

Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

Proposed Comprehensive Conservation Plan

USFWS/Steve Vittum



Refuge trails meander along the creek

The Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1943, lies on the eastern shore of Lake Champlain near the Canadian border in Franklin County, Vermont. The 6,592-acre refuge includes most of the Missisquoi River Delta, the largest wetland complex in the Lake Champlain Basin. As it flows through the refuge, the Missisquoi River is bordered by the largest and perhaps highest quality silver maple floodplain forest remaining in the state. The river meanders through extensive natural and managed emergent marshes of wild rice, buttonbush, and tussock sedge that host thousands of waterfowl during migration. That part of the river harbors rare freshwater mussels, spiny softshell turtles, and fish. Refuge lands protect the Shad Island great blue heron rookery, the largest colony in Vermont, and the entire nesting population of black terns in the state. Hunting, fishing, and viewing wildlife have long traditions in the Lake Champlain valley, and in and around the Missisquoi refuge.

A Conservation Plan for the Future

The Service has developed a draft comprehensive conservation plan for managing the refuge for the next 15 years. The core planning team consisted of the refuge staff, regional office planning staff, a regional biologist, and one member from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. The team also consulted additional resource professionals from the Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Resources Office in Essex Junction, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, and the University of Vermont.

We began preparing this draft CCP/EA in 1998. In 2000, we held three public scoping meetings in Swanton, St. Albans, and Burlington to introduce people to the planning process and to elicit their input on topics of interest to them. That same year, we also distributed copies of our “Issues Workbook” to more than 600 people, to help collect their ideas, concerns, and suggestions on important issues

associated with managing the refuge. The issues and concerns identified were carefully considered as the planning team developed the management alternatives proposed in the draft CCP. In 2002, staffing changes at the regional office and other refuge priorities necessitated a pause in the planning process. We restarted the CCP/EA in December 2004.

The draft comprehensive conservation plan proposes two management alternatives. The first alternative represents current management of the refuge. With this alternative, there would be no change in existing refuge staffing, funding levels, biological programs and public use opportunities.

The second alternative, the Service’s preferred alternative, proposes the following changes and others to existing wildlife and habitat management, and public use programs at the Missisquoi refuge:

- Expand inventory, monitoring, and management of the river delta wetlands to maintain their ecological integrity and the diversity of species on refuge land

Public Meeting Information

Date: March 31, 2007

Time: 1:00 - 4:30 pm

Location:

Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge
Refuge Headquarters
29 Tabor Road
Swanton, VT 05488-8148

Meeting Format:

1:00 - 3:00pm - Open House

3:00 - 4:30pm - Presentation and
Question & Answer

This location is fully accessible.

- Expand inventory of aquatic and upland invasive species and track annual distribution and control methods, and management results of these nuisance species on and around the refuge
- Increase management of high-quality grasslands, shrublands, and other early successional habitats for a range of wildlife species of conservation concern
- Submit proposal to remove Shad Island from 1974 proposed wilderness designation
- Provide more effective long-term management in the Shad Island and Maquam Bog Research Natural Areas through development of management plans.
- Enhance wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities (wildlife observation and photography, hunting, fishing, boating) that provide quality experiences for refuge visitors and protect wildlife and their habitats
- Enhance programs of outreach, and environmental education and interpretation to raise public awareness and involvement in the protection and stewardship of refuge wildlife and habitats

- Increase efforts to inventory, protect, and interpret the rich cultural history of the Missisquoi River delta and enhance partnerships with the local Abenaki tribe and other interested communities
- Provide a Geographical Information System (GIS) that contains current data on refuge biological resources that will more effectively and efficiently guide habitat and species management



Great blue heron rookery



- Introduce a new \$1 refuge activity fee to raise additional funds for trail maintenance, information kiosks, educational programs, and other visitor service improvements
- Expand refuge staff, including new law enforcement, park ranger, maintenance worker, and biological technician positions
- Work in partnership with others, to protect additional lands and waters, particularly intact, fully functioning wetlands and associated riparian areas and lands that maintain and expand the protection of large, unfragmented blocks of upland habitat for area-sensitive wildlife species

What can I do to get involved?

During the last week of March, we will distribute the draft plan for a 30-day public review and comment period. Please provide us with your comments by April 30. Send your comments to Carl Melberg, Planning Team Leader (see next column for contact information). Written comments are preferred, but you may also comment verbally at the March 31, 2007 public meeting noted on the front.

How to Obtain a Copy of the CCP

The draft CCP/EA is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Missisquoi/ccp.html>. To request the document in print or on CD, contact:

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For more information::

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>
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