

Appendix I



Steve Hillebrand/USFWS

Great Blue Heron

Finding of No Significant Impact

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Supawna Meadows National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan

In September 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published the Supawna Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment (draft CCP/EA). Supawna Meadows NWR is located along the shoreline of the Delaware River, where it widens to become the Delaware Bay estuary in Salem County, New Jersey. The refuge currently includes 3,016 acres of tidal waters and marsh, grassland, shrubland, and forest habitats. The approved refuge acquisition boundary encompasses approximately 4,527 acres along the Upper Delaware Bay and Salem River in Pennsville Township, New Jersey. The refuge boundaries are roughly defined by the Delaware Bay, Salem River, and Fort Mott Road. The Supawna Meadows NWR draft CCP/EA outlines three alternatives for managing the refuge over the next 15 years. It carefully considers their direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on the environment and their potential contribution to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System). The draft CCP/EA restates the refuge's purposes, creates a vision for the next 15 years, and proposes six goals to be achieved through plan implementation. Alternative B is identified as the Service-preferred alternative. Chapter 3 in the draft plan details the respective goals, objectives, and strategies for each of the three alternatives. Chapter 4 describes the consequences of implementing those actions under each alternative. The draft plan's appendixes provide additional information supporting the assessment and specific proposals in alternative B. A brief overview of each alternative follows:

Alternative A (Current Management): The Council on Environmental Quality regulations on implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require this "No Action" alternative, which we define as "continuing current management." It describes our existing management priorities and activities, and serves as a baseline for comparing and contrasting alternatives B and C. It would maintain our present levels of approved refuge staffing and the biological and visitor programs now in place. We would continue to focus efforts on providing native tidal marsh habitat for Federal trust resources, in particular, for migrating and nesting wading birds, wintering habitats for marshbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife. We would continue to improve native tidal marsh, primarily through invasive species control. We would also continue to maintain grassland habitats, as well as dikes and water levels on impoundments that have water control structures.

Alternative B (the Service-preferred Alternative): This alternative combines the actions we believe would most effectively achieve refuge purposes, vision, and goals, and respond to public issues. In particular, the priority would be to protect and restore the refuge's native tidal marsh habitat to benefit Pea Patch Island colonial-breeding wading birds, as well as secretive marshbirds, migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and other birds of conservation concern. A secondary consideration would be to manage a diversity of other refuge wetland and upland habitats to benefit breeding and migrating songbirds, waterfowl, and raptors, as well as amphibians, reptiles, and mammals of conservation

concern. We would accomplish this by increasing efforts to control invasive species and implementing a variety of monitoring elements to assist us in adaptively managing the refuge by determining the status of species on the refuge and evaluating management efforts. We would actively maintain high value early/successional habitats. We would evaluate removing or breaching existing dikes to restore tidal flow and reestablish natural marsh functions.

Our visitor services program would be enhanced to provide more opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. We would open new areas to deer hunting and would reconfigure waterfowl hunting and fishing areas to occur in the same areas of the refuge. We would construct at least one additional trail and would consider extending the current trail system onto newly acquired lands. We would add additional facilities and improve existing structures to facilitate wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. We would work with existing and new partners to accomplish these tasks.

Alternative C (Cease Management and Close Refuge to Public Uses): Under this alternative, we would close Supawna Meadows NWR to all public uses and cease all habitat management activities. There would be no funding allocated for any projects at the refuge. This alternative would only partially achieve the refuge purposes, vision, and goals, and respond to public issues; however, budgetary constraints make it a reasonable alternative to consider. Under this alternative, the public would be notified of the closure and appropriate signage would be placed on all buildings and along the refuge boundary. Cape May NWR staff would conduct semiannual site inspections requiring about 40 staff hours per year. We would continue to meet our trust obligations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which requires us to take measures to benefit the recovery of any federally listed species that might be found on the refuge in the future. We would also continue to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act by maintaining Finns Point Rear Range Light.

We distributed the draft CCP/EA for a 30-day period of public review and comment from September 27 to October 27, 2010. We received nine letters or emails representing individuals, organizations, and State agencies and had approximately 20 people attend two public meetings. Appendix H in the final CCP includes a summary of those comments and our responses to them.

After reviewing the proposed management actions, and considering all public comments and our responses to them, we have determined that the analysis in the EA is sufficient to support our findings. We are selecting alternative B, as presented in the draft CCP/EA with the following changes recommended by the planning team, to implement as the final CCP. Changes we made in the final CCP are:

- We inserted language discussing the potential for including a black bear hunt if State regulations are changed to accommodate hunting this species at Supawna Meadows NWR and if there is interest (see chapter 4, general refuge management). This would require further detailed NEPA analysis and public involvement.

- We inserted a paragraph stating that although we are not proposing to open the refuge to turkey hunting at this time, we are willing to further discuss opening the refuge to the State's spring turkey season with assistance from the State. This would also require further detailed NEPA analysis and public involvement (see chapter 4, general refuge management).
- We inserted language clarifying our changes to hunting safety zones and removal of hunting closure signs (see chapter 4, goal 4).
- We added a Finding of Appropriateness to appendix B for the release of *Rhynoncomimus latipes* weevil for the biological control of mile-a-minute weed (*Polygonum perfoliatum*).
- We updated the White-tailed Deer Hunt Compatibility Determination in appendix B to include the State's deer hunt safety zones.
- We corrected all format and typographical errors that were brought to our attention.

We concur that alternative B, with the above changes, in comparison to the other two alternatives will: (1) best fulfill the mission of the Refuge System; (2) best achieve the refuge's purpose, vision, and goals; (3) best maintain and, where appropriate, restore the refuge's ecological integrity; (4) best address the major issues identified during the planning process; and, (5) be most consistent with the principles of sound fish and wildlife management. Specifically, in comparison to the other two alternatives, alternative B provides the biggest increase in the diversity, integrity, and health of high quality habitats through enhanced tidally influenced, upland, and non-tidal wetland habitat management. It also provides the most reasonable and effective improvements to existing public use programs that are in demand, with minimal impacts to wildlife and habitats. The plans to increase staffing and repair existing infrastructure are reasonable, feasible, and will result in the most efficient management of the refuge and best serve the American public. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) includes the EA by reference.

We have reviewed the predicted beneficial and adverse impacts with alternative B that are presented in chapter 4 of the draft CCP/EA and compared them to the other alternatives. We specifically reviewed the context and intensity of those predicted impacts over the short- and long-term, and considered the cumulative effects. The review of each of the NEPA factors to assess whether there will be significant environmental effects is summarized here (40 C.F.R. 1508.27).

(1) Beneficial and adverse effects – we expect the final CCP (alternative B) management actions to benefit both the wildlife and habitats at Supawna Meadows NWR. Important examples include the measures to reduce deer browse damage to trees and shrubs, control non-native invasive species, maintain important native tidal marsh to provide foraging habitat for colonial-breeding wading birds at Pea Patch Island, and manage a variety of other habitats on the refuge to benefit breeding and migrating songbirds, waterfowl, and raptors, as well as amphibians, reptiles, and mammals of conservation concern. These benefits will not result from any major change in management strategy; rather, they will be incremental to the effects of the current

management. Therefore, we do not anticipate any significant beneficial or adverse effect on the human environment.

(2) Public health and safety – we expect the good safety record of the refuge to continue based on the protective actions provided in the stipulations of the compatibility determination for each of the authorized public uses on the refuge. There should be no significant impact on public health and safety from the implementation of the CCP.

(3) Unique characteristics of the area – the primary, unique characteristic of Supawna Meadows NWR is its extensive tidal marsh. We expect the preservation and restoration measures in the CCP, such as increased control of non-native phragmites, to benefit these wetlands for which the refuge was created, and to benefit the surrounding habitats. As in (1), the benefits will be incremental to the effects of the ongoing management measures originally instituted to protect these resources. Thus, we do not expect these incremental benefits to result in a significant impact on the human environment.

(4) Highly controversial effects – the management actions in the final CCP such as invasive species control, early successional habitat restoration, deer hunting, and other wildlife-dependent recreational uses are time-tested measures. Their effects on the refuge are well-studied and widely known from past management and monitoring. There is no scientific controversy over what these effects will be. Thus, there is little risk of any unexpectedly significant effects on the environment.

(5) Highly uncertain effects or unknown risks – the management actions in the final CCP are evolutionary. They are mostly refinements of the existing management measures that we have used since it was administratively complexed with Cape May NWR in 2004. We will implement a comprehensive monitoring program to reassess the effectiveness of each planned improvement. With the data available on the current management results and the system in place to adjust for any unplanned effect, we do not find a high degree of uncertainty or unknown risk that the CCP will cause any significant impact on the environment.

(6) Precedent for future actions with significant effects – the purpose of the CCP is to establish the precedent for managing the refuge for up to 15 years. The effects of that management are designed as gradual improvements over the existing conditions, not global changes. For example, strategies such as restoring native tidal marsh will be completed over several years. Therefore, we do not expect this precedent to cause any significant impact on the environment.

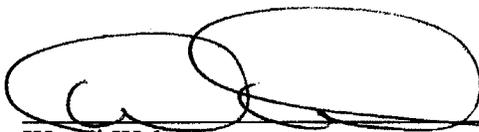
(7) Cumulatively significant impacts – the CCP provides the programmatic, long-term management plan for the refuge. We plan to coordinate with surrounding land managers to promote common goals such as reducing browse damage from deer and expanding opportunities for deer hunting. Our management jurisdiction is limited, however, to the refuge lands, and we do not foresee any of the coordinated activities rising to the level of a significant effect on the environment. Within the term of the CCP, we intend to pursue additional projects such as constructing an additional trail and installing additional observation areas. We will examine the cumulative effects of all projects under the CCP before they are approved, and we will conduct whatever level of additional NEPA review is warranted.

(8) Effects on scientific, cultural, or historical resources – the archaeological and cultural studies summarized in the CCP showed no significant impacts on these resources from the planned management activities. Service cultural resource managers in the Regional Office keep an inventory of known sites and structures, and ensure that we consider them in planning new ground-disturbing or structure-altering changes to the refuge. Throughout the implementation of the CCP, we will continue to consult with the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office concerning removal of structures on the refuge (e.g., Yerkes House) and other projects that might affect sites and structures, and we will continue to conduct or contract archaeological or architectural surveys when needed.

(9) Effects on ESA-listed species and habitats – as detailed in the CCP, we have completed a consultation with the Service's Ecological Services Field Office under Section 7 of the ESA. Their endangered species specialists have concurred with our biological assessment that the planned actions are not likely to adversely affect any of the ESA-listed species that may be present on the refuge, particularly the sensitive joint-vetch. The CCP also protects the delisted bald eagle. Our management actions are designed to preserve and improve the existing habitat for these species and there is no ESA-designated, critical habitat on the refuge. Therefore, we do not anticipate any significant effects on these ESA resources.

(10) Threat of violating any environmental law – our habitat management actions are designed to benefit the environment. They will comply with all applicable protections such as the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. Pursuant to the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd(e)(3), 668dd(m)). Our public hunting and fishing programs under the CCP require all participants to comply with State regulations. We do not anticipate a threat that the CCP will violate any environmental law or cause any significant impact on the environment.

Based on this review, we find that implementing alternative B will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment, in accordance with Section 102(2)(c) of NEPA. Therefore, we have concluded that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and this FONSI is appropriate and warranted.



Wendi Weber
Acting Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Hadley, Massachusetts

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Date

**Supawna Meadows
National Wildlife Refuge
c/o Cape May National Wildlife Refuge
24 Kimbles Beach Road
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
609/463-0994
609/463-1667 FAX
www.fws.gov/northeast/supawnameadows**

**Federal Relay Service
for the deaf and hard-of-hearing
1 800/877 8339**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>**

**For Refuge Information
1 800/344 WILD**

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