



**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

**Silvio O. Conte**

**National Fish and Wildlife Refuge**

*Environmental Assessment for the Proposed  
Removal of BriMar Stable*



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# **Environmental Assessment for Proposed Removal of BriMar Stable**

**Date: March 12, 2019**

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared to evaluate the effects associated with this proposed action and complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1509) and Department of the Interior (43 CFR 46; 516 DM 8), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) (550 FW 3) regulations and policies. Scoping for the EA began on Thursday, August 16, 2018 (6 p.m. to 8 p.m.) when an informational meeting, attended by over 60 people, was hosted in the auditorium located in the Northeast Regional Office in Hadley, Massachusetts.

NEPA requires examination of the effects of proposed actions on the natural and human environment. This EA will be released for a 30-day public review and comment period.

## **Proposed Action:**

The Service is proposing to demolish the building known as the BriMar Stable (Stable) located on the Fort River Division (Division) of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (NFWR, Conte Refuge, refuge) in Hadley, Massachusetts.

A proposed action is often iterative and may evolve during the NEPA process as the agency refines its proposal and gathers feedback from the public, stakeholders, and other agencies. Therefore, the final proposed action and related EA may be different from the original. The proposed action will be finalized at the conclusion of the public comment period for this EA.

## **Background:**

National wildlife refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), the purposes of an individual refuge, Service policy, and laws and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes the Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

The Conte Refuge was established on October 3, 1997, when the Connecticut River Watershed Council, now known as the Connecticut River Conservancy, donated the 3.8-acre Third Island located in Deerfield, Massachusetts to the Service. The refuge was envisioned, designed, and now demonstrates landscape level conservation, education, and recreation partnerships in action, well beyond a traditional refuge boundary. The Refuge System, a world renowned national network of land and water that invests in conservation for wildlife and people for generations to come, administers over 560 national wildlife refuges encompassing over 850 million acres of lands and water. The Conte Refuge is the only congressionally legislated watershed project in the Refuge System.

The refuge was established pursuant to the Silvio O. Conte NFWR Act of 1991. The purposes for which the refuge was established are:

- (1) to conserve, protect, and enhance the Connecticut River valley populations of Atlantic salmon, American shad, river herring, shortnose sturgeon, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, osprey, black ducks, and other native species of plants, fish, and wildlife;
- (2) to conserve, protect, and enhance the natural diversity and abundance of plant, fish and wildlife species and the ecosystems upon which these species depend within the refuge;
- (3) to protect species listed as endangered or threatened, or identified as candidates for listing, pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.);
- (4) to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of wetlands and other waters within the refuge;
- (5) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States relating to fish and wildlife and wetlands; and
- (6) to provide opportunities for scientific research, environmental education, and fish and wildlife-oriented recreation and access to the extent compatible with the other purposes stated in this section.

The mission of the Refuge System, as outlined by the Refuge System Administration Act, as amended by the Refuge System Improvement Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.), is to:

“... to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

The 7.2-million acre Connecticut River watershed (watershed), which also coincides with the refuge’s legislated project area, rises from sea level to the highest elevation in New England. The watershed also includes 396 communities, about 2.4 million people, and about 1.8 million acres of conserved land. The watershed includes a large working landscape such as forests and farms that are typical of New England. In preparation for changing land uses and a changing climate, it is our goal to facilitate habitat connectivity in area (size), elevation, latitude, aspect, and substrate in an effort to promote diversity, redundancy, and resiliency within a network of partner-owned conservation lands to include working forests and farms.

As presented in the final Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), released in December of 2016, the refuge is proposed to be about 197,000 acres of easement and fee lands. These will be strategically connected to the existing mosaic of conservation land already within the watershed. Presently, the refuge totals 37,673 acres located in 22 different places in the 4 states within the watershed (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont) (Figure 1).

On September 17, 2009, the Service acquired the 66.5-acre Zuckerman ownership for \$2.1 million and added it to the Fort River Division of the refuge (Figure 2). The Zuckerman property was slated to become 56 house lots. It now is predominately the site of the Fort River Birding and Nature Trail, a designated National Recreation Trail. The property includes four improvements (Figure 3). Three of the structures, including a residence, a shop building (2,304 square feet), and a former indoor horse exercise arena (16,000 square feet) with attached 1,600-square-foot hot walker room, are key assets for refuge operations and are centrally located within the watershed. The fourth structure is the BriMar Stable, a 30-year-old, 22,500-square-foot building that is excess to the Service's needs, both at the refuge level and at the Regional level.

The Stable is approximately 156 feet long and 72 feet wide. It has a footprint that totals approximately 11,250 square feet. As a two-story structure, it totals about 22,500 square feet and is in very poor condition. The two apartments in the building are not decent, safe, or sanitary; the HVAC, septic, and water is not functional; the electrical system is substandard; and the roof has many leaks, a very large hole, and substantial structural rot. The Stable has provided nesting sites for barn swallows for a few months out of the year. It has been reported that an estimated 35 pairs of barn swallows nested in the building in 2018.

**Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:**

In a memorandum dated March 25, 2015, the Service was instructed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to reduce the amount of real property, government-owned buildings, by 5 percent nationwide by the year 2020. For the Service in Region 5, this equates to reducing the amount of real property by approximately 106,841 square feet. The 22,500-square-foot Stable is excess to the operational needs of the Service. The building has deteriorated to a point that it has become a safety and security concern that could adversely impact other refuge structures, equipment, and refuge visitors and staff.

Figure 1. Silvio O. Conte Refuge Legislated Project Area and Locations



Figure 2. Fort River Division Conservation Focus Area

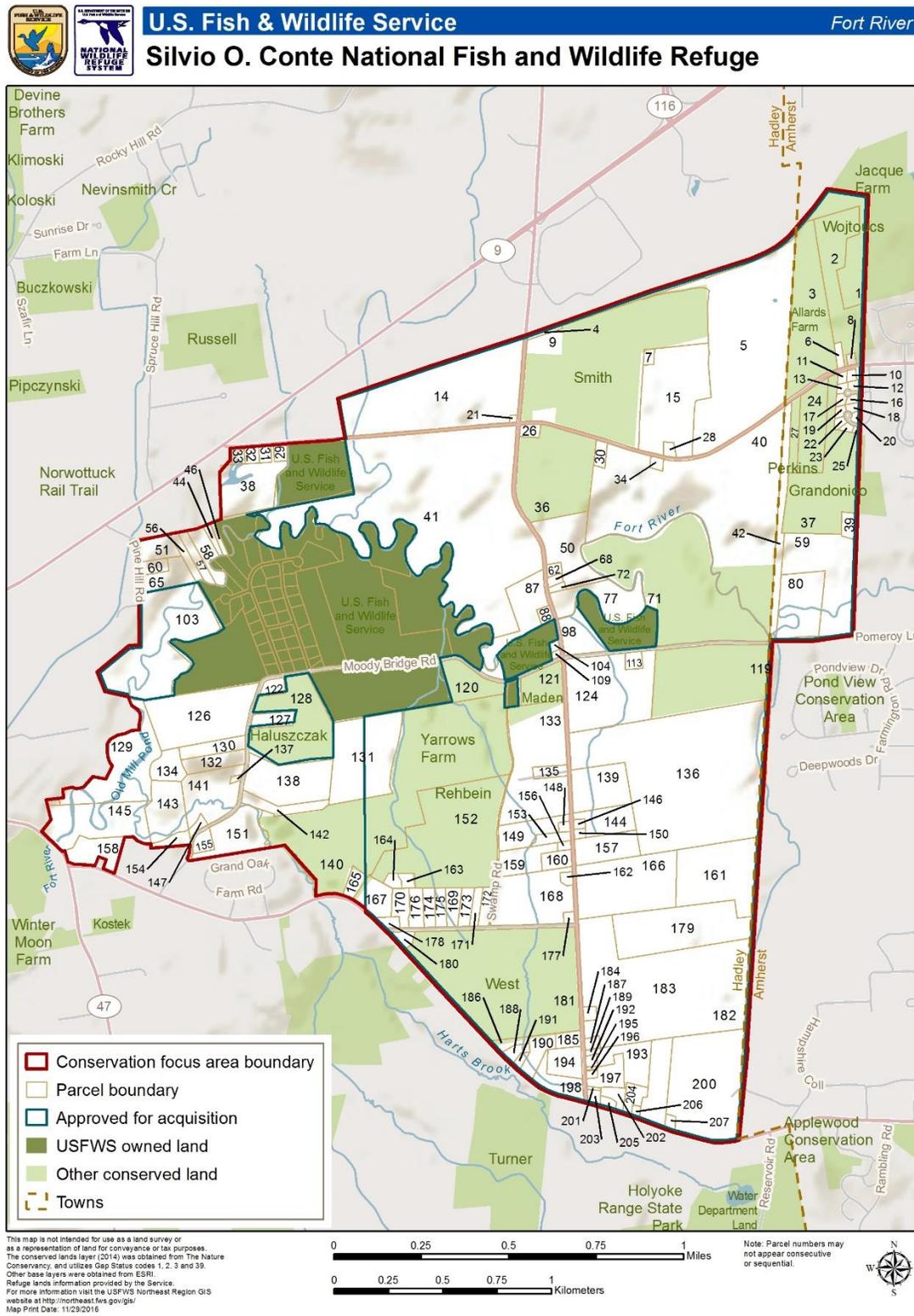
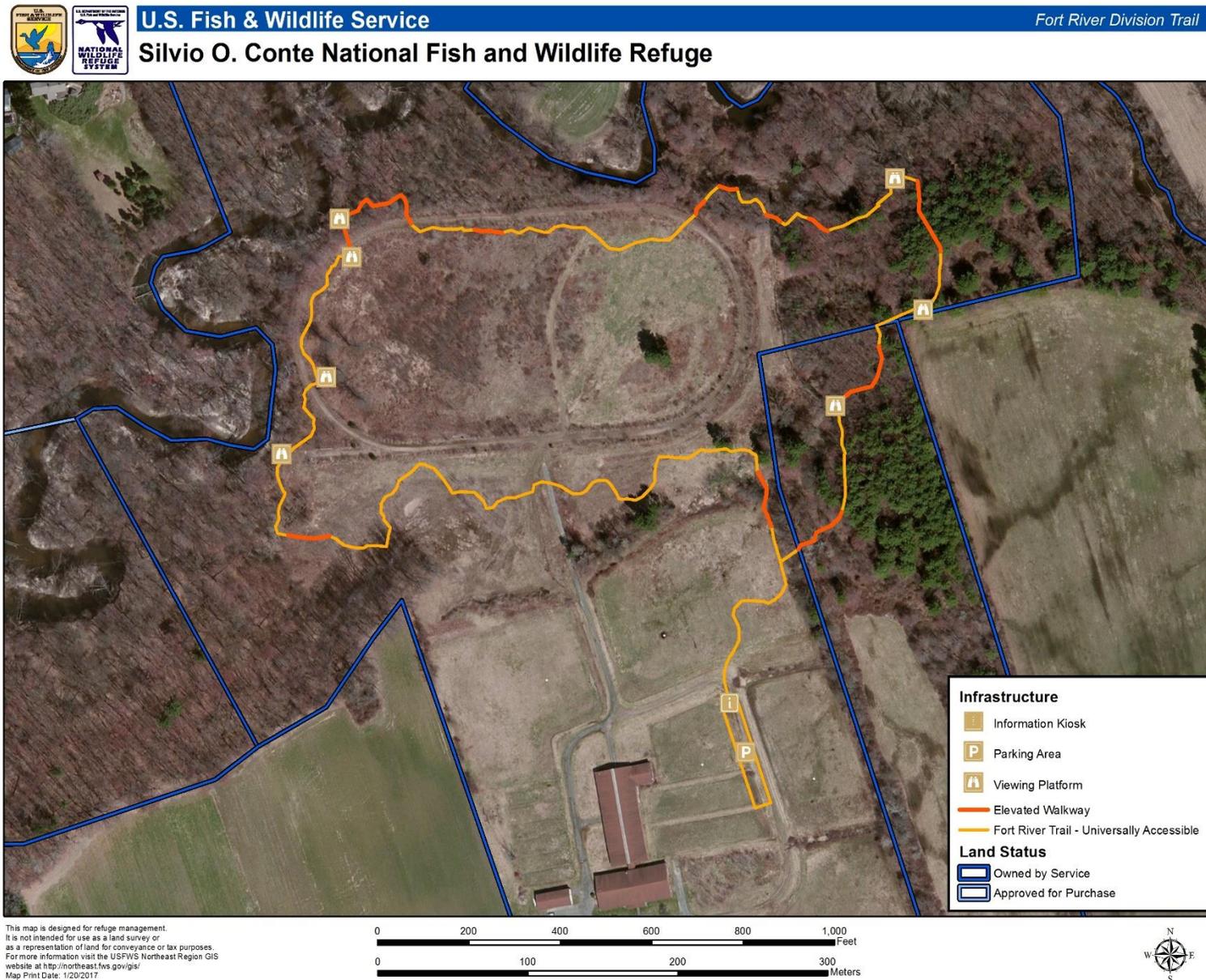


Figure 3. Fort River Birding and Nature Trail and Buildings



**Alternatives Considered:**

**Alternative A – Phased Closure of Stable and Delayed Demolition (Proposed Action)** – Close off the western third of the Stable prior to the 2019 nesting season, making it inaccessible to barn swallows for nesting. Prior to the 2020 nesting season, close off the middle third of the building to barn swallows, leaving only the eastern third of the building open to barn swallows. Following the conclusion of the 2020 nesting season, the entire building would be demolished and removed. Building material would be salvaged, removed, and used for other purposes if possible. Restore the footprint of the structure to native habitat by the end of 2020.

**Alternative B – Allow Stable to Deteriorate (No Action)** – Allow the Stable to remain seasonably available to barn swallows for nesting. The structure will continue to deteriorate, collapse in place, and ultimately be demolished and removed. Restore the footprint of the structure to native habitat after removal.

**Alternative C - Remove Stable** – Demolish and remove the Stable in one phase after the 2019 barn swallow nesting season, repurpose and/or dispose of construction debris, and restore the footprint of the structure to native habitat by the end of 2019.

**Alternatives Considered, but Dismissed from Further Considerations:**

**Repair Stable – Rehabilitate the interior support structure and exterior (roof and sides)** – This alternative was eliminated from further consideration because neither the refuge nor the Region have identified a need or use for the structure. It would also not comply with the direction received from OMB to decrease our real property inventory by 5 percent. Further, it would not be appropriate to dedicate several hundred thousand dollars to repair a building that has deteriorated to a point where it is not reasonably, feasible, or fiscally responsible to rehabilitate and retain the structure. If additional building space was needed, it would be less expensive to remove the Stable and build a new structure designed to meet specific refuge or Regional operational needs.

**Repair Roof of Stable with Private Funds** – Private funds would be used to remove asphalt shingles, repair all rotten wood and holes, and replace roof with metal, thus allowing the Stable to serve as a large artificial nest structure for barn swallows. This alternative was eliminated from further consideration because the structure would remain excess to refuge and Regional needs and, therefore, would not meet Service guidelines for excess property management, would not be removed from the inventory, and would not meet the OMB directive for the reduction of real property by 5 percent by 2020.

**Affected Environment:**

The Fort River Division of the Conte Refuge is located in Hadley, Massachusetts (Figure 3). Identified as one of the 65 Special Focus Areas (SFA) in the 1995 Conte Refuge Final EIS because of its extensive grassland complex, it is now known as the refuge's Fort River Division. In the Final CCP and EIS that was released in December 2016, the Division is proposed to be 2,274 acres, with 908 acres already protected. About 614 acres have been protected as open space by others or enrolled in farmland protection programs, which requires no further conservation action by the Service. The Service administers the other 294 conserved acres that are presently within the larger proposed conservation focus area.

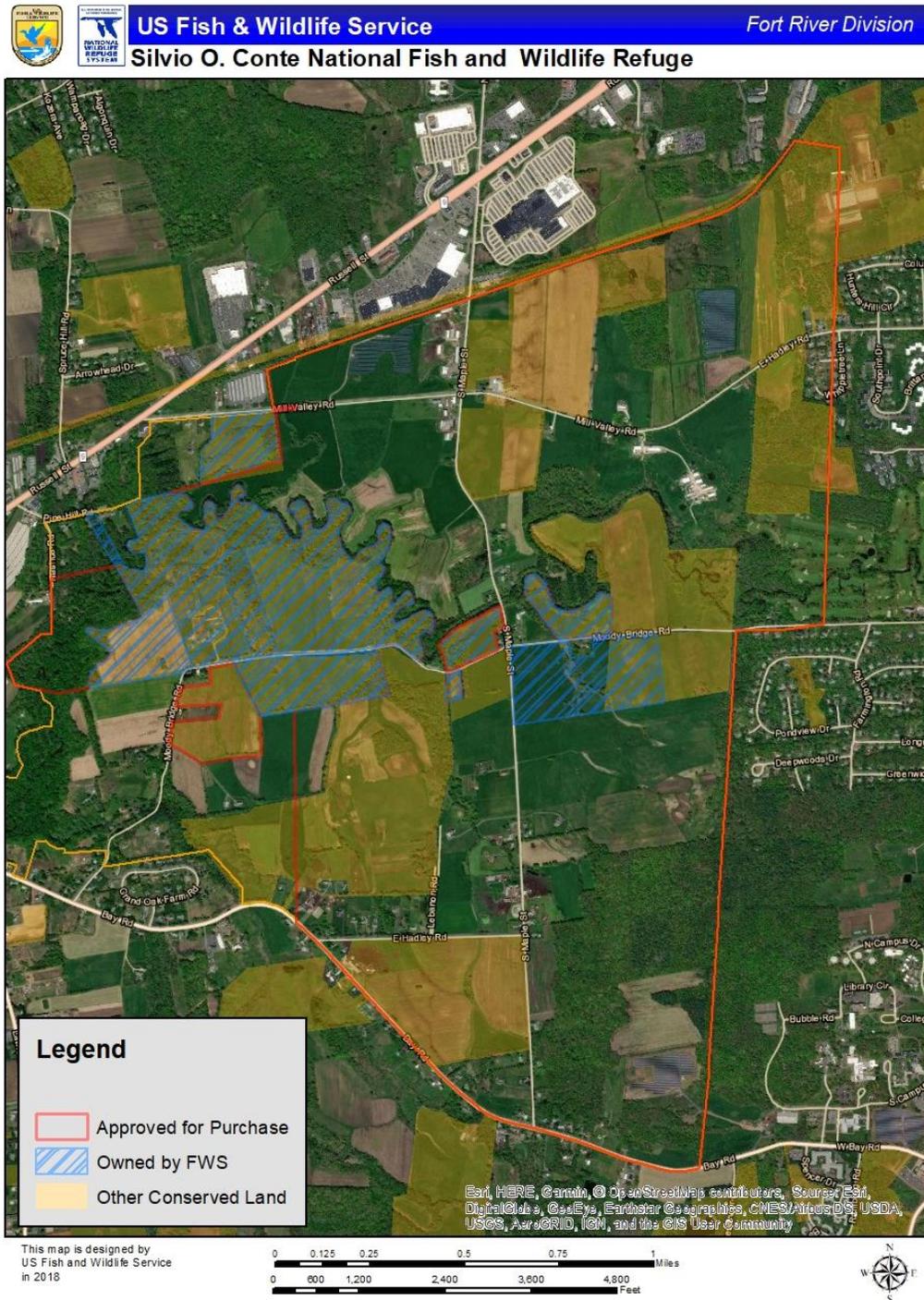
**Natural Resources**

The Fort River, located in the eastern portion of the Pioneer Valley, drains a 35,830-acre watershed. It is the longest free-flowing tributary to the Connecticut River in Massachusetts. The area lies on a valley plateau within a circle of hills. The north-south spine of hills running through the middle of the town of Amherst are glacial drumlins that became the islands of ancient Lake Hitchcock that formed as glaciers receded. The area has a number of distinct geologic features including Rattlesnake Knob, Mount Norwottuck, and trap rock formations of the former volcanic summit. The Fort River Division is generally bounded by Bay Road and the Holyoke Range on the south, Route 47 on the west, the Norwottuck bicycle path on the north, and the Amherst town line on the East (Figure 4).

The area contains about 15 percent agricultural lands, including large farm fields, many with a high clay content that is undesirable for some higher value crops. Most farms are in Hadley and Amherst and typically produce corn or hay silage, or are used for pasture. Approximately 2 percent of the area's 5,473 farmland acres is protected through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Agricultural Preservation Restriction program. About 65 percent of the watershed is forested, and 20 percent is in urban and other land use (TPL 2006).

Soils are mostly glacial tills of various types in the higher elevations in the east, whereas soils in the western portion of the watershed are finer, containing more organic sediments that are more suitable for agriculture. Soils in the northern portion of the watershed (Amherst) are generally sandy and loamy, including the Gloucester-Montauk-Paxton association, Hinkley-Merrimac-Windsor association, and Amostown-Scitico-Boxford association. Soils (Amostown association) in the area west of Route 116 in North Amherst have been put almost entirely into farming use, and the Mount Holyoke area also maintains more rock laden soils within the Rock Outcrop-Narragansett-Holyoke association.

Figure 4. Fort River Division and Other Conserved Land



The Fort River and its tributaries help define South Amherst with its rich farmland and extensive wetlands. The river ranks high in freshwater mussel diversity, including the federally endangered dwarf wedge mussel that was historically found there. The river also holds a naturally reproducing population of brook trout in headwater streams. Lawrence Swamp, located in the southeastern portion of the watershed, is an area rich in biodiversity. The upstream river has been heavily impacted by development in the town of Amherst, but in Hadley, where there is less development, the river has a narrow line of floodplain forest.

The Division has a variety of habitat types, including hardwood forest (22 percent), hardwood swamp (5 percent), shrub swamp and floodplain forest (12 percent), pasture and grasslands (58 percent), and developed (3 percent). In the early 2000s, the owners of several of the parcels began planning housing subdivisions on their fields, so the refuge stepped up its land acquisition efforts. The Division land on Moody Bridge Road, Mill Valley Road, and South Maple Streets in Hadley, Massachusetts, is managed for grassland birds such as bobolinks, savannah sparrows, and potentially grasshopper sparrows and upland sandpipers. It is also managed for floodplain forests and their associated wildlife including tree swallows, warbling vireos, and red-bellied woodpeckers. As a mosaic of grasslands, it provides important foraging habitat for a suite of aerial insectivores.

Wildlife management activities at the Division include mowing fields after August 15 and prior to September 30 annually to retain grass-dominated habitat following the initial nesting period. These fields provide habitat for bobolinks, savannah sparrows, and potentially grasshopper sparrows and upland sandpipers. Upland sandpipers nested here in the 1980s but were not seen again until recently in late summer, outside the breeding season. Invasive plants are impacting priority habitats including the floodplain forests of the Fort River.

Fields in the general vicinity of the Division are often planted in corn for silage or cool season grasses to produce hay. Northern harriers hunt these fields during spring and fall migration. Red-tailed hawks and great horned owls nest in the area. Shorter grass areas in pastures provide nesting habitat for killdeer and Wilson's snipe. Large flocks of Horned larks (50 birds or more) are common in the winter, often with a few Lapland longspurs and snow buntings. American woodcock, turkeys, and brown thrashers nest in the woods along the Fort River.

Eastern bluebirds, Eastern kingbirds, barn swallows, and tree swallows are common breeders here. Also occurring are the sedge wren, wood turtle, marbled salamander, and spring salamander, all of which are State species of concern. The southern Mount Holyoke area of the watershed is a popular site of yearly hawk migrations, with thousands of birds making their way to southerly wintering grounds. More specifically, the Stable has provided nesting sites for barn swallows for a few months out of the year; an estimated 35 pairs nested in the Stable in 2018.

### **Refuge Public Uses**

The Fort River Division of the refuge currently allows hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation. Problem activities include trash dumping, driving vehicles in the fields, and illegal spotlighting of deer. The refuge completed a 1.1-mile-long universally accessible trail on the Division, which is growing in popularity as more

people become aware of the opportunity. It is a popular site for hosting many conservation events, tours, special programs, and receives over 30,000 visits annually.

### **Cultural Resources and Historic Preservation**

Three Native American archaeological sites occur within (or partially within) the Fort River Division. Information about these sites does not indicate the time period(s) of their occupation. The Massachusetts State site files indicate that 13 Native American sites are known within a 1-mile radius of the division, providing evidence of settlement that occurred during the Middle and Late Archaic periods (7,500 to 3,000 years before present) and the Late Woodland period (1,000 to 450 years before present).

Sensitivity for Native American sites ranges from high to low depending on the location within the unit, with well-drained areas at greater elevations having higher sensitivity. Sensitivity for Euro-American sites is considered high where documentary evidence suggests historic land use, moderate near the roadway, and low throughout the poorly drained wetland areas of the Division.

### **Socio-economic Resources**

In 2010, Massachusetts was the 14th most populous State and Hampshire County had an estimated 158,080 residents. This represents 2.4 percent of the population in Massachusetts, occupying about 7 percent of the land area in the State (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Hadley is located near the urban areas of Springfield, Massachusetts (30 minutes away) and Hartford, Connecticut (one hour away). One goal of the refuge is to provide more public access and connect people with nature.

Based on 2010 U.S. Census Bureau data, the total population of Hadley is about 5,250 residents. Hadley contains 24.73 square miles. Hadley is located in the vicinity of five colleges and universities: Amherst College, Hampshire College, Smith College, Mount Holyoke College, and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. During the school year, the population of the town of Amherst increases by about 30,000 with the influx of undergraduate students.

Hampshire County employment is predominantly in retail trade; health care and social assistance; construction; accommodation and food services; and professional, scientific, and technical services. A total of 56 percent of the county's population (16 years and over) is employed. The estimated median household income for Hampshire County is \$59,505 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010-b). The unemployment rate in Hampshire County in May 2012 was 4.6 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012).

### **Environmental Consequences of the Action:**

This section analyzes the environmental consequences of the proposed action on each affected resource, including direct and indirect effects. This EA includes the written analyses of the environmental consequences on a resource only when the impacts on that resource could be more than negligible and therefore considered an "affected resource" or are otherwise considered important as related to the proposed action. Any resources that will not be more than negligibly impacted by the action and have been identified as not otherwise important as related to the proposed action have been dismissed from further analyses.

Tables 1 through 5 provide a brief description of the affected resources in the proposed action area and anticipated impacts of the proposed action and any alternatives on those resources, including direct and indirect effects. Table 6 provides a brief description of the anticipated cumulative impacts of the proposed action and any alternatives.

**TABLE 1. AFFECTED NATURAL RESOURCES AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ANY ALTERNATIVES**

<b>NATURAL RESOURCES</b>	
<b>AFFECTED RESOURCE</b>	<b>ANTICIPATED DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS</b>
<p><b>Wildlife and Aquatic Species</b></p> <p>Grassland nesting species and aerial insectivores (birds and bats) have experienced population declines in recent decades.</p> <p>The 22,500-square-foot Stable building that has been proposed for demolition is used by approximately 35 pairs of barn swallows on a seasonal basis for nesting. It has been reported to be one of the largest colonies in Massachusetts. While barn swallows are a migratory bird, they have no Federal or State (MA) designation for priority consideration.</p>	<p><b>Alternative A:</b> This alternative will not impact grassland nesting species or aerial insectivores as it will not impact the suitability of adjacent expansive grassland habitat that these species use for nesting or foraging. A fire break will be maintained around refuge infrastructure so most of the footprint of the building will be reclaimed in grass and maintained as lawn.</p> <p>This alternative will impact the local colony of barn swallows that nest in the Stable. Impacts are expected to be localized, small in scale, and not affect the entire barn swallow population. This alternative will minimize direct impacts to the Fort River colony by phasing the closure of the Stable and delaying the removal of the building for two nesting seasons.</p> <p>As proposed, the western one-third of the Stable will be made inaccessible (unavailable) for nesting barn swallows prior to the 2019 nesting season, the middle one-third of the building will also be made inaccessible prior to the 2020 nesting season, and the entire structure will be removed through demolition after the 2020 nesting season. The direct impact of excluding portions of the Stable in 2019 and 2020 to barn swallows will be to reduce potential nesting locations in the building, causing barn swallows to nest elsewhere. The impacts to barn swallows from excluding portions of the Stable would be minimal for the 2019 and 2020 nesting seasons because barn swallows could nest in the remaining open portions of the Stable or on other sites at the refuge or in the surrounding area.</p> <p>The Stable would be removed prior to the 2021 nesting</p>

	<p>seasons and not available for barn swallows. Barn swallows returning to Fort River in 2021 could negatively be impacted if suitable nesting sites were limited on the refuge or in the surrounding area. The phased closure could provide a portion of the colony the impetus to transition and relocate elsewhere within the remaining two-thirds of the building or perhaps occupy other suitable nesting sites in the area.</p> <p><b>Alternative B:</b> This alternative will not impact grassland nesting species or other aerial insectivores beyond the barn swallows that seasonally use the building. Barn swallows will not be negatively impacted until the building collapses and has to be removed as a matter of public safety and security considerations. It is unclear when this would happen. However, it would likely happen in a catastrophic manner and could occur during the nesting season. It will not impact the suitability of the adjacent expansive grassland habitat which is used as foraging areas by the insectivores and additionally as nesting habitat by grassland species.</p> <p><b>Alternative C:</b> This alternative will not impact grassland nesting species due to the need to maintain a fire break adjacent to refuge infrastructure. It will not impact the suitability of the adjacent expansive grassland habitat which is used as foraging areas by the insectivores and additionally as nesting habitat by grassland species. Other than the direct impacts to the colony of barn swallows that seasonally use the dilapidated building, population level impacts to barn swallows and other aerial insectivores and grassland species will be negligible.</p> <p>Under this alternative the Stable would be demolished and removed after the 2019 nesting season. Barn swallows returning to Fort River in 2020 could negatively be impacted if suitable nesting sites were limited on the refuge or in the surrounding area.</p>
<p><b>Federal Threatened and Endangered Species and Other Special Status Species</b></p>	<p><b>Alternative A:</b> There would be no impact to threatened and endangered species as there are no threatened and endangered species near the Stable.</p> <p><b>Alternative B:</b> If the structure is allowed to continue to deteriorate and collapse in place, it could damage and compromise the integrity of our primary equipment storage building (former indoor riding arena) that is located only 15 feet to the north. The equipment stored in this building is</p>

	<p>used to accomplish habitat management outcomes throughout the Conte Refuge, which is located in 22 places in 4 states. Under this alternative there is the potential for damage to the arena building and the equipment stored in it. This could hamper and perhaps diminish our ability to achieve desired threatened and endangered species outcomes throughout the watershed.</p> <p><b>Alternative C:</b> There would be no impact to threatened and endangered species as there are no threatened and endangered species near the Stable.</p>
<p><b>Vegetation (including vegetation of special management concern)</b></p>	<p><b>Alternative A:</b> The potential impacts would be negligible. Once the structure is completely removed, about 30 feet by 156 feet of the building footprint would be restored to grass and maintained as lawn, serving as a potential firebreak along the south end of the 80-foot by 200-foot arena building. The remaining 45 feet by 156 feet could be planted with native shrubs to benefit shrub land nesting species.</p> <p><b>Alternative B:</b> If the structure is allowed to continue to deteriorate and collapse in place, it could damage and compromise the integrity of our primary equipment storage building (former indoor riding arena) that is located only 15 feet to the north. The equipment stored in this building is used to accomplish habitat management outcomes throughout the Conte Refuge, which is located in 22 places in four states. Under this alternative there is the potential for damage to the arena building and the equipment stored in it. This could hamper and perhaps diminish our ability to achieve desired habitat outcomes throughout the watershed.</p> <p><b>Alternative C:</b> The potential impacts would be negligible. About 30 feet by 156 feet of the building footprint would be restored to grass and maintained as lawn, serving as a potential firebreak along the south end of the 80-foot by 200-foot arena building. The remaining 45 feet by 156 feet could be planted with native shrubs to benefit shrub land nesting species.</p>
<p><b>Geology and Soils</b></p>	<p><b>Alternative A:</b> No impact.</p> <p><b>Alternative B:</b> No impact.</p> <p><b>Alternative C:</b> No impact.</p>

<b>Air Quality</b>	<b>Alternative A:</b> No impact. <b>Alternative B:</b> No impact. <b>Alternative C:</b> No impact.
<b>Water Resources</b>	<b>Alternative A:</b> No impact. <b>Alternative B:</b> No impact. <b>Alternative C:</b> No impact.
<b>Wetlands</b>	<b>Alternative A:</b> No impact. <b>Alternative B:</b> No impact. <b>Alternative C:</b> No impact.
<b>Floodplains</b>	<b>Alternative A:</b> No impact. <b>Alternative B:</b> No impact. <b>Alternative C:</b> No impact.

**TABLE 2. AFFECTED VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ANY ALTERNATIVES**

VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE	
AFFECTED RESOURCE	ANTICIPATED DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS
<p>National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Priority public uses: Hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and interpretation, photography, hiking, and environmental education.</p>	<p><b>Alternative A:</b> As a matter of public safety and security considerations, the public is not allowed in and around the building complex. There would be no impact to hunting, fishing, or hiking. Hunting is not allowed in this area due to the high level of visitation and there are no opportunities to fish in the vicinity of the area impacted by this alternative. Wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education could be minimally impacted by the phased closure of portions of the Stable, and its eventual removal in 2020, if a large portion of the barn swallow colony finds other nesting locations off the refuge. The number of barn swallow feeding in the surrounding fields and visible to visitors could be reduced.</p> <p><b>Alternative B:</b> As a matter of public safety and security considerations, the public is not allowed in and around the building complex. For the same aforementioned reasons, this alternative does not impact hunting, fishing or hiking opportunities. Wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education would not be impacted under this alternative until the building collapses and is removed. At that time, there could be minimal impacts to these activities if a large portion of the barn swallow colony finds other nesting locations off the refuge. The number of barn swallow feeding in the surrounding fields and visible to visitors could be reduced.</p> <p><b>Alternative C:</b> As a matter of public safety and security considerations, the public is not allowed in and around the building complex. For the same aforementioned reasons, this alternative does not impact hunting, fishing or hiking opportunities. Wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education could be minimally impacted if a large portion of the barn swallow colony finds other nesting locations off the refuge when the Stable is removed. The number of barn swallow feeding in the surrounding fields and visible to visitors could be reduced.</p>

**TABLE 3. AFFECTED CULTURAL RESOURCES AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ANY ALTERNATIVES**

<b>CULTURAL RESOURCES</b>	
<b>AFFECTED RESOURCE</b>	<b>ANTICIPATED DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS</b>
Section 106 Compliance	The structure is less than 50 years of age and has not retained connection to either significant persons or events. Therefore, it does not meet the criteria of eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Demolition of this structure poses no potential effect to historic properties.

**TABLE 4. AFFECTED REFUGE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ANY ALTERNATIVES**

<b>REFUGE MANAGEMENT &amp; OPERATIONS</b>	
<b>AFFECTED RESOURCE</b>	<b>ANTICIPATED DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS</b>
<b>Land Use:</b>	<p><b>Alternative A:</b> Due to the small size of the footprint of the Stable, this alternative would only result in a minimal favorable impact in land use beginning in 2020-2021. Approximately 30 feet by 156 feet of the building’s footprint would be restored to grass and maintained as lawn, serving as a potential firebreak along the south end of the 80-foot by 200-foot arena building. The remaining 45 feet by 156 feet could be planted with native shrubs to benefit shrub land nesting species.</p> <p><b>Alternative B:</b> No impact due to the absence of any change in the footprint of the Stable building while it is still present.</p> <p><b>Alternative C:</b> Due to the small size of the footprint of the Stable, this alternative would only result in a minimal favorable impact in land use beginning in 2019-2020. Approximately 30 feet by 156 feet of the building’s footprint would be restored to grass and maintained as lawn, serving as a potential firebreak along the south end of the 80-foot by 200-foot arena building. The remaining 45 feet by 156 feet could be planted with native shrubs to benefit shrub land nesting species.</p>

<p><b>Administration</b></p>	<p><b>Alternative A:</b> The total cost to close portions of the Stable prior to the 2019 and 2020 nesting seasons is estimated to be \$1,500 in materials and staff time. Removal of the Stable and restoration of the site could require about 3 weeks of time to complete. Total costs for the project are estimated to be \$55,348 and include disposal fees, equipment rental fees, salary, and contingencies (10 percent). The salvage and repurposing of the materials, use of Service-owned equipment, and collaboration with partners could reduce the cost of demolition as well as costs associated with the disposal of the material. The building’s contribution toward OMB’s real property (buildings) reduction target for the Service would be realized after the conclusion of the 2020 nesting season.</p> <p><b>Alternative B:</b> There is no cost to the Service to leave the Stable standing as it would not be maintained. However, the safety and security issues of the dilapidated building would remain. There would be no contribution toward OMB’s real property reduction target for the Service. Removal of the Stable and restoration of the site could require about 3 weeks of time or more to complete due to site conditions attributed to the collapse of the structure. As a collapsed structure, the ability to salvage and repurpose material would be diminished due to safety concerns and the general complexity of site conditions. When compared to the estimated cost (\$55,346) of a planned demolition, the total cost would likely be higher. The contribution toward OMB’s directives for the Service would not likely be realized by the 2020 deadline.</p> <p><b>Alternative C:</b> Removal of the Stable and restoration of the site could require about 3 weeks of time to complete. Total costs for the project are estimated to be \$55,348 and include disposal fees, equipment rental fees, salary, and contingencies. The salvage and repurposing of the materials, use of Service-owned equipment, and collaboration with partners could reduce the cost of demolition as well as costs associated with the disposal of the material. The building’s contribution towards OMB’s real property reduction target for the Service would be realized after the conclusion of the 2019 nesting season.</p>
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**TABLE 5. AFFECTED SOCIOECONOMICS AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ANY ALTERNATIVES**

SOCIOECONOMICS	
AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT	ANTICIPATED DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS
	<p><b>Alternative A:</b> Due to public safety and a range of security considerations, the public will not be allowed in and around the building complex. This alternative is not anticipated to impact the local economy because the Stable is not a destination for public visitation.</p> <p><b>Alternative B:</b> Due to public safety and a range of security considerations, the public will not be allowed in and around the building complex. For the same aforementioned reason, this alternative is not anticipated to impact the local economy because the Stable is not a destination for public visitation.</p> <p><b>Alternative C:</b> Due to public safety and a range of security considerations, the public will not be allowed in and around the building complex. For the same aforementioned reason, this alternative is not anticipated to impact the local economy because the Stable is not a destination for public visitation.</p>

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE	ANTICIPATED DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS
<p>Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, requires all Federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their missions by identifying and addressing disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs and policies on minorities and low-income populations and communities.</p>	<p>Minority or low income communities will not be disproportionately affected by any impacts from this proposed action or any of the alternatives.</p>

**Cumulative Impact Analysis:**

Cumulative impacts are defined as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions” (40 CFR 1508.7).

**TABLE 6. ANTICIPATED CUMULATIVE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ANY ALTERNATIVES**

Other Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Activity Impacting Affected Environment	DESCRIPTIONS OF ANTICIPATED CUMULATIVE IMPACTS
<p>Wildlife-dependent recreation</p>	<p><b>Alternative A:</b> Wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education could be minimally impacted by the phased closure of portions of the Stable, and its eventual removal in 2020, if a large portion of the barn swallow colony finds other nesting locations off the refuge. The number of barn swallow feeding in the surrounding fields and visible to visitors could be reduced.</p> <p><b>Alternative B:</b> Wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education would not be impacted under this alternative until the building collapses and is removed. At that time, there could be minimal impacts</p>

	<p>to these activities if a large portion of the barn swallow colony finds other nesting locations off the refuge. The number of barn swallow feeding in the surrounding fields and visible to visitors could be reduced.</p> <p><b>Alternative C:</b> Wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education could be minimally impacted if a large portion of the barn swallow colony finds other nesting locations off the refuge when the Stable is removed. The number of barn swallow feeding in the surrounding fields and visible to visitors could be reduced.</p>
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**Mitigation Measures and Conditions:**

No mitigation is required to remove the Stable; barn swallows are not a State or Federal listed species and all activities associated with the closure and removal of the building would occur outside the nesting season.

The phased closure and delayed demolition of the Stable will allow time for the barn swallows to nest in other portions of the Stable or in other sites on the refuge or in the surrounding area.

In addition, the proposed removal of the Stable at the conclusion of the 2020 nesting season could provide “seasoned” material to construct alternate nest structures elsewhere within the landscape on partner and private land. These structures could emulate the desirable features of the Stable.

**Monitoring**

As a separate management activity, the nests in the Stable have been counted and the locations documented and mapped using a 24-inch by 24-inch grid for the entire ground floor (11,250 square feet) of the Stable. Based on the reported barn swallow use during the 2018 nesting season, a little over half of the nests present were used. Data collected on the barn swallow nesting colony in the Stable may one day be used to inform future efforts by public and private partners to enhance aerial insectivore nesting habitat on the refuge or on surrounding public and private lands.

**Summary of Analysis:**

**Alternative A – Phased Closure of Stable and Delayed Demolition (Proposed Action)**

Close off the western third of the Stable prior to the 2019 nesting season making it inaccessible to barn swallows for nesting. Prior to the 2020 nesting season, close off the middle third of the building to barn swallows, leaving only the eastern third of the building open to barn swallows. Following the conclusion of the 2020 nesting season, the entire building would be demolished and removed. Employing a phased approach would allow barn swallows two nesting seasons to relocate to alternate sites. This alternative allows the Service to comply with OMB’s directive to reduce the amount of real property by removing buildings that are not needed for operations.

The phased closure and eventual demolition of the Stable would not occur during the nesting season and would not directly impact nesting barn swallows given the availability of other suitable nesting locations

**Alternative B – Allow Stable to Deteriorate (No Action)**

Selection of this alternative would not address the directive the Service received from OMB to reduce the structural footprint of real property by 5 percent. Further, the Service would be retaining a large structure that is excess and excessive to our operational needs that also presents a safety and security issue. The Stable is not needed for storage or any other operational use. Retaining a decaying 22,500-square-foot structure for 35 pairs (+/-) of nesting of barn swallows for seasonal use is not a prudent use of limited public resources. Barn swallows are not listed as threatened or endangered by the Federal Government or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

While the “no action” alternative would allow barn swallows to continue using the Stable for an undetermined period of time, it would not achieve the benefits expected under Alternative A. Barn swallows would continue to nest in the Stable until it collapses. The failure would likely occur in the western third of the structure, followed by a portion of the eastern third. This anticipated and impending outcome could occur at any time, even during the nesting season.

**Alternative C – Remove Stable**

Selection of this alternative would allow the Service to comply with the OMB directive to reduce the structural footprint of real property. Further, the Service would be eliminating a large structure that is excess and excessive to our operational needs. The Stable is not needed for storage or any other operational use. Retaining a decaying 22,500-square-foot structure for 35 pairs (+/-) of nesting of barn swallows for seasonal use is not a prudent use of limited public resources. Barn swallows are not listed as threatened or endangered by the Federal Government or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. If this alternative were selected, the Stable would be demolished after the 2019 nesting season.

**List of Sources, Agencies and Persons Consulted:**

Dr. Randy Dettmers, Division of Migratory Birds, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Northeast Regional Office

Amy Wood, Regional Historic Preservation Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Northeast Regional Office

**List of Preparers:**

**Prepared By**

Andrew C. French, Project Leader, Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

**Review and Editing**

Graham Taylor, Field Supervisor, National Wildlife Refuge System, Northeast Region  
Dean Rhine, Deputy Project Leader, Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

**Coordination**

Discussions related to the proposed Federal action were held with representatives from the agencies and organizations listed below. It is not an indication of their position in any way. Should they choose to do so, they may provide input during the 30-day public review and comment period for this environmental assessment.

Dr. Andrew Vitz, State Ornithologist, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife  
Dr. David King, Research Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Forest Service Northern Research Station  
Dr. Randy Dettmers, Senior Migratory Bird Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Dr. Jonathan L. Atwood, Director of Bird Conservation, Massachusetts Audubon  
Joan Walsh, Gerard Bertrand, Chair of Field Ornithology and Natural History, Massachusetts Audubon  
Patrick Comins, Executive Director, Connecticut Audubon

**Public Outreach:**

On August 16, 2018, a public informational meeting was hosted by the refuge in the Regional Office from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. which served as a forum to share information, ideas, answer questions, and continue the dialogue concerning a path forward that is structurally, financially, and biologically resilient.

In an effort to generate discussion, some potential ideas for possible alternatives were initially proposed and shared at the August 16 meeting, and they were also posted on the Conte Refuge website.

A small meeting, with several individuals opposed to the removal of the stable, was hosted by Jon Niedzielski, Regional Manager for Congressman McGovern, in the Northampton Office on September 7 to facilitate dialogue and share information about the Stable in an effort to bring the offices of the Massachusetts Congressman and both Senators up to date.

In addition to incoming letters and e-mail messages and quite a lot of dialogue within social media circles, the following is a list of coverage that appeared in the news media. The list is not necessarily all-inclusive; it is intended to demonstrate the frequency and duration of the coverage related to the proposed federal action to remove the Stable building.

**List of Articles**

Daily Hampshire Gazette  
July 21, 2018  
Bird haven at crossroads  
Scott Merzbach

Daily Hampshire Gazette  
August 9, 2018  
With barn swallows in mind, Conte Refuge officials issue call for habitat preservation ideas  
Scott Merzbach

Daily Hampshire Gazette  
August 31, 2018  
Barn at Conte Refuge housing birds in danger  
Scott Merzbach

Daily Hampshire Gazette  
September 14, 2018  
Barn work in Hadley continuing despite concerns for birds  
Scott Merzbach

New England Public Radio  
September 24, 2018  
Bird Lovers Concerned About Risk to an Old Home for Barn Swallows

Daily Hampshire Gazette  
September 28, 2018  
Bird advocates meet with fed on fate of Hadley barn swallows

**Letters to the Editor**

Daily Hampshire Gazette

Letter to the Editor

August 8, 2018

Urging community action on barn swallow habitat

Stephanie Chapko

Daily Hampshire Gazette

Letter to the Editor

September 11, 2018

Protect the barn swallow (Sheri Roseblum)

Daily Hampshire Gazette

Letter to the Editor

September 17, 2018

Barn swallow and broken trust

Nancy Goodman

Daily Hampshire Gazette

Letter to the Editor

September 18, 2018

Let the swallow barn stand

Stuart Harris

**Appendix A. Other Applicable Statutes, Executive Orders and Regulations**

<b>STATUTES, EXECUTIVE ORDERS, AND REGULATIONS</b>	
<p><b>Cultural Resources</b> National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 470-470x-6; 36 CFR Parts 60, 63, 78, 79, 800, 801, and 810</p>	<p>The structure is less than 50 years of age and has not retained connection to either significant persons or events. Therefore, it does not meet the criteria of eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Demolition of this structure poses no potential effect to historic properties.</p>
<p><b>Fish &amp; Wildlife</b> Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 1531-1544; 36 CFR Part 13; 50 CFR Parts 10, 17, 23, 81, 217, 222, 225, 402, and 450</p>	<p><b>Endangered Species Act of 1973</b> There are no endangered or threatened species using the stable build, therefore, there will be no impacts as a result of the proposed demolition of the structure.</p>
<p><b>Migratory Bird Treaty Act</b>, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 703-712; 50 CFR Parts 10, 12, 20, and 21</p>	<p><b>Migratory Bird Treaty Act</b> In the United States, Barn Swallows are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C. 703-712; 50 CFR Parts 10, 12, 20, and 21), which prohibits pursuing, hunting, taking, capturing, killing, or possessing migratory birds without a permit. Barn Swallows currently do not receive other special protection or recognition by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) at the Federal level – they are not recognized as an endangered or threatened species under the Endangered Species Act and they are not included in the USFWS’s current list of Birds of Conservation Concern (USFWS 2008).</p>
<p><b>Executive Order 13186 –</b> Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds, 66 Fed. Reg. 3853 (2001)</p>	<p><b>Executive Order 13186</b> The Proposed Action is also consistent with Executive Order 13186 (Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds, 66 Fed. Reg. 3853-2001), which directs Federal departments and agencies to take certain actions to further implement the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). These actions include supporting the conservation intent of the MBTA; restoring and enhancing the habitat of migratory birds; designing migratory bird habitat and population conservation principles, measures, and practices, into agency plans and planning processes; minimizing the intentional take of species of concern; promoting research and information exchange related to the conservation of migratory birds; and recognizing and promoting economic and recreational values of birds.</p>