

San Diego National Wildlife Refuge (Otay-Sweetwater Unit and Vernal Pools Stewardship Project) Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Public Scoping Comments

Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) (Otay-Sweetwater Unit and Vernal Pools Stewardship Project) in the Federal Register on May 24, 2006. With the publishing of the NOI, the initial public scoping period for the CCP was officially underway. To reach the many individuals, organizations, Tribes, and public entities that might have an interest in the CCP process for the San Diego NWR, we also distributed approximately 1,000 copies of Planning Update 1. This Planning Update provided an overview of the CCP process, announced our public scoping meetings, and encouraged public input via mail, e-mail, and fax, and at all scheduled and future public meetings.

Two public scoping meetings were held on June 14 and 15, 2006. These meetings were attended by approximately 70 individuals who provided a wide range of comments related to current and future refuge operations, wildlife and habitat management, public use, and refuge facilities. All of the comments provided at the meetings were written down and then posted for other participants to review. Each participant was given a set of colored dots that could be placed next to those written comments that were of most interest to them.

The input we received between May and October of this year has been very helpful to us as we begin the process of identifying goals and objectives for the Refuge. Presented below are the range of comments and concerns raised during the scoping process. Presented next to some comments is a number in parenthesis. This number represents the number of dots that were added to the comment during the public scoping meetings. These numbers are provided for general information and are not provided to imply that any one comment is more important than another. All comments will receive equal consideration.

Public Scoping Comments

Refuge Management

Partnerships

Interface with the Cleveland National Forest, California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Nature Conservancy, and other agencies and non-governmental organizations during the planning phase, as well as when implementing future management actions.

The planning process should also include bi-national involvement.

Initiate talks with the Sycuan Tribe regarding the possibility of entering into a cooperative agreement with the Tribe to conserve wildlife habitat, particularly for arroyo toads, in Sloane Canyon.

Establish cooperative conservation agreements and other private lands programs to protect lands adjacent to Refuge property.

Vigorously work with other agencies to obtain conservation easements (open space, ranch easements) on lands within the acquisition boundary and on adjacent parcels identified for preservation in approved multiple species conservation plans in order to increase the footprint of preserved lands within this area. (5)

Maintain connections between different communities using existing trails. (2)

To achieve an ecosystem approach to planning will require coordination and partnering with public and private organizations within and adjacent to the acquisition boundary including CDFG, BLM, Sycuan Tribe, Sweetwater Authority, Otay Water District, Caltrans, the Nature Conservancy.

Work in cooperation with other agencies to jointly enforce illegal trespass, off-road vehicle trespass, dumping, and other law enforcement issues.

Law Enforcement

Address illegal migrant foot traffic and camping on Refuge land. (4)

Address the securing, potential fire, and trash issues associated with the use of Refuge lands by transients (7)

Control off-road vehicle activity that is destroying the habitat on the Refuge. (11)

Prevent motorcycles and off-road vehicles from entering the Refuge, particularly after rain storms. This activity is adversely affecting existing non-motorized trails and adjacent habitat. (8)

Work in cooperation with other agencies to jointly enforce illegal trespass, off-road vehicle trespass, dumping, and other law enforcement issues.

Work with adjacent property owners to control access through private parcels onto Refuge lands – example Hidden Valley.

Identify measures to deter illegal dumping on Refuge land and institute a prompt clean up program when illegal dumping does occur in order to discourage more dumping.

Control off-road activity behind Skyline Ranch.

Illegal off-road activity is causing pollution, wildlife disturbance, erosion, loss of habitat, and safety issues for non-motorized trail users.

Illegal activities are occurring on Refuge property, including dumping, drug dealing, alien smuggling, and homeless camping.

Use of motorcycles and other motorized vehicles should be prohibited on the Refuge (10)

Evaluate the need to hire additional law enforcement officers and establish Memorandums of Understanding with other law enforcement agencies to assist in patrol and enforcement.

Identify and secure points used for unauthorized access onto the Refuge by both motorized and non-motorized users.

Identify measures to avoid or minimize illegal activities on refuge lands (drugs, migrant smuggling, homeless camping, dumping) by improving Millar Ranch Road, establishing an official trail system, providing safe parking for visitors, and providing more visible enforcement of rules.

Better law enforcement is needed on the Refuge.

Increase law enforcement on the Refuge to monitor and reduce off-road vehicle activity and dumping. (13)

Manage illegal use of motorcycles on Millar Ranch Road.

Ecosystem/Ecoregion Planning

The CCP should reflect bi-national planning and should consider the recommendations being developed by other organizations to address bi-national watershed management. (3)

Incorporate bi-national, cross border management of ecosystems into the management proposal developed for the Refuge. (6)

When preparing the CCP, consider the conservation action recommendations described for the South Coast Region in the California Wildlife Action Plan.

Hire additional conservation planning staff and obtain additional funds in order to ensure the intended implementation of NCCPs, as well as to meet the obligations under the plans.

The CCP should address the need for federal, state, and local agencies to coordinate management and monitoring of public reserve lands, regardless of the lands' ownership.

Within plan areas, multi-agency management and monitoring teams should be utilized, where possible, to increase efficiency and improve effectiveness.

Monitoring data from Refuge lands should be used to inform collaborative adaptive management.

Work with other agencies to establish regional goals for species and habitat protection.

Future acquisition within the approved Refuge boundary should consider the desire to protect and restore the best remaining regional examples of ecologically intact river systems.

Increase resources for and coordinate with other Federal, state, and local agencies to control existing occurrences of invasive species and to prevent new introductions.

Obtain adequate funding and staff to ensure that sensitive species and important wildlife habitats on Refuge lands are sufficiently protected.

Adopt management policies that safeguard natural resources and wildlife habitat.

Include requirements in the CCP to monitor all public and recreational uses, and, through adaptive management, determine the appropriate uses for a specific area. Where use restrictions are needed to protect sensitive species and habitats, those restrictions should be adequately enforced.

Protect and restore streams and watersheds on the Refuge. In light of the stresses posed by drought and human water use, work to provide adequate in stream flows for aquatic species by reducing or eliminating water diversions on Refuge and other public lands upstream of the Refuge.

Based on the best available science and site-specific conditions, fire management policies and practices should be designed to restore the ecological integrity of the Refuge's natural communities.

Priority areas for acquisition within the Refuge should include inholdings, adjacent natural areas that buffer against the adverse effects of urbanization, and areas where development pressures threaten connectivity between already acquired lands.

Work with federal, state, local, and non-governmental partners should to develop a comprehensive Southern California Outdoor Recreation Program to provide recreational opportunities and access that do not conflict with wildlife habitat needs and then incorporate the recommendations of this plan into the CCP.

The CCP should emphasize wildlife and natural resources conservation education.

Land Acquisition

Describe within the CCP those factors that should be considered in determining which parcels should be acquired for inclusion in the Refuge. Such factors could include: proximity to existing ownership, size of a parcel, linkages, quality of the habitat or presence of listed species, adjacency to existing development, need for buffers to sensitive habitat areas.

The CCP should describe how future acquisitions, habitat management, and monitoring of sensitive species can contribute to the implementation of the County's MSCP.

Hidden Valley should be acquired and added to the Refuge. (9)

The CCP should describe how much land has been lost to development within the acquisition boundary since the Refuge was established, and should also evaluate the effect of these losses on available habitat and sensitive species.

Evaluate the need to acquire more lands to contribute to the recovery of species supported by the Refuge and to prevent listing new species.

Develop prioritizes for future acquisition that would contribute to the success of the MSCP.

Accelerate the acquisition of properties within the approved acquisition boundary. (3)

Preservation of the lands in the undeveloped back country is the highest and best use to which the lands can be put.

Funding for acquisition is essential as withholding these expenditures will endanger the long-term efforts of the MSCP.

Land acquisition should include connections between BLM Rattlesnake and White Mountain holdings and to the more southwesterly project areas.

Not continuing to fund acquisition of parcels within the approved Refuge boundary goes against the whole thrust of current public policy.

The Refuge should integrate the BLM Rattlesnake and White Mountain holdings.

Encourage funding for acquisition of vernal pool habitat on Otay Mesa and in the Sweetwater area and implement habitat restoration in these areas once acquired. (6)

The preservation of major mammal corridors for regional wildlife movement is the most urgent. These corridors should include major drainages from the Cleveland National Forest westward to the coast (including the Cottonwood and Pine Valley Creek drainages). These corridors are needed to provide access to different foraging areas during drought as well as to ensure “genetic mobility” (e.g., Hollenbeck deer population migrating over the Mother Grundy/White Mountain areas to Barrett Lake, Morena, and Pine Valley areas). (3)

Millar Ranch Road Issues

Assist in completing the water line up Millar Ranch Road.

Determine the Refuge’s responsibility for providing fire protection and brush management for residences along Millar Ranch Road.

Evaluate the possibility of widening Millar Ranch Road, as well as cutting back the vegetation along the road, to improve sight distances, increase public safety, accommodate emergency access, and reduce the potential for fire. (4)

“Promise” to improve Millar Ranch Road from Highway 94 to the refuge boundary and provide an all weather stream crossing over Steele Canyon Creek.

Develop an improvement and maintenance plan for Millar Ranch Road that brings the road up to minimum safety standards, provides for emergency evacuation, and provides adequate drainage facilities. (6)

If a water line is installed in Millar Ranch Road, allow a trail to be maintained along the water easement. (2)

Assist adjacent property owners in getting the section of Millar Ranch Road that is owned by Caltrans improved and a bridge installed to accommodate residents to the south on Millar Ranch Road. (2)

Create an alternative river undercrossing at Millar Ranch Road and Highway 94 to benefit the ecosystem (so sensitive species are no longer impacted) and work with partners to secure funding for this project. (9)

There are limited fire hydrants along Millar Ranch Road. (2)

Mount Miguel Fire Department wants 10 feet on either side of Millar Ranch Road cleared of brush. (3)

Fire Management

Consider including prescribed burns as an appropriate action for facilitating habitat restoration and maintenance and reducing the presence of hazardous fuels on the Refuge.

Work cooperatively with adjacent residents and other agencies to resolve fire issues along Millar Ranch Road and to secure funding for clearing brush. (4)

Check fire equipment for invasive plant seeds to prevent the spread of invasive plants in natural areas. (3)

The CCP should address how fire would be used to manage habitat on the Refuge. (4)

Discourage the use of non-native seeds for post fire rehabilitation on the Refuge and adjacent areas. (4)

Fire or other methods must be used to both reduce fuels and provide more natural wildlife habitat. (3)

A fire management plan should be part of the EA and the Refuge should discuss the adequacy of fire access with the fire agencies that serve the area.

Volunteers/Friends

To save costs and engage the local community, the CCP should recommend the development of a stewardship program for the Refuge, including hiring a volunteer coordinator that can engage youth corps, Friends' groups, surrounding homeowners associations, and non-governmental organizations.

Hire staff to recruit and train community volunteers to assist in management, maintenance, and public education.

Establish a refuge foundation that can promote public awareness and support of the refuge and its goals.

Provide legal road access for volunteers to get onto the refuge for removal of trash and habitat restoration.

Incorporate the use of Donovan prison inmates into the Refuge's fire management, trail maintenance, and habitat restoration programs. (4)

Instead of fining federal violators for illegal activities, have the violators work off their fines by assisting in Refuge maintenance programs.

Outreach

Develop an education and outreach program.

Provide smaller area maps on the website to assist the public in understanding which properties are included in the Refuge. (2)

Prepare detailed trail maps as part of the CCP. These maps should also be made available on the website to let the public know which areas are open for public use. (3)

Post the scoping meeting PowerPoint briefing on the website.

Refuge Facilities

If infrastructure and buildings are brought onto the Refuge make them energy efficient, "green," and bury any electric or communication wires.

Signage

Refuge signs should be minimally bilingual and should use icons for additional understanding. (2)

Provide signs to inform the public they are on Refuge land.

Post signs of the Refuge boundary indicating that motorized uses are prohibited.

Provide signs that identify the National Wildlife Refuge and invites people to enjoy its many resources.

Provide signs at trail heads and at trail intersections that include a trail map. (2)

Wildlife/Habitat Management

Wildlife Corridors

Provide an appropriate animal crossing (small bridge or tunnel) at the stream near Millar Ranch Road and Campo Road to reduce road kill and improve access to the Refuge.

Provide linkages or passageway between springs/water sources and other open space areas.

Protect major mammal corridors.

Provide for wildlife movement along permanent and well protected corridors.

Barriers to movement, including Highway 94 and development, pose the greatest threat to the long term viability of all of the major conservation efforts in southwestern San Diego County.

Wildlife Protection

Ensure the protection of the wildlife within the Refuge.

Species Management

Restore habitat on the Refuge for the Quino checkerspot butterfly.

Re-introduce burrowing owls to appropriate Refuge parcels. (5)

Consider adding opuntia, cholla, and shore cactus patches to coastal sage scrub restoration areas, as appropriate, to benefit cactus wren. (4)

A management action of the CCP should be to survey/inventory the rare plants within the Refuge.

Conduct systematic mapping of rare plants on the Refuge.

Evaluate the reintroduction of rare species such as Mexican flannelbush.

Preclude public access to known or potential golden eagle nest sites. (3)

Habitat Management/Restoration

Require revegetation of areas damaged by development such as the Los Montanas golf course project. (3)

Identify the actions that should be taken to sustain and restore priority species and habitats over the next 15 years.

The oak woodland that occurs at the top of the Jamul Mountains should be preserved and managed within the Refuge.

Protect the habitat within the Refuge but also permit public access. (6)

Wildlife habitat and management should be the number one priority for the Refuge. (5)

Conduct systematic mapping of vegetation communities within the acquisition boundary and evaluate existing management problems (e.g., erosion, dumping, off-road activity, vandalism, invasive species) within each vegetation community.

Consider the use of grazing as a tool to manage annual grasses in selected areas.

Areas within the Refuge that formally supported coastal sage scrub and have been impacted by grazing, fire, illegal activities to the point that they are not naturally reverting back to their historic vegetation should be revegetated. (2)

The Otay-Sweetwater Unit is critical to the conservation of coastal sage scrub and associated species in San Diego County and the Southern California region.

All of the lands conserved within the acquisition boundary of the Otay-Sweetwater Unit should be comprehensively plan for habitat conservation, management, and monitoring regardless of ownership as this area is the primary core preserve for the MSCP in Southern California.

The CCP should provide a truly comprehensive and regional in scope vision for cooperative land management and monitoring for all conserved lands within the Refuge acquisition boundary, not just lands administered by the Service. The reasons for why this is essential include:

- The Improvement Act requires the Service to “coordinate the development of [conservation plans] with relevant state plans for fish and wildlife and their habitats.” The MSCP, authorized under the State of California’s Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act (NCCP), is the most important tool for conservation in San Diego County, and the Refuge is a vital part of the MSCP.
- It is consistent with an ecosystem approach to Refuge planning.

Invasive Species

The CCP should address the potential for horses to bring invasive plants onto the Refuge.

When controlling invasive plant species, encourage the complete removal of all cut materials to avoid reinfestation. (5)

Emphasize invasive exotic species control in habitat management planning. (2)

Map the locations of invasive plant concentrations and develop a plan for their control.

Establish a weed management area for the Sweetwater and Otay River Valleys.

Research

Establish the Refuge as a center for research on urban/wildland interface issues and partner with universities, researchers and graduate students, USGS, San Diego Natural History Museum to address questions on management and monitoring (consider providing facilities and dormitory for housing out of town researchers).

Water Quality/Quantity

Altered hydrology has increased storm drain runoff at Bonita Meadows. Work with partners to minimize such impacts to the Refuge in the future. (4)

Address issues related to water runoff into the Refuge from adjacent developments; as such impacts are causing damage to the ecosystem, increasing the risk of fire, and increasing groundwater contamination. (2)

Ensure consistency with Sweetwater Authority's reservoir security, water quality protection goals, and species conservation goals when considering the types and locations of public uses to be permitted on the Refuge in the vicinity of Sweetwater Authority property. (4)

Water quality and groundwater levels are affected by activities occurring upstream of the Refuge. Identify measures to monitor current quality and quantity and ensure that adequate water is available to support Refuge resources.

Identify measures to avoid or minimize water pollution (water quality and water quantity issues) from crossing into the Refuge from adjacent and other development located upstream of Refuge lands. Also, urban runoff flowing in Refuge drainages during periods other than the rainy season can encourage the establishment of invasive plant species within these drainages.

Initiate a groundwater monitoring program, coordinated with adjacent water districts and the Regional Water Quality Control Board, at appropriate locations throughout the Refuge to determine how groundwater levels are being impacted by adjacent development.

Cultural Resources

Identify important cultural resource sites within the reserve and ensure appropriate public use of these areas.

Develop an interpretive plan for the Barn at the Oaks that identifies potential access and parking sites.

Public Use

Evaluate which uses are compatible with Refuge purposes and the mission of the NWRs.

Trails

Provide a safe way for hikers and equestrians to cross Highway 94 at the Steele Canyon Bridge. This will provide access from Bright Valley Farms to the trails along the Sweetwater River. (4)

Provide a trail from Summit Park via Mt. McGinty to Sloan Canyon permitting a connection to the California Riding and Hiking Trail. The refuge is the only public access point remaining in that area for providing a connection to the Riding and Hiking Trail. (2)

Provide trails within the Refuge that will accommodate connections between the Otay River Valley and Tijuana River Valley Regional Trails. (3)

Consider trail locations within other disturbance corridors that may be created within the Refuge for SDG&E or other public utilities.

Provide trails within the Refuge to accommodate bird walks and other nature walks.

Design loop trails that include interpretation. (4)

Ensure that trails on the Refuge are wide enough to avoid and see rattlesnakes.

Provide a trail connection to the Sweetwater Regional Trail connecting Bonita to the California Riding and Hiking Trail. (4)

Support equestrian uses within the Refuge. (16)

Provide a system of well marked trails for equestrians – there is no need to maintain all of the existing trails and pathways on the Refuge. (11)

Allow only non-motorized uses on the Refuge. (5)

Provide for multiple use (non-motorized) joint use trails on the Refuge. (4)

Allow mountain bikes on the trails. (3)

Provide access to Sweetwater Reservoir through the Refuge for fishing (from the south) and also permit walking and biking on this trail. (3)

Link horse/hiking trails to the regional trail network. (6)

Keep unauthorized trails from increasing and manage existing trails. (4)

Permit bicycles on Refuge trails.

Recreational trails, especially equestrian and hiking trails, should be permitted on the Refuge. These trails should facilitate connectivity between County established parks and open space areas.

Five community trail plans within the County of San Diego have been developed that include portions of the Refuge – these trail plans incorporate the Refuge as an access point, vital link, or destination for trail uses.

The CCP should address the possible reroute of a portion of the California Riding and Hiking Trail in Sloane Canyon. This reroute would improve trail safety and provide an important link from Summit Park in the Sweetwater Community to the Riding and Hiking Trail.

A trail connection to the Sweetwater River trail should be provided near Steel Canyon Road and Faraday Drive.

The various trail connections proposed in the Jamul, Valle De Oro, Spring Valley, and Sweetwater Community Trails Plans should be considered for inclusion in the Refuge.

Evaluate and establish official trails – close and restore unnecessary trails, evaluate appropriate trail use.

Some of the existing trails on the Refuge are in poor condition, such as along portions of the trail to Mt. McGinty. The CCP should include a plan for reconstruction or rerouting of bad trail segments.

As acquisition continues, provide trails for hiking to create an awareness of resources (stewardship) and provide opportunities for environmental education.

Allow public use of the trails up the southwest side of Mt. San Miguel. (2)

Permit trail running on the Refuge trail system. (2)

Coordinate trail planning on the Refuge with the County's non-motorized trails plan. (3)

Provide separate designated areas for equestrian use and ATV use on the Refuge.

Trail use should be protected from illegal off-road activity.

Provide a trail system that connects with major wildlife corridors.

Provide safe walking and biking route through the Refuge to the highway.

Manage public access by establishing an official refuge trail system.

Staging Areas

Provide a trailhead and equestrian staging area near Millar Ranch Road and Highway 94 as proposed by the County. (2)

Staging areas that have already been provided are appreciated.

Staging areas should be provided on Proctor Valley Road and at the intersection of Honey Springs Road and Highway 94.

Public Access

Permit the following uses when the Refuge is opened for public use – hiking, bird watching, plant-looking, dog training, hunting, natural history hikes, and equestrian use. (7)

One use on the refuge should not have an advantage over another use. (2)

Provide for parking and public use in the vicinity of Millar Ranch Road and Highway 94.

Protect the habitat within the Refuge but also permit public access. (6)

The Refuge's current management practice of isolation and exclusion is not working; provide positive opportunities for public use.

Confine passive recreational uses to the outer edges of the refuge and further confine these uses to trails and overlooks.

The most sensitive areas of the refuge should only be accessible via guided tours.

Emphasize wildlife first.

Provide facilities to permit users to appropriating clean up after their dogs.

Hunting

Hunting of waterfowl, deer, and other game species should be allowed on the Refuge. (5)

Hunting should be an approved compatible use on the Otay-Sweetwater Unit. (10)

Do not allow the MSCP to trump hunting on the Refuge. (4)

Do not allow hunting on the Refuge. (4)

Consider the proximity of urban development when evaluating hunting proposals for the Refuge. (4)

Consider the potential for conflicts between birders and hunters. (2)

Explain how the County MSCP identifies hunting as a non-conservation related activity and relate that information to planning for hunting on the Refuge. (5)

Evaluate if there is adequate area on the Refuge to support both sensitive and other species, particularly wetland species, and hunting. (3)

Provide opportunities for fishing within the Refuge (2).

Prohibit hunting on Refuge lands because there is not adequate land available within the current Refuge boundaries to support hunting, wildlife and habitat protection, and non-consumptive uses.

The hunting program should be guided by the rules and regulations of the California Department of Fish and Game (which addresses seasons, methods of take, and hunter safety).

Allow hunting of mammals and upland game birds as dictated by habitat type and game population.

Specific areas for hunting and allowable species should not be designated in the CCP, but should be part of a continuing management plan based on the judgment of the Refuge Manager, allowing flexibility as conditions change such as game populations and development of adjacent parcels. (2)

CCP should clearly state that hunting is not incompatible with the mission of the Refuge.

Hunting access on the Refuge should be managed via a check-in and check-out system such as the system used by CDFG (registration card filled out at an entry booth).

Seasonal closures to protect breeding threatened and endangered species should be limited to the area that supports the species, and should not result in the wholesale closure of the Refuge to hunting.

San Diego County Wildlife Federation is ready to work with the Service to ensure a safe and responsible hunting program on the Refuge.

Contact the San Diego County Wildlife Federation to obtain a perspective of the hunting community on approaches for managing the hunting element of the Refuge in the CCP and follow-on management plans.

Camping

Allow camping on the Refuge.

Dog Training

Allow dog training in conjunction with shot-gun use in designated areas at a safe distance from equestrian and hiking trails. (Bird shot can travel a distance of 75 yards.) (13)

Environmental Education/Interpretation

Provide hands-on environmental education experiences on the Refuge and in schools and partner with surrounding schools to develop and implement the program. (8)

Provide an interpretive trail that identifies species for the public. (5)

Outreach and education should be provided not just for children, but also for adults, researchers, etc. (3)

Provide public access via boardwalk, trail, or overlook to vernal pools for the purpose of education, interpretation, and stewardship in order to help protect these areas and finance further conservation of these resources. (5)

Provide educational and recreational activities within the Refuge that encourage public support for habitat conservation.

Develop an education and outreach program.

Educate the public to stay out of sensitive areas using interpretive signs and educational programs.

Promote environmental literacy for future generations.

Interpret wildlife and plants. (4)

Visitor/Interpretive Center

Provide kiosks at the beginning of trails with a map, information about the area, rules, and regulations. (3)

Provide viewing areas with benches and overlooks for birding and visual enjoyment. (2)

Develop a trailhead by the Steele Canyon Bridge.

Provide a visitor or interpretive center to accommodate educational and research activities. (2)

A visitor/interpretive center should be constructed on the Refuge:

- along the Sweetwater River or on Daley Ranch (11)
- in a location that permits access from Steele Canyon High School (5)

Equestrian Center

An equestrian center should be planned for Daley Ranch. (7)

CCP Process

Goals

Consider including the following goals and objectives in the CCP:

- ❖ Provide opportunities for educational and recreational activities within the Refuge to encourage public support for habitat conservation
- ❖ Manage public access by establishing an official refuge trail system
- ❖ Partner with the county to implement the trails plans within the Refuge that are contained in their regional trail program
- ❖ Provide a trailhead and equestrian staging area near Millar Ranch Road and Highway 94 as proposed by the County
- ❖ Provide a visitor center to accommodate educational and research activities. (on Millar Ranch Road at the site of the refuge dedication ceremony and existing kiosk)

- ❖ Hire staff to recruit and train community volunteers to assist in management, maintenance, and public education
- ❖ Establish a refuge foundation that can promote public awareness and support of the refuge and its goals.

Expand the Acquisition Boundary

Expand the acquisition boundary east 6 kilometers to about Dulzura. (4)

Reduce the Acquisition Boundary

Consider amending the acquisition boundary to remove areas from the acquisition boundary that have been developed or have been purchased by another agency for land conservation.

Other

When describing partners in the CCP process, include the San Diego County Wildlife Federation as a working partner.

The CCP should describe the acquisition process for the Refuge.

Compare prior public use of the lands now in Refuge ownership with the uses being considered in the CCP. Specifically, hunting was an allowable use under private ownership. (2)

Explain in the CCP who is in charge of enforcement of current laws and policies within and adjacent to Refuge lands.

Environmental Analysis

Land Use

Control lot splits on the edge of the Refuge, allowing a maximum density of four acres per unit to maintain connections for wildlife into the Refuge.

Review development plans for areas adjacent to the Refuge.

Adjacent landowners should maintain their own defensible space.

The EA for the CCP should address the effect that further acquisition could have on proposed and existing land uses.

Essential public facilities such as water and sewer conveyance systems should be recognized as allowable uses on the Refuge.

Aggregates (Natural Resource Issues)

Consider the impacts of habitat preservation actions on the availability of construction resources. Aggregate resources are present within the acquisition boundary that should be made available for extraction.

The EA should identify the quantity of designated significant mineral deposits that will be removed from San Diego County's resource base and identify alternative areas that can be designated for resource extraction if those areas will be precluded from aggregate production within the Refuge.

Continued implementation of the Refuge would impact the ability of the region to extract aggregate resources from the area mitigation for this impact should be included in the CCP.

Roads/Public Facilities

Establishment of the Refuge resulted in changes to future land use planning, schools, parks, road improvements – specific concerns (conditions of private roads through the refuge – Millar Ranch Road, and safety walking and biking access through the Refuge).

The road networks (construction, expansion, realignment, maintenance, or other improvement actions) included in the County’s General Plan 2020 update should be recognized as allowed within the Refuge.

Fire access roads and fuel management activities should be recognized as allowable uses for the Refuge.

Where the Refuge is located near the international border, roads used by the border patrol should be recognized as allowable uses on the Refuge.