



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge Newsletter 2

Spring 2001

Important facts about newsletter responses

Newsletter responses are instrumental to the planning process. Thank you for taking time to complete and send in your response! We've summarized all the responses received before February 14th in this newsletter.

It is important to remember a few facts regarding these responses:

- All responses are important to this planning process.
- Some opinions may not reflect the goals or policy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and may not be implemented.
- Responses do not represent a random sample, rather the individual opinion of those who received a newsletter, and took time to complete and return it.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

"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."

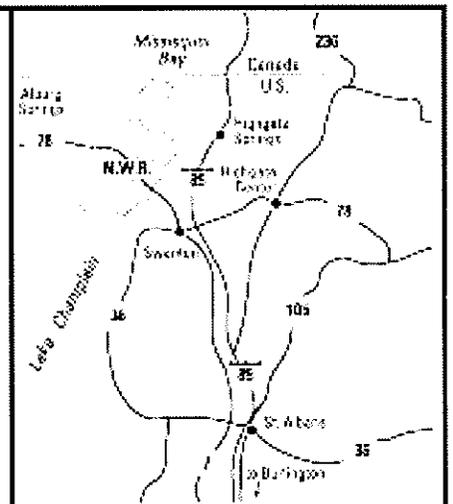
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing a long-term plan for Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. This plan will be a practical guide for managing the refuge and protecting important wildlife habitat for the next 10 to 15 years. This guide will be called a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). As an important part of this planning process, we have been collecting input from the public, conservation organizations, and local and state government agencies. This newsletter is an update on the status of this effort and summarizes comments we have heard so far.

Our first newsletter was mailed in October, 2000 to more than 600 people. It was also made available to refuge visitors and those who attended our public meetings. Over 60 workbooks were returned. Additionally, in October we hosted three open houses in Swanton, St. Albans, and Burlington. We hoped to gather information and ideas from local residents, adjacent landowners, refuge visitors, and other organizations from both of these efforts.

We received a number of good suggestions and ideas. While comments varied, it was clear that most people believe that Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is a special place, with unique natural resources and valuable recreation opportunities. Almost everyone who responded to the workbooks said that the management and protection of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is very important. Most were also excited about the potential for new and expanded public use programs as a result of the new headquarters facility. We hope you will take time to review the comments we received.

Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

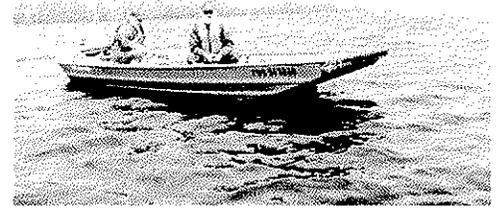
Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1943, is located on the eastern shore of Lake Champlain near the Canadian border in Franklin County, Vermont. The refuge headquarters is two miles northwest of Swanton, on Route 78.



Workbook Responses

What do you consider to be the most important issue facing the Refuge/ this area?

Nearly a third of the respondents felt that public use issues were the most important facing the area. Many respondents were concerned about the overuse of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) while others requested that more areas be open for public use activities, particularly hunting and fishing. Another important issue addressed was water quality. Many respondents expressed concern over the water quality in the bay and river. Management and conservation of the Refuge natural resources was another for some. Many people expressed their appreciation for the unique habitat and wildlife opportunities the Refuge offers. Respondents expressed concern over the impacts development in the area has on natural resources. Other items of interest included the development of the new headquarters facility, Native American involvement with the Refuge, invasive species control, Route 78 expansion, and staffing deficiencies at the Refuge.



Many respondents suggested that Refuge staff continue to monitor activities on the Refuge and get more involved with activities in the community.

Who responded to our workbook?

Most half of those responding to our workbook visit Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge 1-5 times per year. We were excited to find that the other half visit the refuge more than five times per year, with four respondents stating they visit the refuge over 50 times per year! We were also pleased to receive comments from a number of conservation organizations in the areas as well as many residents. Thanks for giving us your time and your thoughts.

What do you value most about the Missisquoi NWR? With a larger perspective in mind, what do you value most about the Missisquoi River basin?

Fifty one percent of the respondents specifically stated they valued Missisquoi NWR most for its wildlife and habitat value. Of that 51%, 12% noted that the value is in part because of the diversity of flora and fauna as well as the great number of unique species and habitat types. Another 25% valued the Refuge most for its protection of this habitat from development and some specifically stated they appreciated having public land in their community. A number of comments celebrated the Refuge's outstanding waterfowl hunting opportunities. Others valued the wildlife observation, fishing, environmental education, and photography opportunities the most.

Are there specific areas within the Northern Lake Champlain Basin that, in your opinion, need protection? If so, please list them here, and explain why you think they are important.

Respondents offered a variety of suggestions for areas to be protected. Here are just a few.

- Wetland, floodplain forest areas
- Wetlands regardless of size
- Rock River Basin, Pike River Basin, South River, Chazy Rivers
- Isle La Motte Coral Reef
- King's Bay wetland complexes
- Missisquoi River riparian lands, wildlife travel corridors, wetland functions
- Spiny soft-shell turtle habitat
- Staging areas for migratory birds and sensitive habitat such as nesting, basking, and overwintering areas for spiny soft-shell turtles



Many visitors to Missisquoi NWR enjoy special programs presented by Refuge staff.

Workbook Responses

We asked respondents to check technical services they thought would be appropriate for Refuge staff involvement.

Following is a list of those services and the number of respondents that supported each method:

- 22 Wetlands management
- 19 Management of endangered species
- 27 Management to benefit wildlife
- 14 Land protection funding
- 33 Control of invasive plant and animal species
- 18 Volunteer opportunities
- 17 Grants for habitat management
- 31 Fishing/hunting education
- 26 Environmental Education

Are there groups we should work with to improve opportunities for wildlife and people?

Respondents offered a number of suggestions for involvement in the CCP process. We mailed a newsletter in November to many of the new contacts. The Refuge will continue to reach out to the community for input in the planning process.

What improvements, changes or new activities are needed to provide better service to the public?

Respondents offered many comments on improvements and changes the Refuge could make. A number of respondents are anxious to see the Refuge offer new educational programs and facilities. They expressed an interest in seeing the new headquarters facility completed. Some people suggested that the Refuge needs to be easier to contact and provide better information to the public regarding its purpose and activities. Several people suggested the Refuge post special information on a website and distribute more brochures and reading material to the community.

Along with interest in educational programs, several respondents requested more guided programs and walks. Others suggested additional wildlife observation platforms and wildlife viewing opportunities along trails and overlooks. However, several respondents were concerned about expanding access and opportunities that might disturb habitat and wildlife. At least three respondents were concerned about balancing hunting and fishing activities with other non-consumptive uses.

A number of people addressed difficulties accessing the Refuge primarily for wildlife viewing and hunting, and suggested making easier access points for handicapped visitors. Others proposed opening all Refuge roads and boat ramps for public access.

Many respondents commented on hunting on the Refuge. Some requested that more areas be open to the public, while others requested that hunting regulations should be better posted and controlled. Several respondents requested that duck blind staking along the Refuge boundary be better controlled. At least one respondent wished that hunting be closed on the Refuge.

Other respondents commented on the importance of emphasizing a variety of species in the management of the Refuge. One person suggested the Refuge construct more nest structures. It was also noted that the Refuge needs additional staffing.

Workbook Responses

Which options should the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pursue in protecting important habitats that are not currently in a National Wildlife Refuge?

Following is a list of suggested options and the number of respondents that supported each one:

- 22 land acquisition
- 26 conservation easements
- 20 purchasing development rights
- 37 partnerships with private land owners
 - 16 working with the State
- 22 environmental education
- 23 habitat restoration
- 1 no involvement

Do our recreational facilities meet your needs? (trails, parking, signs, etc.)

Twenty five people responded "yes" to this question. Other suggestions included:

- improve signage, boat launch facilities, boundary postings, walking trails
- create more access points
- maintain facilities better
- provide better educational facilities, include an exhibit on cultural resources
- construct new headquarters facility and modernize other facilities
- provide new observation areas

What changes or improvements could be made in habitat and/or species management?

Forty two people answered this question. Of those, 21% said that they did not know what improvements could be made.

Some suggested that the refuge consider an active predator management program, including cormorant control. Others emphasized the importance of managing for a variety of species, particularly non-waterfowl species and a broad range of habitats.

Some people emphasized the importance of visitor education about Refuge species and habitats. They also suggested the development of educational components to accompany management programs would be very helpful.

Others recommended building wood duck boxes, nesting islands, food plots, and introducing new types of food for wildlife. Some respondents also felt the refuge should expand habitat and wildlife research and monitoring programs for management decisions.

At least two respondents recommended looking into efforts to reopen potholes and waterways that have silted in and been overtaken with vegetation. A couple of respondents expressed the need to control invasive species.



Twenty one respondents said that fishing was one of their favorite activities on the refuge.

Draft Vision Statement

Workbook Responses

The Missisquoi River delta is an international resource of importance for the people of the United States and Canada. The Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is a critical link in the maintenance of the ecological integrity of this river delta which provides breeding, staging, and migration habitat for thousands of waterfowl and other migratory birds annually. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with its partners, collaborates with other conservation efforts to forge broad alliances to protect and manage this vast and diverse resource to sustain a healthy ecosystem for future generations.

The Refuge protects the largest and most diverse wetland complex in the larger Lake Champlain basin. The diverse floral community is overshadowed only by the faunal diversity represented by the multitude of migratory bird species that use the Refuge. The future of the Missisquoi NWR and the sustained integrity of the river delta ecosystem relies on an understanding of the biological processes that created and maintain this large wetland complex and the human influence on the past, present, and future uses of the area.

Missisquoi NWR is a welcoming destination for those who wish to learn about the Missisquoi River delta and the history and wildlife of the Refuge. Enjoyed by backyard neighbors as well as new visitors, the refuge offers unique opportunities to pursue outdoor-related activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation and environmental education (Priority Public Uses).

The cultural resources at the Refuge provide valuable insight into the history and way of life of Native Americans. Understanding this history is critical to the understanding of human activity on the river delta.

What do you think of our Vision Statement and goals? Any comments/suggestions?

Over 65% of the respondents who answered this question said our draft vision statement was good. We received some suggestions on how to improve our vision statement which included the following:

- focus more on the role of hunting, trapping, and fishing
- focus more on education opportunities
- emphasize more cultural resources
- emphasize more non-game species
- stress the traditional role of the Refuge
- include ways on how the public can help acquire more land
- too lengthy

What concerns do you have about the Refuge? What is working well? What is not? How can we improve?

Concerns

- lack of public awareness of the Refuge
- recently imposed hunting fees
- accessibility to the river
- invasive species
- political decision making
- need for better distribution of information to the public
- hunting guides effect on resources
- water quality
- development of area
- potential impacts of additional activities on the Refuge
- need for more walking trails
- improvement of permit system
- insufficient attention to cultural heritage

Things Working Well

- committed & great staff
- community relations
- Jr. Waterfowl Program
- successful osprey nesting
- "never looked better"
- improved management
- waterfowl efforts
- new facilities coming
- planning effort helpful

What are your favorite activities to engage in while on the Refuge?

Over 60% of the respondents said that wildlife observation was their favorite activity on the Refuge. Nearly 50% also hunt and another 35% also fish. Other activities mentioned were wildlife photography, interpretation and environmental education, as well as canoeing, walking, and just enjoying solitude.

Public Meetings and Next Steps

Update on our new headquarters facility

The Refuge is currently working with architects to complete the development of a site plan for the new headquarters facility. The next step is reviewing and finalizing floor plans for the facility. The facility will be located on Tabor Road 1/4 mile south of Route 78. We are planning a public presentation sometime this summer or fall to give you a preview of what our facility will be all about.

Contact information

If you have any comments on the items above, or on anything related to Comprehensive Conservation Planning, please contact us.

Mark Sweeny, Refuge Manager
371 North River Street
Swanton, VT 05488-8148
phone:(802) 868-4781
email:FW5RW_MSQNWR@fws.gov
(802) 868-4781

or

Alison Whitlock, Lead Planner
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Dr.
Hadley, MA 01035-9589
) 253-8536

Public Meeting Results

In October the Refuge hosted three open houses in Swanton, St. Albans, and Burlington. We requested that the public provide comments and suggestions for our planning process. We received a number of great comments from those who attended.

Many of the meeting attendees had suggestions for management of habitat and wildlife. Several people wanted to discuss closures around osprey nests.

Others encouraged the Refuge to plan for additional vegetation and wildlife surveys. University students attending the meetings suggested that college students could be involved with these projects.



Several people who attended the public meetings expressed interest in the Route 78 improvement project.

Next Steps

We really appreciate your interest in the Refuge and hope you enjoyed hearing what your neighbors had to say. We encourage you to stay involved in the planning process. If you have further comments or thoughts please feel free to contact us.

Thanks again for your participation. We look forward to sharing our plans with you in the future.

Planning Schedule

Ongoing

Meetings with agencies, groups, and other interested partners

Through May 2001

Defining issues, developing alternatives and strategies

Fall 2001

Draft CCP/ Environmental Assessment released and distributed for public comment

Spring 2002

Final CCP/ Environmental documents released and distributed

Are you on the mailing list?

If you did not receive this by mail and wish to receive future mailings about the Missisquoi NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan, please fill in the information requested below.

_____ (Yes) Add me to the mailing list to receive future information about the CCP Process

Name: _____
(please print)

Address: _____

Town: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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

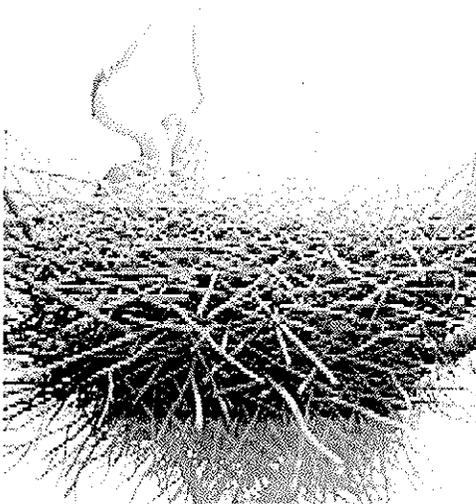
Organization: _____

Title: _____

Thank you for your contribution to your National Wildlife Refuge!
The future of the Missisquoi NWR and the sustained integrity of the river delta ecosystem relies on the understanding of the biological processes that created and maintain this large wetland complex and the human influence on the past, present, and future uses of the area.

Important: Please realize that names on the Comprehensive Conservation Plan mailing list become part of the public record for the planning process. The Service must release these names, if someone requests it, under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974

Signature: _____ Date: _____



Missisquoi NWR is an important nesting area for many species, including these herons. USFWS Photo

Please mail your reply to:

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Hadley, MA 01035-9589
(413) 253-8536