U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Planning Update

Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake Wetland Management Districts

Issue 1, September 2008

The National Wildlife Refuge System

The Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake wetland management districts (districts) are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

The 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 during his presidency.

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), an agency within the Department of the Interior, administers the Refuge System.

Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake Wetland Management Districts

Wetland management districts are little known, but very important, components of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Huron Wetland Management District, Madison Wetland Management District, and Sand Lake Wetland Management District are located in the Prairie Pothole Region of South Dakota and consist of waterfowl production areas as well as wetland and grassland easements.

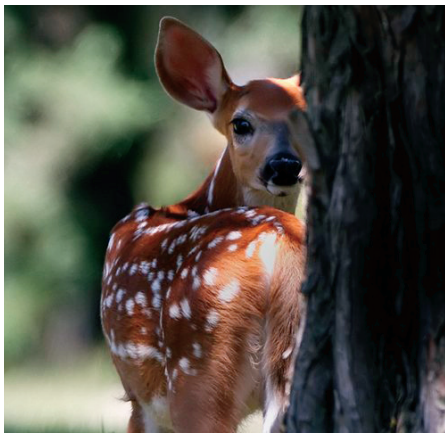
Waterfowl production areas are vitally important to wildlife and people. These lands are managed to provide habitat for endangered species, migratory birds, and other wildlife and to provide places for people to learn about and enjoy wildlife. Waterfowl production areas are open to many compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities year-round. Visitors to waterfowl production areas can expect to find a rich variety of plant and animal life.

The three districts also contain a great number of wetland and grassland easements. These easements are one way that the Service works hand-in-hand with private landowners to protect wildlife habitat. Landowners retain ownership of their land while the Service purchases the right to protect the wetlands or grasslands. When a wetland easement is purchased, the wetland is protected against draining, filling, leveling or burning. The landowner may still hay or farm the wetland basin when conditions allow. Grassland easements protect important prairie habitats for nesting birds. To ensure protection of nesting birds, young broods, and native grassland species, a grassland easement cannot be farmed. Grazing by herbivores is unrestricted and haying is permitted annually.

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.*



© Chris Bailey

Fawn.

J. and K. Hollingsworth/USFWS

Western meadowlark.

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. To meet this requirement, the Service has started work on a comprehensive conservation plan for the Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake wetland management districts. This 15-year plan will provide long-range guidance and management direction for all of the districts' programs. The plan will outline a vision statement and supporting goals, objectives, and strategies. It will be a "living" document that the Service updates every 15 years.

The comprehensive conservation plan and its accompanying environmental assessment or environmental impact statement (as required by the National Environmental Policy Act) will describe management alternatives considered and their effects on the environment. In summary, the 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 purpose of the three districts.
4. Provide other agencies and the public with an understanding of the management strategies to be carried out at the districts.

Approximate Project Timeline

- **SPRING 2008** — Preplanning
- **SUMMER 2008** — Draft Vision and Goals
- **SEPTEMBER 2008** — Public Involvement
- **OCTOBER 2008** — Develop Alternatives and Consequences
- **JANUARY 2009** — Develop Objectives
- **SPRING 2009** — Release the Draft Plan/Environmental Assessment
- **JULY 2009** — Public Meetings
- **SEPTEMBER 2009** — Final Plan
- **2010** — Begin Plan Implementation

Meeting Schedule

September 8, 2008

- Sioux Falls, SD
  4–8 p.m.
  Sioux Falls Convention Center
  1201 N. West Avenue
- Columbia, SD
  4–8 p.m.
  Sand Lake refuge headquarters
  39650 Sand Lake Drive
- Highmore, SD
  4–8 p.m.
  Highmore City Auditorium, east wing
  125 2nd Street SW

September 9, 2008

- Roscoe, SD
  4–8 p.m.
  Prairie Rose Cafe
  101 N. Mitchell Street

September 10, 2008

- Madison, SD
  4–8 p.m.
  Madison district headquarters
  23520 South Dakota Highway 19
- Huron, SD
  4–8 p.m.
  Huron Event Center
  100 4th Street SW

September 11, 2008

- De Smet, SD
  4–8 p.m.
  Kingsbury County Country Club
  611 7th Street SW

Public Involvement and Scoping

Seven public scoping meetings are scheduled during the second week of September 2008. These meetings are essential to development of a list of issues that the comprehensive conservation plan will address. The meetings will follow an informal "open house" format. You are invited to drop by during the meeting times listed below to meet with Service personnel, learn more about the planning process, and provide input.

At 7 p.m., Service personnel will give a short presentation about the districts and the comprehensive conservation planning process.

Why Did You Receive This Update?

This planning update is being widely distributed to generate interest in the planning process and collect ideas and thoughts from the public, state and local governments, organizations, and other partners.

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Service personnel develop a draft vision statement and goals for the districts.

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 Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake wetland management districts.

Since a mailing list is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, your permission is needed to place your name on the permanent mailing list for the comprehensive conservation planning process. If you do not specifically request to be on the plan mailing list, the Service will assume that you do not wish to receive further information about the planning process. If you would like to continue receiving planning updates, please complete the enclosed "mailing list consent" form and return it to one of the district addresses listed to the right. You may also phone or email the district staffs at the email addresses listed and request that your name be placed on the mailing list.

Contact Information

Service staff are available to provide additional information about the districts including their history and accomplishments, or to answer questions about the planning process.

Public comments during the scoping portion of the planning process will be accepted by written letter or email through October 15, 2008, and can be sent to the postal or electronic addresses listed to the right.

Huron Wetland Management District
Room 309 Federal Building
200 Fourth Street SW
Huron, South Dakota 57350
Email: huronwetlands@fws.gov
Phone: 605/352 5894
www.fws.gov/huronwetlands

Madison Wetland Management District
P.O. Box 48
Madison, South Dakota 57042
Email: madisonwetlands@fws.gov
Phone: 605/256 2974
www.fws.gov/madisonwetlands

Sand Lake Wetland Management District
39650 Sand Lake Drive
Columbia, South Dakota, 57433
Email: sandlake@fws.gov
Phone: 605/885 6320
www.fws.gov/sandlake/wmd.htm

Planning Process Information

www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/planning/ccp.htm

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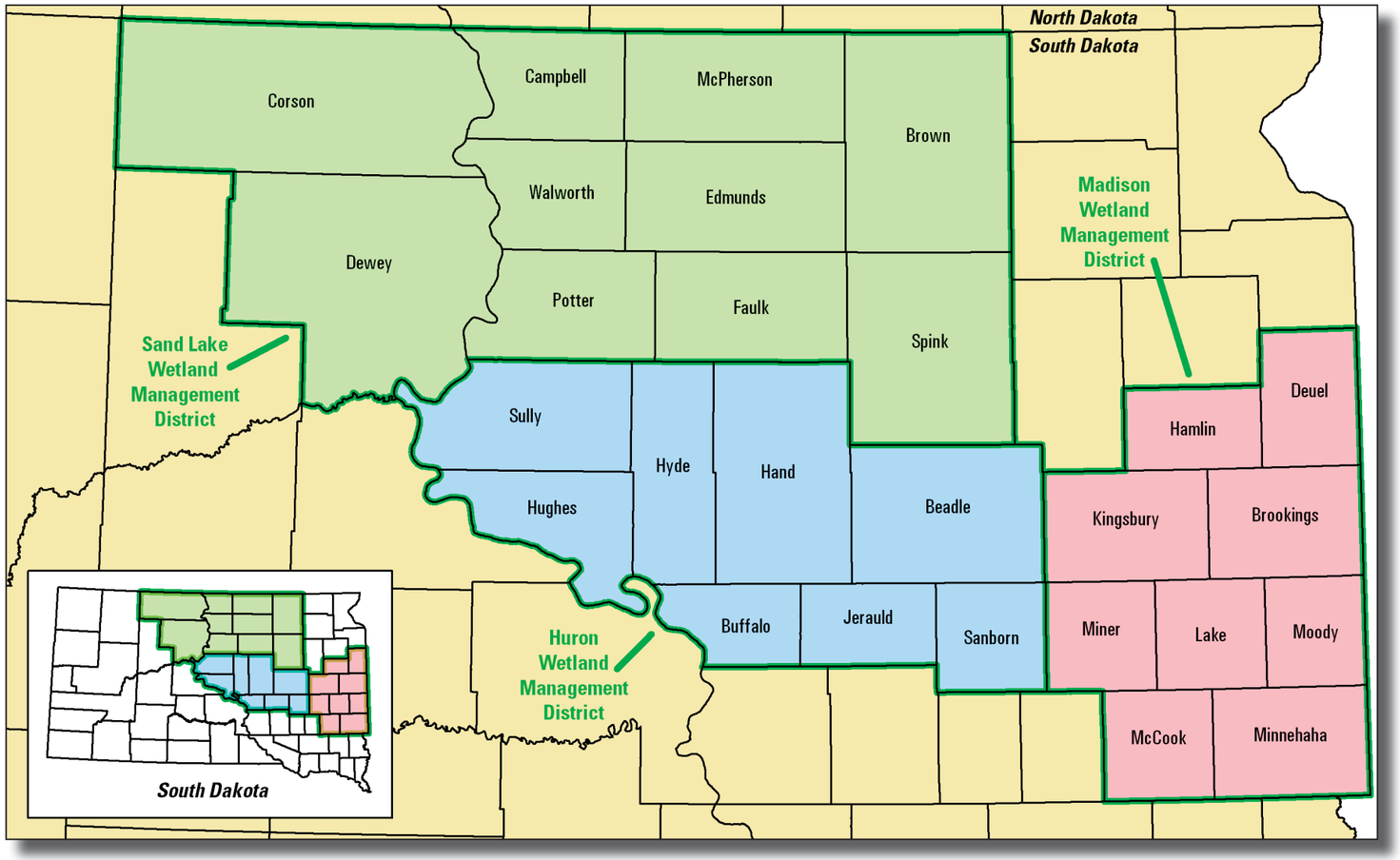
Prairie at Huron Wetland Management District.

Sandy Uecker/USFWS

A wildlife biologist at Huron Prairie Fest.



Chuck Pyle/USFWS

Youth duck hunt.

USFWS

Geese on Bourne Slough, Madison Wetland Management District.

September 2008

Draft Vision and Goals Workshop

In July 2008, the Service developed a draft vision statement and goals for the districts. The vision statement is a future-oriented expression of what the Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake wetland management districts will be, or what the Service hopes to achieve, based on the Refuge System mission and the purpose of the districts. Goals are open-ended, broad statements of desired future conditions that provide direction for achieving the vision. Together, the vision statement and goals will guide the development of the comprehensive conservation plan and provide broad direction for future management of the districts.

DRAFT GOALS

RESEARCH and OPERATIONS

Research and Monitoring

Use science, monitoring, and applied research at the districts, as a learning platform, to advance understanding of the Prairie Pothole Region and management of these areas.

Operations and Administration

Through effective communication and innovative partnerships, secure and efficiently use funding, staff, and volunteer programs for the benefit of all natural resources in the districts.

PARTNERSHIPS and ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Partnerships

Promote and develop partnerships with landowners, public and private organizations, and other interested individuals to maintain, restore, and enhance a diverse and productive landscape in the Prairie Pothole Region.

Environmental Education and Interpretation

Provide quality educational opportunities for persons of all abilities to learn about, understand, and appreciate prairie landscapes and the role of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

PUBLIC USE

Consumptive Uses

Provide visitors with quality opportunities to enjoy hunting, fishing, and trapping of waterfowl production areas and expand their knowledge and appreciation of the prairie landscape and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Nonconsumptive Uses

Provide visitors with quality opportunities to enjoy, observe, photograph, and appreciate the prairie ecosystem while expanding their knowledge of and support for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

HABITAT

Native Prairie

Conserve, restore, and improve the biological integrity and ecological function of the native prairies to support healthy populations of native plants and wildlife and promote the natural role of fire and grazing in shaping and managing these landscapes.

Planted Vegetation

Manage planted grasslands to contribute to the production and growth of continental waterfowl populations, other migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and other wildlife.

Wetlands

Protect, restore, and enhance prairie pothole wetlands to support diverse plant communities and provide habitat to waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and associated wetland-dependent wildlife.

DRAFT VISION

Clear blue skies frame spectacular views of grasslands and wetlands teeming with migratory waterfowl and other wildlife in the Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake wetland management districts.

Here, future generations will experience the whistle of the northern pintail, the song of the western meadowlark, and the distant boom of the prairie chicken.

Located in the Prairie Pothole Region of South Dakota, these districts preserve timeless landscapes in the face of change.

Conservation of these lands is achieved through hard work and the support of friends and neighbors who value natural places as an essential component of their quality of life.