

Chapter 1



Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

American Widgeon Drake

The Purpose of and Need for Action

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Chapter 1

The Purpose of and Need for Action

Introduction

This Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge (Iroquois Refuge, the refuge) is a requirement of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 6688dd, et seq.; Improvement Act). The CCP will serve as a guide for the refuge’s management over the next 15 years.

The CCP is divided into five chapters with eight supporting appendices. This chapter introduces the purpose and need for the development of the CCP and sets the stage for chapters 2 through 4. This chapter includes:

- an explanation of the purpose and need for preparing a CCP for Iroquois Refuge;
- a description of the purposes for which the refuge was established;
- an overview of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service), its national and regional mandates and policies that influenced this document; and
- the vision and goals for Iroquois Refuge;

Chapter 2, “The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process,” provides an explanation of the planning process and how it is used to develop this document and issues and concerns addressed during the planning process.

Chapter 3, “Refuge Resources,” describes the physical, biological, and human environment of the refuge.

Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation,” presents an array of management actions that work best in terms of our ability to meet the refuge’s goals and objectives and respond to the key issues identified at the end of chapter 2.

Chapter 5, “Consultation and Coordination” describes the use, purpose and value of public and partner involvement throughout the planning process and identifies key individuals involved in preparation of this document.

This document also includes a glossary of terms, a list of commonly used acronyms and abbreviations and a bibliography.

Purpose and Need for Action

We developed a CCP that best meets the refuge’s primary purpose, goals and objectives, contributes to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), abides by Service policies and mandates, addresses key issues, and responds to public concerns.

Partner and public involvement is vital to the process of developing a CCP that will successfully guide management of Iroquois Refuge for the next 15 years. The CCP was developed to provide

- a clear vision of the desired future conditions of refuge habitat, wildlife populations, visitor services, staffing, and facilities;

- clear communication regarding refuge management actions to state agencies, refuge neighbors, visitors and partners;
- assurance that refuge management reflects the policies, legal mandates, and the mission of the Refuge System;
- assurance that current and future public use is compatible with the primary purpose of the refuge;
- long-term continuity in refuge management; and
- guidance for staffing, operating, maintenance, and annual budget requests.

The Improvement Act (Public Law 105–57; 111 Stat. 1282) requires that all national wildlife refuges have a CCP completed by 2012 to help fulfill the mission of the Refuge System.

This CCP benefits Iroquois Refuge for multiple reasons: First, it provides the refuge with an updated master plan to ensure fulfillment of its obligations in light of the dramatic changes in environmental, economic, and social conditions since the refuge was first established. Second, it prepares the refuge to better respond to concerns regarding future industries (quarries and wind farms) that may establish in local towns and have an impact on the refuge’s environment and wildlife. Lastly, it allows the refuge to address issues identified during the planning process by the public, partners, other agencies, and refuge staff that could adversely affect fish, wildlife, and plant populations on refuge lands.

This CCP will be reviewed, evaluated, and subsequently updated at least every 15 years in accordance with the Improvement Act and Service planning policy (602 Service 1, 3, and 4).

Project Area

Iroquois Refuge was established in 1958 and encompasses 10,828 acres of open water, emergent marsh, forested wetland, upland forest, grassland, and shrubland habitats. The refuge lies within the rural towns of Alabama in Genesee County and Shelby in Orleans County in the Oak Orchard Creek Watershed on the Lake Plains of western New York (map 1-1 and 1-2). Oak Orchard Creek enters the refuge from the east, meanders northwest, and exits to the north, eventually emptying into Lake Ontario. The refuge is approximately 25 miles west of Lake Erie and 20 miles south of Lake Ontario. New York State Route 63 runs through the center of the refuge, bisecting it from east to west. Iroquois Refuge, in combination with neighboring New York State Wildlife Management Areas, forms the 19,000-acre Tonawanda-Iroquois-Oak Orchard Wetland Complex (map 1-3); this complex is one of the largest contiguous blocks of natural habitat in western New York and includes some of the most productive inland wildlife habitat in the eastern United States.

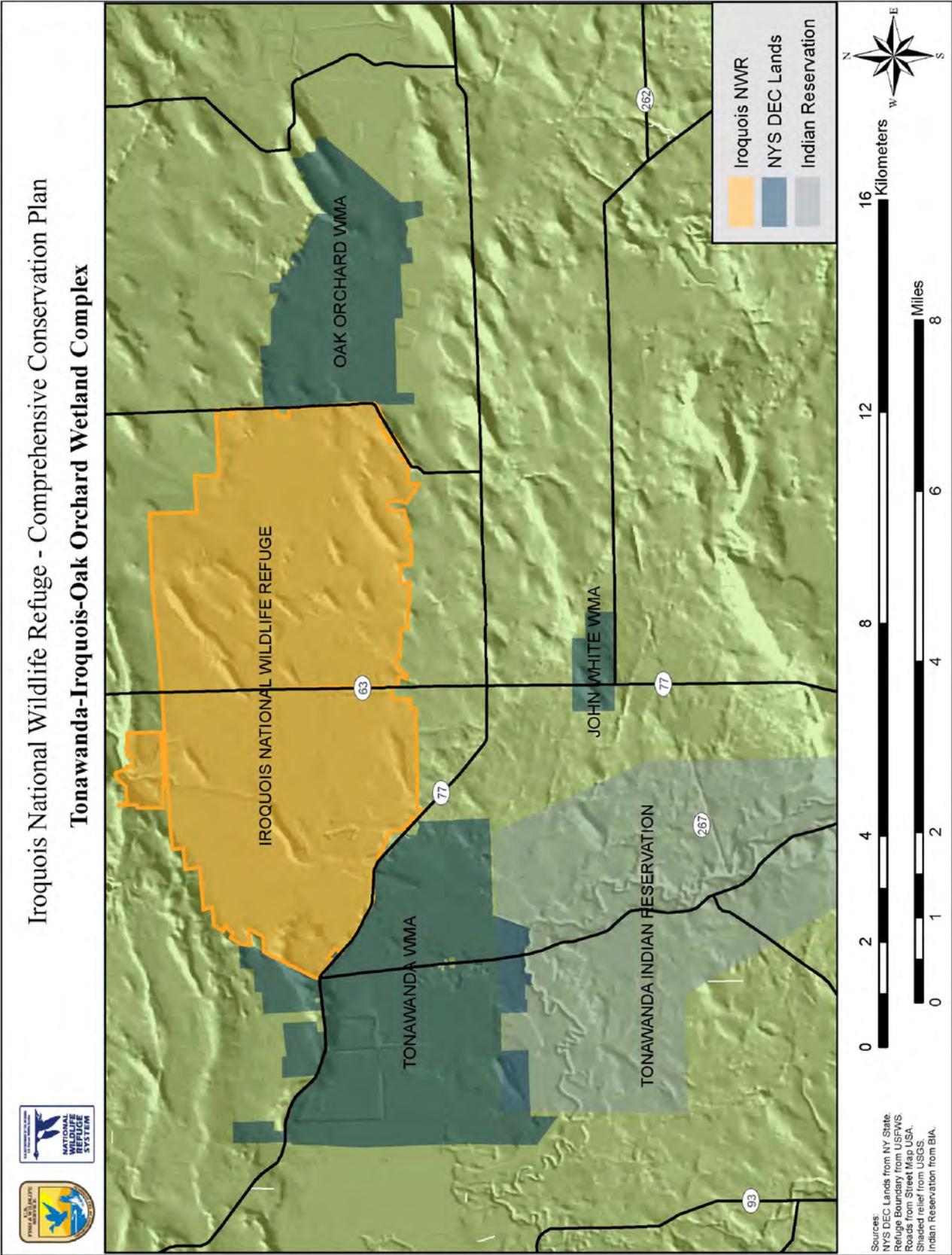


Egret in wetland at Iroquois Refuge





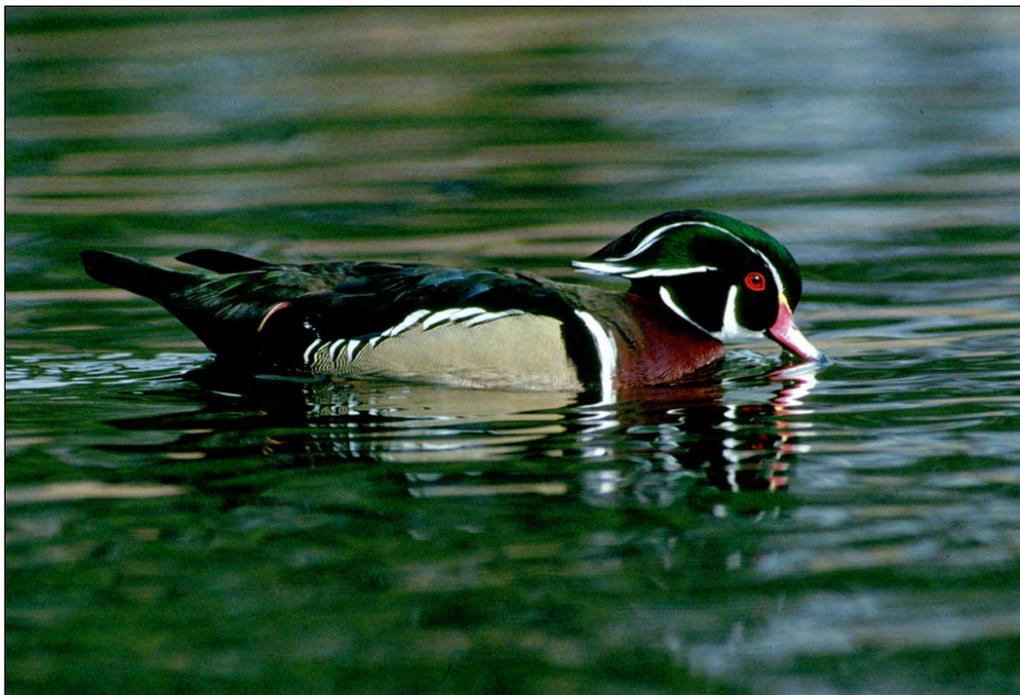
Map 1-3



Over half of the refuge is wetland (6,500 acres) with 4,000 of these wetland acres contained in 19 managed freshwater impoundments. Water levels are adjusted within and between years to mimic natural hydroperiods associated with unaltered wetlands to provide a variety of feeding, nesting, brood rearing, and resting habitats for migratory birds and resident wildlife. The interspersed of open water and aquatic and emergent plant communities provide resting and feeding habitat for over 120,000 waterfowl annually.

Forested wetlands comprise about 3,400 acres of the refuge and are located in the natural floodplain of Oak Orchard Creek and in Seneca Pool, a constructed greentree impoundment. Wood duck boxes and natural tree cavities in mature forested wetlands provide nesting sites for wood duck, hooded merganser, and more than a dozen species of resident and migratory landbirds, and habitat for many mammal species. Approximately 2,200 of the 4,100 acres of upland habitat at Iroquois Refuge are currently maintained in an early successional stage as grassland or shrubland through active management. Grasslands and impoundment dikes are mowed or burned according to a multi-year rotation schedule to suppress encroachment of broadleaf forbs and woody plants.

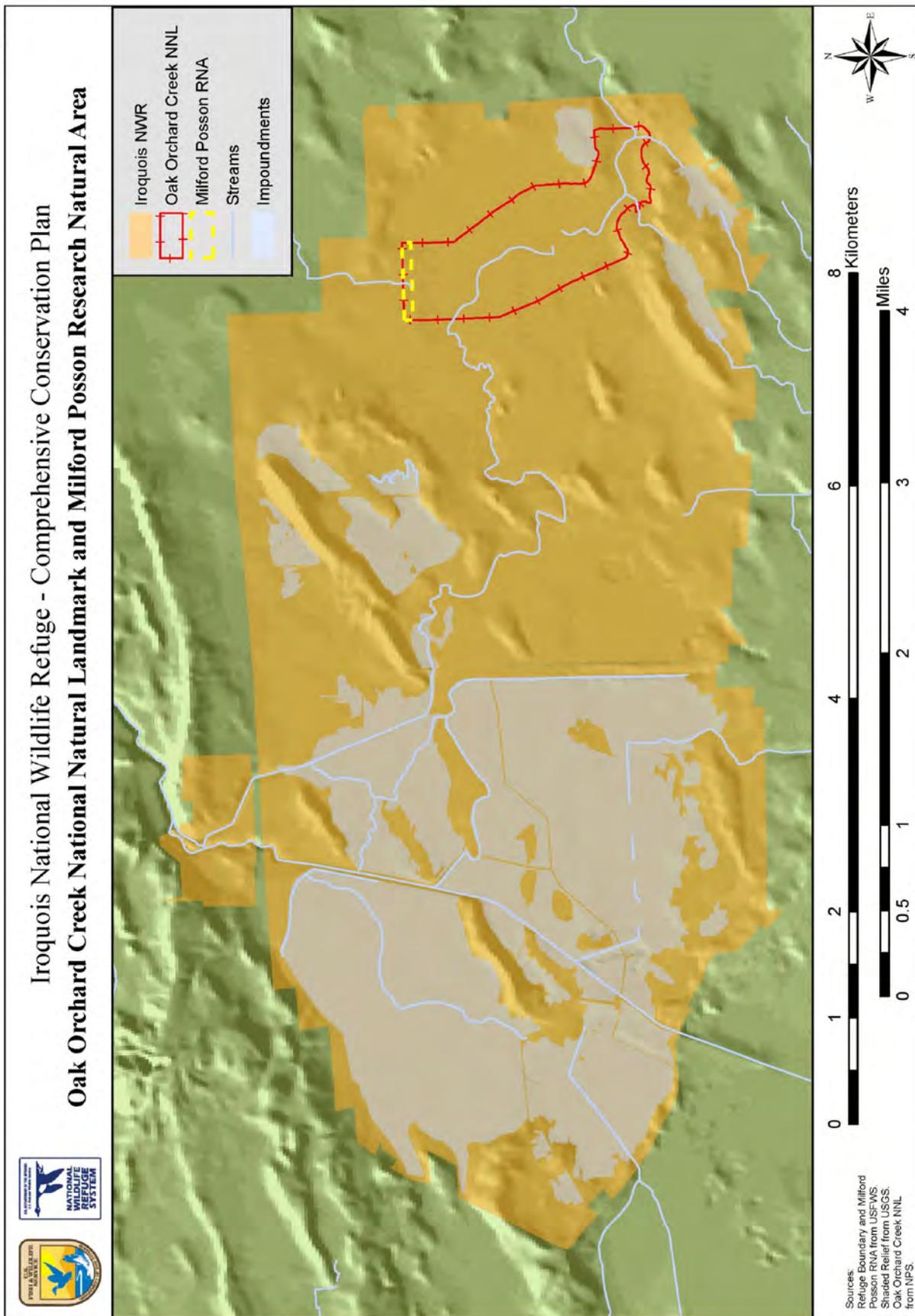
Iroquois Refuge was one of the first areas in New York designated as a National Audubon Society Important Bird Area. The 523-acre Oak Orchard Creek Marsh was designated in 1973 as a National Natural Landmark (NNL; map 1-4). When this landmark was established it included the 15-acre Milford Posson Research Natural Area (RNA; map 1-4).



USFWS

Wood Duck

Map 1-4



The refuge is open to the public and facilitates wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities including hunting, fishing, interpretation, environmental education, wildlife observation and photography. The Improvement Act encourages refuges to provide these types of opportunities when compatible with the primary purpose of the refuge or mission of the Refuge System. Total visitation to the refuge fluctuates year to year between 35,000 to 50,000 visits. A large portion of visitors (75 percent to 80 percent) participate in the refuge's non-consumptive uses such as wildlife observation and interpretation. Iroquois Refuge has four nature trails meandering over six miles allowing visitors to experience the diverse wildlife habitats found on the refuge. Four overlooks provide vantage points for viewing wildlife, including nesting bald eagles. A smaller percentage of Refuge visitors (20 percent to 25 percent) participate in consumptive recreation. Consumptive recreation includes fishing, and hunting for deer, turkey, waterfowl, rail, snipe, woodcock, rabbit, and squirrel. Trapping for furbearers including muskrat, beaver, and mink is conducted for management purposes.

The refuge has partnered with several organizations including Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. (Friends of Iroquois Refuge), Lake Plains Waterfowl Association, Buffalo Audubon Society, the University of Buffalo, Canisius College, and Iroquois Job Corps Center to provide quality special events, youth orientations, environmental education, and interpretation programs. The refuge hosts a Spring into Nature Celebration each April in cooperation with partners providing a range of activities that introduce approximately 1,000 visitors to wildlife, wildlife habitat, and conservation on the refuge. Buffalo Audubon Society has been providing interpretive programs on and near the refuge since 2003. Their nature programs help reach approximately 1,000 people annually. A Youth Turkey Hunt, Youth Waterfowl Hunt, and Youth Fishing Derby are conducted each year to introduce younger generations to these outdoor activities and to provide them with a quality recreational opportunity.

The Service, Policies, and Legal Mandates

This section provides an overview of the Service, the Refuge System, and Service policies and mandates that directly influenced the development of this CCP.

Our Mission

The Service is part of the Department of the Interior. Our mission is:

“Working with others, to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.”

By law, Congress entrusts national resources to the Service for conservation and protection. Those trust resources consist of national wildlife refuges, migratory birds, Federal-listed endangered and threatened species, interjurisdictional fishes, wetlands, and certain marine mammals. To uphold our responsibilities and to achieve our mission we engage in a diversity of activities and programs. These include

- operation and management of the 150-million acre Refuge System which includes 553 national wildlife refuges and thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas;
- operation and management of 70 national fish hatcheries, 65 fishery resource offices, and 81 ecological services field stations;
- enforcement of Federal wildlife laws and international treaties on importing and exporting wildlife;
- protection, restoration and management of endangered species, migratory birds, marine mammals, nationally significant fisheries, and wildlife habitat such as wetlands;

- assistance to foreign governments with their international conservation efforts and development of wildlife conservation programs;
- oversight of the Federal Aid Program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies; and
- employment of approximately 7,500 people at facilities across the country, with a headquarters in Washington D.C., eight geographic regions, and nearly 700 field units.

The Service manual contains standing and continuing directives for implementing those authorities, responsibilities, and activities. The manual can be accessed at: <http://www.fws.gov/pdm/direct.html>.

Special Service directives that affect the rights of citizens or the authorities of other agencies are published separately in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), and are not duplicated in the Service manual. Most of the current regulations that pertain to the Service are issued in 50 CFR parts 1-99. The CFR can be accessed at: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html>.

The National Wildlife Refuge System, Its Mission, and Policies

The Refuge System is the world's largest network of public lands and waters set aside specifically for conserving wildlife and protecting ecosystems. The Refuge System began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated the 3-acre Pelican Island in Florida as a national bird sanctuary. From its creation, the Refuge System has grown to 553 national wildlife refuges protecting 150 million acres of public lands; there is at least one refuge in all 50 States and there are waterfowl production areas in 10 states. Each year, more than 40 million visitors hunt, fish, observe and photograph wildlife, or participate in environmental education and interpretation on refuge lands. Varying in size from half-acre parcels to thousands of square miles, the majority of these lands are in Alaska, with the rest spread across the lower 48 States and U.S. territories. Like Pelican Island, many early wildlife refuges were created for herons, egrets, and other waterbirds. Other refuges were set aside for large mammals like elk and bison. But most national wildlife refuges were created to conserve migratory waterfowl. This is a result of the United States' responsibilities under international treaties for migratory bird conservation and legislation such as the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929. Refuges dot the map along the four major "flyways" that waterfowl follow from their northern nesting grounds to southern wintering areas. Iroquois Refuge lies within the Atlantic Flyway.

In 1997, the Improvement Act was passed. This law established a unifying mission for the Refuge System, a new process for determining compatible public use activities on the refuges, and the requirement to prepare CCPs for each refuge. The Improvement Act states first and foremost, that the Refuge System must focus on wildlife conservation. It further states that the national mission, coupled with the purpose(s) for which each refuge was established, will provide the principal management direction for each refuge.

The mission of the Refuge System is:

"To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

- Refuge Improvement Act; Public Law 105-57

The Improvement Act identifies six wildlife-dependent priority public uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. These six uses receive priority

consideration on refuges and in the development of CCPs. The Improvement Act also declares that all existing or proposed refuge uses must be compatible with the refuge's purpose and consistent with public safety. The refuge manager determines if an existing or proposed use is compatible by evaluating its potential impact on refuge resources. This ensures that the use supports the System mission and does not materially interfere with or detract from the purpose for which the refuge was established.

The Refuge Manual provides a central reference for current policy governing the operation and management of the Refuge System not covered by the Service manual, including technical information on implementing refuge policies and guidelines. This manual can be reviewed at Iroquois Refuge headquarters.

Refuge System Planning Policy

The Refuge System has developed a planning policy that provides guidance, systematic direction, and minimum requirements for developing all CCPs and step-down management plans. This policy also provides a systematic decisionmaking process that fulfills those requirements. The policy states that we will manage all refuges in accordance with an approved CCP. Once implemented, the CCP will achieve the purpose of the refuge, help fulfill the Refuge System mission, maintain and restore the ecological integrity of each refuge, help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System, and meet other mandates that apply to the Refuge System (Fish and Wildlife Service Manual, 602 FW 1,2,3).

The Improvement Act stipulates that each CCP shall identify and describe

- the purposes of each refuge comprising the planning unit (chapter 1);
- the distribution, migration patterns, and abundance of fish, wildlife, and plant populations and related habitats within the planning unit (Chapter 3, Refuge Resources);
- the archaeological and cultural values of the planning unit (chapter 3);
- areas within the planning unit that are suitable for use as administrative sites or visitor facilities (Chapter 4, Management Direction and Implementation);
- significant problems that may adversely affect the populations and habitats of fish, wildlife, and plants within the planning unit and the actions necessary to correct or mitigate such problems (chapters 1, 3 and 4); and
- opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses (chapter 4).

Appropriate Refuge Uses Policy

The Appropriate Refuge Uses Policy provides a national framework and procedure for refuge managers to follow when deciding if uses are appropriate on a refuge. It also clarifies and expands on the Compatibility Policy (603 FW 2.10D) which describes when refuge managers should deny a proposed use without determining compatibility. When we find a use is appropriate, we must then determine if the use is compatible before we allow it on a refuge. This policy applies to all proposed and existing uses in the Refuge System only when we have jurisdiction over the use and does not apply to refuge management activities or situations where reserved rights or legal mandates provide we must allow certain uses (603 FW 1). To view the policy and regulations online, visit: <http://www.fws.gov/policy/603fw1.html>.

Compatibility Policy

Federal law and Service policy provide the direction and planning framework to protect the Refuge System from incompatible or harmful human activities and ensure that Americans can enjoy Refuge System lands and waters. The Improvement Act is the key legislation regarding management of public uses and compatibility. The compatibility requirements of the Improvement Act were adopted in the Service Final Compatibility Regulations and Final Compatibility Policy published October 18, 2000 (*Federal Register*, Vol. 65, No. 202, pp. 62458 to 62496). This Compatibility Policy changed or modified Service regulations contained in Chapter 50, Parts 25, 26, and 29 of the CFR (Service 2000a). The specific compatibility determinations for Iroquois Refuge can be found in appendix B. To view the policy and regulations online, visit: <http://www.fws.gov/policy/603fw2.html>.

Wildlife-Dependent Recreation Policy

The Improvement Act defines and establishes that compatible wildlife dependent recreational uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation) are the priority general public uses of the Refuge System and will receive special consideration in refuge planning and management over other general public uses. The Wildlife Dependent Recreation Policy explains how we will provide visitors with opportunities for those priority public uses on units of the Refuge System and how we will facilitate these uses. To view the policy and regulations online, visit:

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/605fw1.html> (Wildlife Dependent Recreation Policy)

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/605fw2.html> (Hunting)

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/605fw3.html> (Recreational Fishing)

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/605fw4.html> (Wildlife Observation)

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/605fw5.html> (Wildlife Photography)

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/605fw6.html> (Environmental Education)

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/605fw7.html> (Interpretation)

Maintaining Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health Policy

This policy provides guidance on maintaining or restoring the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System including the protection of a broad spectrum of fish, wildlife, and habitat resources found in refuge ecosystems. Refuge managers are provided with a process for evaluating the best management direction to prevent the additional degradation of environmental conditions and restore lost or severely degraded environmental components. Guidelines are also provided for managing external threats to the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of a refuge and its ecosystem (601 FW 3) and can be found at: <http://www.fws.gov/policy/601fw3.html>.

Fulfilling the Promise

In 1999 a report titled, “Fulfilling the Promise, The National Wildlife Refuge System; Visions for Wildlife, Habitat, People and Leadership” (Fulfilling the Promise) was published by the Service. The report is a culmination of a year-long process by teams of Service employees to create a vision for the Refuge System nationwide. This report was a result of the “System Conference” held in Keystone, Colorado in October 1998. It was attended by every refuge manager in the country, other Service employees, and scores of conservation organizations. The Fulfilling the Promise report contains 42 recommendations packaged within three vision statements focusing on wildlife and habitat, people, and leadership. We have often looked to the recommendations in this report for guidance when writing this CCP. For example, Fulfilling the Promise recommends forging new alliances through citizen and community partnerships and strengthening partnerships with the business community. One of the goals in

our CCP at Iroquois Refuge is devoted almost entirely to the development of community partnerships and several of our strategies focus on forging new partnerships or strengthening existing ones.

Other Mandates

Service and Refuge System policy and the refuge's purposes provide a foundation for its management. However, other Federal laws, executive orders, treaties, interstate compacts, and regulations on the conservation and protection of natural and cultural resources also affect how refuges are managed. The Digest of Federal Resource Laws of Interest to the Service lists many of them and can be accessed at: <http://law.fws.gov/lawsdigest/indx.html>.

Conservation Plans and Initiatives Guiding the Project

To the extent possible, a refuge CCP assists in meeting the conservation goals established in existing national and regional plans, state fish and wildlife conservation plans, and other landscape-scale plans covering the same watershed or ecosystem. We consulted the following plans in developing this CCP.

North American Bird Conservation Initiative

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) brings together individual landbird, shorebird, waterbird, and waterfowl plans (described below) into a coordinated effort to protect and restore all native bird populations and their habitats in North America. This “all bird” conservation initiative reduces redundancy in the structure, planning, and implementation of conservation projects. It uses Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) to guide landscape-scale, science-based approaches to conserving birds and their habitats. Iroquois Refuge lies within BCR 13 (map 1-5), the Lower Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Plain. This CCP takes guidance from priorities outlined in the BCR 13 preliminary plan and from the individual bird plans. For more information visit: <http://www.nabci-us.org>.



Steve Maslowski/USFWS

Bobolink



BCR 13 encompasses the vast, low-lying lake plain region surrounding Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River Valley, low-lying regions between the Adirondack Mountains and the Laurentian Highlands, and upper regions of the Hudson River Valley. In addition to providing important lakeshore habitats and associated wetlands, this region was originally dominated by a mixture of oak-hickory, northern hardwood, and mixed-coniferous forests. Nearly 95 percent of the original habitat types have been lost and the landscape is now dominated by agriculture with interspersed wetlands and remnant forest stands.

BCR 13 plays a critical role in providing important staging and migrating habitat for birds during the spring and fall migration (Hartley 2007). Iroquois Refuge used the 2007 BCR 13 Conservation Plan and information in the four individual bird plans to identify important local bird species and to develop habitat management goals and objectives for the refuge. The four individual bird plans relevant to Iroquois Refuge include:

- Partners in Flight – Landbirds – Lower Great Lakes Plain
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan – Atlantic Coast Joint Venture
- North American Waterbird Management Plan – Upper Mississippi Valley/Great Lake Region
- U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Northern Atlantic Regional Shorebird Plan

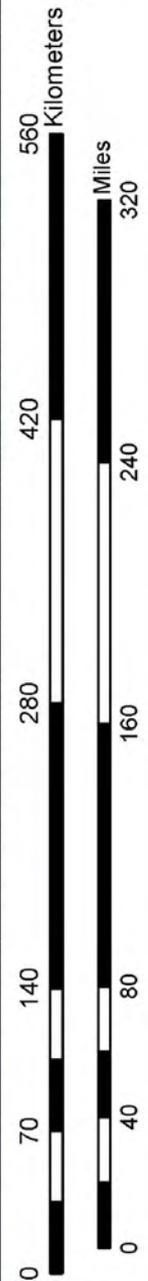
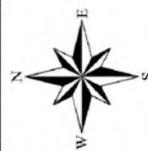
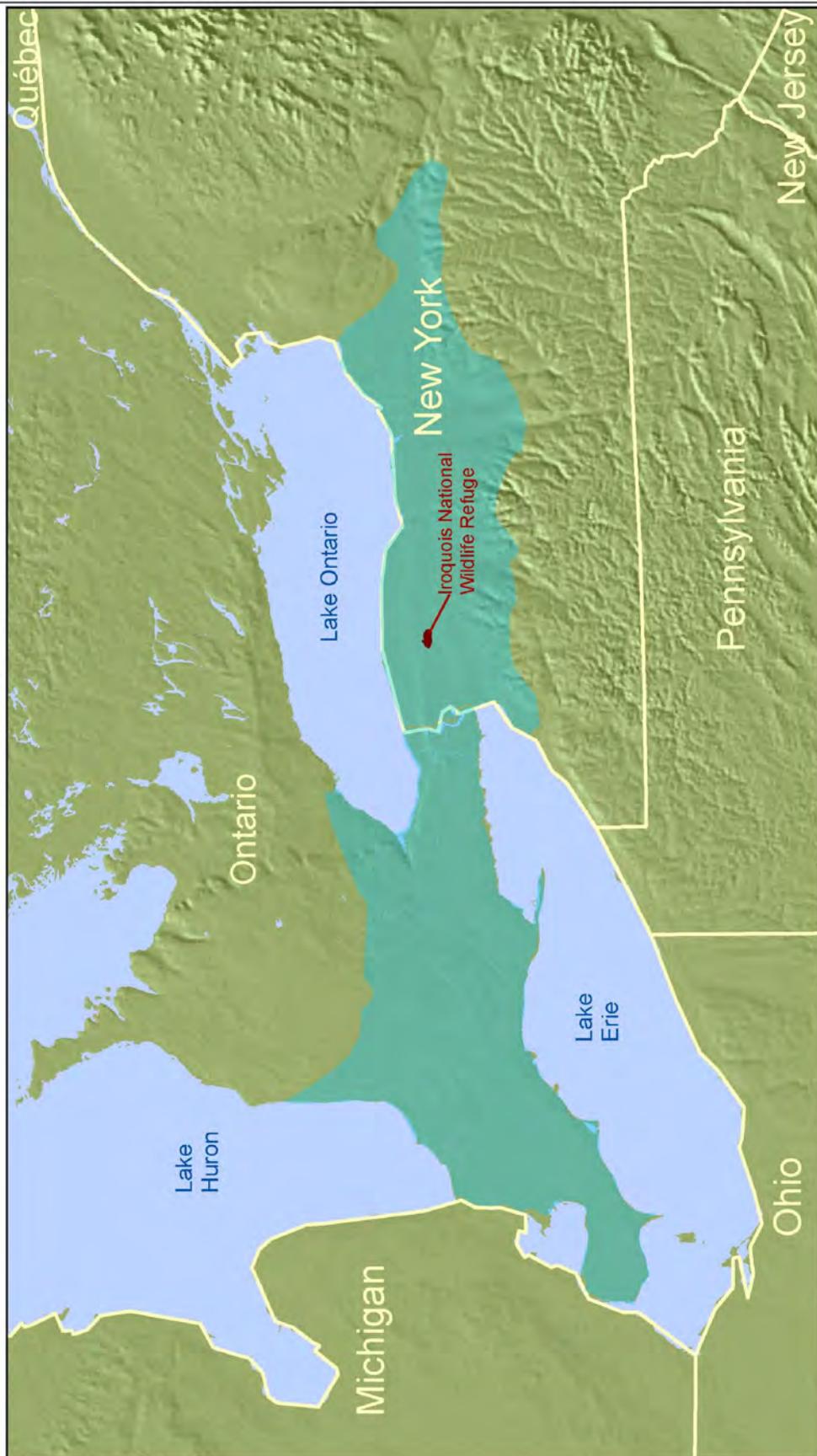
Partners in Flight Landbird Conservation Plan

In 1990, Partners in Flight (PIF) began as a voluntary, international coalition of government agencies, conservation organizations, academic institutions, private, industry, and other citizens dedicated to reversing the population declines of bird species and “keeping common birds common.” The foundation of PIF’s long-term strategy for bird conservation is a series of scientifically and geographically based Bird Conservation Plans. The initial focus on neotropical migratory bird species has since expanded to include all landbirds. You can view the PIF Landbird Conservation Plan at: http://www.partnersinflight.org/cont_plan/default.htm.

Initially, PIF developed draft conservation plans within “physiographic areas”; Iroquois Refuge lies in PIF Area 15 – the Lower Great Lakes Plain (map 1-6). PIF developed a set of objective, science-based rules to evaluate the conservation status of all bird species using species population size, distribution, population trend, threats, and regional abundance to identify regional and continental conservation priorities. Those rules were adapted, and are now being used, to identify bird conservation priorities and opportunities within BCRs. National wildlife refuges, including Iroquois Refuge, protect critical habitats in New York to help reverse decline of priority bird species such as cerulean warbler, Henslow’s sparrow, and other grassland birds and shrub-dependent species.

Map 1-6

Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge - Comprehensive Conservation Plan Partners In Flight (PIF) Area 15



Sources:
Refuge Boundary from USFWS.
Lakes and States from StreetMapUSA.
PIF Area and Shadedrelief map from USGS.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan: Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), signed by the United States and Canada in 1986 and by Mexico in 1994, provides a strategy to protect North America's remaining wetlands and conserve waterfowl populations through habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement (Service and Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) 1986). The plan was updated in 1998 and again in 2004. The updated plan includes a stronger biological foundation, a landscape planning approach, and expanded partnerships (Service and CWS 2004). Implementation of the NAWMP is accomplished at the regional level in Joint Venture Habitat Areas. There are eleven Joint Venture Habitat Areas in the United States, four in Canada, and one that stretches across the United States/Canada border. Partners for habitat conservation include Federal, state, and local governments, Tribal nations, local businesses, conservation organizations, and individual citizens. By 2004, NAWMP partners had invested more than \$3.2 billion to protect, restore, or enhance more than 13 million acres of habitat. More information on the NAWMP is available at: <http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/nawmp/nawmphp.htm>.

Iroquois Refuge lies within the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV); one of the original joint ventures formed under the NAWMP. The ACJV initially focused on protecting and restoring habitat for the American black duck and other waterfowl species in the Atlantic Coast region of the United States. Much of its support is generated through grants provided by the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. While maintaining a strong focus on waterfowl, the ACJV mission has evolved to include the conservation of habitats for all birds. At the regional scale, the ACJV is working on integrated planning efforts in eight BCRs. An important part of this planning effort is the development of Focus Area Plans. Focus Areas are discrete and distinguishable habitats or habitat complexes that are regionally important for one or more priority species during one or more life history stages. Focus Areas have been developed for waterfowl and are being developed for other migratory birds within the BCRs.

The Tonawanda-Iroquois-Oak Orchard Focus Area Plan (ACJV 1991) identified the rehabilitation of Mohawk Pool on Iroquois Refuge as a high priority project. The Service prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) specifically for this project in 2002 (Service 2002). The initial phase of the project is complete; three new wetland sub-units in the Mohawk Pool provide significant improvement in wetland habitat. Rehabilitation of Mohawk Pool and other priorities from the local Focus Area Plan are incorporated into this CCP. For more information on the ACJV go to: <http://www.acjv.org>.

North American Waterbird Conservation Plan

The North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (NAWCP) reflects an independent partnership among individuals and institutions with interest and responsibility for conserving waterbirds and their habitats. The primary goal of the plan is to ensure that the distribution, diversity, and abundance of populations and habitats of breeding, migratory, and non-breeding waterbirds are sustained or restored throughout the lands and waters of North America, Central America, and the Caribbean. The plan provides a framework for conserving and managing colonially nesting water-dependent birds and promotes continentwide planning and monitoring, national-state-provincial conservation action, regional coordination, and local habitat protection and management (Kushlan et al. 2002). A draft conservation plan has been prepared for the Upper Great Lakes/Mississippi Valley Region.

We used the NAWCP in the development of objectives, actions, and strategies for protecting and managing waterbirds that breed on the refuge including black tern, American bittern, and great blue heron. The waterbird plan is available at: <http://www.waterbirdconservation.org>.

U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Northern Atlantic Regional Shorebird Plan

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (USSCP) was developed by partners to ensure that stable, self-sustaining populations of all shorebird species are restored and protected. Collaborators include local,

state, and Federal agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business-related sectors, researchers, educators, and policymakers. The plan was closely coordinated with the NAWMP and Joint Venture staff, as well as PIF and the NAWCP teams as they concurrently developed their revised national plans. Team experts helped set conservation goals for each region of the country, identified critical habitat and research needs, and proposed education and outreach programs to increase awareness of shorebirds and the threats they face.

The USSCP (Brown et al. 2001) identifies three primary objectives: 1) Develop a standardized, scientifically sound system for monitoring and studying shorebird populations that will provide practical information to researchers and land managers for shorebird habitat conservation; 2) Identify the principles and practices upon which local, regional, and national management plans can effectively integrate shorebird habitat conservation with multiple species strategies; and 3) Design an integrated strategy for increasing public awareness and information concerning wetlands and shorebirds.

Regional plans, including the Upper Mississippi Valley/Great Lakes Regional Shorebird Plan, are being developed as part of the overall strategy (Clark and Niles 2000). We used the national and regional shorebird plans in developing the regional “resources of concern” list in appendix C, and in considering the value of the refuge for migrating shorebirds.

The USSCP can be accessed at: <http://shorebirdplan.fws.gov/USShorebird.htm> and the regional plan at: <http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan/RegionalShorebird/RegionalPlans.htm>.

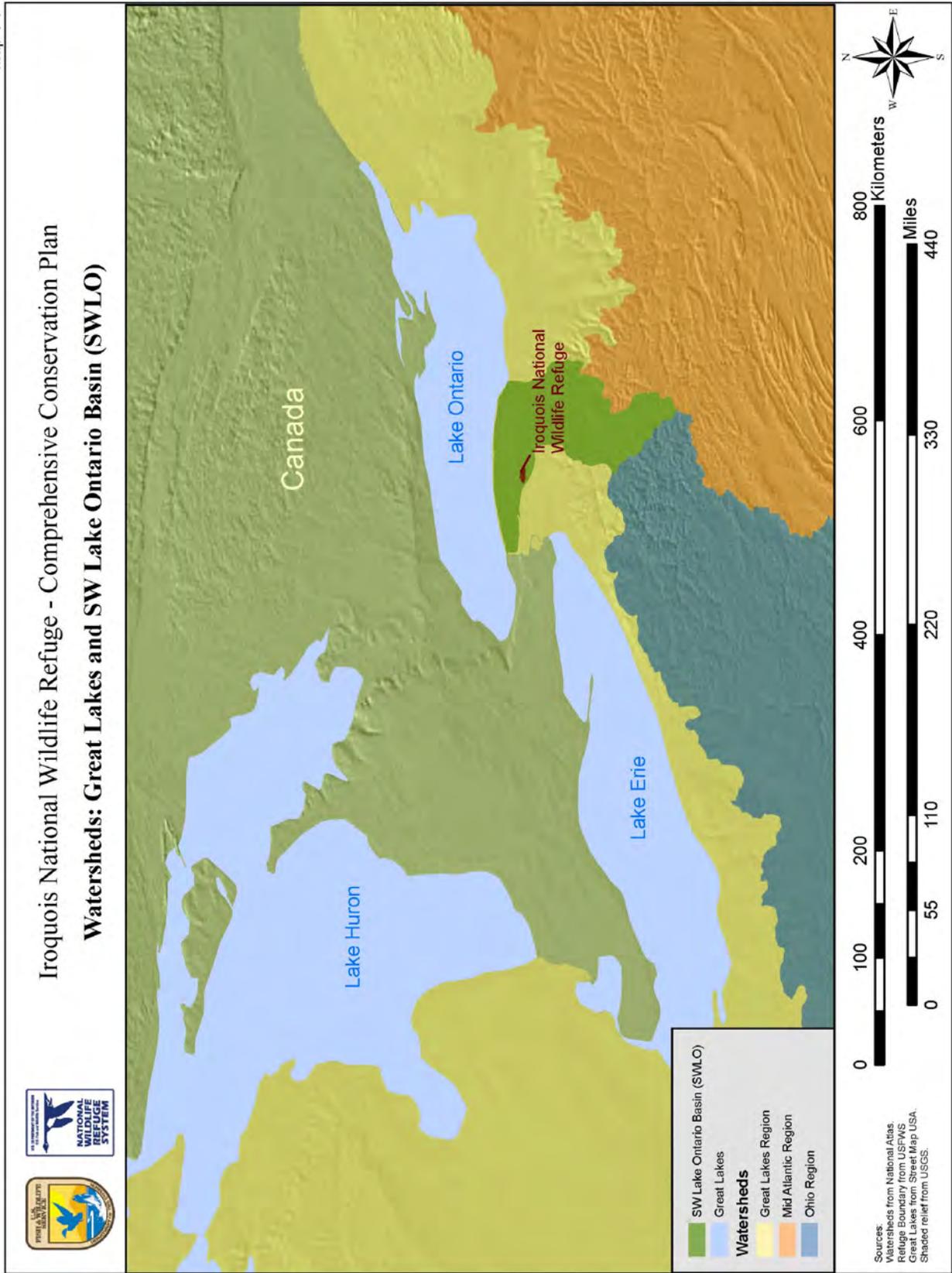
New York State Wildlife Action Plan

In fall 2001, Congress established a new “State Wildlife Grants” program that provided funds to state wildlife agencies for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats. Each state was charged with developing a wildlife action plan by October 2005. State fish and wildlife agencies identified Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) while also addressing the full array of wildlife.

The New York Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) is available at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/30483.html>.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) prepared a CWCS for New York and organized the conservation recommendations within eleven watershed basins (NYSDEC 2005). Iroquois Refuge falls within the Southwest Lake Ontario (SWLO) Basin (map 1-7). The CWCS provides pertinent natural resource information on historical and current conditions for the region of Iroquois Refuge. The list of SGCN was included in the refuge’s potential list of resources of concern (appendix C).

Map 1-7



The SWLO Basin covers 2.2 million acres in western and central New York. The basin stretches across the State from north to south and includes three major sub-watersheds: West Lake Ontario, Lower Genesee, and Upper Genesee. The basin is characterized by a highly diverse landscape covering several ecological zones and a wide variety of vegetative cover, wildlife habitat, and land use. Although grasslands were historically found in the basin, there are no lands in the basin currently classified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as natural grasslands. The northern portion of the basin is primarily an agricultural region with scattered forest stands, diverse and extensive wetlands, and is generally flat. Iroquois Refuge, the only refuge in the basin, is abutted by NYSDEC-managed Oak Orchard Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to the east and Tonawanda WMA (partially in the basin) to the west.

Important Bird Area and Bird Conservation Area Programs

The Important Bird Area (IBA) program is an international bird conservation initiative to identify and conserve the most important places for birds. IBAs are identified according to standardized, scientific criteria through a collaborative effort among state, national, and international non-governmental conservation organizations, state and Federal government agencies, local conservation groups, academics, grassroots environmentalists, and birders. IBAs link global and continental bird conservation priorities to local sites that provide critical habitat for native bird populations. New York's IBA program began in 1996 and has identified 136 IBAs including the Tonawanda-Iroquois-Oak Orchard Wetland Complex. This IBA is noted for its large expanses of wetland, for providing habitat for over 100,000 migrating waterfowl, and breeding and migration habitat for a suite of at-risk bird species. More information can be found at: <http://iba.audubon.org/iba/profileReport.do?siteId=1729&navSite=search&pagerOffset=0&page=1>.

In 1997, the NYSDEC established the Bird Conservation Area (BCA) Program modeled after the IBA program. The BCA program safeguards and enhances bird populations and their habitats on state-owned lands and waters. The Oak Orchard and Tonawanda WMAs are a BCA immediately adjacent to Iroquois Refuge. The major management recommendations for this BCA include water level control to benefit waterbirds, invasive species control, and maintaining grasslands for nesting birds (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/27111.html>). Given the juxtaposition of the State and Federal lands within the wetlands complex, there are management opportunities on the refuge that can contribute to the BCA objectives.

Refuge Establishment, History, and Purpose

On May 19, 1958, the Federal government established the Oak Orchard National Wildlife Refuge using money from the sale of Migratory Bird Conservation Stamps, or “Duck Stamps.” To avoid confusion with the neighboring Oak Orchard State Game Management Area (later changed to Wildlife Management Area), the refuge was renamed Iroquois Refuge in 1964, in respect to the Iroquois Nation.

The purpose for which the refuge was established provides the basic framework for developing management direction for the refuge. The refuge purpose directs which management functions are developed and the types of uses and facilities that may be offered.

In 1958, Iroquois Refuge was established “...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or any other management purposes, for migratory birds” under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act. A total of 10,828 acres of lands were acquired in the towns of Alabama and Shelby, in Genesee and Orleans County, New York (Table 1-1) under provisions of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, Migratory Bird Hunting and Stamp Act, and other authorities. The majority of our land acquisition funds come from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, replenished primarily through the sale of Federal duck stamps to migratory waterfowl hunters and other conservationists.

Table 1-1 History of Land Acquisition at Iroquois Refuge

Acquired	Acres
1958	810.53
1959	1,822.22
1960	1,115.01
1961	1,211.62
1962	331.89
1963	665.16
1964	2,514.37
1965	2,315.95
1966	6.49
1970	34.82
Total Acres	10,828.06

The refuge is also responsible for over 444 acres on 23 easements held by Farmers Home Administration. These easements were acquired in the late 1980s and early 1990s and are spread out among seven western New York counties (map 1-8). The easements help protect wetlands and stream corridors. Table 1-2 provides a summary of these easements by county.

*Sutton's Marsh*



Table 1-2 Easements by County

County	Acres
Allegany	80.0
Cattaraugus	50.1
Chautauqua	76.3
Erie	7.6
Livingston	60.0
Niagara	7.6
Wyoming	163.7
Total Acres	444.8

Step-down Management Plans

The Service Manual (602 FW 4, “Refuge Planning Policy”) lists more than 25 step-down management plans that may be appropriate to ensure safe, effective, and efficient operation on every refuge. These plans contain specific strategies and implementation schedules for achieving refuge goals and objectives. Some plans require annual revisions; others are revised every 5 to 10 years. Some plans require additional NEPA analysis, public involvement, and compatibility determinations before they can be implemented.

Changes in recent policy will make some of the older refuge plans obsolete because they will become a component of other plans (Table 1-3). For example, the refuge has a Forest Management Plan, Grassland Management Plan, and Marsh and Water Management Plan. These will all be incorporated into the Habitat Management Plan. Likewise, public uses such as hunting, interpretation, and fishing will become a component of the Visitor Services Plan.

Table 1-3 Step-down Management Plan Schedule for Iroquois Refuge

Step-down Management Plan	Date Completed/Updated	Anticipated Date Completion/Update
Habitat Management Plan	----	2011
Forest Management Plan	4/04/1990	*
Grassland Management Plan	5/16/1990	*
Upland Habitat Plan	3/29/1990	*
Marsh and Water Management Plan	1/19/1984	*
Visitor Services Plan	----	2012
Public Use Plan	5/18/1992	+
Hunt Plan	10/15/1985	+
Fire Management Plan	2008	2014
Law Enforcement Plan (Crowd Control)	1971	2013
Wildlife Inventory and Monitoring Plan	5/11/1982	2012
Furbearer Management Plan	11/19/1983	2014
Fishery Resources Management Plan	5/04/1995	2016
Integrated Pest Management Plan	----	2015
Cultural Resources Management Plan	----	2015

* Now incorporated into the Habitat Management Plan

+ Now incorporated into the Visitor Services Plan

Iroquois Refuge Vision Statement

We developed the following vision statement for Iroquois Refuge to provide a guiding philosophy and sense of purpose for our planning effort:

“Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, known locally as part of the “Alabama Swamps” will be the ecological “puzzle piece” for western New York by creating and maintaining unsurpassed habitats including wetlands, grasslands, shrublands, and forests for migratory birds and other wildlife. By encouraging compatible wildlife dependent recreation and working with partners, a deep understanding and appreciation for the refuge’s ecological integrity will be fostered in its visitors, regardless of generational, economic, or social boundaries. Through these efforts, future generations will cherish Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge’s interconnectivity to the much larger National Wildlife Refuge System.”

Refuge Goals

Our planning team developed the following goals after reviewing the refuge purposes, the mission of the Service and Refuge System, our proposed vision, public and partner comments, and the mandates, plans and conservation strategies mentioned above.

Goal 1: Provide high quality freshwater wetland migration stopover and breeding habitat for waterfowl, marshbirds, shorebirds, and bald eagles in refuge impoundments through water level control.

Goal 2: Maintain the environmental health and integrity of Oak Orchard Creek and associated bottomland floodplain forests and wetlands as a natural free-flowing habitat with a diverse assemblage of native plants and animals.

Goal 3: Provide a diverse mix of grassland, shrubland, and forested upland habitats arranged to reduce fragmentation and edge effects, and enhance habitat quality for priority species of conservation concern.

Goal 4: Refuge visitors will understand and appreciate fish and wildlife conservation through high quality recreation, education, and interpretive programs.

Goal 5: Hunters and anglers will enjoy and support programs designed to provide high quality hunting and fishing experiences.

Goal 6: Enhance partnerships with local communities and various organizations to garner support and promote refuge programs and resources.