

Chapter 1. Introduction and Background

The Purpose of and Need for Action

Development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is vital to the future management of Cape May National Wildlife Refuge (Cape May Refuge) and its new Two Mile Beach Unit. The purpose of the CCP is to provide strategic management direction over the next 15 years by:

- Providing a clear statement of desired future conditions for habitat, wildlife, visitor services, and facilities;
- Providing a clear understanding of the reasons for management actions;
- Ensuring Refuge management reflects the policies and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) and our other legal mandates;
- Ensuring the compatibility of current and future public use;
- e. Providing long-term continuity and direction for Refuge management;
- f. Providing direction for staffing, operations, maintenance, and the development of budget requests.

The need to develop a CCP is two-fold. First, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Refuge Improvement Act) requires that all National Wildlife Refuges have a CCP in place within 15 years to help fulfill the new mission of the Refuge System.

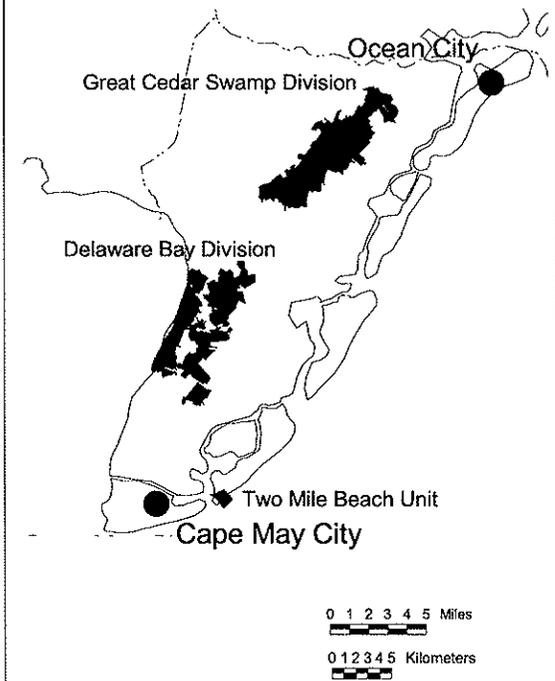
Second, there is currently no master plan establishing priorities and ensuring consistent and integrated management for Cape May Refuge. A vision statement and goals, objectives, and management strategies are needed to effectively manage natural resources. Persistent issues related to non-wildlife dependent public use, beach access, wilderness management, and management for threatened and endangered species must be resolved with public and partner involvement.

Cape May Refuge

Cape May Refuge is located in Cape May County, and includes the Delaware Bay Division, the Great Cedar Swamp Division, and the Two Mile Beach Unit. (See Map 1.) The Refuge was established in 1989. The approved acquisition boundary for the Refuge encompasses 21,200 acres. As of September 26, 2002, the Service owned 11,025 acres within the approved Refuge acquisition area.

In the past seven years, several studies or plans that involved the vicinity of the Refuge have been initiated or completed. These studies demonstrate the importance of this area. The Refuge acquisition area is within the New Jersey Coastal Area Facilities Review Act (CAFRA) zone and within the Service's Twin Capes Project area (Cape May, NJ and Cape Charles, VA). It is partially within the Pinelands National Reserve, the Great Egg Harbor National Scenic and Recreational River, and the Cape May Migratory Bird Stopover Project. Delaware Bay wetlands within the Refuge are designated as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. There are only 17 designated Wetlands of International Importance in the United States.

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge



Data Sources:
USGS 1:100,000 counties.
USFWS refuge boundaries.

Map prepared for Jersey Coast Refuges
Comprehensive Conservation Plan,
January 2001.
This map is for planning purposes only

Shading represents both owned land
and areas approved for acquisition.



Two Mile Beach Unit

The United States Coast Guard declared a major portion of its Electronic Engineering Center (EECEN) in Lower Township, Cape May County, excess to its needs in 1997. (See Map 2.) The northernmost 490 acres of the former EECEN were transferred from the Coast Guard to the Service on October 22, 1999 as the Two Mile Beach Unit of Cape May Refuge under the Transfer of Certain Real Property for Wildlife Conservation Purposes Act. Of the 490 acres, 221 acres are above mean high tide. Of these 221 acres, 90 acres are upland habitat and 131 acres are wetland habitat. The Coast Guard retained the remaining 530 acres of the former EECEN for its Long Range Aid to Navigation (LORAN) Support Unit (LSU) and the north dune antenna tower. The LSU will remain in operation indefinitely.

The eighteen acre parcel of land bounded by LSU along the southern boundary line, Ocean Drive along the northeastern boundary line and the Cape May Inlet along the western boundary line was purchased in August 2003 and added to the Cape May Refuge as part of the Two Mile Beach Unit. The entire property is considered wetland habitat.

Purposes of Cape May Refuge

Lands within the Refuge System are acquired and managed under a variety of authorities. These authorities usually have one or more purposes for which land can be transferred or acquired. Appendix A lists the authorities for acquisition and management of National Wildlife Refuges.

The purposes of Cape May Refuge are:

- "...use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds...." The Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §715d);
- "...the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources...." The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. §742f(a)(4));
- "...the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations (regarding migratory birds)... " The Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C. §3901(b), 100 Stat. 3583).

The purpose of Cape May Refuge's Two Mile Beach Unit is:

- "...particular value in carrying out the national migratory bird management program" The Transfer of Certain Real Property for Wildlife Conservation Purposes Act, 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C. §667b-667d; 62 Stat. 240).

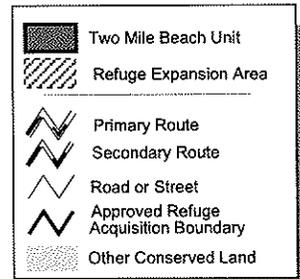
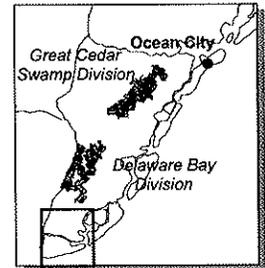
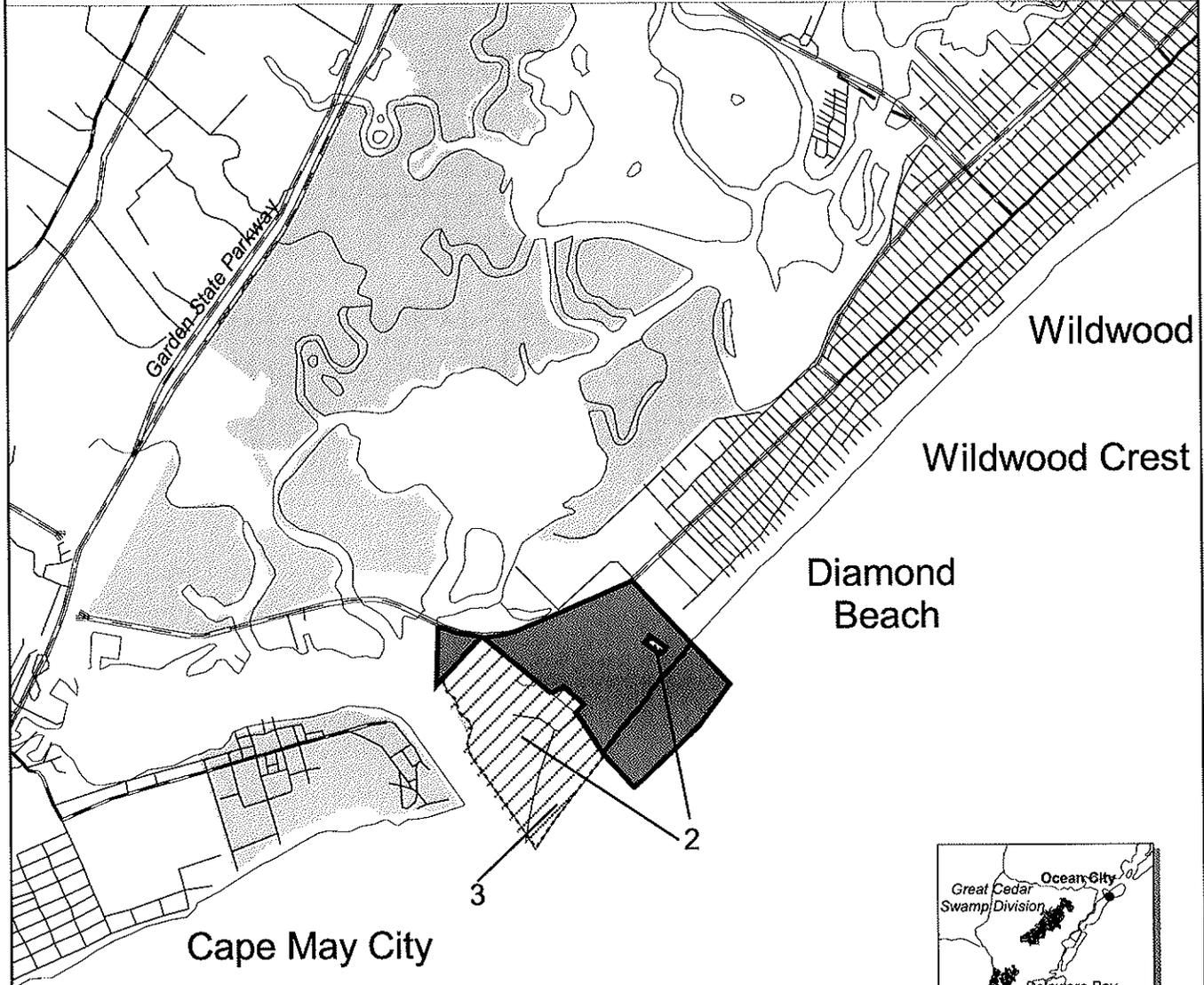
Refuge Vision

The following statement was developed to describe the desired future status of Cape May Refuge.

"Cape May National Wildlife Refuge will continue to contain some of the most important migratory bird habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System. It will continue to be focal points for the protection, management, restoration, and enjoyment of migratory birds and other Federal Trust Resources in coastal New Jersey. The Refuge will provide stop-over and wintering habitats of sufficient size and quality to assist in maintaining migrating birds on the Atlantic Flyway."

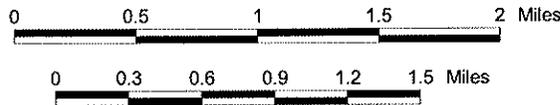
Refuge Expansion Areas

*Cape May National Wildlife Refuge, Two Mile Beach Unit,
Lower Township, Cape May County, New Jersey*



Data Sources:
USGS 1:100,000 roads & hydro.
New Jersey - other protected land.
USFWS refuge boundaries &
other refuge information.

Map prepared for Jersey Coast Refuges
Comprehensive Conservation Plan,
November 2001.
This map is for planning purposes only.



The Refuge will expand its role in land protection efforts by acquiring additional habitat along the coast and inland watersheds, and working with all interested parties to promote conservation efforts on non-refuge lands. The Refuge will preserve important plant and animal populations, ecological communities, and the integrity of the landscape by protecting lands from development, restoring fire to the upland habitats, and restoring wetlands. It will play a critical role in preserving biodiversity locally, regionally and within the Refuge System.

The Refuge will build alliances with State, county and local governments, other organizations and local communities to promote the ecological integrity of the landscape, ecotourism and the historical and cultural attractions of the region. The Refuge will provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation on Refuge lands. The Refuge will help assure the sustainable economic viability of the area, and supplement and promote the values which attracted people and wildlife to the Jersey Shore in the first place."

National and Regional Mandates

This section presents hierarchically, from the national-level to the local-level, highlights of legal mandates, Service policy, and existing resource plans which directly influenced development of this CCP.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its Mission

National Wildlife Refuges are managed by the Service, part of the Department of the Interior. The mission of the Service is:

"...working with others, to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

National resources entrusted to the Service for conservation and protection are: migratory birds, endangered species, interjurisdictional fish, wetlands, and certain marine mammals. The Service also manages the Refuge System and national fish hatcheries, enforces federal wildlife laws and international treaties on importing and exporting wildlife, assists with state fish and wildlife programs, and helps other countries develop wildlife conservation programs.

The National Wildlife Refuge System and its Mission

The Refuge System is the world's largest collection of lands and waters set aside specifically for the conservation of wildlife and ecosystem protection. Over 520 National Wildlife Refuges are part of the national network today. Refuges occur in every state and a number of U.S. Territories, encompassing over 92 million acres nationwide. Over 34 million visitors annually hunt, fish, observe and photograph wildlife, or participate in environmental education and interpretive activities on Refuges.

In 1997, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Refuge Improvement Act) was passed. This legislation established a unifying mission for the Refuge System, a new process for determining compatible activities on Refuges, and the requirement to prepare CCPs for each Refuge. The Act states that above all else, wildlife comes first in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Act does this by establishing that wildlife conservation is the principal mission of the Refuge System; by requiring that we maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of each refuge and the Refuge System; and by mandating that we monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants on each refuge. The Act

further states that the national mission, coupled with the purpose(s) for which each Refuge was established, will provide the principal management direction for each Refuge.

The mission of the 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." (National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105-57)

The Refuge Improvement Act declares that all existing or proposed public uses must be "compatible" with the purposes for which each refuge was established. Six wildlife-dependent public uses were highlighted in the legislation as priorities to evaluate in CCPs. The six uses are: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation. "Compatibility" is determined by the Refuge Manager after evaluating the activities' potential impact on Refuge resources.

Other Legal and Policy Mandates

While the Refuge System Mission and the purposes for which each refuge was established provide the foundation for management, National Wildlife Refuges are also governed by other federal laws, executive orders, treaties, interstate compacts, and regulations pertaining to the conservation and protection of natural and cultural resources. Appendix A provides a summary of some of the most important Federal laws related to management of National Wildlife Refuges.

Service policies providing guidance on planning and the day-to-day management of a Refuge are contained within the Refuge System Manual and the Service Manual.

Fulfilling the Promise, The National Wildlife Refuge System: Visions for Wildlife and Habitat, People, and Leadership

This report (USFWS, March 1999) resulted from the first-ever Refuge System Conference held in Keystone, Colorado in October 1998, and attended by every Refuge manager in the country, other Service employees, and leading conservation organizations. The report contains 42 recommendations dealing with Wildlife and Habitat, People, and Leadership. This CCP deals with all three of these major topics, and we have looked to the 42 recommendations for guidance throughout the project.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan: Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

This Plan (USFWS, 1986) documents the strategy among the United States, Canada, and Mexico to restore waterfowl populations through habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement. The Plan includes ten regional habitat "Joint Ventures" that are partnerships involving federal, state and provincial governments, tribal nations, local businesses, conservation organizations, and individual citizens. Cape May Refuge lies within the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. Seven focus areas, totaling more than 90,400 acres, have been identified for protection in New Jersey. Both wetlands and adjacent uplands are part of the focus areas.

The goal for the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture is:

"Protect and manage priority wetland habitats for migration, wintering, and production of waterfowl, with special consideration to black ducks, and to benefit other wildlife in the joint venture area."

In addition to the ten regional habitat joint ventures, there are two species joint ventures: Arctic Goose and Black Duck. Since black ducks winter in New Jersey, the goals and objectives of the Black Duck Joint Venture apply to management of Cape May Refuge. The coastal salt marsh habitats along the mid-upper Atlantic coast have been identified by the Black Duck Joint Venture as the most important habitat for wintering black duck.

Partners In Flight Land Bird Conservation Plan: Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain (Physiographic Area #44)

The Partners in Flight Program is developing a plan for the Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain Physiographic Area (USFWS, April 1999). Habitat loss, land bird population trends, and vulnerability of species and habitats to threats are all factors used in the priority ranking of species. Further, the plan will identify focal species for each habitat type from which population and habitat objectives and conservation actions will be determined. This list of focal species, objectives and conservation actions will help direct land bird management on Cape May Refuge.

The draft plan ranks species and habitats on the basis of overall conservation priority. The following first tier priority land birds breed on the Refuge:

- piping plover;
- salt marsh sharp-tailed sparrow;
- seaside sparrow;
- American black duck;
- eastern wood-pewee;
- clapper rail;
- American oystercatcher.

The first-tier is "high overall (global) priority," which indicates high vulnerability of a species throughout its range.

Furthermore, more than 15 additional second-tier priority land birds breed on Cape May Refuge. The second-tier is "high physiographic area priority."

Also, seven of the eight priority habitat types identified in the plan are found currently or historically on the Refuge:

- pine savannah;
- barrier and bay islands;
- salt marsh;
- forested wetland;
- mixed upland forest;

- early succession old field and shrub/scrub;
- fresh/brackish emergent wetland.

Regional Wetlands Concept Plan - Emergency Wetlands Resources Act, Northeast Region

In 1986, Congress enacted the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act to promote the conservation of our nation's wetlands. The Act directed the Department of the Interior to develop a National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan identifying the location and types of wetlands that should receive priority attention for acquisition by federal and state agencies using Land and Water Conservation Fund appropriations. In 1990, the Service's Northeast Region completed a Regional Wetlands Concept Plan (USFWS, October 1990) to provide more specific information about wetlands resources in the Northeast. The Regional Plan identifies a total of 850 wetland sites that warrant consideration for acquisition, and also identifies wetland values, functions, and potential threats for each site. The Plan identifies one site within Cape May Refuge: Great Cedar Swamp.

The Nature Conservancy Delaware Bay Project

The Nature Conservancy is a nonprofit conservation organization. Its mission is to preserve plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on earth by protecting lands and waters they need to survive. The Nature Conservancy joins forces with communities and public and private organizations to pioneer conservation programs around the world.

The Nature Conservancy has targeted the Delaware Bayshore for protection and has established the Delaware Bayshore Ecosystem Project, which includes Cape May and Cumberland Counties in New Jersey. Through the project the Nature Conservancy hopes to identify techniques to balance conservation needs with the need to develop sustainable economic uses. The Conservancy hopes to improve stewardship of private and public land. The Conservancy seeks to promote better coordination between public agencies, private landowners, citizens and nonprofit organizations active in the area. The Conservancy stresses the importance of biological diversity and the unique characteristics which enables the Delaware Bayshore to serve as an important reservoir of our natural heritage.

Relevant Ecosystem and Species Recovery Plans

Throughout the last decade, the Service has been putting more emphasis into defining and protecting entire ecosystems. To this end, the Service has initiated new partnerships with private landowners, state and federal agencies, corporations, conservation groups, and volunteers. Implementing an Ecosystem Approach to Fish and Wildlife Conservation is a top national priority for the Service. Fifty-two Ecosystem teams were formed across the country, typically using large river watersheds to define ecosystems. Individual Ecosystem Teams are comprised of both the Service and our partners, who work together to develop goals and priorities for research and management.

Cape May Refuge lies within both the Hudson River/New York Bight Ecosystem and the Delaware River/Delmarva Coastal Ecosystem.

Hudson River/New York Bight Ecosystem Plan

The following resource priorities from this plan (USFWS, September 1994) are relevant to Cape May Refuge:

- Protect and restore migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and species of special concern associated with native grasslands and forest habitats.
- Protect, restore and enhance populations of beach-dependent plants and animals, with emphasis on threatened and endangered species, and species of special concern.
- Increase populations of colonial nesting water birds, shorebirds, waterfowl, and inter-jurisdictional fish requiring shallow water, salt marshes, adjacent uplands, and coastal lagoons and rivers.

Delaware River/Delmarva Coastal Ecosystem

The following resource priorities for the Delaware River/Delmarva Coastal Ecosystem are relevant to Cape May Refuge:

- Protect, restore and enhance migratory bird habitat and populations, with emphasis on the coastal migration corridor.
- Protect, restore, and enhance wetland habitats, with emphasis on Service-owned wetlands and other areas of exceptional value.
- Protect and enhance populations of threatened, endangered, and candidate species and their habitats.
- Protect and enhance populations of inter-jurisdictional fish and their habitats.
- Protect, restore, and manage Trust Resources on Service-owned lands.

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*), Atlantic Coast Population, Revised Recovery Plan

The primary objective of the revised recovery plan (USFWS, May 1996) is to remove the Atlantic coast piping plover population from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants by:

- Achieving well-distributed increases in numbers and productivity of breeding pairs;
- Providing for long-term protection of breeding and wintering plovers and their habitat.

The Revised Recovery Plan describes detailed "Recovery Tasks" needed to meet the recovery objective, including:

- Monitoring to identify limiting factors;
- Control of feral animals and predators;
- Erect enclosures for protection from predators.

Recovery Plans for Other Federally Listed or Recovered Threatened or Endangered Species

Where the following federally listed threatened or endangered species occur on Cape May Refuge, we will follow the management goals and strategies laid out in their respective recovery plans: peregrine falcon, bald eagle, seabeach amaranth, and swamp pink. This list will change as new species are listed, delisted, or discovered on Refuge lands.

This page intentionally left blank