

# Chapter 1. Introduction and Background

## The Purpose of and Need for this Plan

Development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is vital to the future management of the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge (Forsythe Refuge). The purpose of the CCP is to provide strategic management direction over the next 15 years by:

- a. Providing a clear statement of desired future conditions for habitat, wildlife, visitor services, and facilities;
- b. Providing a clear understanding of the reasons for management actions;
- c. Ensuring Refuge management reflects the policies and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) and our other legal mandates;
- d. 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.

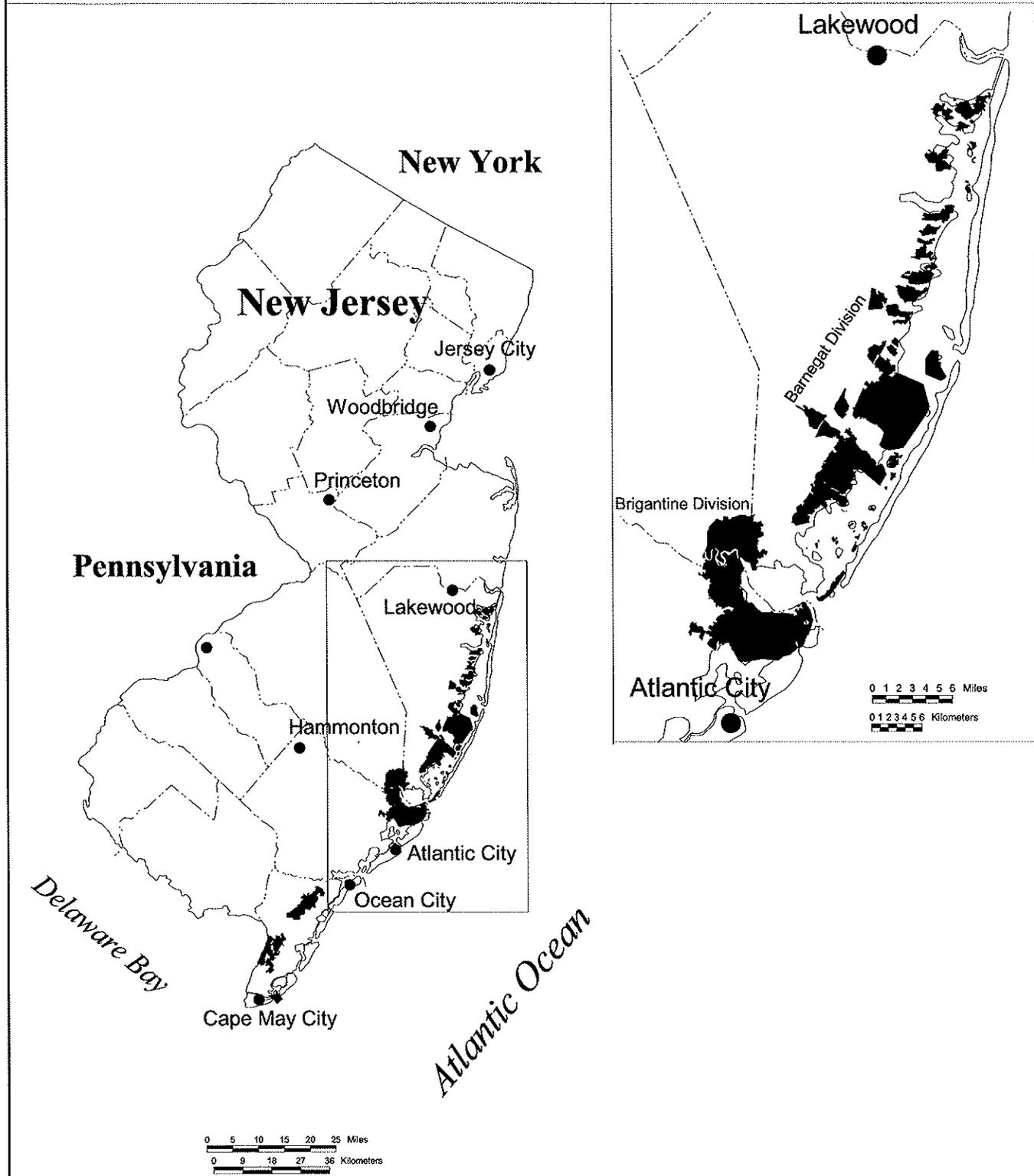
Second, there is currently no master plan establishing priorities and ensuring consistent and integrated management for Forsythe Refuge. A vision statement and goals, objectives, and management strategies are needed to effectively manage natural resources. Persistent issues related to non-wildlife dependent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

## Forsythe Refuge

Forsythe Refuge is located in Atlantic, Burlington, and Ocean Counties, and consists of two divisions: the Brigantine Division and the Barnegat Division. (See Map 1.) The Refuge extends along more than 50 miles of the coast. This Refuge was renamed in 1984 in memory of the late conservationist Congressman from New Jersey, Edwin B. Forsythe, through a Congressional Joint Resolution (H.J. Res. 537). The resolution combined the Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge and the Barnegat National Wildlife Refuge. Those Refuges were established in 1939 and 1967, respectively, under provisions of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act. The Reedy Creek Unit was established in 1991, and is administered as part of Barnegat Division. The approved acquisition boundary of the Refuge encompasses more than 56,600 acres. As of September 30, 1999, the Service owned or leased 44,302 acres within the approved Refuge acquisition area.

Refuge wetlands are designated as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. There are only 17 designated Wetlands of International Importance in the United States. Refuge lands and waters provide important resting and feeding habitat for tens of thousands of ducks and geese, wading birds, and shorebirds during their spring and fall migrations.

# Edwin B. Forsythe 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.



Congress designated 6,600 acres of the Refuge as the Brigantine Wilderness on January 3, 1975 (P.L. 93-632) to be managed under the Wilderness Act of 1964 (78 Stat. 890; 16 U.S.C. 1121 (note), 1131-1136). Map 2 shows the Refuge Wilderness Areas. This designation has far-ranging impacts on the management of these portions of the Refuge.

## Purposes of Forsythe 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 Forsythe Refuge are:

- For lands acquired under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §715-715r), as amended, "...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds...." (16 U.S.C. §715d);
- "...the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources...." 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)... " Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C. §3901(b), 100 Stat. 3583);
- "...to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness." The Wilderness Act of 1964 (78 Stat. 890;16 U.S.C. 1121 (note), 1131-1136).

## Refuge Vision

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

*"Edwin B. Forsythe Refuge will continue to contain some of the most important migratory bird habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System. It will continue to be a focal point for the protection, management, restoration, and enjoyment of migratory birds and other Federal Trust Resources in coastal New Jersey. The Refuge will provide a true wilderness experience on pristine barrier islands and salt marshes, that are premiere examples of these ecological communities and untrammled by man. It will also provide stop-over and wintering habitats of sufficient size and quality to assist in maintaining migrating birds on the Atlantic Flyway.*

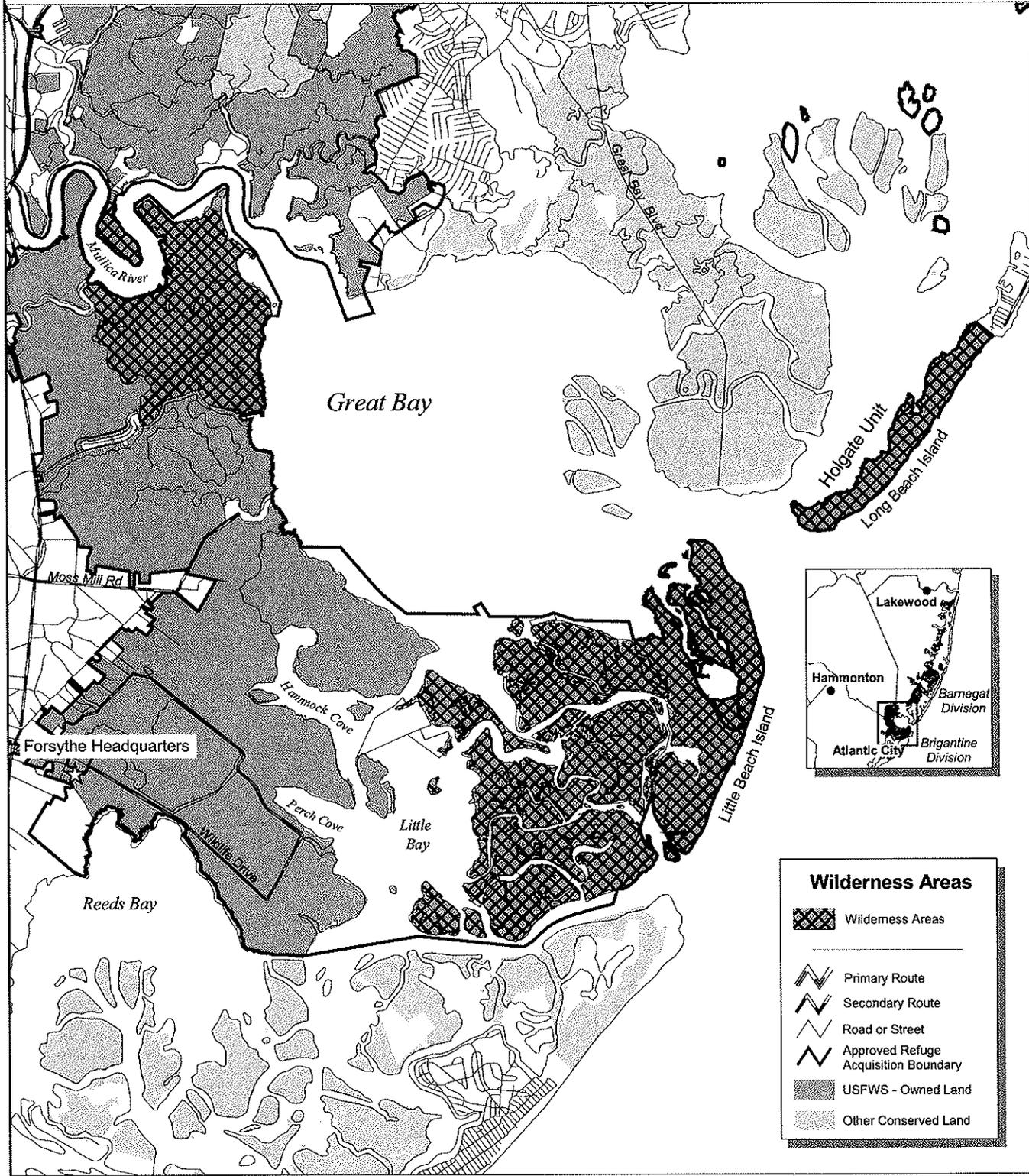
*The Refuge will expand its role in land protection efforts by acquiring additional habitat along the coast and inland watersheds, and working with all interested parties to promote conservation efforts on non-refuge lands. The Refuge will preserve important plant and animal populations, ecological communities, 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*

# Brigantine National Wilderness Area

## *Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge*

*Brigantine Division, Atlantic, Burlington and Ocean Counties, New Jersey*



**Wilderness Areas**

-  Wilderness Areas
-  Primary Route
-  Secondary Route
-  Road or Street
-  Approved Refuge Acquisition Boundary
-  USFWS - Owned Land
-  Other Conserved Land

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,  
 January 2001.  
 Not to be used for legal or other purposes.



*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.

### **The Wilderness Act**

The Wilderness Act mandates that certain federal lands be maintained in a natural, undeveloped state in order to "preserve for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness." The Act instructs federal agencies to manage Wilderness Areas in a manner which "preserves the wilderness character of the area," and provides "outstanding opportunities for solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation." In 1975, Congress designated 6,600 acres on Forsythe Refuge as the Brigantine National Wilderness Area. (See Map 2 on page 4.)

### **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 its preparation.

### **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. Forsythe 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 23,400 acre Brigantine-Barneget Wetlands focus area is within the Forsythe Refuge.

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 the Forsythe 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 Forsythe 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 Forsythe 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 three sites within Forsythe Refuge: Brigantine/Barnegat Wetlands, Manahawkin Lake, and Reedy Creek.

### **Trust for Public Land Century Plan**

The Trust for Public Land is a national nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to preserving land of recreational, ecological, and cultural value for public enjoyment. Its primary mission is to protect open space for public benefit. The Trust's Barnegat Bay Initiative is a long-term protection strategy involving land acquisition, public education and scientific research on the regions remaining outstanding natural resources. Its goal is to collaborate with other non-profit and civic groups and local, state and federal government agencies to establish a powerful and united coalition working to preserve the Barnegat Bay watershed. Barnegat Bay is within the National Estuary Program

The Century Plan (Trust for Public Lands, 1995) is a guide for future action to preserve the Barnegat Bay watershed in Ocean County, New Jersey and heighten public awareness about the Bay's landscape and ecological importance. It lists 100 unique conservation and public access sites that are of long-term importance to protecting the Bay as an ecosystem and treasured public resource. Of the 100 sites, approximately 50 percent are currently partially or totally within the approved acquisition boundary for the Forsythe Refuge.

## **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.

Forsythe Refuge lies within the Hudson River/New York Bight Ecosystem.

### **Hudson River/New York Bight Ecosystem Plan**

The following resource priorities from this plan (USFWS, September 1994) are relevant to Forsythe 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.

### **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. Forsythe Refuge is specifically mentioned in the following task:

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

### **Northeastern Beach Tiger Beetle (*Cincindela dorsalis dorsalis*), Recovery Plan**

The recovery objective of this plan (USFWS, September 1994) is to remove the Northeastern Beach Tiger Beetle from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.

Recovery for the Northeastern beach tiger beetle will require reestablishing the species across its former range along the Atlantic Coast and protecting it within the Chesapeake Bay region. The Plan describes the Holgate Unit as part of the Northeastern beach tiger beetle historical range, and as having "medium restoration potential". According to the Plan, the Holgate Unit would be an excellent restoration site, if off-road vehicles were prohibited from the intertidal zone.

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

Where the following federally listed threatened or endangered species occur on Forsythe 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.

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