

Chapter 5



USFWS

Meeting at Mason Neck Refuge

Consultation and Coordination with Others

- Introduction
- Planning to Protect Refuge Resources
- Partners Involved in Refuge Planning
- Contact Information

Introduction

This chapter describes how we engaged others throughout the development of this CCP. It details our efforts to encourage the involvement of the public and conservation partners, including other Federal and State agencies, county officials, civic groups, non-government conservation and education organizations, and user groups. It also identifies who contributed in writing the plan or significantly contributed to its contents.

It does not detail the dozens of informal discussions the refuge manager and his staff have had over the last 5 years where the CCP was a topic of conversation. Those involved a wide range of audiences, including congressional representatives or their staffs, local community leaders and other residents, refuge neighbors, refuge visitors, and other interested individuals. During those discussions, the refuge manager and his staff often would provide an update on our progress and encourage comments and other participation.

According to Service policy, we must review and update our final CCP at least once every 15 years. We may need to revise it sooner, either in response to significant new information that would markedly change management direction, or if the Service Director or our Regional Director deem it necessary. If so, we will once again announce our revised planning and encourage your participation.

Planning to Protect Refuge Resources

Our refuge planning began informally in June 2006 at an initial strategy meeting between the refuge staff and regional office staff and culminates with this final CCP.

June 2 and 16, 2006:

We had initial phone calls between refuge staff and regional office planning staff. We discussed the planning process and distinguished between the responsibilities of the regional office staff, refuge staff, and a potential contractor. Also, we discussed the refuges' resources and the potential issues that would need to be addressed in the plan. We developed a tentative schedule for accomplishing the major steps in the planning process and determining when and how we should involve others.

September 28-29, 2006:

We held our first team meeting on Mason Neck Refuge. For both refuges, we drafted a vision statement, identified preliminary issues, determined what additional resource information we needed to collect and summarize, discussed who should participate on the core planning team, and what other experts we should consult to help us address planning issues. We also developed our timetable for the planning process.

November 6, 2006:

We wrote to the executive director of the VDGIF inviting representatives from the agency join our core planning team. He responded and nominated four individuals.

January 18-19, 2007:

The planning team leader met with refuge staff and the contractor to discuss aspects of the planning process that have been accomplished and what needed to be initiated. We also discussed other State agency and Service participation, drafted a vision and goals, shared information on the "Affected Environment," and developed plans for public scoping meetings.

March 7, 2007:

We distributed a one-page newsletter to over 200 citizens, local and elected officials, organizations and agencies, and members of the Friends of Potomac River Refuges mailing list to formally announce the beginning of the planning process. We also announced two public open houses we would host in later in the month.

March 27 and 28, 2007:

We hosted two open-house meetings in Woodbridge and Lorton, Virginia. We announced the meetings with notices published in local and regional newspapers, on the radio, in our newsletter, and on our regional planning Web site. Twenty-seven people attended the meetings.

At both meetings, we presented an overview of current refuge management, described the planning process, and explained how people can get involved. We also shared our preliminary vision and goals for the refuges and the issues we already knew we needed to address. We asked for feedback and answered any questions about the planning process.

March 29, 2007:

We convened the core team for the first time, including VDGIF and Virginia Department of Parks and Recreation members. Topics at the meeting included: the planning process steps, what had been accomplished to date, tentative issues to address, and a draft vision and refuge goals. We also identified other preplanning needs yet to be done, and other information sources there were.

May 15-16, 2007:

Refuge staff hosted a field trip to Mason Neck Refuge for the core planning team, including VDGIF and Virginia State Parks representatives, and other State agency and Service experts. The purpose of the field visit on May 15 was to conduct a Visitor Services Review of the refuge, its current program, and potential. On May 16, State agency and Service staff evaluated the refuge's biological program and discussed issues related to bald eagle and waterbird management, and the management of Little Marsh impoundment.

May 18, 2007:

We published a NOI to prepare a CCP in the *Federal Register* (72 FR 28066).

- October 4-5, 2007:** We held a core team meeting to review the status of the planning process, reviewed issues and discussed how to address them, revised the vision and goals, and discussed a framework for three potential alternatives for Mason Neck Refuge. On October 5, we invited the volunteer coordinator of the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District and the Potomac River Watershed Coordinator of the VDEQ to discuss water quality monitoring the use of volunteers. Members of the Friends of Potomac River Refuges were also at the meeting to learn about the State's volunteer program.
- December 2007:** We distributed a planning update newsletter to everyone on our project mailing list, as well as distributed it from the Refuge Complex office and at refuge events. We also posted the newsletter on our Web site. The newsletter summarizes what we heard at our public meetings, what we have been working on as a planning team, and it encouraged continued involvement in the planning process.
- January 9, 2008:** We met with Mason Neck Area Managers and provided an update on the status of the CCP process. Mason Neck Area Managers include:
- Bureau of Land Management–Meadowood Special Recreation Management Area
 - Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority–Pohick Bay Regional Park
 - Virginia State Parks–Mason Neck State Park
 - Virginia State Historic Site–Gunston Hall Plantation
- January 30, 2008:** We participated in the Friends of Potomac River Refuges Annual Meeting with the general membership attending. Comments were made in our presentation on the status of the CCP process and how to get involved in the process.
- February 20, 2008:** We met with Prince William County Supervisor Frank Principi. There was general discussion of the CCP process and the PHNST through Featherstone Refuge.
- March 12, 2008:** We attended a Friends of Potomac River Refuges board meeting and mentioned the status of the CCP.
- April 9, 2008:** We attended a Friends of Potomac River Refuges board meeting and mentioned the status of the CCP.

- April 10, 2008:** We discussed the status of the CCP at the Merrimac Farm Dedication with David Whitehurst and Jerry Sims of VDGIF. In particular, we discussed management of Featherstone Refuge.
- April 17, 2008:** We met with Jerry Sims and Rick Busch of VDGIF to discuss further details on the management of Featherstone Refuge.
- April 19, 2008:** We co-hosted the Eagle Festival and had a general discussion with interested individuals attending the festival on the CCP process, the status of planning, and how to get involved.
- April 28, 2008:** We met with Prince William County Supervisor Frank Principi, Prince William County Planner Pat Thomas, and NPS Heritage Trial Superintendent Don Briggs to discuss the CCP planning process and the PHNST routing through Occoquan Bay and Featherstone Refuges.
- May 1, 2008:** During the Crows Nest Property Dedication, we had a general discussion with Rick Bush and Jerry Sims of VDGIF on the CCP process and management of Featherstone Refuge.
- May 3, 2008:** We met with Jerry Sims and Rick Busch of VDGIF to discuss further details on the management of Featherstone Refuge.
- May 30, 2008:** We held a core team meeting to discuss progress on writing CCP chapters. We reviewed what the contractor had done to date and provided edits.
- September 16, 2008:** We held a meeting with Eddie Byrne of Kettler Development Corporation to discuss the new development adjacent to Featherstone Refuge and the refuge's needs for dedicated public parking.
- September 18, 2008:** We met with Jerry Sims of VDGIF about management of Featherstone Refuge.
- October 8, 2008:** We met with Jerry Sims, John Rohm, Ron Hughes, Joe Ferdenanson, and VDGIF for a tour of Featherstone Refuge and led a discussion of management activities.
- October 13, 2008:** We met with the Mason Neck Area Managers and provided a CCP status update.

- December 10, 2008:** We discussed the proposed Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail with other national wildlife refuge managers from Virginia, Nathan Caldwell from the Service's Headquarters, and National Park Service Trail staff present. There was general discussion on status of trail and a conceptual plan. We provided an update on the status of the CCP.
- January 23, 2009:** We provided a CCP status update at the Friends of Potomac River Refuges annual meeting.
- January 29, 2009:** We met with James McGlone, VDF, to discuss forest management planning for Mason Neck Refuge, which included a discussion of the CCP and proposed goals and objectives for forest management.
- February 2009–December 2010:** We continued to meet as a core planning team, meet with the Mason Neck Area Managers Group, and with VDGIF to refine our proposed goals and objectives.
- January 5, 2011:** We announced the availability of the draft CCP/EA in the Federal Register for 49 days of public review and comment. We also distributed a newsletter and sent out a press release announcing the public comment period and encouraging people to participate. The Federal Register notice, newsletter, press release, and our planning Web site also announced the three open house/public meetings we planned for February 2-3, 2011.
- February 2-3, 2011:** We hosted a total of three open houses/public meetings in Woodbridge and Lorton, Virginia. At each of the meetings, we gave a short overview of the refuges and the CCP planning process. We also recorded all the comments and suggestions provided at the meetings.
- March 2011:** We enlisted the USDA-FS's Recreation Solutions Enterprise Team to compile and analyze all of the response we received during the public comment period.
- April–June 2011:** We considered all the public comments we received and drafted a response to each substantive comment. Based on these substantive comments, we reviewed and revised, where appropriate, the draft CCP/EA.
- July–August 2011:** We compiled the final CCP for Regional Supervisor, Regional Chief, and Regional Solicitor's Office before submitting it to the Regional Director for review and approval.

Partners Involved in Refuge Planning

The refuges' programs enjoy a great deal of support from outside the Service in many arenas: conducting biological surveys, enhancing public use and refuge programs, restoring habitat, and protecting land. Our partnerships will continue to expand under the increasing interest in conserving refuge resources. During the past 5 years, we have kept the following partners about the planning process and encouraged their involvement.

- Friends of Potomac River Refuges
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- Virginia Department of Forestry
- Ducks Unlimited
- Audubon Society of Northern Virginia
- Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network
- The Hartwell Foundation
- Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech)
- Potomac River Region members of the Gateways Network
- USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA – Forest Service, Forest Health
- Mason Neck State Park
- Fairfax County School District
- Virginia Native Plant Society
- College of William and Mary – Center for Conservation Biology
- Audubon Naturalist Society
- Northern Virginia Bird Club
- USDA – Wildlife Services
- Prince William Conservation Alliance
- USDI-Bureau of Land Management
- Gunston Hall Plantation
- Pohick Bay Regional Park–Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

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Bill Wallen

Occoquan Bay refuge in the fog