



# U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR & Coachella Valley NWR)

### Planning Update 1 - August 2010

#### Mark Your Calendar

Public scoping meetings are scheduled for

**Sept. 14, 2010 in Palm Desert** and

**Sept. 21, 2010 in Calipatria** (details on page 5)

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#### Greetings From the Refuge Complex

The Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex is embarking on an important year-long process to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) that will guide the management of the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and Coachella Valley NWR over the next 15 years.

Your ideas and comments will be an important part of the CCP process, which is why we encourage you to attend one of our upcoming public scoping meetings. At these meetings, you will have the opportunity to learn more about the CCP process and current management practices on the Refuge Complex. More importantly, we will have the opportunity to hear your thoughts and suggestions regarding the future management of these Refuges.

Two scoping meetings are scheduled, one in Calipatria near the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and the other in Palm Desert near the Coachella Valley NWR. Specific meeting details are provided on page 5.

Because not everyone will be able to attend one of these meetings, we have also prepared this Planning Update,

which provides you with information about the CCP process and the Refuges, as well as suggestions for how you can get and stay involved in the planning process.



**American white pelican, a species frequently observed at the Salton Sea**

Photo by Menke/USFWS

We encourage you to look over the information provided in this Planning Update and send any comments you may have to us via the Refuge Planner, whose contact information is provided on page 7. To be sure your comments are considered, we should receive them no later than November 8, 2010.

Additional Planning Updates will be provided throughout the CCP process to keep you up-to-date on our progress and to let you know how you can continue to be involved. Feel free to contact us at any time with your questions or comments. I look forward to your involvement.

Chris Schoneman, Refuge Manager  
Sonny Bono Salton Sea  
National Wildlife Refuge Complex



**Wind blown sand habitat in the Coachella Valley**

Photo by Avery/USFWS

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Who are we?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the nearly 150 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which includes 552 national wildlife refuges and other units and 37 wetland management districts. The Service also operates 65 fish and wildlife conservation offices and 70 national fish hatcheries.

The Service enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, and helps foreign governments with their wildlife and habitat conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance Program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and game agencies. Many of the Service programs directly benefit both wildlife and citizens of California.

## What is the National Wildlife Refuge System?



In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt protected an island with nesting pelicans, herons, and roseate spoonbills in Florida's Indian River from feather collectors who were decimating their colonies. In doing so, he established the nation's first bird sanctuary, known as Pelican Island, and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his tenure. This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand, later becoming the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS).

The Refuge System is the largest system of lands in the world dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. It is spread across 50 states, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and several Pacific Islands. These refuges are home to more than 700 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 reptile and amphibian species, and more than 200 species of fish. In addition, 280 of the 1,300-plus federally-listed threatened or endangered species in the U.S. are found on units of the NWRS.

In 1997, Congress passed the NWRS Improvement Act, which provided significant new guidance for the management of the Refuge System. The Improvement Act included a new statutory mission statement and directed the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to conserving wildlife and maintaining the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of ecosystems.

The Improvement Act states that compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation) are legitimate and appropriate general public uses of the NWRS. However, this statement is not intended to imply that all of these uses will be allowed on every refuge. After being evaluated for compatibility with refuge resources and purposes, as well as the mission of the NWRS, the uses permitted on a refuge may be further tailored to take into account such issues as legal commitments, community traditions, or constraints within a given location. Other public uses in addition to those described above might also be permitted on a refuge if they are deemed both appropriate and compatible.



**Interpreting Wildlife at the  
Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR**

## 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 fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."*

This mission of "wildlife first" differs from other Federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, which focuses on forest stewardship and sustainable forest uses; the Bureau of Land Management, whose efforts are directed toward the productivity and multiple use of the land; and the National Park Service, which conserves scenery, wildlife, and historic objects for people's enjoyment. As we move forward to develop a CCP for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex, we must ensure that all of our proposals are consistent with the mission of the NWRS.

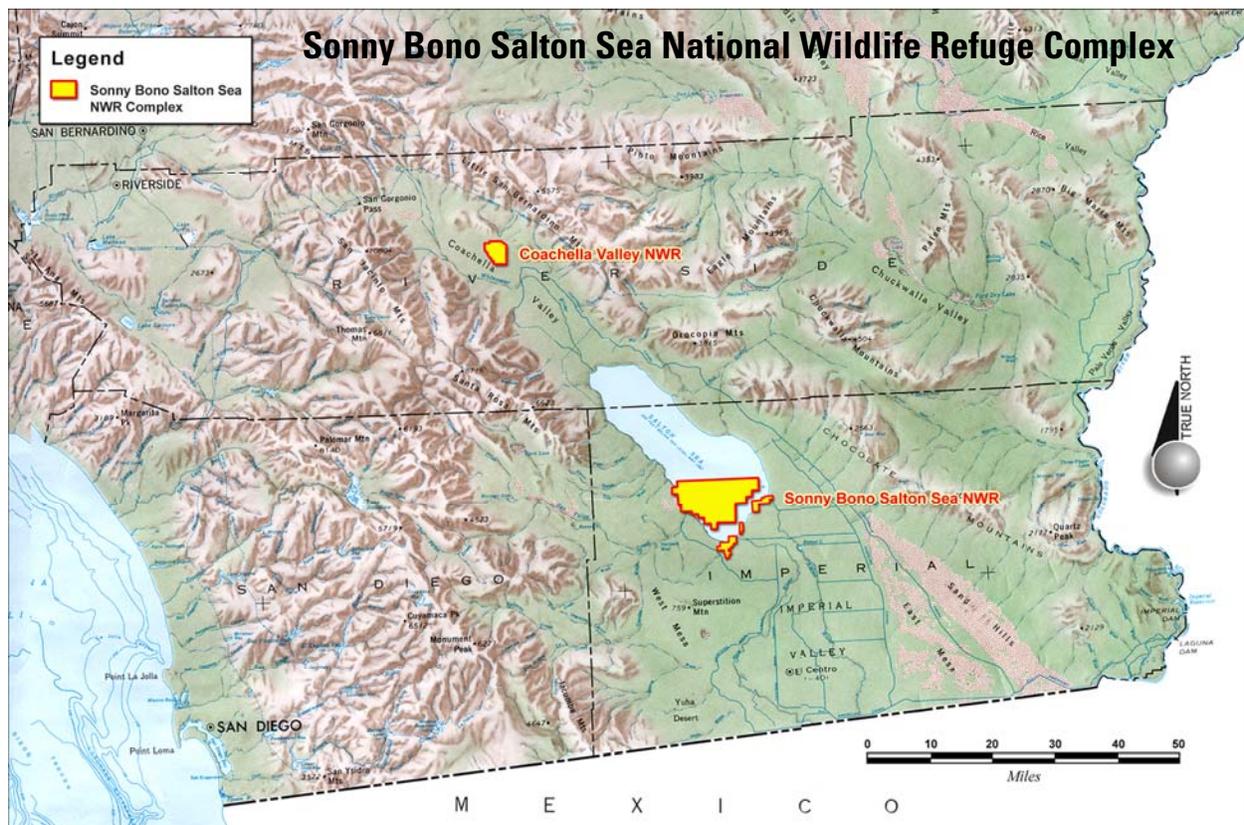
## What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, and Why is it being Prepared?

A Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is a “blueprint” for how a specific refuge should be managed over a 15-year period. It is intended to provide a clear vision of the desired future conditions for that refuge and to ensure consistent management of the refuge. A CCP contains the Refuge goals, objectives, and management strategies that when implemented will assist in achieving the mission of the System, reflect the purposes for refuge establishment, maintain the refuge’s biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health, and provide opportunities for compatible public uses. The CCP also provides the public with an understanding of how and why specific management directives were developed and includes opportunities for public involvement.

We prepare CCPs in accordance with the provisions of the NWRS Improvement Act. When Congress passed the Improvement Act, it included a requirement that a CCP be prepared for each refuge in the Refuge System. A CCP is to be completed for every refuge by 2012. Once a CCP has been approved for a refuge, the refuge is to be managed in accordance with the approved CCP.

## About the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NRW Complex

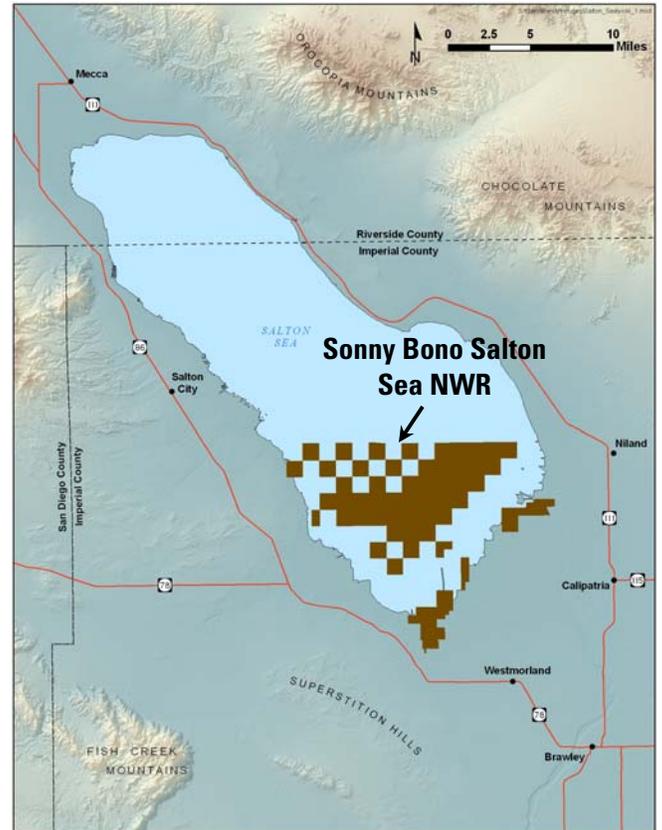
The Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex includes two distinct refuges - the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR, located in Imperial County, California, and the Coachella Valley NWR, located in Riverside County, California. Although both Refuges are located within the Salton Sea Transboundary Watershed, the habitats and species protected within each of these Refuges are very different. The Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR, situated at the south end of the Salton Sea, is managed to support an array of migratory birds that travel along the Pacific Flyway, while the Coachella Valley NWR, located in the western portion of the Colorado Desert, is managed to protect desert species and habitats once common in the Coachella Valley. (continued on page 4)



## Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR

In 1930, President Hoover signed an Executive Order establishing the Salton Sea Wild Life Refuge as a 32,766-acre sanctuary and breeding ground for birds and other wildlife. At the time of establishment, nearly 60 percent of the Refuge consisted of open saline lake. The remaining areas included shoreline alkali flats, freshwater marshes, native desert scrub, and farm fields. In 1940, management of federal wildlife refuges was shifted from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of the Interior and the refuge name was changed to the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge name was changed again in 1998 in memory of Congressman Sonny Bono, who was very active in the efforts to restore the health of the Salton Sea.

Between the 1930s and the mid-1940s, agricultural runoff into the Salton Sea increased, gradually inundating the land that had been set aside for the Refuge in 1930. To address these land losses, the Imperial Irrigation District in 1947 leased approximately 24,000 acres of land just to the south of the Salton Sea to the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), U.S. Navy, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Today, about 2,500 acres of manageable habitat are included within the Refuge boundary, with approximately 920 acres managed as wetlands to support resident and migratory birds and another 940 acres farmed to provide forage for wintering geese and other migratory birds. The remaining area includes dikes, shoreline, nesting islands, and salt flats.



The manageable habitat areas of the Refuge are included in two units located approximately 18 miles apart. Each unit contains managed wetland habitat to support shorebirds, seabirds, and other water-dependent bird species, as well as areas of intensely managed crop fields. The Refuge's managed wetlands also provide for the needs of year-round resident species such as the federally listed endangered Yuma clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris yumanensis*). Over 400 species of birds have been recorded at the Refuge and at least 93 species have nested here, including several species of nesting seabirds. About 41 species of mammals, 18 species of reptiles, four species of amphibians, and 15 species of fish have also been documented. One fish species of note on the Refuge is the federally listed endangered desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*).

Public uses include waterfowl hunting, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, interpretation, and research. Opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation have been enhanced through the construction of photo blinds and elevated observation platforms. Interpretive trails provide information about the existing habitats and associated species. (continued on page 5)

### Refuge Purposes:

**Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR** - Refuge purposes include “. . . a refuge and breeding ground for birds and wild animals . . .” (Executive Order 5498, dated 11/25/30); “. . . for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds” (16 U.S.C. § 715d, Migratory Bird Conservation Act); and “. . . for the management and control of migratory waterfowl and other wildlife . . .” (16 U.S.C. § 695, Lea Act).

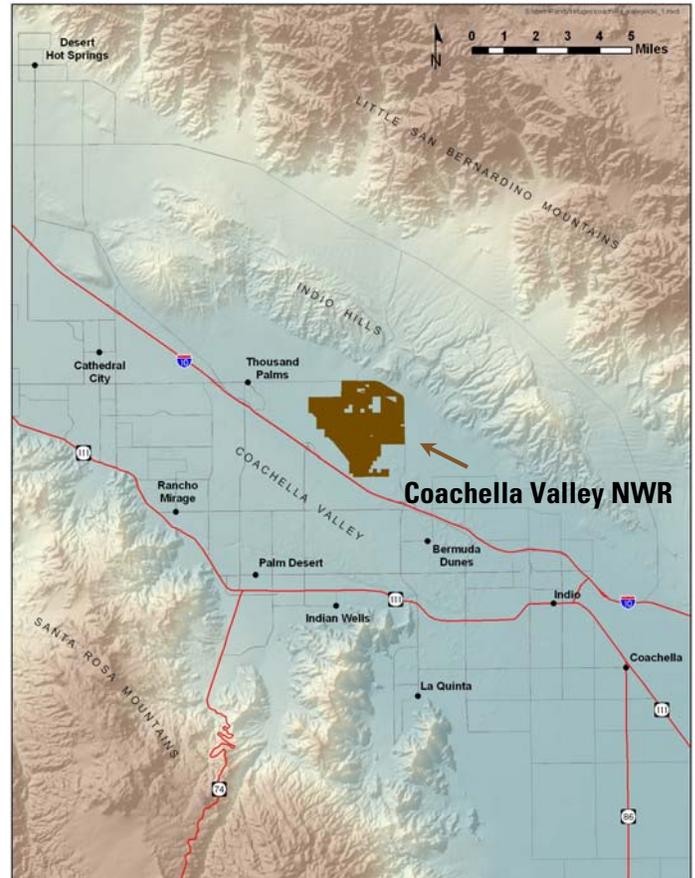
**Coachella Valley NWR** - The purpose of this Refuge is “. . . to conserve (A) fish and wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species . . . or (B) plants . . .” (Endangered Species Act of 1973).

## Coachella Valley NWR

The 3,709-acre Coachella Valley NWR, located in Riverside County, was established in 1985 for the purpose of protecting the federally listed threatened Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard (*Uma inornata*) and the wind blown sand habitat that supports it. The blow-sand fields located on the Refuge also support the federally listed endangered plant, Coachella milk-vetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus coachellae*) and the flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma macalli*).

The Refuge is part of the Thousand Palms Conservation Area, a federal, state, and private conservation effort organized within the larger Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Reserve System. The Coachella Valley NWR is located in the southern portion of the Conservation Area. Management of the lands within the Conservation Area is coordinated to maximize operating efficiencies among the various agencies and landowners, while continuing to maintain the specific missions and purposes of the individual land units as they are authorized to guide management efforts.

Public access on this Refuge is limited to a designated trail corridor in order to protect the sensitive habitat and listed species present on the Refuge.



## Notice of Public Scoping Meetings

Please join us at one of the following scoping meetings to discuss management of the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex (Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and Coachella Valley NWR):

### Coachella Valley Area

**September 14, 2010 - 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM**

**University of California, Riverside-Palm Desert Graduate Center, 75-080 Frank Sinatra Drive, Palm Desert, CA 92211**

For directions go to: [http://palmdesert.ucr.edu/about/maps\\_and\\_directions.html](http://palmdesert.ucr.edu/about/maps_and_directions.html)

The entrance to UCR Palm Desert is located on Frank Sinatra Drive. You must be traveling westbound on Sinatra to enter the center.

### Salton Sea Area

**September 21, 2010 - 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM**

**Calipatria Inn, 700 North Sorensen Avenue (Route 111), Calipatria, CA 92233**

Located on the west side of Route 111 at the north end of town.

**For more detailed directions, call**

**Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner, (760-431-9440 ex. 349) or Chris Schoneman, Project Leader, (760-348-5278 ex. 227)**  
(additional contact information is provided on page 7)

## The CCP Process

The CCP process involves a number of key planning steps, as illustrated below. Up to this point, we have been involved in the pre-planning steps of the process. Pre-planning consists of establishing a planning team, compiling data, identifying information and data needs, and beginning internal scoping to identify management concerns, issues, and opportunities. The preparation of this Planning Update and the publishing of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register represent the initiation of the public scoping phase of the CCP process. During this phase, the public is encouraged to assist us in identifying potential issues, management actions and concerns, significant problems or impacts, and opportunities or alternatives to resolve them. Public scoping will continue until we prepare a draft CCP/environmental assessment.

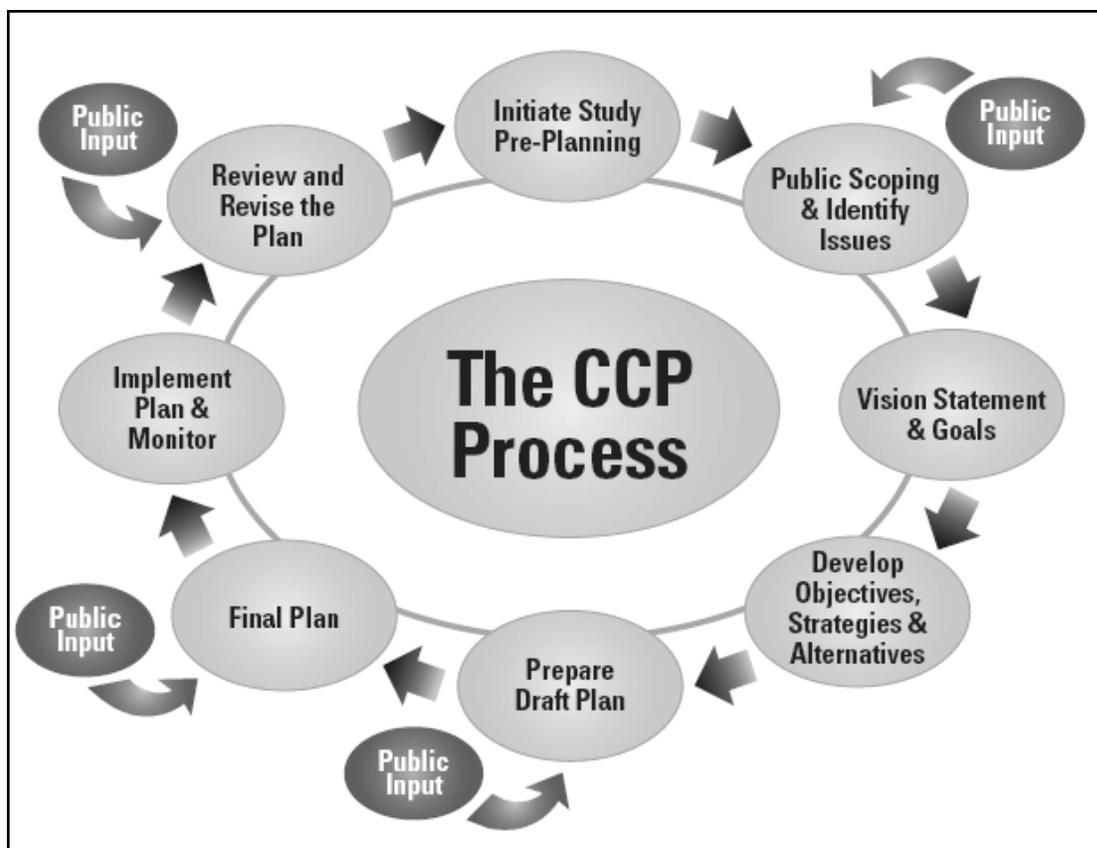
Throughout the CCP process, the following goals of CCP planning should be considered: 1) decisions of the Refuge should be based on an ecosystem approach that considers the broader goals and objectives of the refuge's ecosystems and watersheds; 2) management decisions and their rationale should be supported with a thorough assessment of available science derived from scientific literature, on-site refuge data, expert opinion, and sound professional judgment; 3) the six priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses should receive priority consideration during the preparation of the plan; and 4) a forum for the public to comment on the type, extent, and compatibility of uses on the refuge, including priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses, should be provided.

Public involvement is also an important goal of the CCP process. To ensure public involvement in refuge management decisions, a process for

effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with affected parties, including Federal agencies, State conservation agencies, tribal governments, local governments, conservation organizations, adjacent landowners, and interested members of the public will be provided.

Finally, each CCP must comply with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through the concurrent preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The CCP process integrates NEPA compliance requirements directly into the CCP process by providing a combined draft CCP/EA or EIS. Following completion of the final CCP/NEPA document, the product of the planning process will be a stand-alone CCP, separate from the EA or EIS.

The key planning steps listed below will be described in greater detail in future Planning Updates so you can understand and follow our progress throughout the planning process.



## Issues for Consideration in the CCP

During the initial pre-planning phase of the CCP process, the planning team identified a number of issues that should be addressed in the CCP.

Presented below are just a few of those issues.

### **Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR**

- 1) **Effects of Waterfowl Foraging on Adjacent Farmlands:** Reducing crop damage due to waterfowl foraging is one of the purposes of the Refuge. The numbers of snow geese migrating through the Imperial Valley are increasing, requiring higher productivity in fields managed by the Refuge as foraging habitat.
- 2) **Adapting to a Shrinking Salton Sea:** The waters of the Salton Sea are receding, resulting in increased salinity levels in the remaining waters and exposed soils that are highly susceptible to wind erosion. Both of these conditions will have a direct effect on how Refuge lands are managed in the future.
- 3) **Predation in Seabird Nesting Areas:** Predator management may be necessary to address the increase in predation of seabird chicks and eggs by raccoons and coyotes.
- 4) **Displacement of Nesting Seabirds:** Expanding nesting opportunities on the Refuge could reduce the displacement of some of the Refuge's nesting seabird species by other larger species of seabirds.

### **Coachella Valley NWR**

- 1) **Invasive Weedy Species:** Weedy non-native plants are increasingly invading the Refuge's blow sand habitat, jeopardizing habitat quality.
- 2) **Sand Movement:** Winds blowing across the Refuge can transport sand onto adjacent properties and roadways.
- 3) **Public Use:** Access is limited to an existing trail corridor, although illegal access onto other areas continues to be documented.

During the scoping process, we will expand this list to include those Refuge issues that you have identified as important to you. All we need are your comments. You can provide them at the public scoping meeting (see page 5), or by sending us a letter, email, or fax (see contact information on this page). We look forward to hearing from you!

## What's in a Name?

Many people confuse Federal and State fish and wildlife agencies because their names are similar. The Service is a Federal agency within the U. S. Department of the Interior. The State fish and wildlife agency in California is the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), included within the California Resources Agency. Our names are similar and so are our missions: both agencies are dedicated to wildlife conservation for the benefit of present and future generations. Our jurisdictions are different. The Service is the lead agency responsible for Federally listed species and migratory birds, whether they are located on Federal, State, or private lands. The Service is also the agency responsible for managing National Wildlife Refuges, including the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and the Coachella Valley NWR. The DFG has primary responsibility for resident fish and wildlife on State and private lands, and oversees State-listed species and streambed alteration issues throughout California. The Service coordinates with DFG during the CCP process to ensure that management actions proposed for refuges will also assist in achieving the State's habitat and species conservation goals.

### **Please feel free to contact us!**

We are available to provide additional information about the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex and to answer any questions you might have about the planning process. You can contact us by phone, mail, or e-mail.

#### **Please send your scoping comments to:**

##### **Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

6010 Hidden Valley Road, Suite 101

Carlsbad, CA 92011

760-431-9440 ex. 349 (phone), 760-930-0256 (fax)

Email: [Victoria\\_Touchstone@fws.gov](mailto:Victoria_Touchstone@fws.gov); please include "Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR CCP" in the subject line message.

#### **Direct your inquiries about Refuge operations to:**

##### **Chris Schoneman, Project Leader**

Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex

906 W. Sinclair Road, Calipatria, CA 92233-9744

760-348-5278 ex. 227 (phone)

Email: [Christian\\_Schoneman@fws.gov](mailto:Christian_Schoneman@fws.gov)



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### **Planning Schedule**

<b>September 2010</b>	<b>Initiate Public Scoping</b>
<b>September 14, 2010</b>	<b>Public Scoping Meeting in Palm Desert, 5:00 to 7:00 PM (see page 5 for details)</b>
<b>September 21, 2010</b>	<b>Public Scoping Meeting in Calipatria, 5:00 to 7:00 PM (see page 5 for details)</b>
<b>May 2011</b>	<b>Release Draft CCP for Public Comment</b>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>Publish Final CCP</b>

We will periodically be posting information about the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex CCP on our website. You can visit this site throughout the CCP process to keep up-to-date on our progress. Go to: <http://fws.gov/saltonsea> and scroll down to the bottom of the page.

If you did not receive this *Planning Update* through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, or if you would like to be removed from the list, contact the Refuge Planner (see page 7 for contact information). Please feel free to pass this *Planning Update* along to anyone you think might be interested in the CCP process for Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex. Thank you!