

Chapter 5: Plan Implementation

In this chapter:

[5-1 Introduction](#)

[5-2 Funding and Staffing](#)

[5-3 Priorities](#)

[5-4 Partnership Opportunities](#)

[5-5 Plan Review and Revision](#)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the actions, funding, coordination, and monitoring needed to implement the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). As noted in the inside cover of this document, this plan does not constitute a commitment for staffing increases or operational and maintenance increases. These decisions are at the discretion of Congress in overall appropriations and in budget allocation decisions made at the Washington and regional levels of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS, Service).

5.2 Funding and Staffing

This CCP outlines an ambitious course of action for the future management of Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, Refuge). The ability to meet objectives for wildlife, habitat, and people will require a significant commitment of staff and funding from the Service. The Refuge will continually need appropriate operational and maintenance funding to implement this plan.

A park ranger (currently vacant) and a Service biologist are stationed at the Refuge at an office in the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center (NGLVC, Visitor Center, Center). Management, maintenance, and administrative support are coordinated from the St. Croix Wetland Management District (WMD) office in New Richmond, WI approximately 160 miles away. Both the ranger and biologist positions will be needed for full implementation of this CCP.

5.3 Priorities

In the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, Congress established a three-tiered hierarchy, or three priorities for Refuge management. As a first priority, every refuge is to be managed to fulfill its purposes and the National Wildlife Refuge System mission, namely conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants. Secondly, refuges are to facilitate wildlife-dependent or “Big 6” public uses, namely hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and interpretation and environmental education. Of lowest priority is managing other uses and activities such as general recreation.

However, setting priorities based on this list may not be realistic given the complexities of managing a national wildlife refuge. Below are some reasons why certain actions may be completed before others in this plan.

- Staffing levels and expertise at the Refuge determine the types of activities that may take place each year. The region has held the park ranger position vacant on the Refuge since 2011 for workforce planning salary savings. Unless the position is filled, the

Refuge will not be able to undertake many of the strategies identified for environmental education and interpretation. Refuge participation in special events at the visitor center will also be reduced due to lack of staff. Many of the objectives and strategies assume a best case staffing and funding scenario. Due to the annual variation in funding levels as well as long-term workforce planning, strategies and objectives will be prioritized through annual work plans that are developed based on funding levels.

- Many of the habitat and riparian restoration projects are very expensive, often exceeding the capability of the Refuge to independently fund the project. Successful completion of the project requires a coalition of partners and grant funding sources. Since grants often have specific purposes, the availability of grant resources and partners can often redefine the hierarchy of refuge priorities. We will not “chase” grant funding to complete new projects or start new initiatives, but rather, we will rely on good science and established priorities to make decisions.
- Refuge management is partially dependent on the availability of staff from the St. Croix WMD to assist with administrative and operational support. Priorities at the Refuge need to be considered in conjunction with St. Croix WMD priorities. A high priority in the Whittlesey Creek NWR plan may not be possible without support from St. Croix WMD staff. Therefore decisions will need to be made about the highest priority use of resources at both stations.
- Defined priorities in the plan may change if safety problems or other high priority activities are identified and need to be resolved, thus resulting in a shift in funding that may limit the capacity to complete plan strategies.

In the short term, given the fiscal climate and congressional budgets, our strategy is to maintain the wildlife biologist position at the Refuge, focusing on habitat restoration and, when complementary to our main biological efforts, partnerships with local universities and colleges that provide learning opportunities for students. These learning opportunities will complement some of the strategies identified in Goal 3 (“Provide a diverse audience with opportunities to experience high quality, wildlife-dependent activities and to understand and appreciate a natural functioning landscape”). Although budget levels cannot be predicted from one year to the next, our strategy is eventually to fill the park ranger position at the Refuge to implement many of our visitor services goals.

As part of the plan implementation, various step-down plans are usually identified in the CCP. Several plans including Habitat Management Plan, Public Use Plan, and Hunt Plan have already been completed for the Refuge. At this time, the only remaining step-down plan that will need to be developed is the Inventory and Monitoring Plan, which should be completed within one year after approval of the CCP.

5.4 Partnership Opportunities

Partnerships are an essential element for the successful accomplishment of goals, objectives, and strategies at Whittlesey Creek NWR. The objectives outlined in this CCP need the support and the partnerships of federal, state, and local agencies; non-governmental organizations, and individual citizens. Refuge staff will continue to seek creative partnership opportunities to achieve the vision of the Refuge.

We expect to continue to work with the following notable partners, while also developing new partnerships:

- U.S. Forest Service
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- National Park Service
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
- Bayfield County
- Town of Barksdale
- City of Ashland
- Northland College
- Trout Unlimited
- Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center

5.5 Plan Review and Revision

The CCP is intended to be a dynamic plan based on the concept of adaptive management. Since the CCP will be a constant reference and guide for Refuge staff, internal review will be continuous. In addition, it is expected that the public and partners will offer continuous feedback. The Service will monitor, evaluate, and document minor plan modifications to determine that changes are needed to achieve Refuge goals and objectives. There will be opportunity for public review and comment before making any substantive amendments or revisions.