

## Appendix G

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*Wildflowers and nonnative purple loosestrife*

# Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness Review

- Introduction
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## Introduction

The purpose of a wilderness review is to identify and recommend to Congress the lands and waters of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) that merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Wilderness reviews are required elements of Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP), are conducted in accordance with the national wildlife refuge (NWR, 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 regulations on public involvement.

Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are areas that meet the criteria for wilderness identified in the Wilderness Act. Section 2(c) of the act gives the following definition:

*A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions, and which 1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; 2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; 3) has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and 4) may also contain ecological, geological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.*

The wilderness review process has three phases: inventory, study, and recommendation. In the inventory phase, we identify lands and waters that meet the minimum criteria for wilderness as WSAs. In the study phase, we evaluate a range of management alternatives to determine whether a WSA is suitable for wilderness designation or management under an alternative set of goals and objectives that do not involve wilderness designation. In the recommendation phase, we forward a wilderness study report with recommendations on wilderness designation from the Director through the Secretary and the President to Congress. We prepare that report after our Regional Director has signed the record of decision for the final CCP.

We manage any areas recommended for designation to maintain their wilderness character in accordance with the management goals, objectives and strategies in the final CCP, until Congress makes a decision or we amend the CCP to modify or remove the wilderness proposal. If the inventory does not identify any areas that meet the WSA criteria, we document our findings in the administrative record for the CCP and end the study process. We will manage nonwilderness areas following the management direction outlined in the CCP.

## Inventory Criteria

The wilderness inventory is a broad look at the planning area to identify WSAs. A WSA is a roadless area of undeveloped Federal land and water that meets the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act.

## 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.

*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.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the roadless criteria:

- A. The area does not contain improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use.
- B. The area is an island, or contains an island that does not have improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use.
- C. The area is in federal fee title ownership.

*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.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the size criteria:

- A. An area of more than 5,000 contiguous acres. State and private lands are not included in making this acreage determination.
- B. A roadless island of any size. A roadless island is defined as an area surrounded by permanent waters or that is markedly distinguished from the surrounding lands by topographical or ecological features.
- C. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous federal acres that is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, and of a size suitable for wilderness management.
- D. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous acres that is contiguous with a designated wilderness, recommended wilderness, or area under wilderness review by another federal wilderness-managing agency such as the Forest Service, National Park Service, or Bureau of Land Management.

*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.

An area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole. In evaluating the naturalness criteria, we also consider significant hazards caused by humans, such as the presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity and the physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities. An area may not be considered unnatural in appearance solely on the basis of the sights and sounds of human impacts and activities outside the boundary of the unit. We considered the cumulative effects of those factors, in conjunction with the size of the land base and its physiographic and vegetative characteristics in our evaluation of naturalness.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating naturalness:

- A. The area appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.
- B. The area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole.
- C. The presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity or the existence of other significant hazards caused by humans.
- D. The presence of physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities.

*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 elements, 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 criteria; Congress has designated a number of wilderness areas in the Refuge System that are closed to public access to protect resource values.

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. These primitive recreation activities may provide opportunities to experience challenge and risk, self-reliance, and adventure.

These two elements are not well defined by the Wilderness Act, but can be expected to occur together in most cases. However, an outstanding opportunity for solitude may be present in an area offering only limited primitive recreation potential. Conversely, an area may be so attractive for recreation use that experiencing solitude is not an option.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive unconfined recreation:

- A. The area offers the opportunity to avoid the sights, sounds and evidence of other people. A visitor to the area should be able to feel alone or isolated.

- B. The area offers nonmotorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport.

*Supplemental Value*—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.

## **Summary and Conclusion of Wilderness Inventory Findings**

### **Evaluating Roadless Criteria**

The Montezuma NWR does not meet the roadless criteria. Refuge lands are bounded or divided by roads. A major highway, the New York State Thruway, runs east-west across the refuge, as does New York State Road 5 (NY 5)/US Route 20. In addition, NY 89 transects several refuge tracts, and NY 90 bounds refuge lands along part of the eastern boundary. The refuge also includes the 3-mile Wildlife Drive, as well as many service roads.

### **Evaluating Size Criteria**

The refuge does not include any roadless areas of at least 5,000 acres, or roadless areas of sufficient size to preservation 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 NYS Canal System, which includes the Cayuga-Seneca Canal and the Erie Canal. These large waterways cut across large portions of the refuge and dramatically influence the area’s hydrology. Constructed in the early 1800s, the canals drained area lands, dramatically lowering the water table.

Consequently, large areas that were formerly wetlands became arable, and the highly productive mucklands were actively farmed until they were acquired by the Service. After establishment, many of the former mucklands were converted to impoundments, utilizing existing farm dikes and other water control structures to intensively manage the land for the purposes of providing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. Currently, over 12 miles of dikes and at least 37 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 overlooks, trails, signs, parking areas, two observation towers, and boundaries that are maintained. Facilities currently include the refuge headquarters and nearby visitor contact station, two shop/maintenance buildings, and an office (former fur house). There are also two houses, one with two garages and a barn and one with one garage that dot the landscape.

Because Montezuma NWR lies at the north end of 38-mile long Cayuga Lake, not only are there numerous roads that pass through the refuge and surrounding area, but also other transportation and utilities that traverse the area. In addition to the numerous roads described in the “Evaluating Roadless Criteria” section, two rails pass through the area. Furthermore, multiple power lines transect or run adjacent to refuge lands. Several telephone, gas, oil, and other utility conduits run 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 150,000 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 is sufficiently large to allow visitors to experience solitude. Road noise is so great from the thruway and surrounding highways that virtually nowhere on the refuge is free from this disturbance.

### **Conclusion**

Montezuma NWR does not meet the criteria for a WSA and should not be recommended for further evaluation of wilderness potential. An inventory of the refuge concluded that it does not meet the minimum requirements for wilderness with regard to roads, size, naturalness, and solitude or primitive/unconfined recreation. 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, additional study is not warranted at this time.