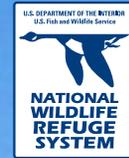


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



Patuxent Research Refuge

*Draft Comprehensive Conservation
Plan and Environmental Assessment*

October 2012



Front Cover:

Cash Lake Fishing Pier
USFWS

Back Cover:

Visitor Center Trail
USFWS



This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service* is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 150-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of more than 550 national wildlife refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance Program which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.

Comprehensive Conservation Plans provide long-term guidance for management decisions and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes and identify the Service's best estimate of future needs. These plans detail program planning levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning and program prioritization purposes. The plans do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.



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Refuge Vision Statement

Positioned near the center of the Baltimore-Washington Corridor, Patuxent Research Refuge is an island of green within a sea of urban development. This large, contiguous block of forest and wetlands provides a unique opportunity for wildlife research on a landscape and local scale in a natural setting. The refuge and our partners interpret the results of research for the visiting public as a way of connecting people with the natural world. As the first national wildlife refuge established for both wildlife and research, and the home of the U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, staff and partners are able to conduct cutting-edge wildlife research and passionate interpretation of the natural world in the shadows of protected historic and cultural resources. The North Tract and the National Wildlife Visitor Center provide opportunities for local children, national decision-makers, and the general public from around the world to develop a conservation ethic and learn about the refuge, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the importance of science and the benefits that green spaces provide to wildlife and people. Patuxent Research Refuge fosters a sense of connection to natural resources for visitors, researchers, and decision-makers while providing a natural corridor for species that migrate naturally or that may need to move in response to future climatic changes. Pieced together from a variety of past uses and owners, this important component of the green infrastructure of the mid-Atlantic provides improved air and water quality for the surrounding area, connects people with the natural world, and allows for conservation at a landscape scale.



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Summary

Type of Action: Administrative—Development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Lead Agency: U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service

Location: Patuxent Research Refuge
Laurel, MD

Administrative Headquarters: Patuxent Research Refuge
Laurel, MD

Responsible Official: Wendi Weber, Regional Director, Northeast Region

For Further Information: Bill Perry, Natural Resource Planner
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035-9587
Phone: (413) 253-8468
Email: northeastplanning@fws.gov

This Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment analyzes three alternatives for managing the 12,841-acre Patuxent Research Refuge (refuge) over the next 15 years. This document also contains seven appendixes that provide additional information supporting our analysis. Following is brief overview of each alternative:

Alternative A-Current Management: Alternative A satisfies the National Environmental Policy Act requirement of a “no action” alternative, which we define as “continuing current management.” It describes our existing management priorities and activities for Patuxent Research Refuge, and serves as a baseline for comparing and contrasting alternatives B and C.

Alternative B-Forest Restoration and Mixed Public Use: Alternative B is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)-preferred alternative. It combines the actions we believe would best achieve the refuge’s purposes, vision, and goals; addresses issues and concerns identified throughout the planning process; responds to public comments and inquiries; and are feasible to implement in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, policies, and guidance.

Alternative B emphasizes the management of specific refuge habitats to support species of conservation concern in the Chesapeake Bay region. In particular, it emphasizes forest biodiversity and ecosystem function. This includes the restoration for a number of impoundments and grasslands to forested areas. In addition, alternative B strives to promote wildlife-dependent public uses, while allowing for non-wildlife-dependent

uses. In particular, it promotes higher quality hunting and fishing programs; expands wildlife observation, viewing, and photography opportunities; and initiates new interpretive program and environmental education opportunities.

Alternative C-Maximize Forest Interior Restoration and Emphasize Wildlife-dependent Public Use Activities: This alternative emphasizes maximizing interior forest habitat. This would require active management to restore a majority of impoundments and grasslands into forested areas that would support forest interior-dwelling species, in addition to other species of conservation concern. Alternative C also focuses on accommodating wildlife-dependent public uses while minimizing non-wildlife-dependent uses, particularly by expanding wildlife observation, viewing, and photography opportunities and reducing the number of special events and interpretive programming.