

Appendix K



Larry Woodward/USFWS

Green heron at impoundment

Summary of Public Comments and Service Responses on the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment for John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum

Introduction

In March 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we, our) completed the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum (John Heinz NWR, the refuge) Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA). That document outlines three alternatives for managing the refuge over the next 15 years and identifies alternative B as the “Service-preferred alternative.” We released the draft CCP/EA for public review and comment from March 22 to April 23, 2012.

We evaluated all the letters, electronic mail, and phone calls we received during that comment period, along with comments recorded during our two public meetings. This document summarizes the substantive comments we received and provides our responses to them. Based on our analysis in the draft CCP/EA and our evaluation of comments, we made minor modifications to alternative B and recommended it to the Northeast Regional Director for implementation. It is that modified alternative B which is detailed in this final CCP. Our modifications include additions, corrections, or clarifications of our preferred management actions. We have also determined that none of those modifications warrants our publishing a revised or amended draft CCP/EA before publishing the CCP.

The changes we made to the final CCP include the following:

- (1) We highlighted that we will work closely with the Philadelphia International Airport to assess any wildlife hazards prior to implementing any wetland restoration under objective 1.1 in Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation.”
- (2) We incorporated updated information provided by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission into section 3.11 of Chapter 3, “Existing Environment,” and section 2.5 of Appendix C, “Habitat Management Plan.”
- (3) We added the following strategy to objective 2.1 in chapter 4: “Work with partners to identify and obtain resources to replace the water control system in the impoundment.”
- (4) We corrected all format and typographical errors that were brought to our attention throughout the CCP.

As we create the refuge step-down plans, we will take into consideration all comments that relate to those plans.

The Northeast Regional Director (RD) will either select alternative B for implementation, or one of the other two alternatives analyzed in the draft CCP/EA, or a combination of actions from among the three alternatives. The RD will also determine whether a Finding of No Significant Impact is justified prior to finalizing the decision. The RD will make a decision after:

- Reviewing all the comments received on the draft CCP/EA, and our response to those comments.
- Affirming that the CCP actions support the purpose and need for the CCP, the purposes for which the refuge was established, help fulfill the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), comply with all legal and policy mandates, and work best toward achieving the refuge’s vision and goals.

Concurrent with release of the approved CCP, we will publish a notice of the availability in the *Federal Register*. That notice completes the planning phase of the CCP process, and we can begin its implementation phase.

Summary of Comments Received

During the comment period, we received 19 sets of responses, both written and oral. We gathered oral comments at the following two public meetings attended by about 17 people: April 10, 2012, 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum, 8601 Lindbergh Boulevard, Philadelphia, PA 19153.

We received written comments, including electronic mail and post, from 16 organizations and individuals, and we received one phone call with comments. We received letters from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural

Resources, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Philadelphia International Airport, with comments included below. We received a letter from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission on the draft CCP/EA, and we received comments from members of the Friends of Heinz Refuge.

In the discussions below, we address every substantive comment received during the comment period. Comments were organized by subject. Directly beneath each subject heading, you will see a list of unique letter numbers that correspond to the person, agency, public meeting, or organization that submitted the comment. In some cases, one person may have submitted a comment more than once (public meeting, email, written letter, or telephone). The cross-referenced list appears as attachment 1 to this appendix.

In our responses, we may refer the reader to other places in this document or the draft CCP/EA where we address the same comment. In some instances, we refer to specific text in the draft CCP/EA and indicate how the CCP was changed in response to comments. There are several options for obtaining the full versions of the draft CCP/EA or the final CCP. They are available online at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/John%20Heinz/ccphome.html>

For a CD-ROM or a print copy, contact the refuge manager:

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Service Responses to Comments by Subject

Biological Resources

Biological Resources—General (Letter ID#: 1, 13, 18)

Comment: A commenter asked about the how land changes on the refuge have impacted native versus nonnative species and if we had any information about historic habitat conditions prior to the construction of the impoundment.

Response: Thank you for your interest in refuge habitats. In the last decade, refuge staff has implemented plans to control invasive plants and restore native plants. This past year, the refuge started a volunteer program called Weed Warriors to train volunteers to assist with this endeavor. Historically the impoundment, which was built in the 1600s, was part of a 6,000-acre freshwater tidal marsh. While no official surveys are available from that time, the CCP outlines the possibility of restoring part of the impoundment back to tidal marsh.

Comment: The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) recommended a few corrections to our discussions about species in chapter 2 of the draft CCP.

- Change the name of the red-bellied turtle to eastern redbelly turtle.
- Remove the comment that eastern mud turtles are “now considered potentially extirpated in PA.” There has recently been documentation of the turtles occurring in the State. It was not confirmed in John Heinz NWR but two small populations were discovered elsewhere in Bucks County. PFBC has proposed listing of eastern mud turtle as endangered in the State, which has been approved by agency commissioners and will soon go out for public comment.
- Add the northern snakehead (*Channa argus*) to table 2.6.
- Make the change in table 2.6 that *Gambusia holbrooki* is the synonym of *Gambusia affinis*.
- Use sp. instead of spp. when talking about *Dorsoma* since there is only one species of it in Delaware.

Response: We appreciate your comment and made the suggested corrections to Chapter 2, “Affected Environment,” in the draft CCP, which is now Chapter 3, “Existing Environment,” in the final CCP.

Comment: The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission commented that while crayfishes are not discussed in the section on invertebrates in chapter 2 of the draft CCP, it is possible that crayfish species of conservation interest (*Cambarus diogenes* and *Cambarus acuminatus*) occur within the refuge.

Response: Thank you for your comment. We have added information about these species under the following sections of the final CCP: Section 3.12 “Refuge Biological Resources” in chapter 3 and objective 1.2 in Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation” of the final CCP. We also added this information to the final Habitat Management Plan (appendix C of the final CCP).

Comment: The Philadelphia International Airport and the Federal Aviation Administration requested to be involved early and often in the planning of any refuge activities that may attract any wildlife that could be hazardous to airport activities.

Response: We will continue to work closely with the Philadelphia International Airport and the Federal Aviation Administration. Under objective 1.1 in Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation,” of the final CCP, we have specifically identified that we will work with the Philadelphia International Airport to assess wildlife hazards prior to implementing wetland restoration on the refuge, including potentially restoring portions of the impoundment to tidal marsh.

Habitat Management **(Letter ID#: 5, 9, 17)**

Comment: One person recommended that the refuge be restored to tidal and freshwater marshes and forests in a state as close as possible to its original condition. The commenter stated that this restoration will form a base for sustainable marshes and woodlands that will support a healthy community of organisms.

Response: We agree that restoring refuge lands to historic conditions potentially would be beneficial to native wildlife. However, current refuge habitats, such as the impoundment, may provide important habitat for priority species that might not be available elsewhere in the area due to significant habitat loss around Philadelphia. We plan to study the effects on wildlife and habitat, both positive and negative, of both maintaining the impoundment and restoring the impoundment to tidal marsh. If we determine that restoring a portion of the impoundment to tidal marsh would be beneficial, we would develop comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by preparing another NEPA document and distributing it for public review and comment.

Comment: Audubon Pennsylvania commended the use of adaptive management to maintain and restore native habitats and natural systems of the refuge.

Response: Thank you, we appreciate your support in this effort.

Comment: One commenter expressed support for the continued preservation of habitat for important reptile and amphibian species.

Response: Thank you. We agree this is important and we appreciate your support in this effort.

Invasive Species

(Letter ID#: 9, 13, 17)

Comment: The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission commented that they think it is likely that invasive aquatic crayfishes, which represent a significant threat to the refuge's aquatic systems, occur within the refuge. They stated that management actions, including the removal of dams and other blockages may cause the dispersal of exotic crayfishes, potentially allowing them to invade new areas. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission recommends that we carefully consider the effect of dam removal on dispersal of exotic crayfishes prior to their removal.

Response: We appreciate your comments. As we look into restoration of a portion of the impoundment to tidal marsh, we will continue to consult with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. We have included language in Chapter 4, "Management Direction and Implementation," of the final CCP under objectives 1.2 and 2.1 that acknowledges the potential impacts of nonnative crayfish.

Comment: Audubon Pennsylvania commented that additional emphasis on controlling invasive carp would likely maximize the value of the impoundment habitat for a wide variety of species.

Response: The refuge supports and continues to implement drawdowns of the impoundment to reduce large breeding carp. Restoring part of the impoundment to tidal marsh and mudflats, as described in the CCP, would also aid in the control of the invasive carp.

Comment: One commenter suggested establishing pilot management plots to remove nonnative pest vegetation and establish desirable native plant communities.

Response: We appreciate your suggestion. We agree that controlling nonnative species and restoring native species are important for the refuge. We have recently established a Weed Warrior Program, in which trained volunteers adopt plots, remove invasive plants, and restore the habitat with native plants. The Friends of Heinz Refuge also obtained funding and built a native plant pollinator garden to encourage creation of backyard and schoolyard habitat. Our biology program continues mechanical and chemical control of invasive plants in targeted areas.

Bird Habitat

(Letter ID#: 2, 9)

Comment: Audubon Pennsylvania commented that the restoration of habitat for specific nesting marsh bird populations that have disappeared or diminished from John Heinz NWR deserves more attention, e.g., black-crowned night heron, common gallinule, least bittern, and teal-winged and great egret. They recommend we take the habitat requirements of these marsh-nesting species into consideration in the plan, for instance, that water levels and availability of emergent vegetation are likely key factors in attracting these species back to the refuge.

Response: We appreciate your recommendations for the habitat requirements of marsh-nesting species. We support improving and increasing the habitat for marsh-nesting species. We will continue drawdowns to breakup accumulation of spatterdock biomass. Also, we will continue planting of native emergent vegetation species. Restoring part of the impoundment to tidal marsh and mudflats, as described in the CCP, would also increase habitat for nesting marsh birds.

Comment: Audubon Pennsylvania also stated that they believe it's incorrect that nonnative forest is a nesting site for short-eared owls. Short-eared owls historically nested in the refuge and Philadelphia International Airport area, but there are no records of them nesting during the second Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas (2004 to 2008). Audubon Pennsylvania stated that the poplar forest seems like an unlikely nesting location given the species' habitat preferences.

Response: Thank you for this observation. The reference to short-eared owls nesting in forested habitats on the refuge, or on the refuge in general, was included by mistake. We have removed any reference to short-eared owls nesting on the refuge from the final CCP and the final Habitat Management Plan.

Endangered and Threatened Species

(Letter ID#: 13)

Comment: The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission commended our emphasis on protecting and restoring habitats for State-listed species, such as the redbelly turtle and southern leopard frog.

Response: Thank you, we appreciate your support in this effort.

Impoundment Management and Restoration

(Letter ID#: 1, 2, 9, 11, 12, 16, 17)

Comment: One person asked about the effect that the conversion of the impoundment to tidal marsh would have on species diversity.

Response: At this time, we do not know what effect the conversion of the impoundment to tidal marsh would have on species diversity. As part of the planning process for the impoundment restoration project, we intend to conduct studies to determine whether it would be desirable, in terms of wildlife habitat, and logistically feasible to restore a portion of the impoundment to tidal marsh.

Comment: A commenter asked what the timeline is for an impoundment restoration study.

Response: It will take most of the life of the 15-year CCP to conduct the impoundment restoration study, perhaps more. We will need to conduct several species and habitat assessments to see if it would be desirable to restore the impoundment from a wildlife and habitat perspective. If desirable from a wildlife and habitat perspective, we will also work with the town of Tinicum and Philadelphia International Airport to determine how restoring a portion of the impoundment would impact them. Lastly, we will need to make sure that it is logistically feasible to restore the impoundment and that the funding is available to do so.

Comment: The Philadelphia International Airport and the Federal Aviation Administration expressed concern that creation or enhancement of freshwater tidal marsh would create an attractant for hazardous wildlife within the critical area of wildlife separation for the Philadelphia International Airport. As such, the airport does not fully support alternatives B and C because they propose creating freshwater marsh in the refuge. With planning and precautions, alternative C could be more desirable to the airport than B because converting the impoundment to freshwater tidal marsh will lessen the attractant value to migrating waterfowl and the delayed restoration in alternative C would allow time for the Philadelphia International Airport to work with the refuge to assess potential wildlife hazards prior to any habitat modification. Both alternatives B and C, however, are preferable to alternative A (current management) because the current impoundment is a significant attractant to migrating waterfowl; converting the impoundment to freshwater tidal marsh would lessen the attractant value.

Response: We understand the concerns of the Philadelphia International Airport and the Federal Aviation Administration and will continue to work closely with them on projects that might create attractants for wildlife, particularly migratory birds. We have highlighted our intent to work closely with them by including specific strategies in chapter 4 of the final CCP, under objectives 1.1 and 2.1.

Comment: Audubon Pennsylvania commented that restoring a portion of the impoundment to tidal marsh and improving the remaining impoundment to allow for management of water levels is a responsible approach to management of migrant shorebirds, migrant waterfowl, and nesting marsh birds. This approach would give the refuge manager more flexibility and the ability to predictably provide habitat for migrant birds at the appropriate times of year.

Response: Thank you, we appreciate your support in this effort.

Comment: A few commenters said that they would like to see the refuge take a more aggressive approach to managing the impoundment for migrating shorebirds and breeding marsh birds such as Virginia rail, American bittern, and common gallinule. One commenter wanted to know about the interim options to improve shorebird habitat in the spring and fall prior to tidal restoration in the impoundment. Another suggested partnering with local birding and conservation organizations to get funding necessary for better managing the water level in the impoundment.

Response: We appreciate the interest in migrating shorebirds and breeding marsh birds. These are important species for the refuge. As discussed in chapter 2 of the draft CCP/EA, and chapter 3 of the final CCP, it is currently difficult for the refuge to manage water levels in the impoundment for a variety of reasons. For example, there is uncontrolled runoff into the impoundment during rain events and Darby Creek, which receives impoundment waters, is currently higher than the impoundment itself. This makes it difficult for refuge staff to manage water levels in the impoundment for these species or other species. It will take many years to determine if or how we should restore portions of the impoundment to tidal marsh. In the interim, we are continuing to seek additional funding sources and partnerships to replace the water control system in the impoundment. If successful, this should improve our ability to manage the impoundment for these and other species. We inadvertently left this out of the draft CCP/EA. We have added this strategy to chapter 4 of the final CCP, under objective 2.1 In the long-term, if we restore part of the impoundment to tidal marsh and mudflats after appropriate hydrology studies are completed, as described in the CCP, it would also aid in the control water level management issues.

Deer Management **(Letter ID#: 1, 2, 9)**

Comment: A commenter asked how we are planning on reducing deer at the refuge.

Response: Overabundance of deer is a problem on the refuge, as discussed in Chapter 3, “Existing Environment,” and under objective 1.2 in Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation,” of the final CCP. As discussed in chapter 4, objective 1.2 of the final CCP, we are planning to hire wildlife control specialists to reduce the deer population. Additional detail was available in the Draft Deer Management Plan, which was posted on the refuge planning Web site. The Deer Management Plan has been finalized in conjunction with the CCP and is posted on the refuge’s planning Web site.

Comment: One commenter wondered how deer control on the refuge would compare to deer control at Valley Forge.

Response: Deer control on the refuge is similar to deer control at Valley Forge National Historic Park. Similar to Valley Forge National Historic Park, the refuge will use wildlife control specialists to reduce and maintain the deer population.

Comment: A couple of commenters strongly supported the development and implementation of a deer management plan. One person expressed concern that if a deer management plan is not implemented as soon as possible, there won’t be a native environment to save. Audubon Pennsylvania commented that an overabundance of deer has a profound impact on forest structure and regeneration and is an issue that must be addressed to secure the future of forested habitats.

Response: We agree overabundance is a problem, as discussed in as discussed in Chapter 3, “Existing Environment,” and under objective 1.2 in Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation,” of the final CCP. The Deer Management Plan, which has been finalized in conjunction with the final CCP, describes the actions we plan to take to reduce the deer population.

Comment: One person recommended establishing and studying long-term deer exclosures on the refuge.

Response: We agree that establishing deer exclosures on the refuge is valuable. We have already established small comparative plots and studies to collect information used in developing the Deer Management Plan. We will continue to maintain and study these areas, and will use the information collected to implement our Deer Management Plan. Several other long-term exclosures have been installed to start native trees and shrubs, although the fencing needs to be replaced or repaired. After the visitor services step-down plan is complete, refuge staff will also consider installing interpretive signs for visitors to learn about deer, native plants, and exclosures.

Comment: Audubon Pennsylvania commended the Service for focusing on habitat impacts caused by deer instead of setting a desired density goal. They said the refuge will need detailed planning to determine the most effective and efficient methods for bringing the deer herd into balance with the available habitat at the refuge.

Response: Thank you, we agree with your comment. The Deer Management Plan will help us to do this.

Public Use and Access

General Public Use—(Letter ID #: 1, 2, 7, 14, 16, 17)

Comment: One person commented that some parts of the refuge are far to walk to and suggested using golf carts to transport visitors.

Response: We appreciate your comment and recognize that it may be difficult for some visitors to walk the entire refuge. We have allowed bicycle access on the refuge to address this issue. However, maintaining and storing golf carts would be logistically difficult, would divert staff time and refuge funding from implementing wildlife and habitat projects and priority public uses, and would likely increase disturbance of wildlife and habitats. For these reasons we do not intend to provide golf carts for visitors.

Comment: One commenter asked for more details on how the refuge works with senior citizens and suggested that we reach out to this demographic more for help with refuge projects and volunteering.

Response: Thanks for your suggestion on working more closely with senior citizens. We recognize that senior citizens have a lot to contribute to the refuge. Refuge staff encourages senior citizen volunteers and visitors. We currently work with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) and the Senior Environmental Corps for water testing. We will continue to look into new partnerships that could potentially reach more of the demographic. We welcome any assistance or recommendations in how we can engage this audience more effectively.

Comment: One commenter expressed concern about the impact that making the impoundment smaller would have on public use, stating that local people who hike and walk their dogs, who aren't birding, probably come to walk by the water in the spring.

Response: We recognize that people value the impoundment both aesthetically and for wildlife viewing opportunities; however, it also provides valuable habitat for migratory birds and other species of conservation concern. The Refuge System has a wildlife-first mission, and Service policy prioritizes maintaining biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of refuges. We will be conducting studies to understand how restoring part of impoundment will affect refuge biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health. The findings of this study will ultimately inform our decision whether or not to restore the impoundment to tidal marsh. Even if we restore part of the impoundment to tidal marsh, we anticipate that there would still be some impoundment left.

We do not yet know how marsh restoration would affect wildlife and habitat. However, one of the establishing purposes of the refuge is to protect Tinicum Marsh and freshwater tidal marsh, and to provide environmental education opportunities about the marsh. Restoring the marsh would facilitate the establishing purposes and bring marsh habitat closer to the visitor center, making it easier to conduct environmental education programs that focus on the marsh.

Comment: The Friends of Heinz Refuge (FOHR) commended inclusion of noise issues into the CCP as it affects both visitors and wildlife. They recommended that the Service gather as much noise-level data as possible and work with Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to develop a system of noise barriers along the I-95/refuge boundary.

Response: We appreciate FOHR's support on this issue. As specified in chapter 4, under goal 1, we plan to work with Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and Philadelphia International Airport to evaluate effects of traffic and airport noise on refuge wildlife to determine if a sound barrier is warranted. If warranted, we will determine location(s), design(s), and types(s) of appropriate barriers. In the interim we will encourage tree planting along transportation corridors to help buffer the noise.

Comment: A couple of commenters suggested increasing refuge visibility and presence in the western side of refuge, particularly by developing and distributing interpretive and trail signs throughout the area, developing and offering programs specific to the location at least once a month, constructing a small visitor contact station on the site, and offering refuge literature as part of the planned kiosk.

Response: We will be updating or replacing the existing kiosk and signs on the western side of the refuge. However, at this time, even if proposed increases in staffing and budget were implemented, building and staffing a satellite visitor contact station would not be feasible. We appreciate the recommendations for additional programs and outreach materials. We will consider them as we develop our visitor services step-down plan.

Comment: One commenter recommended providing a dog droppings bag dispenser near the three-panel kiosk, on the parking lot side, so it is visible to people who walk their dogs on the refuge. The commenter said that many people do not enter the visitor center so do not see or notice the existing dog droppings bag dispenser.

Response: Thank you for your comment. We will discuss placement of dog droppings bag dispenser in this location and will make appropriate changes if needed. Visitor service facilities will be further evaluated and improved through the visitor services step-down plan.

Comment: One person proposed improving trail access to the wetland restoration area and access to tidal mudflats along the creek.

Response: We agree that improving trail access is important. In the CCP, we include constructing a boardwalk into the tidal marsh (see map 4.2 of the final CCP) that would allow improved access while protecting sensitive resources. Darby Creek trail also has been rebuilt providing improved access to view the tidal mudflats. The restored trail is now open with a bench and view deck. The wetland restoration area also has a view deck. Additional improvements and trail access will be considered in the visitor services step-down plan.

Wildlife Observation **(Letter ID #: 1, 17)**

Comment: A commenter recommended having bird observation by the Morton House with binoculars and signage to alert visitors to the bird observation opportunity.

Response: Thank you for your comment. The Morton House is outside of refuge boundaries and jurisdiction. It is on the property of Norwood Township. Refuge staff will evaluate visitor service facilities such as binoculars and signage in the future visitor services step-down plan.

Comment: One person suggested establishing effective bird blinds to allow wildlife observation without disturbing the wildlife.

Response: Thank you for your comment. We agree that wildlife blinds are important tools that improve wildlife observation opportunities and decrease disturbance to wildlife. A new photography blind was added by the little boardwalk and two new view decks are designed into the new tidal marsh boardwalk (see map 4.2 of the final CCP). Refuge staff will evaluate visitor service facilities such as bird blinds as we develop the visitor services step-down plan.

Public Use Conflicts (Letter ID: 1, 2, 16)

Comment: Several commenters expressed concern about increasing conflicts between refuge users—particularly between visitors who come for walking and wildlife observation and the visitors who bike. Two commenters said that safety is an issue for walkers and wildlife observers, and traditional users, such as birders, get “run over” by bicyclists.

Response: We recognize that there can be conflicts between different refuge user groups. One of the reasons we have allowed bicycling on the refuge is to encourage more environmentally friendly ways for visitors to access the refuge instead of using motorized transportation. Managing multiple and sometimes conflicting uses on the refuge is often difficult. We have tried to address these conflicts in our Compatibility Determinations by creating stipulations to minimize conflicts. For example, we have limited bicycling to the main trails that are more equipped to handle more diverse uses. Furthermore, we are working to improve the enforcement of the stipulations, such as improving visibility of refuge signs and increasing outreach efforts to educate users about authorized public uses and locations. We encourage visitors to notify us if there are violations or ongoing conflicts and we will take them into consideration and revise the Compatibility Determinations, if needed. We are required to reevaluate non-priority public uses every 10 years, but will do it sooner if necessary.

Comment: A few commenters said that the refuge is like a city park to some visitors. One commenter observed that visitors may have a limited idea about allowed uses at the refuge and another commenter suggested limiting the number of visitors to maintain “refuge-ness.”

Response: We are committed to protecting wildlife and habitat and providing quality, wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities for visitors. We agree there is a balance between the number of visitors and types of public uses allowed and providing opportunities for quality, wildlife-oriented public use. Maintaining this balance can be a challenge. Because of its proximity to Philadelphia, many visitors to the refuge are more familiar with local parks, and the use of those spaces, than with the National Wildlife Refuge System. However, one of the refuge’s establishing purposes is to provide opportunities for environmental education. In addition, the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1996, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1253) requires us to facilitate opportunities for priority public uses where compatible. This, combined with its location, puts the refuge in a rare position to be an ambassador for the National Wildlife Refuge System and to share important conservation messages with diverse audiences. Reaching out to nontraditional audiences also supports many Service and Refuge System initiatives including the urban refuge initiative outlined in the Refuge System vision document. We believe, with proper oversight, refuge resources can accommodate the levels of public use described in the final CCP. We will continue to evaluate effects of public use on refuge wildlife and habitat as well as conflicts between public uses and will adjust activities as warranted.

Comment: Several commenters said that dogs are a problem on the refuge because there are some people who remove their dogs from the leash and do not pick up after their dogs. One commenter wants infractions to be documented, quantified, and posted to the public. If the infractions continue, the commenter said that dog walking should be disallowed at the refuge.

Response: We recognize that there are conflicts between user groups. While dog walking is not a priority public use, it is a traditional use on the refuge and many people participate in priority public uses while walking their dogs, such as environmental interpretation. We have tried to address these conflicts in our Compatibility Determinations by creating stipulations to minimize conflicts. For example, we have limited dog walking to the main trails that are more equipped to handle more diverse uses. Furthermore, we are working to improve the enforcement of the stipulations, such as improving visibility of refuge signs and increasing outreach efforts to educate users about authorized public uses and locations. Refuge Law Enforcement keeps written logs of warnings and tickets and we encourage visitors to call the visitor center if there are violations or ongoing conflicts. We will take them into consideration and revise the Compatibility Determinations, if needed. We are required to reevaluate non-priority public uses every 10 years, but will do it sooner if necessary. Refuge staff will evaluate visitor service facilities such as regulation signs when we develop the visitor services step-down plan.

Marsh Boardwalk
(Letter ID: 2, 16)

Comment: A couple of commenters proposed creating a new boardwalk to the marsh.

Response: We agree and have proposed constructing a boardwalk into the marsh under objective 4.1 in Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation,” of the final CCP.

Comment: A comment was made that the money allocated to build a new boardwalk out into the marshland should instead be allocated to upgrading the water control system. The commenter said that in more than 10 years, they have not seen anyone use the old bird blind that was formerly overlooking the marsh restoration area and that the proposed location of the boardwalk is farther than the average visitor will walk. They suggested building other infrastructure projects closer to the regularly trafficked areas.

Response: At this time, while we recognize that the boardwalk may be far for some people to walk, it would be difficult to construct a boardwalk closer to the major refuge facilities. The boardwalk will be built where there is tidal habitat and will be sited based on environmental concerns and conditions. One of the refuge’s establishing purposes is educating the public about Tinicum Marsh. The boardwalk will facilitate our ability to support this purpose. Once built, we will design environmental education programs to take advantage of the boardwalk. We recognize that controlling water levels in the impoundment is an issue. Please see our response to the last comment under “Impoundment Management and Restoration” above.

Refuge Signs
(Letter ID: 2, 16)

Comment: One commenter suggested putting better signs at the State Route 420 end of the refuge.

Response: Thank you for your comment, we agree and are in the process of developing better signs that should be put up this year.

Comment: One commenter recommended using the three-paneled kiosk near the entrance to the Dike and Haul Roads in a more dynamic way to educate and inform visitors. She said that we should make the information posted at the kiosk more interesting and timely with flyers about upcoming events, “bird/animal of the month” posters, etc. She also suggested moving the trail maps and activity brochures to the parking lot side of the kiosk since they are not visible to people who come directly from the parking lots.

Response: We appreciate your comments. These will be helpful for us to consider as we develop the visitor services step-down plan. We hope to complete this plan within 3 years of finalizing the CCP.

Comment: A couple of commenters suggested that the refuge post more signs for key locations, such as “Fisherman’s Pier,” “Observation Platform,” “Hoy’s Pond,” etc., including all the roads and trails. One person also suggested putting distance markers along all the roads and trails. All of this signage would provide visitors with points of reference for, for instance, describing the location of a wildlife sighting. Similarly, it was proposed that the refuge post a large, readable map of the trails at the refuge with all the key locations identified.

Response: We appreciate your comments. They will be important for us to take them into consideration as we develop the visitor services step-down plan. We hope to complete this plan within 3 years of finalizing the CCP.

Comment: One commenter suggested putting up signs to clearly notify visitors about prohibited and allowed uses on the refuge. In particular, she recommended putting up a sign saying “No Littering” since littering has been a consistent problem on the refuge, and posting a sign that outlines the rules for bicycling on the refuge.

Response: Thank you for your comment. Refuge staff have begun to put up regulation signs on trails within the refuge. Refuge staff will evaluate visitor service facilities such as interpretive and regulatory signs when we develop the visitor services step-down plan.

Environmental Education
(Letter ID #: 6, 9, 14)

Comment: Audubon Pennsylvania, the Wyncote Audubon Society, and FOHR all expressed support for the proposed environmental education programs. The Wyncote Audubon Society said that they support “the continued growth and development of educational and environmental programs at the Heinz NWR to build on the ongoing successful array of visitor services, improvements in trails, signage, as well as habitat management, deer control, and educational programs that have occurred since the opening of the Cusano Environmental Education Center.” Audubon commented that connecting urban youths to nature is a critical piece of meeting the refuge mission and that the refuge is an ideal place to introduce children to nature.

Response: Thank you, we appreciate your support on this issue and look forward to partnering with Audubon Pennsylvania, the Wyncote Audubon Society, FOHR and others to connect urban youth with nature.

Comment: The FOHR noted that there has been historic resistance by most local school districts to become involved with education opportunities offered at the refuge.

Response: The refuge has established strong relationships with some local schools and we hope to partner with new schools and school districts to expand our environmental education program. The environmental education component of the visitor services step-down plan will help us address this.

Comment: The FOHR also commented that they agree that making better school and refuge connections is important and offered a few suggestions for how the refuge could do that:

- Using citizen science programs as a means to track climate change parameters, excite visitors and students, and improve refuge visibility.
- Offering non-teacher-led field trips to make the refuge more competitive amongst its peers – docent training should be a high priority.
- Reactivating the Refuge Environmental Education Development (REED) team or creating a new one.

Response: We appreciate your comments. They will be important for us to take into consideration as we develop the visitor services step-down plan. We hope to complete this plan within 3 years of finalizing the CCP. We have proposed increasing refuge staff- and volunteer-led environmental education programs and will be involving partners in developing new programs and evaluating old ones. This may include reactivating the REED team or creating a similar team.

Comment: The FOHR also wanted clarity in the CCP about the intended source of funding for busing students to the refuge. Currently FOHR provides funds for busing inner-city students to the refuge—will this continue to be FOHR’s responsibility or will the Service start funding it?

Response: We appreciate FOHR’s support for refuge activities, including providing funding for busing students to refuge. Current refuge funding does not include sufficient funding for busing students to the refuge. We will work with FOHR and other partners to find ways to meet these needs, and hope that FOHR will continue to provide funding for busing students when needed. It is possible that sufficient funding from FOHR may not always be available, particularly as we plan to expand the refuge’s environmental education programs. We have modified language in chapter 4, goal 3, under “Strategies that apply to all objectives” to indicate we will work with FOHR to continue funding and pursue alternative funding or grant programs if needed for supporting transportation to and from the refuge.

Refuge Advertising and Visibility

(Letter ID#: 1, 2)

Comment: A few commenters said that there is a need to increase public knowledge about the refuge and its purposes. One person suggested using the Comcast public access service to help advertise the refuge. Two commenters recommended increasing signage advertising the refuge in the surrounding area, including increasing and improving signage on I-95 and near the airport. One commenter suggested adding “visitor center” onto signs to draw people to the refuge.

Response: We appreciate your comments. They will be important for us to take into consideration as we develop the visitor services step-down plan. We hope to complete this plan within 3 years of finalizing the CCP.

Comment: One commenter suggested expanding the refuge’s Web-based information and asked what that would entail.

Response: Yes we are planning to expand the refuge’s Web-based information as discussed under objectives 3.2 and 4.1 in Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation,” of the final CCP. Expanding the refuge’s Web-based information will involve developing additional programs and materials, finalizing the visitor services step-down plan, and working with partners to coordinate and cross-post information as appropriate. Some of the additional content will be fairly easy to develop and post. However, we are planning to develop programs specific to target audiences. This is a new approach to refuge environmental education and interpretation and will require more time and resources.

Hunting and Fishing

(Letter ID#: 1, 7)

Comment: A commenter asked if fishing is compatible at the refuge.

Response: Recreational fishing is an historic, priority public use on the refuge. It is allowed in the refuge, as per the Compatibility Determination in appendix B of the final CCP.

Comment: One person wanted to know what the process and timeline is to get a deer hunt established.

Response: Opening a refuge to hunting is a lengthy process. Prior to opening any refuge to hunting, the Service must complete several steps. First, we must meet the requirements of NEPA including involving the public and preparing the appropriate NEPA document (an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement) to evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives and the associated effects on the human environment. Next, we must prepare the NEPA decision document which documents the alternative (or combination of alternatives) we are choosing to implement. As part of this process, we must complete an evaluation of effects on federally listed species under section 7 of the ESA. We must also prepare a news release, an outreach plan, a hunt plan, a compatibility determination, and any refuge-specific regulations. Once finalized and signed by the Regional Director, necessary documents are submitted to the Service’s Headquarter’s office in Washington D.C. These documents must be submitted on or before January 31 to open for the following fall. Once initiated, this entire process would likely take about 2 years.

Comment: Several commenters were supportive of opening the refuge to hunting. A couple of commenters suggested opening a small, controlled deer hunt to help with deer management. One person suggested an early morning hunt from dawn to early morning. Another commenter proposed using sharpshooters to reduce deer numbers then using a hunt to maintain deer population.

Response: As specified in chapter 4, objective 5.2 of the final CCP, we will work with the Pennsylvania Game Commission to explore the possibility of opening a portion of the refuge to limited deer hunting in the future. However, these hunts are not expected to be adequate to control the deer population and could not be implemented quickly or easily. We plan to wait for the Folcroft Landfill remediation to be completed before we consider opening the refuge to hunting. This would help minimize conflict between hunting and other priority public uses, such as environmental education and interpretation.

Climate Change

Climate Change (Letter ID#: 1, 10)

Comment: A commenter wanted to know how we are addressing climate change.

Response: Currently, the refuge is implementing several monitoring programs to help us better address climate change. We will also be taking climate change into account for current, planned, and future restoration efforts. We discuss the specifics of this in section 3.4 of Chapter 3, “Existing Environment,” in the final CCP.

Comment: The Defenders of Wildlife wanted us to consider their factsheet on climate change and national wildlife refuge conservation planning as we finalize the CCP.

Response: We consider climate change to be an important issue in developing and implementing CCPs and refuge step-down plans and we are required to consider it in our planning efforts as per Executive Order 13514. We appreciate this information.

Refuge Partnerships and Volunteers

Partnerships (Letter ID#: 1, 14)

Comment: One commenter asked how we are interfacing with the Darby Creek Valley Association and the airport expansion.

Response: The refuge continues to maintain and enhance working relationships with local conservation associations and adjacent and nearby landowners. The airport expansion is occurring outside the scope of the CCP; however, the refuge continues to take an active interest in projects that are occurring in the area, including the proposed airport expansion. Refuge staff, PHL and FAA work together to review and comment on the appropriate NEPA documents for projects on the refuge and airport.

Comment: One commenter recommended that we consider including key partners (at minimum, FOHR representatives) in the development of phase two visitor services plans. They said that including representatives from the FOHR will help them to determine the additional resources they need to develop in order to be ready to assist the refuge with plan implementation.

Response: We value the contributions of FOHR members and our other partners. As we state under goal 3 in Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation,” of the final CCP, we will work with partners to develop new environmental education and interpretation programs and to evaluate current programs. We appreciate the willingness of FOHR to assist us in this effort.

Comment: FOHR commented that a few FOHR contributions were not recorded in the draft CCP, including the Groundhog Day Family Festival, the Nature Walk programs led by FOHR volunteers, the FOHR funding of busing for student field trips to the refuge, and the FOHR facilitation of the partnerships with Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and Longstreth Elementary School in Philadelphia.

Response: Thank you for providing this information. We will update our files. There are so many programs occurring on the refuge that it is difficult for us to capture all of them in the CCP.

Comment: FOHR strongly supports a more formal volunteer program. They suggested that priority funding opportunities be given to the refuge to fill the position of volunteer coordinator to facilitate environmental education.

Response: We appreciate your comment and the support of FOHR. We agree that a more formal volunteer program is important. While the volunteer coordinator is not currently our highest priority to fill, we will consider ways to strengthen the volunteer program with current staff during the development of the visitor services step-down plan.

Refuge Administration

Facilities (Letter ID#: 4, 19)

Comment: One person requested putting a portable toilet at the end of the impoundment trail away from the visitor center.

Response: Currently, there are two portable toilets along the impoundment trail, one at the parking lot and one at the observation tower. Portable toilets from the west end of the refuge (Route 420 entrance) were removed after years of vandalism. Refuge staff will evaluate visitor service facilities such as portable toilets when we develop the visitor services step-down plan. Installing additional portable toilets will depend on available staffing and budgets.

Comment: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) commented that future activities at the refuge that involve new construction or ground disturbing activity should be reviewed with their office on a project by project basis to assess potential effects on cultural resources.

Response: We concur. We will continue to work with PHMC to meet our obligations under Section 106 of the NHPA, as well as other applicable laws and regulations. This is stipulated in chapter 3, section 3.3.7 of the draft CCP/EA and chapter 4, section 4.2.7 of the final CCP.

Alternatives

Alternative B (Letter ID#: 2, 9, 15, 16)

Comment: A commenter wanted to know why there is a higher education component in alternative C but not in alternative B.

Response: Both alternatives B and C in the draft CCP included working with colleges and universities. However, under alternative B, we would focus more resources toward working with kindergarten through 12 grade students, while under alternative C we would put more resources toward working with colleges and universities. The intent is to set priorities to help us focus limited resources.

Comment: A few commenters, including Audubon Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Department of the Conservation of Natural Resources, expressed support for alternative B. The letter from Audubon Pennsylvania said that “Audubon supports the Service’s preferred alternative B, and hopes that funding levels for the National Wildlife Refuge System and John Heinz NWR in particular, will be sufficient over the next fifteen years to allow alternative B to be fully implemented.” The letter from the Pennsylvania Department of the Conservation of Natural Resources said that “PA DCNR supports alternative B because it provides the best opportunity to increase the population of State-listed plants and increase acreage of State rare natural communities such as freshwater tidal marsh and coastal plan forest.”

Response: Thank you for your comments, we appreciate the support of Audubon Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of the Conservation of Natural Resources, and others for our preferred alternative.

Alternative C (Letter ID#: 9)

Comment: Audubon Pennsylvania noted that alternative C calls for delayed restoration of the entire impoundment to tidal marsh in light of imminent sea level rise in the coming decades. However, they suggest that it may be most responsible to keep portions of the current impoundment separated from tidal flow and allow for human management of water levels so that some shorebird and waterfowl habitat can be assured every year.

Response: We appreciate your comments and we agree that there may be value in maintaining some of the impoundment. At this time, it is unclear what the relative benefits are to restoring some or all of the impoundment. We will be studying the potential environmental impacts of restoring the impoundment, including completing additional NEPA compliance, before we implement any restoration plans.

Planning Process and Policy**CCP Process (Letter ID#: 3)**

Comment: One commenter requested that we send postcards to area residents letting them know when public meetings are going to take place. She suggested that direct contact may reach more people.

Response: We made significant efforts to ensure that area residents were aware of the CCP planning process. We distributed press releases to local media, posted the public meeting information on the refuge Web site, and sent copies of newsletters to contacts on our mailing list. We are aware that several articles were also printed in local papers. The large quantity of area residents around the refuge makes it difficult for us to do mailings to all of them. However, we agree that we should add the mailing addresses for all refuge-adjacent landowners to our contact list, and we will do so for the final CCP and for future refuge activities.

Attachment 1-Letter ID Numbers and Respondents

Letter ID Number	Name or Public Meeting Date and Time
1	April 10, 2012 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. meeting
2	April 10, 2012 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. meeting
3	Jeannette Guess
4	Anonymous
5	Donna Wilhelm
6	Jane Henderson - Wyncote Audubon Society
7	Lois L. Brooks - Friends of Heinz Refuge
8	Mary Morrison - National Park Service
9	Brian J. Byrnes – Audubon Pennsylvania
10	Julie Kates – Defenders of Wildlife
11	Keith Brune – Philadelphia International Airport
12	Evelyn Martinez – Federal Aviation Administration
13	Christopher A. Urban – PA Fish and Boat Commission
14	Jean R. Diehl – Friends of Heinz Refuge
15	Frederick Sechler – PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
16	Debbie Beer
17	Stephen Kacir
18	Phone call with Philadelphia International Airport and Federal Aviation Administration
19	Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission