

Chapter 2: The Planning Process

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Throughout this document, five national wildlife refuges (NWRs, refuges) are discussed individually—such as the Gravel Island NWR or the Green Bay NWR. This document also discusses all five NWRs collectively as one entity and when doing so, refers to the group as the “Great Lakes islands refuges” or “Great Lakes islands NWRs.”

The Great Lakes islands refuges Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) has been written with input and assistance from citizens, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and staff from state and local agencies. The participation of these stakeholders is vital, and all of their ideas have been valuable in determining the future direction of the refuges.

Internal Agency Scoping

The CCP planning process began in February 2009 with a kickoff teleconference between staff at the Seney, Shiawassee and Horicon refuges as well as staff and regional planners from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (FWS, Service) office in the Twin Cities area. The participants in this “internal scoping” exercise reviewed vision statements and goals, existing baseline resource data, planning documents, and other information. In addition, the group identified a preliminary list of issues, concerns, and opportunities facing islands that would need to be addressed in the CCP.

A list of required CCP elements such as maps, photos, and GIS data layers was also developed at this meeting and during subsequent e-mail and telephone communications. Concurrently, the group studied federal and state mandates plus applicable local ordinances, regulations, and plans for their relevance to this planning effort. Finally, the group agreed to a process and sequence for obtaining public input and a tentative schedule for completion of the CCP. A Public Involvement Plan was drafted and distributed to participants soon after the meeting.

Open House Events

Public input was encouraged and obtained using several methods, including open houses, written comments during a public scoping period, and personal contacts.

Initial public scoping for the CCP began during the summer of 2009 with a series of eight open house events held in communities near the island refuges. Turnout ranged from very light (Huron NWR and Michigan Islands NWR) to more than 50 attending (Washington Island and Green Bay NWR). Comment forms were available at the events and were made available at the managing refuge headquarters and visitor centers during the following weeks.

Those interested in making written comments had until August 15, 2009 to submit them. Comments could be sent by U.S. mail, e-mail, or via the Service’s planning website on the

Internet. Eighty-five comment forms and other written comments were received during the scoping process.

The following is a list of dates and locations where open house events were held.

Lake Michigan

Gravel Island NWR and Green Bay NWR (Gravel, Hog, Pilot, Plum and Spider Islands)

Wednesday, June 17, 2009, 5–8 p.m.
Washington Island Community Center Gymnasium
910 Main Road; Washington Island, WI

Thursday, June 18, 2009, 5–8 p.m.
Sturgeon Bay Library
107 South 4th Avenue; Sturgeon Bay, WI

Lake Huron

Michigan Islands NWR (Big and Little Charity, Scarecrow, Thunder Bay Islands)

Tuesday, July 7, 2009, 4–8 p.m.
Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center
500 W. Fletcher Street; Alpena, MI

Wednesday, July 8, 2009, 4–8 p.m.
Au Gres Community Library
230 Mackinaw Street; Au Gres, MI

Thursday, July 9, 2009, 4-8 p.m.
Sleeper State Park
6573 State Park Road; Caseville, MI

Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, Lake Superior

Harbor Island NWR, Huron NWR, and portions of Michigan Islands NWR (Hat, Shoe, Pismire, Gull Islands)

Monday, July 20, 2009, 5–8 p.m.
L'Anse Public Library
201 N 4th St, L'Anse, MI

Wednesday, July 22, 2009, 4:30–7:30 p.m.
Peaine Township Hall
Beaver Island, MI

Thursday, July 23, 2009, 5-8 p.m.
Drummond Island Town Hall
Drummond Island, MI

Total open house attendance: 115

Summary of Issues, Concerns and Opportunities

The following list of significant issues was generated by internal scoping, the public open house events, e-mails, and letters. Each issue will be described in more detail in the following chapters of this plan.

Major issues identified by the public:

Double-crested Cormorant Management: Strong feelings among some for increased control measures in Green Bay and Beaver Island chain.

Access: Plum and Pilot Islands were added to the Green Bay NWR in 2007. Many people are requesting access to Plum Island for kayak and motor boat landings and hiking on trails. A group of people requested advertising Harbor Island as part of a kayak trail and establishing boat landings and hiking trails. Other commenters had an opposing view to retain the status quo at Harbor Island.

Island Acquisition: Several comments were received about adding specific islands in private ownership to the Refuge System. What criteria should be used for adding islands to the existing refuge system?

Cultural Resources: Will cultural resource sites, especially the lighthouses, receive adequate care, restoration, and protection into the future?

Visitor Services: Should additional wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities be made available, or are the existing opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation adequate?

Public Comments on Draft CCP

The Draft CCP, Land Protection Plan (LPP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) were officially released for public review on August 23, 2012; the 31-day comment period ended on September 24, 2012. Planning information was sent to individuals and organizations for review and announced through local media outlets, resulting in 24 comment submissions. During the comment period two open house events were held to receive public comments on the Draft CCP. The open houses were held on September 10th, 2012, from 5–8 p.m. at the Washington Island Community Center; Rutledge Room; 910 Main Road; Washington Island, WI; and September 12th, 2012, from 4–7 p.m. at the Bear Track Inn Restaurant and Motel; 33655 Townline Road; Drummond Island, MI.

Forty-four individuals attended these open house events. Because few changes to the preferred alternative were recommended during the public review period, only minor changes were made to the drafts in preparing the final CCP/EA document.

All respondents that expressed an opinion endorsed the selection of Alternative C and the general approach of the proposed future management of the Great Lakes islands refuges. We were able to incorporate nearly all of the specific changes suggested in the written comments. Consequently, we did not produce a formal Response to Comments Appendix for this CCP.

Preparation, Publishing, Finalization, and Implementation of the CCP

The Gravel Island, Green Bay, Harbor Island, Huron, and Michigan Islands CCP and EA were prepared by a team of staff from the Seney, Shiawassee, and Horicon Refuges and the Service's regional office. The CCP/EA was published in two phases and in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EA (Appendix A) presents a range of alternatives for future management and identifies the preferred alternative, which is also the CCP.

Verbal and written comments received by the Service were incorporated into this document. This document is the basis for guiding management on the refuges over a 15-year period. It will guide the development of more detailed step-down management plans for specific resource areas; it will underpin the annual budgeting process through Service-wide allocation databases. Most importantly, it lays out the general approach to managing habitat, wildlife, and people on the Great Lakes islands refuges that will direct day-to-day decision-making and actions.