

Hello, my name is Steve Whitson, the Refuge Manager for Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

In June we released a Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan, what we refer to as a CCP. The Draft CCP proposed some changes to management that people welcomed, like increasing emphasis on interpretation and other visitor services. It also proposed some changes that some strongly oppose. Some of these changes include varying the water levels in Silver Lake and converting cropland to native habitat. We have received more than 500 comments on the Draft CCP, and on June 22 nearly 400 people attended an open house at the Refuge to tell us their thoughts on the proposed management direction.

The comment period officially closed on July 5, and the next step is to review the comments and look at how we can address the concerns you expressed in the CCP. Based on the comments we've received, it is clear to us that we need to do more than revise our preferred alternative. We've decided to develop a new alternative, Alternative 4, to address the concerns we've heard.

So what is Alternative 4? We don't know yet. We know it will be different from what the Service proposed at Swan Lake NWR with the original preferred alternative. It will be an alternative that allows us to meet our legal mandates, mission and purpose while taking into consideration what the public values at

Swan Lake NWR. It is clear people care a great deal about Swan Lake NWR and value it as part of the history and character of the community. We appreciate that perspective, and we also have to consider the broader role every refuge plays in conserving this nation's wildlife and habitat. We want the final CCP to respect both of those roles.

Congress mandated that we prepare a comprehensive conservation plan for every refuge in the nation when it passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. One of the purposes of comprehensive conservation planning is to create better communication between refuges and their neighbors about refuge management. Whether you liked the original proposed management plan or not, I hope that you appreciate that this process has created opportunities for us to talk about how Swan Lake NWR is managed and why it is managed that way. We look forward to working with you to accomplish the mission of Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge.