

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge

Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement Release

Final Plan is Now Available

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has completed a final comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) for Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The 15-year management plan will guide refuge practices to achieve the Service's wildlife conservation mission and to support public use on the refuge, such as hunting, wildlife observation and photography, and fishing. The plan will be released for a 30-day review through late January 2013.

The review period offers individuals and organizations that commented on the draft CCP/EIS the opportunity to review our responses to comments. It also allows federal and state agencies with jurisdiction or expertise to review the plan. After the review ends, we will evaluate and incorporate any new substantive information and complete the process to approve the final CCP.

Where to Get a Copy of Final CCP/EIS

You can download an electronic copy of the final CCP/EIS from our website at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/primehook>.

You may also request a CD-ROM copy from our planning staff (see reverse side).

Public Comments on the Draft Plan

We released the draft CCP/EIS for public review from May 31 to August 27, 2012. During the comment period, we held seven public meetings. In total, we received over 120 separate



Delmarva fox squirrel



Northern pintail

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written and oral comments, as well as 1,024 copies of a single form letter and an online petition endorsed by 522 individuals.

The comments received covered a variety of topics, including dune and marsh restoration, climate change and sea level rise, hunting and other public uses, cropland management, mosquito control, and impacts to local communities.

A summary of all substantive comments received and our responses to them is provided in Appendix M in the final CCP/EIS.

Changes Made in the Final CCP/EIS

Based on the comments received, we made several minor changes and clarifications to our preferred Alternative B in the final CCP/EIS. The most significant changes include:

- We clarified that dune restoration is a likely first step in restoring marsh habitat. However, we would only restore refuge dunes as part of a more comprehensive

plan to restore marsh, not as a stand-alone project.

- We made several modifications to our proposed hunting program. For example, we now propose to allow waterfowl hunting four days per week until 3:00 pm to be consistent with state regulations. We have also modified our proposed hunt areas to minimize disturbance to resources and reduce conflicts between users, including no longer proposing to open Prime Hook Creek to hunting.
- Since we are no longer proposing to open Prime Hook Creek to hunting, we will continue to allow year-round access to the western four miles of Prime Hook Creek for visitors engaged in uses such as wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and fishing.
- We will permit the use of adulticides for mosquito control when there is a documented human disease threat, instead of only when a public health emergency is declared.

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We also fully describe these changes in Appendix M in the final CCP/EIS. This modified Alternative B is the Service's preferred alternative in the final CCP/EIS. It combines the actions that we believe most effectively achieve the refuge purposes, vision, and goals.

In particular, Alternative B proposes to:

- Restore artificial freshwater marsh to salt marsh to be more resilient to climate change and sea level rise and to benefit shorebirds, waterfowl, and fish.
- Restore previously farmed areas to native forest habitat to benefit forest birds and Delmarva fox squirrel.
- Expand recreational opportunities, particularly for wildlife observation, fishing, and hunting.
- Control invasive plant species and nuisance wildlife species, such as snow and resident Canada geese.

Next Steps

At the close of the 30-day review, the Service's Northeast Regional Director will determine if the final CCP/EIS is adequate to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. She will then select an alternative to implement as the final CCP and document this decision in a Record of Decision (ROD). We will announce the ROD's availability in the *Federal Register*.

Effective with the signing and release of the ROD, we can begin to implement the CCP. We look forward to working with our neighbors, conservation partners, and other federal and state agencies to implement our CCP.



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Prairie warbler

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For more information on the refuge and planning process, visit: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/primehook/>.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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