



Protection Island and San Juan Islands National Wildlife Refuges

Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Planning Update 1



The Refuges provide important breeding habitat for black oystercatchers. Photo: Karen Robinson, USFWS.

Help Us Plan for the Future

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has launched a planning process to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for Protection Island and San Juan Islands National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs or Refuges). The CCP will guide the management of the Refuges for the next 15 years. You can play a role in the planning process by helping us identify issues, concerns, and opportunities.

This Planning Update is the first in a series of updates that will keep you informed about the CCP's development. It includes information on the CCP process, the National Wildlife Refuge System, the purposes for which the Refuges

were established, and the preliminary list of goals, issues, concerns and opportunities to be addressed in the CCP. A response form for comments is also included.

About the CCP

When Congress amended the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Act) in 1997, it incorporated an underlying philosophy that "wildlife comes first" on Refuges.

The Act provided the Service with guidance for managing refuges to ensure the long-term conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. It also established six priority public uses on National Wildlife Refuges—wildlife observation and photography, hunting, fishing, interpretation, and environmental education.

The Act also strengthened the compatibility determination process for assuring that priority uses and other activities do not conflict with refuge management purposes.

The Act requires all lands within the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) to be managed in accordance with a CCP. A CCP ensures that the management of each refuge reflects the purposes of that refuge and the mission, policies, and goals of the Refuge System. The Service views the planning process as an opportunity to strengthen current partnerships and forge new ones.

The CCP for Protection Island and San Juan Islands NWRs will outline refuge goals, objectives, and management strategies for achieving the purposes for which the Refuges were established.

In This Update:

Background information on the Refuges.....	2
Your involvement can help the Refuges.....	4
Preliminary issues, concerns, and opportunities...	4
Mail in response form.....	5

Our vision for the future.....	7
Preliminary goals for the Refuges.....	7
We welcome your comments.....	8
CCP planning schedule.....	8

See the insert for Refuge maps.

Background Information on the Refuges

Meet Protection Island National Wildlife Refuge

Protection Island NWR is located near the mouth of Discovery Bay on the southeast side of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Protection Island NWR consists of about 316 acres covered by grass and shrubs, with a small woodland area, high sandy bluffs, shoreline, and sand spits.

The combination of soil conditions suitable for burrow-nesting seabirds, freedom from non-native predators, and limited human disturbance, make the island one of the most important seabird nesting locations in Washington State. About 70% of Puget Sound's seabirds nest on the island and the glacial-till sandy bluffs provide essential habitat for one of the largest

colonies of rhinoceros auklets (a seabird related to puffins) in the world.

Protection Island also remains a "last stand" for breeding tufted puffins in Puget Sound. The sand spits are a major resting and breeding site for harbor seals and a small number of breeding elephant seals.

To minimize disturbance and protect sensitive breeding wildlife, the island and surrounding waters are closed to the public. All boats are required to remain 200 yards from shore.

Management programs at Protection Island focus on removing hazardous materials, structures, and selected invasive species. A caretaker lives on the island year-round and acts as official host to researchers studying on the island.



Meet San Juan Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Located in the northwest corner of Washington State between southern Canada and the United States mainland, the 83 islands, rocks, and reefs that form the San Juan NWR provide important breeding, resting, and foraging habitat for sensitive marine bird and mammal species.

Although small in total acreage, this Refuge has a wide diversity of habitats, including: remnant prairies, cliff faces, rocky shorelines, and old growth forest that support many unique plants. The islands are closed to public access, except for Matia and Turn Islands.

Management on the islands has focused on inventorying resources and selected removal of invasive species. Recreational uses on Turn and Matia Islands have been managed under an agreement with Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

*Protection Island
is home to one of
the largest
colonies of
rhinoceros auklets
in the world.*

Photo: USFWS.

Refuge Purposes

The Refuge Administration Act directs the Service to manage each refuge to fulfill the mission of the Refuge System; to maintain and, where appropriate restore the refuge's ecological integrity; and achieve the specific purposes for which the refuge was established.

Establishment of Protection Island National Wildlife Refuge was authorized by an Act of Congress in 1982. The purposes of this Refuge are to *“provide habitat for a broad diversity of bird species, with particular emphasis on protecting the nesting habitat of the bald eagle, tufted puffin, rhinoceros auklet, pigeon guillemot, and pelagic cormorant; to protect the hauling-out area of harbor seals; and to provide for scientific research and wildlife-oriented public education and interpretation.”*

Establishment history related to San Juan Islands NWR dates back to 1914 when Smith and Minor Islands were reserved *“as a preserve, breeding ground and winter sanctuary for native birds.”*

In 1975 when several refuges were combined and lands were added to the San Juan Islands NWR, the purpose was to *“facilitate the management of migratory birds for which the United States has a responsibility under international treaties and to further effectuate the purposes of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act.”*

In 1976, all the islands were designated San Juan Islands Wilderness except for Smith, Minor, Turn, and a 5-acre parcel on Matia. This added the Wilderness Act purposes including *“to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.”*

The Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to . . .

“. . . administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”



Harbor seals use refuge islands for pupping.

Photo: USFWS.

Your Involvement Can Help the Refuges

The planning team has identified preliminary issues, concerns, and opportunities for the Refuges for your reflection and comment. They have also drafted preliminary visions and goals for the Refuges.

Getting involved early in the CCP planning process is the best way to ensure that your issues of interest and ideas are considered.

You can submit written comments by completing the enclosed comment form and returning it by fax, e-mail or regular mail. You can also provide oral comments over the phone. We will continue to notify you with updates and notices of public meetings.

Historically, tufted puffins nested on a number of San Juan Islands, but currently, Protection Island remains a "last stand" for breeding tufted puffins in the Puget Sound.

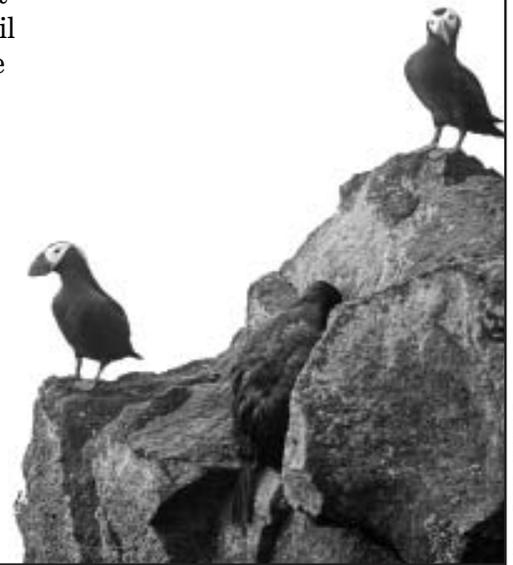


Photo: USFWS

Preliminary Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

The following broad categories of preliminary issues have been identified for consideration in the planning process.

Threats to Refuge Resources: Oil spills, other contaminants such as creosote, marine debris, and derelict fishing gear, can kill wildlife and degrade their habitats. Invasive species can out-compete native species and result in decreased native species population levels and adversely altered habitats.

Refuge Buffers: Wildlife, especially breeding seabirds and marine mammals, need areas relatively free of human disturbance to rest and reproduce. Exploring partnerships to create buffer areas closed to public access around the islands is one method of reducing human disturbance to wildlife thereby enhancing their survival.

Habitat Restoration: There are several potential opportunities to restore historic habitats on the Refuges, including restoring a portion of

freshwater wetland on Protection Island, and reintroducing or enhancing special status native plant species or native plant communities.

Wilderness management on San Juan Islands NWR: Most of the San Juan Islands NWR is designated wilderness with special management guidelines based on the Wilderness Act of 1964. Preserving the intent of wilderness character can conflict with some management activities (e.g., using large signs to identify the Refuge islands and prevent disturbance).

Research Opportunities: Scientific research is one of the purposes of Protection Island and the island has an extensive history of research studies. The Service will be evaluating how much and what types of research are appropriate and compatible with the other purposes of the Refuges.

Visitor Services: Currently, the Refuge islands, except Turn and

Matia, are closed to public access due to the sensitivity of seabirds and marine mammals to disturbance. A thorough review of all the public activities will be explored during the planning process.

Refuge Administration: The lack of staff stationed in the San Juans and Protection Island limits the Service's ability to adequately track population trends, reduce disturbance, and provide public education and outreach. We will review the long-term needs for and locations of administrative facilities for both Refuges.

Additional issues may be identified during public scoping. The CCP will focus on ways of minimizing threats to the Refuges' resources; it will also include a revised wilderness stewardship plan for the San Juan Islands Wilderness; and Visitor Services programs will be evaluated based on current Service policies during the planning process.

Mail In Comment Form

The Service seeks your help in planning the future of Protection Island and San Juan Islands Refuges. We value your support as we continue to manage these exceptional wildlife areas for the benefit of the American people. You can play a significant role in the development of this long-term management plan.

Please consider answering the following questions and returning this page by **October 30, 2007** to:

Kevin Ryan, Project Leader
Washington Maritime National Wildlife Refuge Complex
33 S. Barr Road
Port Angeles, WA 98362
(360) 457-8451 (360) 457-9778 fax

If you choose to submit comments via email use the following address: FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov. and include *Protection Island and San Juan Islands NWRs CCP* in the subject line of the message.



Bald eagle. Photo: USFWS.

We Would Like Your Comments

What do you see as the primary issues that need to be addressed in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

What are your thoughts on the visions and goals for Protection Island and San Juan Islands National Wildlife Refuges?

Do you have additional comments at this time?

continued on the next page . . .

Please cut along this line.

Name and contact information (optional):

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please include me on your mailing list.

Please remove me from your mailing list.

Is there someone else you know who would like to be on the mailing list?

Name: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Address: _____

All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official public record, and may be released as part of the public disclosure process.

Thank you for your time.



Please fold and affix a first class stamp.

Place stamp here.

Kevin Ryan, Project Leader
Washington Maritime NWR Complex
33 S. Barr Road
Port Angeles, WA 98362

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Our Vision for the Future

Vision statements describe the desired future conditions of our Refuges. They reflect the purposes of each Refuge as well as the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The goals, objectives, and strategies of the comprehensive conservation plan will act as our guide for achieving these desired future conditions.

Preliminary Vision Statement for Protection Island NWR

Protection Island Refuge, located within Washington's Strait of Juan de Fuca, is a unique combination of shoreline, spits, and sandy bluffs and a safe haven for nesting tufted puffins, pigeon guillemots, pelagic cormorants, and thousands of rhinoceros auklets.

Bald eagles roost and nest in the forested uplands and forage on the island and in the surrounding waters. Elephant seals and hundreds of harbor seals find the beaches a good place to have their pups.

The island's isolation provides an undisturbed backdrop for the

rhinoceros auklets returning to their burrows to feed their young as the sun sets.

Scientists and Refuge partners conduct research on flora and fauna.

Refuge staff and year-round resident caretakers maintain the few necessary structures. School children, local residents, and visitors to the area enjoy off-refuge environmental education opportunities that instill a sense that Protection Island is a special place.

Wildlife watchers respectfully circumnavigate the island by boat to view the abundant seabirds and marine mammals from a distance.

Amid the cacophony of seabirds, an anomalous sense of peace and serenity nurtures a desire to care for the natural treasure that is Protection Island.

Preliminary Vision Statement for San Juan Islands NWR

Nestled among large islands and marine waters abuzz with human activity, the San Juan Islands

Refuge encompasses more than 80 small islands, rocks, and reefs scattered throughout the San Juan archipelago.

The Refuge is a wilderness sanctuary for a dazzling array of marine life including black oystercatchers, pigeon guillemots, pelagic and double-crested cormorants, glaucous-winged gulls, and seals.

The breathtaking forces of nature shaped this marine wilderness embracing many miles of shoreline, reefs, lichenized rocks, bluffs, and old growth forests.

These wild lands inhabited by wild creatures and supporting healthy breeding colonies provide the backdrop for folks to enjoy, appreciate and understand the Refuge's valuable place in the Puget Sound ecosystem.

Working with partners, the Service provides opportunities for researchers, boaters, birders, and other nature lovers to develop a stewardship ethic for our Refuge islands.

Preliminary Goals for the Refuges

1. Protect, maintain, and restore natural biological diversity and integrity of habitats historically characteristic of rocky islands with shallow soils in San Juan Island archipelago, especially for migratory birds, marine mammals, and rare native plant and wildlife species.

2. Protect, maintain, and restore (where appropriate) habitats historically characteristic of glacial till islands (Protection, Smith and Minor Islands) especially for breeding marine mammals, nesting seabirds, and other migratory birds.

3. Protect and maintain undisturbed reef habitat in the San Juan Islands Refuge for marine mammals and birds.

4. Protect and maintain barren rock island habitat with consolidated rocky shorelines on the San Juan Islands Refuges for marine birds and mammals.

5. Conduct and support research and monitoring in the Puget Sound ecosystem, including Protection Island and the San Juan Islands, that contributes to our understanding and ability to sustain

healthy populations of Refuge wildlife and habitats, especially for seabirds.

6. Promote awareness, appreciation, and stewardship of the Puget Trough Marine Ecosystem and associated seabirds, and an understanding of the role of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

7. Promote the wilderness character and experience of the San Juan Islands Wilderness Area.

We Welcome Your Comments

Address comments, questions, and requests for more information to:

Kevin Ryan, Project Leader
Washington Maritime National
Wildlife Refuge Complex
33 S. Barr Road
Port Angeles, WA 98362
Phone: (360) 457-8451 Fax: (360) 457-9778

Comments can be e-mailed to us using the following address:

FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov.

Include "Protection Island and San Juan Islands" in the subject line.

An electronic version of this planning update and other planning information are available online at:

<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning>

Select the link for "Projects Online" then select "Protection Island and San Juan Islands NWRs Comprehensive Conservation Plan."

General information about Refuges and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is available at:

<http://www.fws.gov>.

CCP Planning Schedule

Planning Step	Target Date
Planning Update 1.....	completed September 2007
Preliminary Alternatives Developed.....	Spring 2008
Public Meetings.....	Summer 2008
Public Review of draft CCP/EA.....	Fall 2008
Final CCP and NEPA Document.....	Spring 2009

We will keep you informed if the target dates change as CCP planning progresses.



Washington Maritime National Wildlife Refuge Complex
33 S. Barr Road
Port Angeles, WA 98362

Change of address requested.



*Planning Update 1
In this issue: The
Washington Maritime
National Wildlife Refuge
Complex is launching
the comprehensive
conservation planning
process for the Protection
Island and San Juan
Islands National Wildlife
Refuges. Photo: USFWS*