



Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

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Comprehensive Conservation Planning — What's New, What's Next

During the fall and winter, progress was made on the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). Two public open houses, in Olympia and Tacoma, were well attended. Meetings were also held with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Nisqually Indian Tribe in regard to management issues. Ducks Unlimited, in cooperation with the Refuge, has contracted with ENSR, a hydrological firm from Redmond, Washington, to develop models for assessing various habitat restoration scenarios.

In the next several months, small, informal workshops will be held to gather recommendations from focus groups on managing public use, wildlife, and habitats. Representatives of various groups will participate in the workshops. Results of the workshops will be summarized in a future planning update. If you have information for or about focus group representatives, please call the Refuge.

All comments received from the open houses, issues workbooks, meetings, and workshops will be considered in the development of alternatives for the draft CCP. If you have additional comments on the CCP, you are encouraged to contact the Refuge by phone or in writing. Future planning updates and public meetings will continue to keep you informed on the CCP progress.

Summary of Comments from November 1997 CCP Open Houses

Thanks to everyone who participated in the November open houses, which provided the public with an opportunity to learn about Refuge planning and offer comments. A total of 151 people attended. Of the 600 plus issues workbooks that were distributed during the comment period, 144 (about 24 percent) were returned with a diversity of useful comments. In the following summary of results from the workbooks and open houses, percentages represent issues workbook results (more than one response was often checked per question by respondents).

Overall, the public was supportive of the draft Refuge goals. Some comments indicated conservation and management of habitats and species recovery efforts (Goals I and II) should be the primary focus and not be compromised by Goal IV (recreation and interpretation).

The most highly valued Refuge purposes and activities were the conservation of fish and wildlife and the protection of the Nisqually Delta (90 percent). The role people envisioned for the Refuge in protecting, conserving, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats was fairly evenly distributed (64 to 61 percent respectively) within four categories: estuarine wetlands restoration; environmental education; working with conservation groups; and Refuge expansion. The greatest concerns were the

degradation of habitat quality (65 percent), the loss of estuarine habitat (63 percent), development in South Puget Sound (60 percent), development in the Nisqually watershed (59 percent), declines in anadromous fishes and wildlife (53 to 56 percent), and the spread of invasive, exotic species (49 percent).

Four major issues at Nisqually NWR were highlighted in the issues workbook. They were: 1) changing the mix of habitat types on the Refuge; 2) trail access; 3) waterfowl hunting; and 4) Refuge expansion. The following summarizes the public's comments on each major issue.

Changing the mix of habitat types

Most respondents (75 percent) favored some amount of tidal restoration for the 1,000-acre area inside the dike. The largest number of respondents (30 percent) favored restoring as much as possible to estuarine habitat, while many others (28 percent) favored restoring half of the diked lands. A smaller number (22 percent) preferred improving freshwater and grassland habitats and not restoring tidal action. Those who favored more estuarine restoration stressed the advantages of creating nursery areas for fish and feeding areas for shorebirds, reducing costs for dike repair, and expanding opportunities to learn about estuarine habitat. Respondents who favored less estuarine restoration expressed concern about the loss of trails and harm to species that depend on terrestrial and freshwater habitats. Others expressed concern that restoration be done well and that viable habitats be created. More than half (54 percent) indicated a preference for one or more of the conceptual strategies depicted in eight maps in the issues workbook. The largest number preferred Maps E and F, which represent about 50 percent estuarine restoration.

Trail access

Most respondents (63 percent) felt that fish, wildlife, and habitat needs should take priority in trail and tidal restoration decisions. Some (27

percent) believed that changes in trail configuration or length should still provide easy access to diverse habitats and support or enhance environmental education. Others (26 percent) wanted, if possible, to maintain all existing trails and achieve tidal restoration. Suggestions included installing bridges or culverts at dike breaches, construction of an alternative east-west trail, spur trails, boardwalks, and viewing platforms. A smaller number (8 percent) thought no change should be made in trail configuration or length.

Most respondents supported seasonal trail closures to protect wildlife and reduce disturbance (69 percent) or user safety (34 percent). Many, however, expressed discontent about the seasonal closure of trails to allow waterfowl hunting. They were not necessarily against hunting; they just wanted access to Refuge trails. Many of these people believed that changes should be made in waterfowl hunting areas to allow year-round trail use.

Waterfowl hunting

Many people (46 percent) opposed waterfowl hunting on the Refuge; they commented that the Refuge should be maintained as a sanctuary for waterfowl and all other wildlife. Smaller numbers (19 percent) felt waterfowl hunting should be allowed. Of the people who supported waterfowl hunting, approximately two-thirds preferred the maximum area of the Refuge be open to hunting. Others indicated various portions of the tidflats or lands east of the Nisqually River should be open to hunting.

Many others (30 percent) felt if a hunting program were developed, it should be a quality program designed to insure the protection of wildlife and habitat resources. The largest number (43 percent) stated that waterfowl hunting should be allowed two to three days per week. Other suggestions included: opening the Refuge to hunting on one weekend day and holidays; establishing youth-only times; using buffers; increased law enforcement; limiting

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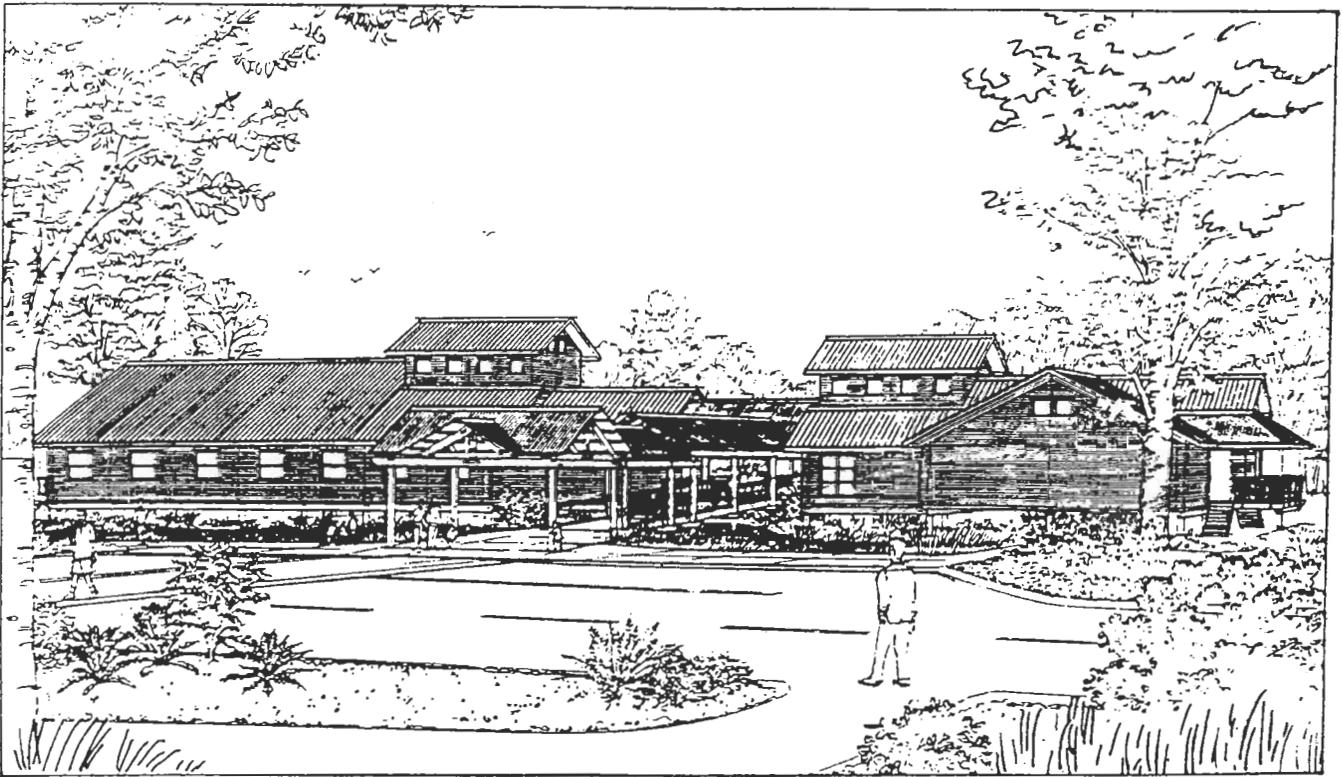
Construction to Begin on New Administrative Site

In early March, the architectural design of the new Refuge Office, Visitor Center, maintenance buildings, entrance road, and parking lot was finalized and sent out for bid. The construction contract has been awarded to Jody Miller Construction of Tacoma. Although the schedule has not been finalized, construction is expected to begin in May and could take up to one year.

Work has begun on the upgrade of the existing Twin Barns Loop Trail. When complete, this trail will be fully handicap accessible and will include a series of interpretive panels. Construction of the new wildlife observation platform next to the Twin Barns Education Center, which

is part of this trail, is almost complete. Work has also started on the boardwalk portion of the loop trail that will begin at the new Refuge Office and parallel the maintenance road to the Education Center. If you've been to the Refuge recently, you've seen the piles of lumber and other materials, which will be used to construct the boardwalk, stacked along the maintenance road. The Washington Conservation Corps is building the boardwalk and observation platform.

During the next year, visitors to the Refuge will see construction work in progress as the new Refuge infrastructure starts to take shape. Your patience is asked as the work may disrupt your visit to the Refuge. If you have questions about the construction work, call the Refuge office.



Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge Complex Administrative Office and Visitor Center

From the new parking lot, visitors to the Refuge will walk up a covered walkway to reach the new Administrative Office (on the left) and Visitor Center (on the right). A deck will allow visitors to view a freshwater wetland. The building, with outside access to restrooms, will be on pilings five feet above the ground. The Visitor Center will

be open daily and will have a lobby, a sales outlet for the Nisqually Refuge Cooperating Association, permanent exhibits, and a 100-person multi-purpose room. The building and parking lot will be located in the area of the current shop. The architectural design was done by William Wilson and Associates of Portland, Oregon.

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shell numbers; and a lottery or permit process for hunters. Because hunting times are determined by tides, half days were not recommended.

Some respondents who supported hunting cited the lack of available waterfowl hunting areas. They also mentioned the history of hunter dollars for refuge acquisition, particularly for Nisqually NWR. The Refuge was purchased primarily with monies from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF). The MBCF is derived from the sale of Duck Stamps, an appropriated Wetland Loan, and import duties on arms and ammunition. Some individuals commented that duck hunting should occur without change on State lands, since trail users have access during the rest of the year. Other

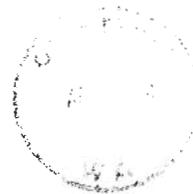
suggestions included opening Red Salmon Creek and the diked interior for hunting, and adding boat anchors and blinds. A few people suggested decisions be made about tidal restoration before changing hunting rules. Several people stated that Refuge, State, and private lands should be posted and the Refuge and State should work out hunting issues.

Refuge expansion

Most respondents (70 percent) supported acquiring lands on the east bluff to provide a buffer to the Refuge. Some (22 percent) felt the Refuge should consider protecting additional lands south of I-5. Several people expressed an interest in having the Refuge acquire State lands within the Refuge boundary, and others indicated their support for renewed efforts to acquire the other inholdings.

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