

# *Description of Planning Process*

## NEPA - National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 stipulates that a written assessment must be made of any action proposed by an agency of the Federal Government that significantly affects the quality of the human environment. NEPA also requires Federal decision makers to study, develop, and describe appropriate alternatives to recommended courses of action and solicit the views of other Federal and State agencies and the public early in the decision making process. An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to accompany this CCP (See Appendix F). The proposed action (preferred alternative) identified in the EA is the CCP (enhanced management alternative).

## Tewaukon Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plan Process

The Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plan is guided by the established purpose of the Refuge and Wetland Management District, the Service and National Wildlife Refuge System missions, Service compatibility standards, and other Service policies, plans and laws related to Complex management.

Planning is the process of deciding in advance what you are going to do. The Plan is the vehicle used to let others know in advance what you're going to do.

While developing the CCP the planning team reviewed conservation planning efforts of the following groups: Partners in Flight, Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, North American Waterfowl Management Plan Committee, U.S. Forest Service, ND Game and Fish Department, and Service Mainstem Missouri Eco-team (Appendix H).

This CCP establishes the goals, objectives, and strategies for Complex management. Listed below is an outline of the planning process used to develop the Tewaukon Complex CCP:

1. Preplanning (forming a planning team, identifying available people and funds, organizing efforts)
2. Identify Issues and Develop Vision » **Public Input Gathered on Issues**
3. Gather Information on Resources and Legal Responsibilities
4. Analyze Resource Relationships (Develop Goals and Objectives)
5. Develop Range of Alternatives
6. Assess Environmental Effects
7. Identify Preferred Alternative
8. Publish Draft Plan » **Public Comments on Draft Plan Gathered**
9. Respond to Comments
10. Adopt Plan
11. Implement Plan, Monitor/Evaluate Actions, Review and Revise

As with any process, comprehensive conservation planning is not necessarily linear or sequential, but can involve moving back and forth between steps. We are currently working on Stage 8 in the process (publishing the Draft Plan).

## Compatibility Determinations

Compatibility determinations are required by the Refuge Improvement Act for any program or activity occurring on Refuge System lands. The planning team reviewed previously completed compatibility determinations regarding Complex programs and reevaluated these determinations to ensure they were relevant and current. Compatibility determinations document the evaluation of Complex programs and activities by the Refuge Manager. In a compatibility determination, a program or activity is judged to be compatible or incompatible with Refuge purposes. No current program or activity on the Refuge was determined to be incompatible as a result of this review. Even if uses are determined to be compatible, the Refuge Manager must also evaluate whether adequate staff and funding are available to support the program or activity. Compatibility determinations can be found in Appendix G.

## Involving the Public

This planning effort will provide local communities, national, State, and Tribal organizations, and interested individuals an opportunity to have a voice concerning the future direction of the Complex. The primary thrust for the planning process is to provide a forum for ideas and issues to be shared, reviewed and evaluated. It is also important for the Service to provide information to the public throughout the process.

Since the Tewaukon Complex includes three Counties and many people visit the Complex from Fargo and Wahpeton, it was decided to hold open houses in several locations to gather public input. A list of the open houses held are as follows:

Sargent County	Forman City Hall (March 12, 1998)
Ransom County	Lisbon High School (March 17, 1998)
Richland County	American Legion Hankinson (March 24, 1998)
	Wahpeton Law Enforcement Center (March 26, 1998)
Cass County (Fargo)	ND State University Memorial Union (April 2, 1998)

The open houses provided participants an opportunity to learn about the Fish and Wildlife Service's and National Wildlife Refuge System's mission and goals and the Refuge and District purposes and current management issues. People attending were provided the chance to speak with Service representatives and to share their comments and concerns about current management. Attendees were also asked to suggest ways they would like to see Complex management change.

Prior to the public meetings, the Complex staff discussed the planning process with local County commissioners, sportsmen's groups, other interested groups, and advertised in the local media. Information on the planning process was also displayed in cafes and businesses frequented by community members in the three Counties comprising the Complex. A questionnaire on Refuge issues was provided to the public to stimulate additional public input for the planning process.

## Issues Raised During the Planning Process

The Tewaukon Complex staff received a variety of input from the meetings, questionnaires, and verbal discussions. The majority of the public input dealt with public use and recreation issues. Most of the local input dealt with very specific issues. Refuge users were interested in expanded fishing hours, more year-round access, and fishing in more Refuge wetlands. Expanding Refuge hunting opportunities to include waterfowl and predators, and modification of existing hunting seasons (i.e., shortening the pheasant season) were other recreation issues brought up by the public. Habitat issues identified by the public included expanding or decreasing the acres of cropland and conducting more management (such as planting more shelterbelts for winter cover and food plots) for pheasants and deer on the Complex. Grassland habitat and management issues included more protection for grasslands, integrating more grazing into management, maintaining and increasing weed control efforts, and reducing grassland habitat fragmentation. Crop damage on private lands by Canada geese was an issue raised throughout the District. Issues involving land acquisition and subsequent loss of local tax revenue were also raised. The planning team identified many of the same issues raised by the public. Some additional issues that the planning team raised included the decline, protection, and management of wetland habitat, tallgrass prairie and associated migratory birds.

The Tewaukon CCP is designed to address broad management and wildlife issues.

## Putting It All Together

Specific habitat management is the end product of this planning process. For example, Refuge habitat management actions such as weed control, farming, or water management should logically step-down from the broad Refuge System mission statement to the purposes the Refuge was established for, to the Refuge Vision statement. The links identified in the CCP planning process that step-down from the Refuge Vision to a habitat management action are established by setting habitat goals, quantifying the goals into objectives, and identifying a series of strategies that can be used to achieve the objectives. The strategies (specific habitat management) applied must be evaluated to determine if the objectives are being met. If the objectives are met, then the goals and vision should also be met.

Some strategies may not be effective and some will take a long time to evaluate. For example, an objective may be to eliminate the noxious weed leafy spurge using a variety of strategies such as chemical application and biological control. Refuge managers recognize that the objective of eliminating all leafy spurge is not possible since new infestations can start in small areas of soil disturbances. Current tools may also have limitations and may only slow the spread of leafy spurge or reduce the size of the infestation. The CCP is flexible. It allows for new strategies to be implemented as new methods become available and when existing strategies are not effective ways to meet the objective. Important things to keep in mind are other factors that influence outcomes besides management activities. These factors, which include animal impacts, wildfires, weather, funding and staffing, all influence the effectiveness of strategies and their outcomes.

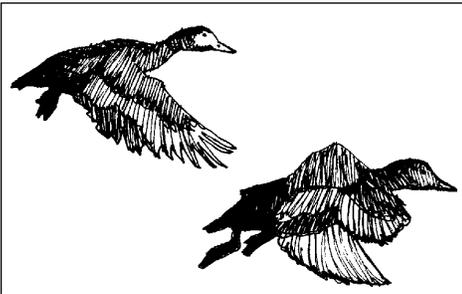
The CCP, which describes specific actions to be taken by the Complex staff over the next 15 years, will be used to prepare step-down management plans, revise existing plans, and budgets. Given that new information, techniques, and technology frequently arise, the CCP will be updated as necessary.

# ***U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Missions and Goals***

The mission of the Service is “working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.” The goals of the Service are aimed at fulfilling this mission. Some of the Service goals are: 1) sustaining fish and wildlife populations including migratory birds, endangered species, anadromous fish, and marine mammals; 2) conserving a network of lands and waters including the National Wildlife Refuge System; 3) providing Americans opportunity to understand and participate in the conservation and use of fish and wildlife resources.

## ***National Wildlife Refuge System Mission and Goals***

The Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to “administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans” (1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act). Goals of the System are to: 1) preserve, restore, and enhance threatened and endangered species in their natural ecosystems; 2) perpetuate the migratory bird resource; 3) preserve a natural diversity and abundance of refuge flora and fauna; 4) provide the public an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology; 5) provide visitors with wildlife-dependent recreation.



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National wildlife refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the Service and National Wildlife Refuge System, the designated purpose of the Refuge unit as described in the establishing legislation and/or executive orders, Service laws and policy, and international treaties (for a complete list see Appendix E). Individual refuges provide specific habitat requirements that support trust resource species including migratory birds, endangered species, marine mammals, and anadromous fish. For example, waterfowl breeding refuges in South and North Dakota provide important wetland and grassland habitat that supports populations of waterfowl as authorized by the Migratory Bird Conservation Act and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The Tewaukon Complex supports breeding populations of waterfowl and provides migration habitat during spring and fall periods. Sabine NWR and other refuges in Louisiana and Texas provide wintering habitat for waterfowl populations. This network (system) of refuge lands is critical to the survival of these birds. Any deficiency in one location affects the species and the entire system’s ability to maintain self-sustaining populations.

Legislative history exists that recognizes the importance of providing for wildlife oriented recreation for people on national wildlife refuges. The Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 USC 460k-460k-4) provided guidance for the Service to provide wildlife oriented recreational opportunities for the public if they were compatible with the primary purposes that the refuge was established for, and funds were available for the development, operation, and maintenance of recreational programs. In the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, six wildlife-dependent recreational uses are recognized as priority public uses of refuge lands. These are wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation, and fishing and hunting. These, and other uses, can be allowed on refuges if they are compatible with the purpose of the refuge and funding is available to support them. Uses may be allowed through a special regulation process, individual special use permits, and sometimes through State fishing and hunting regulations.

