

MONOMOY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Summary of Issues For the Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

The following is a summary of issues and opinions expressed to CBI surrounding the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge and the upcoming Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Issues are offered without attribution by name or organization of the one or more interviewees who offered the comment. The comments are summarized in this way to protect confidentiality and to assist the reader in focusing on the substance of the issues raised, not the commenter who raised them.

Every effort has been made to accurately and comprehensively summarize the issues we gleaned from our thirteen (13) interviews with some nineteen (19) individuals. However, any errors or omissions to this report are the sole responsibility of CBI. Please also note that this effort was intended to initially “rescope” the issues surrounding management of the Refuge, but in no way supplants nor replaces the opportunity for public comment during the formal public comment period on rescoping that will follow in early 2005. Limited time and budget prevented us from speaking to everyone who might have a stake in the Refuge.

USES

- ***Public Access***
 - Amount of use. Most noted that overall the Refuge is not overused nor “trampled” by visitors. However, as noted below there are concerns about the amount of use in regard to the Refuge Headquarters (i.e., parking, ferry service).
 - Parking. Many raised this issue. Interviewees noted several points. The parking lot at the FWS headquarters is too small for the amount of people that visit the Refuge every year. Some people interviewed felt there was a “loophole” being exploited by FWS to allow causeway parking, since others who operate a business are not allowed to park there. Some noted causeway parking could prevent fishermen from accessing launch areas. Some stated that FWS offers open access parking which in turn attracts people to Monomoy to use the beach for recreational activities and sunbathing.
 - Traffic. Many also raised this issue. Many noted that drivers utilize the Quitnessit Association road to get to the FWS, including vans, cars, SUVs, trucks, RVs, etc. The road is narrow and, other than snow removal, maintained primarily by the Association. Some noted that although the road is utilized for FWS operations, they do not assist in paying for or

maintaining the road. Others noted that due to poor signage, the traffic sometimes ends up in other neighborhoods and on other businesses.

- Boat access. Most felt that boat access was generally acceptable and used appropriately at the Refuge. Some interviewees said that some boaters and jet skiers get close to Monomoy and scare away nesting birds. Likewise some felt a few visitors come to the island and do not pay any attention to closed areas. However, most stated that visitors are generally respectful of the Refuge and its wildlife.

- ***Public Uses***

- Dog walking. Some people explained that although people are supposed to keep their dogs on leashes on the refuge and only on Morris Island, it does not always happen. Some went on to say that dogs should be banned since they disturb the birds.
- Beach combing. Most interviewees stated that they did not see any issues with beachcombing along the refuge. However, some noted that archeological artifacts should be turned into the appropriate authorities.
- Sunbathing. All most all interviewees stated that sunbathing should not be happening at the Refuge since this is not an appropriate activity for a wildlife refuge and because there are so many other beaches around where this could be accommodated. Interviewees noted that visitors might confuse the mission of the National Seashore (recreation and resource protection) with the Refuge (resource protection and appreciation of that resource).
- Kayaking. Most noted that kayakers park in the appropriate places along the causeway and do not misuse the refuge.
- Jet skis. Some interviewees said that some boaters and jet skiers, when they operated, do get close to Monomoy and scare away nesting birds. Some stated that the pollutant discharge impacts on wildlife habitat from jet skis should be considered if they were ever to be reintroduced on the Refuge. Interviewees stated that the NPS and Town ban have had positive impact on the Refuge (i.e., no jet skis).
- Seal watching. Most interviewees stated that this is an appropriate and positive activity on the Refuge. Seal watching is a popular activity on the refuge and ferry services offer rides to view them. Tourists like this activity more than whale watching because the ride is much shorter and not as rough and you are almost guaranteed to see seals. However, some explained that it puts a burden on the FWS Headquarters, adds to traffic and congestion, and presents problems regarding parking. A few expressed concern that this activity has become too large and has adverse impacts for seals and may be dangerous to those who unwisely get too close to the seals.
- Shore/Surf Fishing. Most interviewees stated that this is an appropriate and positive activity on the Refuge. There is a lot of surf fishing that takes

place on Monomoy for striped, blue fish, false albacore, and others. Some said that although they saw no problem with the activity, there could be issues of fishermen going from one side of the island to the other and cutting through the areas where protected birds live.

- Boat Fishing. Few noted this neither as a major activity nor as a major impact.
 - Hunting (sea ducks). Few noted this as a major activity. This sport is currently not very popular but on the rise according to some.
 - Shell fishing (recreational). Residents and non-residents of the Town can apply for a town-wide recreational shellfish permit administered by the Town to collect a limited number of shellfish per day. People explained that permit holders enjoy this recreational activity, many along Morris Island, most of which is within the Refuge boundary. Recreational permit holders tend to use areas other than the remainder of the Refuge because these areas (within and outside the refuge) are easier to access (see shellfishing commercial below).
- ***Commercial Uses***
 - Shellfishing (commercial). This issue raised the most comments by all most all interviewees. Comments are noted below.
 - The Town issues town-wide permits for commercial shellfishing. These permits are not only for Monomoy but include any shellfishing area within the jurisdiction of the Town as a whole. On the best days in prime summer fishing, there are no more than 125 shellfishermen operating on the Refuge. Much of the rest of the year (fall, winter, spring) these numbers are significantly less.
 - Though the impacts of shellfishing on the resource (both the shellfish themselves and as food for other wildlife, particularly birds) might be further studied, few felt that there were significant, adverse impacts caused by commercial shellfishing. Some view that there are not only no adverse impacts from shellfishing, but that there are positive benefits to the ecosystem from shellfishing. These benefits include a more diverse and robust benthic ecosystem, and in turn, increased foraging opportunities for the shore birds.
 - Some believe no more study is needed, the activity has occurred since Colonial times, and after almost 400 years, clambers are part and parcel of this ecosystem.
 - Many noted that shell fisherman monitor and enforce their own activities quite well and also serve as additional “eyes and ears” for the FWS.
 - Some noted that they understand that, despite few expected adverse impacts, commercial shellfishing may raise two regulatory/administrative issues: commercial shellfishing as a

compatible use on the Refuge and the appropriateness of such activity in the Wilderness portion of the Refuge.

- It was noted that shellfishing is regulated by the town of Chatham and is open only to residents of the town pursuant to Massachusetts's law. It was noted that over 50% of soft-shell clams taken annually come from Monomoy: shellfish from the refuge are noted to be clean and free of pollutants. Last year the town issued approximately 640 town-wide commercial licenses. As the commercial groundfish industry suffers more closures, those that live in Chatham absolutely depend on shellfishing to supplement their income.
 - It was noted that when the land that currently makes up the Refuge was ceded to the FWS in 1945, FWS reassured the Town that establishment of the Refuge would not negatively affect Chatham's shellfishery on Monomoy. According to interviewees, these assurances have been reiterated a number of times through the years, through changes in personnel, and up until quite recently. The last time the Refuge issued a compatibility study it was openly recognized that shellfishing was compatible with the Refuge's mission, objectives, and operations.
 - Many feel strongly that they have a right to shellfish the flats, which extends, as long as properly managed and administered, as an inherent right to the citizens of the Commonwealth. Interviewees noted that: 1) shellfishing is important to the identify and inherent rights of the Town and its residents; 2) shellfishing is very important economically to the Town, especially for year-round residents; 3) shellfishing has been done by Native Americans and by the first settlers in the 1600s; and 4) shellfishing is a low impact activity done by hand rakes and sheer individual effort.
 - Many depend on this activity for their livelihood. These fishermen recognize that ones shellfishing livelihood is affected by natural cycles of the resource. However, outright, administrative restriction would have a devastating economic impact, increase significantly shellfishing pressure on other areas within the Town (and elsewhere) and require a large management adjustment by the Town.
 - Many noted that shellfishing in Chatham has the strong support of local fishermen, local elected officials, state agencies; state elected officials, and Congressmen and Senators.
- Ferry services. Many interviewees expressed a view on this issue. Comments are noted below.
- Some raised strong concern about the impacts of a ferry service operating on FWS Headquarters land. Impacts of concern included parking on the causeway and near the Headquarters, number of visitors, visitors' impacts to abutting properties, and use of ferry service as a "means to sunbathe not bird watch." Some felt that

recreational activities should be prohibited but educational and wildlife purposes, including use by school groups and serious bird watchers, should be maintained and supported.

- Some interviewed raised concerns about the fairness of the ferry service from Headquarters. These interviewees noted that they did not understand why the service was not publicly bid, why a local business was not given preference, and if such amenities as FWS bathrooms and a parking lot were “subsidizing” a commercial operation with federal government dollars.
 - Others noted that the Headquarters Ferry Service provides a valuable service to visitors, ensuring that the wildlife are viewed and the public has direct access to the refuge. Some noted that this ferry service was essential to accessing the Lighthouse and that much of the use at Headquarters is not ferry service customers, but others.
 - In regard to other ferries operating from outside the refuge, the Town requires all other ferry companies to provide off-site parking to minimize extra burden on Town facilities.
 - Commercial guide services. Many noted that this was a growing activity on the Refuge. Commercial guides include guides for activities such as seal watching, surf fishing, surf fly-fishing, and sea duck hunting. Some expressed concern regarding commercial guide services that use the area, especially for commercial fly-fishing. Many of these guides “parachute” in from other states and may not feel the “ownership” of Monomoy as local residents and more regular users. Some felt guides “have no vested interest in preserving and maintaining Monomoy.” Some interviewees said guides cross from one side of the Island refuge to another and through the grassy nesting areas of protected birds. Likewise there was concern expressed that guides, although commercial, are not regulated.
 - Commercial fishing. Some state-regulated commercial fishing and lobstering activities take place off the coast of Monomoy, usually utilizing weir, hook and line techniques, and traps. Fishing includes finfishing, lobstering, and surf clamming. Few commented that this was a major or problematic activity.
- ***Lighthouse use/Maintenance.*** A few noted this resource as an important, historic resource for the Refuge. These interviewees noted that boat access from Headquarters to the Lighthouse is essential for visitation and use.
 - ***Law enforcement.*** Nearly everyone interviewed felt there were not enough law enforcement personnel to effectively regulate the Refuge and its users, both at Headquarters and out on the flats and Islands. Some interviewees suggested further coordination with the National Park Service. Some noted that regular users tend to be self-policing and can and have informally assisted the FWS in monitoring activities.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBORS AND OTHERS

- ***Relationship w/neighbors and community***

- Quitnessit Neighborhood. Some interviewees noted issues regarding the Refuge's impact on abutting properties and the Quitnessit neighborhood. These issues are noted below.
 - Interviewees expressed concern about access to the site by wheeled vehicles (cars, buses, etc) and the traffic it causes. Concern was expressed around heavy traffic volume created by the refuge ferry service, as well as parking at the refuge and along the causeway, all activities that disrupt the neighborhood.
 - It was noted that the access road is owned and maintained by the Quitnessit Association and often overburdened by summer use.
 - Some expressed concern about commercial uses on the refuge (i.e., ferry services), potential future commercial uses (food service) and their impacts on abutters. Interviewees expressed concern about the number of people coming to sun bathe and utilizing the refuge for purely recreational reasons as opposed to another beach.
- Town of Chatham. Some interviewees noted that the Town of Chatham is the sole municipal neighbor of the Refuge and thus, this relationship should be carefully maintained and nurtured. Points mentioned are noted below.
 - Some stated that the FWS does not do enough to actively keep the Town informed and to maintain an effective working relationship.
 - Some stated that the FWS has not been consistent nor kept promises with the Town on issues important to it.
 - Some people interviewed expressed concern regarding being involved in the process before government and environmental groups worked out all the details, and that processes like this “seem to be a done deal by the time local people get to give their input.” These interviewees suggested improved communication, receipt of documents and written information prior to public meetings, and time to allow people to reflect, consider, and organize.
 - Among some interviewees, there is great unease about the presence and role of the federal government on and in a local area that prides itself on its independence and self-sufficiency.
 - A major change in management of access to and on the Refuge would cause very grave concern and a strong reaction by the Town and its residents.

- ***Cape Cod National Seashore***

- Opportunities for cooperative law enforcement/management. Because of the limited number of law enforcement officials employed by FWS and the

- NPS, some said there may be opportunities to share law enforcement personnel, especially during the peak summer months.
- Differing Regulations/Restrictions. The town, NPS, and FWS all have different mandates, interests, and regulations, some of which are in conflict with each other, making co-management of the area problematic. Some interviewees noted that FWS should make efforts to clarify and communicate how the FWS is different than NPS. Many noted that they both are viewed as “the federal government” and many may miss important distinctions about regulation, mandate, and resources.
 - Overlapping boundaries. Confusion exists regarding the boundary of the National Seashore and the Refuge as both have migrated since their original designations many years ago. There are areas of both that overlap with each other as well as with the Town, and it is not clear which jurisdiction trumps the other. During discussions people explained that usually informal agreements are made by the people overseeing the resources rather than through formal understandings—a type of peaceful coexistence but one that creates confusion with some other stakeholders.
 - Lessons learned. Some noted that the FWS should take lessons from recent public involvement efforts sponsored by NPS, including ones involving hunting.
- ***The Public***. As noted under other topics, some interviewees mentioned the issues of how well and to what degree the FWS should manage public use and access at the Refuge. Some interviewed were unclear of FWS metric for success in how they run the refuge—does FWS look to increase the number of visitors it has to the refuge; do they try to increase the number of animals or animal species at the refuge; do they want to try to increase revenue at the refuge through commercial activities? In general, at least some were unclear as to how the public, visitors, and visitors’ activities fit into the Refuge’s mission and mandate.

NATURAL RESOURCES

- ***Geomorphology***
 - South Point Beach attaching to South Monomoy Island. The geomorphology of the area is changing, and it seems possible that South Beach will likely attach to South Monomoy Island, further convoluting the issue of jurisdiction between FWS, the Town, and NPS. Likewise, such a land bridge could have severe implications for predator control since coyotes and other predators could easily reach the island and feed on plover and terns on the refuge; it would also possibly impact fishing in the area. Furthermore, if South Beach changes jurisdiction, it could have major implications for recreation and commercial shellfishing.

- Dredging and Beach Renourishment. Dredging and beach renourishment have been discussed as a potential need by some. A few interviewees mentioned this topic.
- ***Archeology and historic artifacts***. A few mentioned that the Refuge does and must contain numerous historic artifacts from shipwrecks to Native American cultural resources. A few expressed concern that the FWS has not adequately catalogued what they might have and do not have the personnel to police beachcombers and others from taking such finds.
- ***Visual impact***. A few noted that extensive activity on South Beach could detract from the relative isolation and wilderness experience of the Refuge.
- ***Predator Control***
 - Coyotes. Some noted strong concern about predator control of coyotes. It was noted that control of coyotes could be quite ineffective, that it is a regional, and is not solely a Refuge issue. Some stated that it is imperative that the refuge utilize existing non-lethal alternatives and actively search out new ones, and that when lethal control does occur, the targets are specific. Some stated that lethal predator control is probably never appropriate for a wildlife refuge, but policies that integrate deterrents and careful habitat modification, target only offending individuals, and actively search out alternatives to lethal control are certainly more appropriate than the refuge's current policy of shooting coyotes on sight. Some suggested more research was needed on kinds of control and its effectiveness
 - Black Crowned Night Herons. A few mentioned this issue. One noted that since it is focused on individuals and not on the species as a whole, the control activities are targeted, specific, and appropriate. Another noted that since this is a declining species in Massachusetts, FWS should be very careful about taking this species, for whatever reason.
 - Gulls. Some mentioned this issue; particularly in regard to prior FWS control efforts. Some noted that this was the most serious and significant conflict that the Refuge has faced. Some interviewees noted that the lessons from this experience – the strength and influence of local residents, Cape Cod residents, and associated elected officials – should be applied to future, potentially contentious issues. Some noted that the problem has gone away with the closing of local landfills.
- ***Wilderness Management***. A few noted that the upland Islands within the wilderness boundary are not heavily used, protected from most adverse uses, and that the commercial shellfisherman provided a monitoring mechanism and report concerning activity to the FWS, including around areas closed for nesting and other sensitive bird activity. It should be noted that the flats and waters within the

wilderness do see activity (see comments on fishing, shellfishing and other uses above).

- ***Seal/motorboat interactions.*** Few interviewees raised a concern about too great of adverse impacts to seals. However, a few expressed concern that this activity has become too large and has adverse impacts for seals and may be dangerous to those who unwisely get too close to the seals.
- ***Nesting seabirds and shorebirds.*** Most interviewees noted that this is the primary natural resource of the Refuge. Most interviewees consider this a valuable resource and one that the FWS does a decent to superior job in managing and protecting. Some noted the valuable relationship between Massachusetts Audubon and the Refuge, including the tours that take place frequently in the summer. A few noted that issues have arisen in the past, from gull control, to closure of various areas/Islands, to listing non-Native species such as goose and swan as part of the diversity. Overall, however, most interviewees appeared satisfied with the FWS managing of this primary resource.
- ***Endangered Species.*** Generally, interviewees noted the following federal or state-listed species as threatened or endangered.
 - Piping plover
 - Roseate tern
 - Northeastern beach tiger beetle
 - Northern Harrier
 - Short eared owl
- ***Vegetation control.*** Though listed in the original scoping documents and issues by FWS, our interviewees did not raise this issue. When prompted by us, no one expressed concern about prescribed burning or other vegetation control methods.
- ***Mosquito control.*** Currently on Monomoy the Cape Cod Mosquito Control Project controls mosquitoes. BTI (a bacteria that acts specifically on mosquito larvae preventing development) is applied by hand to water. According to the few who mentioned this issue, the application is safe and there have been no incidences with humans or other animals. Many in the Town do support the control of mosquitoes due to their nuisance and more importantly, their ability to carry various diseases.
- ***Horseshoe crabs.*** Though this was a litigated issue recently, most interviewees believed that its restriction was appropriate and handled effectively. The few who mentioned the resource noted the importance of crabs to the lifecycle of birds and other wildlife.