

## Chapter 2

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*Savannah sparrow*

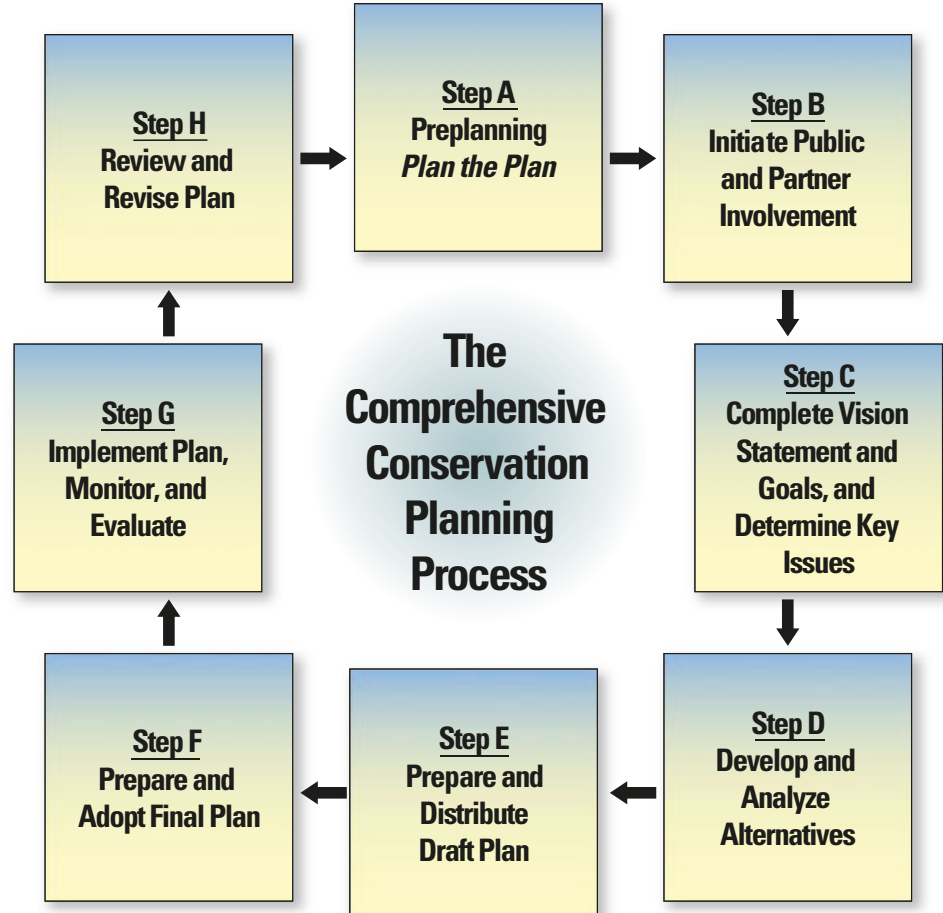
## The Planning Process

- **The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process**
- **Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities**
- **Issues and Concerns Outside the Scope of this Analysis or Not Completely Within the Jurisdiction of the Service**

## The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

Service policy establishes an eight-step planning process that also facilitates compliance with NEPA (Figure 1.1). Our planning policy and CCP training course materials describe the eight steps in detail. We followed the process depicted below in developing the draft CCP/EA.

Figure 2.1. The CCP Planning Process.



Since 1973, we have focused on conserving lands within the approved refuge boundary, facilitating wildlife-dependent public uses, managing habitat for several focus species, such as piping plovers and least terns, and establishing relationships with the community and our partners. In 1999, we began to prepare for a CCP that would encompass all of the refuges in the Eastern Massachusetts NWR Complex. We published a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register*, and began public scoping. By 2001, we determined that writing a plan for eight refuges was too cumbersome, and resolved to focus on CCPs for the three northernmost refuges in the refuge complex. The efforts for Nantucket NWR were halted at that time.

After finishing three refuge complex CCPs and initiating two others, we initiated a CCP for Nantucket NWR once again. In April 2008, we published a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* announcing the start of the CCP process for Nantucket NWR. In August 2008, we began collecting information on refuge resources, and summarized our biological inventory and monitoring information.

We convened our core team in September 2008, which consists of refuge staff, regional division staff, and representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (MA DFG, MassWildlife), Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head

(Aquinnah), and Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. We discussed management issues, drafted a vision statement and tentative goals, and compiled a project mailing list of known stakeholders, interested individuals, organizations, and agencies. We initiated all of those steps as part of “Step A: Preplanning.”

Also in September 2008, we once again engaged the public during “Step B: Initiate Public Involvement and Scoping,” by distributing a planning update newsletter to approximately 60 individuals, organizations, and agencies, announcing we were beginning the planning process and the upcoming public meeting in October.

In October 2008, we held both the stakeholder and public scoping meetings in Nantucket, Massachusetts, to discuss previously identified public issues and concerns, determine whether new issues existed or previously identified issues had changed, share our draft vision statement and tentative goals, describe the planning process, and explain how people could become involved and stay informed about the process. Those meetings helped us refine the partner and public concerns we would need to address in the planning process. We announced the location, date, and time of the public meeting in local newspapers, in the planning update, and on our Web site. Twenty-eight people attended the public meeting. This meeting was followed by a month-long comment period where we continued to receive public and partner issues and concerns through e-mail, letters, and comment form submission.

Our next planning team meeting was held in mid-December 2008 where we worked on “Step C: Review Vision Statement, Goals, and Identify Significant Issues.” We also initiated “Step D: Develop and Analyze Alternatives.” We identified key issues, decided upon our three management alternatives, and identified strategies under each alternative.

In February 2011, we distributed a newsletter summarizing the three management alternatives we analyzed in detail for the EA/draft CCP. That completed Step D.

The EA/draft CCP represented “Step E: Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA document.” On August 2, 2011, we published a notice of availability in the *Federal Register* announcing our release of the draft for public review and comment. The notice indicated the comment period was for 30 days, but in fact we extended the comment period an additional 30 days until October 1, 2011. During that comment period, we also held two public meetings to obtain comments and attended a meeting at the Nantucket Anglers Club in which we reiterated the comment period and upcoming public meetings. We received comments by regular mail, e-mail, and at the public meetings. After the comment period ended, we reviewed and summarized all of the comments we received, developed our responses, and published them in appendix J to this final CCP.

Once we prepared the final CCP, we submitted it to our Regional Director for approval. Our Regional Director determined that it warrants a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI; appendix L), and found its analysis adequate to issue a decision at that time. We will announce the final decision by publishing Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register*, where we will also notify people of the availability of the final CCP. That will complete “Step F: Prepare and Adopt a Final Plan.”

Then “Step G: Implement Plan, Monitor, and Evaluate” can begin. As part of “Step H: Review and Revise Plan,” we will modify or revise the final CCP as warranted following the procedures in Service policy (602 FW 1, 3, and 4) and NEPA requirements. Minor revisions that meet the criteria for categorical exclusions (550 FW 3.3C) will require only an environmental action memorandum. As the Improvement Act and Service policy stipulate, we will review and revise the CCP fully every 15 years.

## Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

We define an issue as “any unsettled matter requiring a management decision.” An issue can be an “initiative, opportunity, resource management problem, threat to a resource, conflict in use, or a public concern.” Issues arise from many sources, including our staff, other Service programs, State agencies, other Federal agencies, our partners, neighbors, user groups, or Congress. One of the distinctions among the proposed management alternatives is how each addresses those issues. The following summary provides a context for the issues that arose during the scoping process.

## Habitat and Species Management

The primary purpose of National wildlife refuges is the conservation of wildlife and habitats. That is our highest priority, and serves as the foundation for all that we do. Many refuges were established for a very specific purpose, such as protecting a particular species or habitat. Based on the establishing purpose for this refuge, and the discussions that took place up to the time of its establishment, the primary justifications for creating Nantucket NWR were protecting federally listed and State-listed shorebirds, such as the piping plover and least tern, and a regionally important migratory bird area.

How best to protect, restore, and/or enhance coastal habitat and its associated species on the refuge is an important issue we address in this plan. We heard many opinions on specific actions or techniques to accomplish that. Many of these recommended maintaining a balance between public access and wildlife protection, as many felt their recreational enjoyment of the refuge on Great Point was in jeopardy. In particular, the presence of federally listed piping plovers and other beach nesting birds of conservation priority cause changing circumstances throughout the summer months for vehicular and pedestrian access, and these access restrictions and beach closures are a public concern. More recently, the presence of seals on the point and the increasing frequency of beach closures as a result, are a concern to beachgoers and anglers, and anglers expressed concern over seals taking their fish.

Other concerns raised were the absence of a consistent use of the refuge by beach nesting species, despite seemingly ample habitat, and how to manage dune erosion. Conducting compatibility and appropriate use determinations will help guide management decisions. Management actions can best be accomplished in partnership with adjacent land managers.

The following key issues and concerns arose during scoping concerning habitat and species management:

- How can we effectively protect, enhance, restore, or create quality wildlife habitat on the refuge that will promote nesting shorebird populations and provide adequate migratory staging grounds?
- How can we address the presence of seals on the refuge in the context of the regional population, Federal mandates, and in terms of public health and safety?
- What steps can we take to reduce the incidence of nest failures due to predation on the refuge?
- What are the most effective and efficient measures we can undertake to control dune erosion?

## Public Use/Community Relations

National wildlife refuges sustain fish and wildlife, and they sustain people as well. We know that the lands that comprise the Nantucket NWR are important for residents and visitors. Fishing, walking on the beach, and being at the point where Nantucket Sound meets the Atlantic Ocean are enjoyable and rejuvenating. As a destination for beachgoing, seal watching, and fishing, the refuge also contributes economically to Nantucket's local economy. We aspire to

understand the various communities of Nantucket and how we can contribute to these communities while adhering to our mission. We will do our best to nurture and cultivate the mutually beneficial relationships we have developed using the resources we have available.

During public scoping, we learned that many people are only vaguely aware of the refuge, and that there was some confusion about the refuge boundaries. Many considered the entire peninsula to be TTOR land. Those that are aware of the refuge are not necessarily knowledgeable about the opportunities and services we offer, or the impacts of our management actions. Others mentioned concerns over management actions to protect wildlife that impinge upon their use and enjoyment of the refuge. To them, allowing recreational opportunities was the best way to increase community interest and involvement in the refuge. Two common issues associated with access were continuing to allow over-sand vehicle (OSV) access and allowing dogs on the refuge. Some feedback suggested ways we might provide a stronger presence, and conduct interpretation and outreach. Others recommended integrating our management plans with TTOR and Nantucket Conservation Foundation (NCF) to share resources and provide consistency between all three land managers on the peninsula. Finally, some who



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*Surfcasting on Great Point at Nantucket National Wildlife Refuge*

felt well-informed and satisfied about refuge activities valued the contribution of the refuge to the community and their quality of life.

In response to those comments and the issues listed below, we evaluated a range of quality, wildlife-dependent, recreational opportunities, and proposed measures to promote Service visibility, community understanding and support for refuge programs.

The following are key issues or concerns that arose during scoping about public use and community relations:

- How can we continue to provide satisfactory public access and quality, wildlife-dependent experiences while meeting Federal mandates to protect nesting habitat for federally listed and State-listed shorebird species?
- What is the best approach to address vehicular access to the refuge to both maintain access for refuge users, while incorporating measures to effectively manage federally protected wildlife, and protect sensitive habitats?
- How do we effectively conduct outreach to notify people of and explain our refuge policies and regulations, and how can we address nonwildlife-dependent public use of the refuge?
- How can we most effectively work with our partners to continue to provide interpretive and educational opportunities on the refuge?
- What administrative facilities, such as an office, visitor contact facilities, and roads are needed to manage the refuge, what other logistical support for potential future onsite staff can we provide, and where should these be placed or located?

- How do we improve the visibility of the Service and the refuge on Great Point and in the local community?
- What other opportunities can we provide for compatible, priority, wildlife-dependent public uses?

## **Land Protection**

Nantucket NWR was established for its benefit as a wildlife sanctuary for migratory birds. The ability of the refuge to meet its purpose is currently limited by its small land area and intensive public use. Protection of other lands on the island of Nantucket as part of Nantucket NWR would allow the refuge to better fulfill the Service mission.

Regionally, the Service manages many coastal refuges along the Atlantic Coast and on Long Island Sound. Since this is an important flyway for migratory birds, including additional land area as part of the refuge system would further the Service mission, and provide a regional continuum of protected coastal habitat available to migrating birds. The importance of Nantucket NWR not only to migratory birds, but for other federally listed or candidate species is addressed in our Land Protection Plan (appendix G). The following key issues and concerns arose during scoping about land protection and acquisition:

- How can we ensure that as Coast Guard and other Federal lands become available, we have the knowledge and ability to acquire them if possible?
- How should we prioritize lands for acquisition as they become available in the future?
- How can we best work with our partners to accommodate future easement acquisitions?
- What will be our public use policies on future land acquisitions and, if the acquisition of easements on partner lands lead to potentially conflicting public use policies, how can we address those differences fairly for the best possible outcomes?

## **Issues and Concerns Outside the Scope of this Analysis or Not Completely Within the Jurisdiction of the Service**

The resolution of these issues falls outside the scope of this CCP or outside the jurisdiction or authority of the Service. These issues are only briefly addressed elsewhere, or are not addressed again in this CCP:

- *Control the deer population to reduce the risk of Lyme disease.* Given its size (approximately 21 acres) and location on the tip of a narrow peninsula, the refuge does not support a sizable deer population and, in our opinion, does not contribute undue risks for increasing the occurrence of Lyme disease locally. In addition, an extended deer hunting season is allowed on the adjacent TTOR lands. We will provide a link to TTOR's hunt information on our refuge Web site. Given the negligible impact that we predict deer hunting and other control measures for Lyme disease on the refuge would have, we determine those measures are outside the scope of this CCP at this time.
- *What are the potential impacts on the refuge from offshore energy developments?* Although offshore energy developments could be an increasing issue in the future, particularly for potential nearshore energy development projects, without a specific proposal for which the Service has jurisdiction, evaluating the impacts from these activities falls outside the scope of this CCP at the present time. However, we will continue to review proposals where the Service has jurisdiction when they arise, and will address specific Federal concerns as appropriate and warranted.