

Planning Update

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

North Dakota Wetland Management Districts

Issue 2, September 2008

This planning update describes the process the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has made in development of a comprehensive conservation plan for nine wetland management districts in North Dakota:

- Arrowwood
- Audubon
- Chase Lake
- Crosby
- Devils Lake
- J. Clark Salyer
- Kulm
- Lostwood
- Valley City

North Dakota Wetland Management Districts

A wetland management district provides oversight for all of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's small land tracts in a multicounty area. These nine wetland management districts in North Dakota manage 1,208 waterfowl production areas, tens of thousands of conservation easements, and 50 wildlife development areas in 34 counties. These district lands, totaling 1,125,084 acres, are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, a network of lands set aside to conserve fish and wildlife and their habitat.

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires the Service to develop a comprehensive conservation plan by 2012 for each wetland management district and national wildlife refuge. The act provides clear guidance for the management of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Service has been preparing a comprehensive conservation plan for the nine wetland management districts. The plan will guide management for all district programs. The plan is a "living" document that the Service will update every 15 years.



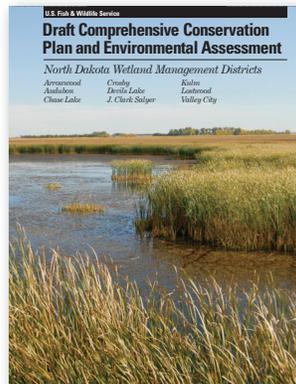
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A mallard hen and drake prepare to land on a waterfowl production area within a wetland management district.

Draft Plan Available for Public Review

The Service has completed a draft comprehensive conservation plan for public review. The draft plan for the wetland management districts sets out a draft vision statement and six supporting goals.

An environmental assessment, required by the National Environmental Policy Act, accompanies the draft plan. The assessment includes management alternatives for the districts and the effects of those alternatives on the environment.



To achieve the vision and goals for the districts, the Service considered three alternatives. The Service identified alternative B as its "proposed action." For this proposed action, the Service developed objectives and strategies—these represent the draft plan.

Draft Vision Statement

Wetland management districts conserve an important network of public and private wetland and upland habitat in North Dakota.

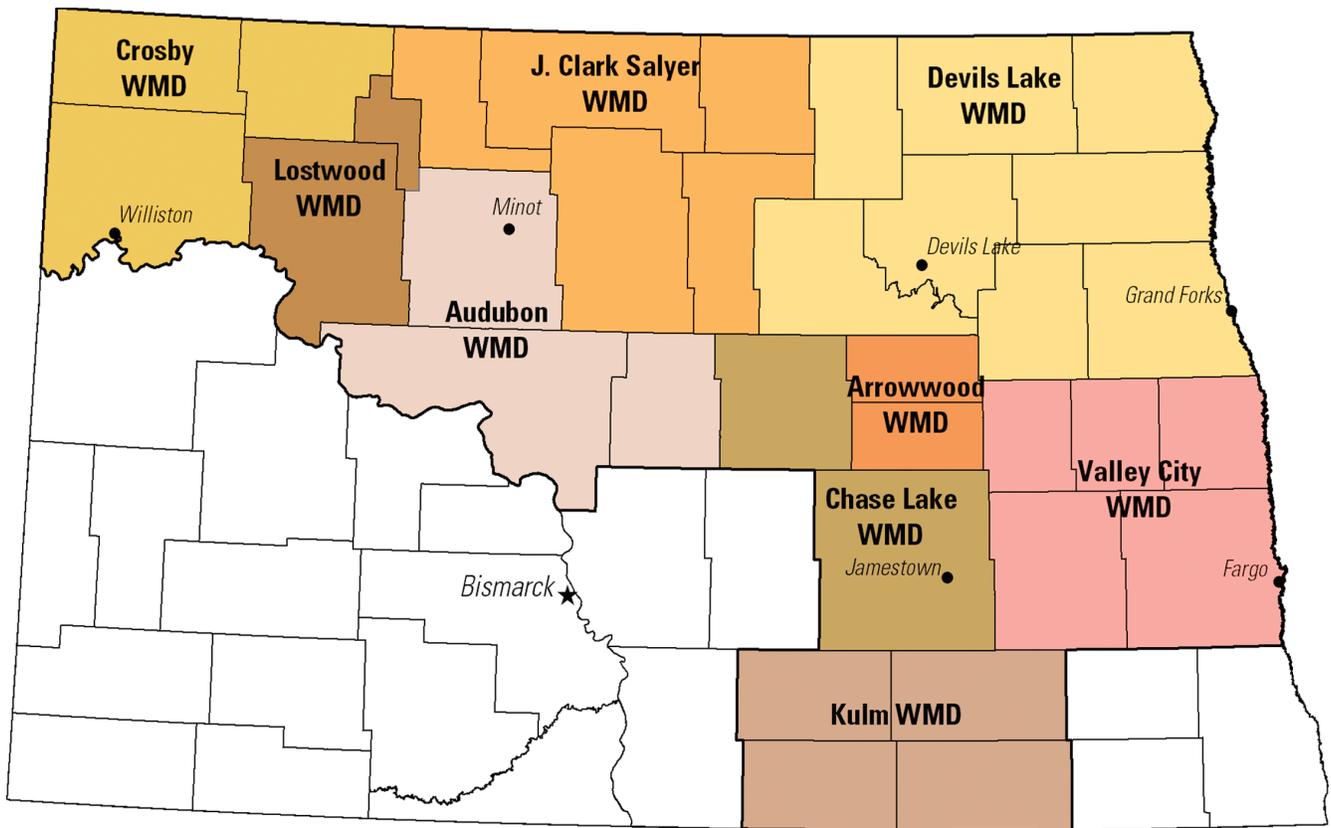
This network preserves the integrity of the historical and vital resting and breeding grounds of North America's migratory waterfowl.

As part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, these lands benefit ducks, other migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and resident wildlife.

The responsible management and protection of this expanding network requires adequate funding, dedicated personnel, and successful partnerships.

Our communities and visitors value grasslands and marshes as a beneficial and important component of a diverse, healthy, and productive prairie landscape.

Current and future generations enjoy wildlife-dependent uses of these lands and partners, especially waterfowl hunters, actively support and encourage our habitat conservation programs.



WMD=wetland management district.

Draft Goals

The Service developed the following goals to achieve the vision for the districts.

Habitat and Wildlife Goal

Protect, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity of grasslands and wetlands of the North Dakota Prairie Pothole Region. Contribute to the production and growth of continental waterfowl populations to meet the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Also, support healthy populations of other migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and other wildlife.

Monitoring and Research Goal

Use science, monitoring, and applied research to advance the understanding of the Prairie Pothole Region and management within the North Dakota wetland management districts.

Cultural Resources Goal

Identify and evaluate cultural resources in the North Dakota wetland management districts that are on Service-owned lands or are affected by Service undertakings. Protect resources determined to be significant and, when appropriate, interpret resources to connect staff, visitors, and communities to the area's past.

Visitor Services Goal

Provide visitors with quality opportunities to enjoy hunting, fishing, trapping, and other compatible wildlife-dependent recreation on Service-owned lands and expand their knowledge and appreciation of the prairie landscape and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Partnerships Goal

A diverse network of partners join with the North Dakota wetland management districts to support research; protect, restore, and enhance habitat; and foster awareness and appreciation of the prairie landscape.

Operations Goal

Effectively employ staff, partnerships, and volunteers and secure adequate funding in support of the National Wildlife Refuge System's mission.



USFWS

A canvasback hen keeps watch over her ducklings.

Alternatives Considered

Alternatives A, B, and C present different ways to achieve the draft vision and goals for the districts.

Alternative A (No Action)

Funding, staff levels, and management activities at the districts would not change. Programs would follow the same direction, emphasis, and intensity as they do at present.

The Service sets priorities for management of wildlife habitat and associated species at the districts' waterfowl production areas. Only high-priority waterfowl production areas receive consistent management.

The district staffs conduct limited, issue-driven research and limited monitoring and inventory of birds and vegetation.

The district staffs monitor all conservation easements; however, only the high-priority easement violations are consistently enforced.

On a multiyear rotation among districts, the staffs conduct public use events and workshops with such groups as school districts, youth groups, and conservation groups.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Wildlife habitat management would enhance wetlands and uplands, where warranted, on district lands. The Service would base management objectives for habitat types on the habitat preferences of groups of targeted species such as waterfowl, migratory shorebirds, grassland birds, and threatened and endangered species.

The district staffs would focus on high- and medium-priority tracts. The staffs would carry out compatible techniques to enhance production of the targeted migratory bird populations.

The district staffs would expand existing environmental education and visitor services programs, with additional waterfowl emphasis.

The Service proposes construction, at a future date, of the following facilities:

- One new administration and visitor center facility each for Audubon and Kulm wetland management districts.
- One new visitor contact station each for Arrowwood, Devils Lake, Lostwood, and Valley City wetland management districts.



Jackie Jacobson/USFWS

Environmental education is an important activity at the districts.

Alternative C

Management by the districts staffs would be more intensive and widespread, targeting native prairie and wetland habitat.

As a priority, district staffs would seek out restoration projects that expand and return native grasslands to quality native prairie.

There would be potential for additional management options that address the habitat requirements and needs of specific groups of water-dependent birds such as waterfowl and shorebirds.

The staffs would develop new environmental education and visitor services programs.

The Service proposes future construction:

- One new administration and visitor center facility each for Audubon and Kulm wetland management districts.
- One new visitor contact station each for Arrowwood, Devils Lake, Lostwood, and Valley City wetland management districts.

How to Provide Comments

We invite you to share your comments about the draft plan (the proposed action) and environmental assessment. We will accept letters, faxes, and emails. To be considered, all written comments must be emailed or postmarked by September 15, 2008.

Email: john_esperance@fws.gov

Postal Mail:

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Fax: 303/236 4792, Attn: John Esperance

Public Meetings

You may wish to participate in our public meetings. At a public meeting, you will be able to discuss the elements of the plan with staff from a wetland management district. The staff will record any comments you provide.

Arrowwood Wetland Management District (WMD)

September 9, 2008 / 5–7 p.m.
McHenry Cafe
291 Johnson St.
McHenry, ND

Audubon WMD

September 9, 2008 / 6:30–7:30 p.m.
Refuge Complex Headquarters
3275 11th Street NW
Coleharbor, ND

Chase Lake WMD

September 10, 2008 / 5–7 p.m.
District Headquarters
5924 19th Street SE
Woodworth, ND

Crosby WMD

September 11, 2008 / 1–6 p.m.
District Headquarters
10100 Highway 42 NW
Crosby, ND

Devils Lake WMD

September 9, 2008 / 7–9 p.m.
Devils Lake Armory Meeting
Room (south entrance)
524 4th Avenue NE
Devils Lake, ND

J. Clark Salyer WMD

September 9, 2008 / 4–7 p.m.
Refuge Complex Headquarters
681 Salyer Road
Upham, ND

Kulm WMD

September 11, 2008 / 4–6 p.m.
District Headquarters
1 First Street SW
Kulm, ND

Lostwood WMD

September 10, 2008 / 1–6 p.m.
Lostwood Refuge Headquarters
8315 Highway 8
Kenmare, ND

Valley City WMD

September 17, 2008 / 5–7 p.m.
District Headquarters
11515 River Road
Valley City, ND

Final Steps in the Planning Process

1. There is a 30-day public review of the draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment, including public meetings.
2. The Service revises the draft plan as needed based on public comments. The regional director selects the preferred alternative, which guides development of the final plan.
3. A “notice of availability” published in the *Federal Register* lets the public know that the Service has completed and approved the final comprehensive conservation plan. The Service makes copies of the final plan available.
4. The Service implements the approved, final plan.

Contact Information

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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