



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
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Memorandum

To: Service Directorate

From: **Deputy** Director *James W. Kurtz*

Subject: Land Protection Planning Interim Guidance

For over 15 years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has planned and established new National Wildlife Refuges (refuges) and expanded existing refuge boundaries pursuant to Service policy, Land Acquisition Planning (341 FW 2) and the August 11, 2000, Director's Memorandum (*Changes to the Land Acquisition Planning Procedures*). The environmental and societal challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century call for a comprehensive, collaborative, landscape-level approach to land protection planning. In particular, the Service needs to address Presidential priorities and initiatives, incorporate elements of Strategic Habitat Conservation, and implement our Refuge System vision embodied in *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation*.

To help implement this vision, several cross-regional teams were created, including a Strategic Growth Implementation Team that developed the Strategic Growth Policy (602 FW 5), and a Planning Implementation Team that published *A Landscape-scale Approach to Refuge System Planning* (also known as the "PIT Report"). Informed by these products, a team of natural resource planning and realty professionals is revising the refuge planning policies in Part 602 of the Service Manual. These policies will be sent to the Directorate for review at a later date.

Interim guidance for land protection planning is attached that supplements guidance in Director's Memorandum dated August 11, 2000, and 341 FW 2, Land Acquisition Planning Policy. This guidance is designed to focus on land protection projects that support our mission and the conservation vision, goals, and objectives identified in Landscape Conservation Designs. In addition, the draft interim guidance includes procedures to address non-biological considerations. Such considerations will help decision-makers determine if the proposed project is feasible, has a high likelihood of success, and provides a solid conservation return on investment.

For further information please contact Ms. Cynthia Martinez, Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System, at (202) 208-5333 or [Cynthia\\_Martinez@fws.gov](mailto:Cynthia_Martinez@fws.gov).

Attachment

## **Land Protection Planning Interim Guidance to Supplement Guidance in Director's Memorandum Dated August 11, 2000, and 341 FW 2, Land Acquisition Planning Policy.**

We use the land protection planning process to consider habitat protection measures needed to meet National Wildlife Refuge System objectives. Our land protection procedures also are intended to ensure that the strategic growth of the Refuge System is based on explicit priorities, rigorous biological planning, and conservation design that support achieving measurable population objectives that are developed in cooperation with State fish and wildlife agencies and our conservation partners. This guidance applies to new refuges and to additions to existing refuges where land acquisition is the proposed method of land protection. This guidance does not apply to minor expansions of refuge boundaries up to a cumulative total of 10 percent of the original approved acreage or 40 acres, whichever is greater.

### **The Refuge System Land Protection Planning Process**

Land protection planning for the Refuge System is conducted in three phases: Preplanning, developing a Land Protection Strategy (LPS), and developing a Land Protection Plan (LPP).

#### **Preplanning**

The preplanning phase of Refuge System land protection planning consists of participating in Landscape Conservation Design (LCD) development, identifying priority conservation areas suitable for Refuge System land protection, and identifying the information and resources that we may need to develop a LPS.

1. We engage with our partners in developing a LCD so that we can co-produce the biological and social science needed to make informed management decisions. A LCD may or may not identify priority conservation areas suitable for land protection by the Service or by one or more of our partners.
2. When participating in LCD development, Service personnel should evaluate any potential priority conservation areas identified as suitable for land protection to determine if they support the priority conservation targets and meet the science-based criteria in 602 FW 5.
3. If we identify priority conservation areas in a LCD that may be suitable for Refuge System land protection, we can begin to identify the information and resources needed to develop an LPS. We also need to identify other employees and partners who could contribute to LPS development.

#### **Developing a Land Protection Strategy (LPS)**

The LPS is a proposal to create one or more new refuges and/or expand one or more existing refuges within a landscape-scale geography where a LCD has been developed. The LPS will replace the former Preliminary Project Proposal (PPP) identified in the August 11, 2000, Director's Memorandum, and will now serve as the basis for Director's approval to proceed with

the development of a LPP. It is still intended to be an overview, generally three to six pages in length per proposed new or expanded refuge unit. The LPS will:

1. Identify and describe the project's contribution to fulfilling the mission of the Refuge System and the conservation vision, goals and objectives identified in the LCD.
2. Provide a map(s) of the project that depicts one or more new refuges, and/or expansions to one or more existing refuges in the context of the larger landscape including the project's contribution to the conservation estate.
3. Summarize the science-based criteria identified in Strategic Growth Policy (602 FW 5(5.9)) used to demonstrate support for priority conservation targets (identified in 602 FW 5(5.8)).
4. Summarize non-biological considerations such as potential funding, support of landowners, participation of conservation partners, and the demographic and economic trends that affect the feasibility of the project and its conservation return on investment.
5. Include a Targeted Resource Acquisition Comparison Tool (TRACT) preliminary report for each refuge included in the LPS. (This replaces the LAPS Analysis required in Attachment 1 of the August 11, 2000, Director's Memorandum)

### **Developing a Land Protection Plan (LPP)**

We build on the information in the approved LPS to develop a LPP. A LPP is similar to a LPS, but provides more detail on the project proposal. We develop a LPP to fully evaluate project proposals for new refuges or major expansions of refuges and to engage and communicate with the public. LPPs include details about the project proposal, inform the public and landowners within the project proposal area about our plans, and present a Conceptual Management Plan (CMP) for the lands proposed for protection. LPPs either incorporate a NEPA document or include evidence of NEPA compliance and compliance with other applicable laws, regulations, policies, and Executive Orders. The LPP will:

1. Provide detailed information on:
  - a. The refuge(s) purposes, goals, and objectives.
  - b. How the refuge(s) contribute to fulfilling the mission of the NWRS.
  - c. How the refuge(s) contribute to fulfilling the conservation vision, goals, and objectives identified in the LCD.
2. Provide maps, including:
  - a. A contextual map indicating where the project lies in the larger landscape and how the project would contribute to the conservation estate.
  - b. A detailed map of the project indicating the proposed acquisition boundary and key conservation features such as priority habitats to be conserved.
  - c. One or more maps that prioritize land acquisition for the project.

3. Fully document the science-based criteria identified in Strategic Growth Policy (602 FW 5(5.9)) used to demonstrate support for priority conservation targets (identified in 602 FW 5(5.8)).
4. Document non-biological considerations that affect the feasibility of the project and its conservation return on investment by addressing the following questions. These may be included within or as a supplement to the LPP:
  - a. How many acres must we acquire to fulfill refuge purposes and achieve population objectives?
  - b. Within the project area, how many tracts, totaling how many acres, are currently available for acquisition from willing sellers?
  - c. How much time will we have to acquire these acres, given local and regional demographic and economic trends?
  - d. How much staffing does the project entail?
  - e. What are the costs associated with the project, including the costs of land acquisition, habitat restoration, and operations and maintenance?
  - f. How are local rates of population and economic growth affecting land prices?
  - g. What is our expected rate of acquisition given the presence of willing sellers, potential funding, and partner and political support?
  - h. Is our expected rate of acquisition sufficient for a successful project?