

Planning Update

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment Souris River Basin Refuges

Issue 3, March 2007



Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

Habitats at the Souris River basin refuges support the gadwall (above) and many other migratory ducks.

Establishment, Acquisition, and Management History

North Dakota's Souris River Basin is home to three national wildlife refuges, known collectively as the "Souris River basin refuges."

- Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge (NWR); 19,500 acres—extends south from the Canada border along 28 miles of the Des Lacs River in Burke and Ward counties, North Dakota
- J. Clark Salyer NWR; 58,700 acres—extends southeast from the Canada border along 75 miles of the east arm of the Souris River in Bottineau and McHenry counties, North Dakota
- Upper Souris NWR; 32,092 acres—extends south-southeast along 35 miles of the west arm of the Souris River in Renville and Ward counties, North Dakota

The executive orders establishing these refuges in 1935 state the purpose of each refuge is for a "refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife."

The Souris River basin refuges are located in a critical area of the Central Flyway. The refuges provide resting and breeding habitat for migrating and nesting waterfowl. The American Bird Conservancy recognizes all three refuges as "Globally Important Bird Areas."

Planning

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act requires the development of a comprehensive conservation plan for each national wildlife refuge in the nation. These plans guide the management of each refuge for the next 15 years.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has prepared an environmental assessment with alternatives for management of the Souris River basin refuges. The Service identified alternative B as the "proposed action," which was further developed as the draft comprehensive conservation plan.

After the public has reviewed and commented on the draft plan and environmental assessment, the Service will select and approve an alternative. The selected alternative will become the final comprehensive conservation plan. This final plan will become the foundation for management and use of the Souris River basin refuges.

Future of the Refuges

If the proposed action were to be selected, the Service would carry out the objectives described for alternative B, which represents the draft plan.

Under this alternative, the refuges would prioritize for management the habitats with high probability of restoration. Priorities for habitats or habitat types would be based on where funds and resources (1) could be best used, (2) would be most needed, or (3) would be most likely to achieve success in meeting goals and objectives.

Other aspects of the proposed action include the following:

- Some habitats may be only partially restored or minimally managed.
- Collaborative research and monitoring would increase.
- Some visitor services would decrease as more staff and funding shift to habitat restoration.

- Environmental education would be emphasized and would rely more on volunteers and groups to contribute time.

Vision Statement

From Paleo-Indians on the tails of the Ice Age to the Assiniboine and Chippewa, early fur trappers, explorers, and naturalists; eminent bison herds and astoundingly abundant bird life; fires stretching for miles to revitalize treeless prairie; and determined homesteaders and vanquished farms of the Dust Bowl era...

The Souris River basin figures prominently in the cultural and natural history of mid-continent North America's plains and prairies. Three national wildlife refuges of the Souris River basin—Des Lacs, J. Clark Salyer, and Upper Souris—will conserve much of the ecology and natural character of the northern plains region while helping sustain populations of migratory birds and other wildlife native to the landscape.

The refuges will create a sense of awe and wonder by providing an array of wildlife-dependent recreational and educational experiences that enhance visitor awareness

of the splendid natural and cultural heritage of the northern plains.



Gary Eslinger/USFWS

Stiff Sunflower

Functioning as integral parts of the ecosystems and human communities to which they belong, the Souris River basin refuges will seek collaborative partnerships to attain common goals.

A diverse and passionate refuge workforce will rely on sound science to understand and restore or emulate natural processes essential to the integrity and perpetuation of major biological communities with which the refuges are entrusted.

Please Provide Your Comments

The Service invites you to review and comment on the draft plan and environmental assessment. Your comments will help the Service write a final plan that is both visionary and practical.

You may attend the upcoming open house to comment personally on the analysis and document. The open house will be held at the Minot Public Library in Minot, ND on March 6, 2007, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.

The Service will also accept public comments in written format at the postal and email addresses and fax number listed below. The Service needs to receive your comments by March 19, 2007 in order to consider them when writing the final plan.

Please send comments to the following:

Toni Griffin, planning team leader
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P.O. Box 25486
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Planning Steps Completed

- √ Preplanning completed: refuges' history researched and information gathered.
- √ Public scoping conducted: planning updates distributed, open houses held, and public comments collected.
- √ Vision and goals drafted.
- √ Range of alternatives developed.
- √ Draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment prepared.

In the larger context of conserving biological diversity in agricultural and natural ecosystems in North America, prairies are a priority, perhaps the highest priority.

~ F.B. Samson and F.L. Knopf 1994



Ducks settle in a wetland in the Souris River basin.

Darla Leslie/USFWS

Planning Steps Remaining

- Public review of the draft plan and environmental assessment, February–March 2007.
- Preparation of the final plan for approval by the Service's regional director, April–August 2007.



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