

Chapter 2: The Planning Process

The Tamarac NWR and Tamarac WMD CCP has been written with input and assistance from citizens, universities and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and staff from other federal, state and local agencies. The participation of these stakeholders is important, and all of their ideas have been valuable in determining the future direction of the Refuge. Refuge and Service planning staff are grateful to all of those who have contributed time, expertise, and ideas throughout the CCP process. We appreciate the enthusiasm and commitment expressed by many for the lands and living resources administered by the Tamarac NWR.

Internal Agency Scoping

The CCP process began in late February 2007 with a kick-off meeting between Refuge staff and regional planners from the Service's office at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. The participants in this "internal scoping" exercise discussed a vision statement, goals, existing baseline resource data, planning documents and other pertinent information. In addition, the group identified a preliminary list of issues, concerns and opportunities facing the Refuge and Tamarac WMD that would need to be addressed in the CCP.

A list of required CCP elements (e.g., maps, photos, and GIS data layers) was also developed at this meeting and during subsequent e-mail and telephone communications between Refuge staff and the Service's office in the Twin Cities. 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 immediately after the meeting.

Public Scoping

Public input was encouraged and obtained using several methods, including open house events, writ-



Skiing at Tamarac NWR. Photo credit: D. Mudderman

ten comments during a public scoping period and personal contacts.

Initial public scoping for the Tamarac NWR and WMD CCP began in July 2007 with a series of open house events held in Detroit Lakes and at the Refuge Headquarters (Tamarac NWR) and in Bagley, Minnesota (WMD). Turn-out was light at all events despite widespread notification in area newspapers and local television. Comment forms were available at the events and made available at the Refuge Headquarters and Visitor Center during the following weeks.

People interested in making written comments had until September 2007 to submit them. Comments could be sent by U.S. mail, e-mail, or via the Tamarac NWR planning website on the Internet. The Planning Team received eight written comment forms and several e-mail messages during public scoping and took numerous pages of notes from internal group discussions and conversations with individuals representing government agencies, NGOs and Refuge users.

Refuge Program Reviews

On April 25-26 and November 14-16, 2006, a Biological Program Review was held to obtain detailed input on the issues and opportunities concerning the habitat and biological monitoring program at the Refuge. Thirty people representing the Minnesota DNR, the U.S. Geological Survey – Biological Resource Division, universities, NGOs, Refuge staff, volunteers and the Tamarac Interpretive Association attended these discussions. On July 17-18, 2006, a Visitor Services Review was conducted by the Regional Office. Regional Landscape Architect Richard Sorenson, Fergus Falls Prairie Wetlands Center Visitor Services Specialist Ken Garrahan, and Tamarac NWR staff participated in the review. This program review was scheduled to coincide with the CCP scoping process and to help formulate objectives and strategies in the plan.

Summary of Issues, Concerns and Opportunities

The following list of issue topics was generated by internal Refuge scoping, the public open house sessions and program reviews. Each topic will be described in more detail in the following chapters of this plan.

Tamarac NWR

Wildlife Management

- *Waterfowl Focus Shift to Natural Diversity with Emphasis on Service Resource Conservation Priority Species*

When Tamarac NWR was established in 1938, the tail end of the Dirty Thirties, much of the land had been cleared, prairies were dry, forests were less dense, and lakes were shallower. The Refuge's original master plan emphasized getting water on the land and focusing on the production of Wood Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Mallards, and Canada Geese. The landscape has changed since the 1930s, both in terms of the environment and Service policy. By expanding Tamarac NWR's original specific focus on waterfowl to natural diversity of wildlife native to Minnesota, with an emphasis on Conservation Priority Species in Region 3, Tamarac NWR demonstrates a more holistic view of wildlife. This view continues to implement the broad mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System to conserve America's wildlife and enhance biodiversity, as well contribute to wildlife conservation at an appropriate regional scale by trying to assist those species in greatest need of attention. Identifying the direction

of waterfowl management will dictate some habitat management decisions.

- *Establish Population Objectives For Eastern Gray Wolves, Bald Eagles and Trumpeter Swans*

Eastern gray wolves are federally listed as threatened in Minnesota under the Endangered Species Act. The Bald Eagle has been delisted from the Endangered Species Act but is protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and revisions (1994). The Trumpeter Swan is a Conservation Priority Species in Region 3 and considered by the state of Minnesota to be endangered. The refuge has a legal responsibility to monitor the status of these species. Additionally, given the history of reintroduction of the Trumpeter Swans at Tamarac NWR and recovery from the brink of extinct of the Bald Eagle, there is tremendous visitor interest in these majestic bird species.

- *Stocking Fish Where Appropriate and Not in Conflict with Refuge Purposes*

Tamarac NWR is managed primarily for waterfowl, which means that lake levels are managed with the goal of producing aquatic vegetation and invertebrates for ducks. There is interest in to developing more fishing opportunities by stocking fish in Refuge lakes. Some of these include lakes where certain fish species did not naturally occur.

- *High White-tailed Deer Population is Damaging Refuge Habitats*

The recent high refuge deer population has limited conifer regeneration by over browsing. Insects, amphibians, mammals and some migratory songbird populations can also be negatively impacted. The refuge needs to establish a sustainable deer population objective that balances habitat concerns, hunting opportunities and eastern gray wolf population objectives. Deer are a major prey species for the resident wolf packs. Utilize state and tribal deer hunting framework/strategies to achieve this goal

- *Managing Invasive Wildlife Species*

Earth worms are an invasive species present on the Refuge. Carp have not yet entered Refuge waters, but are only held in check by a water control structure. Zebra mussels have recently infested a lake within the refuge's watershed. The Refuge needs to better understand what impacts exotic earth worms are having on habitat and explore ways to ensure that carp, zebra mussels, and other invasive species do not infiltrate the Refuge.

- *Managing Beaver to Minimize Infrastructure Damage*

Beaver are very effective in blocking water flows, including through Refuge water control infrastructure. Beaver activity increases the costs of maintaining Refuge water control structures and road culverts. To date, beaver control has been primarily addressed by tribal recreational trapping, and to a lesser degree, removal by contract, permit, and Refuge staff. These efforts have been ineffectual in controlling the growth of Refuge beaver populations. An expansion of the Refuge's trapping program may help reduce the beaver population, however, fluctuating fur markets dictate interest and other alternatives need exploration.

- *Invertebrate Numbers and Health*

Invertebrates are a critical food resource for waterfowl, particularly during migration, egg laying, and brood rearing. An initial investigative survey on Pine Lake suggested a general lack of aquatic invertebrates in the lake. The study underscores the need for more information regarding the abundance and diversity of Refuge invertebrate populations. Water quality monitoring may provide some answers to this concern.

Habitat Management

- *Manage Water Levels to Promote Wild Rice Production, Enhance Tribal Harvest Opportunities and Minimize Downstream Impacts*

Refuge waters have a long history of wild rice production and use by wildlife, particularly waterfowl, and Native American people. The basic purpose of water level management has been to enhance the area's natural ability to grow wild rice, and the other vegetation and associated invertebrates established within the aquatic ecosystem.

The refuge has added stoplogs in August to enhance tribal rice harvesting opportunities in the past. This action was thought to have benign consequences for all parties involved, however the downstream lake shore owners complained of lowered water levels on Height of Land Lake. The resulting low water caused boat launching and docking problems and posed safety concerns for boaters and skiers that could potentially hit submerged dead head logs, now closer to the surface. The water management program needs to address this issue.

Additionally, there has been a request to maximize rice production on a yearly basis. However, recent research indicates that stable water levels will, over time, jeopardize the long-term

viability of a wild rice-dominated lake. Wild rice systems require water level fluctuations from year to year to insure a sustainable system.

- *Water Quality Monitoring Needs*

A 2005 lake assessment by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency indicated that North Tamarac Lake could possibly be listed as an Impaired Water due to high levels of phosphorus.

The refuge needs to develop a comprehensive water quality monitoring program to establish a baseline for refuge waters (not just North Tamarac Lake). Work with MPCA to determine the parameters, sites, timing, laboratory use, long term objectives, etc., for this effort.

- *Managing Invasive Plant Species*

Exotic and invasive plant species pose a threat to the maintenance and restoration of the Refuge's diverse habitats. Canada thistle, plumeless thistle, purple loosestrife, leafy spurge and spotted knapweed and several other invasive terrestrial plants are known to occur on the Refuge. The Refuge currently uses chemical, mechanical and biological methods of controlling invasive plant species.

Although Tamarac NWR believes, from general observation, the water bodies of the refuge are fairly clear of aquatic invasive plants, the potential for infestation is high due to the large number of boating visitors.

More invasive plant species, both terrestrial and aquatic, are predicted to spread to the area. The refuge needs to establish an invasive species monitoring program. Closer coordination with county weed task forces would help with the early detection monitoring, preventative measures development and removal strategies. Outreach with neighboring lake associations has been requested.

- *Forest Management*

Forest habitat within the transitional zone was once characterized by upland conifer, upland deciduous, mixed upland, lowland conifer, mixed lowland forest, and lowland deciduous communities. These communities have been altered over the past 200 years by logging, agriculture and development. This has created grassland and forest openings that are costly to maintain and do not fully emulate a natural system of succession.

- *Establishing Habitat Corridors With Other Conservation Lands*

Tamarac NWR is located near federal, state, tribal and county lands. Connectivity between

the Refuge and other conservation units could benefit wildlife and habitats.

Visitor Services

- *Inadequate Parking Facilities*

Inadequate parking areas raises safety concerns and does not invite use.

- *Hunters with Disabilities Limited by Lack of Accessible Facilities*

Hunters with disabilities are limited to hunting on roads that are already open to vehicles. There is interest in the Refuge providing more access.

- *Tribal and State Hunting Season Conflicts*

On the north half of the refuge, the tribal seasons overlap with state seasons. The season for tribal primitive deer hunting overlaps with the state small game season, creating quality hunt conflicts for tribal members and safety issues for small game hunters. The tribal rifle season overlaps with state archery season, creating quality hunt conflicts for hunters and possible safety concerns. Additionally, many non-tribal hunters scout out locations for deer hunting during the state grouse season and are not wearing the required blaze orange, which creates safety concerns. All hunters should be aware of the different hunting seasons on the refuge and use safe hunting practices. The Refuge needs to insure visitors are informed.

- *Native American Cultural Practices*

The site of Tamarac NWR has a long, rich history of Native American Indian cultural traditions. The Refuge remains an important site for traditional practices of the local Ojibwe tribe. Wild rice is harvested by tribal members in concert with the rice abundance. Access to ricing lakes is balanced with wildlife management activities. Other activities such as plant collection and harvesting leeches have potential conflicts with wildlife management objectives. There are opportunities for incorporating traditional Ojibwe practices into the Refuge's interpretive programs, events and signage.

- *Lake Access Regulations are Confusing*

The regulations related to lake access are confusing. One Refuge lake is open only for the winter; some are open only during the summer; some are open both winter and summer. Some lakes are open to fishing but not to other uses. In some instances, roads provide vehicle access to a boat landing, but walking on that road is prohibited. This complexity makes it difficult for the visiting public to follow the Refuge's regulations.

- *Bank Fishing Access Regulations Are Unclear*
Bank fishing restrictions are unclear for the visiting public.

- *Expanded Hunting Opportunities*

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has asked Tamarac NWR to consider opening bear and turkey hunting seasons.

- *Additional Public Use Activities Requested*

Visitors have expressed interest in uses not currently allowed or expanding some that are limited.

- Leaving ice houses overnight is currently prohibited in accordance with federal regulations.

- Motorized vehicles are not allowed on frozen lakes. This activity has been requested to access ice fishing locations.

- Horseback riding is currently allowed on county and township roads, auto tour route and Bruce Blvd. Increased spread of invasive plants through horseback riding activities on the refuge is a threat to the maintenance and restoration of the Refuge's diverse habitats.

- The North Country National Scenic Trail is a footpath proposed to route through the refuge in the public use area south of County Hwy 26.

- Canoeing and tubing on the Ottertail River is currently not allowed through the refuge due to its location within the sanctuary area and disturbance to wildlife.

- *Fishing with Motorboats*

In some cases, motorboat use interferes with Refuge visitors engaged in wildlife observation. There is concern that boat trailering and motorized fishing activity is not compatible with other uses along the Refuge's auto tour route.

- *More Demand for Environmental Education Programming*

Tamarac NWR's environmental education program is growing and lacks the facilities and staffing to meet demand for environmental education programming. School groups, home school groups, colleges and others have expressed interest in Refuge-based environmental education opportunities.

- *Division of Outreach Workload Among FWS Offices*

Agassiz NWR, Glacial Ridge NWR, Rydell NWR, Hamden Slough NWR, Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District and Fergus Falls

Wetland Management District are all less than a 2 hour drive of Tamarac NWR. There are many benefits to having other stations nearby, however this proximity also makes it confusing for Refuge staff to divide up the outreach workload and articulate the differing Refuge purposes to the public. Because the refuges are so close and there is potential for audiences to overlap, there are opportunities for outreach efforts to have a broader perspective and impact.

Facilities/Roads

- *Volunteer/Intern Housing Needed*

The Refuge needs to provide housing for volunteers and interns who come to do extended projects. The nearest community with available housing is a long drive away from the Refuge, making it unfeasible to house people off-site. A bunkhouse would be suitable for students; Recreation Vehicle pads would be useful for volunteer Refuge hosts working on the Refuge.

- *Potential to Demonstrate Green Facilities*

Federal buildings, particularly U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service facilities, can play an important role in demonstrating practical and efficient “green” building technologies. There are opportunities on Tamarac NWR to demonstrate these technologies.

- *Speeding Creates Safety, Wildlife Mortality and Maintenance Problems*

Vehicle speed on all public roads needs to be kept to a minimum to improve visitor safety and to reduce dust, wildlife mortality, and long-term maintenance costs. Many of these public roads are administered by the county and townships. Tamarac NWR needs to continue to work with these local governmental agencies responsible for speed limits to insure safety and to maintain the character of a National Wildlife Refuge.

- *ATV and Snowmobile Uses*

County ordinances allow the operation of an ATV or snowmobile in the right-of-way of county roads. Local ATV and snowmobile enthusiasts have respected Tamarac’s interest in prohibiting this activity, particularly in light of the numerous trails available around the refuge. Additionally, most road right-of-ways within the Refuge include either steep or undeveloped ditches which are unsafe to operators, thus limiting the potential activity. Tamarac NWR plans to coordinate with the County to restrict this activity within the boundary of the Refuge in order to maintain the character of a National Wildlife Refuge, prevent habitat destruction and avoid law enforcement issues, such as trespass or illegal operation.

Tamarac WMD

- *Land Acquisition*

Thousands of wetlands dot the District landscape, yet as of 2010, no fee-title lands have been acquired or additional easements procured within the five-county Wetland Management District. Private lands work is a valuable component of habitat restoration and protection, however, perpetual protection, whether through the Service or other agency programs, assures long-term conservation benefits for wildlife and wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities.

- *Partnerships*

Partnerships are an essential part of accomplishing the goals of the Tamarac WMD. Partnerships allow the Service to reach beyond social and political boundaries to achieve specific objectives and, through involvement of individuals and organizations, inspire future generations to care about conservation. Developing partnerships requires a commitment of people and funding.

- *Direction of the WMD*

District activities have been primarily restricted to private land wetland restoration and easement enforcement. Many opportunities exist to broaden habitat restoration efforts. The role the District can play at addressing the needs of migratory birds, Conservation Priority Species and critical habitats across the landscape needs to be determined. A commitment of staff and funding is critical to achieving this goal.

- *Easement Management Planning and Implementation*

Over 35 FmHA inventory property tracts were transferred to the District in the mid-1990s. Many of these tracts possess undeveloped, outdated, or unfulfilled management plans, but could yield significant ecological benefits to the landscape. Service resources need to be allocated to develop and carry out up-to-date habitat management plans on these Refuge System lands.

- *Invasive Plants*

Invasive plants are considered one of the greatest threats to natural ecosystems. Within the District, the Service is working with private landowners and partners to control existing and prevent additional spread of invasive species.

- *Education and Outreach*

Opportunities exist for the Service to develop education and outreach tools for the Tamarac WMD that will promote private lands conserva-

tion and demonstrate wildlife conservation techniques.

Preparation, Publishing, Finalization and Implementation of the CCP

The Tamarac NWR and Tamarac WMD CCP and Environmental Assessment (EA) were prepared by the staff of Tamarac NWR, the USFWS Regional Office and a representative of the Minnesota DNR. The CCP/EA will be published in two phases and in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Draft EA (Appendix A) presents a range of alternatives for future management and identifies the preferred alternative, which is also the Draft CCP. A public review period of at least 30 days, which will include a public meeting, will follow release of the draft plan.

Verbal and written comments received by the Service will be incorporated where appropriate and perhaps result in modifications to the preferred alternative or in the selection of one of the other alternatives. The alternative that is ultimately selected will become the basis of the ensuing Final CCP. This document then, becomes the basis for guiding management on the Refuge and its management district over the coming 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 at the Tamarac NWR and Tamarac WMD that will direct day-to-day decision-making and actions.