

Chapter 2. The Planning Process

Introduction

The CCP for the Sacramento River Refuge is intended to comply with the requirements of the Improvement Act and the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). Refuge planning policy guided the process and development of the CCP, as outlined in Part 602, Chapters 1, 3, and 4 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manual (May 2000).

Service policy, the Improvement Act, and NEPA provide specific guidance for the planning process, such as seeking public involvement in the preparation of the Environmental Assessment (EA) document. The development and analysis of “reasonable” management alternatives within the EA include a “no action” alternative that reflects current conditions and management strategies on the Refuge. Management alternatives were developed as part of this planning process and can be found in Appendix A: Environment Assessment.

The planning process for this CCP began in March 2001 with pre-planning meetings and coordination. CCP teams were formed. For the first few months, the core team met weekly in order to expedite the start of the public scoping process and benefit from the existing assistant refuge manager’s institutional knowledge prior to his transfer to New Mexico in June 2001.

Initially, members of the Refuge staff and planning team identified a preliminary list of issues, concerns, and opportunities that were derived from wildlife and habitat monitoring and field experience with the past management and history of the Refuge. Early in the process, visitor services, especially hunting and fishing, were identified as primary issues. This preliminary list was expanded during public scoping and then refined and finalized through the planning process to generate the vision, goals, objectives, and strategies for the Refuge. Throughout this process, close coordination with the CDFG was emphasized to coordinate the CCP and their parallel wildlife management planning efforts for the Sacramento River.

The following describes the comprehensive conservation planning process for the Refuge:

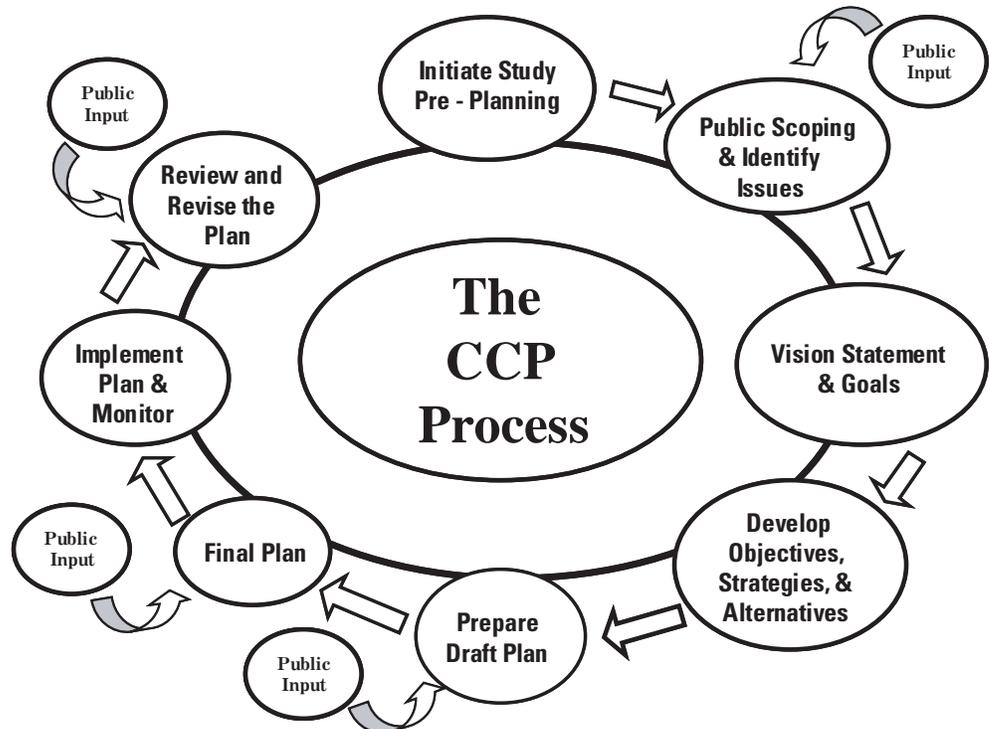
The Planning Process

Part of comprehensive conservation planning includes preparation of a NEPA document. Key steps in the CCP planning process and the parallel NEPA process include:

1. Preplanning and Team formation
2. Public Scoping
3. Identifying issues, opportunities, and concerns
4. Defining and revising vision statement and Refuge goals
5. Developing and assessing alternatives
6. Identifying the preferred alternative plan
7. Draft CCP and EA
8. Revising draft documents and releasing final CCP
9. Implementing the CCP
10. Monitoring / Feedback (Adaptive Management)

Figure 7 shows the overall CCP planning steps and process in a linear cycle. The following sections provide additional detail on individual steps in the planning process.

Figure 7. The CCP Process.



Planning Hierarchy

The Service planning hierarchy that determines the direction of the goals, objectives and strategies is a natural progression from the general to the specific. Described as a linear process, the planning hierarchy is, in reality, a multi-dimensional flow that is linked by the Refuge purposes, missions, laws, mandates, and other statutory requirements (Figure 8).

- The Refuge purposes provide direction for the Refuge.
- A Refuge vision broadly reflects the refuge purpose(s), the Refuge System mission and goals, other statutory requirements, and larger-scale plans as appropriate.
- Goals then define general targets in support of the vision.
- Objectives direct effort into incremental and measurable steps toward achieving those goals.
- Strategies identify specific tools to accomplish objectives.

In practice, the process of developing vision, goals, and objectives is repetitive and dynamic. During the planning process or as new information becomes available, the plan continues to develop.

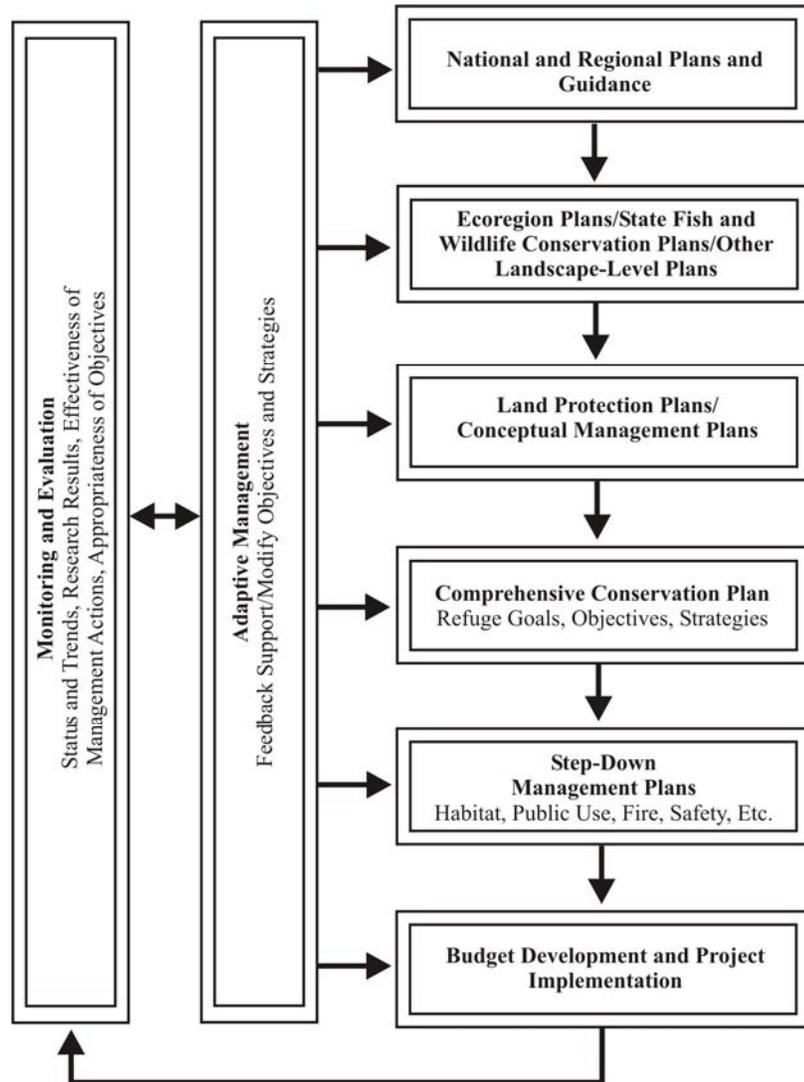
The Planning Team

The CCP process requires close teamwork with the staff, planners, and other partners to accomplish the necessary planning steps, tasks, and work to generate the CCP document and associated EA. Two teams were formed:

Core Team

The core team is the working/production entity of the CCP. The members are responsible for researching and generating the contents of the CCP document and participate in the entire planning process. The team consists of Refuge staff, planners, and Geographic Information System personnel. The Sacramento River Refuge core team, facilitated by the refuge planner, meets regularly to discuss and work on the various steps and sections of the CCP. The team members also work independently in producing their respective CCP sections, based on their area of expertise. Multi-tasking by team members is a standard requirement since work on the CCP occurs in addition to their regular workload. (Appendix K).

Figure 8. Relationships between Service, System and other planning efforts.



Expanded Team

The expanded team is the advisory and coordination forum of the CCP. It is significant for this Refuge because of the Refuge's basis and history of working in close partnership with other local, State, Federal, and private agencies and organizations concerned with the Sacramento River and its watershed. The Sacramento River Refuge expanded team is composed of the Core team, other Service and Federal personnel, and State of California personnel to provide overview, discussion, and coordination during the planning process. (Appendix K).

Pre-Planning

Pre-Planning involved formation of the planning teams, development of the CCP schedule, and gathering data. The teams determined procedures, work allocations, and outreach strategies. They also created a preliminary mailing list.

Public Involvement in Planning

Public involvement is an important and necessary component of the CCP and NEPA process. Public scoping meetings allow the Service to provide updated information about the Refuge System and the Refuge itself. Most important, these meetings allow the Refuge staff to hear public comments, concerns, and opportunities. These public meetings provide valuable discussions and identify important issues regarding the Refuge and the surrounding region.

The Refuge hosted four public scoping meetings in different towns in May and June 2001 (Table 3). Each meeting began with a presentation introducing the Refuge and the Service staff, provided an open forum for public comment, and ended with a breakout session consisting of various tables with people and information available to address Refuge management, wildlife and habitat, and public use. A separate table was set up to handle questions about a separate EA document for planned Refuge restoration efforts. In addition to comments made and noted on flip charts at the meetings, comments were also received by postcard mailers, email, and letters. These comments were analyzed and used to further identify Refuge issues and revise CCP strategies (Table 4).



Public Scoping Meetings. June, 2001

USFWS Photo

Table 3. Public Scoping Meetings.

Meeting Date	Location	Attendance
30 May 2001	Willows, CA	23
04 June 2001	Chico, CA	55
05 June 2001	Red Bluff, CA	13
06 June 2001	Colusa, CA	8

Table 4. Refuge Issues Identified Through Public Comment.

Refuge Issue Category	Number of Comments Received (283¹)
Public Use Issues	63
Big 6 Uses	36
Camping	7
Biking	5
Public Use Issues	30
Public Access Issues	69
Hunting/Fishing Access	17
River Access/Boat Ramps	9
Disabled Access	4
Refuge Access Issues	43
Management Issues	83
LE/Fire	14
Agricultural/Adjacent Land Owner Concerns	18
Refuge Management Issues	51
Outreach/Informational Issues	16
Flood & Erosion Management Issues	11
Opinions / Questions	41

¹Total number of comments received. Numbers within Refuge issue categories do not equal the total comments received since many comments covered multiple categories.

Public Outreach

During the planning process, the Refuge staff continued to actively participate with the various working groups and agency teams concerning the Sacramento River. The staff also met with various interest and local groups to explain the Refuge and the planning process, and to listen to their concerns.

An information letter called “Planning Updates” was also mailed to the public. These periodic publications were created to provide the public with up-to-date Refuge information and progress on the CCP process. The Planning Updates were also made available on the Refuge, Region webpage, and at various outreach meetings. Appendix J contains a list of individuals and organizations that were notified or were sent a copy of the Draft CCP, were sent planning updates, or attended scoping meetings.

Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

Through the scoping process and team discussions, the planning team identified issues, concerns, and opportunities. Over 170 people attended the four public scoping sessions held in May and June 2001. The public provided over 280 comments as of October 2001 (Table 4) for consideration in identifying issues and opportunities for the CCP. The team categorized the comments into five main areas of interest: public use, public access, management, flood and erosion control, and general opinions and questions.

Public use issue categories included wildlife-dependant activities which include hunting, fishing, camping on gravel bars, biking and other types of recreation. Out of 32 comments received about hunting, 3 opposed and 29 supported opening the Refuge to hunting. Three comments specifically stated the need for areas on the Refuge for bank fishing. Three comments suggested limiting or controlling motor and off-road vehicles, while 1 comment suggested allowing motor and off-road vehicles on the Refuge. Having a place to conduct dog trials or dog training was also requested by 3 comments.

The public access issue categories included access for hunting and fishing, access to the river, access for disabled people, and other Refuge access issues. Out of 69 comments received only 2 comments opposed allowing access to the Refuge while the rest overwhelmingly supported opening the Refuge.

Management issue categories included law enforcement/fire management issues, agriculture/adjacent land owner issues, and Refuge management concerns. Some of the Refuge management concern comments included how to manage the Refuge, what techniques to use to manage and what the management priorities should be. Many of the comments received in the outreach and informational issue category were requests for information including several types of brochures, posting signs on the Refuge, and providing access to wildlife survey data. This category also included requests for special events and more education programs.

The flood control and erosion management issue categories included flood control, levee maintenance, and bank stabilization. The opinions/questions/other issues category had comments that ranged from questions about the CCP process to stating personal opinions on a wide variety of topics.

The team also noted resource issues and opportunities that were identified during the scoping process. All comments and issues were reviewed and compiled; the CCP teams consulted them during the process of creating and refining the Refuge's CCP vision, goals, objectives, and strategies.

Development of the Refuge Vision

A vision statement is developed or reviewed for each individual refuge unit as part of the CCP process. Vision statements are grounded in the unifying mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and describe the desired future conditions of the refuge unit in the long term (more than 15 years). They are based on the refuge's specific purposes, the resources present on the refuge, and any other relevant mandates. Please refer to Chapter 1 for the Refuge vision statement.

Determining the Refuge Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The purpose for creating the Refuge is established by law (Chapter 1). The Improvement Act directs that the planning effort develop and revise the management focus of the Refuge within the Service's planning framework, which includes: the Service mission, the Refuge System mission, ecosystem guidelines, and refuge purposes. This is accomplished during the CCP process through the development of goals, objectives, and strategies.

Goals

Goals describe the desired future conditions of a refuge in succinct statements. Each one translates to one or more objectives that define these conditions in measurable terms. A well-written goal directs work toward achieving a refuge's vision and ultimately the purpose(s) of a refuge. Collectively, a set of goals is a framework within which to make decisions. The existing interim Refuge goals are as follows.

Interim Refuge Goals:

- Provide natural habitats and management to restore and perpetuate endangered or threatened species, or species of special concern.
- Preserve a natural diversity and abundance of flora and fauna.
- Provide opportunities for the understanding and appreciation of wildlife ecology and the human role in the environment; and provide high-quality wildlife dependent recreation, education, and research.
- Provide a diversity of riparian and wetland habitats for an abundance of migratory birds, particularly waterfowl and other water birds.

Through the CCP process these interim goals were evaluated and revised and are stated in Chapter 5.

Objectives, Rationale, and Strategies

Once the Refuge goals are reviewed and revised then various objectives, a rationale, and strategies are determined to accomplish each of the goals.

Objectives: Objectives are incremental steps we take to achieve a goal. They are derived from goals and provide a foundation for determining strategies, monitoring refuge accomplishments, and evaluating success. The number of objectives per goal will vary, but should be those necessary to satisfy the goal. Where there are many, an implementation schedule may be developed. All objectives must possess the following five properties: specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and time-fixed.

Rationale: Each objective should document the rationale for forming the objective. The degree of documentation will vary, but at a minimum, it should include logic, assumptions, and sources of information. This promotes informed debate on the objective's merits, provides continuity in management through

staff turnover, and allows reevaluation of the objective as new information becomes available.

Strategy: A specific action, tool, technique, or combination of actions, tools, and techniques used to meet an objective. Multiple strategies can be used to support an objective.

Development of the Refuge Management Alternatives

The development of alternatives, assessment of their environmental effects, and the identification of the preferred management alternative are fully described in the EA (Appendix A). Alternatives were developed to represent reasonable options that address the specific Refuge issues and challenges. A “no action” or continuation of current management alternative is required by NEPA. A range of other alternatives were studied and are briefly described as follows.

Alternative A: No Action

Under the Alternative A: No Action, the Refuge would continue to be managed as it has in the recent past. The focus of the Refuge would remain the same: to provide fish and wildlife habitat and maintain current active management practices; and to restore the 9 units identified in the 2002 Environmental Assessment for Proposed Restoration Activities on Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge for migratory birds and threatened and endangered species. The Refuge would remain closed to visitor services other than the limited existing opportunities of fishing at Packer Lake. Current staffing and funding levels would remain the same. Recent management has followed existing step down management plans:

- Environmental Assessment for Proposed Restoration Activities on Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge
- Fire Management Plan for Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge
- Annual Habitat Management Plan for Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge
- Cultural Resource Overview and Management Plan

Alternative B: Optimize Habitat Restoration and Public Use (Proposed Action)

Under this Alternative, the Refuge would use active (also known as cultural) and passive management practices to achieve and maintain full restoration/enhancement of all units where appropriate, as funding becomes available. The agricultural program would be phased out as restoration

funding becomes available. The Refuge would employ both cultivation and natural recruitment restoration techniques as determined by site conditions. Public use opportunities would be optimized to allow for a balance of wildlife-dependent public uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, interpretation and environmental education) throughout the entire Refuge in coordination with other agencies and programs. Staffing and funding levels would need to increase to implement this alternative.

Alternative C: Accelerated Habitat Restoration and Maximize Public Use

Under this Alternative, the Refuge focus would use active and passive management practices to achieve and maintain full restoration of all units. The agricultural program would cease immediately and remaining orchards would be removed. Restoration of these sites would be implemented as funding becomes available. Public use opportunities would be maximized to allow for all wildlife-dependent public uses throughout the majority of Refuge. The staff would manage cooperatively with other agencies and organizations, and focus resources and facilities to accommodate uses and demands. In addition, staffing and funding levels would need to substantially increase to implement the alternative.

Selection of the Refuge Proposed Action

The alternatives were analyzed in the EA (Appendix A and EA Appendix 1) to determine their effects on the Refuge environment. Based on this analysis, we have selected Alternative B as the proposed action because it best achieves the Refuge goals, purposes, and Refuge System and Service missions.

Alternative B is founded upon the existing cooperative management programs, with enhancements in habitat and monitoring programs and an integration of a cooperative visitor services program that includes hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, interpretation, and environmental education. Cooperative management refers to the current practice of working closely with State and other river partners to provide protected and enhanced habitat along with visitor service opportunities and adjacent land uses on publicly owned properties. Please refer to Chapters 5 and 6 which describes this management plan.

Plan Implementation

The Draft CCP and EA were provided for public review and comment during July and August, 2004. The Service responded to these comments (Appendix R), finalized the document and released it to the public. The Refuge will implement the plan and associated step-down plans (Chapters 5 and 6) over the next 15-years, as funding permits.