

Chapter 2



USFWS

Snowy Egret on the Refuge

The Planning Process

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- Issues and Opportunities
- Plan Amendment and Revision

The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

This chapter describes the process by which we developed this CCP and outlines how others were included in that process. It details how we first invited, and will continue to encourage, the partnership of other Federal and state agencies, civic, public, and private conservation and education organizations, and the affected public in our decisions about managing the refuge.

Service policy establishes an eight-step planning process that also facilitates our compliance with NEPA (figure 2.1.²). Our planning policy and CCP training course materials describe those steps in detail. We followed that process in developing this CCP.

Since 1974, we have focused on conserving and managing Supawna Meadows NWR to help sustain migrating waterfowl, wading birds, and other trust species, and to facilitate wildlife-dependent public uses.

We began the CCP process for the refuge in May 2007 (Step A) with a kick-off meeting. We discussed the current status of the refuge, important issues to be addressed in the CCP, and the status and sources of data for the analysis. We defined a core team to include refuge managers and staff from Cape May NWR, Service regional planners, and a NJDFW representative.

We held an internal scoping meeting, site visit, and field review in July 2007 to identify issues, concerns, management ideas, and data sources for the development of the CCP and analysis of management strategies.

We published and distributed our first newsletter in August of 2007 (Step B).

On September 7, 2007, we held two public scoping meetings at the Pennsville Public Library to solicit comments from the community and other interested parties on the scope of the CCP and the issues and impacts that should be evaluated in the draft CCP/EA.

We published an official notice in the Federal Register on September 24, 2007, that announced we were preparing a draft CCP/EA.

Between 2008 and 2010, we worked on “Step C: Review Vision Statement, Goals, and Identify Significant Issues” and “Step D: Develop and Analyze Alternatives.” On April 15, 2008, we held a biological workshop with representatives of the Service, the NJDFW, and the Delaware Division of Parks to discuss management objectives for the array of refuge habitats.

On May 6, 2008, we held a public use objectives meeting that addressed hunting, access to Finns Point Rear Range Light (FPRRL), and a variety of other public use opportunities, issues, and concerns.

After a review meeting in June 2008 with senior staff at the Service’s Northeast Region headquarters, we revised the biological and public use objectives.

We distributed a second newsletter in July 2008.

² “The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process” (<http://policy.fws.gov/602fw3.html>)

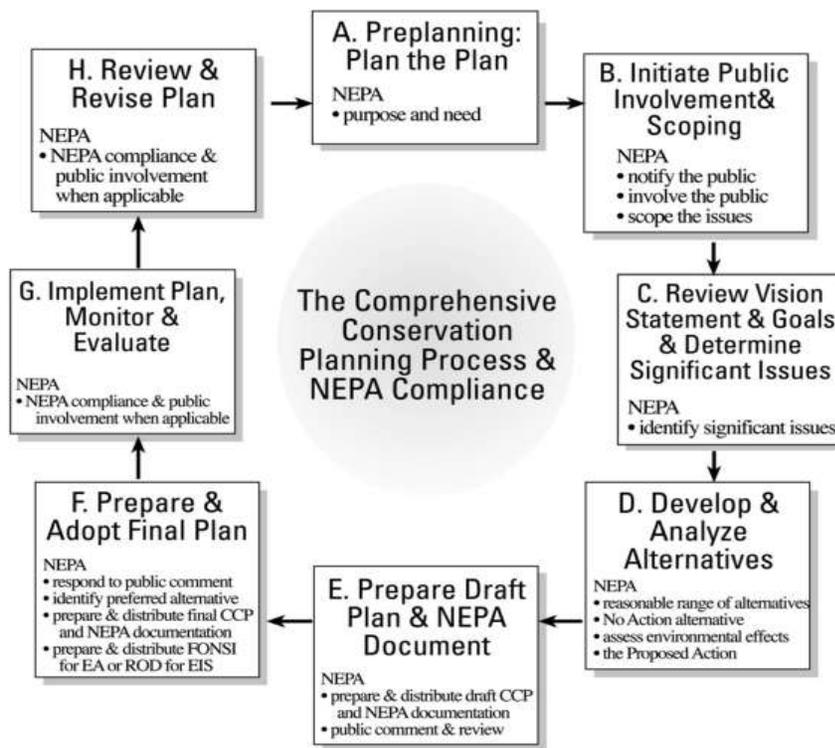


Figure 2.1. The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

We completed “Step E: Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA Document” by publishing our Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register announcing the release of the draft CCP/EA and by distributing it for public review on September 27, 2010. During a 30-day period of public review, we distributed a third newsletter and a press release and held two public meetings to obtain comments. We also received comments by regular mail, electronic mail, and at the refuge. After the comment period expired, we reviewed and summarized all of the substantive comments we have received and prepared our responses. These are presented in appendix H.

At the same time, we sent a copy of the draft CCP/EA to the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for review and comment on compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and other applicable State and Federal laws relating to cultural resources. On November 23, 2010, we received an email indicating New Jersey SHPO concurrence with the draft CCP/EA. We also sent a copy of the draft CCP/EA and an intra-service consultation form to the Service’s New Jersey Ecological Services (ES) Office to ensure compliance with the ESA. We received the signed concurrence from the New Jersey ES Office on November 29, 2010.

This CCP was submitted to our Regional Director for review and approval. He determined that it warranted a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI; see appendix I) and found its analysis sufficient to simultaneously issue his decision adopting this CCP. We announced his final decision by publishing a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register, where we also notified people of the availability of the CCP. This completes “Step F: Prepare and Adopt a Final Plan.”

“Step G: Implement Plan, Monitor and Evaluate” can now begin with approval of this CCP. As part of “Step H: Review and Revise Plan,” we will modify the final CCP as warranted following the procedures in Service policy (602 FW 1, 3, and 4) and NEPA requirements. Minor revisions that meet the criteria for categorical exclusions (550 FW 3.3C) will require only an Environmental Action Memorandum. As the Improvement Act and Service policy stipulate, we must fully revise CCPs every 15 years.

Issues and Opportunities

From public meeting and planning team discussions, we developed a list of issues, concerns, opportunities, and other items requiring a management decision. We placed them in two categories: key issues and issues outside the scope of the EA.

Key issues - Key issues are those the Service has the jurisdiction and authority to resolve. The key issues, together with refuge goals, formed the basis for developing and comparing the different management alternatives we analyzed in chapter 3 of the draft CCP/EA. The varying alternatives were generated by the wide-ranging opinions on how to address key issues and conform to the goals and objectives.

Issues and concerns outside the scope of this analysis - These topics fall outside the jurisdiction and authority of the Service or were deemed impractical. We discuss them after “Key Issues” below, but this plan does not address them further.

Key Issues

We derived the following key issues from public and partner meetings and further team discussions. **Chapter 4, “Management Direction and Implementation”** shows how these issues will be addressed in such a way as to best support refuge goals.

1. Which species should be a focus for management and how will the refuge promote and enhance their habitats?

Congress entrusts the Service with protecting federally listed endangered or threatened plant and animal species, anadromous and inter-jurisdictional fish species, migratory birds, and certain marine mammals, and mandates their treatment as management priorities when they occur on a refuge. Appendix A identifies Federal trust resources on the refuge, as well as other species of special concern.

Numerous species of concern, including those species listed by the NJDFW as endangered, threatened, or a species of special concern, are potentially present in the vicinity of the refuge. The shortnose sturgeon is present in the adjacent Delaware River. Other federally listed threatened or endangered species may enter the Delaware Bay and may occasionally travel up the river as far as the refuge. No sea turtle nesting habitat is present on the refuge; however, some turtles including Atlantic hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Atlantic loggerhead (*Caretta caretta caretta*), Atlantic ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), and Atlantic leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) may enter the Delaware Bay. Whales occasionally enter the Delaware Bay and one individual is known to have strayed as far north as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Spotila et al. 2007). Sensitive joint-vetch (*Aeschynomene virginica*), a federally listed threatened species, was found on the muddy tidal banks of the Delaware River on August 8, 1881. No plants were found during a survey conducted on September 30, 1992. Although these federally listed species may be found close to the refuge, their presence is largely limited to the Delaware River and Delaware Bay where the Service does

not have jurisdiction. Therefore, the Service is limited in its ability to support recovery objectives for these species through refuge management.

Migratory birds are also a Federal trust resource. The challenge with migratory bird management lies in determining how each refuge can contribute significantly to the conservation of migratory bird species of concern. One important question we address is, “Which migratory bird species and associated habitat types should be a priority for management on these refuges?” Management emphasis on a certain species or species group may preclude management for other migratory bird species of concern. On the refuge, for example, managing for grassland-dependent bird nesting habitat would likely reduce the habitat potential for interior forest nesting birds. Migratory bird species associated with both habitat types are in decline throughout PIF Area 44.

This CCP identifies the migratory bird species of management emphasis, associated management and land protection, and their impacts on other species of concern. Refuge goals 1 through 3 address our response to this issue.

2. How will the refuge manage invasive, exotic, and overabundant species?

Invasive plant species such as phragmites (*Phragmites australis*), Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*), Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), mile-a-minute vine (*Polygonum perfoliatum*), autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*), multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*), and Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) threaten refuge habitats by displacing native plant and animal species, degrading wetlands and other natural communities, and reducing natural diversity and wildlife habitat values. They out-compete native species by dominating light, water, and nutrient resources, and are particularly menacing when they affect native habitats, as when phragmites invades tidal marsh habitat.

Invasives are able to establish themselves easily, reproduce prolifically, and disperse readily, which makes eradicating them difficult. Once they have become established, getting rid of them is expensive and labor intensive. Many cause measurable economic impacts, especially in agricultural fields. Preventing new invasions is extremely important for maintaining biological diversity and native plant populations. The control of affected areas will require extensive partnerships with adjacent landowners, State agencies, and local governments.

Invasive animal species, such as mute swans (*Cygnus olor*) and feral cats also threaten refuge habitats by displacing, harming, or devastating native plant and animal species, degrading wetlands and other natural communities, and reducing natural diversity and wildlife habitat values. The threats of invasive animal and plant species are very similar.

We suspect that several wildlife species on the refuge are adversely affecting natural biological diversity. Native species (e.g., deer, resident Canada geese, and snow geese) and small furbearing mammals (e.g., beavers, raccoons, woodchucks, and muskrats) can become problems when their populations exceed the range of natural fluctuation and the ability of their habitat to support them. In particular, issues surface when these animals directly affect trust species or degrade natural communities. Small mammalian predators have been known to destroy neotropical migratory bird nests. Although we expect some predation in a natural system, concerns arise when it prevents our meeting conservation objectives.

There can be adverse ecological and economic impacts when deer, Canada geese, or snow geese forage excessively on fields or marsh vegetation, or when beavers and woodchucks affect water quality, degrade water control structures or impoundment dikes, or cause flooding where it is not desirable. As adjacent lands are developed for residential or commercial use, the concentrations of deer can rise on less developed lands, like the refuge. An overabundance of deer can produce long-term negative effects, such as potential disease epizootics (Demarais et al. 2000); increased browsing pressure on landscapes, vegetation, and crops; and severe habitat degradation (Cypher and Cypher 1988). When deer populations become excessive, they can also compromise human health and safety. An increase in vehicle-deer collisions or the incidence of Lyme disease raises community concerns. The measures for controlling each species are potentially controversial, and may include lethal removal, visual and acoustic deterrents, and destroying nesting or den sites. Our response to this issue is addressed in refuge goals 1 through 4.

3. How will the refuge manage impoundments and forested wetlands?

Impoundments are confined bodies of water. The refuge has five impoundments with water control structures (WCS) totaling approximately 84 acres, and five impoundments without WCSs totaling approximately 4 acres. Natural changes in water levels can occur from rainfall and natural springs. Water levels can be altered in impoundments with WCSs by inserting or removing boards that either release water or allow tidal water to flow into the impoundments. Currently, the water level is managed in three of the five impoundments with water control structures. Changes in water levels during specific times of the year provide habitat and food for an array of wildlife including shorebirds, wading birds, and waterfowl. Shorebirds benefit from impoundments when water levels are lowered and mudflats are exposed providing foraging habitat. Wading birds and waterfowl benefit when water levels are higher providing food such as aquatic vegetation, invertebrates, and fish.

The refuge has approximately 186 acres of forested wetland habitat. A WCS is located along Xmas Tree Lane in forested wetland habitat. Managing the water levels here would provide additional forested wetland habitat (i.e., a green-tree reservoir). This area represents an excellent example of mature forest quality with great size class diversity. Forested wetlands provide habitat for wood duck nesting and brood rearing, roosting eastern screech owls, and breeding reptiles and amphibians.

Managing areas with WCSs could benefit a variety of species by changing water levels at various times of year. The habitats could also be restored by removing WCSs and dikes to allow the habitat to revert to historic conditions, such as in the Tract 11 impoundment where the habitat surrounding the dike is tidal marsh, or by plugging ditches and restoring the natural hydrology to the forested wetland habitat. The Tract 11D Lighthouse Road impoundment could be managed to benefit wading birds and waterfowl. The Xmas Tree Lane impoundment could be used to provide fishing opportunities to the public. Our responses to these issues are addressed in refuge goals 3 and 4.

4. How will the refuge provide opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent public uses, realizing that those uses occasionally conflict?

The Refuge Improvement Act does not establish a hierarchy among the six wildlife-dependent priority public uses of refuges, nor does it establish any clear process for determining such a hierarchy. Unfortunately, those uses sometimes conflict with each other in time, space, or the allocation of resources. For

example, environmental education and interpretation programs could conflict with hunting if they occur in an area open to hunting at the same time. In the Northeast Region, we have established “areas of emphasis” to identify where each refuge may make its greatest contribution to the six priority public uses. Supawna Meadows NWR’s areas of emphasis are the same as Cape May NWR’s areas of emphasis - interpretation and wildlife observation and photography.

Some people express concerns when refuge resources are disproportionately allocated toward one use and opportunities for other uses suffer. An additional challenge for the refuge manager is determining the carrying capacity of the refuge to support these uses while still managing to provide a quality experience. Our responses to this refuge issue are addressed in refuge goal 5.

Traditional wildlife-dependent uses of the refuge include fishing and hunting of waterfowl and white-tailed deer. Until 2007, the refuge provided opportunities for limited shotgun, muzzleloader, and bow hunting for white-tailed deer. After the completion of an approved EA and FONSI, deer hunting opportunities were changed to include only bow hunting.

5. How will the refuge manage compatible non-priority public uses on the refuge?

Service policy provides that a use might be inappropriate based on compliance with other laws and policy, the availability of resources to manage the uses, possible conflicts with other uses, safety concerns, or other administrative factors. Inappropriate uses may, nonetheless, be compatible in the sense that it may not materially interfere with the purposes of the refuge or the Refuge System’s mission. Other uses, such as historic uses, might be appropriate and compatible, but may not be priority public uses or wildlife-dependent uses.

During the period 1989 through 2004, we provided public access to the Finn’s Point Rear Range Light (FPRRL) for 10 weekends (Saturday and Sunday) during the summer months. With the decline in onsite personnel and safety concerns, this activity is currently limited to allowing access only during the New Jersey Lighthouse Challenge, directly sponsored by the Friends of Supawna Meadows and the New Jersey Lighthouse Society. The Challenge is held annually one weekend in October.

Visitors have requested permission to participate in a variety of non-priority public uses at Supawna Meadows NWR. A few of these non-priority public uses (e.g., scientific research) have been considered compatible. All other non-priority public uses (for example, horseback riding, bicycling, jogging, physical geocaching, group gatherings not related to wildlife-dependent recreation, and picnicking) have been determined to be inappropriate and incompatible with the refuge’s purposes (see appendix B for Findings of Appropriateness and Compatibility Determinations).

6. How will the refuge cultivate an informed and educated public to support the mission of the Service and the purposes for which the refuge was established?

Community involvement in support of our Refuge System mission is both very important and very rewarding. Outreach ties the refuge to local communities, inspiring an interest in the Refuge System and in natural resource conservation and stewardship. It is important that people understand what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how we can work together to improve our communities. Our challenge lies in determining how best to reach out, raise the visibility of the

refuge in the local community, and cultivate a relationship. Some people advocate increasing the number of refuge programs open to the public, while others promote refuge staff involvement in established community events, government committees, and conservation organizations. Goal 6 of the CCP addresses our responses to this issue.

7. What additional lands will the refuge protect or acquire?

New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation. One of the consequences of that distinction is the extreme pressure it places on natural resources. Previously undeveloped lands are being developed rapidly. During our public scoping process, many individuals encouraged us to expand the refuge for a variety of reasons and many expressed concern over the rapid rate of development. Some spoke of the direct benefits, even the necessity, of maintaining land in its natural state, which the refuge exemplifies.

The refuge's current approved acquisition boundary encompasses 4,527 acres, of which the Service currently owns 3,016 acres in fee title lands. An additional 254 acres is managed under a conservation agreement. We will continue to maintain an active land acquisition program and work with willing sellers to acquire properties within the existing acquisition boundary. The primary funding source for land acquisition comes from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which Congress approves annually. In past years the availability of LWCF funding for Supawna Meadows NWR has been limited. As funds become available, the primary acquisition emphasis will be on those properties within the acquisition boundary.

8. How will the refuge obtain the staffing and funding necessary to complete priority projects?

Between 1998 and 2004, Supawna Meadows NWR was staffed with a refuge manager, a biologist, a maintenance worker with collateral law enforcement responsibilities, and a part time administrative assistant. In March 2004, the refuge was administratively complexed with Cape May NWR. In response to funding shortfalls, the 2006 Regional Work Force Planning Report identified Supawna Meadows NWR as an unstaffed satellite refuge complexed to the Cape May NWR. Therefore, the refuge currently has no onsite staff. **Approximately 20 percent of the Cape May NWR staff's time is spent annually providing management, maintenance, and law enforcement support to Supawna Meadows NWR.**

As the CCP was developed, we had to consider what could be accomplished in the next 15 years without onsite staff. If we are able to hire onsite staff, what positions would we want to fill and what additional management activities would they be able to support?

9. How will we preserve, protect, and interpret cultural and historic resources on refuge lands?

The FPRRL was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on August 30, 1978. It is a well-known historic feature located on refuge land. The catwalk was open to the public for viewing in the recent past, but engineering inspection has shown it to pose a potential safety hazard that would require substantial funding to correct. Although it is not directly related to the goals of refuge management, the Service recognizes its responsibility to maintain the FPRRL in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1974. The New Jersey Lighthouse Society and others expressed interest in having the refuge provide

opportunities for public access to the lighthouse during the annual Statewide lighthouse challenge. Questions were raised as to how best to meet the needed protection of the lighthouse and provide public access. Would this be more appropriately accomplished through a property transfer agreement with the State Division of Parks and Forestry, or through cooperative agreements with non-government agencies, such as the New Jersey Lighthouse Society, and/or the Friends of Supawna Meadows NWR?

We also recognize the potential of the lighthouse to be a focal point for enhancing the public's knowledge and understanding of the environmental importance that the refuge provides to a variety of wildlife species and habitats, as well as interpreting the historic value of the lighthouse. Efforts in this regard would be subject to maintaining the historic integrity of the lighthouse.

There are two other sites on the refuge that generate cultural and historic interest. The first of these sites is a small family cemetery dating back to the late 1800s, located just off County Route 197 along the entrance road to the location of the old refuge office. The cemetery has not been assessed for eligibility as a site for the National Register of Historic Places; however, we do recognize the importance of maintaining this site suitable for visitor appreciation.

The second of these sites is the previous headquarters, the old farmhouse of the Samuel Urion Farmstead, which has been referred to as the Urion-Yerkes homestead. We will consult with the New Jersey SHPO about disposition of this building and will comply with any applicable requirements including mitigation, if needed. The farmhouse has fallen into extensive disrepair beyond reasonable restoration value over the years; therefore, demolition is the anticipated outcome.

The draft CCP/EA was sent to New Jersey SHPO for review and comment. We received an email response indicating their concurrence with the document, provided we continue to work with them to comply with applicable Federal and State laws and regulations.

Issues Outside the Scope of this CCP

1. Water Quality – Proposal to dredge the Delaware River

During the public scoping process, some members of the public expressed concerns about water quality in the Delaware and Salem rivers and the potential harmful effects a proposed dredging operation within the Delaware River could have on Supawna Meadows NWR. The project has been proposed for many years by the Army Corps of Engineers. The proposal to increase the depth of the river from 40 feet to 45 feet is currently involved in various lawsuits from environmental organizations and the States of Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. At this point in time, the outcome of the litigation and final dredging operation plan are unclear and cannot be addressed in this CCP. Furthermore, completion of this project is not within the Service's jurisdiction.

2. Will the refuge expand upland hunting opportunities?

During a scoping meeting with NJDFW, it was recommended that we look into expanding hunting opportunities on the refuge, in particular to include wild turkey, American woodcock, eastern gray squirrel, northern bobwhite, ruffed grouse, and rabbit. Although we considered this recommendation, we have eliminated this from detailed evaluation because of the small size of the huntable area within the refuge and the potential conflicts with other public uses.

Plan Amendment and
Revision

Periodic review of the CCP will be required to ensure that objectives are being met and management actions are being implemented. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be an important part of this process.

Monitoring results or new information may indicate the need to change our strategies. At a minimum, CCPs will be fully revised every 15 years. We will modify the CCP documents and associated management activities as needed and we will follow the procedures outlined in Service policy, the Refuge Improvement Act, and NEPA requirements.

