

## *II. Planning Process*

### **Planning Process, Planning Time Frame, and Future Revisions**

Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs) provide a clear and comprehensive statement of desired future conditions for each refuge or planning unit. The CCP will provide long-range guidance and management direction to achieve refuge purposes, help fulfill the Refuge System mission, and maintain or restore the ecological integrity of each Refuge and the System. Additional goals of the CCP process include using science and sound professional judgment to support management decisions, ensuring the six priority public uses receive consideration during the preparation of the CCP, providing a public forum for stakeholders and interested parties to have input in refuge management decisions, and to provide a uniform basis for funding.

The CCP planning process consists of the following eight steps. Although the steps are listed sequentially, CCP planning and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation can be iterative. Some of the steps may be repeated or more than one step can occur at the same time.

- ✓ Preplanning - form core team, identify needs
- ✓ Identify Issues and develop Vision - Public Input Gathered on Issues
- ✓ Develop Goals and Objectives - from issues, resource relationships, legal responsibilities
- ✓ Develop and Analyze Alternatives, including the Proposed Action
- ✓ Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA Document - assess environmental effects, Public Comments on Draft Plan Gathered
- ✓ Prepare and Adopt Final Plan
- ✓ Implement Plan, Monitor and Evaluate
- ✓ Review and Revise Plan

Comprehensive conservation planning efforts for Waubay Complex began in December 1997 with a meeting of regional management and planning staff and field station employees from Waubay Complex and Tewaukon Complex at Tewaukon's headquarters in North Dakota. At that meeting a core planning team was designated with the major responsibilities of gathering information, soliciting public input, and writing the Plan.

Beginning in January of 1998, an extensive scoping effort was undertaken to solicit comments from interested parties. Comments were solicited from at least 29 public gatherings, including open houses, county commissioner meetings, sports/farm shows, sportsman groups, agency meetings, live radio interviews, and other community organizations. Sixteen hundred leaflets were mailed out and media releases also encouraged the public to comment and get involved in the CCP process. Participants were provided an opportunity to learn about the Service and Complex's purposes, mission, goals, and management issues. Everyone had the chance to speak with Service representatives and to share their comments. The mailing list is included in Appendix G. The public has an additional chance to comment now during this Public Review of the Draft Plan.

The CCP will guide management on the Refuge and WMD for the next 15 years. Plans are signed by the Regional Director, Region 6, thus providing Regional direction to the station project leader and staff. Copies of the Plan will be provided to all interested parties when requested. Whenever there is a significant need or at least every 5 years, the project leader will review the Plan and decide if a revision is necessary.

## Planning Issues

For the planning team, the biggest issue was the loss and degradation of grassland and wetland habitats. Protecting and restoring these habitats would reduce the continued loss of biodiversity and help restore wildlife populations. Staff felt the best way to accomplish this would be through partnerships, easement acquisition, and improved management of fee-title lands. Habitat fragments would also be reduced by removing food plots, replanting woodlands, and removing or controlling nonnative plants, shrubs, or trees.

Public comments also expressed a need to protect and enhance native habitats. Some were in favor of increased acquisition (fee and easement), but others were not. Many comments encouraged the use and management of native plants and animals and biological control methods for weed control.

Wildlife issues for the planning team centered on increasing baseline data for individual WPAs and developing monitoring and inventory plans. These plans would improve our ability to track management activities and their effects on the landscape and wildlife populations. For the public, comments ranged from wanting more nesting structures to reintroducing elk.

Only a few comments were received during scoping meetings regarding hunting. One was to restrict hunting seasons to only primitive weapons, another to decrease the number of tags offered, and a third to expand youth hunting and fishing programs. Allowing all three deer hunting seasons to continue provides more opportunities for hunters as well as accomplishing Refuge objectives to control deer numbers and protect habitat. Hunting success for muzzleloader and archery seasons is usually about 25 to 30 percent while it is closer to 50 percent or higher for rifle seasons (Refuge files, SDGFP 2001). Providing hunts for youth or people with disabilities will be considered and developed if practicable.

Both the public and the planning team expressed an interest in increasing public use, environmental education, and interpretation. There was also a desire to build better relations with the community and provide more volunteer opportunities. There was a particular interest in increasing the access and availability of fishing on the Refuge. The planning team had to consider the requirements of trust resources, particularly waterfowl, and compatibility issues when addressing these requests. There are also safety and accessibility concerns that need to be considered, as well as the need for additional funding to address these concerns. Issues such as providing additional boat access and stocking fish off-refuge are the primary responsibility of the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks or other agencies.

The Sisseton-Wahpeton Tribe brought up two issues, bison grazing and collecting plants on Service owned lands within the Complex.

Many of the issues brought up by the public were considered and incorporated into the CCP, but some were dismissed due to incompatibility or other negative impacts. For example, although elk at one time roamed the Great Plains, this issue was not considered due to economic and other constraints.

