

Appendix J: Response to Comments Received on the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Response to Comments Received on the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan

During the comment period for the Draft CCP, two comments, one oral and one written, were received from individuals and a comment letter was received from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (see pages 136-137).

Comments

- The individuals included complimentary comments toward the District program and one expressed endorsement of the preferred alternative.

Response: We truly appreciate the support.

- An individual expressed concern over the number of acres of cool season grasslands that were being broken up, which results in a loss of nesting cover.

Response: We presented our plans for breaking up the grass fields on page 42 in the Draft CCP. Cool season grass fields are broken up to prepare fields for conversion to warm season grass/forb cover. Warm season grasses and forbs provide a much more diverse mix of species than cool season exotic grasses such as brome. We have considered the pros and cons of farming 600 acres at a time and concluded that it is better to convert as many acres of cool season grass fields as possible while nesting habitat was available in adjacent idle fields through the Conservation Reserve Program.

- An individual expressed the concern that not enough of the existing oaks will be left standing on the Kostka WPA and the day time deer population will be diminished.

Response: Most of the trees that will be removed in the oak savanna restoration on the Kostka WPA are non-oak species such as aspen, Siberian elm, box elder, and buckthorn. Some of the red oaks that form a thick understory below the burr oaks will be removed in an effort to return the oak savanna to its historical state. The restored habitat, whether it is native prairie or oak savanna will still provide suitable deer habi-

tat. The Service's goal is to provide waterfowl and grassland bird habitat on the WPAs, and this habitat will also provide many benefits for other wildlife species including deer.

- An individual asked what restrictions, particularly related to dogs, would be in place to protect the summer and spring nesting populations.

Response: Access to WPAs is limited to foot access only to protect summer and spring nesting populations. Our regulations require that dogs on WPAs must be on a leash unless engaged in legal hunting activities.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

We appreciate the Department's support of our management goals. We will continue to work, as noted in Chapter 5, with the Department and other conservation organizations within our shared conservation mission. We respond below to each of the bulleted points of the Department's letter.

First bullet – The Service WMD offices integrate Joint Venture documents into their planning and implementation of habitat management and restoration activities as discussed under “Migratory Bird Conservation Initiatives” in Chapter 3 of the CCP. Acquisition funding and available properties vary each year, so it is difficult to set specific wetland protection goals by wetland habitat type and acreage in support of the Joint Venture.

The Service considers waterfowl, grassland birds, species of concern, threatened and endangered species, and other trust species in making habitat management decisions. To be more explicit, the rationale under Objective 2.4 has been modified to add the State's Species of Greatest Conservation Need in its management considerations. Other species are also considered in management decisions but the priority is trust species.

Second bullet – We agree that increased coordination to achieve common goals will be beneficial to all parties involved and lead to a landscape approach



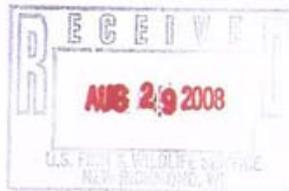
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August 22, 2008

Leopold Wetland Management District
Attention: CCP Comment
W10040 Cascade Mountain Road
Portage, WI 53901



St. Croix Wetland Management District
Attention: CCP Comment
1764 95th Street
New Richmond, WI 54017

Subject: Leopold and St. Croix WMD Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Dear Mr. Lenz and Mr. McConnell:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Leopold Wetland Management District (WMD) and St. Croix WMD Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP). As these plans note, the two WMD's share issues and a joint planning process was used to develop the individual CCP's. Because of these shared issues, the following comments are made regarding both CCP's, unless otherwise noted.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (Department) supports the primary management goals listed in Chapter 4 of each plan. We encourage the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to work hand-in-hand with the Department and other conservation land groups to help maintain the integrity of the area's natural resources and in keeping with the legislative mandates within the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. In light of the shared mission we have to protect and promote natural resources, the Department and Service can benefit by working together on mutual goals.

More specifically:

- The Department is committed to the "all-bird" habitat goals and objectives of the recently revised Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture (UMRGLRJV). We suggest that each CCP would be strengthened by a more prominent support of the UMRGLRJV goals and objectives by wetland habitat type and acreage. As the Service was heavily involved with the revision of the UMRGLRJV, it stands to reason that Service programs would integrate this important habitat initiative within their planning documents and habitat activities.

Likewise, habitat work undertaken by the Service, both wetland and upland, should consider benefits to a variety of species, especially those focal species designated in the UMRGLRJV Implementation Plan or as Species of Greatest Conservation Need as designated in the Wisconsin Action Plan.

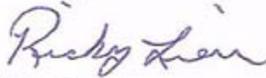
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- Department and Service field staff and regional and state program administrators should meet on a regular basis to coordinate mutually beneficial activities and increase the awareness of each agency's initiatives, concerns, and ideas. Other habitat partners should be included in these meetings as appropriate.
- We support increased resource inventory and research, as the plan states, especially if data is collected by consistent and statistically valid means. Please work with the Department to facilitate, where appropriate, the cooperative collection of this mutually beneficial information to manage wildlife habitat.
- We are pleased that deer hunting continues to be allowed. In light of both the impact excessive deer can have on native species and ongoing concerns about chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Wisconsin, hunting offers a tool to control deer populations. As CWD management in Wisconsin evolves, the Department would seek USFWS cooperation in both research and management activities where applicable on Service properties.
- Modifications meant to improve visitor services on federal lands such as wildlife observation stations, parking lots, trails, or boardwalks should be evaluated as to their effect on key wildlife habitat and the ability of people to participate in other compatible uses, especially hunting. Physical modifications to federal properties should not negatively impact valuable wildlife habitat. Likewise, such modifications should, at a minimum, have a neutral affect on the ability of hunters to use the land or, preferably, should improve hunting opportunities.
- We are pleased that trapping is a compatible use at federal lands within each WMD. Besides providing a valuable resource harvested by Wisconsin trappers, trapping can benefit the production of grassland nesting bird species by the removal of predators.
- The control of non-native invasive species is an ongoing concern for habitat managers. Rather than stating a percentage of invasives to be controlled as is currently shown in the draft CCP's, it may be beneficial to consider a layered approach that takes into account the degree to which invasive species may be controlled, the relative impact presented by certain invasive species, and the quality of the property at which an invasive species may appear.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on each CCP. The Department looks forward to working with the Service within these important areas in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,



Ricky Lien
Wetland Habitat Specialist
Bureau of Wildlife Management

cc: Tom Hauge – WM/6
Bill Vander Zouwen – WM/6
Eric Lobner – Fitchburg
Tami Ryan – Milwaukee
Jeff Pritzl – Green Bay
Kris Belling – Eau Claire
Mike Zeckmeister – Antigo

to conservation issues. Our support of coordinated efforts is acknowledged in our discussion of existing and future partnerships.

Third bullet – We, too, see the value in the coordination of data collection, which would provide better data. This is another example of benefits gained through partnerships.

Fourth bullet – The Service will continue to work with the Wisconsin DNR to address CWD concerns or management implications on WPAs.

Fifth bullet – Public uses on WPAs are evaluated for their compatibility with the purpose of the WPA. At the present time, the CCP proposes public use improvements such as trails, boardwalks, and observation platforms on only a limited number of WPAs. The majority of the WPAs will continue to be managed with few public use modifications. When compatible, hunting along with the other big six uses (fishing, wildlife observation, environmental education, interpretation, photography) are encouraged on WPAs. The Service also recognizes that promotion of the value of WPAs to all members of the public is an important part of reconnecting people with nature and supporting the intent of the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997.

Sixth bullet – Your continued support for trapping opportunities is noted.

Seventh bullet – Until complete invasive species inventories are conducted on each WPA it is difficult to determine the specific levels of control and the appropriate priority species. Priority for invasives control is stated in terms of attempting to control or limit invasive species in priority wetland and grassland habitat, because these are the most important habitat types for federal trust species.