



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge

January 2002 - Planning Newsletter 1

Open Houses and Meetings

Tuesday, January 15

6pm-9pm

Red Mill Elementary School
1860 Sandbridge Road
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Wednesday, January 16

6pm-9pm

First Colonial High School
1272 Mill Dam Road
Virginia Beach, VA

Thursday, January 17

6:30 pm-9pm

Kempsville High School
5194 Chief Trail
Virginia Beach, VA

The meetings are open to the public. Each meeting will begin with an open house session for the first hour, then proceed to a brief presentation. The remainder of the meeting will allow the public to submit comments, suggestions, and questions.

Your participation is critical to the success of this planning effort. Throughout this process, there will be several other opportunities for you to provide input to the plan.

Share your ideas with us by answering the questions included in this newsletter and returning your response.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is starting work on a long-term management plan for Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This plan, called a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), will serve as a guide for managing the Refuge over the next 15 years.

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge contains over 8,700 acres, situated on and around a thin strip of coastline typical of barrier islands found along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Habitats include beach, dunes, woodland, farm fields, and marsh. The majority of refuge marshlands are on islands contained within the waters of Back Bay in southeastern Virginia.

Approximately 10,000 snow geese and a large variety of ducks visit Back Bay Refuge during the peak of fall migration, usually in December. The refuge also provides habitat for a wide assortment of other wildlife, including threatened and endangered species such as loggerhead sea turtles, piping plovers, peregrine falcons, and bald eagles.

This planning project offers a unique opportunity for the Service to involve individuals, organizations, and local communities in the future management of the Refuge. You can play a significant role in the development of this far-reaching plan by submitting comments and participating in public meetings.



Gulls utilizing some of the 4 miles of beach on the Refuge

USFWS Photo

More information on planning and getting involved

Why is this planning effort starting now?

In October 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, which states that, first and foremost, the National Wildlife Refuge System must focus on wildlife conservation. This law establishes: (1) the mission of the Refuge System; (2) a new process of determining compatible public use activities on refuges; and (3) requires us to prepare CCP's for each refuge.

National Wildlife System mission:

"to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservatoin, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Goals of this planning process:

- Outline Refuge management priorities for the next 10 to 15 years;
- Describe significant Refuge resources and their importance;
- Identify how the Refuge can best protect these resources;
- Clarify what public uses are, and are not, compatible with managing significant resources;
- Identify the Refuge's role within the local community and as a national resource.

What are Refuges all about?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, part of the Department of the Interior, is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. The Service also manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest collection of lands set aside specifically for the protection of fish and wildlife populations and habitats. Refuges also offer a variety of wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, and many have visitor centers, hiking trails, and environmental education programs.

What activities can be enjoyed at Refuges?

There are laws and policies which guide management of public use on National Wildlife Refuges. Only those public uses which are determined to be compatible with the mission of the Refuge System and the purposes of the Refuge are allowed. The Refuge Improvement Act identified six wildlife dependent public uses as priority uses:

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| - environmental education | - wildlife photography |
| - interpretation | - hunting |
| - wildlife observation | - fishing |

Want to get involved?

We need to know your feelings about the Refuge, your concerns, those things that you are happy with, and your ideas for turning the Refuges's vision into reality. We hope you can attend a public meeting. Locations, dates, and times are listed on the front page. If you have any questions, please feel free to call the Refuge Headquarters 757/721-2412, or call Thomas Bonetti, the CCP team leader at 413/253-8307.

The Issues Workbook

Getting Involved...

You can help us focus our planning effort on those things that matter to you and your community. Your comments will assist us in identifying the best alternative for long-term management of Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

The following workbook provides an effective way for us to share background information and to hear your ideas and concerns on important issues affecting the Refuge. We have compiled a list of questions to provide a basis for comparing your comments with others we receive. Answer any or all that are important to you. Feel free to add additional comments in the space provided, give us a call, send us an Email, or write to us at the address provided on the last page.



Gray Fox

USFWS photo

Values, Vision, and the Service's Role

1. How many times a year do you visit Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge?

- never 25-50
 1-5 50+
 5-25

2. What are your favorite activities to engage in while visiting the Refuge?

3. With a larger perspective in mind, what do you value most about the Refuge?

4. What do you consider the most important problem facing the Refuge today?

5. What technical services would you like the Refuge staff to provide to your local community? (check if appropriate)

- wetlands management
 management of endangered species
 grasslands restoration
 management to benefit wildlife
 land protection funding
 control of invasive and non-native species, including plants
 volunteer opportunities
 grants for habitat management
 other: _____

6. Please indicate here any additional comments you wish to make on values, vision or the Service's role in your community.

Issues Workbook (continued)



Great Blue Heron

USFWS photo

Fish, Wildlife, and Their Habitats

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge provides important habitat for a wide variety of species, including some that are threatened or endangered. Also, rare and declining plant communities exist on the Refuge.

1. Are there specific areas within the Refuge that, in your opinion, need protection? If so, please list them here, and explain why you think they are important.

2. Which options should the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pursue in protecting important habitats that are not currently in a National Wildlife Refuge? (Please check your top three choices)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> land acquisition | <input type="checkbox"/> habitat restoration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> conservation easements | <input type="checkbox"/> grants programs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> purchasing development rights | <input type="checkbox"/> no active involvement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> partnerships with private landowners | <input type="checkbox"/> other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> work with conservation groups | |



Loggerhead Sea Turtle

USFWS photo

3. Are any of the following issues a major concern to you? If so, please check your top choices.

- the fragmentation of important habitats
- invasion of exotic plant and animal species
- overdevelopment of fragile habitats
- increased recreational use in sensitive habitat areas
- decreased water quality
- lack of active management to improve wildlife habitats
- other issues (please specify)

4. If possible, please provide additional details on why you selected the above choices. In particular we would be interested to know specific locations of concern.

5. Please include here any additional comments on conserving fish and wildlife habitat.

Issues Workbook (continued)

“Compatibility” with the Refuge purpose is determined by the Refuge Manager based on an evaluation of:

- 1) anticipated impacts to natural resources;
- 2) whether safety among and between users can be maintained;
- 3) whether the Refuge has the budget and staffing resources to administer the activity, and
- 4) expected level of involvement with partners and volunteers.

Refuge regulations exist for your safety and for the protection of wildlife and the environment. A complete listing of regulations can be obtained by phoning the Refuge office. Please inquire if you are uncertain as to whether or not a particular activity is permitted.

Recreation, Education, and Access

It is important to recognize there are laws and policy which guide management of public use on National Wildlife Refuges. National Wildlife Refuges are closed to public use until officially designated open -- and, only those public uses that are “compatible” with the purpose(s) for which a Refuge was established are allowed. Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge was established with a purpose to serve “... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.” In 1990, the purpose of the Refuge was expanded to include “the conservation of wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide...”

Six wildlife-dependent uses are identified by the Refuge Improvement Act as a priority on National Wildlife Refuges when determined to be compatible. These are: environmental education, fishing, hunting, interpretation, wildlife observation and wildlife photography.

1. Are any of the current activities, or the current levels of use on the Refuge a concern to you?

2. Do our recreational facilities meet your needs? (trails, parking, signs, etc.) Please explain.

3. Please indicate here any additional comments on recreation, education, and public access.



Snow Goose nesting on eggs

USFWS photo

Issues Workbook (continued)

Please contact us if you have any questions or need additional information. Also, we would be happy to meet with your group or organization to discuss this project. Direct all inquiries to:

John Stasko: Refuge Manager
Back Bay NWR
4005 Sandpiper Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23456-4325

phone: (757) 721-2412
E-mail: john_stasko@fws.gov

Federal Relay Service for the
deaf and hard-of-hearing
1-800-877-8339

ADA compliant materials will
be provided upon request

That's it! Thank you for your time.

IMPORTANT: Now that you are done, please separate pages 3-6, put them into the self-addressed envelope and drop it in the mail by March 31. We will let you know the results as soon as we can. Please help us keep our mailing list updated by completing the following.

If you wish to receive future "Planning Updates" about the Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, please fill in the appropriate information below and return with the Issues Workbook.

(Yes) Add me to your mailing list

(No) Take me off your mailing list

Name: _____ (Please Print)

Mailing Address _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

If you are acting in an official capacity as the representative of an organization, please complete the following two items:

Organization: _____

Title: _____

IMPORTANT: Please note that the names on the Comprehensive Conservation Plan Mailing List become part of the public record for this project. The Service must release names only, if requested, under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974. To retain you on our mailing list we need your permission. Please sign below.

Signature: _____

Date: _____



Stag

USFWS photo