

# Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge and Karner Blue Butterfly Conservation Easement

## *Release of Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan*

Blueback Herring/Duane Raver

### Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan is Now Available!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we, our) is pleased to announce the release of the final Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the 1,103-acre Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) and the 29-acre Karner Blue Butterfly Conservation Easement (conservation easement). We thank everyone who provided comments on our draft CCP/Environmental Assessment (EA) released in February 2012. These comments provided us with valuable information for preparing our final document.

This CCP represents our 15-year management plan for the refuge and conservation easement. The plan furthers the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System); provides direction to achieve the refuge's purposes, vision, and goals; and contributes to State and regional conservation plans. Implementing the plan will help achieve the refuge's important role in conserving and managing wildlife resources in the Great Bay Estuary area.

### How to Access the Final Plan

You may view or download the final CCP from our Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Great%20bay/ccphome.html>.



Great Bay Refuge- Greg Thompson

You may also request a printed copy or CD-ROM version by contacting refuge staff (see "Contact Information" below).

### Public Comments on the Draft Plan

We released the draft CCP/EA for public comment from February 10, 2012 to March 19, 2012. We also held an afternoon and evening public meeting on March 8, 2012 in Newington, New Hampshire.

We greatly appreciate the level of public interest and involvement in our planning effort. We received 25 written comments on the draft CCP/EA during the comment period.

These comments covered a variety of topics including freshwater impoundment management; salt marsh restoration; conservation of rare, threatened, and endangered species; refuge staffing and facilities; public access; and hunting and other public use opportunities.

These comments helped us improve the management objectives and strategies in the final CCP.

We evaluated all of the substantive comments we received during the comment period, and include our responses to them as Appendix K, "Summary and Response to Public Comments," in the final CCP.

### Changes from the Draft to Final Plan

The final CCP is based on alternative B, which we identified as the Service-preferred alternative in the draft CCP/EA. In response to the comments we received, we made several minor changes to alternative B for the final plan. These changes include the following:

1. We added a strategy to evaluate wildlife use on grassland and shrubland fields that we will no longer manage and that will transition to forest. If we find that these areas are providing important habitat to shrubland-dependent species of conservation concern, we may decide to manage them as shrubland rather than allow them to transition to forest.



Wood Duck

Mike Sweet/USFWS

## Goals

**Goal 1:** Perpetuate the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of estuarine and freshwater habitats on Great Bay Refuge to protect water quality and sustain native plant communities and wildlife, including species of conservation concern.

**Goal 2:** Perpetuate the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of upland and forested wetland habitats on Great Bay Refuge to sustain native plant communities and wildlife, including species of conservation concern.

**Goal 3:** Foster and maintain conservation, research, and management partnerships to promote protection and stewardship of the ecological resources of the Great Bay Estuary.

**Goal 4:** Promote enjoyment and awareness of Great Bay Refuge and Great Bay Estuary by providing high-quality, compatible wildlife-dependent public uses on refuge lands and on partner lands and waters around the refuge.

**Goal 5:** Contribute to the recovery of the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly and other rare Lepidoptera through the conservation, protection, and restoration of pine barrens habitat.



Tim Williams

White-tailed deer

2. We added a strategy to detect and remove “hot spots” of DDT contamination from Upper Peverly Pond if staffing and funding allow.
3. We amended the existing strategy on evaluating the Stubbs Pond fish ladder to state that we would implement any recommended repairs, as soon as funding allows.
4. We revised a strategy to state that we would: “Inventory, map, and assess the quality of forested and scrub-shrub wetlands, including vernal pool habitat, rare plants, and rare natural communities. Identify actions that will sustain or enhance these areas, including treating invasive plants, as warranted.”

We selected alternative B for the final CCP, with the changes above, for several reasons.

First, we believe it represents the array of management actions that best work towards achieving the refuge’s purposes, vision, and goals, Refuge System policies, and the goals of other State and regional conservation plans.

Second, we feel that this alternative most effectively addresses the key issues raised during the planning process.

The full basis and rationale for our decision is documented in Appendix L, “Finding of No Significant Impact,” in the final CCP.

### Highlights of the Final Plan

Here is a brief summary of our planned management for Great Bay Refuge and the Karner blue butterfly conservation easement. For more detailed information, please refer to the final CCP.

### Great Bay Refuge

Our habitat management program on Great Bay Refuge will emphasize managing a diversity of habitats to support species of conservation concern in the Great Bay Estuary area.

Our major habitat management activities include the following:



Joel Trick/USFWS

Karner blue butterfly

- Protecting the refuge’s existing salt marsh and rocky shoreline to benefit estuarine species of concern, such as salt marsh sparrows, eelgrass, and oysters
- Increasing the amount of forested habitat on the refuge to benefit forest-dependent migratory birds of concern, such as wood thrush and scarlet tanager, and solitary tree bats
- Increasing the amount of shrubland on the refuge to support shrubland-dependent species of concern, such as New England cottontail, a candidate for the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Species
- Consolidating grasslands into fewer, larger fields to benefit grassland-dependent migratory birds of concern, such as the State threatened upland sandpiper
- Maintaining and managing Upper Peverly Pond and Stubbs Pond Dams to benefit migrating and wintering waterfowl, such as American black duck, shorebirds, and marshbirds
- Removing Lower Peverly Pond Dam and restoring approximately 1,100 feet of stream habitat to benefit migratory fish
- Controlling invasive and pest species to improve the biological integrity, diversity, and ecological health of refuge habitats
- Expanding our inventorying, mapping, and monitoring program to help inform future management decisions

## Vision Statement

Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge will be a treasured cornerstone in protecting and restoring the Great Bay Estuary's unique and significant ecological and cultural resources, which are unparalleled in New England. The estuary's shallow tidal waters will teem with a rich diversity of aquatic resources, from oysters and eelgrass beds, to healthy populations of migratory fish. The refuge's oak-hickory forests, grasslands, shrublands, and freshwater ponds will support a bounty of wildlife throughout the year. During winter, bald eagles will thrill refuge visitors as they taunt the many and diverse flocks of waterfowl and waterbirds foraging and resting in its quiet, protected waters. In spring, the refuge's forests, fields, and wetlands will fill with a symphony of bird songs and frog calls. The summer will reward visitors with the opportunity to view native fledgling birds, fawns, and other young of the year. During the fall, the refuge will host hundreds of migrating species ranging from waterfowl, to songbirds, bats, and butterflies, all needing safe haven in an increasingly urbanized landscape.

Visitors from throughout New England will travel to the refuge to become immersed in the sights and sounds of nature. The refuge will showcase innovative, science-based, adaptive management techniques and, coupled with exceptional outreach, education, and interpretive programs, help raise awareness and appreciation of the natural world and uphold the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The refuge, in collaboration with partners, will work tirelessly to expand the protection and conservation of the Great Bay Estuary and its native habitats and wildlife for the benefit of the American people.

The Karner blue butterfly conservation easement lands in Concord, New Hampshire, will contribute to the recovery of the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly. Each spring, the flowers of native lupine plants growing among pitch pine on the conservation easement lands will attract thousands of adult Karner blue butterflies to feed on nectar. During the summer, an abundance of Karner blue caterpillars will feed on the lupine leaves. As part of an extraordinarily dedicated partnership, the conservation easement is a key link in the network of lands in the Concord area managed to help reverse the butterfly's decline and bring the species back from the brink of extirpation.

We will also expand our conservation, research, and management partnerships to help restore and conserve the Great Bay Estuary.

We will enhance our existing visitor services program on Great Bay Refuge by

- rerouting trails to improve wildlife viewing opportunities;
- installing interpretive signs and offering interpretive talks;
- updating our Web site;
- evaluating expanding our existing hunting program by adding a fall archery deer hunt and a turkey hunt; and
- developing environmental education activities.

Our long-range plan is to hire four onsite staff for Great Bay Refuge, including an assistant refuge manager, a wildlife biologist, a park ranger, and a maintenance worker. To house these new positions and better serve the public, we are also planning to build a new refuge headquarters and visitor contact station.

### Karner Blue Butterfly Conservation Easement

We will enhance our partnership with New Hampshire Fish and Game to manage the conservation easement for the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly. In particular, we will continue to support the captive-rearing program and management of pine barrens habitat, including controlled burning and planting native wild lupine.

We will also install new interpretive signs, extend the existing trail, offer volunteer-led interpretive walks, and enhance our Web site.

### Implementing the Plan

We will immediately begin implementing projects outlined in the CCP. In order to successfully achieve our vision and goals, it is critical that we continue to maintain and develop new partnerships and sustain our invaluable volunteer program.

We encourage you to stay involved during the plan's implementation. Come visit us at the refuge and conservation easement!

### Contact Information

To learn more about Great Bay Refuge, please visit our Web site at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/greatbay/>.

Our staff are currently located at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. You can contact us by:

Telephone: 978/465-5753

Email: [fw5rw\\_prnwr@fws.gov](mailto:fw5rw_prnwr@fws.gov)

Mail: Parker River  
National Wildlife Refuge  
6 Plum Island Turnpike  
Newburyport, MA 01950

### U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov>

1 800/ 344 WILD

### Federal Relay Service for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing

1 800/877 8339



September 2012

# Map of Public Use Facilities Proposed in Final CCP

