



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Project Update

July 2005

Comprehensive Conservation Plan Approved

A planning effort that involved neighbors, non-government organizations, local officials and many interested citizens has concluded with the completion of a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service approved the plan and is making it available online at: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/planning/detroitriver/index.html>

The comprehensive conservation plan outlines how the Refuge will fulfill its legal purpose and contribute to the National Wildlife Refuge System's wildlife, habitat and public use goals. The plan articulates management goals for the next 15 years and specifies the objectives and strategies needed to accomplish these goals. While the planned future condition is long-term, we anticipate that the plan will be updated every 5 to 10 years based on information gained through monitoring habitat and wildlife, as well as recreational usage.

Major achievements expected over the life of the plan include protecting coastal wetlands, islands and other unique habitats, establishing a visitors' center, developing a network of Refuge volunteers, and fostering partnerships to assist the Refuge in achieving wildlife and habitat goals.

The Refuge

The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge is located along the Lower Detroit River and western shoreline of Lake Erie in Wayne and Monroe counties, Michigan. Established by Public Law 107-91 on December 21, 2001, the Detroit River International Refuge is the first



Humbug Marsh shoreline, Detroit River IWR. USFWS

international refuge in North America. The authorized Refuge boundary includes islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals and riverfront lands along 48 miles of shoreline. Its location also makes it unique – the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge is one of only a few refuges situated in a major metropolitan area.

The Refuge establishing act redesignated islands that were once part of Wyandotte National Wildlife Refuge – Grassy Island, Mud Island and Mamajuda Island – as part of the new international refuge. When created in 1961, the original Wyandotte NWR consisted of two islands, Grassy and Mamajuda, and the shallow water shoals around the islands. Since the early 1960s, Mamajuda Island has decreased in size and is exposed only during low water levels.

The Refuge boundary was further expanded in 2003 with the approval of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex Expansion and Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Expansion Act (Public Law 108-23). The Act extends the authorized boundary of the Refuge along the Lake Erie coastline west to I-75 and south to the Ohio/Michigan border. The expansion area encompasses more

than 7,500 acres and numerous coastal marshes and sensitive wetlands that could be suitable as part of the Refuge. The Act could eventually result in a string of protected coastal areas extending along the entire Lake Erie Western Basin in Michigan and Ohio.

Where You Can Find the CCP

The CCP is available online at <http://www.fws.midwest.gov/planning/detroitriver/index.html>, and copies are also available in libraries in communities surrounding the Refuge. To request a copy, call the Refuge at 734/692-7608 or write to the Refuge at:

Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge
Large Lakes Research Station
9311 Groh Road
Grosse Ile, MI 48138

The Planning Process

The Detroit River IWR planning process began in 2002. Initially, Service staff from various programs met in the regional office to identify a list of issues and concerns that were associated with the management of the Refuge. These preliminary issues and concerns were based on staff knowledge of the area and contacts with citizens in the community. The planning team then asked Refuge neighbors, organizations, local government units, and interested citizens to share their thoughts at a series of open house events. A series of open house events, meetings and workshops were held in local communities between June 2002 and September 2002 with more than 150 people attending. The planning team received 35 written comments during these events and took numerous pages of notes from small group and individual discussion.

Public involvement continued with the release of the draft CCP in June 2004. The planning team received 20 letters, forms and e-mail comments during the 30-day review period, and many of these comments contributed to modification of the plan. However, the comments covered a variety of topics and detail, and not all of the thoughts expressed could be represented in the CCP. The CCP includes an appendix with responses to the comments received.

Who We Are and What We Do

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Our specific responsibilities include enforcing federal wildlife laws,

managing migratory bird populations, restoring nationally significant fisheries, administering the Endangered Species Act, and restoring wildlife habitat such as wetlands.

The Service's role also includes managing the National Wildlife Refuge System, a network of more than 540 national wildlife refuges encompassing more than 93 million acres of public land and water.



Red-headed Duck. Photo by Myles Willard

Refuge Vision

“The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, including the Detroit River and Western Lake Erie Basin, will be a conservation region where a clean environment fosters the health and diversity of wildlife, fish, and plant resources through protection, creation of new habitats, management, and restoration of natural communities and habitats on public and private lands. Through effective management and partnering, the Refuge will provide outstanding opportunities for “quality of life” benefits such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and environmental education, as well as ecological, economic, and cultural benefits, for present and future generations.”

Refuge Goals

- *Goal 1: Partnerships:* Establish functional partnerships involving communities, industries, governments, citizens, non-profit organizations and others to manage and promote the Refuge consistent with the plan's vision statement and the Act that created the Refuge.



Lake sturgeon. USFWS

Provide an institutional framework to develop effective private or public partnerships for the purpose of sustainability.

- *Goal 2: Wildlife-dependent Uses:* The Refuge will facilitate and promote hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation as wildlife-dependent uses.
- *Goal 3: Public Environmental Awareness:* Visitors and local citizens demonstrate a strong conservation ethic that supports the Refuge and broad-based environmental awareness.
- *Goal 4: Watershed Development:* Future development that occurs within surrounding watersheds and that may impact the Refuge is well planned, environmentally sustainable, and reflects known Best Management Practices.
- *Goal 5: Refuge Outreach:* People living or working within the Refuge watersheds will understand and appreciate the importance and ecological value of the Detroit River and Western Lake Erie, and their contributing watersheds, to fish and wildlife and to human quality of life.
- *Goal 6: Heritage Values:* The hunting and fishing heritage, cultural resources and cultural history of the Refuge are valued and preserved, and connect Refuge staff, visitors, and the community to the area's past.
- *Goal 7: Healthy Fish and Wildlife Communities:* Fish and wildlife communities are healthy, diverse and self-sustaining.
- *Goal 8: Reduced Toxic Substances:* Reduce levels of toxic substances to a threshold that does not threaten or harm or adversely affect wildlife, fish or human health.
- *Goal 9: Sustainable Economic Development:* Economic development and redevelopment is environmentally sustainable, well planned, and aesthetically pleasing.
- *Goal 10: Beneficial Water Uses:* Restore beneficial uses of water resources in the Refuge.
- *Goal 11: Conflicting Use Resolution:* Lands and waters within the Refuge are responsibly managed to resolve potentially conflicting uses.



Round Island Marsh, Detroit River IWR. USFWS

Management Direction

As part of the planning effort, an Environmental Assessment was prepared that evaluated three potential management alternatives: (1) current direction, (2) leading through partnerships, and (3) habitat management emphasis.

Alternative 2, leading through partnerships, was selected as the preferred alternative and developed into the CCP. Under this alternative, the Refuge will seek to serve as a focal point for the many ongoing conservation efforts on the Detroit River and surrounding watersheds. The Service will continue

direct habitat protection efforts but with an emphasis on cooperative management instead of fee ownership. The Refuge land base will grow primarily through management agreements with private industry, government agencies, and other organizations. Land acquisition, especially of river island and coastal wetland habitats, will continue through donations, partnerships and special grants.

Identification and/or cleanup of environmental contaminants will continue on existing Refuge lands or lands actively considered for acquisition. However, contaminant issues on private lands managed under agreement will be addressed only to the point where wildlife and human safety are a concern and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not become liable for costly cleanup measures.

Developing effective partnerships for habitat conservation and environmental education will be the primary focus of the Refuge staff. The need for citizens to work together to enhance the Detroit River and Lake Erie ecosystems will be a major theme for the Refuge's environmental education activities. Wildlife-dependent recreational uses, including hunting and fishing, will be encouraged on Refuge-owned lands where it is safe and appropriate. Private landowners will continue to retain all rights to manage public access on their lands. Additional recreational uses will be limited due to the small size of Refuge land holdings and potential conflicts with wildlife-dependent priority uses.

The Detroit River IWR currently has two employees, including the Refuge Manager. To achieve the objectives of this plan, the Midwest Region of the Service has requested additional funding from Congress to establish a Refuge office, including staff and equipment, in the vicinity of the Refuge boundary. The budget proposal includes hiring at least five staff members, leasing office space, and purchasing vehicles and small boats. This request must compete with other national budget priorities and start-up funding is not assured in any given year.

The CCP identifies a number of key programs and strategies that can be implemented as soon as a staff is in place:

Partnerships: A primary theme throughout the CCP is the tremendous potential to establish partnerships to attain the purpose and goals of the Refuge. Potential partners include communities, industries, governments, citizens, and non-profit organizations. Many of these partnerships already exist by the Refuge has the potential to be a focal point to bring together larger and more effective private and public partnerships.

Volunteers: There is a great potential for an active pool of volunteers once a dedicated staff person, especially a public use specialist, is assigned to the Refuge. The goal of any Refuge volunteer program is to have staff and volunteers working side by side in the most efficient manner to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Refuge.

Hunting and Fishing: The CCP emphasizes that fishing and hunting opportunities will be increased as the Refuge land base grows, except where contaminant exposure, local regulations, safety or the needs of sensitive species prohibit such uses.

Visitor Center: The former Daimler-Chrysler tract, now called the Refuge Gateway, will become the future Refuge headquarters and visitors center. Wayne County will own the building and lease space to a number of organizations, including the Service. The facilities will incorporate a “green” or environment friendly design that reflects the character of the river.

Other public use facilities could include trails and boardwalks accessible to disabled users, interpretive signage, observation decks with spotting scopes, wildlife viewing blinds, photography blinds, fishing platforms, outdoor vault toilets along the trails, benches, and an outdoor classroom pavilion.

Land Protection: The CCP identifies key remnant coastal wetlands, islands, and other wildlife habitats that could be protected and/or restored through partnership efforts. By 2015, no less than 40% of the remaining coastal wetland and island habitat on public and private lands within the Refuge boundary will be protected through fee, easements, and cooperative agreements.



Blue-winged Teal. USFWS

Into the Future

Throughout the comprehensive conservation planning process, many people have contributed time and ideas to make the Detroit River IWR CCP a better document. We are grateful to everyone who cared enough about the Refuge and its future to participate in this planning effort.

To succeed, a refuge management plan has to adapt to nature’s everchanging conditions. Although the plan is complete, we expect to revise it every 5 to 10 years in response to conditions that could not be anticipated in planning. We will continue to welcome your thoughts on Refuge management.

The Detroit River IWR is a place for both wildlife and people to use and enjoy, now and in the future. We hope that you will continue to care about and participate in conserving the Refuge’s wildlife and habitat.

For more information, visit the Refuge’s website at:
<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/DetroitRiver>

You are also invited to contact the Refuge Manager, John Hartig, at: john_hartig@fws.gov
