

Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Vision for the Future

Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge showcases the largest contiguous, high elevation wetland complex in West Virginia and harbors a vast assemblage of rare plants and animals normally associated with more northern latitudes. The refuge conserves, protects, and manages a mosaic of wetland, forested, and early successional habitat that supports migratory birds and threatened and endangered species. As a steward of a significant portion of the headwaters, the Refuge ensures the integrity of the natural resources of the upper Blackwater River watershed. Refuge habitats and wildlife are conserved and managed through research and collaboration with federal, state, and local conservation partners.

As an integral part of the surrounding community, the Refuge provides high quality, safe, wholesome, and diverse opportunities for education and recreation, especially hunting and wildlife observation. The refuge experience fosters public interest in the beauty and unique character of Canaan Valley, an appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology, plant ecology, and stewardship of the natural world. Visitors develop a greater understanding and appreciation for the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and refuge management programs, and for the importance of protecting lands for wildlife conservation.



USFWS

The refuge contains the largest contiguous, high elevation wetland complex in West Virginia.

Refuge Setting

The refuge, located in Tucker and Grant Counties, West Virginia, sits in the Canaan Valley, 3,200 feet above sea level in the Allegheny Mountains.

On September 11, 1994, 86 acres of land were purchased to establish the Canaan Valley refuge. More land was acquired over the following years, including 12,000 acres from Allegheny Power Systems in 2002, bringing the refuge to its current size of 16,183 acres.

Canaan Valley contains a wetlands complex of about 9,500 acres, making it the largest wetlands system in West Virginia. Of these total wetlands, 5,370 acres are currently located within the refuge.

Status of our Conservation Plan

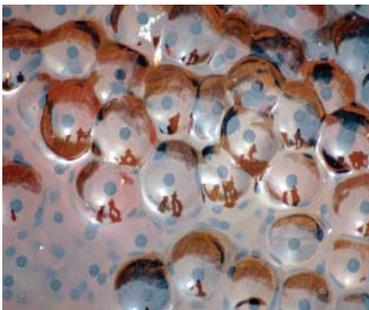
We began planning for Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge in 2006. We identified preliminary issues, stakeholder and management concerns, and developed refuge vision statements and preliminary goals. We are now proud to announce the availability of a draft plan and environmental assessment for the Canaan Valley refuge. Once final, that plan will guide wildlife and habitat management,

land conservation and public use programs on the refuge for the next 15 years.

Details of the Draft Plan

Our draft plan presents four management alternatives that were developed by a team consisting of regional planners, biologists, refuge staff, and resource specialists from the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources. Our team also consulted with ecologists and other scientific experts. We carefully considered public input from scoping meetings and a citizen survey.

The four alternatives share some actions in common. These actions may be required by law or policy, or they may be administrative actions that do not require public review, but deserve calling to your attention. We believe they are crucial to achieving the refuge's purposes, vision and goals. These actions include protecting the federally listed Cheat Mountain salamander, Indiana bat, and recently de-listed West Virginia northern flying squirrel. The actions also include controlling invasive plant species such as multiflora rose, Japanese stiltgrass, and garlic mustard.



Ken Stumm/USFWS

Wood Frog Eggs

Description of the Alternatives

We based our four alternatives on the purposes for establishing the refuge, the refuge's vision and goals, and the issues and concerns identified by the public, state agencies, and the Service during the planning process. Some actions are common to all alternatives, such as protecting wetlands and rare plant communities, addressing climate change, and protecting cultural resources. Other actions distinguish the alternatives. The draft CCP/EA describes the alternatives in detail, and relates them to the issues. Highlights of each alternative follow.

Alternative A.

Current Management

This alternative would maintain the status quo in refuge management over the next 15 years. As such, it provides a baseline for comparing or contrasting the three "action" alternatives. Under Alternative A we would continue the priorities of the biological program including shrubland and grassland management for migratory birds, protection of threatened and endangered species, red spruce and balsam fir community restoration, upland and wetland habitat restoration, invasive plant monitoring and eradication, and rare plant and animal conservation. We would continue to offer hunt programs according to State seasons. We would continue to provide opportunities for wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation programs, as staffing and funding allows. Finally, we would continue to collaborate with partners to promote the natural resources of Canaan Valley.

Alternative B.

Emphasis on Focal Species (Service-preferred Alternative)

This alternative represents the combination of actions we believe would most effectively achieve the purposes and goals of the refuge and would best contribute to conserving Federal trust resources in West Virginia and the central Appalachians. For each habitat type objective, we identify "focal species" whose life and growth requirements would guide management activities. We would balance the conservation of the mixed forest landscape with the management of early successional habitats and the protection of wetlands. We would increase access for deer hunters in order to remove more deer from the refuge and to reduce deer browse. Funding and staffing would increase

to support enhanced programs. We would increase trail connectivity by, for example, connecting Swinging Bridge Trail to Cortland Road.

Alternative C.

Expanding Priority Public Uses

Under this alternative, we would emphasize the expansion of priority public uses. We would create a cross-valley trail that connects the west side of the refuge to the east side. The biological objectives are similar to Alternative B with the exception of increased emphasis on grassland management with reduced emphasis on forest stand improvement and restoration. Funding and staffing would increase beyond Alternative B to support expanded public use programs.

Alternative D.

Managing for Historic Habitats

This alternative strives to restore and maintain the ecological integrity of historic natural communities within the refuge. No particular species would be the focus of management. Rather, management would range from passively to actively manipulating vegetation to create or hasten mature forest structural conditions. New visitor infrastructure, including trails, would be limited to already-disturbed areas. We would add a law enforcement officer position to the staff to help enforce stricter limitations on visitor use.

Public Review and Comment on the Plan

Public involvement is crucial in the planning process, and we encourage your participation. Your comments will help shape the final plan. We are releasing the draft plan for a 45-day period of public review and comment. Please submit your comments by July 16, 2010, by regular mail, email, or fax to Beth Goldstein, Planning Team Leader, at the address below. You can also submit comments at our public meetings (see shaded box in next column for dates and locations).



M. Crockett/USFWS

Hermit Thrush Nest

How to Obtain a Copy of the CCP
The draft plan is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Canaan%20Valley/ccphome.html>. To request the document in print or on CD, contact:

Beth Goldstein

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Hadley, MA 01035

Phone: (413) 253-8564

Fax: (413) 253-8468

E-mail: northeastplanning@fws.gov

(Please put "Canaan Valley" in the subject line)

Open Houses and Public Hearings

At all the venues listed below, we will host a daytime session from 2-4 p.m., and an evening session from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Each session will include a short presentation and a comment period. All venues are fully accessible.

Tuesday, June 15, 2010

Canaan Valley Volunteer Fire Dept.

State Rte. 32 and Cortland Road

Canaan Valley, WV 26260

Wednesday, June 16, 2010

Tucker County Senior Center

206 Third Street

Parsons, WV 26287

Thursday, June 17, 2010

Randolph County Community Arts Ctr.

Corner of Park St. and Randolph Ave.

Elkins, WV 26241

For Further Information

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<http://www.fws.gov/canaanvalley/>

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

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov>

May 2010

