

Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Conservation Management Planning Update

Thanks for your help!

During the week of June 13, we held three public open house meetings in the towns of Crisfield, Salisbury, and Cambridge. These meetings were set up to facilitate public review and comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment and Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Attendees signed in and joined our mailing list to receive future updates.

At the meetings, Refuge Manager Glen Carowan delivered introductory remarks and staff members facilitated public participation. We provided copies of the land protection plan and Highlight summary and encouraged people to comment. Participants who spoke at the meetings were asked to submit formal written comments.

Public scoping and draft review processes determine the success of a CCP. We thank everyone who participated for their time, and especially for their invaluable input. All comments received will be considered, responded to, and then incorporated into the final EA/CCP.

Public concerns focused on:

1. Additional land protection.
2. Fear of eminent domain and being named in the LPP.
3. Competition with local hunt and gun clubs.

"The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."



USFWS Photo

The remaining populations of the Delmarva fox squirrel are most abundant in portions of Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot, and Dorchester Counties.

The local timber industry is concerned that we are taking additional commercial forest lands out of production, which could adversely impact their operations. Other comments expressed include:

Inadequate analysis of the socioeconomic impacts to timbering in the LPP.

Lack of active forest management on the refuge.

General distrust that we will not implement the proposed forest management plan.

The local timber industry will support our purchase of conservation easements if "a stewardship plan based on sound silviculture practices is adopted" as a condition, and the landowner is compensated at "true development value."

Our apologies...

We regret that we scarcely communicated with the public between our 1998 scoping meetings and the release of the draft report in June 2005. Difficulties with printing and complications with the release of the draft report after issuing the notice of availability in the Federal Register resulted in a compressed review period. An extension was granted to ensure that the public has adequate time to respond to the draft EA/CCP.

Mailing problems also arose. Because of the size of the main report, we only mailed the Land Protection Plan and the Highlight summary. Unfortunately, the LPP was mistaken for the CCP, which led to confusion and misinterpretation.

Fortunately, Manager Carowan briefed Dorchester County officials and non-governmental agencies before the

public open house meetings.

We held follow-up meetings for clarification purposes. On August 11 we met with forest industry representatives at the Johnson Lumber Company in Easton. On August 16 we met with representatives from the Friends of the Nanticoke, Wicomico Environmental Trust and the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance in Salisbury. These meetings were designed to address specific concerns and issues of these stakeholder groups. We provided and clarified information regarding the refuge forest management and land protection plans.

Addressing Public Concerns:

1. Additional land protection

The Service is not the only potential land buyer on the Eastern Shore. Landowners have a choice to place property into conservation, or to sell it for development. However, the Service can ill afford to stand still in the face of increasing urban development and further fragmentation of an already limited forest habitat.

The importance of the area's unique natural resources has long been recognized by federal and state resource management agencies, private conservation organizations, land trusts, and local citizens.

Acquiring additional land and conservation easements in the vicinity of the refuge and along the Nanticoke River corridor fulfills national goals and ensures public access for the future. We offer safe habitats for endangered species, waterfowl, migratory birds, and fish while providing compatible recreational and educational opportunities for everyone.

Conservation partners voiced strong support for our involvement in a cooperative effort to identify land protection priorities. The Service would acquire lands and easements where appropriate.

2. The Use of Eminent Domain

We found ourselves in a "Catch-22" on the issue of eminent domain: we knew that not mentioning it would arouse suspicion, but discovered that openly discussing it incites fear.

Yes, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, like all governmental agencies, has been given the power of eminent domain. This power allows condemnation as a means to acquire lands for the public good. Some land owners fear that the Service might condemn and take their lands without their consent. Even worse, some fear that if condemnation happened, they would not be adequately compensated for the real value of their land.

Please be assured that the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge has never used condemnation—nor has it ever been proposed—for our land protection plan. Moreover, laws mandate that the Service and all government agencies pay fair market value or "just compensation" for land.

Again we emphasize, that condemnation is not proposed and will not be used in conjunction with the refuge's land protection plan.

3. Hunting

Hunting is considered a priority use. We are mandated to provide hunting opportunities on condition that they are compatible with our mission and management goals and objectives. The refuge provides a quality hunt at minimum fee. Hunters can hunt more days at lower prices than private lease landowners charge.

The refuge provides 60-days for archery; 6 days for muzzle loader (black powder) rifle and 5 days for shot-gun. We can accommodate up to 465 permits per day. In 2004, we issued 778 archery permits, 900 muzzle loader rifle permits, 1137 shot-gun permits and 67 youth hunt permits resulting in approximately \$40,000 direct revenue. This money is spent entirely on the refuge's public trust programs and thousands of people benefit.

In addition, if we figure that each hunter spends \$75 to \$125 a day locally—for a license, lodging, meals, gas and other goods and services—and we have 3,100 hunter days then this translates into a conservative \$232, 5000 to \$387,500 to the local economy.

It is not our intent to compete with private hunt and gun clubs. Rather, we are mandated to provide hunting to the public who cannot afford private rates, or have no other place to hunt. The results are that public benefits are improved with significant socioeconomic benefits realized to local communities.



Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge at its best!

The Service has agreed to work in partnership with the State of Maryland and representatives of the forestry industry to develop a Forest Stewardship Plan. Guiding principles are also being developed, that will be incorporated into alternative B that speaks to the future sustainable forestry management at Blackwater Refuge.

Our Forest Management Ethics

In our preferred alternative B, we propose active, but sustainable, forest management on refuge lands. Our managed forests principally protect, maintain or enhance wildlife values. We have identified specific management objectives to include a forest management plan, and specific actions recommended to achieve these goals.

Active forest management on refuge lands would create opportunities for timber companies to bid on the timber or the silvicultural work to be performed.

The Service does not manage forests for timber production because it is not a mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, or the Chesapeake Marshlands Refuge Complex. In the Northeast Region this has been limited to removing surplus, marketable, damaged, diseased, or dead timber. Normally, we contract with local timber interests to remove commercial

grade trees. Special Use Permits are written to protect refuge resources and operations are monitored by refuge staff.

We are not proposing to take forest or agricultural land out of production.

We have drafted a forest management plan that complements the State of Maryland's Strategic Forestland Assessment. Please be confident that we will stick to this plan. Prescriptions for timber stand improvements, regeneration harvests, prescribed burns, strategic land protection, and reforestation will be collaboratively developed with input from the forest management community—once the EA/CCP is approved. Preliminary prescriptions can be found on pages 4-61 through 4-89 of the draft EA/CCP.

No Major Losses to Timbering

Of the roughly 15,000 acres identified in the LPP for protection at Blackwater NWR, only 3,300 acres are manageable forestlands; of the 16,000 acres along the Nanticoke River (areas B and C), identified in the LPP for protection, 4,200 acres are manageable forestlands. However, not all of these acres are suitable for commercial harvest, and many are not the size and age for producing saw timber. Both Dorchester Lumber Company (pine) and Johnson Lumber Company (hardwood) are saw timber mills; and are the only remaining mills in the area.



Setting a trap for the fox squirrel.

Conservation Easements

Conservation easements transfer some, but not all property rights to a conservation-based buying entity, as specified by mutual agreement. When we negotiate conservation easements, a landowner can either agree not to engage in activities damaging to wildlife habitat resources, or simply let us manage the land for wildlife. Similarly, timber harvest rights can be negotiated as part of an easements agreement.

The Service acquires easements through purchase, donation, or exchange. The property owner retains all responsibility for paying property taxes.

Where Do We Go From Here?

After analyzing all of the public review comments received, the Service will prepare the final EA/CCP. Revisions or modifications to the report will be made based upon the comments.

The final report is anticipated to be released at the end of the calendar year. A 45-day public review period will be provided. No additional meetings are planned or required. However, periodic review of the CCP is necessary to ensure that objectives are being met and management actions are being implemented. Planning is dynamic and monitoring results or public input may indicate the need to change our strategies. Significant changes may warrant additional NEPA analysis; minor changes will not, but will be documented in annual monitoring, project evaluation reports, or the annual refuge narratives.

For further information

Gib Chase, Senior Wildlife Biologist and Refuge Planning Team Leader
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035
413/253 8525
gib_chase@fws.gov
<http://www.fws.gov/blackwater/>





Gib Chase
Division of Planning
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035