



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and Carlton Pond Waterfowl Production Area

*Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and
Environmental Assessment*

April 2013



Front Cover:

*Aerial view of Sunkhaze
Meadows Unit.*
Cheryl Daigle and Friends of
Sunkhaze Meadows NWR.

Back Cover:

Lily pads at Carlton Pond.
Danielle D'Auria



*This blue goose, designed by J.N.
“Ding” Darling, has become the
symbol of the National Wildlife
Refuge System.*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 150-million acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of more than 550 national wildlife refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries and 81 ecological services field stations. The Service enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance Program which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.

Comprehensive Conservation Plans provide long-term guidance for management decisions and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes and identify the Service’s best estimate of future needs. These plans detail program planning levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning and program prioritization purposes. The plans do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.



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Refuge Vision Statement

Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and Carlton Pond Waterfowl Production Area are a tapestry of natural lands within central Maine.

The Sunkhaze Meadows Unit supports an expansive, intact peat bog system. The free-flowing Sunkhaze Stream and its tributaries meander through diverse habitats including raised peat domes, grassy wet meadows, and floodplain forests before joining the restored Penobscot River. Mature upland forests surround the wetlands, protecting this unspoiled landscape for future generations of plants, animals, and people.

Bobolink and sedge wren sing and woodcock dance in the large contiguous grassland and deer overwinter in the forest mosaic comprising the Benton Unit. Wood turtles and rare mussels are protected by the wide, shaded riparian forests of the Sandy Stream Unit.

Carlton Pond Waterfowl Production Area is a beautiful wetland jewel amidst a pastoral landscape. Rare black terns nest in the emergent marsh, while bald eagles, bitterns, and marsh wrens forage amid the shallow open waters and emergent pickerelweed and wild rice.

Visitors experience nature and find respite there throughout the year. In spring, birders observe migratory waterfowl and songbirds. Wildlife enthusiasts and anglers enjoy fishing, paddling and hiking throughout summer. Hunters spend crisp autumn mornings stalking their prey. In winter, people snowshoe and ski through the silent woods. Through our close partnerships and programs, visitors gain further appreciation of conservation and are inspired stewards of nature.



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Summary

Type of Action: Administrative—Development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Lead Agency: U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service

Location: Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and
Carlton Pond Waterfowl Production Area
Kennebec and Penobscot Counties, Maine

**Administrative
Headquarters:** Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Rockland, ME

Responsible Official: Wendi Weber, Regional Director, Region 5, Northeast

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This draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzes three alternatives for managing the 11,876-acre Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and the 1,068-acre Carlton Pond Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) over the next 15 years. This document also contains six appendixes that provide additional information supporting our analysis. Following is a brief overview of each alternative:

Alternative A: This alternative is referred to as our “No Action” or “Current Management” alternative, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Under this alternative, no major changes to our biological, public use, or administrative management practices would occur.

Alternative B: This is the Service’s preferred alternative. It represents the objectives and strategies recommended by the planning team for best achieving the refuge’s and WPA’s purposes, vision, and goals and responding to issues. Under this alternative, we continue to focus on conserving the Sunkhaze Meadows peatland-wetland complex, maintaining late successional forest habitats, and managing grassland and shrubland where currently present. With the eventual addition of proposed staff, we would also expand programming and some infrastructure for public use.

Alternative C: This alternative also prioritizes conserving the Sunkhaze Meadows peatland-wetland complex. However, this alternative proposes expanding young forest and shrubland habitats. With the eventual addition of proposed staff, we would also expand programming and infrastructure for public use.

