

Planning Update

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

North Dakota Wetland Management Districts & North Dakota National Wildlife Refuges

Issue 1, March 2007

The National Wildlife Refuge System

The National Wildlife Refuge System takes many forms in the protection of the nation's fish and wildlife—wetland management districts and national wildlife refuges play an important role.

The National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first bird sanctuary, and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife.

This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand and became the National Wildlife Refuge System—the largest system of lands in the world dedicated for the conservation of wildlife.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) administers the Refuge System.

North Dakota Wetland Management Districts

The Service has decided to group nine of the wetland management districts in North Dakota for the development of a comprehensive conservation plan.

The nine “North Dakota Wetland Management Districts” are located in the heart of the Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota. These districts provide wetland areas needed by waterfowl in the spring and summer for nesting and feeding. In addition, hundreds of thousands of waterfowl use these wetlands in the spring and fall for feeding and resting during their long migration.



Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

A mallard hen guides her ducklings through a wetland.

The primary purposes of the North Dakota Wetland Management Districts are as follows:

- wetland habitat preservation and improvement
- waterfowl and wildlife production
- maintenance of migratory habitat
- provision of winter cover for resident wildlife

The districts provide a home for all waterfowl species found in the Prairie Pothole Region. Mallard, gadwall, and blue-winged teal are the most abundant ducks, with several other species of diving and dabbling ducks common to the area. Spectacular concentrations of waterfowl and other migratory birds gather in the districts each spring and fall.

The North Dakota Wetland Management Districts mainly work with two tools for habitat protection—wetland easements and waterfowl production areas.

- Wetland easements protect wetlands on private land. The private landowners retain ownership of the land, and the Service manages the land cover (vegetation) for waterfowl.
- Waterfowl production areas are lands purchased by the Service for the protection and management of waterfowl habitat. All waterfowl production areas are open to the public for hunting, hiking, bird watching, and photography.



Erwin and Peggy Bauer/USFWS

Mallards are common in the North Dakota wetland management districts and national wildlife refuges.

North Dakota National Wildlife Refuges

The “North Dakota National Wildlife Refuges” are twelve refuges that the Service has grouped for the development of a comprehensive conservation plan.

These refuges provide habitat for a wide variety of species. The North Dakota National Wildlife Refuges provide important feeding grounds for migratory birds within the Central Flyway, along with grassland habitat for upland birds and mammals.

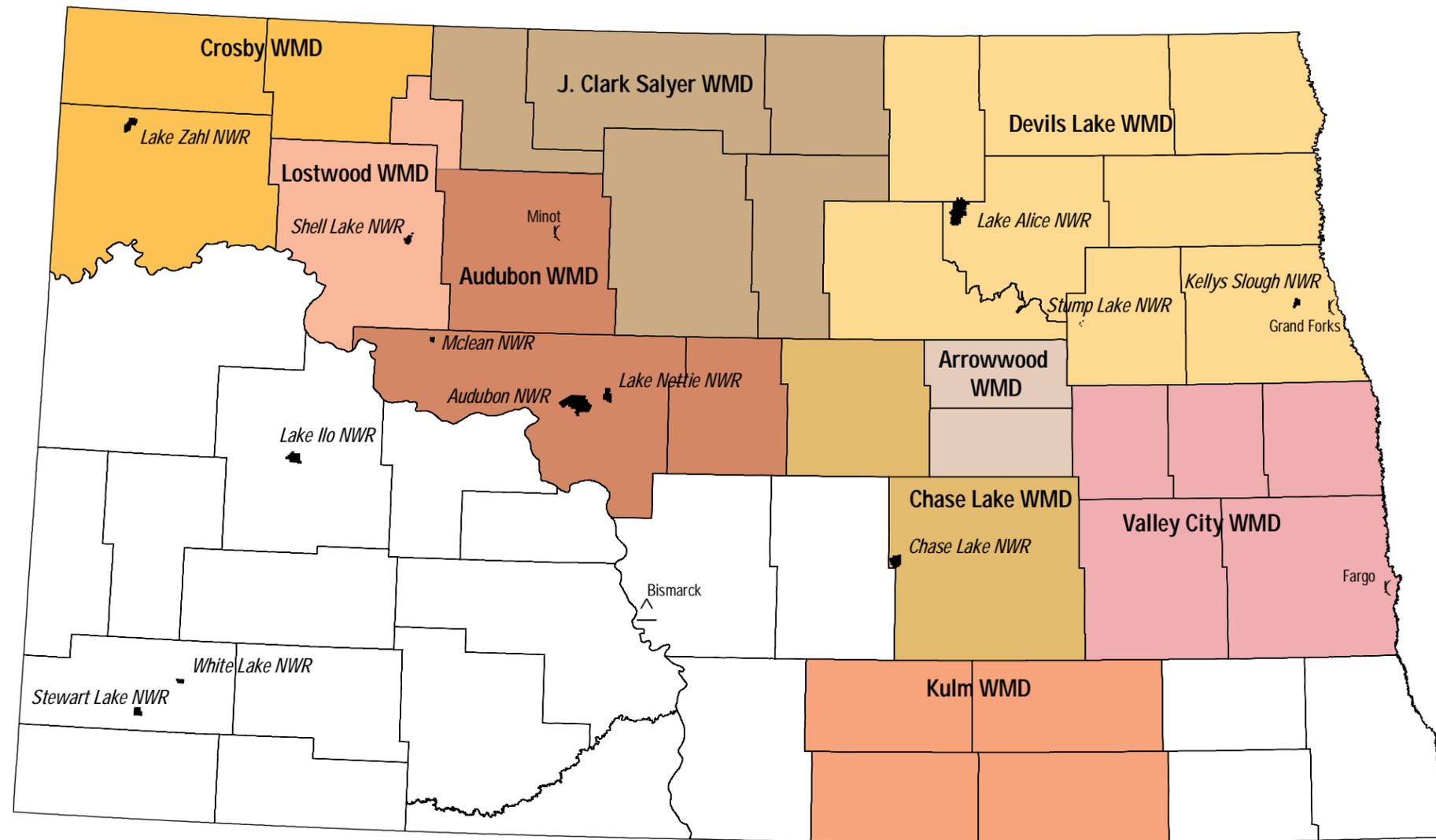
The North Dakota National Wildlife Refuges provide visitors with an opportunity to experience and explore the area's rich legacy of wildlife and natural history:

- Most of the refuges provide an auto tour route so that visitors can lose themselves in the beauty of the native prairie.
- Visitors can take advantage of blinds for photography of wildlife. Hiking trails offer a firsthand look at prairie wetlands with their array of wildflowers in the spring.
- Fishing and hunting opportunities are provided during special seasons.

The North Dakota National Wildlife Refuges provide a wilderness experience combined with the viewing of a gliding American white pelican, just as President Theodore Roosevelt enjoyed when he established the refuges in the early 1900s.

A comprehensive conservation plan will provide long-term guidance and management direction for the following North Dakota Wetland Management Districts.

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



A comprehensive conservation plan will provide long-term guidance and management direction for the following North Dakota National Wildlife Refuges.

- Audubon National Wildlife Refuge
- Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge
- Kelly's Slough National Wildlife Refuge
- Lake Alice National Wildlife Refuge
- Lake Ilo National Wildlife Refuge
- Lake Nettie National Wildlife Refuge
- Lake Zahl National Wildlife Refuge
- Mclean National Wildlife Refuge
- Shell Lake National Wildlife Refuge
- Stewart Lake National Wildlife Refuge
- Stump Lake National Wildlife Refuge
- White Lake National Wildlife Refuge

What is a comprehensive conservation plan?

In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Improvement Act). This legislation provides clear guidance for management of the Refuge System including this new mission statement.

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.

The Improvement Act directs the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to the conservation of wildlife and maintenance of the biological integrity of ecosystems.

To support and fulfill this mission, the Improvement Act also requires that, by 2012, the Service will have developed a comprehensive conservation plan for each unit of the Refuge System at the time of the Act. Refuge System units include wetland management districts and national wildlife refuges.

To meet this requirement, the Service has started work on two comprehensive conservation plans—one for the North Dakota Wetland Management Districts, and one for the North Dakota National Wildlife Refuges.

These 15-year plans will provide long-range guidance for all programs at the districts and refuges. Each plan will outline a vision statement and supporting goals, objectives, and strategies. These plans will be “living” documents that are updated every 15 years.

Draft comprehensive conservation plans will be developed through an environmental analysis (as required by the National Environmental Policy Act) for each of the projects—districts and refuges. The environmental assessments or environmental impact statements will describe management alternatives considered and their effects on the environment.

In summary, each comprehensive conservation plan will do the following:

1. Outline a vision
2. Guide management decisions
3. Outline goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve the vision and purposes of the units
4. Provide other agencies and the public with an understanding of the management strategies to be carried out at the units



Yellowthroat

Dave Menke/USFWS



American Avocet

USFWS



Green-winged Teal

Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

What are the steps and completion dates for this planning process?

1. Preplanning, December 2006–January 2007
2. Public involvement, February 2007–January 2008
3. Develop and analyze alternatives for addressing issues and achieving goals, April–August 2007
4. Prepare the draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental document, January–December 2007
5. Review the draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental document, January–April 2008
6. Develop the final comprehensive conservation plan, June–August 2008

Why did you receive this update?

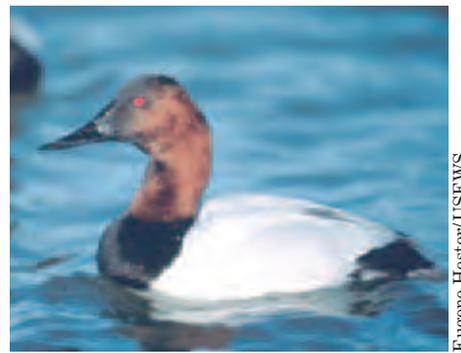
The Service is widely distributing this planning update to generate interest in the planning process and collect ideas and thoughts from the public, state and local governments, organizations, and other partners.

You are receiving this update because you were identified as someone who may want to be kept informed or share ideas about the future management of the North Dakota Wetland Management Districts or the North Dakota National Wildlife Refuges.

Will you be getting future planning updates?

If you would like to continue to receive planning updates, please complete the enclosed “mailing list consent” form and return it in the envelope provided.

Since this mailing list is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, your permission is needed to place your name on the permanent mailing list. If you do not return this form, the Service will assume that you do not wish to receive any further updates.



Eugene Hester/USFWS

Canvasback

Contact Information

The Service can provide information about the districts' and refuges' history, goals, and accomplishments. In addition, Service staff are available to answer questions about the planning process.

Public comments will be accepted by written letter or email through March 2008, and can be sent to the following postal or electronic addresses or by fax:

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Dave Menke/USFWS

Northern Pintail



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