

Appendix K



USFWS

The Wood Duck Nature Trail is a recycled railroad bed.

Finding of No Significant Impact

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Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

In February 2008, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA) for Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR; refuge), which lies in Sussex County, New Jersey and Orange County, New York. That draft evaluates three alternatives for managing the refuge over the next 15 years, and carefully considers their impacts on the environment and their potential contribution to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) and the refuge's purposes, vision, and goals. Alternative B is identified as the Service-preferred alternative. The plan's appendixes provide additional information supporting the assessment and specific proposals in alternative B, including Appendix G, the Land Protection Plan, which identifies a 9,550-acre expansion proposal. A brief overview of each alternative follows.

Alternative A (Current Management): The Council of Environmental Quality regulations on implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require this "No Action" alternative, which we represent as current management. Alternative A includes our current programs and activities and serves as the baseline against which to compare the other alternatives. Under alternative A, we would continue to use a variety of habitat management tools to maintain the refuge's early successional habitats, non-forested wetlands, grasslands and forested communities. We would continue efforts to protect the Federal listed, threatened bog turtle by managing occupied sites on refuge-owned lands and attempting to acquire occupied sites within the current acquisition boundary. We would continue to offer hunt programs for deer, spring and fall turkey, migratory birds, woodcock and resident Canada geese on our lands in New Jersey according to that State's seasons. We would maintain current access sites for fishing and boating, and current trails for wildlife observation and photography. We would continue to offer limited environmental education and interpretation programs, as staffing and funding allows. Finally, we would continue to pursue acquisition from willing sellers of the 2,021 non-Federal acres of important wildlife habitat that lies within our currently approved acquisition boundary.

Alternative B (the Service-preferred alternative): This alternative includes an array of management actions that, in our professional judgment, work best toward achieving the purposes of the refuge, our vision and goals for those lands, and the goals in State and regional conservation plans. Alternative B would expand the current refuge boundary by 9,550 acres through a combination of fee-simple and easement acquisition from willing sellers. The proposed expansion boundary encompasses a 15-mile tributary of the Wallkill River; includes tremendous wetland resource values and forms a key corridor connection between preserved habitats on the Kittatinny Ridge to the west and the Hudson Highlands to the east. Habitat types in the expansion area are similar in nature to the habitat types in the original acquisition boundary. Also under alternative B, we would take a more proactive approach to restoring wetlands and a 100-meter riparian corridor along either side of the Wallkill River. We would establish three grassland focus areas on the refuge and let other small fields revert to early successional habitats to benefit migratory birds. We would continue our current hunting programs on Service lands owned in New Jersey and add bear hunting according to that State's season. Other opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation would increase on the current refuge and would be added in the expansion area. Funding and staffing would increase to adequately support program expansions.

Alternative C: Alternative C would establish and maintain the ecological integrity of natural communities on the refuge and surrounding landscape without specific emphasis or concern for any particular species or species groups. Under alternative C, we would expand the refuge's current acquisition boundary by 7,609 acres to help restore the natural hydrologic regimen of the Wallkill River system. A bottomland hardwood forest component would be established on more than 70 percent of the current refuge. Sites prone to continuous flooding would likely be sustained as emergent marsh and shrublands. Upland sites would likely revert to a mixed mid-Atlantic hardwood forest association. We would attempt to restore the natural hydrologic regimen of the Wallkill River and its tributaries by removing man-made impediments to water flow. We would allow hunting for deer and resident Canada geese only. Other public uses within the current refuge boundary would remain the same as alternative A and additional opportunities would be offered in the proposed expansion boundary.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

We distributed the draft CCP/EA for a 66-day period of public review and comment from February 4 to April 9, 2008. We received 683 unique responses from 2,781 individuals/groups. Appendix J in the final CCP includes a summary of those comments and our responses to them.

After reviewing the proposed management actions, and considering all public comments and our responses to them, I have determined that the analysis in the EA is sufficient to support my findings. I am selecting alternative B, as presented in the draft CCP/EA, to implement as the final CCP. Alternative B helps fulfill the mission of the NWRS; best achieves the refuge's purposes, vision, and goals; maintains and, where appropriate, restores the refuge's ecological integrity; addresses the major issues identified during the planning process; and is consistent with the principles of sound fish and wildlife management.

I find that implementing alternative B adheres to all legal mandates and Service policies, and will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment, in accordance with Section 102(2)(c) of NEPA. Therefore, I have concluded that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and this Finding of No Significant Impact is appropriate and warranted.



ACTING
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Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Hadley, Massachusetts

1/29/09
Date