



602 FW 1 *Refuge Planning Overview*

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1.1 What is the purpose of Part 602 and this chapter? Part 602 provides guidance for National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) planning, including specific chapters on the Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process ([602 FW 3](#)) and Step-Down Management Planning ([602 FW 4](#)). This chapter (602 FW 1) provides an overview of refuge planning.

1.2 To what does Part 602 apply? Part 602 applies to all units of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

1.3 What is our policy for managing refuges? The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service or we) will manage all refuges in accordance with an approved Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), which, when implemented, will achieve refuge purposes; help fulfill the Refuge System mission; maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System; and meet other mandates. The CCP will guide management decisions and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies to accomplish these ends. We also may require step-down management plans to provide additional details about meeting CCP goals and objectives and to describe strategies and implementation schedules. Each plan will be founded on principles of sound fish and wildlife management and available science, and be consistent with legal mandates and our other policies, guidelines, and planning documents. We will prepare refuge plans that, above all else, ensure that wildlife comes first on national wildlife refuges.

1.4 What are our authorities? Authorities listed below include laws that require us to manage units of the Refuge System in accordance with approved CCPs and to integrate refuge planning decisions with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

A. National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, 16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee (Refuge Administration Act). This law states that " . . . the Secretary shall -- (i) propose a comprehensive conservation plan for each refuge or related complex of refuges . . . in the System; (ii) publish a notice of opportunity for public comment in the Federal Register on each proposed conservation plan; (iii) issue a final conservation plan for each planning unit consistent with the provisions of this Act and, to the extent practicable, consistent with fish and wildlife conservation plans of the State in which the refuge is located; and (iv) not less frequently than 15 years after the date of issuance of a conservation plan under clause (iii) and every 15 years thereafter, revise the conservation plan as may be necessary." This law provides additional detail on conservation planning for the Refuge System. Above all else, the law directs that wildlife comes first in the National Wildlife Refuge System. It does so by establishing that wildlife conservation is the principal mission of the Refuge System; by requiring that we maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of each refuge and the Refuge System; and by mandating that we monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants on each refuge.

B. Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 as amended, 16 U.S.C. 140hh-3233, 43 U.S.C. 1602-1784 (ANILCA). Section 304 states, in part, "The Secretary shall prepare, and from time to time, revise, a comprehensive conservation plan . . . for each refuge." You may find additional guidance on the content of these plans and management direction in this and other sections of ANILCA. If any provisions of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 conflict with the provisions of ANILCA, the provisions of ANILCA will prevail for refuges in Alaska.

C. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, and the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA, 40 CFR 1500-1508. NEPA is the basic national charter for protection of the environment. The procedural provisions in CEQ's regulations require Federal agencies to integrate the NEPA process with other planning at the earliest possible time in order to provide a systematic interdisciplinary approach; identify and analyze the environmental effects of their actions; describe appropriate alternatives to the proposal; involve the affected State and Federal agencies, Tribal governments, and the affected public in the planning and decision-making process; and fully integrate all refuge proposals that may have an impact on the environment with the provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1501.2).

1.5 What are the goals of refuge planning?

- A.** To ensure that wildlife comes first in the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- B.** To ensure that we manage the Refuge System for the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats and that refuge management achieves our policies, the Refuge System mission, and the purposes for which the refuge was established.
- C.** To ensure that the administration of the Refuge System contributes to the conservation of the ecological integrity of each refuge, the Refuge System, and to the structure and function of the ecosystems of the United States.
- D.** To ensure opportunities to participate in the refuge planning process are available to our other programs; Federal, State, and local agencies; tribal governments; conservation organizations; adjacent landowners; and the public.
- E.** To provide a basis for adaptive management by monitoring progress, evaluating plan implementation, and updating refuge plans accordingly.
- F.** To promote efficiency, effectiveness, continuity, and national consistency in refuge management.
- G.** To help ensure consistent Systemwide consideration of the six priority public uses--hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation--established by the Refuge Administration Act and to ensure that these uses receive enhanced consideration over general public uses in the Refuge System.
- H.** To ensure that we preserve the wilderness character of refuge lands.

1.6 What do the following terms mean? (Quotations are from the Refuge Administration Act unless otherwise noted.)

A. Adaptive Management. The rigorous application of management, research, and monitoring to gain information and experience necessary to assess and modify management activities. A process that uses feedback from refuge research and monitoring and evaluation of management actions to support or modify objectives and strategies at all planning levels.

B. Alternatives. Different sets of objectives and strategies or means of achieving refuge purposes and goals, helping fulfill the Refuge System mission, and resolving issues.

C. Biological Diversity. The variety of life, including the variety of living organisms, the genetic differences among them, and the communities in which they occur.

D. Biological Integrity. Biotic composition, structure, and functioning at the genetic, organism, and community levels consistent with natural conditions, including the natural biological processes that shape genomes, organisms, and communities.

E. Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). A document that describes the desired future conditions of a refuge or planning unit and provides long-range guidance and management direction to achieve the purposes of the refuge; helps fulfill the mission of the Refuge System; maintains and, where appropriate, restores the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; helps achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System; and meets other mandates.

F. Coordination Area. A wildlife management area made available to a State, by "(A) cooperative agreement between the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the State fish and game agency pursuant to Section 4 of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U.S.C. 664); or (B) by long-term leases or agreements pursuant to the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act (50 Stat. 525; 7 U.S.C. 1010 et seq.)." States manage Coordination Areas, but they are part of the Refuge System. We do not require CCPs for Coordination Areas.

G. Ecological Integrity. The integration of biological integrity, natural biological diversity, and environmental health; the replication of natural conditions.

H. Ecosystem. A biological community together with its environment, functioning as a unit. For administrative purposes, we have designated 53 ecosystems covering the United States and its possessions. These ecosystems generally correspond with watershed boundaries, and their sizes and ecological complexity vary.

I. Environmental Health. Abiotic composition, structure, and functioning of the environment consistent with natural conditions, including the natural abiotic processes that shape the environment.

J. Goal. Descriptive, open-ended, and often broad statement of desired future conditions that conveys a purpose but does not define measurable units.

K. Issue. Any unsettled matter that requires a management decision, e.g., an initiative, opportunity, resource management problem, threat to the resources of the unit, conflict in uses, public concern, or the presence of an undesirable resource condition.

L. National Wildlife Refuge (refuge). "A designated area of land, water, or an interest in land or water within the Refuge System, but does not include Coordination Areas."

Find a complete listing of all units of the Refuge System in the current [Report of Lands Under Control of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#).

M. National Wildlife Refuge System Mission (mission). "The mission of the 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."

N. Objective. A concise statement of what we want to achieve, how much we want to achieve, when and where we want to achieve it, and who is responsible for the work. Objectives derive from goals and provide the basis for determining strategies, monitoring refuge accomplishments, and evaluating the success of strategies. Make objectives attainable, time-specific, and measurable.

O. Planning Area. The area upon which the planning effort will focus. A planning area may include lands outside existing planning unit boundaries currently studied for inclusion in the Refuge System and/or partnership planning efforts. It also may include watersheds or ecosystems outside of our jurisdiction that affect the planning unit. At a minimum, the planning area includes all lands within the authorized boundary of the refuge.

P. Planning Team. Planning teams are interdisciplinary in membership and function. Teams generally consist of a Planning Team Leader, Refuge Manager and staff biologists, a state natural resource agency representative, and other appropriate program specialists (e.g., social scientist, ecologist, recreation specialist). We also will ask other Federal and Tribal natural resource agencies to provide team members, as appropriate. The planning team prepares the CCP and appropriate NEPA documentation.

Q. Planning Team Leader. The Planning Team Leader typically is a professional planner or natural resource specialist knowledgeable of the requirements of NEPA and who has planning experience. The Planning Team Leader manages the refuge planning process and ensures compliance with applicable regulatory and policy requirements.

R. Planning Unit. A single refuge, an ecologically or administratively related refuge complex, or distinct unit of a refuge. The planning unit also may include lands currently outside refuge boundaries.

S. Purposes of the Refuge. "The purposes specified in or derived from the law, proclamation, executive order, agreement, public land order, donation document, or administrative memorandum establishing, authorizing, or expanding a refuge, refuge unit, or refuge subunit." For refuges that encompass congressionally designated wilderness, the purposes of the Wilderness Act are additional purposes of the refuge.

T. Refuge Operating Needs System (RONS). The Refuge Operating Needs System is a national database that contains the unfunded operational needs of each refuge. We include projects required to implement approved plans and meet goals, objectives, and legal mandates.

U. Step-Down Management Plan. A plan that provides specific guidance on management subjects (e.g., habitat, public use, fire, safety) or groups of related subjects. It describes strategies and implementation schedules for meeting CCP goals

and objectives.

V. Strategy. A specific action, tool, technique, or combination of actions, tools, and techniques used to meet unit objectives.

W. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mission. Our mission is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

X. Wilderness Review. The process we use to determine if we should recommend Refuge System lands and waters to Congress for wilderness designation. The wilderness review process consists of three phases: inventory, study, and recommendation. The inventory is a broad look at the refuge to identify lands and waters that meet the minimum criteria for wilderness. The study evaluates all values (ecological, recreational, cultural), resources (e.g., wildlife, water, vegetation, minerals, soils), and uses (management and public) within the Wilderness Study Area. The findings of the study determine whether or not we will recommend the area for designation as wilderness.

Y. Wildlife-Dependent Recreational Use. "A use of a refuge involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, or environmental education and interpretation." These are the six priority public uses of the Refuge System as established in the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended. Wildlife-dependent recreational uses, other than the six priority public uses, are those that depend on the presence of wildlife. We also will consider these other uses in the preparation of refuge CCPs; however, the six priority public uses always will take precedence.

Z. Vision Statement. A concise statement of what the planning unit should be, or what we hope to do, based primarily upon the Refuge System mission and specific refuge purposes, and other mandates. We will tie the vision statement for the refuge to the mission of the Refuge System; the purpose(s) of the refuge; the maintenance or restoration of the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; and other mandates.

1.7 What is the relationship between Refuge System planning and other planning efforts? Refuge planning should maintain continuity and consistency with other planning efforts. The relationship between these planning efforts is hierarchical, starting from national plans to regional, State, and ecosystem-level plans, stepping down to refuge-specific plans. See [Exhibit 1](#). The process of adaptive management uses feedback from refuge research and monitoring, and evaluation of management actions to support or modify objectives and strategies at all planning levels.

A. National and Regional Plans. We will review other Service documents that address particular programs, species, habitats, public uses, economic uses, archaeological resources, etc., when identifying issues to address in refuge planning. National and regional goals, objectives, strategies, and policies influence management planning for refuges. Source documents include: [Fulfilling the Promise: The National Wildlife Refuge System](#), the [Fish and Wildlife Service Manual](#), the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, National Outreach Strategy, regional resource plans, endangered species recovery plans, migratory bird and flyway plans, fishery resource plans, Joint Venture plans, Partners in Flight plans, and strategies to promote the conservation of natural biological diversity. The contribution of the refuge to achieving regional and national goals will help implement our mission and ensure integrity of the Refuge

System.

B. Service Ecosystem Plans, State Fish and Wildlife Conservation Plans, and Other Landscape-Level Plans. Refuge planning will reflect conservation goals and objectives for the landscapes in which the refuges are located. Refuges must review goals and objectives of existing ecosystem plans and determine how the refuge can best contribute to the functioning of the ecosystem. We will coordinate refuge planning with State conservation agencies, tribal governments, other government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. To the extent practicable, refuge plans will be consistent with the fish and wildlife conservation plans of the State and the conservation programs of Tribal, public, and private partners within the ecosystem.

C. Land Acquisition Planning. We integrate land acquisition and CCP planning throughout the land acquisition planning process. We describe three opportunities for integration in the following paragraphs:

(1) Refuge planning typically begins before the establishment of an area as a unit of the Refuge System. Land acquisition planning (usually resulting in a Land Protection Plan [LPP] and associated NEPA document) is a preliminary step in the continuous, integrated refuge planning process. This process eventually results in completion of a CCP and appropriate refuge step-down management plans. Other land use, species, or habitat protection planning efforts, or legislative or executive directives may precede land acquisition planning. Refuge establishment documentation (LPP and associated NEPA document) should identify the approved refuge boundary, refuge purpose(s), goals, and general management direction. See [341 FW 2](#).

(2) Planning for proposed new refuges or major expansions to existing refuges not undergoing a CCP will include the development of a Conceptual Management Plan (CMP) for the new unit. The CMP provides general, interim management direction. The CMP should identify refuge purpose(s), interim goals, and pre-existing compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation) that we will allow to continue on an interim basis. The interim period is the duration of time between establishment of a new refuge or refuge expansion and the completion of an approved CCP. Refuges functioning under CMPs also will develop step-down management plans, as appropriate.

(3) Fully integrate land acquisition planning efforts into CCP preparation whenever possible. Some proposed new refuges or refuge expansions may warrant CCP development at the time of acquisition planning. Include appropriate Realty staff on the planning team when considering land acquisition during the CCP process to ensure consistency with land acquisition policy. See [341 FW 2](#).

D. Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP). The CCP is a document that describes the desired future conditions of a refuge or planning unit and provides long-range guidance and management direction to achieve the purposes of the refuge; helps fulfill the mission of the Refuge System; maintains and, where appropriate, restores the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; helps achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System; and meets other mandates. See [602 FW 3](#). For refuges established after October 9, 1997, prepare CCPs when the refuge obtains staff and acquires a land base sufficient to achieve refuge purposes, but no later than 15 years after we establish the refuge. Convert refuge long-range management plans (e.g., master plans and refuge management plans) approved prior to October 9, 1997, into CCPs with appropriate public involvement and NEPA

compliance no later than October 2012.

E. Step-Down Management Plans. Step-down management plans provide the details (strategies and implementation schedules) necessary to meet goals and objectives identified in the CCP. CCPs will either incorporate or identify step-down management plans required to fully implement the CCP. After completion of the CCP, modify existing step-down management plans to accomplish stated goals and objectives as needed. See [602 FW 4](#).

F. Integration With Budget Development and Implementation. We will use CCPs to guide annual budget requests. We will identify the unfunded costs of implementing strategies in refuge plans using our budget databases, including the Refuge Operating Needs System (RONS), Maintenance Management System (MMS), and Land Acquisition Priority System (LAPS). As we complete or update each plan, we will review and update these databases to incorporate projects identified in CCPs. The total funding and staffing identified in these databases represents the additional resources required to fully implement the refuge plans.

1.8 Who is responsible for implementing our policy?

A. Director. The Director is responsible for providing national policy and ensuring adherence to refuge planning policy.

B. Regional Director. The Regional Director: (1) ensures compliance with national planning policy, NEPA, and other applicable laws and policies; (2) approves CCPs, amendments to CCPs, and associated NEPA and other agency compliance documents; and (3) ensures that we manage refuges in accordance with approved CCPs. The Regional Director or designee approves step-down management plans, determines planning priorities, and allocates funds to develop and implement plans.

C. Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System. The Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System is responsible for initiating and completing refuge plans, budgeting for planning, ensuring programmatic staff participation, and developing regional planning priorities. The Special Assistant for Ecosystems is responsible for ensuring that ecosystem teams participate in developing plans and implementing approved plans.

D. Refuge Planning Coordinator. The Headquarters, Division of Refuges, and each Region will designate a Refuge Planning Coordinator. In cooperation with representatives of our National Conservation Training Center, the Coordinators will establish and maintain appropriate training courses. Refuge Planning Coordinators will provide guidance and direction to assist Planning Team Leaders, regional and field-based planning staff, and planning team members. The Coordinators also are responsible for maintaining regional planning schedules and updating status reports and funding needs for the planning program. The Coordinators periodically will meet to review and recommend changes to planning policy, resolve common planning problems and issues, and help ensure national consistency.

E. Planning Team Leader. The Planning Team Leader is responsible for initiation of the planning process, preparation and completion of refuge plans, and ensuring that we meet compliance requirements. The Planning Team Leader, in consultation with the Refuge Manager, is responsible for identifying appropriate and proper representation on the interdisciplinary planning team, including team members, support personnel, and outside or contract assistance. The Refuge Manager and Planning Team Leader will

submit the final CCP through line supervision for concurrence and approval by the Regional Director.

F. Refuge Supervisor. The Refuge Supervisor is responsible for overseeing participation of the Refuge Manager in CCP preparation and implementation, and for providing direction and guidance on compliance with Refuge System policy and regulations. Once the Planning Team Leader and Refuge Manager submit the plan, the Refuge Supervisor will be responsible for review and concurrence of the plan prior to its submission to the next level.

G. Refuge Manager. The Refuge Manager participates in the preparation of the CCP working closely with the Planning Team Leader. The Refuge Manager assures that the refuge staff participates in plan development. The Refuge Manager and Planning Team Leader submit the final CCP through line supervision for concurrence and approval by the Regional Director. The Refuge Manager is responsible for: making compatibility determinations; implementing approved CCPs and step-down management plans; tracking progress; and recommending changes to plans based on monitoring and evaluation. The Refuge Manager also reports plan accomplishments through standard reporting mechanisms and budgeting procedures.

H. Planning Team. The planning team, coordinated by the Planning Team Leader, is responsible for the initiation and completion of all planning steps, including public involvement and NEPA compliance, resulting in a refuge CCP. We describe the steps in [602 FW 3.4 C](#). The planning team is responsible for the CCP's content in terms of information relating to management of refuge resources and use activities. The planning team will ensure that the CCP, when implemented, will achieve the purposes of the refuge and help fulfill the Refuge System mission.

I. Regional Environmental (NEPA) Coordinator. The Regional Environmental (NEPA) Coordinator provides technical assistance on NEPA-related matters.

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