

Appendix B.



USFWS

Tram Route

Wilderness Review

Introduction

The purpose of a wilderness review is to identify and recommend to Congress lands and waters of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) that merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Wilderness reviews are a required element of comprehensive conservation plans, are conducted in accordance with the refuge planning process outlined in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manual (602 FW 1 and 3), and include compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and public involvement.

The wilderness review process has three phases: inventory; study; and, recommendation. Lands and waters that meet the minimum criteria for wilderness are identified in the inventory phase. These areas are called wilderness study areas (WSAs). In the study phase, a range of management alternatives are evaluated to determine if a WSA is suitable for wilderness designation or management under an alternate set of goals and objectives that do not involve wilderness designation.

The recommendation phase consists of forwarding or reporting the suitable recommendations from the Regional Director through the Secretary and the President to Congress in a wilderness study report. The wilderness study report is prepared after the record of decision for the final comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) has been signed. Areas recommended for designation are managed to maintain wilderness character in accordance with management goals, objectives, and strategies outlined in the final CCP until Congress makes a decision or the CCP is amended to modify or remove the wilderness proposal.

Wilderness Inventory

Introduction

The wilderness inventory takes a broad look at each planning area, also known as Wilderness Inventory Areas (WIAs), to identify WSAs. A WSA is an area of undeveloped Federal land that retains its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, and further, meets the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act.

Minimum Wilderness Criteria

A WSA is required to appear natural, provide for solitude or primitive recreation, and be either a roadless area that meets the size criteria, or an island of any size. Only Federal lands are eligible to be considered for wilderness designation and inclusion within the NWPS.

Roadless

Roadless refers to the absence of improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use. A route maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a road.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the roadless criteria:

- A. The area does not contain improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use.
- B. The area is an island, or contains an island that does not have improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use. A roadless island is defined as an area surrounded by permanent waters or that is markedly distinguished from the surrounding lands by topographical or ecological features.
- C. The area is in Federal fee title ownership.

Size

The size criteria can be satisfied if an area has at least 5,000 acres of contiguous roadless public land, or is sufficiently large that its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition is practicable.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the size criteria:

- A. An area of more than 5,000 contiguous acres. Adjacent state and private lands are not included in making this acreage determination.
- B. A roadless island of any size.
- C. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous Federal acres that is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, and of a size suitable for wilderness management.
- D. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous acres that is contiguous with a designated wilderness, recommended wilderness, or area under wilderness review by another Federal wilderness managing agency such as the Forest Service, National Park Service, or Bureau of Land Management.

Naturalness

The Wilderness Act, Section 2(c), defines wilderness as an area that “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.” The area must appear natural to the average visitor, rather than “pristine.” The presence of historic landscape conditions is not required.

An area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole. Significant hazards caused by humans, such as the presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity and the physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities are also considered in evaluating the naturalness criteria.

An area may not be considered unnatural in appearance solely on the basis of the sights and sounds of human impacts and activities outside the boundary of the unit. The cumulative effects of these factors in conjunction with land base size, physiographic and vegetative characteristics were considered in the evaluation of naturalness.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating naturalness:

- A. The area appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.
- B. The area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole.
- C. Does the area contain significant hazards caused by humans, such as the presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity?
- D. The presence of physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities.

Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

A WSA must provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, and does not need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre. Further, an area does not have to be open to public use and access to qualify under this criteria; Congress has designated a number of wilderness areas in the Refuge System that are closed to public access to protect resource values.

Opportunities for solitude refer to the ability of a visitor to be alone and secluded from other visitors in the area. Primitive and unconfined recreation means non-motorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport. These primitive recreation activities may provide opportunities to experience challenge and risk; self reliance; and adventure. These two elements—solitude and primitive recreation—are not well defined by the Wilderness Act, but can be expected to occur together in most cases. However, an outstanding opportunity for solitude may be present in an area offering only limited primitive recreation potential. Conversely, an area may be so attractive for recreation use that experiencing solitude is not an option.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive unconfined recreation:

- A. The area offers the opportunity to avoid the sights, sounds and evidence of other people. A visitor to the area should be able to feel alone or isolated.
- B. The area offers non-motorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport.

Supplemental Values

The Wilderness Act states that an area of wilderness may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value. Supplemental values of the area are optional, but the degree to which their presence enhances the area's suitability for wilderness designation should be considered. The evaluation should be based on an assessment of the estimated abundance or importance of each of the features.

Wilderness Inventory Areas at Patuxent Research Refuge

The CCP planning team identified three wilderness inventory areas (map B-1) at Patuxent Research Refuge (refuge). The CCP planning team evaluated the areas to determine if they retained their primeval character and influence, were without permanent improvements or human habitation, and met the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. Our findings are described below.

WIA 1: North Tract

Does the wilderness inventory area:

(1) Have at least 5,000 roadless acres of land, or is it of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unconfined condition, or is it a roadless island?

The North Tract is 8,100 acres; however, the area contains about 9.5 miles of asphalt and gravel roads that are open to the public.

(2) Generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable?

No. The North Tract contains a variety of managed areas, including ballfields, impoundments, shooting ranges, and visitor facilities.

(3a) Have outstanding opportunities for solitude?

No. Roads and parking lots provide vehicle access to visitors; most visitors are confined to the two major interpretive trails. Hunters however, have wide access to the refuge on foot.

(3b) Have outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?

No. Off-road or off-trail access is not allowed except during the white tailed deer hunting season, which is highly regulated.

(4) Contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?

The North Tract contains numerous historic resources. These include cemeteries, and the remains of homesteads, taverns and mills.

WIA 2: Central Tract

Does the wilderness inventory area:

(1) Have at least 5,000 acres of land, or is it of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unconfined condition, or is it a roadless island?

No. The Central Tract is approximately 2,700 acres and contains 13 miles of road that are open to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff, U.S. Geological Survey staff, and visitors.

(2) *Generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable?*

No. The area contains 21 major structures including administrative buildings, endangered species rearing facilities, and research laboratories.

(3a) *Have outstanding opportunities for solitude?*

No. Roads and parking lots provide vehicle access to staff. Other areas of the Central Tract are off-limits to the public.

(3b) *Have outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?*

No. The Central Tract is closed to the public.

(4) *Contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?*

The Central Tract contains the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and the associated buildings and grounds. The educational and scientific features of this area relate to the human influenced areas.

WIA 3: South Tract

Does the wilderness inventory area:

(1) *Have at least 5,000 acres of land, or is it of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unconfined condition, or is it a roadless island?*

No. The South Tract is approximately 2,000 acres and is home to the National Wildlife Visitor Center. The area is served by tram tours and a public access road.

(2) *Generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable?*

No. The area is actively managed with numerous culverts and water control structures. There is also a tram route that is operated by the refuge Friends group. The National Wildlife Visitor Center and associated parking lot, trails, and boardwalk are located in the South Tract.

(3a) *Have outstanding opportunities for solitude?*

No. Roads and parking lots provide vehicle access to visitors; most visitors are confined to an interpretive trail and the tram.

(3b) *Have outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?*

No. Off-road or off-trail access is not allowed.

(4) Contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?

The South Tract contains the Upland Hardwoods Research Natural Area, a 1,700 forest tract designated by the Department of the Interior for scientific research that is to remain in an undeveloped and natural condition.

Summary of Wilderness Inventory Findings

The CCP planning team found that Patuxent Research Refuge does not meet the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. Each of the WIAs contain characteristics that make them unsuitable for further study. The largest of the WIAs is the North Tract (WIA 1), which has been heavily used as a military training area in the past and contains active firing ranges. The Central Tract (WIA 2) contains over 30 buildings and animal pens and WIA 3 contains the National Wildlife Visitor Center and the heaviest amount of public use. While there are ecological and historic values on the refuge, these do not, in and of themselves, warrant wilderness recommendation. In summary, Patuxent Research Refuge does not qualify as a WSA, and will not be considered further for wilderness designation in this CCP.

Map B-1. Wilderness Inventory Study Areas



