

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## The Process and the Plan

This document represents a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) that guides the management of Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (NFWR, refuge) in Missouri. The CCP is the result of a collaborative, multiple-year planning process that includes preplanning, scoping, alternatives development, environmental assessment (EA) and Draft CCP document preparation, public review and comment, and the adoption of this final plan to guide management of the refuge over the next 15 years. The planning process for Big Muddy NFWR is described in further detail in chapter 2.

## The Refuge



*Welcome to Big Muddy NFWR; photo: USFWS*

The refuge, at present, is comprised of 11 units, totaling more than 17,000 acres, located in Missouri along the floodplain of the Missouri River (figure 1-1). The 11 refuge units encompass river features, such as islands, chutes, bends, and tributary confluences. These features were once common but are now rare because of changes to the Missouri River and its floodplain initiated to promote navigation and minimize flooding. Surprisingly, some part of each unit still offers a glimpse of the former diversity of the Missouri River floodplain. This glimpse is from a time characterized by a shifting mosaic

of river features driven by a wide range of seasonal and annual flows. Therefore, current refuge management focuses on reconnecting the Missouri River and its tributaries to their floodplains, restoring hydrology, returning native vegetation, reducing invasive species, and offering a variety of wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities. Restoring or mimicking the historic river dynamics fosters a range of bottom land and wetland vegetation, and associated fish and wildlife including some, such as the pallid sturgeon, that are at risk of extinction.

## Document Chapters

This first chapter provides a brief introduction to the comprehensive conservation plan. The remaining chapters provide more detailed information on the refuge planning and policy context (chapter 2), the refuge environment and current management (chapter 3), and the objectives, rationales, and potential implementation strategies that will guide management of the refuge over the next 15 years (chapter 4). Appendices include the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), species lists, abbreviations and glossary, legal and policy guidance, literature cited, appropriate use designations, compatibility determinations, the list of preparers and contributors, the communications list, and the response to comments on the EA and Draft CCP.

**Figure 1-1: Location of Big Muddy NFWR**

