



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex
7376 S. Wolfsen Road
Los Banos, CA 93635



Memorandum

To: Assistant Regional Director, Refuges

From: Project Leader, San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex,
Los Banos, California

Subject: Request for minor revision to the 2006 San Joaquin River National Wildlife
Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan

The Service acquired the Riverbend Tract as an addition to San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in 2022. The Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is not scheduled to be revised for several years; therefore, we are submitting this minor revision to integrate this property into the CCP and implement approved management strategies for the 285 acres. The proposed revision is consistent with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (Administration Act), as amended, Service policy, and the National Wildlife Refuge System Chief's April 8, 2019 memo that provides guidance on how to prepare minor revisions to refuge CCPs.

Background/Need for Minor Revision:

The Administration Act, as amended, and Service policy (Fish and Wildlife Service Manual chapters 602 FW 1 and 3) identify the need to periodically review and revise Comprehensive Conservation Plans. The Administration Act states that the "Secretary shall manage the refuge or planning unit in a manner consistent with the plan and revise the plan at any time if the Secretary determines that conditions that affect the refuge or planning unit have changed significantly." (16 U.S. Code § 668dd(e)(1)(E)). The Service Manual chapter 602 FW 3, (Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process) Section 8(b) states "Revise the CCP when significant new information becomes available, ecological conditions change, major refuge expansion occurs, or when we identify the need to do so during plan review. This should occur every 15 years or sooner, if necessary."

The addition of the tract shown in Figure 1 is considered a minor revision to the 2006 CCP because it includes minor changes to CCP objectives and strategies that do not significantly change the management direction of the refuge. The addition of this property does not alter the original intent of any part of the CCP.

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Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA):

The proposed minor revision meets the criteria for the following categorical exclusion: 516 DM 8.5 B(9) “Minor changes in existing master plans, comprehensive conservation plans, or operations, when no or minor effects are anticipated. Examples include minor changes in the type and location of compatible public use activities and land management practices.” The list of extraordinary circumstances in 43 CFR part 46 §46.215 was reviewed and none were found to be applicable.

Proposed Minor Revision

This memorandum requests approval to revise the Refuge’s CCP as detailed in Attachment 1 to incorporate the Riverbend Tract. The change would make minor edits to the narrative for Objective 5 (Shaded Riverine Aquatic Habitat and Floodplain Habitat) and strategies 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 and add a new strategy 2.5.7 (Attachment 1). Public uses on the property will be considered in the future through the compatibility process (603 FW 2). Additionally, these properties will be included in general operations and management programs outlined in the CCP under Goals 1, 4, and 5 including but not limited to, prescribed fire, wildlife monitoring, invasive species management, and other refuge management activities.

Refuge Manager/
Project Leader:

(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Chief, Natural
Resources Division:

(Signature and Date)

Refuge Supervisor:

(Signature and Date)

Approval:

Assistant Regional
Director, Refuges:

(Signature and Date)

Attachment 1

Revisions to CCP under Goal 2, Objective 5 (additions shown in [BEGIN NEW TEXT] underline, [END NEW TEXT]; deletions shown in [BEGIN DELETED TEXT] ~~strikeout~~ [END DELETED TEXT])

Goal 2 (Threatened and Endangered Species): Contribute to the recovery of threatened/endangered species, as well as the protection of populations of special status wildlife and plant species and their habitats.

Narrative: Federal and State threatened and endangered species and other special status species are a high priority for the management of the San Joaquin River NWR. The Refuge will aid in the protection and recovery of these species by maintaining and managing the habitats on which they depend, pursuing other measures, as needed, and participating in species recovery efforts.

Objective 5. *Provide and enhance migration, spawning and rearing habitat for fall-run Chinook salmon (Federal–Threatened), Central Valley steelhead (Federal–Threatened), Sacramento splittail (Federal–Threatened), and any other listed fish species by establishing and maintaining a minimum of seven miles of shaded riverine aquatic habitat and 3,500 acres of floodplain habitat along the San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tuolumne Rivers.*

Narrative: The Refuge is downstream from tributaries where Chinook salmon and steelhead spawn and within the spawning area for Sacramento splittail. These species are currently excluded from most of the Refuge floodplain by the presence of flood control levees. Breaching on-Refuge levees as part of floodplain restoration and as an alternative flood control project will allow the River to assume a more natural pattern of flooding and inundation, giving these and other special status native fish species access to the floodplain during flood events. During periods of inundation, the restored floodplain can provide valuable spawning and rearing habitat for Sacramento splittail, and rearing habitat for salmon and steelhead smolts, thus contributing to the recovery these listed species. [BEGIN DELETED TEXT] However, if designed or managed incorrectly, floodplain channels and wetlands could cause stranding and mortality of these same fish as the floodwater recedes. In addition, operation of any unscreened Refuge lift pumps along the San Joaquin, Tuolumne, and Stanislaus rivers could result in fish mortality. [END DELETED TEXT]

Strategies:

2.5.1 [BEGIN DELETED TEXT] Coordinate with staff from the FWS Anadromous Fish Restoration Program and National Marine Fisheries Service to e [END DELETED TEXT] Ensure that levee breaching and floodplain restoration is designed and implemented in ways that maximize spawning and rearing habitat benefits to listed and special status fish species, while minimizing potential for stranding.

2.5.2 Implement levee breaching and riparian floodplain restoration as outlined in [BEGIN DELETED TEXT] ~~the CALFED ERP 01-N08~~ [END DELETED TEXT] habitat restoration grants.

2.5.3 Develop a fisheries management strategy that is compatible with other Refuge management objectives and maximizes habitat benefits to listed and special status fish species.

2.5.4 Work with partners to evaluate floodplain rearing potential, conduct monitoring to document actual use by and benefits to listed and special status species, and resolve any fisheries issues on Refuge lands.

2.5.5 Install fish screens on all Refuge riverine lift pumps to avoid entrapment of juvenile Chinook salmon, steelhead, Sacramento splittail or any other special status species of fish.

2.5.6 Seek funding sources and establish partnerships to continue additional riparian floodplain restoration and implement projects when funded.

[BEGIN NEW TEXT] 2.5.7 The Riverbend Tract was purchased, and is being restored, with *San Joaquin Fish Population Enhancement Program* grant funds, provided by the California Department of Water Resources as a floodplain restoration project. The intent of this project is to enhance native fish populations, and reduce their vulnerability to water diversions, predation, and other impacts in the lower San Joaquin River watershed. The intent of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is to manage the property in a manner that is in alignment with *San Joaquin Fish Population Enhancement Program* goals. Specific desired protections for the Riverbend Tract to be managed, maintained, and monitored are consistent with fish habitat goals as described in this CCP and include:

- Enhance native fish habitat in the lower San Joaquin River watershed by taking a multispecies, ecosystem approach with a diverse group of stakeholders including state, federal, local, and non-profit entities.
- Reduce vulnerability of native fishes to water diversions, predation, and other impacts to their populations at all life stages within or upstream of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.
- Protect and maintaining restored floodplain, shaded riverine and riparian habitats, and river processes in the regulatory floodway of the San Joaquin River within the property limits.
- Protect habitat for spring- and fall-run Chinook salmon, Central Valley steelhead, Sacramento splittail, and other native fishes.
- Avoid actions that would impede or discourage natural flooding, hydraulic connectivity, erosion, and depositional processes on the property within the floodway.
- Maintain passages and engineered features open and accessible for fish passage as practicable given hydrology, water level conditions, and funding availability.
- Avoid entrainment of juvenile Chinook salmon, steelhead, Sacramento splittail or any other special status species of fish with installation of fish screens or other water control features.
- Ensure that levee breaching and floodplain restoration (i.e. re-grading) is designed and implemented in ways that maximize spawning and rearing habitat benefits to listed and special status fish species, while minimizing potential for stranding.
- Avoid actions that would strand fish where hazards were removed. [END NEW TEXT]