MONOMOY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Suggestions for Community Engagement
For the Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

Our interviewees provided a number of ideas how the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) might engage the public during its upcoming planning process. Interviewees offered suggestions for both the "rescoping process" that will initiate the planning process as well as for activities as the planning process proceeds. Generally, these suggestions are built around the first several of the following planning stages:

- Scope the issues
- Define the vision and goals
- Develop alternatives for meeting the vision and goals
- Prepare a draft plan and accompanying National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document, including selecting preferred alternatives
- Finalize the Plan
- Implement the Plan

Within these activities, the FWS might seek to achieve any number of public engagement goals. Generically, the goals of public engagement may include:

- To inform
- To educate
- To listen
- To receive comment
- To discuss
- To dialogue
- To build agreement

Public engagement includes reaching out to and informing others as well as listening to and being influenced by others. In short, effective community engagement is a two-way street. At its best, an agency and its stakeholders participate in a dialogue that leads to shared understanding, shared learning, shared expectations, new and good ideas, and ultimately, shared approaches (at least in part) on how to plan and manage the resources of the refuge.

Please note that the suggestions below go above and beyond the regulatory requirements for public involvement. FWS is obligated only to provide public input and comment during the scoping and draft document stages. However, experience in many different planning venues has shown that, within given resources, more public engagement during

the planning process as whole leads to more robust, transparent, understood, and comprehensive plans that are easier to implement.

These suggestions include comments about general outreach as well as specific kinds of forums that FWS or others might host.

EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Whatever the activities of FWS planning, one of the key goals of public engagement is sharing information and engagement. This meets the objectives of informing and educating. The interviewees had a range of suggestions for how the public (and its many segments) might be notified of issues, action, and events. Generally, we found that many interviewees did not feel informed of past planning activities and were unclear about the current status of the scoping and planning efforts. Most interviewees asked that FWS find at least a few means to communicate regularly with the public during the planning process – even if no additional progress has been made – so all are aware of the status of FWS's efforts.

Tools for Education and Information
The following are a range of means that FWS might use to inform the public of their planning efforts.

- Press releases
- Easily accessible Websites
- Poster boards – poster-size boards that highlight key information and issues, usually including technical information, charts, pictures, and graphs
- Fact sheets of key issues or areas
- Periodic and regular written Updates – these might include one to two page documents that can be distributed via email lists, mail, and made available at local venues for easy distribution.

Outlets for Education and Information
Interviewees also suggested a variety of means for disseminating information. The general message we heard is that the FWS should be active and regular in its communications with stakeholders. Though the FWS may not have the resources to utilize all of these outlets, we suggest that the Service use at least a few different outlets to ensure that as many different individuals receive information as possible. Though the FWS may have to establish an administrative record repository at one or more locations, this "information repository" approach was not one suggested by interviewees.

The primary outlets suggested by interviewees include:

- Local and regional papers. These include the *Chatham Chronicle*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Cape Cod Times*.
- Local libraries, town halls, and local "hot spots" like breakfast places and grocery stores. These are particularly useful for posting upcoming meeting notices, times, and locations.
- Email and list serves. Most interviewees have access to email and would greatly appreciate periodic updates on the planning process. Emails might include a short written update in Word or in PDF form. In order to reach out to a greater number of individuals, the FWS could, with permission and assistance, forward information to organizations that already have established member email list serves. This would be an effective means to distribute information quickly, widely, and inexpensively. Neighborhood associations, fishermen's' groups, wildlife and environmental organizations, and others all have such lists.
- U.S. Mail. Interviewees didn't express a strong preference for written versus electronic communication. However, since at least some are not on email and because a large list of emails may be hard to obtain, some suggested that the best means to develop a mail list would be to review the Town's tax rolls and invite both non-resident and resident taxpayers via such a list to key events and notify them of actions and public comment periods. Some noted that such an extensive mail list might be too costly and difficult to manage.
- Cable access bulletin boards and local shows

DISCUSSION AND DIALOGUE

Though informing and education are important public engagement activities, they are rarely sufficient in meeting the interests of the public and agencies. Most of our interviewees want to hold discussions and dialogue with the FWS during the planning process.

As we understand it, by requirement, FWS would have to hold at least a public comment period and a public meeting of some kind during the scoping of the Plan as well as when the draft Plan is issued for comment and prior to finalizing it. It is also our understanding, that given the many stakeholders and issues associated with the Monomoy Refuge, the FWS (and those we interviewed) would like to engage its public(s) in more interactive discussions and dialogues.

In order to meet public engagement goals of discussion and dialogue, we suggest a few kinds of forums that would go beyond typical public meetings. Typical public meetings usually involve the agency presenting and the public commenting on issues and concerns. Though public meetings can be useful in helping an agency learn about the range of views and issues in a community and with the public, such meetings have significant limitations. Public meetings rarely lead to a nuanced understanding of everyone's

concerns, do not provide an opportunity to explore options, and structurally tend to divide the discussion into "us" and "them" rather than helping all focus on the commonly shared public resource.

Please note that the suggestions below are meant to be supplementary to the public comment process. For both the FWS and its stakeholders, a public comment process where anyone can prepare written comments and enter them into the administrative record is an essential and required part of the planning process.

Forums for Discussion and Dialogue
We heard a range of views on how best for the FWS and its stakeholders to meet in a constructive and useful fashion. Generally, interviewees stressed that forums should be well-planned and organized, have good groundrules for constructive participation, be noticed several weeks in advance (for larger events), and disseminate materials ahead of time so participants can be more focused in their comments. We heard that kinds of forums ought to be tailored to the kind of issues, the goal of the dialogue, and the sensitivity of the issues. Overall, interviewees made three broad suggestions for kinds of useful forums for dialogue.

- *Small, Individual Organizational/Stakeholder Meetings*. Within the proper bounds of administrative law, the FWS ought to meet with key constituents in small, informal meetings to discuss issues and concerns. Such meetings might include meeting with the Town of Chatham on issues important to the Town or meeting with direct abutters to the Refuge Headquarters. These kinds of small, informal meetings can help focus everyone on a few key issues, keep the dialogue to a manageable number of individuals, and help better build trust and understanding. These meetings are not and must not be decisional nor a replacement for other kinds of public activities. These kinds of meetings are essential for addressing highly complex, difficult and contentious issues. Though action items and next steps are often put in writing after these kinds of meetings, generally, one does not produced detailed minutes or summaries after such informal meetings.

- *Targeted, Issue or Stakeholder Focused Public Dialogues*. Rather than hold one large, all inclusive public event that would seek to draw all stakeholders and discuss all issues relevant to managing the Refuge, many interviewees suggested holding a larger number of more focused public dialogues. For instance, during the rescoping process, the FWS might hold three public dialogues. For examples sake, these might include: one on public use and access; one on wildlife and resource management; and, one on commercial activities in and near the refuge. Though anyone and everyone would be invited to attend, these more focused meetings would allow a more detailed, thorough discussion of the issues under each broad topic. For the public record, for later FWS deliberations, and for

informing those not attending, it is important to have a meeting summary of the dialogue.

- *Public Workshops*. If the FWS did decide to hold one inclusive public event to ensure they have understood all the issues in initiating rescoping, many interviewees suggested that such a forum be well-designed, well-organized, and utilize lots of smaller group work (breakout groups). For instance, the FWS might sponsor a Workshop on a weekend day for a half-day to three-quarters day event. This event might include some general presentations on the Refuge and its resources and the planning process. Then, participants would move to smaller breakout groups. Each breakout group would have a facilitator/recorder and a FWS resource person. In one format, groups of participants might move through several "issue breakouts" to express their views and concerns. In this kind of "round robin" format, everyone gets a chance to discuss all the issues.

  In another kind of format, participants might choose to go to a specific topical breakout group such as predator management or public access or traffic and parking. This kind of approach allows people to choose the topic they are most interested in, but it does not allow everyone to comment on every issue. After breakout groups are held in whatever approach, participants report back to the larger group. Lastly, if desired, once all the issues are identified and discussed, the Workshop can use various facilitation techniques to identify which f the issues are of most importance to the participants. For the public record, for later FWS deliberations, and for informing those not attending, it is important to have a meeting summary of the dialogue. This approach might also be used once FWS has developed draft goals and objectives and preliminary alternatives so that the stakeholders would have an in-depth opportunity to understand, discuss, and offer comment on FWS's developing plans.

When to Hold Forums and How Often during the Planning Process

The three kinds of approaches above might be held at any number of times and at any number of points during the planning process. Though such details will be worked out by the FWS as it proceeds, we did hear a few key and specific suggestions.

- *Seasonal residents must have an opportunity to participate*. Thus, if the rescoping process is taking place this winter, it will be important to use mailings and organizational mailing lists/list serves to educate and inform those not available locally. At the least, it would be important to hold at least an informational meeting in early summer to help summer residents and frequent visitors learn about and comment on where the planning process is at that point. We did ask if a second, scoping forum in Boston would reach out to seasonal residents and visitors. Many noted that Chatham draws from such a wide national and

international base; an additional Boston meeting would still miss many of these stakeholders.

- *The FWS should engage stakeholders more times than at scoping and at the draft Plan stage*. In addition to the written forms of outreach suggested above, many interviewees stressed the FWS should not simply "rescope the issues" then "disappear" until the draft Plan is produced for comment. Thus, if possible within FWS's resources and time constraints, we suggest, at a minimum, that FWS hold one or more public forums (as well as the more informal, smaller meetings), at the following points in the planning process.

    - For rescoping;
    - During early summer 05 as an information session to inform seasonal residents and visitors
    - For sharing and obtaining input on the Plan's vision and goals'
    - For sharing and obtaining input on the Plan's alternatives;
    - For sharing and obtaining input on the draft Plan.

    We recognize that this would be a significant investment of limited public resources. However, given our interviewees and experience elsewhere, to achieve the goals of dialogue, discussion, and even agreement building on some issues, we think this periodic engagement of the public is essential. The effort is likely to produce a draft plan that is better understood, better informed by public interest, and more likely to have the support of a wider range of stakeholders.

    And, on key, sensitive issues, we *strongly recommend* that FWS engage key stakeholders even more frequently in face-to-face, direct, on-going dialogue.

- *The FWS should establish a clear and transparent schedule of actions, activities, and the role of stakeholders.* In whatever manner FWS decides to engage stakeholders, it is important for the agency to provide clarity and some measure of certainty for when stakeholders and the public at large will have the opportunity to voice issues, influence draft documents and plans, and provide more formal public comment. Previous gaps in communication have sometimes led to confusion, uncertainty, and suspicion. Thus, CBI recommends that FWS develop a schedule of public/stakeholder activities for the entire planning process. Though this schedule and scope may be somewhat general and may evolve over time, it will help shape expectations and provide clarity for how stakeholders will be involved.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

Interviewees made some additional suggestions. We have listed these briefly below.

- Find joint sponsors for events such as Conservation Commissions, Audubon, Town, or The Friends group.
- Use Informational Meetings to get people up to speed before taking feedback/input on the issues.
- Use groups such as the Friends group to convene small, informal meetings as needed.
- Hold public meetings in which key stakeholder groups make presentations, take comment, and FWS primarily listens.
- In meetings, don't explain too much or expect audience to care about all the federal regulations and policies that guide planning.
- Get surveys from NPS they gathered during their recent public process regarding hunting.
- Be clear about how the FWS is different than NPS – it's not just the "Federal" government.
- In public meetings, limit testimony to 2 to 4 minutes.
- Get written information out early so people can be more effective in their comments.
- Participate in an ad hoc, periodic (once a quarter perhaps), non-Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) committee to help review and discuss the on-going planning activities.