and processes used to develop the original CCP. As with a standard CCP planning effort, revisions must follow NEPA requirements and include opportunities for public review and comment. Minor plan revisions that meet the criteria for a categorical exclusion in an EAS may be made in accordance with 550 FW 3.3C.