

Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge

Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

Planning Update

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service/we) has released the final comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge. This is the product of an intensive multi-year planning effort by the Service with full involvement by state agencies in Maine and New Hampshire.

Highlights of the Final CCP/EIS

Similar to our draft CCP/EIS, we fully analyzed three alternatives for managing the refuge over the next 15 years. Of the three alternatives evaluated, we recommend a modified *Alternative B - Management for Particular Habitats and Focal Species*.

This modified alternative is based on public comment. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for planning this CCP/EIS provided the public with an opportunity to be involved in shaping the final plan through review and comment (see sidebar).

We believe modified Alternative B strikes an appropriate balance between resource protection and public use on existing and proposed refuge lands.

Umbagog Lake



Highlights of the plan include:

- Serves as a master plan for the refuge, providing guidance for management decisions over the next 15 years. The plan also provides the public with a better understanding of the direction the refuge is headed for wildlife management and visitor services, and public use and access.
- Conserves the integrity of vital wetland and upland habitats for the protection of water quality and the benefit of migratory birds, waterfowl and other species of regional significance such as common loons, bald eagle and white-tailed deer.
- Proposes the conservation of significant wildlife habitat with links to other conserved lands in the region. This provides a critical habitat component for wide-ranging species such as American marten and moose.
- Enhances and expands refuge visitor services and public use opportunities, and provides public access for wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, environmental interpretation, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, dog sledding, bicycling, horseback riding, camping, boating, and gathering of berries.
- Proposes the construction of a new refuge headquarters and visitor contact station.

- Proposes to use active forest management to achieve habitat goals.

Some Important Changes Made in Response to Public Comment

- Designated areas on the refuge would be open to certain public uses not included in the original proposal. These include dog sledding, horseback riding and bicycling, and the collection of berries, fiddleheads, mushrooms and shed antlers.
- The number of acres proposed for acquisition from willing sellers would be 47,807 acres. The Service is now proposing the acquisition of 56 percent of these lands in fee title (full ownership) and 44 percent in conservation easement, rather than 65 percent in fee title and 35 percent in easement.
- Alternative B has been clarified to more clearly state that the Service is not recommending significant changes to current hunting or fishing regulations on existing or proposed refuge lands.
- Snowmobile and other vehicular access, horseback riding and dog sledding would be provided on designated trails and roads on both existing and future refuge lands. The refuge would remain closed to ATV use.
- Decisions relating to furbearer management and trapping, and the expansion of the hunting program to include turkey and bobcat seasons, would be deferred and considered during separate planning and public involvement periods.
- Alternative B has been clarified to more clearly state that forest management would be used as a habitat management tool to help fulfill management objectives.

Upcoming Open House

Tuesday, December 16, 2008
Town Hall
Errol, New Hampshire

7:00 - 9:00 pm

This location is fully accessible



Dave Menke/USFWS

Among other species, rusty blackbirds will benefit from the refuge's objective of conserving boreal fen and bog habitat.



Erwin & Peggy Bauer/USFWS

Refuge management for focal species on both currently-owned and proposed refuge lands provide habitat connectivity for wide-ranging mammals including American marten.

Final CCP/EIS Available for Public Review

The final CCP/EIS is available for public review for 30 days, one of the last steps in the public involvement process we follow in making agency decisions under NEPA. We will hold an open house on Tuesday, December 16 in Errol, NH to provide information and address questions about the plan. You can access the document at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Lake%20Umbagog/ccphome.html>

Although this is considered a *review* period and not a formal *comment* period, we will certainly share any new significant issues with our regional director who will be making the final decision (see Next Steps).

Summary of Comments Received from our Draft Plan Release

The public played an instrumental role in shaping our preferred alternative in the final document. We evaluated more than 14,000 public comments received during an open comment period of 77 days. The issues and information that were raised influenced several changes to our final recommendation.

We received comments from government agencies, elected officials, conservation and preservation organizations, recreational organizations, animal rights groups, timber or wood products industry or associations, hunting and fishing sports clubs, energy industry companies, a civic organization, and an outfitter.

Because of the volume of comments we received and our interest in an objective analysis of them, we enlisted an outside agency to compile a database and prepare a summary report of all the comments - available on the web at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Lake%20Umbagog/ccphome.html>. All comments and our responses to them are summarized in Appendix O of the final CCP/EIS.

State agencies from both Maine and New Hampshire including Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game, and New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development, Division of Forests and Lands were represented on the core planning team. Many other state agency staff provided technical support for our plan. Our coordination with others is summarized in Chapter 5 of the final CCP/EIS.

To Obtain the Document and for More Information

The complete document is available online at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Lake%20Umbagog/ccphome.html>

For CDs or printed copies, contact:

Nancy McGarigal
Planning Team Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035
413/253 8562
northeastplanning@fws.gov

Next Steps

At the close of the 30-day public review period on January 5, 2009, our regional director will make a final decision. This will be documented in a Record of Decision (ROD). We will publish a notice in the *Federal Register* announcing the availability of the ROD. Once the ROD is prepared and signed, we can begin to implement the plan.

We encourage you to stay involved as we implement the plan. Cooperation from our neighbors, local communities, and conservation partners is vital to our success in managing all aspects of the refuge from conserving land, to managing habitats and protecting species, to outreach and education and providing wildlife-dependent recreation.

For Further Information

Paul F. Casey, Refuge Manager
Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 240
Route 16 North
Errol, NH 03579
603/482 3415
lakeumbagog@fws.gov
<http://lakeumbagog.fws.gov>

Federal Relay Service for the deaf and hard-of-hearing: 1 800/877 8339
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

December 2008

