

Planning Update

Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment North Dakota Limited-interest National Wildlife Refuges

Issue 2, March 2007

The North Dakota Limited-interest National Wildlife Refuge Program

The 39 “North Dakota Limited-interest National Wildlife Refuges” were established in the 1930s. These refuges are flowage and/or refuge easements that were signed by the state and dozens of landowners for the overriding purpose of protecting migratory birds.

In the late 1930s and ‘40s, approved acquisition boundaries were established around adjacent easement lands. Lands within the boundaries were designated as national wildlife refuges. However, the easement agreements remained in effect until the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) acquired the land. Most easement agreements were perpetual and today 47,296 easement acres remain inside the approved acquisition boundary of 54,140 acres. After 70 years, 99 percent of these acres remain in private ownership.



Boat docks and 149 cabins surround the lake on Camp Lake NWR.

The easement agreement gives the Service the right to control (1) all hunting and trapping; and (2) uses that occur on impoundments, lakes, or rivers.

The landowners retain all other rights including the right to farm, graze, and build a home, and other uses based on records from the past 70 years.

Planning

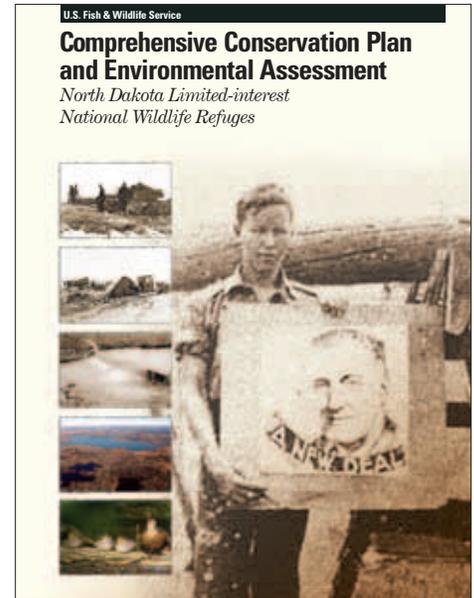
The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires that a comprehensive conservation plan be completed for each national wildlife refuge, including the 39 North Dakota limited-interest refuges. Plans have a 15-year lifespan and guide all management programs.

Highlights of the Final Plan

Divestiture

The Service will prepare a proposal to Congress to divest six refuges.

- The state owns or manages three of the refuges—Lake Patricia (Morton County), School Section Lake (Rolette County), and Sheyenne Lake (Sheridan County). Management would be transferred to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.
- The remaining refuges—Bone Hill (LaMoure County), Camp Lake (McLean County), and Cottonwood Lake (McHenry County) would have their easements revoked and



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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be transferred back to the landowner or co-managed with the state (the state would manage the water resources under agreement with landowners). Water rights would be relinquished to the state.

All negotiations will occur while the Service prepares the divestiture proposal for Congress.

Future of the Retained Limited-interest Refuges

Habitat Priorities

Native prairie is the highest priority habitat. Each managing station (the overseeing national wildlife refuge)

Vision Statement

Since our nation's beginning, great flocks of wildfowl—ducks, geese, and waterbirds—provided sights and sounds, food and feather. These wings of migration not only inspired hunters but some of our greatest artists, photographers, and poets. In the 1930s, much of the United States including North Dakota was gripped by a devastating drought and depression. Hot winds that dried crops also dried wetlands. Wildfowl numbers plummeted, and the skies grew quiet.

Americans took this crisis and saw opportunity and a great partnership was formed. Conservation leaders, the State of North Dakota, the federal government, and private landowners laid the foundation for what would become the “Limited-Interest Refuge Program.” This program addressed both wildlife conservation and economic needs. The Work Progress/Program Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps brought jobs to the communities building dams and other structures to create water areas

that now provide habitat and sanctuary for waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Through cooperation with the current refuge landowners and other conservation partners, the program will realize its full potential. It will become a premier example of private land partnerships promoting fish and wildlife conservation, supporting other conservation programs while continuing to serve as sanctuaries for international migratory birds.

will prioritize other habitat types needing protection for each of its assigned limited-interest refuges.

After being contacted by the Service, landowners can decide if they wish to receive added compensation for enhanced protection of these priority habitat types. The habitat priority lists will help the Service distribute any additional refuge funds.

Landowner Partners

Because nearly all of the refuges remain in private ownership, landowner partnerships are critical to the success of the comprehensive conservation plan. To foster partnership, the Service will provide landowners an update on plan implementation and other programs and opportunities.

The Service will contact landowners about activities that could affect their land, such as structure repairs, proposed public use activities, and compensation opportunities for habitat protection.



Original 1930s Water Control Structure (refuge unknown)

Water Level Management

The Service will examine the water management structures to determine which need repair. Repairs will be based on the managing stations' priority lists (see previous "Habitat Priorities"). Rehabilitation of structures will be done as funds become available. The focus will be on updating the water level management capabilities needed to enhance habitat for migratory birds.

Hunting

The Service will work with willing landowners and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department to determine if additional hunting opportunities exist on the limited-interest refuges. Special attention will be given to those refuges where crop depredation by geese and deer has been a landowner concern.

A compatibility determination will be completed for newly proposed uses before opening any area to the public. No uses will be approved that conflict with the refuge purposes—primarily migratory bird protection.

Trapping

Trapping will continue to be used to control unnaturally high populations of small predators such as raccoons and skunks. Small predators have devastated populations of ground-nesting birds, particularly waterfowl, by feeding on their eggs and young. Trapping is an important tool to improve the nest success of ground-nesting birds.

Small predators have thrived due to agricultural development and other habitat changes. Their natural predators, such as grizzly bears and wolves, no longer exist at the refuges. Depredation by small predators and habitat loss are the main reasons that waterfowl and other ground-nesting bird populations have plummeted. This crisis is human-caused, and requires human intervention to restore the natural predator-prey balance.

The trapping program will continue to be a permit-only program and limited to less than one trapper per refuge. Trappers will be required to report all captures. The Service will continue to work with the international Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (www.fishwildlife.org) to develop "best management practices" for trapping programs on the refuges.

Fishing

The Service will work with willing landowners and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department to find additional public fishing opportunities, including ice fishing. Once sites are identified, the Service will follow policy requirements to "officially" open the refuges to new uses. A compatibility determination will be completed for each proposal.

For a copy of the final plan, please send a request to one of the below postal or email addresses:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 6 Division of Refuge Planning
Attn: Jolene Beaudry
PO Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225-0486

jolene_beaudry@fws.gov

For other questions, please contact the responsible managing station:

Managing Station	Limited-interest Refuges
Arrowwood National Wildlife Refuge Complex 701/285 3341 Pingree, ND	<i>Half Way Lake Johnson Lake Sibley Lake Stoney Slough Tomahawk</i>
Audubon National Wildlife Refuge Complex 701/442 5474 Coleharbor, ND	<i>Camp Lake Hiddenwood Lake Lake Otis Lake Patricia Lost Lake Pretty Rock Sheyenne Lake</i>
Devils Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex 701/662 8611 Devils Lake, ND	<i>Brumba Lamb's Lake Little Goose Pleasant Lake Rock Lake Rose Lake Silver Lake Snyder Lake Wood Lake</i>
J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge Complex 701/768 2548 Upham, ND	<i>Buffalo Lake Cottonwood Lords Lake Rabb Lake School Section Lk. Willow Lake Wintering River</i>
Kulm National Wildlife Refuge Complex 701/647 2866 Kulm, ND	<i>Bone Hill Dakota Lake Maple River</i>
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex 701/387 4397 Moffit, ND	<i>Appert Lake Canfield Lake Hutchinson Lake Lake George Springwater Sunburst Lake</i>



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