

Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Planning Newsletter *April 2006*

“This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge’s next 15 years are full of opportunities for critical habitat conservation, wildlife-dependent recreation, and community involvement. By sharing ideas and concerns, area residents and community leaders can play a significant role in developing a shared vision for the refuge.”

- Refuge Manager Joe McCauley

A Conservation Plan for the Future

We continue to make progress in the development of a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The CCP will guide wildlife and habitat management, land protection, and public use programs on the refuge for the next 15 years.

Refuge staff, based in Warsaw, Va., are leading this planning effort with assistance from planners, biologists and other natural resource specialists from the Service and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Developing a CCP is an intensive process, which may take up to two years to complete.

The planning team has drafted a vision statement and management goals. It will develop specific objectives and will begin analyzing management alternatives in the next several months. Our next newsletter will include details about the proposed alternatives.

Opportunities for Public Involvement

We hosted open houses in early December to provide local residents and other interested individuals their first opportunity to become involved in the CCP planning process. Forty-five people attended these meetings, which were held in Richmond, Port Royal, and Warsaw. Participants made recommendations about how the



The refuge provides important habitat for wood ducks and other birds.

refuge should be managed and helped identify issues that we will consider in developing the CCP.

To learn more from the public, we distributed issues workbooks at the open houses, professional and partners meetings, and to individuals who participated in refuge hunting programs. The responses have provided insightful comments about current recreational opportunities, public access, and natural resource conservation programs at the refuge.

The CCP team, in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey’s Fort Collins, Co., Science Center, will distribute a survey to 1,200 randomly selected residents living within the Rappahannock River watershed this spring. The survey is designed to assess general knowledge about the refuge, and public perceptions and concerns about wildlife conservation in the river valley.

In addition, Refuge Manager Joe McCauley and refuge staff have met with civic and farming groups, conservation organizations, state agencies, and others to discuss the CCP. We will continue to encourage these and other groups and individuals to stay engaged in the planning process.

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Cat Point Creek

Identifying Refuge Goals

As part of the conservation planning process, the CCP team is considering the following management goals for the Rappahannock River Valley NWR. The refuge will:

- 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;
- Maintain the long-term productivity of riparian habitats along the Rappahannock River and its tributaries for bald eagles and other migratory birds;
- Maintain and enhance the biological diversity and environmental health of tidal and non-tidal wetlands to benefit waterfowl, marsh and wading birds, fish and shellfish, reptiles, and amphibians;
- 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; and

- 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 National Wildlife Refuge System.

Management Issues

We will evaluate and address several issues as the CCP develops. Several issues were discussed at the open houses hosted in December. These included grassland management, cooperative farming, depredation of agricultural land by over-abundant species such as white-tailed deer, controlling invasive species, community concern over loss of productive agricultural lands, land acquisition priorities, beach use on the Rappahannock River, refuge facilities, and hunting on the refuge. In addition, interest in a trapping program was expressed during the open houses.



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Wilna Grasslands

For Further Information

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Refuge News

Refuge Designated as a Chesapeake Gateways Network Site

On March 8, Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge was designated as a site within the Chesapeake Gateways Network (www.baygateways.net). Administered by the National Park Service, the Network is an interconnected series of sites that improve access to the Chesapeake Bay, and that enhance the interpretation and conservation of its resources.

Grant funding is available through the Network to establish water trails and interpretive facilities, which may provide a source of funding to support public use actions that may be proposed in the CCP.

Refuge Publishes "Conservation Easements - A Landowner's Guide"

The Rappahannock River Valley NWR was established in 1996 to protect the outstanding fish and wildlife habitat that exists in and along the river. The Service set a land protection goal for the refuge of 20,000 acres in seven counties, flanking both sides of the river from Skinkers Neck south to



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Mt. Landing Creek, a potential water trail access point

Belle Island State Park. As of 2005, the Service had acquired nearly 8,000 acres from willing sellers, including nearly 1,400 acres under conservation easement.

According to Refuge Manager Joe McCauley, purchasing conservation easements, rather than buying land outright, can be an economical way for the Service to protect wildlife habitats in the river valley. The land remains in private ownership, allowing landowners to retain property rights for certain activities such as farming, hunting, and fishing. The Service recently published "Conservation Easements - A Landowner's Guide"

for landowners within the refuge's boundary who may be interested in protecting all or part of their property for the benefit of fish and wildlife.

Refuge Launches New Web Site

Visit the Rappahannock River Valley NWR's new web site - www.fws.gov/northeast/rappahannock - for an abundance of information about the refuge and its wildlife and habitat management, land protection, and public use programs. Watch for updates about the CCP and opportunities to be involved in its development.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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