



Howland Island, Baker Island, and Jarvis Island National Wildlife Refuges

Comprehensive Conservation Planning *Planning Update #2 – Spring 2006*

Thank You for Participating!

Frigatebird chicks can be found in native puncture vine, *Tribulus cistoides* on Howland Island.



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Howland Island, Baker Island, and Jarvis Island National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs). This plan will guide the management of the Refuges for the next 15 years. As part of this process, we have been seeking input from the public, conservation and research organizations, and local, State and Federal government agencies. This planning update is to provide information on the status of the planning process and what we have heard from people so far.

In October 2005, the Service mailed approximately 250 copies of Planning Update #1, and several of you returned comments with suggestions for managing the Refuges. Planning Update #1 provided background information on the refuges, described the CCP process, and introduced you to the National Wildlife Refuge System.

This second update provides a revised schedule, summarizes the comments we received, presents the draft vision and goals for Howland Island NWR, and presents a range of alternatives to be considered for the management of Howland Island.

You will notice that we are currently concentrating our efforts on the Howland Island NWR CCP. This is because we have decided to address each Refuge individually. Planning for the remaining two refuges will soon follow.

We would like to thank everyone who has provided comments and we invite you to continue sharing your ideas with us. Your participation continues to be critical to the success of this planning effort.

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Refuge Manager

What were your concerns for the Refuges?

The public scoping period for preparation of a draft CCP and EA for the Refuges ended on November 14, 2005. Responses back from the public indicated that it would not be necessary to host public meetings for these Refuges. However, Refuge staff did meet with representatives from some of our partner agencies such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources to introduce them to the CCP process.

Most comments reflected support for maintaining closure of the Refuges to public use and continuation of research, monitoring, and invasive species control activities. In addition, coordination and collaboration with NOAA, specifically with respect to marine mammals, was suggested.

Preliminary Vision Statement for Howland Island NWR

Vision statements are brief descriptions of what the Refuge should be. They provide a picture of desired future conditions and are used to inspire and motivate staff, partners and the public.

Howland Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) exemplifies the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a world leader in tropical island and coral reef conservation, protection, and restoration. The refuge is one of the last places in the world where the terrestrial and marine tropical island ecosystems are still intact and relatively free of human impacts. Natural, physical and ecological processes unfold with limited human interference and support a diverse community of marine organisms including seabirds, marine mammals, turtles, fish, invertebrates, plants, and corals. This rare equatorial oasis is largely defined by upwelled nutrients that sustain enhanced biodiversity and productivity. Isolation and solitude overwhelm the human spirit. Habitat conditions, both marine and terrestrial, appear much as they did before humans discovered the island. The cultural history of Howland Island is protected in written accounts and in archaeological sites on the island and in surrounding waters. Protection of Howland Island NWR is strengthened in perpetuity. The refuge serves as a living laboratory for measuring current and future human impacts to island, coral reef, and deep marine habitats in the refuge and global processes elsewhere.



Tournefortia argentea, or Tree Heiloptrope is a native plant typical of Pacific Island beach strand habitat.

What are the Key Issues for Howland Island NWR?

The planning team and Service staff used input from the public, various organizations and other agencies to formulate the following issues that provide the basis for drafting management goals and objectives for public review.

Issue 1: Communication and Cooperation

Howland Island lies more than 1,600 nautical miles away from Refuge staff located in Honolulu. Its remoteness compels a growing list of partners and cooperators to be kept abreast of planning and management activities at Howland Island. Maintaining open lines of communication with our partners will facilitate cooperative activities such as expedition planning and collaborative research activities.

Issue 2: Public Use Resources

Although Howland Island, Baker Island, and Jarvis Island National Wildlife Refuges have been closed to the general public since their establishment, unauthorized public use has occurred on these islands. Unauthorized fishing activities and transient boat traffic have been documented within refuge boundaries. With no on-site staff, the Service has limited control over access and use. The Service currently permits access through issuance of Refuge Special Use Permits.

Issue 3: Biological and Ecological Resources

On average, staff visit Howland Island once every 2 years. The Service does not have the funds to charter or maintain a vessel that can safely make regular passages to the island from Honolulu. Thus, the Service must rely on other agencies who do have the capability to make open ocean voyages. Due to the infrequency and limited staff time spent on the islands, biological and ecological information is not of sufficient frequency to allow for a detailed assessment of resources. The collection of baseline and long-term monitoring information should be a primary concern and the focus of Refuge management.

Issue 4: External Forces

The introduction of invasive species from unauthorized visits, marine debris, and vessel groundings is beyond the capacity of current management control. Global climate change is also beyond the control of the Service. But, changes in the chemical composition of the atmosphere and oceans, surface temperatures, intensity and frequency of storms, and changes in sea level are anticipated to have impacts on Refuge resources. It will be necessary to maintain a monitoring program to assess the impacts of global climate change and invasive species introductions to the low lying equatorial Pacific refuges.

Issue 5: Education and Outreach

The general public is not aware that the refuge exists. There are few entrance signs, no boundary signs, and little published information in popular literature. Refuge boundaries are rarely portrayed on nautical charts, and other maps and erroneous information about Howland and nearby Refuges have also been recently presented on the Internet.

Preliminary Goals for Refuges

Goals are broad statements intended to provide direction for the future management of a Refuge. They are based on the purposes of the Refuge, the mission and policies of the National Wildlife Refuge System, input received through this planning process and the key issues identified as most significant to the Refuge. We are in the process of drafting objectives and strategies that will be available for public review and comment when the draft CCP is released. The following are the draft goals for Howland Island NWR.

Goal 1: Provide increased level of staff presence on island.

Without a more consistent presence, it will not be possible to meet any of our other goals, except Goal 7.

Goal 2: Maintain and monitor the integrity of natural tropical island and marine communities.

Increase the general understanding of the health of the island and marine environment, including keeping the island free of invasive species and marine debris.

Goal 3: Enhance population and habitats of potential sensitive species.

Restore nesting populations of Phoenix Petrel and Polynesian Storm Petrel, develop baseline information on sea turtle use, and conduct surveys of marine organisms such as giant clams and bumphead parrotfish.

Goal 4: Protect the integrity of the Refuge to maintain its wilderness character and values.

Evaluate the lands and waters of the Refuge for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, and preserve and enhance its wilderness character by removing human-generated debris and invasive species.

Goal 5: Coordinate and cooperate with government agencies, private institutions and the public to achieve conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitats.

Continue to coordinate with other agencies and organizations to provide staff regular access.

Goal 6: Increase knowledge and understanding of the Refuge and its role in the ecosystem through scientific inquiry.

Investigate interest by global climate change researchers to use Refuge resources as a baseline and time-series monitoring site. Exchange scientific information between outside scientists and management staff.

Goal 7: Enhance general public understanding of and appreciation for the purpose and value of the Refuge.

Increase off-site educational opportunities for the general public to learn about remote island and coral reef ecosystem values.

Goal 8: Protect cultural resources of the Refuge.

Document existing cultural resources.

Goal 9: Perpetuate and enhance protection of Refuge lands and waters.

Protect Refuge resources within marine boundaries surrounding the Refuge by maintaining closure to public visitation and use.

Planning Schedule

Planning Update #1	Completed
Planning Update #2	May 2006
Public Review of Draft Howland Island CCP	June 2006
Public Review of Draft Baker and Jarvis Island CCP's	October 2006

What's Next?

The draft CCP and Environmental Assessment for Howland Island will be available for public review and comment in June, with Baker and Jarvis Island CCP's due in October. The draft CCP's will provide you with an opportunity for input into the decisions being made to manage the Refuges over the next 15 years. A third planning update is scheduled just prior to the release of the Howland Island draft CCP and will include highlights and information on how to receive a copy for review.



Masked Boobies, *Sula dactylatra*, a ground-nesting species require predator-free areas such as Howland Island to successfully nest.

Please feel free to contact us

We are available to provide additional information regarding the Refuge and the planning process. Feel free to call, write, or e-mail.

If you did not receive this update through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, please contact us. If you would like to be removed from the list, please let us know.

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Land hermit crabs, *Coenobita perlata*, can be found across all Howland Island habitats.

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