

CHAPTER 1: THE PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION



Sunset over the Rappahannock River: USFWS

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Introduction

The purposes for establishing the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) are to conserve and protect fish and wildlife resources, including endangered and threatened species and wetlands. Refuge habitats include freshwater tidal marsh, forested swamp, upland deciduous forest, mixed pine forest, and managed grassland.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we, our) purchased the first tract of land for the refuge in 1996. By September 30, 2007, it comprised 7,711 acres. Within its 268,000-acre approved acquisition boundary (Service 1995), we are authorized to purchase up to 20,000 acres in conservation easement or fee title. That approved boundary lies on either side of the Rappahannock River, including parts of Lancaster, Middlesex, Richmond, Essex, Caroline, Westmoreland, and King George counties (see map 1.1).

This draft comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental assessment (EA) for the refuge combines two documents required by Federal law into one document:

- a CCP, required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1996, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Pub.L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1253; Improvement Act); and,
- an EA, required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq., 83 Stat. 852; NEPA).

Following the public review of this draft CCP, our Regional Director will decide on the components of a final CCP to guide refuge management decisions over the next 15 years. We will use the CCP to promote understanding of and support for refuge management among state agencies in Virginia, our conservation partners, tribal governments, local communities and the public.

Chapter 1 explains the purpose of and need for preparing a CCP/EA, and sets the stage for five subsequent chapters and nine appendixes. Specifically, chapter 1

- defines our planning analysis area,
- presents the mission, policies and mandates affecting the development of the plan,
- identifies other conservation plans we used as references,
- lists the purposes for which the refuge was established and its land acquisition history,
- clarifies the vision and goals that drive refuge management,
- describes our planning process and its compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations, and
- identifies public issues or concerns that surfaced as we developed the plan.

Chapter 2, “Description of the Affected Environment,” describes the physical, biological, and human environments of the refuge.

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Chapter 3, “Description of the Alternatives,” presents three management alternatives and their objectives and strategies for meeting refuge goals and addressing public issues. It also describes the activities that we expect to occur regardless of the alternative selected for the final CCP. The range of alternatives includes continuing our present management of the refuge unchanged, promoting a wide diversity of habitat types and enhancing visitor services programs, favoring forest habitat types, and improving visitor services.

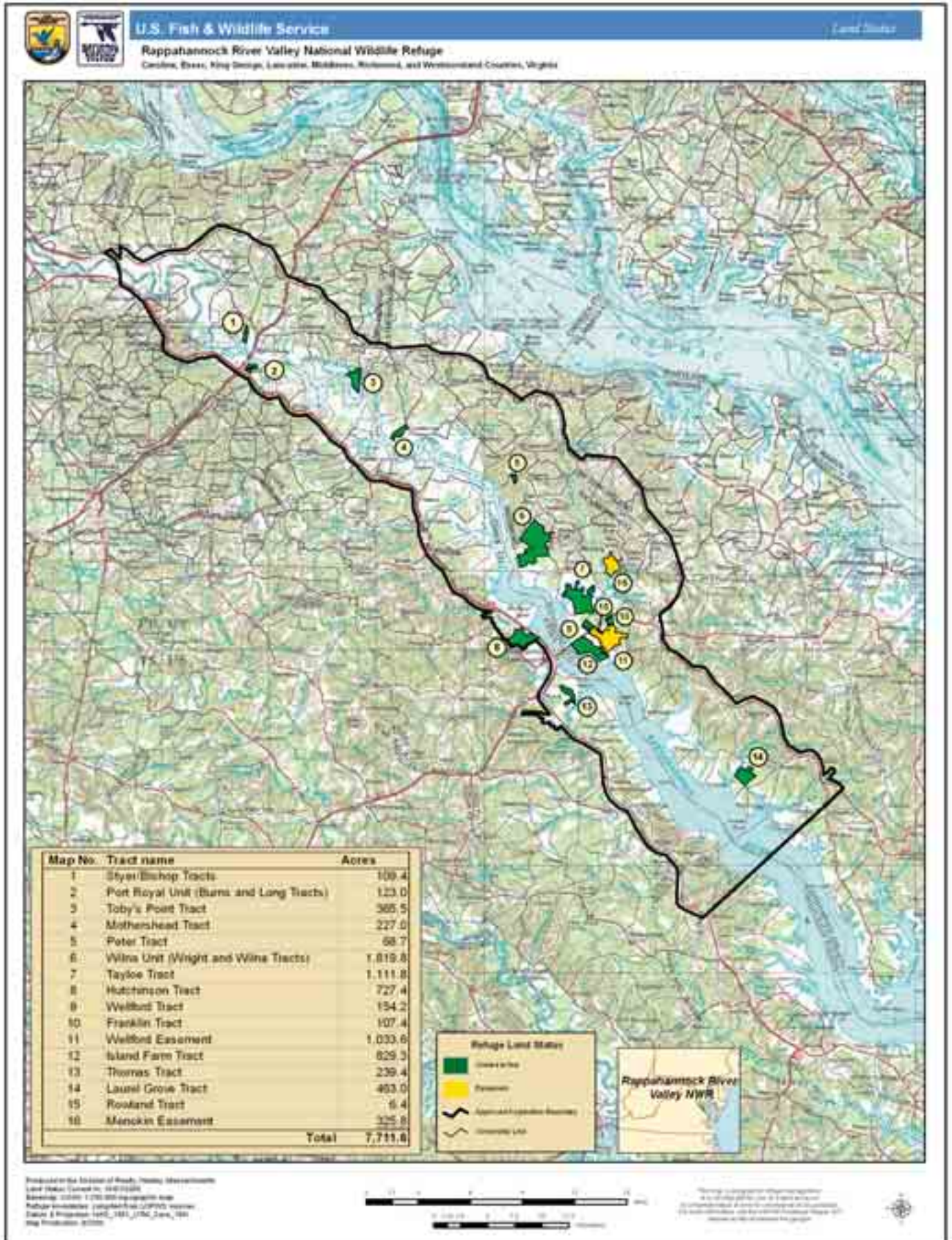
Chapter 4, “Environmental Consequences,” assesses the environmental consequences of implementing each of three management alternatives. It predicts the foreseeable benefits and consequences affecting the socioeconomic, physical, cultural, and biological environments described in chapter 2.

Chapter 5, “Consultation and Coordination with Others,” summarizes how we involved the public and our partners in the planning process. Their involvement is vital for the future management of this refuge and all national wildlife refuges.

Nine appendixes, a glossary with acronyms, and a bibliography (literature cited) provide additional documentation and references to support our narratives and analysis.

The Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action

We propose to develop a CCP for the refuge that, in the Service’s best professional judgment, best achieves the purposes, vision, and goals of the refuge; contributes to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System; adheres to Service policies and other mandates; addresses identified issues of significance; and, incorporates sound principles of fish and wildlife science.



Map 1.1. Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge and its Regional Setting

NEPA regulations require our evaluation of a reasonable range of alternatives, including a proposed or preferred action and no action. The no-action alternative can be either (1) taking no management action, or (2) not changing current management. In this draft plan, alternative A is the latter. All alternatives will be evaluated and compared as to how well they meet the purpose of, and need for, a CCP.

The *purpose* of adopting a CCP for this refuge is to accomplish the following goals:

Goal 1. Contribute to the biological diversity of the mid-Atlantic region by protecting, enhancing, and restoring the refuge's upland habitats, with an emphasis on breeding, migrating, and wintering birds.

Goal 2. Maintain the long-term biological integrity of riparian habitats along the Rappahannock River and its tributaries for bald eagles and other migratory birds.

Goal 3. Maintain and enhance the biological diversity and environmental health of tidal and non-tidal wetlands to benefit Federal listed species, waterfowl, other migratory birds, fish and shellfish, reptiles, and amphibians.

Goal 4. Promote enjoyment and stewardship of our Nation's natural resources by providing high-quality, wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities on refuge lands and waters.

Goal 5. Communicate and collaborate with local communities, Federal and state agencies, and conservation organizations throughout the lower Rappahannock River watershed to promote natural resource conservation and the mission of the Refuge System.

The *need* for a CCP on this refuge is manifold. First, the Improvement Act requires us to write CCPs for all national wildlife refuges by 2012 to help fulfill the mission of the Refuge System. Also, new Service policies providing specific guidance on implementing the Improvement Act have been developed since the refuge was established. A CCP incorporates those policies, and develops strategic management direction for the refuge for 15 years, by

- stating clearly the desired future conditions for refuge habitat, wildlife, visitor services, staffing, and facilities;
- explaining concisely to state agencies, refuge neighbors, visitors, partners, and other stakeholders the reasons for management actions;
- ensuring that refuge management conforms to the policies and goals of the Refuge System and legal mandates;
- ensuring that present and future public uses are appropriate and compatible;
- providing long-term continuity and consistency in management direction; and,
- justifying budget requests for staffing, operating and maintenance funds.

In addition, other needs are manifest. This refuge lacks a master plan to implement that strategic management direction and guide our decisions. The environment of the refuge has changed considerably since 1996. Most notably, the refuge grew to its present size. The economy and patterns of land use and land ownership in local communities are changing. The pressures for public use and access have continued to increase. New ecosystem and species conservation plans have developed that bear directly on refuge management. The priority of habitat management and restoration to control invasive plants has grown. We also must evaluate our administrative and visitor facilities, including their locations, to ensure the best customer service possible. Finally, as responsible stewards of Federal lands, conveying our vision and priorities for the refuge to our partners, local communities, and interested and affected individuals is imperative.

Regional Context

The regional context for our proposed action is the Rappahannock River watershed (figure 1.1). The Rappahannock River is part of the of the Chesapeake Bay/Susquehanna River ecosystem. The main stem of the river originates in Chester Gap, a mountainous region near Front Royal, Virginia, at an elevation of 1,350 feet. The Rapidan River joins it in the piedmont, and they continue through the western side of the coastal plain before reaching the Chesapeake Bay. The entire journey is 185 miles from source to mouth. The watershed of the two rivers combined comprises about 2 million acres (see figure 1.1).



Accessible fishing pier on the Hutchinson tract: USFWS



Map 1.2. Rappahannock River Watershed

The Service and the Refuge System: Policies and Mandates Guiding Planning

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its Mission

As part of the Department of the Interior, the Service administers the Refuge System. The Service mission is “*Working with others, to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.*”

Congress entrusts to the Service the conservation and protection of these national natural resources: migratory birds and fish, Federal-listed endangered or threatened species, inter-jurisdictional fish, wetlands, certain marine mammals, and national wildlife refuges. We also enforce Federal wildlife laws and international treaties on importing and exporting wildlife, assist states with their fish and wildlife programs, and help other countries develop conservation programs.

The Service Manual, <http://www.fws.gov/directives/direct.html>, contains the standing and continuing directives on implementing our authorities, responsibilities, and activities. We publish special directives that affect the rights of citizens or the authorities of other agencies separately in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR); the Service Manual does not duplicate them (see 50 CFR 1–99 at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html>).

The National Wildlife Refuge System and its Mission and Policies

The Refuge System is the world’s largest collection of lands and waters set aside specifically for the conservation of wildlife and the protection of ecosystems. More than 545 national wildlife refuges encompass more than 97 million acres of lands and waters in all 50 states and several island territories. Each year, more than 40 million visitors hunt, fish, observe and photograph wildlife, or participate in environmental education and interpretation on refuges.

In 1997, President Clinton signed into law the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. That Act establishes a unifying mission for the Refuge System and a new process for determining the compatibility of public uses on refuges, and requires us to prepare a CCP for each refuge. The act states that the Refuge System must focus on wildlife conservation. It also states that the mission of the Refuge System, coupled with the purpose(s) for which each refuge was established, will provide the principal management direction on that refuge. The mission of the Refuge System is

“to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.” — National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act; Pub.L. 105–57

The Refuge Manual contains policy governing the operation and management of the Refuge System that the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual does not cover, including technical information on implementing refuge polices and guidelines on enforcing laws. You can review the Refuge Manual at refuge headquarters. These are a few noteworthy policies instrumental in developing this CCP. You may view them on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/manuals/part.cfm?series=600&seriestitle=LAND%20USE%20AND%20MANAGEMENT%20SERIES>

Policy on the National Wildlife Refuge System Mission, Goals and Purposes

This policy (601 FW 1) sets forth the Refuge System mission noted above, how it relates to the Service mission, and explains the relationship of the Refuge System mission and goals, and the purpose(s) of each unit in the Refuge System. In addition, it identifies the following Refuge System goals.

- Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants;
- Develop and maintain a network of habitats;
- Conserve those ecosystems, plant communities, and wetlands that are unique within the United States;
- Provide and enhance opportunities to participate in compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation; and,
- Help to foster public understanding and appreciation of the diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.
- This policy also establishes management priorities for the Refuge System.
- Conserve fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats;
- Facilitate compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses; and,
- Consider other appropriate and compatible uses.

Policy on Refuge System Planning

This policy (602 FW 1, 2, 3) establishes the requirements and guidance for Refuge System planning, including CCPs and step-down management plans. It states that we will manage all refuges in accordance with an approved CCP that, when implemented, will help

- achieve refuge purposes;
- fulfill the Refuge System mission;
- maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System;
- achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System and the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; and,
- conform to other applicable laws, mandates, and policies.



Fall on the refuge: USFWS

That planning policy provides step-by-step directions and identifies the minimum requirements for developing all CCPs. Among them, we are to review any existing special designation areas such as wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, specifically address the potential for any new special designations, conduct a wilderness review, and incorporate a summary of that review into each CCP (602 FW 3).

Policy on the Appropriateness of Refuge Uses

Federal law and Service policy provide the direction and planning framework for protecting the Refuge System from inappropriate, incompatible or harmful human activities and ensuring that visitors can enjoy its lands and waters. This policy (603 FW 1) provides a national framework for determining appropriate refuge uses to prevent or eliminate those that should not occur in the Refuge System. It describes the initial decision process the refuge manager follows when first considering whether to allow a proposed use on a refuge. An appropriate use must meet at least one of the following four conditions.

1. The use is a wildlife-dependent recreational use as identified in the Improvement Act.
2. The use contributes to fulfilling the refuge purpose(s), the Refuge System mission, or goals or objectives described in a refuge management plan approved after October 9, 1997, the date the Improvement Act became law.
3. The use follows state regulations for the take of fish and wildlife.
4. The use has been found to be appropriate after concluding a specified findings process using 10 criteria.

You may view that policy on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/06-5645.pdf>.

Policy on Compatibility

This policy (603 FW 2) complements the appropriateness policy. Once a refuge manager finds a use appropriate, they conduct a further evaluation through a compatibility determination assessment. The direction in 603 FW 2 provides guidelines for determining compatibility of uses and procedures for documentation and periodic review of existing uses. Highlights of the guidance in that chapter follows:

- The Refuge Improvement Act and its regulations require an affirmative finding by the refuge manager on the compatibility of a public use before we allow it on a national wildlife refuge.
- A compatible use is one “that will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the Refuge System or the purposes of the refuge.”
- The act defines six wildlife-dependent uses that are to receive enhanced consideration on refuges: “hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.”
- The refuge manager may authorize those priority uses on a refuge when they are compatible and consistent with public safety.
- When the refuge manager publishes a compatibility determination, it will stipulate the required maximum reevaluation dates: 15 years for wildlife-dependent recreational uses; or, 10 years for other uses.
- However, the refuge manager may reevaluate the compatibility of a use at any time: for example, sooner than its mandatory date, or even before we complete the CCP process, if new information reveals unacceptable impacts or incompatibility with refuge purposes (603 FW 2.11, 2.12).
- The refuge manager may allow or deny any use, even one that is compatible, based on other considerations such as public safety, policy, or available funding.

Policy on Wildlife-dependent Public Uses

Part 605 Chapter 1 of the Service manual presents specific guidance on implementing direction, including the following criteria for a quality, wildlife-dependent recreation program. It

1. promotes safety of participants, other visitors, and facilities;
2. promotes compliance with applicable laws and regulations and responsible behavior;
3. minimizes or eliminates conflict with fish and wildlife population or habitat goals or objectives in an approved plan;
4. minimizes or eliminates conflicts with other compatible wildlife-dependent recreation;
5. minimizes conflicts with neighboring landowners;
5. promotes accessibility and availability to a broad spectrum of the American people;
7. promotes resource stewardship and conservation;
8. promotes public understanding and increases public appreciation of America's natural resources and our role in managing and conserving these resources;
9. provides reliable/reasonable opportunities to experience wildlife;
10. uses facilities that are accessible to people and blend into the natural setting; and
11. uses visitor satisfaction to help to define and evaluate programs.

Policy on Maintaining Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health

This policy (601 FW 3) provides guidance on maintaining or restoring the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System, including the protection of a broad spectrum of fish, wildlife, and habitat resources in refuge ecosystems. It provides refuge managers with a process for evaluating the best management direction to prevent the additional degradation of environmental conditions and restore lost or severely degraded components of the environment. It also provides guidelines for dealing with external threats to the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of a refuge and its ecosystem.

Other Mandates

Although Service and Refuge System policy and the purpose(s) of each refuge provide the foundation for its management, other Federal laws, executive orders, treaties, interstate compacts, and regulations on conserving and protecting natural and cultural resources also affect how we manage refuges. Our "Digest of Federal Resource Laws of Interest to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service" describes many of them at <http://www.fws.gov/laws/lawsdigest/indx.html>.

Of particular note are the Federal laws that require the Service to identify and preserve its important historic structures, archaeological sites, and artifacts. NEPA mandates our consideration of cultural resources in planning Federal actions. The Improvement Act requires the CCP for each refuge to identify its archaeological and cultural values. Following is a highlight of some cultural and historic resource protection laws which relate to the development of CCPs.

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 470aa–470ll; Pub.L. 96–95) approved October 31, 1979, (93 Stat. 721), referred to as ARPA, largely supplanted the resource protection

provisions of the Antiquities Act of 1906 for archaeological items. ARPA establishes detailed requirements for issuance of permits for any excavation for or removal of archaeological resources from Federal or Native American lands. It also establishes civil and criminal penalties for the unauthorized excavation, removal, or damage of those resources; for any trafficking in those removed from Federal or Native American land in violation of any provision of Federal law; and for interstate and foreign commerce in such resources acquired, transported or received in violation of any state or local law.

The Archeological and Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 469–469c; Pub.L. 86–523,) approved June 27, 1960, (74 Stat. 220) as amended by Pub.L. 93–291, approved May 24, 1974, (88 Stat. 174) carries out the policy established by the Historic Sites Act (see below). It directs Federal agencies to notify the Secretary of the Interior whenever they find that a Federal or Federally-assisted licensed or permitted project may cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, prehistoric or archaeological data. The act authorizes the use of appropriated, donated or transferred funds for the recovery, protection and preservation of that data.

The Historic Sites, Buildings and Antiquities Act (16 U.S.C. 461–462, 464–467; 49 Stat. 666) of August 21, 1935, popularly known as the Historic Sites Act, as amended by Pub.L. 89–249, approved October 9, 1965, (79 Stat. 971), declares it a national policy to preserve historic sites and objects of national significance, including those located on refuges. It provides procedures for designating, acquiring, administering and protecting them. Among other things, National Historic and Natural Landmarks are designated under the authority of this act.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 470–470b, 470c–470n), Pub.L. 89–665, approved October 15, 1966 (80 Stat. 915) and repeatedly amended, provides for the preservation of significant historical features (buildings, objects and sites) through a grant-in-aid program to the states. It establishes a National Register of Historic Places and a program of matching grants under the existing National Trust for Historic Preservation (16 U.S.C. 468–468d). This act establishes an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, which became a permanent, independent agency in Pub.L. 94–422, approved September 28, 1976 (90 Stat. 1319). The act created the Historic Preservation Fund. It directs Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their actions on items or sites listed or eligible for listing on the National Register.

The Service also has a mandate to care for museum properties it owns in the public trust. The most common are archaeological, zoological, botanical collections, historical photographs, historic objects, and art. Each refuge maintains an inventory of its museum property. Our museum property coordinator in Hadley, Massachusetts, guides the refuges in caring for that property, and helps us comply with the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act and Federal regulations governing Federal archaeological collections. Our program ensures that those collections will remain available to the public for learning and research.

Other Federal resource laws are also important to highlight as they are integral to developing a CCP. The Wilderness Act of 1964 (16 U.S.C. 1131–1136; Pub.L. 88–577) establishes a National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) that is composed of Federal-owned areas designated by Congress as “wilderness areas.” The act directs each agency administering designated wilderness to preserve the wilderness character of areas within the NWPS, and to administer the NWPS for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave those areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. The act also directs the Secretary of the Interior, within 10 years, to review every roadless area of 5,000 acres or more and every roadless island (regardless of size) within National Wildlife Refuge and National Park systems for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Service planning policy requires that we evaluate the potential for wilderness on refuge lands, as appropriate, during the CCP planning process.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended, selects certain rivers of the nation possessing remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, preserves them in a free-flowing condition, and protects their local environments. Service planning policy requires that we evaluate the potential for wild and scenic rivers designation on refuge lands, as appropriate, during the CCP planning process.

Chapter 4, “Environmental Consequences,” evaluates this plan’s compliance with the acts noted above, and with the Clean Water Act of 1977 as amended (33 U.S.C. 1251, et seq.; Pub.L. 107–303), the Clean Air Act of 1970 as amended (42 U.S.C. 7401 et seq.), and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531–1544), as amended. Finally, we designed this draft CCP/EA to comply with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500–1508).

Conservation Plans and Initiatives Guiding the Proposed Action

Birds of Conservation Concern 2008 Report

The Service developed this report (USFWS 2008) as an update to their 2002 report in consultation with the leaders of ongoing bird conservation initiatives and such partnerships as Partners In Flight (PIF), the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and Joint Ventures, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (NAWCP), and the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan. It fulfills the mandate of the 1988 amendment to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1980 (100 Pub. L. 100–653, Title VIII), requiring the Secretary of the Interior, through the Service, to “identify species, subspecies, and populations of all migratory non-game birds that, without additional conservation actions, are likely to become candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.” The overall goal of this report is to accurately identify the migratory and non-migratory bird species (beyond those already designated as federally threatened or endangered) that represent our highest conservation priorities.

The geographic scope of this endeavor is the U.S. in its entirety, including island “territories” in the Pacific and Caribbean. The report encompasses three distinct geographic scales – the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs), the eight Service Regions, and National - and is primarily derived from assessment scores from three major bird conservation plans: the Partners in Flight North American Landbird Conservation Plan, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan. Bird species included on lists in the report include nongame birds, gamebirds without hunting seasons, subsistence-hunted nongame birds in Alaska, and Endangered Species Act candidate, proposed endangered or threatened, and recently delisted species. Population trends, threats distribution, abundance and relative density were all factors considered.

This report is intended to stimulate coordinated and collaborative proactive conservation actions among Federal, state, tribal, and private partners. It is hoped that by focusing attention on these highest-priority species, this report will promote greater study and protection of the habitats and ecological communities upon which these species depend, thereby contributing to healthy avian populations and communities. You may view the report at: <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/reports/BCC2008/BCC2008m.pdf>. This is one of the plans we used in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies in goals 1, 2, and 3.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP; update 2004) and Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Implementation Plan (ACJV 2005)

Originally written in 1986, NAWMP describes a 15-year strategy promulgated by the United States, Canada, and Mexico to restore and sustain waterfowl populations by protecting, restoring and enhancing habitat. The plan committee, including representatives from each nation, has modified

the 1986 plan twice to account for biological, sociological, and economic changes that influenced the status of waterfowl and the conduct of cooperative habitat conservation. The most recent modification, in 2004, (NAWMP 2004) updates the needs, priorities, and strategies for the next 15 years, increases stakeholder confidence in the direction of its actions, and guides partners in strengthening the biological foundation of North American waterfowl conservation. You may review the plan at <http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/NAWMP>.

To convey goals, priorities, and strategies more effectively, NAWMP 2004 is comprised of two separate documents: Strategic Guidance and Implementation Framework, the former for agency administrators and policy makers who set the direction and priorities for conservation. The latter includes supporting technical information for use by biologists and land managers.

The plans are implemented at the regional level in 14 habitat Joint Ventures and 3 species Joint Ventures: Arctic goose, black duck, and sea duck. Our project area lies in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV), which includes all the Atlantic Flyway states from Maine to Florida and Puerto Rico. The waterfowl goal for the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture is “Protect and manage priority wetland habitats for migration, wintering, and production of waterfowl, with special consideration to black ducks, and to benefit other wildlife in the joint venture area.”



Scarlet tanager: ©Les Brooks

In 2005, a revision of the original ACJV Implementation Plan (ACJV 2005) was completed. The ACJV 2005 plan presents habitat conservation goals and population indices for the ACJV consistent with the NAWMP update, provides status assessments of waterfowl and their habitats in the joint venture, and updates focus area narratives and maps for each state. That document is intended as a blueprint for conserving the valuable breeding, migration and wintering waterfowl habitat present within the ACJV boundary based on the best available information and the expert opinion of waterfowl biologists from throughout the flyway. You may review the ACJV 2005 at http://www.acjv.org/acjv_publications.htm.

The Black Duck Joint Venture plan also relates to our project area. Black ducks use the refuge year-round, and are most plentiful during fall migration and winter. The Black Duck Joint Venture Plan, Final Draft Strategic Plan (USFWS/CWS 1993) can be viewed at <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bdjv/>.

We used these plans in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3.

New England/Mid-Atlantic Bird Conservation Region (BCR 30) Implementation Plan (2007)

The refuge lies in the New England/Mid-Atlantic BCR 30, which lists birds of high conservation priority for the region. BCR 30 provides important resources for migratory birds whose ranges span the western hemisphere. The habitats associated with coastal ecosystems provide the highest habitat values and critical staging areas for migratory waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds, and landbirds. Forested upland communities, are the second most important habitats for migratory birds in the BCR. The Chesapeake Bay and Delaware Bay, as well as other major bays in the BCR, provide crucial

resources for many migrating birds as they journey from their breeding sites in the north to non-breeding sites in Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South America.

Unfortunately, most of the lands in BCR 30 have been altered from their historic condition. Urban development and agriculture dominates much of the landscape. The loss or degradation of habitat (e.g., by fragmentation, agriculture, and invasive species) are the greatest threats to bird populations in BCR 30. This plan identifies the bird species and habitats in greatest need of conservation action in this region, activities thought to be most useful to address those needs, and geographic areas believed to be the most important places for those activities. This plan is meant to start a regional bird conservation initiative of partners across BCR 30 communicating their conservation planning and implementation activities to deliver high-priority conservation actions in a coordinated manner. You may view the BCR 30 implementation plan at http://www.acjv.org/bcr30_draft.htm.

We used this plan in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3.

North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (Version 1, 2002)

This plan (Kushlan et al., 2002) is an independent partnership among individuals and institutions with the interest in and responsibility for conserving water birds and their habitats. The plan is just one element of a multi-faceted conservation program. Its primary goal is to ensure that the distribution, diversity, and abundance of populations and habitats of breeding, migratory, and non-breeding water birds are sustained or restored throughout the lands and waters of North America, Central America, and the Caribbean. It provides a framework for conserving and managing colonially nesting water-dependent birds. In addition, it will facilitate continent-wide planning and monitoring, national, state, and provincial conservation, regional coordination, and local habitat protection and management. You may access the plan at <http://www.nawcp.org/pubs/ContinentalPlan.cfm>.

In 2006, the Mid-Atlantic New England Working Group developed the Waterbird Conservation Plan for the Mid-Atlantic/New England/Maritimes (MANEM) Region (MANEM Waterbird Working Group 2006). This plan is being implemented between 2006 and 2010. It consists of technical appendixes on (1) waterbird populations including occurrence, status, and conservation needs, (2) waterbird habitats and locations within the region that are crucial for waterbird sustainability, (3) MANEM partners and regional expertise for waterbird conservation, and (4) conservation project descriptions that present current and proposed research, management, habitat acquisition, and education activities. Summarized information on waterbirds and their habitats provides a regional perspective for local conservation action. You may access the plan at <http://www.fws.gov/birds/waterbirds/manem/index.html>.

We used this plan in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3.

U.S. Shorebird (2001, 2nd Edition) and North Atlantic Regional Shorebird Plans

Concerns about shorebirds led to the creation of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan in 2000. A second edition was published in May 2001 (Brown et al, 2001). Developed in a partnership with individuals and organizations throughout the United States, the plan presents conservation goals for each U.S. region, identifies important habitat conservation and research needs, and proposes education and outreach programs to increase public awareness of shorebirds and of threats to them. You may read the plan at <http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan/USShorebird/downloads/USShorebirdPlan2Ed.pdf>.

In the Northeast, the North Atlantic Regional Shorebird Plan (Clark & Niles, North Atlantic Shorebird Habitat Working Group 2000) was drafted to step down the goals of the continental plan to smaller scales to identify priority species, habitat and species goals, and implementation projects. You may view the North Atlantic Regional Shorebird Plan at <http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan/RegionalShorebird/RegionalPlans.htm>.

We used this plan in identifying species of concern in appendix A, and in developing management objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3.

National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (May 2007) and Virginia Bald Eagle Guidelines

In July 2007, the Service issued a final ruling to remove the bald eagle from the Federal list of endangered and threatened species. The bald eagle remains under the protection of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (Eagle Act) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). The Service developed National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines to advise landowners, land managers, and others who share public and private lands with bald eagles when and under what circumstances the protective provisions of the Eagle Act may apply to their activities. The guidelines help minimize impacts on bald eagles, particularly where people may constitute a “disturbance,” which the Eagle Act prohibits. The guidelines (1) publicize the provisions of the Eagle Act that continue to protect bald eagles, to reduce the possibility that people will violate the law, (2) advise landowners, land managers and the public of the potential for various human activities to disturb bald eagles, and (3) encourage additional, nonbinding land management practices that benefit bald eagles. We intended the guidelines primarily as a tool for landowners and planners who seek information and recommendations on how to avoid disturbing bald eagles. You may view the guidelines at <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/issues/BaldEagle/NationalBaldEagleManagementGuidelines.pdf>.

Because of the delisting, the specific guidelines for Virginia’s bald eagles, prepared by our Virginia Field Office and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), are being revised. The bald eagle remains a state threatened species in Virginia, and because of the importance of the Chesapeake Bay region for the entire Atlantic population of eagles, we will consider state guidelines regarding time-of-year restrictions and distance requirements from nests and concentration areas, even if they are more stringent than the national guidelines. We referred to those guidelines as we developed our management objectives and strategies for bald eagles.

Partners In Flight Bird Conservation Plans

In 1990, Partners In Flight (PIF) began as a voluntary, international coalition of government agencies, conservation organizations, academic institutions, private industries, and citizens dedicated to reversing the population declines of bird species and “keeping common birds common.” The foundation of PIF’s long-term strategy is a series of scientifically based bird conservation plans using physiographic areas as planning units.

The goal of each PIF plan is to ensure the long-term maintenance of healthy populations of native birds, primarily non-game birds. The plan for each physiographic area ranks bird species according to their conservation priority, describes their desired habitat conditions, develops biological objectives, and recommends conservation measures. The priority ranking factors in habitat loss, population trends, and the vulnerability of a species and its habitats to regional and local threats.

Physiographic Area 44—Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain (April 1999).—Our project area lies in Physiographic Area 44, the Mid-Atlantic Coastal Region. We referred to this plan in developing our list of species of conservation concern in appendix A, as well as our habitat objectives and strategies under goals 1, 2, and 3. This plan can be accessed at http://www.blm.gov/wildlife/plan/pl_44_10.pdf.

Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, National State Agency Herpetological Conservation Report (Draft 2004)

Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) was created in response to the increasing, well-documented national declines in amphibian and reptile populations. Many consider it the most comprehensive effort in herpetofaunal conservation. PARC members come from state and Federal agencies, conservation organizations, museums, the pet trade industry, nature centers, zoos, the power industry, universities, herpetological organizations, research laboratories, forest industries and environmental consultants. Its five geographic regions—Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest and Northwest—can focus on national and regional challenges in herpetofaunal conservation. Regional working groups allow for region-specific communication. The Northeast working group has developed “Model State Herpetofauna Regulatory Guidelines” which informs us on specific habitat management prescriptions for the benefit of different taxonomic groups of herpetofauna. We consulted these guidelines as we developed our strategy, this document can be found at (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/neparc/products/modelherpregs.htm>)



Northern water snake: USFWS

The National State Agency Herpetological Conservation Report (NHCR) is a summary report (PARC, 2004) sponsored by PARC that provides a general overview of each state wildlife agency’s support for reptile and amphibian conservation and research through September 2004. It lists amphibian and reptile species of concern for each state. Each state report was compiled in cooperation with its agency’s lead biologist on herpetofaunal conservation. That report can be accessed at <http://www.parcplace.org/documents/PARCNationalStates2004.pdf>. Its purpose is to facilitate communication among state agencies and partner organizations throughout the PARC network to identify and address regional and national herpetological priorities.

PARC intends to expand the scope of the NHCR to include other states, provinces, and territories. It will include other state agencies that are supporting herpetofaunal conservation and research, such as transportation departments, park departments, and forest agencies. The next NHCR report will integrate a list of the Species of Conservation Concern into each state’s comprehensive conservation wildlife strategy (see below).

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries Program, Northeast Region Strategic Plan 2009-2013 (January 2009)

The Service's Fisheries Program (Program) primary mission is to work with others to maintain self-sustaining, healthy populations of coastal and anadromous fish (fish that spend part of their lives in fresh water and part in the ocean), fish species that cross state or national boundaries, and endangered aquatic animals and their habitats. In the Northeast Region, 25 fishery management offices and national fish hatcheries work with states and other partners to restore and protect a variety of fish and other aquatic species. Examples include Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*), American shad (*Alosa sapidissima*), river herring (*Alosa pseudoharengus*, *Alosa aestivalis*), sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus*), horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*), American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*), and menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*).

The Program has played a vital role in conserving and managing fish and other aquatic resources since 1871. Today, the Program is a critical partner with states, Tribes, other governments, other Service programs, private organizations, public institutions, and interested citizens in a larger effort to conserve these important resources. In 2002, working with its many partners in aquatic conservation through the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council's Fisheries Steering Committee, the Service completed its Strategic Vision (Vision) document: "Conserving America's Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries Program Vision for the Future." That vision document includes goals, objectives, and action items on a national programmatic scale.

The Program is committed to working with partners to

- Protect the health of aquatic habitats;
- Restore fish and other aquatic resources; and
- Provide opportunities to enjoy the many benefits of healthy aquatic resources.

The Regional Fisheries Program Strategic Plan (plan) is an extension of the vision, describing more specifically the tactics to be implemented by the Northeast Region to fulfill the goals and objectives identified in the vision. The first plan covered years 2004 to 2008. The current plan can be viewed at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/fisheries/>.

This plan brings together changing national direction, institutional knowledge, analysis of spatial information, and the perspectives of our state and tribal partners to develop a strategic plan that allows this regional program to prioritize its efforts during challenging times, while promoting positive change into the future. As the plan is implemented it will we build on a strong foundation of active partnerships and past accomplishments, while recognizing that continued communication, cooperation and expansion of partnerships is essential for successful implementation of this plan and fulfillment of the Program's resource responsibilities and obligations. This plan was built off the lessons learned from implementing the 2004-2008 strategic plan, which was very broad.

One step-down effort resulting from the plan is the identification and ranking of fish and other aquatic species as to their level of conservation concern by hydrologic unit. We used this ranking and have consulted with the Regional Fisheries Program staff in developing aquatic objectives and strategies under goal 3, and in creating appendix A, "Species and Habitats of Conservation Concern on the Refuge and Other Refuge Species Lists."

Virginia Wildlife Action Plan (October 2005)

In 2002, Congress created the State Wildlife Grant Program (SWG), and appropriated \$80 million in state grants. The purpose of the program is to help state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies conserve fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need. The funds appropriated under the program are allocated to each state according to a formula that takes into account its size and population.

To be eligible for additional Federal grants, and to satisfy the requirements for participating in the SWG program, each state and U.S. territory was charged with developing a statewide “Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy” and submitting it to the National Advisory Acceptance Team by October 1, 2005. Each plan must address eight required elements, and each plan is to identify and focus on “species of greatest conservation need,” yet address the “full array of wildlife” and wildlife-related issues, and “keep common species common.”

The Virginia plan (VDGIF 2005), commonly referred to as the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan (VA WAP) resulted from that charge. It creates a vision for conserving Virginia’s wildlife and stimulates other states, Federal agencies, and conservation partners to think strategically about their individual and coordinated roles in prioritizing conservation.

In addressing the eight elements below, the VA WAP helps supplement the information we gathered on species and habitat occurrences and their distribution in our area analysis, and helps us identify conservation threats and management strategies for species and habitats of conservation concern in the CCP. The expertise convened to compile this plan and its partner and public involvement further enhance its benefits for us. We used the VA WAP in developing our list of species of concern in appendix A, and the management objectives and strategies for goals 1, 2, and 3. These are its eight elements:

1. information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the state fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the state’s wildlife;
2. descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to the conservation of species identified in element 1;
3. descriptions of problems that may adversely affect species identified in element 1 or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats;
4. descriptions of conservation actions necessary to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions;
5. plans proposed for monitoring species identified in element 1 and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in element 4, and for adapting those conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions;
6. description of procedures to review the plan at intervals not to exceed 10 years;
7. plans for coordinating, to the extent feasible, the development, implementation, review, and revision of the plan strategy with Federal, state, and local agencies and Native American tribes that manage significant areas of land and water within the state, or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats; and,
8. plans for involving the public in the development and implementation of plan strategies.

The State of Virginia completed its final WAP, with no changes from its draft, in October 2005. You may view it at <http://www.vawildlifestrategies.org/draft.html>.

Other Information Sources

We also consulted the plans and resources below as we refined our management objectives and strategies, especially those with a local context.

Continental or National Plans

- Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan; available at <https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/ES-Programs/Conservation/Fishery/fishery.html>
- National Wetlands Research Center Strategic Plan; available at <http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/about/5-year-plan.htm>
- National Audubon Society Watchlist; available at <http://web1.audubon.org/science/species/watchlist/>

Regional Plans

- CHESAPEAKE 2000 A Watershed Partnership; available at: <http://www.chesapeakebay.net/pubs/agree99.PDF>
- Ducks Unlimited Conservation Plan; available at <http://www.ducks.org/Conservation/ConservationPlan/1516/InternationalConservationPlan.html>
- The Chesapeake Rivers Site Conservation Plan (TNC) ; available at: http://conserveonline.org/coldocs/2001/08/chesriv_plan.zip/?searchterm=chesriv_plan
- Chesapeake Bay Lowlands Ecoregional Plan (TNC) ; available at <http://conserveonline.org/docs/2005/03/CBYplan.pdf>
- Partners for Wildlife Strategic Plan; available at: <http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/partners/web/pdf/783.pdf>
- Fisheries Program – Northeast Region Strategic Plan; available at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/fisheries/docs/reports/Regional%20Strategic%20Plan%20Final.pdf>

State Plans

- Business Plan for Environmental Education; available at <http://www.vanaturally.com/pdf/busplan.pdf>
- VA Outdoors Plan and/or Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORP); available at http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational_planning/vop.sht

Local Plans

- Northern Neck PDC: Cat Point Creek Watershed Management Plan 2004; available at http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil_&_water/documents/02-CatPointCreekWMP-2004.pdf

Individual Species Plans

- Atlantic Flyway Mute Swan Management Plan; available at <http://www.mdwfa.org/flyway/muteswanchesapeakebaymanagementplan.pdf>
- American Woodcock Management Plan; available at <http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps2111/nativefilesharvest/wdckrept.html>
- Black Duck Joint Venture; available at <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bdjbv/bdjbvstpl.htm>
- King Rail Conservation Plan; available at http://www.fws.gov/midwest/MidwestBird/FocalSpecies/documents/Draft_King_Rail_Conservation_Plan.pdf

- Northern bobwhite conservation initiative; available at <http://www.bobwhiteconservation.org/>
- Sensitive Joint-Vetch Recovery Plan; available at http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plans/1995/950929b.pdf
- American Shad and River Herring Fisheries Management Plan (spawning/nurseries); available at <http://www.asmfc.org/speciesDocuments/shad/fmps/1985FMP.pdf>
- Final Recovery Plan for the Shortnose Sturgeon; available at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pdfs/recovery/sturgeon_shortnose.pdf
- Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Sturgeon and its amendments and addendums; available at <http://www.asmfc.org/speciesDocuments/sturgeon/fmps/fmps/sturgeonFMP.pdf>
- American Eel Fisheries Management Plan and addendum; available at <http://www.asmfc.org/speciesDocuments/eel/fmps/eelFMP.pdf>
- Management Plan for the Atlantic Population of Canada Geese; available at http://www.mdwfa.org/flyway/CAGO_APMgmtPlanMarch2008.pdf
- Management Plan for the Eastern population of Tundra Swans; available at <http://www.mdwfa.org/flyway/FinalEPTUSWPlanJuly-07.pdf>
- Small-Whorled Pagonia Recovery Plan; available at http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plans/1992/921113b.pdf

Refuge Establishing Purposes and Land Acquisition History

The refuge was established in 1996 for the following purposes and under the following authorities.

“for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources...” 16 U.S.C. §742f(a) (4), and

“for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude...” 16 U.S.C. §742f(b) (1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956), and

“the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions ...” 16 U.S.C. §3901(b), 100 Stat. 3583 (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986), and

“to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species...or (B) plants...” 16 U.S.C. §1534 (Endangered Species Act of 1973), and

“for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds...” 16 U.S.C. §715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act).

Figure 1.1 above depicts the refuge ownership boundary as of September 30, 2007. Table 1.1 below summarizes the land acquisition history of the refuge by year.

Table 1.1. History of land acquisition at the Rappahannock River Valley refuge through September 30, 2007

Acquisition Date	Acreage	Funding Source
1996	1112	Donation
1998	41	LWCF ²
1999	2651	LWCF; Donation
2000	166	LWCF; MBCF ³
2001	860	LWCF
2003	686	LWCF
2004	1015	MBCF; LWCF
2005	1180	LWCF
2006	0	
2007	0	
Total	7,711¹	

¹The Service owns 6,352 acres in fee and 1,359 in conservation easement. Those acres are rounded to whole numbers; contact the refuge headquarters for precise acreages.

²LWCF—Land and Water Conservation Fund.—funding sources include revenues from the sale of surplus Federal real property, motorboat fuel taxes, fees for recreation on Federal lands, and receipts from mineral leases on the outer continental shelf.

³MBCF—Migratory Bird Conservation Fund.—the funding source is receipts from the sale of Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps.

Refuge Administration

We administer the Rappahannock River Valley refuge as part of the Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex, which also includes the James River, Plum Tree Island, and Presquile refuges. The refuge complex headquarters is located in Warsaw, Virginia.

This refuge complex now has seven permanent staff: a refuge manager, deputy refuge manager, refuge wildlife biologist, administrative assistant, a visitor services specialist, refuge law enforcement officer, and one maintenance worker. Seasonal staff positions will vary between one and five each year. Six of the employees are stationed in Warsaw; one is stationed in Charles City, Virginia. The position at the Charles City sub-office assists in visitor services for the entire refuge complex, and manages the day-to-day operations at the James River, Plum Tree Island, and Presquile refuges.

Refuge Operational Plans (“Step-down” Plans)

Refuge planning policy lists more than 25 step-down management plans that may be required on refuges. Those plans contain specific strategies and implementation schedules for achieving refuge goals and objectives. Some plans require annual revisions; others require revision every 5 to 10 years. Some require additional NEPA analysis, public involvement, and compatibility determinations before we can implement them.

The status of step-down plans on the refuge follows. This draft incorporates by reference those that are up-to-date. Chapter 3 provides more information about the additional step-down plans needed and their schedule for completion.

Chapter 1: The Purpose of and Need for Action

The refuge now has the following seven step-down plans in place. We will update them as warranted for consistency with the final CCP.

- Fire Management—completed 2002; scheduled to be updated in 2009 (Also see Appendix H for general fire program direction).
- Public Deer Hunting—completed 2002
- Public Fishing—completed 2003
- Environmental Education—completed 2004
- Avian Influenza Contingency Plan—completed 2007
- Hurricane Action Plan—completed 2007
- Chronic Wasting Disease Plan—completed 2008



Mt. Landing Creek: USFWS

We plan to complete the following step-down plans (also see chapter 2). Additional plans may be required depending on the alternative selected for the final CCP.

- Habitat Management Plan (HMP; highest priority step-down plan, to be completed within 1 year of CCP approval)
- Annual Habitat Work Plan (AHWP) (to be completed annually after HMP approval)
- Safety Plan (to be completed within 1 year of CCP approval)
- Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM; to be completed within 2 years of CCP approval)
- Inventory and Monitoring Plan (IMP; to be completed within 2 years of CCP approval)
- Visitor Services Plan (to be completed within 5 years of CCP approval)
- Law Enforcement Plan (to be completed within 5 years of CCP approval)

Refuge Vision Statement

Our planning team developed this vision statement to provide a guiding philosophy and sense of purpose in the CCP.

“On the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, birds will raise their young in native habitats of field, forest, and marsh. They will find rest and nourishment during migration and a haven in winter. We will manage refuge lands and waters with an emphasis on species whose populations have declined, assisting them on the road to recovery.

“In partnership with others, we will contribute to the communities where we exist, helping renew the health and vitality of the Rappahannock River and the Chesapeake Bay. We will compliment the rich traditions of hunting, fishing, forestry and agriculture on Virginia’s Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula.

“The refuge will serve as an outdoor classroom, where students of all ages will study nature’s complexity, contributing to our understanding and appreciation of the natural world and the National Wildlife Refuge System. All those who visit will find enjoyment in the presence of healthy and abundant fish, wildlife, and plants, and will leave with a renewed personal commitment to land conservation and stewardship.”

Refuge Goals

We developed these goals after considering the vision statement, the purposes for establishing the refuge, the missions of the Service and the Refuge System, and the mandates, plans, and conservation initiatives above. These goals are intentionally broad, descriptive statements of purpose. They highlight elements of the vision for the refuge that we will emphasize in its future management. The biological goals take precedence; but otherwise, we do not present them in any particular order. Each offers background information on its importance.

Goal 1. Contribute to the biological diversity of the mid-Atlantic region by protecting, enhancing, and restoring the refuge’s upland habitats, with an emphasis on breeding, migrating, and wintering birds.

Goal 2. Maintain the long-term biological integrity of riparian habitats along the Rappahannock River and its tributaries for bald eagles and other migratory birds.

Goal 3. Maintain and enhance the biological diversity and environmental health of tidal and non-tidal wetlands to benefit Federal listed species, waterfowl, other migratory birds, fish and shellfish, reptiles, and amphibians.

Goal 4. Promote enjoyment and stewardship of our Nation’s natural resources by providing high-quality, wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities on refuge lands and waters.

Goal 5. Communicate and collaborate with local communities, Federal and state agencies, and conservation organizations throughout the lower Rappahannock River watershed to promote natural resource conservation and the mission of the Refuge System.

The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

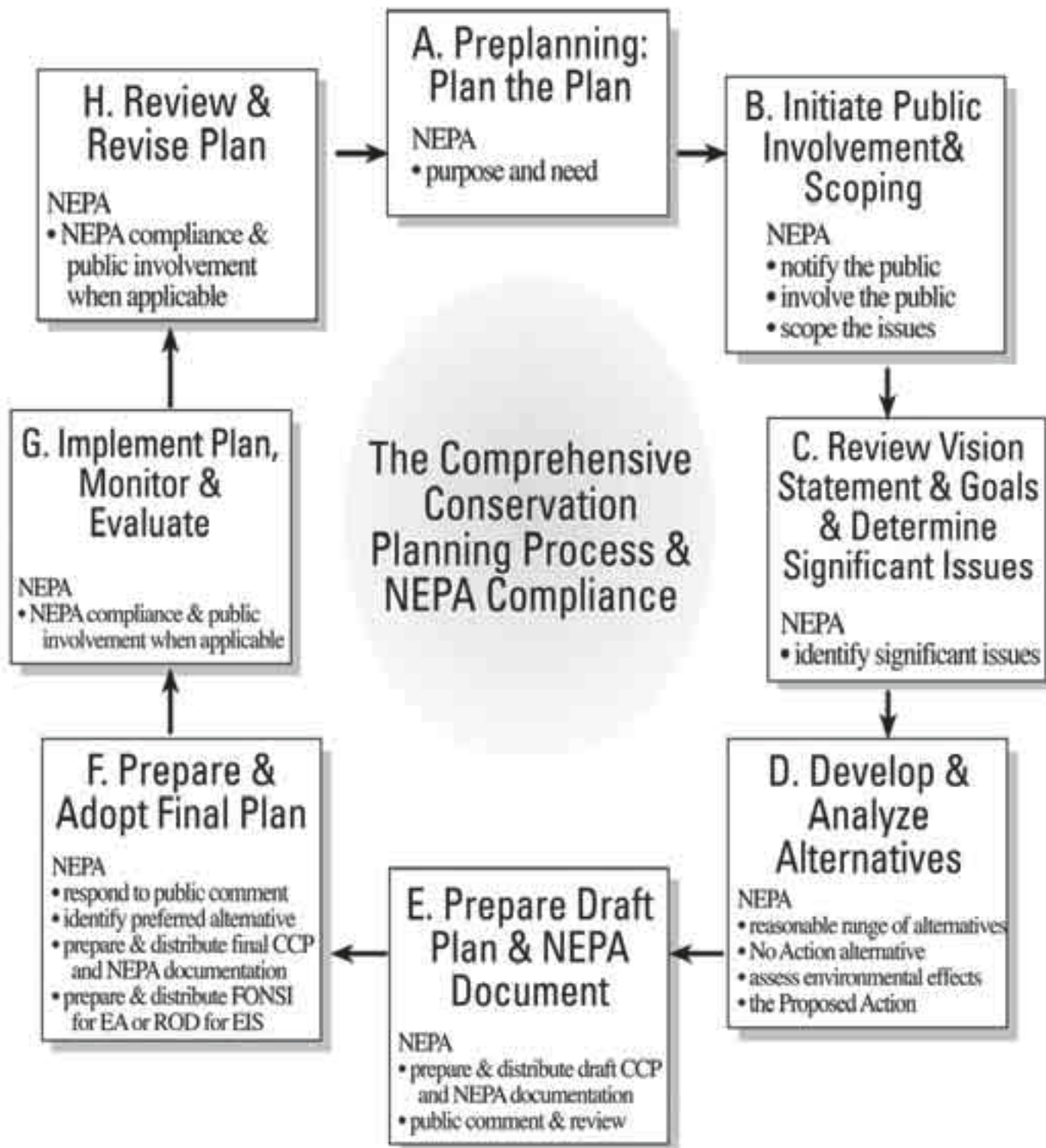


Figure 1.1. The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process and its Relationship to the National Environmental Policy Act

Service policy (602 FW 3) establishes an eight-step planning process that also facilitates compliance with NEPA (map 2.1). The full text of the policy and a detailed description of the planning steps can be viewed at <http://policy.fws.gov/602fw3.html>. We followed the process depicted below in developing this draft CCP/EA.

Since 1996, we have focused on conserving lands within the approved refuge boundary, facilitating wildlife-dependent public uses, managing habitat for several focus species, such as grassland birds and bald eagles, and establishing relationships with the community and our partners. In 2005, we began to prepare for developing a CCP by collecting information on refuge resources and mapping its habitats. We convened our core team, which consists of refuge staff, Regional Office staff, our VA Fisheries Coordinator, and representatives of the VDGIF. We discussed management issues, drafted a vision statement and tentative goals, and compiled a project mailing list of known stakeholders, interested individuals, organizations, and agencies. We also conducted a wilderness review, evaluated wild and scenic rivers potential, and summarized our biological inventory and monitoring information. We initiated all of those steps as part of “Step A: Preplanning.”

In November 2005, we started “Step B: Initiate Public Involvement and Scoping.” On November 1, we formally announced the start of the planning process in a Notice of Intent in the “Federal Register.” Also in November, we distributed a newsletter to approximately 310 individuals, organizations and agencies, announcing we were beginning the planning process and asking people if they wanted to remain on our mailing list.

In December 2005, we distributed copies of a planning newsletter and issues workbook to everyone on that list. Those workbooks asked people to share what they valued most about the refuge, their vision for its future and the Service role in their community, and any other issues they wanted to raise. We received 32 completed workbooks.

Early in December, we held public scoping meetings in Richmond, Port Royal, and Warsaw, Virginia, to identify public issues and concerns, share our draft vision statement and tentative goals, describe the planning process, and explain how people could become involved and stay informed about the process. Those meetings helped us identify the public concerns we would need to address in the planning process. We announced their locations, dates, and times in local newspapers, in special mailings, and on our website. Forty-five people attended those public meetings. Since then, we have also solicited public issues and concerns regularly from individuals through visitor contacts, refuge-sponsored events, community-sponsored events in which the refuge participated, and answered invitations to speak to community organizations.

Throughout 2006, we worked on “Step C: Review Vision Statement, Goals, and Identify Significant Issues”. We held a technical workshop to seek advice from technical experts on what resources of conservation concern in the refuge planning area should be a management priority. We also met with elected officials, our state partners, and other Service divisions to apprise them of the status of the project and exchange technical information.

For much of 2006 and into 2007, we worked on “Step D: Develop and Analyze Alternatives.” We compiled and analyzed various management alternatives to serve as the foundation for developing this draft CCP/EA. We distributed to our mailing list and posted on our website a planning update newsletter in April 2006. That newsletter shared our goals, provided an update on CCP activities, and summarized the key issues we would address in this CCP.

Also in 2006, the USGS Fort Collins Science Center helped us develop and implement a community survey to provide us with information on public satisfaction, preferences, and expectations regarding our current and proposed refuge management. We randomly selected more than 1,200 residences near the refuge to receive that survey questionnaire. The final report on the survey provided valuable

information for our management proposals. We distributed an executive summary of its results in October 2007; that summary appears in appendix G of this CCP. You may request the full report from refuge headquarters in print copy or on CD-ROM, or view it online at <http://www.fort.usgs.gov/products/publications/>.

In May 2007, we distributed another newsletter summarizing the three management alternatives we analyzed in detail for this draft CCP/EA. That completed Step D.

This draft CCP/EA represents “Step E: Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA document.” We will publish a Notice of Availability in the “Federal Register” announcing our release of this draft for its 30-day period of public review and comment. During that comment period, we will also hold public meetings to obtain your comments. We expect to receive them by regular mail, electronic mail, or at the public meetings. After the comment period ends, we will review and summarize all of the comments we have received, develop our responses, and publish them in an appendix to the final CCP.

Once we have prepared the final CCP, we will submit it to our Regional Director for approval. He will determine whether it warrants a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and may find its analysis sufficient to simultaneously issue a decision adopting a CCP. If he has concerns, he may require us to revise the EA or complete an environmental impact statement. We will announce his final decision by publishing Notice of Availability in the “Federal Register,” where we will also notify people of the availability of the final CCP. That will complete “Step F: Prepare and Adopt a Final Plan.”

Then “Step G: Implement Plan, Monitor and Evaluate” can begin. As part of “Step H: Review and Revise Plan,” we will modify or revise the final CCP as warranted following the procedures in Service policy (602 FW 1, 3, and 4) and NEPA requirements. Minor revisions that meet the criteria for categorical exclusions (550 FW 3.3C) will require only an environmental action memorandum. As the Improvement Act and Service policy stipulate, we will review and revise the CCP fully every 15 years.

Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

We define an issue as “any unsettled matter requiring a management decision.” That can be an “initiative, opportunity, resource management problem, threat to a resource, conflict in use, or a public concern.” Issues arise from many sources, including our staff, other Service programs, state agencies, other Federal agencies, our partners, neighbors, user groups, or Congress. One of the distinctions among the proposed management alternatives is how each addresses those issues. The following summary provides a context for the issues that arose during the scoping process.



Ovenbird nest: USFWS

Habitat and Species Management

National wildlife refuges primarily promote the conservation wildlife and habitats. That is our highest priority, and serves as the foundation for all that we do. Many refuges were established for a very specific purpose, such as protecting a particular species or habitat. Based on the several purposes for this refuge, and the discussions that took place up to the time of its establishment, the primary justifications for creating it were protecting bald eagles and wetlands along the lower Rappahannock River, and protecting a regionally important waterfowl migration and feeding area.

How best to protect, restore, and or enhance wetlands and their associated species on the refuge is an important issue we address in this draft plan. We heard many opinions on specific actions or

techniques to accomplish that. Some of those suggestions fall outside our jurisdiction. Some we can accomplish best in partnership with other Federal or state agencies. Others expressed concerns that our current management (e.g., restrictions on public use and access to protect wildlife and habitats) was impinging on the public use and enjoyment of the river, and recommended a more conservative approach to setting refuge regulations.

Most of the refuge acreage is upland habitat. Our management of that acreage, which also can directly affect wetlands nearby, is also an important management concern. Many migratory birds of conservation concern depend on those upland habitats when breeding, wintering, or migrating. We heard a range of opinions on which habitat types we should emphasize and which Federal trust and state species of concern should be a management focus. Some of those recommendations, in particular those for grassland and early successional forest habitats, can be labor-intensive. The alternatives in chapter 3 analyze different habitat management priorities.

The following key issues and concerns arose concerning habitat and species management.

- What is the appropriate amount and distribution of grasslands habitat to manage on the refuge?
- Is there a role for cooperative farming on the refuge?
- How can we effectively and economically control invasive plants, which are affecting the quality of habitats we provide on the refuge?
- What are the most effective and efficient measures we can undertake to protect, restore, and conserve wetlands and riparian habitats on the refuge and throughout the lower Rappahannock River?

Land Protection

Changes in land use and associated impacts that threaten the integrity of natural resources in the lower Rappahannock River area are increasingly a concern. Recently, we have observed lands that once provided contiguous habitat now are being sub-divided, primarily into residential lots. Although local communities may desire some of that development, our level of concern rises when those areas destroy or degrade important wildlife habitat, degrade water quality, restrict what was once public access to recreation areas, or spoil the rural landscape. In addition, those changes elevate the potential threat from invasive and exotic plants, which are becoming increasingly widespread and difficult to control. Our community survey revealed that, overall, community members are not in favor of increased development along rivers and streams.

Many organizations, including state and Federal agencies, are involved in protecting and conserving those qualities we mentioned on the lower Rappahannock River. We work with our conservation partners to identify sensitive wildlife habitat in need of protection or restoration. We also collaborate in outreach, education, research, and private landowner assistance. Service land acquisition, through either fee purchase or conservation easement from willing sellers, is one of the most important tools we use to conserve important areas of wildlife habitat. Up to 20,000 acres is approved for acquisition at the Rappahannock River Valley refuge. That land acquisition program garners a lot of public interest and attention. We heard directly from people who support our efforts to acquire and manage important habitat areas. Others were supportive as long as we allow public use and access on those lands. Some indicated a preference for the purchase of conservation easements, rather than purchase in full fee title. Others expressed concerns over the Service taking land out of the local tax base or taking agricultural land out of production. We evaluate and address those concerns in our proposed management alternatives.

The following key issues and concerns arose about land protection and acquisition.

- How can we address community concern over the loss of agricultural land production through Service acquisition?
- How should we prioritize lands for acquisition within the approved acquisition boundary? Do the original acquisition priorities (1996 EA) reflect our current priorities?
- How do we manage the conservation easements purchased for the refuge? In future easement acquisitions, what rights should the Service purchase?

Public Use/Community Relations

Our goal is to become an integral part of the socioeconomic health and quality of life of the communities we affect. The challenge for us is to understand the visions of the respective communities and our role in them while adhering to our mission. We also need to determine how best to nurture and cultivate the mutually beneficial relationships we have developed using the resources we have available.

During public scoping, and because of our community survey, we learned that many people are vaguely aware of the refuge, but are not particularly knowledgeable about the opportunities and services we offer. Others mentioned that they are noticing an increase in public awareness because of our refuge events and programs, and media attention. Some suggested ways we might conduct additional outreach. Others recommended additional recreational activities desired in the local communities. To them, providing more recreational opportunities was the best way to increase community interest and involvement in the refuge. Finally, some who felt well informed and satisfied about refuge activities valued the contribution of the refuge to the community and their quality of life.

In response to those comments and the issues below, our alternatives evaluate a range of quality, wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, and propose measures to promote Service visibility, community understanding and support for refuge programs.

The following are key issues or concerns that arose about public uses and community relations.

- How do we effectively conduct outreach to explain our regulations on beach use on the river?
- What administrative facilities, such as an office, visitor contact facilities, and roads are needed to manage the refuge, and where should they be located?
- How do we improve the visibility of the Service and the refuge in the local community?
- How can we deal with the potentially negative impact of roaming hunting dogs on wildlife, visitors, and neighbors?
- What other opportunities can we provide for compatible, priority, wildlife-dependent public uses?