

# Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

## Issues Workbook

### Let's Get Started...

At this early stage of planning we are seeking your input via meetings, this workbook, and any other written or verbal comments submitted to us. We would like to hear directly from you - to learn how you feel about the Refuge, any issues or concerns you have, and any suggestions you may have about how to better accomplish our mission. We encourage you to provide comments to us as soon as possible. The sooner we receive your comments, the sooner we will be able to incorporate them into the planning process.

Thanks for taking the time to give us your input!

*148 workbooks were received; a disproportionate # were from Vermont - see geographic breakdown on last page.*

### Questions on Values, Vision and the Service's Role

1. What do you value most about the Connecticut River and its watershed?

The workbook's first question, "What do you value most about the Connecticut River and its watershed?" was answered in 137 workbooks. Each answer usually mentioned multiple values.

**Recreation** was the value most often mentioned (in 49 of the responses). A variety of specific types of recreation were mentioned, presented here in decreasing order: fishing (20); hunting (12); canoeing/kayaking (9); hiking (8); boating (7); quiet, non-motorized recreation (4); wildlife viewing (4); water-based recreation (2); camps (2); biking (1); birding (1); family recreation (1); trapping (1); driving (1); sightseeing (1); tubing (1); and wildlife photography (1).

The availability of **open space**, especially large undeveloped, natural areas, was mentioned in 41 responses. Many of these responses mentioned other related qualities, using the adjectives "rural" "remote" "unspoiled" "wilderness feel" "isolated."

**Abundant fish and wildlife** to enjoy was mentioned 39 times, closely followed by mention of the beauty of the landscape and scenery (34 times).

The presence of **healthy ecosystems** was mentioned 27 times, often with a mention of the services such ecosystems provide, particularly quality wildlife habitat and flood storage.

**The river itself**, as a landscape focus and historically/culturally unifying feature was mentioned 26 times. **Good water quality** and or lack of contaminants and pollution was mentioned 20 times.

**Access** to the river and/or to open space was highly valued (15), as was the **economic contribution of agricultural and forest lands** (14). **Native plants** were mentioned in 10 responses. The **historical and cultural** background of the area, still so visible in lovely small towns, was also frequently mentioned (9). Closely related to that, the **traditional way of life** (farming, logging) was valued (7) and the connection of this to a working landscape that provides habitat noted.

**Good people** were also mentioned seven times, noting the value of the many watershed citizens committed to stewardship of their own lands and the broader environment, as well as the many good organizations working for the environment and wildlife.

The **juxtaposition of large natural areas with human populations** was also noted as valued in five responses; these areas offer a "wilderness-like" experience without excessive travel to the watershed's residents.

Finally, three responses noted that the area was **home**, and two noted the **spiritual value** of natural areas.

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2. What do you consider to be the most important problem facing the watershed?
- 82 overdevelopment/loss of open space
  - 38 pollution
  - 37 loss/degradation of habitats
  - 21 negative impacts from recreation
  - 14 invasive species
  - 8 loss of access
  - 7 climate change
  - 6 increasing population pressures
  - 4 threats to/loss of local control
  - 3 ignorance
  - 2 erosion of property rights
  - 2 lack of funding
  - 1 lack of centralized body to regulate river and watershed
  - 1 high-grading of timber

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3. Which of the following Refuge-sponsored activities have you heard about or participated in? Which do you think sound valuable? (Please place an X in the box corresponding with your answer) **The numbers in each box represent the percentage of respondents that placed an “X” in that particular box.**

Activities	Heard About	Participated In	Valuable
Exhibits at the Montshire Museum	42.5	25.8	51.0
Educational programs at Montshire Museum	43.2	14.2	45.8
Exhibits at the Great North Woods Visitor Center	35.5	14.8	44.5
Programs at Great North Woods Visitor Center	30.3	5.8	40.0
Exhibits at Great Falls Discovery Center	31.0	18.7	45.2
Programs at Great Falls Discovery Center	29.0	13.5	41.2
Invasive plant control workshops for land managers	38.1	18.1	58.1
Invasive plant conferences	32.9	15.5	52.9
Volunteer invasive plant control projects	38.7	19.4	63.2
Endangered species volunteer work	27.7	12.2	56.8
Technical assistance from Refuge staff	21.3	16.1	52.3
Financial assistance through grants	29.0	13.5	52.3
Cooperative projects with partners in land protection	36.8	18.7	58.7
Cooperative projects with partners to control invasive species	31.0	16.8	49.7
Hunting on Refuge lands	40.6	22.6	52.6
Fishing on Refuge lands	36.8	18.7	58.7
Walking/hiking/skiing/snowshoeing on Refuge lands	35.5	47.7	73.5
Birding or other wildlife observation on Refuge lands	32.9	42.6	72.9
Photography on Refuge lands	29.7	32.9	63.9
Environmental education/interpretation programs on Refuge lands	32.3	17.4	65.2
Environmental education/interpretation programs at other outdoor locations sponsored by the Refuge	27.7	8.4	56.1
Snowmobiling on the Nulhegan Basin or Pondicherry Divisions	40.0	11.6	27.7

Additional comments: *“Valuable - forestry and habitat improvement, and continued motorized.”*

*“Recreational riding on Refuge roads.”*

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### 4. Where have you heard of the Refuge's CCP efforts before?

100 responses

- 19 had not heard prior to getting a workbook; many pointed out that the question should have defined "CCP"
- 53 contact with refuge (staff 15, meetings 13, visits to centers 8, mailings/email 18, kiosk 3, seasonal employment 2)
- 25 through other organizations (specifically mentioned: Ct. River Joint Commissions, Ct. River Watershed Council, The Nature Conservancy, NH Fish & Game, Friends of Conte, Friends of Nulhegan, Northern Gateway Assoc. Vt. Traditions Coalition, Upper Valley Land Trust, Putney Mtn. Assoc. New England Wild Flower Society, Essex County Natural Resource Conservation District, North Woods Stewardship Center, Windham Regional Planning Commission, Swanzey Conservation Commission, sporting/recreational organizations)
- 13 had read newspaper articles; 2 mentioned articles in hunting or fishing magazines
- 9 internet/refuge website
- 4 website
- 3 newsletter (not clear whose newsletter)
- 1 email (not clear whose)

### Questions on Conservation

5. Please keep in mind that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concentrates its efforts on migratory species and federally endangered species. In your opinion, which species or habitats should be a priority for the Refuge? Please rank the following in priority order (1 being the highest priority, 2 being the second highest, and so on). If you do not think we should be engaged in a choice, please place an X in the blank. **The Mean is the average ranking for those respondents that ranked at least 1 item and ranked only 1 item as "1", 1 item as "2", etc. Lower numbers for the mean indicate a higher priority. The X column refers to the total number of respondents that indicated that we should not be working on that item.**

<u>X</u>	<u>Mean</u>	
7	6.9	declining songbird populations
4	7.4	songbirds whose natural range is mostly in New England
5	6.2	migratory fish (e.g. Atlantic salmon, American shad, river herring, eels)
8	5.1	federally threatened and endangered species (piping plover, bald eagle, Puritan tiger beetle, dwarf wedge mussel, shortnose sturgeon, Jesup's milk-vetch, small-whorled pogonia, northeast bulrush)
10	8.4	regionally declining plants
7	5.8	state-listed threatened and endangered species
4	4.9	rare habitats
8	4.8	protection of large blocks of forest
9	6.9	protection of large blocks of grassland
7	6.2	restoration of floodplain forests
3	5.0	protection/restoration of wetlands

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5      5.5      protection/restoration of riparian areas  
                 other \_\_\_\_\_

Q5 Which species or habitats should be priority for the refuge? (continued)

Written in the “other” blank:

*flora and fauna on USFWS sites in urbanized locales*  
*decommissioning or redesigning dams to restore natural hydrology and floodplains (mentioned twice)*  
*manage what you have now*  
*manage all suitable forest lands*  
*demonstrate sustainable forest structures and types needed to support native wildlife*  
*protect a variety of habitats and large ecosystems instead of species by species, many small patches are imp. too*  
*public and landowner education may be most imp. if many folks then manage their land for wildlife and ecosystem protection or conserve their land*  
*protect trees against insects and diseases*  
*habitat connectivity for bird migrants*  
*white tail deer habitat (mentioned twice)*  
*increase deer, grouse and rabbit populations*  
*Canada lynx, mountain lion, gray wolf, pine marten*  
*maintain corridors*  
*question wisdom of Atlantic salmon program*  
*management of all native species and their habitats*  
*owners of private property*  
*spruce grouse*  
*buy up good wildlife habitat*  
*amphibian habitat*  
*the endangered dragonfly at the Schell bridge*  
*access points (mentioned twice)*

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6. Which tools should the Service use to help them conserve, protect, and enhance priority species and habitats? Please rank the following tools in priority order (1 being the highest priority, 2 being the second highest, and so on). If you do not think we should be engaged in a choice, please put an X in the blank. **See question 5 for a discussion of the results.**

<u>X</u>	<u>Mean</u>	
4	4.3	land acquisition from willing sellers at market value
2	5.2	focused land management on appropriate Refuge lands (to enhance conditions for priority species)
2	7.4	conduct research on Refuge lands
1	7.1	conduct monitoring on Refuge lands
3	7.1	provide research and demonstration areas on Refuge lands ( <i>one person wrote: Timber cut demo projects in addition to overall timber program.</i> )
8	5.0	technical assistance to encourage focused land management on appropriate private lands ( <i>one person wrote: "no coerciveness"</i> )
6	4.8	purchase of development rights
4	5.3	work with other agencies and conservation groups ( <i>one person wrote: Agencies – "Yes", Conservation Groups – "sweet heart deals are a problem"</i> )
5	5.9	work with private landowners
5	5.9	targeted education to decision makers and land managers
2	6.9	work to remove barriers to fish passage ( <i>one person wrote: "Only when practical"</i> )
2	6.8	work to improve in-stream habitats

Written in the "other" blank:

*wilderness*

*periodic vehicle patrols of Refuge lands.*

*conduct species inventory on Conte lands or lands that may be purchased.*

*proper policing of existing regulations*

*improve whitetail deer habitat*

*targeted education to communities*

*lobbying agencies to use Eminent domain to acquire fee title or easement to critical habitats*

*be our umbrella*

*research impacts of human activities outside of the Refuge.*

*work to prevent barriers to fish passage.*

*ecosystem management approach.*

*listen to us!*

*public access*

*work on deer winter yards.*

*use any tools available. All these are 1, so use them.*

*get control*

*Make dollars go as far as possible by utilizing other resources such as conservation organizations and research institutions to do much of the work above. Share expertise with others and get them to do the work.*

*Employ staff with a knowledge of the history of the region.*

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7. Which of the following issues should be a priority for the Refuge? Please rank the following issues in priority order (1 being the highest priority, 2 being the second highest, and so on). If you do not think we should be engaged in an issue, please place an X in the blank. **See question 5 for a discussion of the results.**

<u>X</u>	<u>Mean</u>	
6	2.8	loss of habitat to suburban and industrial development
7	3.3	fragmentation of habitats by roads and development
8	5.4	lack of fish passage due to dams and culverts (one person added: <i>"Dams only – do not use as excuse to close roads."</i> )
6	4.0	impacts of human activities to water quality and aquatic habitats (one person added: <i>"Human activities do not significantly impact at Conte Refuge"</i> )
8	6.3	loss of surface water levels or flow reductions due to water withdrawals
5	6.3	effects of recreational use on wildlife habitats
10	5.3	lack of management capability to maintain optimal habitats
6	5.3	displacement of native species by invasive exotic plants and animals (one person wrote: <i>"Depends on species"</i> )
5	5.8	threats to federal-listed species (one person wrote: <i>"Depends on species"</i> )
7	7.0	negative public sentiment toward certain management techniques (e.g. forestry, burning, herbicides)

Written in the "other" blank:

*climate change impacts*

*priority funding for USFWS programs dealing with species preservation.*

*improve white deer habitat*

*concentrate on purposes 1 & 2*

*listen to us!*

*Maintaining as much old growth forest as possible for woodland interior species. Many wildlife management strategies incorporate a mosaic of new and old growth and harvesting including WHIP, which all seem to manage forests in many cases and skew the natural ordinance of species numbers and ratios. An excellent TNC publication if you have not seen it already; "Natural Dynamics . . .*

*create holistic vision, where all these issues fit together \_ Holistic is the word!*

*lack of public access*

*improve white tail deer yards*

*private use*

*define recreational impacts. hiking, skiing one thing, wheeled off-road vehicles another.*

*ranked as 11 - purchase of land by the government*

*threats to federal-listed keystone species including gray wolf, Canada lynx, pine marten, mountain lion*

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### Questions on Education

8. Please rank the topics you think we should be teaching in priority order (1 being the highest priority). If you do not think we should be engaged in a choice, please place an x in the blank. **See question 5 for a discussion of the results.**

<u>X</u>	<u>Mean</u>	
9	5.2	general natural resource concepts
4	4.5	wildlife/habitat concepts
3	5.9	the needs of migratory species
2	5.6	the problems faced by endangered species
4	4.2	resource stewardship
4	5.9	how to control invasive species
4	5.0	how to manage land for wildlife
5	3.9	impact of personal choices on ecosystem health
1	4.5	value of biodiversity
10	6.2	how to connect with/enjoy the outdoors

Comments written in "other" blank:

*effects of climate change*

*the need to enforce the ESA (Endangered Species Act). Complements "8.1"*

*The impact of political/legislative choices on ecosystem and human health should be a required course for all state and federal legislators.*

*human birth control*

*the importance of traditional activities, hunting, fishing, forest management.*

*bird id workshops*

*The existence of the Refuge itself-not widely known by the millions who live in it! This unique to the SOC NWR, all items above are being addressed through they certainly could use more coordination & funding - again, I think of you folks as holding/being the umbrella over state/regional/local public-& private sector efforts...*

*Refer people to other agencies who can help do the above.*

*economic development, economics*

*The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program [Natural Resources Conservation Service, not USFWS] is helpful for some wildlife species but perhaps not to ecosystem health overall.*

*watershed as a complex system*

*mans history on river*

*These are all different components of a holistic curriculum, one informs the next.*

*land tax credits for migratory use of private property*

*I think every opportunity to teach should be utilized and the topic should be related to the place and audience.*

*value of historic sites*

*Specific seminars on hunting and fishing should be offered.*

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*We must foster a renewed stewardship ethic for the land and teach landowners, managers and others how to pass on the land healthier than when we first acquired it in order that those who will inherit it will carry this ethic and standard of care forward into the future.*

*We need to install an understanding and appreciation in the minds of visitors to the Refuge and North Country about what we value about the land and our hear-felt traditions.*

9. Please rank the audiences you think we should be reaching in priority order (1 being the highest priority). If you do not think we should be engaged in a choice, please place an X in the blank. **See question 5 for a discussion of the results.**

<u>X</u>	<u>Mean</u>	
6	3.4	K-12th grade students
1	2.9	teachers of K-12th grade students
11	5.1	nature center staffs
2	2.2	special audiences that can influence/solve certain problems (landowners, foresters, recreational users, etc.)
8	4.9	urban residents
7	4.9	rural residents
6	5.4	college students
5	5.5	families

Comments added under "other":

*Teach whenever and wherever you can.*

*If education is agenda driven, it's a negative, not a positive.*

*regional officials responsible for planning, zoning, land use, development, and transportation*

*international visitors authorized to be in the USA.*

*federal and state legislators.*

*elected officials*

*meet more with other conservation groups in the area including governmental and ngos.*

*suburban/exurban residents*

*hunters & fishermen*

*birding community*

*public at large, urban, rural, college, families....*

*towns/municipalities, highway crews, and other local boards and officials.*

*make a concerted effort to keep other "related" environmental agencies informed of your activities, needs & concerns*

*long-time residents*

*military (captive audience)*

*legislators, town boards, etc..*

*mayors/first selectmen, P&Z commissioners, Inland Wetland commissioners.*

*civic-minded individuals*

*hunters, the people who will help you because they have used the land forever.*

*esp. in regional place-their backyards.*

*With limited resources, biggest impact is with "teach the teachers" and facilitate those efforts.*

*all*

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*Develop awareness of the burdens your programs place on "small" people, e.g., those who have to work everyday & can't attend meeting to appropriately protect themselves from gov't regulations!*

10. Please rank the educational tools you think we should be using in priority order (1 being the highest priority). If you do not think we should be engaged in a choice, please place an X in the blank. **See question 5 for a discussion of the results.**

<u>X</u>	<u>Mean</u>	
2	3.1	articles in newspapers and magazines
1	2.4	field trips and workshops
8	3.3	general educational programs
6	2.9	mobile exhibits that visit fairs, schools, nature centers
3	3.1	demonstration projects

Comments added under "other:"

*Focus on the mediums that get the most for the investment and provide the best hands on opportunities that leave lasting impressions. Exhibits are costly and focused so that they are less flexible for a variety of audiences but certainly not useless, well done they give a strong message.*

*K-12 curriculum per Vermont Standards for teachers' use in classrooms sponsored, scientific fair- style activities (i.e. Vermont Historic Day)*

*If education is agenda driven, it's a negative, not a positive.*

*TV, Cable, Podcast, radio.*

*film and lecture series*

*email newsletter (EG NIPGro)*

*-landowners, camp owners/lease holders*

*internet (web-inars)*

*web- based education.*

*internet resources*

*Efforts in various contexts: Urban/rural; floodplain/forest/grassland; invasives' habitat restoration.. Etc.. Best would be projects that others can emulate. Online video/virtual tour of conte w/research & stewardship demo; Start w/broad context/overview of watershed. Population-show different types of development & lands uses - then focus on wildlife & habitats & demo stewardship on Refuge lands---- perhaps a series?*

*nature walks with instructors*

*participatory projects involving communities*

*curriculum that thousands of teachers can use/& teacher workshops.*

*invasives newsletter sent out by[refuge staff person] Cynthia Boettner is invaluable to us working in the trenches education stations*

*all outdoor clubs (ski-doo to hunters)*

*curricular units including field trips + workshops conducted by teachers trained by Conte staff*

*"teach the teachers" and facilitate those efforts*

*more interaction between those who pay for your programs & those who benefit*

*lobby Gov Officials*

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### Questions on Recreation and Public Access

While natural diversity conservation and ecosystem health are the Refuge's primary purposes, some public uses can be allowed when they do not impact these resources. In fact, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 identifies six priority wildlife-dependent public uses that are to receive enhanced consideration on national wildlife refuges: environmental education, interpretation, fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, and photography. These six uses will be evaluated in this planning process.

Other uses must be evaluated by the refuge manager to see if they are "appropriate" and "compatible." Such things as whether the activity contributes to fulfilling the refuge's purposes, its consistency with applicable laws, regulations and policies, whether it can be offered consistent with public safety, whether the refuge has the budget and staffing resources to administer the use, whether the activity will impair the existing wildlife-dependent recreational uses, whether the activity is available/can be done elsewhere, and anticipated impacts to resources are all considered prior to allowing uses.

11. Are any of these activities or current levels of use on the Refuge a concern?

wildlife viewing	25	photography	14
environmental education	25	interpretation	21
hunting	33	fishing	33
hiking	23	skiing/snowshoeing	19
snowmobile access	82	vehicle access	78

Please explain your concerns:

84 people added comments here

55 commented concerning motor vehicles, snowmobiles, or ATV/ORVs

motor vehicles (all inclusive): worried about the impact of (14) concerns included noise, scaring wildlife, habitat damage, pollution, conflict w/ other uses, cost of infrastructure maintenance and regulation, fossil fuel consumption; be prohibited (9); be restricted/limited/controlled (9);

snowmobiles (specifically): worried about the impact of (8) concerns included noise, scaring wildlife, pollution, conflict w/ other uses, cost of regulation; be prohibited (8); be restricted/limited/controlled (4)

ATVs/ORVs (specifically): worried about the impact of (7) concerns included noise, scaring wildlife, habitat damage, pollution, conflict w/ other uses, cost of infrastructure maintenance and regulation; be prohibited (5); be restricted/limited/controlled (3)

1 commented that more research on the impacts of snowmobiles was needed

1 commented that the vehicular access at the Nulhegan Basin Division is currently well managed

8 commented that all traditional uses should be allowed to continue

8 expressed general concern for overuse (in almost any activity) to have impacts and recommended careful management, monitoring and establishment of threshold levels

5 commented that hunting should not be allowed; 4 of the same 5 also thought fishing should not be allowed

3 thought bicycles should be allowed

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3 thought trails for hiking, skiing and snowshoeing should be established, separate from snowmobiling areas

2 noted that even non-motorized activities have impacts and should be restricted to carefully placed trails

2 felt that wildlife viewing should be enhanced

2 others felt that environmental education and outreach activities needed to be increased

1 commented that the refuge and opportunities at it were little known and more advertising of its existence was needed

1 suggested horseback riding on designated trails

1 suggested improved canoe and kayak access

### 12. In your opinion, what other activities should occur on Refuge lands?

There were 97 responses to this question, broken down as follows.

There were 40 comments relating to preferences regarding uses currently allowed:

15 no additional needed (either because commenter was satisfied with those currently offered or believed we had our hands full implementing those and/or did not want more resources spent on recreation instead of conservation activities)

2 allow all legal and/or traditional uses

7 passive, low-impact recreation only

2 restrict vehicles (suggestion to use buses instead)

1 prohibit vehicles

2 restrict snowmobiles

2 prohibit snowmobiles

1 allow ATVs on logging trails

1 restrict ATVs

4 prohibit ATVs

1 allow dogs

1 prohibit dogs

1 provide wilderness-like experience

1 no wilderness

5 allow trapping

1 allow hunting

2 retain camps (including a suggestion to allow their use for educational groups and work crews)

There were 31 comments that suggested new activities be allowed:

13 bicycling (on existing roads and/or designated trails only) (one request to build trails)

10 camping (6 of these specified back country, no trace camping, most of others low impact camping)

6 hiking (included three requesting trails)

5 horseback riding (on existing roads and/or designated trails only)

2 kayaking

1 boating

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- 1 canoeing
- 2 firewood collecting (one specific to camp owners)
- 1 cross country skiing

Nineteen diverse comments mentioned various aspects of habitat management are summarized below:

*control moose population so deer habitat can improve*  
*manage the winter deer yards*  
*demonstrate how timber management can create healthy early successional habitats*  
*early successional habitats*  
*compatible agricultural uses (hay fields) as demonstration areas*  
*demonstration activities by other organizations*  
*habitat management/protection/restoration*  
*invasive species prevention and control is very important*  
*proactively manage key habitats as demonstrations*  
*forestry, controlled forestry*  
*no fish stocking*  
*salvage storm damaged areas*  
*provide large unfragmented forest blocks*  
*provide unlogged blocks*  
*more emphasis on managing for non game species*  
*less emphasis on early successional*  
*benefit priority trust and T&E species*  
*demonstrate values of riparian ecotones*  
*demonstrate the appropriate use of Best Management Practices to manage water quality*

There were 11 comments/suggestions regarding education, summarized below:

*partnership w/Abnakis*  
*increased scouting involvement*  
*seminars and outdoor workshops*  
*signs which explain the mission and how a particular piece of land fits into the mission*  
*more programs*  
*public education about regional land use and cultural history as well as ecology*  
*highlight outstanding resources*  
*promote visibility*  
*hands-on education*  
*programs to educate volunteers*  
*teaching landowners how they can manage for key species on their lands*  
*demonstrate appropriate habitat management methods for use by private landowners*  
*transfer information through the media to provide objective basis for the public to understand the needs of priority species*  
*advocate for missing habitat elements through education and demonstration*

There were six comments advocating for research, paraphrased below:

*on predators*  
*inventories*  
*research opportunities for high school and college students and grad students*  
*research to demonstrate efficacy of management initiatives on priority wildlife species*  
*no activities in primary habitats*

There were three comments advocating for improved access (one each specifically for improved access for the elderly and handicapped).

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There were the following miscellaneous comments:

*have used them all and feel the staff has done a great job  
improvements needed for hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, wildlife viewing and wildlife photography  
plow roads for increased pedestrian access in winter  
return lands to private ownership  
control erosion of Ct River banks  
promote especially scenic or naturally beautiful areas  
allow ceremonies on refuge lands(for example tribal)  
advocate that refuge acquire centralized land base in Westfield River area  
summer work projects for youth are good  
For a greater variety of uses, focus other efforts on helping other landowners with multi-use sites.*

### 13. Have you used any of our recreational facilities (visitor/education centers, roads, trails, kiosks, other signage). Do they meet your needs?

This question was answered by 101 commenters. Eighty-three indicated that they had used recreational facilities, and 57 of those indicated satisfaction. The remaining offered the following comments or suggestions:

*The Nulhegan visitor center is fairly new, and I anticipate it will have more to offer in the future...*

*more ADA on lands.*

*Kiosks are a good idea, however, too many of them detract from the wilderness aspect. I'm concerned about the amount of snowmobile signs that you are requiring. You are way above what is expected in proper signage.*

*I have utilized/visited much of the Refuge and its infrastructure. As an observation, it is unfortunate, but the Conte Refuge presence at the Montshire Museum is almost lost, or at best is extremely muted. Ideally, the FWS presence at the Montshire should be enhanced, or possibly relocated in order to provide the Refuge with proper recognition in the Upper Valley.*

*Snowmobiling should not continue on the Refuge  
FWS should include the CO2 emissions of snowmobiles, as well as the other pollutants they generate, as part of their overall impact on wildlife and their habitats  
The CCP process should include an analysis of areas suitable for wilderness designation, and of river segments suitable for Wild, Scenic and Recreational status.  
The FWS should assess the potential for and means of achieving either natural recolonization or active endangered, and other rare or imperiled species on the Refuge. E.g., gray wolf, Canada lynx, pine marten, brook trout, Atlantic salmon.*

*I have seen some of the signage. It is adequate. The best natural area signage I have ever seen is maintained by Ontario Dept of Forestry on private lands. Nothing that I have seen in Conte comes even close.*

*Invasive plants Programs in Turner's facility – very good.*

*My family, friends, and I use land controlled by the State and Federal agencies in the State, the camp grounds are run down and I see more limitations and limited access every year. I fear being locked out of my woods and streams, no longer to hunt and fish. I fear that some time soon, only being able to view the Vermont I love from the managed access area @ visitor center.*

*They are spare or non-existent.*

*Have visited the new Visitors center at the Silvio Conte refuge, but have not had the opportunity to partake in any educational/environmental education programs.  
The refuge staff at the Silvio Conte refuge is very courteous, helpful and accommodating.  
The welcome signs and brochures are a good idea.*

*Yes, so far the management has done a wonderful job.*

*Great Falls is nice, but not oriented to older users.*

*The current signage and road maintenance should be maintained "as is".*

*Additional kiosks at boat launches where none exist could be extremely valuable, effective way to educate on aquatic invasive species.*

*Yes, we enjoy PondduCherry a great deal. I have not had the opportunity to be on the Nulhegan Lands but have been to the headquarters. I would like to spend more time in that area hiking.*

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*Montshire- fine, some of the exhibits are a bit staid.*

*Nulhegan - mostly great I wish you had the resources to keep the roads in better shape.*

*If you are doing resource management of some sort, a sign explaining what you are doing would be very interesting and educational.*

*I would keep signage to a minimum.*

*Champion lands are extremely well taken care of.*

*The Great Falls Discovery Center for its museum. It has also hosted meetings for the New England Wild Flower Society's Plant Conservation Volunteer Program.*

*1. I have visited Mollie Beattie Bog. I found it interesting but would appreciate the opportunity to get closer to the unusual plants in order to photograph them close up.*

*2. I have snowshoed the unmarked road from Rt. 105 to Siphone Camp, bushwacked to North Branch, then connected back to the road. The trails were definitely not adequate for public use in the winter. There's little or no access from the highway in winter, no maps or signs. I have also hiked that road in spring; the road itself was perfectly adequate but ended after little more than a mile, and the terrain was difficult to bushwack from anywhere along the road.*

*3. I have walked Stone Dam Road for one or two miles in winter, and about a mile in spring before mud season. But without the ability to drive the road, one cannot get very far into the Refuge.*

*Yes, in general, they are pretty good. Signs at intersections would be helpful; also some limited winter access would be nice.*

*I have been in the Nulhegan area and find the roads not well marked. Just looking for the Molly Beattie Bog was difficult.*

*Roads are good (VT) could use better signage, more pullovers (parking) for picnic.*

*Yes when present very good, make maps available showing locator & dormitories of preserves.*

*I'd like to see more signage at resource areas and along the river.*

*Tried 3 times to get into the "White elephant" in Brunswick [new Nulhegan Basin Division office and visitor contact station] – doors were always locked at 3 in the afternoon, no less!*

*I have seen Refuge land around the country. I feel you do a great job with the resources, you have.*

*Yes, I participated in a Japanese knotweed workshop at Turners Falls and an invasive ranking workshop at Montshire with the past several years. Our family has visited the biodiversity exhibits at the Montshire on several occasions – great for grandkids who spend the majority of lives in the new Mexican Desert!*

*Great Falls Discovery Ctr. Is great. I understand that better signage along the river (e.g. at all dams, designating postage locations & /or procedures) is needed. More info should be available on the website also, including a map of the "refuge & the watershed.*

*Visitor centers, kiosks, and educational programs help raise the profile of the Conte refuge. The visitor center at Turner's Falls and other facilities educate the public as to the importance of the river's ecosystem. The facilities meet the needs and further efforts to educate the public about the value of the river can only improve the funding and attention given to the Conte Refuge.*

*I have used the Nulhegan Basin for about 10 years, I have a lot of respect for the open woods, roads and waterways. It's one of the only places left for me to do what I love.*

*The current signage and road maintenance should be maintained "as is".*

*Could have better signage and direction, i.e., to find Mollie Beattie bog.*

*Pondicherry hiking trails – yes, but interpretive signage would be a good addition  
-Montshire – great facilities, but Conte signage and recognition inadequate.*

*Yes, I have visited, the Nulhegan and Pondicherry refuges our family primitive (not in visitor center) and that is good. Continue to promote low impact uses and laws as well as encourage outdoor experiences. Could use substantial investments in pedestrian (non motorized) access & facilities.*

*Turners Falls center is wonderful learning opportunity.*

*a) Visitor Center – excellent, b) roads – very good, c) maps – need improvement.*

*Any non-motorized access should be permitted. Mountain bikes should be required to obtain a permit which would allow rules to articulated to protect habitats from potential abuse. Snowmobiles and skiers co-exist best where there are separate trails, and some roads/trails should be clearly designated for each. Signage is important.*

*Yes. The new Island Pond Regional Recreation map was especially helpful! The new Visitor Center is a great*

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*facility and one I hope will see used.*

*I love using the roads. They are essential to almost all uses of the Refuge, and riding the roads is a time honored enjoyment in itself.*

*I have used some of these in the past. I do use the roads on the Refuge for access and have used trails on the Pondicherry for work purposes. I feel more comfortable when the visitor centers are smaller, more intimate, less pretentious and have a smaller footprint on the landscape. I would suggest that where possible this infrastructure be kept to a minimum to avoid ecological and social concerns.*

### 14. Do you have other comments on recreational use?

There were 107 responses to this question.

Five comments addressed **priorities** and basically agreed that, “top priorities should be ecological restoration, landscape linkage, and biodiversity protection,” that recreational uses should be prioritized below conservation and education, and that, “. . . all allowable recreation should be in line w/ other refuge goals.”

Of the many comments relating to **recreation in general**, 11 expressed a desire for keeping lands open to as many uses as possible and noted that public lands (like Yellowstone) were becoming less accessible and/or expressed a fear that “elite preservationists” were trying to restrict uses. Three expressed a desire to “Leave it like it is!” regarding, presumably, the currently allowed uses, but also a desire to “keep lands as little developed as possible” and “don’t support impending commercialism.” Three more noted that recreation had an important role in connecting people to nature and increasing their appreciation and support for conservation. Five responses expressed the viewpoint that recreation must be carefully sited and managed to avoid impacts to the primarily important resource conservation objectives (*Lets keep our refuge lands from being “loved to death”*). Finally, four comments expressed that cooperation could allow recreation and ecological health to coexist:

*As long as we all respect the land and law enforcement we can all use this land together.*

*Need to do more to encourage use that has low impact by a wider range of the population. Many think it is “keep out” when the opposite is true.*

*coordination and partnership are key; engage w/ recreational and environmental stakeholders at same time as recreationists do not always realize the impacts of their actions (even the detrimental impacts of too many foot travelers)*

*recreational use should be managed so exclusive groups not affected by each other*

Suggested **new uses** (18 comments) included: six asking that bicycling be allowed (one specified on main roads and two asked for special paths as gravel not suitable); 2 asked for accessible trails; one each for the following :

canoe trail

allow cross country skiing and snowshoeing on snowmobile trails

provide areas for no-trace camping

picnic areas would allow more people exposure to nature

horse-drawn sleighs in winter

develop and promote “fishing holes”

planting program of native berries, get scouts involve, let people pick berries and gather nuts - would also provide food

more viewing opportunities

wildlife viewing needs to be carefully managed

Comments on **hunting and fishing** were three for keeping them and one against hunting.

The debate about **motorized versus non-motorized recreation** continued to be aired here, with six comments urging continued access for motorized recreation, while 30 comments registered reservations about them and urged a wide range of response: banning them; restricting their spatial extent; better enforcement of rules; to replacing them with non-polluting buses. There were four suggestions for compromise: “*certain areas should have no vehicle access to provide areas where solitude can be experienced,*” “*A smaller human-scale network of trails should be established to facilitate use by those on snowshoes, cross-country skies, and/or on foot who prefer to seek out wildlife or otherwise enjoy wildlife without being exposed to the noise and air pollution caused by snowmobiles in the winter and cars in other times of the year,*” and “*Winter non-motorized use is (severely) imited to main roads. Consider limited improvements for winter non-motorized access and even where motorized access (i.e. snowmobiles) aren’t allowed.*” (4<sup>th</sup> repeated the plea for more non-motorized winter access)

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Five suggestions were received on **education and outreach**:

- more educational programs
- outreach to make people aware of refuge's existence
- outreach and garbage cans to discourage litter at river access points
- educate about times of year for nesting and rearing young to reduce disturbance
- educate recreational users about their impacts

Regarding **land acquisition**, the following comments were submitted here:

*I favor long-term stewardship of wild areas by Conte. Local gov't just doesn't look after preservation.*

*Let's try to keep what we have - preserve through working with landowners and not have govt. move in and own land. Then things will stay pretty much as they are a lite footprint!*

*smaller parcels in more locales play an important role for local wildlife and people  
protect CT natural areas from intense development pressures*

The following comments were submitted here regarding **land management**:

*active timber management to maintain game species*

*need wilderness*

*keep natural areas where people can retreat from technology*

*moose and deer population monitoring is needed because early successional habitat management objectives can be compromised by populations that exceed carrying capacity (e.g., over browsing).*

*The Refuge should evaluate various recreational activities in terms of their potential as a vector for transporting invasive species. Measures should be taken to limit these activities or to engage the user groups in invasive species control in exchange for the privilege of using the Refuge lands.*

*Both NH and VT have Wildlife Action Plans. I hope that the Conte Planning activities will be fully integrated (beyond just recreational use) into these plans.*

**Boats** were mentioned in two comments, which pointed out that the size and speed of boats on the river is a problem and that boating restrictions needed to be enforced.

**Miscellaneous suggestions** included:

*parking is a problem that needs to be resolved*

*snowmobile clubs should wait until after deer season and remove in early spring - signs are ugly*

*in Nulhegan Basin Division, there are places where foot bridges across streams would be nice for hiking*

*more outreach in White River area*

*any increases in recreational opportunities should come with increases in staff/resources to manage and maintain them*

*trash containers at entrances to prevent litter*

## Issues Workbook

### That's it! Thank you for your time.

IMPORTANT: Now that you are done, please separate pages 3-10 and mail them back to us by April 13, 2007. We will summarize these public comments and those received at the public meeting in our next newsletter. Please help us keep our mailing list updated by completing the following.

If you have specific challenges, needs, opportunities that you would like to bring to our attention, please attach information or contact us at anytime in the process.

If you wish to receive future "Planning Updates" about the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge comprehensive conservation plan, please fill in the appropriate information below and return the with the Issues Workbook.

State	# Responses
CT	10
MA	31
ME	3
NH	35
NJ	1
NY	3
VT	61

If you are acting in an official capacity as the representative of an organization please complete the following two items.

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

IMPORTANT: Please note that names on the CCP mailing list become part of the public record for this project. The Service must release names only, if requested, under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974. To retain you on our mailing list we need your permission. Please sign below.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
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March 2007

