

## Appendix G



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*Philadelphia skyline visible over Darby Creek and Tinicum marsh*

## Wilderness Review

- **G.1 Introduction**
- **G.2 Minimum Wilderness Criteria**
- **G.3 Inventory Conclusions**
- **G.4 Service Summary and Conclusion of Wilderness Inventory Findings**

## G.1 Introduction

The purpose of a wilderness review is to identify and recommend to Congress lands and waters of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) that merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Wilderness reviews are required elements of comprehensive conservation plans, are conducted in accordance with the refuge planning process outlined in the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual (602 FW 1 and 3), and include compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and public involvement.

The wilderness review process has three phases: (I) inventory; (II) study; and, (III) recommendation. In the inventory phase, we create wilderness inventory areas (WIAs) after mapping all Service fee-owned lands and waters on the refuge. Any WIAs meeting the minimum criteria for a federally designated wilderness are identified as wilderness study areas (WSAs).

The purposes of the wilderness inventory phase are to

- a) identify Refuge System lands and waters with wilderness character and establish those areas as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs);
- b) identify areas of Refuge System lands and waters that do not qualify as WSAs; and
- c) document the inventory findings for the planning record.

## G.2 Minimum Wilderness Criteria

A WSA is required to be a roadless area or an island of any size, meet the size criteria, appear natural, and provide for solitude or primitive recreation.

Size — The size criteria can be satisfied if an area has at least 5,000 acres of contiguous roadless public land, or is sufficiently large that its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition is practicable.

Roadless — Roadless refers to the absence of improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use. A route maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a road. Only Federal lands are eligible to be considered for wilderness designation and inclusion within the NWPS.

Naturalness — The Wilderness Act, Section 2(c), defines wilderness as an area that “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.” The area must appear natural to the average visitor, rather than “pristine.” The presence of historic landscape conditions is not required.

Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation — A WSA must provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, and does not need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre. Further, an area does not have to be open to public use and access to qualify under this criterion. Opportunities for solitude refer to the ability of a visitor to be alone and secluded from other visitors in the area. Primitive and unconfined recreation means nonmotorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport.

Supplemental Values — The Wilderness Act states that an area of wilderness may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value. Supplemental values of the area are optional, but the degree to which their presence enhances the area’s suitability for wilderness designation should be considered. The evaluation should be based on an assessment of the estimated abundance or importance of each of the features.

## G.3 Inventory Conclusions

### Evaluating Roadless Criteria

The John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge does not meet the roadless criteria. Refuge lands are bounded or divided by roads. A major highway, Interstate 95, runs east-west across the southern refuge boundary. The refuge is also includes several service roads.

### Evaluating Size Criteria

The total approved acquisition boundary for the refuge is 1,200 acres, thus it cannot include any roadless areas of at least 5,000 acres. Due to the presence of access roads, adjacent roads, and remnants of historic disturbance (dikes, fences, and former water control structures), there is no smaller acreage of sufficient size to preserve and use in an unimpaired condition.. Furthermore, no lands within the refuge are contiguous to other agency-owned lands under review for wilderness areas.

### Evaluating Naturalness Criteria

The refuge does not satisfy the naturalness criteria, as the area has been highly modified for human use with the arrival of European settlers. Prominent features of human origin are the remnants of a trolley railbed, dikes around the impoundment, presence of a landfill, a managed impoundment, and other remnants of older infrastructure. Currently, over 2 miles of dikes and at least three water control structures are found on the refuge.

In addition to water control structures and dikes, refuge infrastructure includes buildings and roadways that require regular maintenance. There are also a wildlife observation tower, trails, signs, parking areas, viewing blinds, and boundaries that are maintained. Facilities currently include the refuge headquarters and visitor center, as well as two maintenance buildings.

In addition to the roads described in the “Evaluating Roadless Criteria” section, two railroads pass along the southeastern boundary of the refuge. Furthermore, gas and oil pipelines transect or run adjacent to refuge lands. Several telephone, gas, oil, and other utilities also run adjacent or through the refuge.

### Evaluating Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Criteria

The refuge does not meet criteria for solitude and primitive/unconfined recreation criteria. The number of annual visits to the refuge is currently estimated at almost 135,000 and is expected to increase over the next 15 years. The refuge consists primarily of inaccessible/off-limit wetlands with relatively few upland areas, and visitor use is concentrated on dike roads, and upland trails. Consequently, even during times of the year when visitation is typically at its lowest, one is likely to see other people on the refuge, regardless of location. Waterways and other areas that can be accessed by boat consist of canals or flooded impoundments, neither of which are sufficiently large to allow visitors to experience solitude.

## G.4 Service Summary and Conclusion of Wilderness Inventory Findings

We utilized the refuge in its entirety, as owned by the Service in fee title, within the approved acquisition boundary as the basis for our WIA. We then evaluated the refuge to determine if it met the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act.

Based on our review, the 1,193-acre John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge does not meet the size criteria for a WSA. It is less than 5,000 acres and its size is not sufficient to preserve natural ecological processes unique to a wilderness setting. Chapter 2 maps show the current refuge-owned lands, easements and proposed acquisition boundaries. We will reevaluate this determination in 15 years with the revision of this CCP, or sooner if significant new information warrants a reevaluation. In summary, at this time additional study is not warranted.