

# News Release

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement Available**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today the release of the Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (CCP/EIS) for Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, located on the Nisqually River delta in south Puget Sound, Washington, was established in 1974 for the conservation and protection of fish and wildlife resources, especially migratory birds. The 2,925-acre Refuge includes a range of aquatic and terrestrial habitats, including tidal estuary, freshwater wetlands, grasslands, riparian forest, and upland forest. It provides important wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, raptors, and wading birds; and supports several threatened and endangered species including Chinook salmon, bull trout, bald eagle, marbled murrelet, and Steller sea lion.

The CCP will provide management guidance for protection, maintenance, restoration, and public use of Refuge resources during the next 15 years. The CCP proposes to protect up to an additional 3,479 acres of land, restore high priority estuarine, riparian, and freshwater wetland habitats, and provide new opportunities for visitors to enjoy and learn about wildlife. To help make immediate progress toward improving Refuge conditions, the Refuge staff will continue to strengthen current relationships with key partners and seek new partnerships with interested parties. It is anticipated, however, that some of the actions outlined in the CCP will be accomplished over time as funding becomes available.

The Draft CCP/EIS was released for public review in December 2002. A total of 1,717 comments were received during the 60-day public comment period. A majority of the comments expressing support for a particular alternative supported Alternative D, the agency-preferred alternative. Refuge expansion, waterfowl hunting, and wildlife observation generated the most interest, with more than 1,000 comments specifically mentioning these activities. Appendix M of the Final CCP/EIS includes a summary of all comments received as well as the Service's responses to these comments. The agency-preferred alternative proposes the following actions:

- ❖ Expand the existing 3,936-acre currently approved Refuge boundary to include an additional 3,479 acres of freshwater wetland, riparian, and forested habitats.

- Increased land protection would result from land acquisition, easement, or cooperative agreement with willing landowners.
- ❖ Restore 699 acres of former estuarine habitat in the Nisqually delta and allow the Nisqually River and McAllister Creek to flow more naturally.
  - ❖ Provide greatly improved freshwater wetland and riparian habitats.
  - ❖ Expand the environmental education program to serve 15,000 students annually.
  - ❖ Reduce the existing 5.5-mile dike trail loop to a 3.5-mile round-trip trail, including a boardwalk extension into the estuary.
  - ❖ Create a new 2.5-mile loop trail on tribal and Refuge lands east of the Nisqually River along with a visitor contact station and parking area.
  - ❖ Open 191 acres to boat-access waterfowl hunting, permitted 7 days per week during the hunting season with a 25-shell limit.
  - ❖ Reduce the Research Natural Area (RNA) by 29 acres to allow for hunting and to square off the refuge hunt area with adjacent State hunting areas.
  - ❖ Enforce the current RNA fishing and shellfishing closure.
  - ❖ Maintain tidal restoration areas as closed areas for wildlife sanctuary and research and monitoring.
  - ❖ Close McAllister Creek to bank fishing, due to dike removal.
  - ❖ Explore new bank and accessible fishing opportunities along the Nisqually River.
  - ❖ Establish a 5-mph speed limit for all watercraft in Refuge waters.
  - ❖ Close the RNA to boating from October 1 through March 31 to provide sanctuary for migratory birds and other wildlife.

The CCP is required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act passed by Congress in 1997. The Final CCP/EIS is available for review at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the following libraries in Washington State: Timberland Community Library in Olympia; Tacoma Public Library; University of Washington's Suzallo Library in Seattle; William J. Reed Library in Shelton; and The Evergreen State College Library in Olympia. You may request a copy of the Summary of Changes and Appendix M (Comments and Responses) (110 pages), or a CD which contains the Final CCP/EIS and summary document, by contacting the Refuge Office at (360) 753-9467. The Final CCP/EIS is also available for viewing and downloading online at: <http://pacific.fws.gov/planning>. Implementation of the CCP can begin after the Record of Decision is signed, which would occur no sooner than 30 days after release of the Final CCP/EIS.



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, 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 fish and wildlife agencies.