

CHAPTER 1— Introduction



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Student Conservation Association intern Shannon Crawford releases a banded duck.

The Service (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) has developed this draft CCP (comprehensive conservation plan) to provide a foundation for the management and use of the Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake Wetland Management Districts (WMDs, or districts), located in north central and eastern South Dakota (figure 1). When finalized, the CCP will serve as a working guide for management programs and actions for these three districts over the next 15 years.

This draft CCP was developed in compliance with the Improvement Act (National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997) and Part 602 (National Wildlife Refuge System Planning) of “The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.” The actions described in this draft CCP and EA (environmental assessment) meet the requirements of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act of 1969). NEPA compliance is being achieved through public involvement and the analyses presented in this document.

The final CCP will specify the actions necessary to achieve the vision and purposes of the districts. Wildlife is the first management priority in all units of the System (National Wildlife Refuge System), and public use (wildlife-dependent recreation) is allowed

and encouraged as long as it is compatible with the districts’ purposes.

The draft CCP and EA has been prepared by a planning team composed of representatives from various Service programs, including the Division of Refuges, the Division of Realty, and the Division of Visitor Services and Communications. In addition, the planning team used public input. Public involvement and the planning process are described in section 1.6, “Planning Process.”

After reviewing a wide range of public comments and management needs, the planning team developed alternatives for management of the three districts. The team recommended one alternative as the Service’s proposed action. This action addresses all substantive issues while determining how best to achieve the districts’ purposes. The proposed action is the Service’s recommended course of action for management of these districts. The proposed action is summarized in chapter 3, “Alternatives,” with its predicted effects described in chapter 5, “Environmental Consequences.” The details of the proposed action constitute the draft CCP (chapter 6, “Implementation of the Proposed Action”).

1.1 Purpose and Need for the Plan

The purpose of this draft CCP is to identify the role that these districts will play in support of the System's mission and to provide long-term guidance for management of the districts' programs and activities. The CCP is needed to:

- communicate with the public and other partners in efforts to carry out the System's mission;
- provide a clear statement of direction for management of the three districts;
- provide neighbors, visitors, and government officials with an understanding of the Service's management actions on and around the districts;
- ensure that the Service's management actions are consistent with the mandates of the Improvement Act;
- ensure that management of these districts is consistent with Federal, State, and county plans;
- provide a basis for development of budget requests for the districts' operations, maintenance, and capital improvement needs.

Sustaining the nation's fish and wildlife resources is a task that can be accomplished only through the combined efforts of governments, businesses, and private citizens.

1.2 The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Refuge System



The Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for fish, wildlife, and plant conservation. The Service's mission, working with others, is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The National Wildlife Refuge System is one of the Service's major programs.

OVERVIEW

More than a century ago, America's fish and wildlife resources were declining at an alarming rate. Concerned citizens, scientists, and hunting and angling groups

joined together to restore and sustain America's national wildlife heritage. This was the genesis of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Today, the Service enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores vital wildlife habitat, protects and recovers endangered species, and helps other governments with conservation efforts. In addition, the Service administers a Federal aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars to States for fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, and related programs across America.

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt designated the 5.5-acre Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first wildlife refuge for the protection of brown pelicans and other native nesting birds. This was the first time the Federal Government set aside land for wildlife. This small but significant designation was the beginning of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

One hundred years later, the System has become the largest collection of lands in the world specifically managed for wildlife, encompassing more than 150 million acres in 550 refuges and more than 3,000 small areas for waterfowl breeding and nesting. Today, there is at least one refuge in every State and in five U.S. territories and commonwealths.

In 1997, the Improvement Act established a clear mission for the System.

The mission of the 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 states that each national wildlife refuge (that is, each unit of the System, which includes wetland management districts) shall be managed:

- to “fulfill the mission of the System, as well as the specific purposes for which that refuge was established”;
- to consider “wildlife conservation ... [as] the singular National Wildlife Refuge System mission” (Final Compatibility Regulations Pursuant to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997);
- to “ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the System are maintained”;

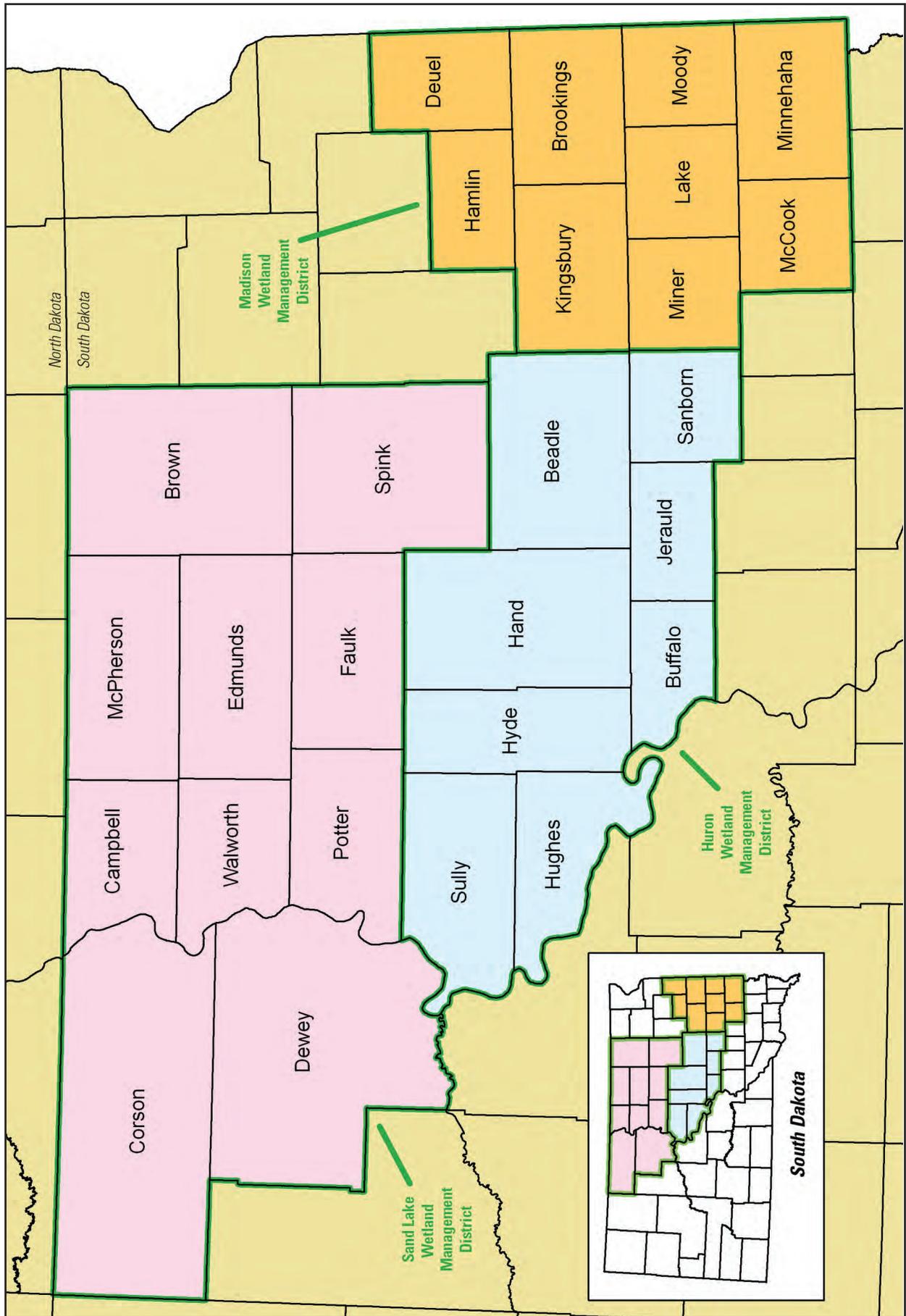


Figure 1. Vicinity map of the three districts, South Dakota.

- to fulfill the requirements of preparing “a comprehensive conservation plan ... for each refuge within 15 years after the date of enactment of the ... Act” and of ensuring opportunities for “public involvement in the preparation and revision of [these] plans”;
- to recognize that “compatible wildlife-dependent recreation [fishing, hunting, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation] is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System”;
- to retain the authority of a refuge manager to “make ... the compatibility determination” after exercising “sound professional judgment ... regarding wildlife conservation and uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System” (Final Compatibility Regulations Pursuant to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997).

In addition to the System’s mission, the wildlife and habitat vision for each unit of the System stresses the following principles:

- Wildlife comes first.
- Ecosystems, biodiversity, and wilderness are vital concepts in refuge and district management.
- Habitats must be healthy.
- Growth of refuges and districts must be strategic.
- The System serves as a model for habitat management with broad participation from others.

Following passage of the Improvement Act, the Service immediately began to carry out the direction of the new legislation, including preparation of CCPs for all national wildlife refuges and wetland management districts. Consistent with the Improvement Act, the Service prepares all CCPs in conjunction with public involvement. Each refuge and each district is required to complete its CCP within the 15-year schedule (by 2012).

PEOPLE AND THE REFUGE SYSTEM

The Nation’s fish and wildlife heritage contributes to the quality of American lives and is an integral part of the country’s greatness. Wildlife and wild places have always given people special opportunities to have fun, relax, and appreciate the natural world.

Wildlife recreation contributes millions of dollars to local economies through bird watching, fishing, hunting, photography, and other wildlife pursuits. Nearly 35 million people visited national wildlife refuges in 2006 (Caudill and Carver 2007), mostly to observe wildlife in their natural habitats. Visitors experience nature trails, auto tours, interpretive programs, and hunting and fishing opportunities. Local communities that surround the refuges and districts derive significant economic benefits from refuge-related activities.

Economists report that System visitors contribute more than \$1.7 billion annually to local economies (Caudill and Carver 2007). These figures do not include Alaska or the Pacific Island refuges, which together hosted more than 2 million visitors in 2006.

COMPATIBLE USES IN THE REFUGE SYSTEM

Lands within the System differ from multiple-use Federal lands in that they are closed to all public uses unless specifically and legally opened. A refuge or district use is not allowed unless the Service determines the use to be appropriate and compatible. A *compatible* use is one that, in the sound professional judgment of the project leader, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the System’s mission or the purposes of the refuge or district. Sound professional judgment is defined as a decision that is consistent with the principles of fish and wildlife management and administration, the available science and resources, and adherence to law.

A compatibility determination is the written documentation that a proposed or existing use of a national wildlife refuge or wetland management district is or is not a compatible use. The determination is completed, signed, and dated by the project leader with the concurrence of the System’s assistant regional director. Compatibility determinations are typically completed as part of the process for a CCP or step-down management plan. Once a final compatibility determination is made, it is not subject to administrative appeal.

The Improvement Act states that six priority uses—hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education—should receive consideration in planning and management over other public uses. All facilities and activities associated with recreational uses, or where there is an economic benefit associated with a use, require compatibility determinations. However, refuge or district management activities such as prescribed fire or invasive plant control do not require compatibility determinations.

The draft compatibility determinations for these districts are presented in appendix A and are available for public review and comment as part of the draft CCP and EA.

SERVICE ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Service activities in South Dakota contribute to the State’s economy, ecosystems, and education programs. The following list summarizes the Service’s presence and activities:

- employ 173 people in South Dakota
- assisted by 191 volunteers donating more than 8,000 hours in the following areas:
 - more than 4,000 hours for wildlife and habitat
 - nearly 1,500 hours for maintenance work

- 1,350 hours for wildlife-dependent recreation
- 1,165 hours in miscellaneous other activities related to Service work
- manage two national fish hatcheries encompassing 591.79 acres and one fish and wildlife management assistance office
- manage seven national wildlife refuges encompassing a total of 103,884.85 acres
- manage six wetland management districts across 50 South Dakota counties comprising the following:
 - 160,432.41 fee acres (waterfowl production areas [WPAs])
 - 591,308.44 wetland easement acres
 - 705,532.59 grassland easement acres
 - 712.23 flowage and miscellaneous easement acres
 - 40,875.90 Farmer's Home Administration easements
- host more than 202,000 annual visitors to Service-managed lands:
 - more than 93,000 hunting visits
 - nearly 45,000 fishing visits
 - more than 57,500 wildlife observation visits
 - environmental education programs for nearly 7,000 students
 - a currently unknown number of trapping visits
- provide \$4,668,784 to SDGFP (South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks) for sport fish restoration and \$8,793,314 for wildlife restoration and hunter education
- employ eight Partners for Fish and Wildlife program managers, who have helped private landowners restore wetland and upland habitats as shown below:
 - Huron WMD
 - 517 wetlands restored (1,805 acres)
 - 298 wetlands established (1,149 acres)
 - 173 upland sites restored (6,467 acres)
 - 193 upland sites (grazing systems) enhanced (100,842 acres)
 - Madison WMD
 - 1,701 wetlands restored (5,934 acres)
 - 251 wetlands established (528 acres)
 - 180 upland sites restored (8,897 acres)
 - 141 upland sites (grazing systems) enhanced (31,097 acres)
 - Sand Lake WMD
 - 177 wetlands restored (719 acres)
 - 383 wetlands established (1,809 acres)
 - 122 upland sites restored (6,384 acres)
 - 221 upland sites (grazing systems) enhanced (84,712 acres)
- make payments to counties through the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act (Public Law [P.L.] 95-469,

amended 1978); payments for fee title lands are based on the greatest of three-quarters of 1 percent of the fair market value (appraisals are completed every 5 years), 25 percent of net receipts, or \$0.75 per acre

1.3 National and Regional Mandates

System units are managed to achieve the System's mission and goals, along with the designated purpose of the refuges and districts (as described in establishing legislation, executive orders, or other establishing documents). Key concepts and guidance of the System are in the Administration Act (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966), Title 50 of the CFR (Code of Federal Regulations), "The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual," and the Improvement Act.

The Improvement Act amends the Administration Act by providing a unifying mission for the System, a new process for determining compatible public uses on refuges and districts, and a requirement that each refuge and district be managed under a CCP. The Improvement Act states that wildlife conservation is the priority of System lands and that the Secretary of the Interior will ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of refuge lands are maintained. The act requires the Service to monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge and district.

A description of these and other laws and executive orders that may affect the CCP or the Service's implementation of the CCP is provided in appendix B. Service policies on planning and day-to-day management of refuges and districts are in the "Refuge System Manual" and "The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual."

1.4 District Contributions to National and Regional Plans

The resources and management activities of the Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake WMDs contribute to the conservation efforts described below.

FULLFILLING THE PROMISE

A 1999 report, "Fulfilling the Promise, The National Wildlife Refuge System" (USFWS 1999), is the culmination of a yearlong process by teams of Service employees to evaluate the Refuge System nationwide. This report was the focus of the first National Refuge System conference (in 1998)—attended by refuge

managers, other Service employees, and representatives from leading conservation organizations.

The report contains 42 recommendations packaged with three vision statements addressing wildlife and habitat, people, and leadership. This CCP deals with all three major topics. The planning team looked to the recommendations in the document for guidance during CCP planning.

BIRD CONSERVATION

During the past few decades, there has been growing interest in conserving birds and their habitats. This trend has led to the development of partnership-based bird conservation initiatives that have produced international, national, and regional conservation plans. “All-bird” conservation planning in North America is being achieved through the NABCI (North American Bird Conservation Initiative). Formed in 1999, the NABCI committee is a coalition of government agencies, private organizations, and bird initiatives in the United States working to advance integrated bird conservation based on sound science and cost-effective management to benefit all birds in all habitats. Conservation of all birds is being accomplished under four planning initiatives: The North American Landbird Conservation Plan (Partners in Flight), the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

PARTNERS IN FLIGHT

The Partners in Flight program began in 1990 with the recognition of declining population levels of many migratory bird species. The challenge, according to the program, is managing human population growth while maintaining functional natural ecosystems. To meet this challenge, Partners in Flight worked to identify priority land bird species and habitat types. Partners in Flight activity has resulted in 52 bird conservation plans covering the continental United States.

The primary goal of Partners in Flight is to provide for the long-term health of the bird life of this continent. The first priority is to prevent the rarest species from going extinct. The second priority is to prevent uncommon species from descending into threatened status. The third priority is to “keep common birds common.”

For planning purposes, Partners in Flight splits North America into seven groupings of birds by ecological area—avifaunal biomes—and 37 BCRs (bird conservation regions) (figure 2). The three districts are within the “prairie avifaunal biome” in BCR 11, the Prairie Pothole Region. The westernmost portion of the Sand Lake WMD is within the “badlands and prairies avifaunal biome” in BCR 17.

BCR 11 is the most important waterfowl production area in the North America, despite extensive wetland

drainage and tillage of native grasslands. The density of breeding dabbling ducks commonly exceeds 100 pairs per square mile in some areas during years with favorable wetland conditions. The area comprises the core of the breeding range of most dabbling duck and several diving duck species. BCR 11 provides critical breeding and migration habitat for more than 200 other bird species, including such species of concern as Franklin’s gull and yellow rail, as well as piping plover, federally listed as threatened. In addition, Baird’s sparrow, Sprague’s pipit, chestnut-collared longspur, Wilson’s phalarope, marbled godwit, and American avocet are among the many priority nonwaterfowl species that breed in BCR 11. According to NABCI, wetland areas also provide key spring migration sites for Hudsonian godwit, American golden-plover, white-rumped sandpiper, and buff-breasted sandpiper.

Partners in Flight conservation priorities in the prairie avifaunal biome focus on protection of remaining prairies; management of existing grasslands using fire and grazing; and control of invasive plants, including woody plant encroachment.

Region 17 is a semiarid plain dominated by mixed-grass prairie. Importantly, this region provides habitat for some of the healthiest populations of high-priority dry-grassland bird species on the continent, including mountain plover, McCown’s longspur, and long-billed curlew.

NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT PLAN

By 1985, waterfowl populations had plummeted to record lows. Habitat that waterfowl depend on was disappearing at a rate of 60 acres per hour. Recognizing the importance of waterfowl and wetlands to North Americans and the need for international cooperation to help in the recovery of a shared resource, the United States and Canada governments developed a strategy to restore waterfowl populations through habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement. Written in 1986, the NAWMP (North American Waterfowl Management Plan) envisioned a 15-year effort to achieve landscape conditions that could sustain waterfowl populations. Specific NAWMP objectives are to increase and restore duck populations to the average levels of the 1970s—62 million breeding ducks and a fall flight of 100 million birds. Mexico became a signatory to the plan in 1994.

The plan is innovative because of its international scope and its regional-level implementation. Its success depends on the strength of partnerships called “joint ventures,” involving Federal, State, provincial, tribal, and local governments; businesses; conservation organizations; and individual citizens.

Joint ventures are regional, self-directed partnerships that carry out science-based conservation through a wide array of community participation.

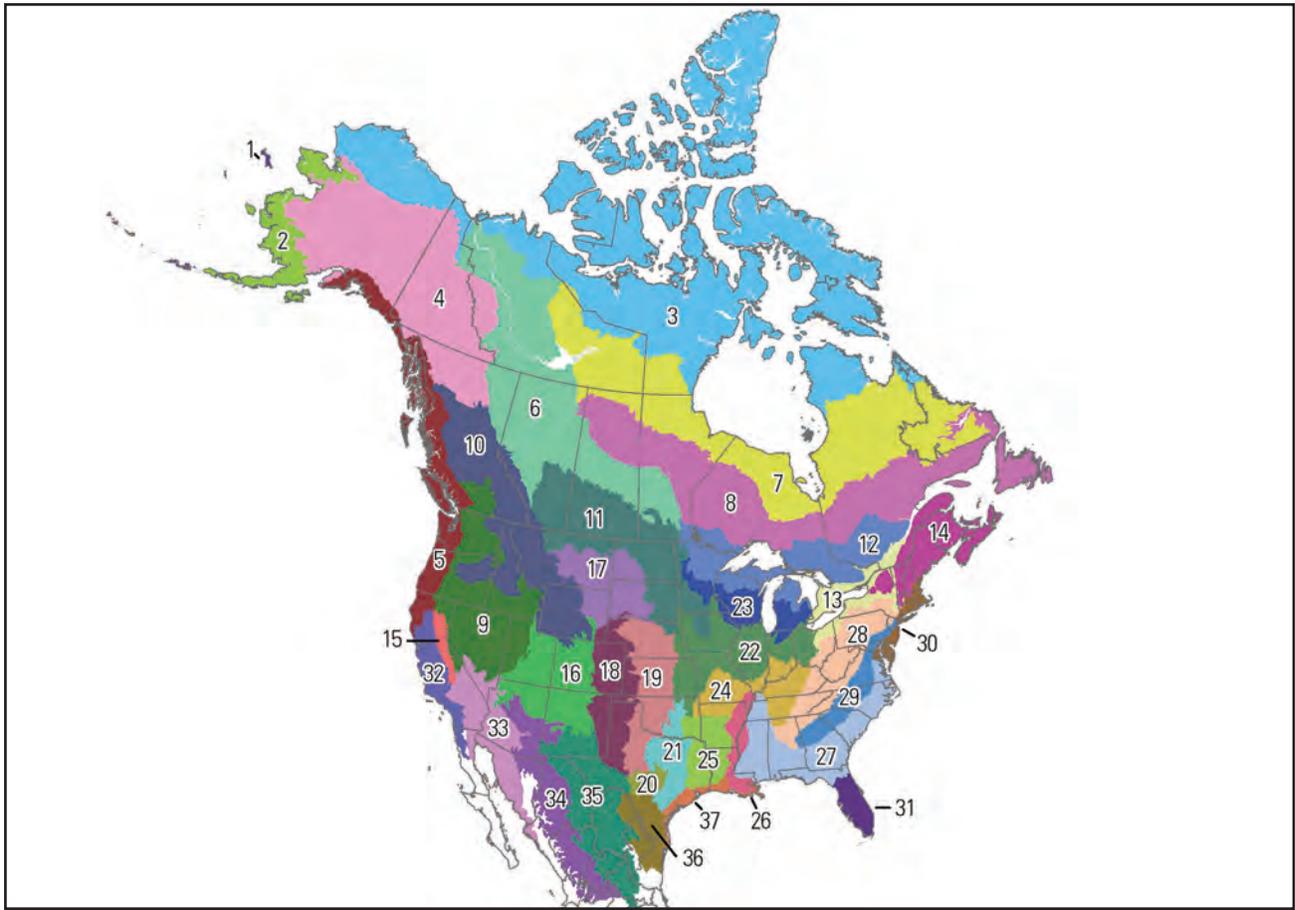


Figure 2. Map of the bird conservation regions of North America.

Joint ventures develop implementation plans focusing on areas of concern identified in the plan. The three districts covered in this draft CCP lie within the area covered by the PPJV (Prairie Pothole Joint Venture).

The PPJV, which covers the Prairie Pothole Region of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota, was established in 1987, and is one of the original six priority joint ventures under the NAWMP. The joint venture protects, restores, and enhances high-priority wetland and grassland habitat to help sustain populations of waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, and prairie land birds. The PPJV encompasses one-third (100,000 square miles) of North America's Prairie Pothole Region. The remaining 200,000-square-mile portion is located in the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. This unique area contains millions of depressional wetlands (or potholes), making it one of the richest wetland systems in the world. These glacially formed prairie potholes and their surrounding grasslands are highly productive, supporting a stunning diversity of bird life.

RECOVERY PLANS FOR FEDERALLY LISTED THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES

Where species that are federally listed threatened or endangered under ESA (Endangered Species Act)

occur in the three districts, the Service will follow the management goals and strategies in the species' recovery plans. The list of threatened or endangered species that occur at the districts will change as species are listed or delisted, or as listed species are discovered on district lands.

Currently, these three districts are following the recovery plans for these species:

- Piping plover (threatened) in the northern Great Plains (USFWS 1994a)
- Whooping crane (endangered) (USFWS 1994b)
- Interior least tern (endangered) (USFWS 1990)
- Western prairie fringed orchid (threatened) (USFWS 1996)

STATE-LEVEL COMPREHENSIVE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Over the past several decades, documented declines of wildlife populations have occurred nationwide. Congress created the SWG (State Wildlife Grant) program in 2001. This program provides Federal funds to States and territories to support conservation aimed at preventing wildlife from becoming endangered and in need of protection under ESA. The SWG program is an ambitious endeavor to take an active hand in

keeping species from becoming threatened or endangered in the future.

According to the SWG program, each State, territory, and the District of Columbia was required to complete a CWCS (comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy) by October 1, 2005, to receive future funding.

The strategies promulgated under the SWG program will help define an integrated approach to the stewardship of all wildlife species, with additional emphasis on species of concern and habitats at risk. The goal is to shift focus from single-species management and highly specialized individual efforts to a geographically based, landscape-oriented fish and wildlife conservation effort. The Service approves CWCSs and administers SWG program funding.

SDGFP's mission "... to perpetuate, conserve, manage, protect, and enhance South Dakota's wildlife resources, parks, and outdoor recreational opportunities" sets the framework for the State's actions.

SDGFP has opted to apply a *coarse filter/fine filter* strategy to its public land management needs. The plan emphasizes ecosystem diversity as the primary means to address habitat needs for biodiversity, with a secondary focus on non-habitat concerns regarding species of greatest conservation need. Program staff establishes a schedule for the development of recovery objectives for State-listed species. A threats assessment, identification of recovery goals, and species recovery actions provide a coordinated approach and give guidance for cooperating agencies to assist in recovery of these species. Management actions directed toward species are designed using an adaptive management framework.

South Dakota's list of "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" comprises 28 birds, 10 mammals, 7 freshwater mussels, 4 gastropods, 9 insects, 20 fishes, and 12 reptiles and amphibians. There are three primary criteria for inclusion in the list: State- and federally listed species for which the State has a mandate for recovery, species for which South Dakota represents a significant portion of the species' overall range, and species that are indicative of or depend upon a declining or unique habitat in South Dakota.

Three broad categories of human influence interfere with the maintenance of ecosystem diversity. These are direct alteration or conversion of species composition, structure, or function; indirect alteration or suppression of historical disturbance processes; and indirect alteration of species composition, structure, or function through the introduction and spread of nonnative species. Primary causative agents are agriculture and, to a lesser degree, urbanization. For riparian/wetland and aquatic ecosystems, additional causative agents include draining, surface water diversion, water impoundments, dams, ponds for water supply, and stream channelization.

The accidental or intentional introduction of invasive nonnative species can have major impacts on native species and ecosystems. Such introductions are of particular concern to maintaining the ecological integrity of historical ecosystems.

The loss or degradation of habitat as well as non-habitat-related impacts are areas of concern associated with the persistence of species in South Dakota. Loss or degradation of habitat is directly influenced by direct and indirect impacts on ecosystem diversity. Non-habitat-related impacts are typically characterized by direct human influences on a species' normal life cycle or existence.

The planning team reviewed South Dakota's CWCS and used the information during development of the draft CCP and EA. Implementation of the draft CCP's habitat goals and objectives would support the goals and objectives of the South Dakota conservation strategy.

1.5 Strategic Habitat Conservation

A BROADER VISION

In the face of escalating challenges such as land use conversion, invasive species, water scarcity, and complex issues that have been amplified by accelerating climate change, the Service has evolved from its ecosystem approach to conservation toward developing a broader vision.

A cooperative effort by the Service and the USGS (U.S. Geological Survey) culminated in a report by the National Ecological Assessment Team (USGS 2006). The report outlines a unifying adaptive resource management approach for conservation at a landscape scale—the entire range of a priority species or suite of species. This is strategic habitat conservation—a way of thinking and doing business by incorporating biological goals for priority species populations, making strategic decisions about the work needed, and constantly reassessing.

Since 2006, the Service has taken significant steps to turn this vision into reality and has defined a framework of 22 geographic areas. Experts from the Service and USGS developed this framework through an aggregation of bird conservation regions (figure 2). The three South Dakota districts lie in the Plains and Prairie Potholes Geographic Area (figure 3). Key species and species groups targeted in this geographic area are paddlefish, pallid sturgeon, waterfowl, shorebirds, grassland birds, and black-footed ferret.

The Service is using the geographic framework as the basis to identify the first generation of landscape conservation cooperatives. These cooperatives are conservation-science partnerships between the

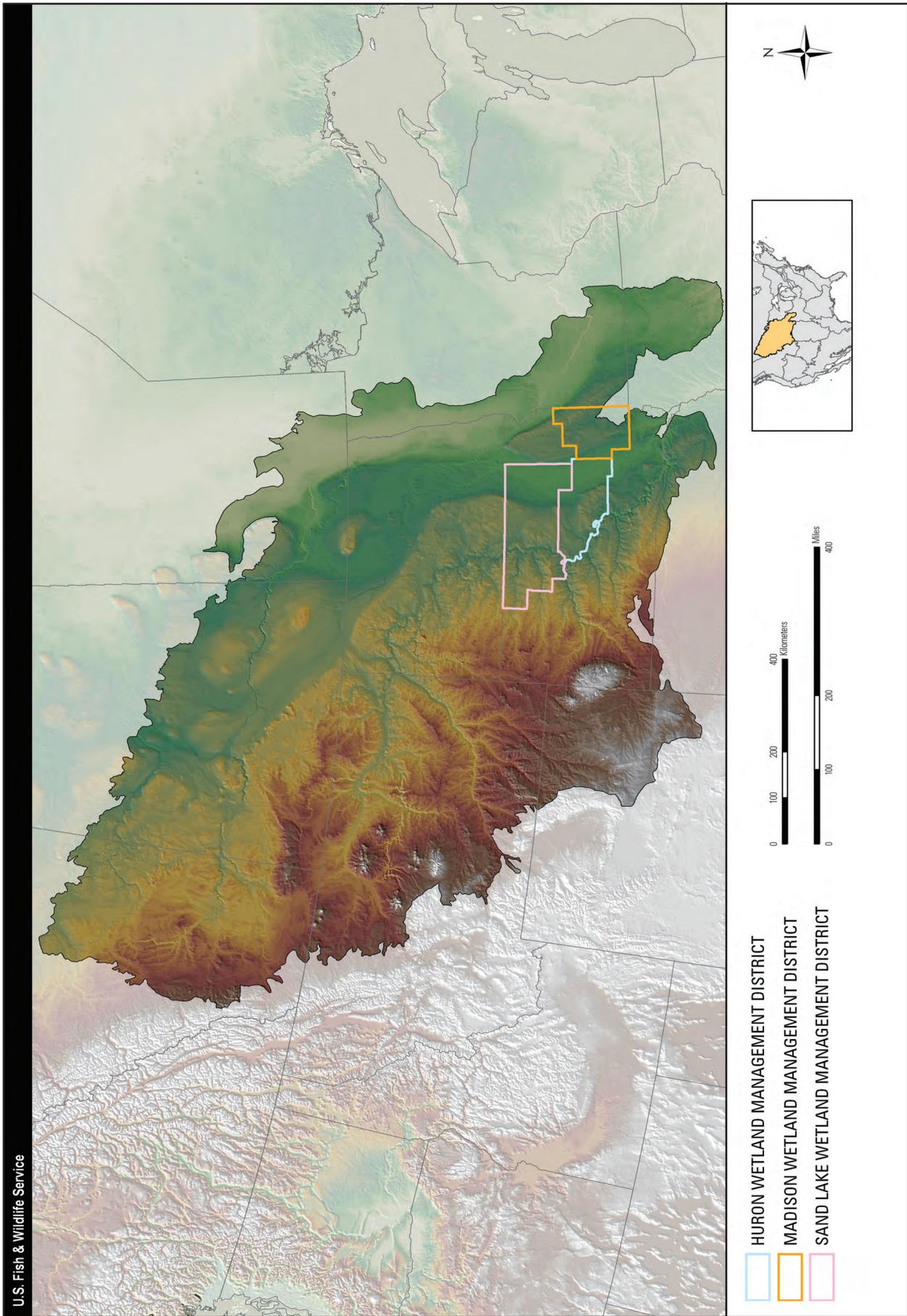


Figure 3. Map of the Plains and Prairie Potholes Geographic Area.

Service and other Federal agencies, States, tribes, NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), universities, and others. Designed as fundamental units for planning and science, the cooperatives have the capacity to help the Service carry out the elements of strategic habitat conservation—biological planning, conservation design and delivery, and monitoring and research. Coordinated planning and scientific information will strengthen the Service’s strategic response to accelerating climate change.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Service expects that accelerating climate change will affect the Nation’s fish, wildlife, and plant resources in profound ways. While many species will continue to thrive, some may decline and in some instances go extinct. Others will survive in the wild only through direct and continuous intervention by resource managers. In 2009, the Service drafted a strategic plan to address climate change for the next 50 years. The draft strategic plan employs three key strategies: adaptation, mitigation, and engagement. In addition, the plan acknowledges that no single organization or agency can address climate change without allying itself with others in partnerships across the Nation and around the world (USFWS 2010). This draft strategic plan is an integral part of the Department of the Interior’s strategy for addressing climate change as expressed in Secretarial Order 3289 (DOI 2009).

The Service will use the following guiding principles in responding to climate change (USFWS 2010):

- *Setting Priorities*—Continually evaluate priorities and approaches, make difficult choices, take calculated risks, and adapt to climate change.
- *Partnership*—Commit to a new spirit of coordination, collaboration, and interdependence with others.
- *Best Science*—Reflect scientific excellence, professionalism, and integrity in all the Service’s work.
- *Landscape Conservation*—Emphasize the conservation of habitats within sustainable landscapes, applying the Service’s strategic habitat conservation framework.
- *Technical Capacity*—Assemble and use state-of-the-art technical capacity to meet the climate change challenge.
- *Global Approach*—Be a leader in national and international efforts to meet the climate change challenge.

1.6 Planning Process

This draft CCP and EA for the three South Dakota districts is intended to comply with the Improvement Act, NEPA, and the implementing regulations of the acts. The Service issued its Refuge System planning policy in 2000. This policy established requirements and guidance for refuge and district plans—including CCPs and step-down management plans—to ensure that planning efforts comply with the Improvement Act. The planning policy identified several steps of the CCP and environmental analysis process (figure 4).

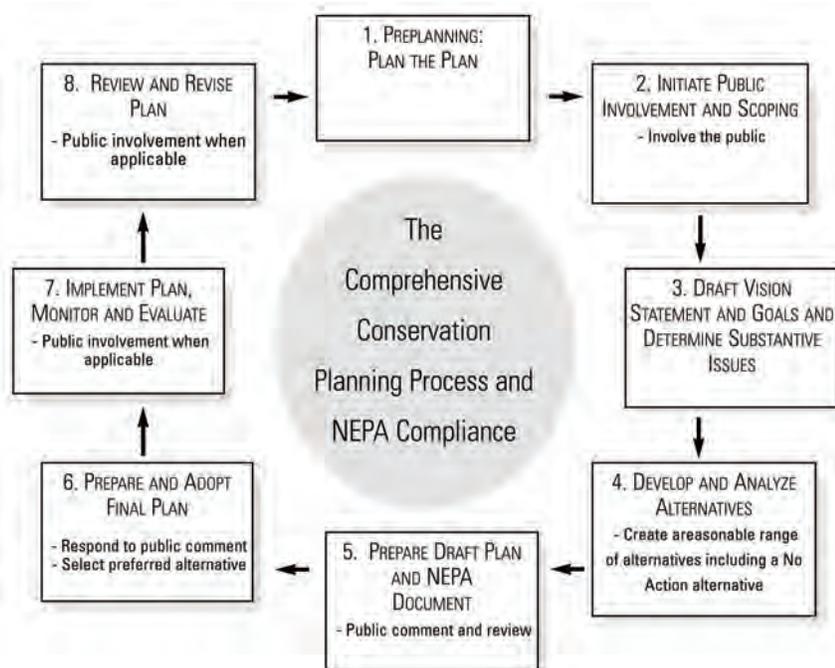


Figure 4. Steps in the planning process.

The Service began the pre-planning process in April 2008. The planning team consists of the project leaders of the three districts and many members of their staffs, as well as Regional Office personnel from the Divisions of Refuges and the Division of Realty (appendix C). During preplanning, the team developed a mailing list, internal issues, and a special qualities list. The planning team identified the status of current districts' programs, compiled and analyzed relevant data, and determined the purposes of the districts.

Table 1 summarizes the planning process to date.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping is the process of obtaining information from the public for input into the planning process.

Over the course of preplanning and scoping, the planning team collected available information about

the resources of the districts and the surrounding areas. Chapter 4 summarizes this information.

The draft CCP (chapter 6) outlines long-term guidance for management decisions, sets forth proposed objectives and strategies to accomplish refuge purposes and meet goals, and identifies the Service's best estimate of future needs.

The draft CCP details program levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning purposes.

A notice of intent to prepare the draft CCP and EA was published in the Federal Register in July 2008.

A mailing list of more than 600 names includes private citizens; local, regional, and State government representatives and legislators; other Federal agencies; and interested organizations (appendix D).

Table 1. Planning process summary for the Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake WMDs CCP.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
April 23, 2008	Pre-CCP kickoff conference call between planning team leader and project leaders and staffers of the three WMDs.	Planning team leader and district staff introduced. CCP/EA planning steps reviewed and clarified. Staff's CCP-related training ascertained. Dates and sites for public scoping meetings discussed.
May 2008	Identification of Native American tribes with possible aboriginal interests in the CCP planning area.	Comprehensive list of federally recognized Native American tribal government contacts to invite to CCP developed. Invitation letters to participate in planning process drafted. Invitation letters to CCP drafted, reviewed, and surnamed.
June 2008	Identification of SDGFP's conservation officers in the CCP planning area.	List of names of conservation officers to invite to participate in CCP process prepared. Invitation letter to the director of SDGFP to participate in CCP process drafted, reviewed, and surnamed.
June 24–27, 2008	Meet and greet site visit with CCP planning members at their field stations.	Traveled to all three district headquarters to meet informally with staffers to be part of the CCP planning team to answer CCP-related questions, decide on sites for public scoping meetings, and coordinate the development of CCP-related mailing list for entire planning area.
July 3, 2008	Mailing of invitation letters to the director of the SDGFP and Native American tribal governments with aboriginal interests in planning area to participate in CCP process.	Ensured coordination with and information of State and tribal conservation partners identified in Refuge Improvement Act. Extended invitation to be part of CCP planning team.
July 15, 2008	Kickoff meeting.	Planning team composition and roles determined; issues and qualities summarized; biological and mapping needs identified; responsibilities and schedule agreed upon; public scoping planned.
July 15–16, 2008	Purposes, vision, and goals workshop.	Districts' purposes revisited and understood. Vision statement and goals developed.
August 2008	Public scoping planning.	Scoping meeting schedules and formats finalized.
September 1, 2008	Planning update 1.	Planning update (describing CCP process), comment forms, announcing public scoping meetings, and postage-paid envelopes mailed.
September 8, 2008	Public Scoping meeting, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.	Public opportunity offered (to learn about the CCP and provide comments).

Table 1. Planning process summary for the Huron, Madison, and Sand Lake WMDs CCP.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
September 8, 2008	Public Scoping meeting, Columbia, South Dakota.	Public opportunity offered (to learn about the CCP and provide comments).
September 8, 2008	Public Scoping meeting, Highmore, South Dakota.	Public opportunity offered (to learn about the CCP and provide comments).
September 9, 2008	Public Scoping meeting, Roscoe, South Dakota.	Public opportunity offered (to learn about the CCP and provide comments).
September 10, 2008	Public Scoping meeting, Madison, South Dakota.	Public opportunity offered (to learn about the CCP and provide comments).
September 10, 2008	Public Scoping meeting, Huron, South Dakota.	Public opportunity offered (to learn about the CCP and provide comments).
September 11, 2008	Public Scoping meeting, DeSmet, South Dakota.	Public opportunity offered (to learn about the CCP and provide comments).
September 12–19, 2008	Public scoping comments.	All public comments to date compiled, summarized, and categorized to be addressed.
October 15–17, 2008	Alternatives and environmental consequences workshop.	Range of management alternatives drafted and a preferred one chosen based on careful analysis of its environmental consequences.
January 21–23, 2009	Objectives, strategies, and rationales workshop.	Objectives, strategies, and rationales for the proposed action begin to be drafted.
February 2009	Draft CCP and EA preparation.	First draft of the CCP and EA being prepared.
March–September 2009	Draft CCP and EA preparation temporarily halted.	Draft CCP and EA preparation halted due to planning team members participation in the emergency response to severe flooding event in the Dakotas and subsequent field season work.
September–December 2009	Draft CCP and EA data gathering continued.	Draft CCP and EA preparation continues with gathering of biological data in preparation of proposed prioritization system of management.
February–April 2010	Planning process on hold due to planning team members' participation in north-eastern South Dakota flooding containment events	Preparation of Draft CCP and EA temporarily stopped to deal with emergency situation.
July–December 2010	Draft CCP and EA data gathering continued.	Draft CCP and EA preparation continues with gathering of biological data in preparation of proposed prioritization system of management.
January–February 2011	Draft CCP and EA preparation and finalization.	Internal review draft CCP and EA preparation ends.
March 2011	Planning team reviews the draft CCP and EA.	First draft of the CCP and EA reviewed and commented on by planning team.
April 2011	Internal Service review of the draft CCP and EA.	Draft CCP and EA reviewed and commented on by the Service's regional office staff, planning team, and others.
May 2011	Preparation of Public Draft CCP and EA.	Planning team makes final edits to and prints draft CCP and EA for public distribution.
July 2011	Public review of and public meetings on draft CCP and EA.	Draft CCP and EA presented; public comments collected and compiled.
August 2011	Planning team review of public comments.	Public comments considered; changes recommended.
August 2011	Briefing of the Service's Regional Director.	Summary of public comments reviewed and addressed by the Service's Regional Director and deputy regional director.
August 2011	Editing of draft CCP/EA and preparation of final CCP.	Responses to public comments and necessary changes incorporated into the final CCP.
August 2011	CCP approval, publication, distribution, and implementation.	Final CCP approved by the Service's Regional Director and districts' staff begin implementing.

In September 2008, the first planning update was sent to everyone on the mailing list. Information was provided on the history of the districts and the CCP process, the draft vision and goals for the districts, and an invitation to and details of the eight public scoping meetings. Each planning update included a comment form and postage-paid envelope to give the public an opportunity to provide written comments.

The local media also announced the public meetings. The Service held eight public scoping meetings during four consecutive days. (See table 1 for details).

After a presentation about the districts, along with an overview of the CCP and NEPA process, attendees at the open house-style meetings were encouraged to ask questions and offer comments. Each attendee was given a comment form to submit additional thoughts or questions in writing.

All written comments were due by October 15, 2008. All comments received throughout the scoping process (obtained from meetings and correspondence, including emails) were considered in development of this draft CCP and EA.

STATE COORDINATION

In July 2008, an invitation letter to participate in the CCP process was sent by the Service's Region 6 director to the director of SDGFP. Local SDGFP conservation officers and district staff maintain excellent and ongoing working relations that antedate the start of the CCP process.

SDGFP is responsible for managing natural resource lands owned by the State, in addition to enforcement responsibilities for the State's migratory birds and endangered species.

TRIBAL COORDINATION

In June 2008, 14 Native American tribal governments were identified by the Service as having possible aboriginal interest in the planning area. In early July 2008, letters of invitation to participate in the CCP development process were signed by the Service's Region 6 director and sent to the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, the Lower Sioux Indian Community, the Oglala Sioux Tribe, the Prairie Island Indian Community, the Rosebud Sioux

Tribe, the Santee Sioux Tribe, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Tribe, the Spirit Lake Tribe, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and the Upper Sioux Community. With information about the upcoming CCP, the letter invited tribal recipients to serve on the planning team. The Service received two inquiries from among the 14 tribal governments identified and invited. After receiving clarification on the CCP, the chairs of these tribal governments wished to continue receiving correspondence, but felt the planning area would not be of interest to tribal members.

RESULTS OF SCOPING

Comments collected from the scoping meetings and correspondence, including comment forms and emails, were used in the development of a final list of issues to be addressed in this draft CCP and EA.

The Service determined which alternatives could best address these issues. The planning process ensures that issues with the greatest effect on the districts are resolved or given priority over the life of the final CCP. Identified issues, along with a discussion of effects on resources, are summarized in chapter 2.

In addition, the Service considered suggested changes to current management of the districts presented by the public and other groups.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The Service's Director of Region 6 will make the final decision on the selection of a preferred alternative for the CCP. The Regional Director's decision will be based on the legal responsibility of the Service and will consider the mission of the Service and the System, other legal and policy mandates, the purposes of the three districts, and the vision and goals in this draft CCP. In addition, the Regional Director will consider public input about the draft CCP and EA. Other considerations are land uses in the surrounding area and other parts of the ecosystem, the environmental effects of the alternatives, and future budget projections.

The Service's final decision will be documented in a finding of no significant impact that is published together with the final CCP and distributed to the public. The Service will begin to carry out the final CCP immediately on publication of the notice of availability of the final CCP in the Federal Register.

