

APPENDIX H: LAND PROTECTION PLAN FOR THE TEXAS CHENIER PLAIN REFUGE COMPLEX EXPANSION

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Texas Chenier Plain NWR Complex currently includes over 105,000 acres of public land managed and administered by the USFWS as native wildlife habitat. The Complex includes four separate refuges including: Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), McFaddin NWR, Texas Point NWR and Moody NWR. The Complex and the proposed acquisition area occupy low lying coastal prairies, near coastal woodlots, and coastal wetlands between Trinity Bay to the west and the Sabine River on the east. Chambers, Jefferson and Galveston Counties have jurisdiction over portions of the Complex or proposed acquisition areas. A quick summary for each refuge is shown below in Table H-1.

- Moody NWR is located along East Galveston Bay in south-central Chambers County. The town of Smith Point is approximately 5 miles west of this Refuge. The USFWS holds a perpetual, non-development conservation easement on the Moody NWR, which is otherwise entirely privately-owned and managed.
- Anahuac NWR is located on the north shore of East Galveston Bay. Almost all of the Refuge lies within Chambers County, with a small portion lying south of the GIWW in Galveston County. The Refuge is bounded by Robinson Bayou on the west, State Highway 124 on the east, several private farms and ranches and F.M. Road 1985 on the north, and East Bay and the GIWW on the south. Refuge Complex and Anahuac NWR staffs are headquartered in the city of Anahuac, located 18 miles northwest of the Refuge.
- McFaddin and Texas Point NWRs are located on the southeastern tip of the Upper Texas Coast, adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico. All of Texas Point NWR and most of McFaddin NWR are located in Jefferson County. Texas Point and McFaddin NWRs are bounded on the south by the Gulf of Mexico, and the refuges contain approximately 6 and 15 miles of Gulf shoreline, respectively. The GIWW dissects McFaddin NWR and divides once contiguous watersheds into two distinct units. Texas Point NWR is adjacent to the town of Sabine Pass, and McFaddin NWR lies 12 miles further west. The town of High Island is located along the Gulf near the McFaddin NWR's western boundary. Office facilities for the staffs of the McFaddin and Texas Point NWRs and some Refuge Complex staff (Fire Management) are located on the McFaddin NWR.

Table H-1.
National Wildlife Refuges within the Texas Chenier Plain Complex

Refuge	Acreage	Date of Establishment	Ownership
Anahuac	34,339	1963	Fee Title
McFaddin	58,861	1980	Fee Title and Conservation Easements
Texas Point	8,952	1979	Fee Title
Moody	3,516	1961	Conservation Easement

II. THREAT TO AND STATUS OF RESOURCE TO BE PROTECTED

The coastal marshes, prairies and woodlots of the Chenier Plain region of southwestern Louisiana and southeast Texas comprise a hemispherically important biological area. The Texas Gulf Coast is the primary site for ducks wintering in the Central Flyway, with an average of 1.3-4.5 million birds, or 30-71% of the total flyway population (Stutzenbaker and Weller 1989). This area also winters 90% of the snow, Canada, and greater white-fronted geese in the Central Flyway (Buller 1964). Additionally, the coastal marshes, prairies and prairie wetlands of the Chenier Plain region of the Texas Gulf Coast serve as a critical staging area for Central Flyway waterfowl migrating to and from Mexico and Central and South America. Hundreds of thousands shorebirds, wading birds, and other marsh and waterbirds also winter or migrate through the region, including several now identified by the USFWS as avian Species of Conservation Concern. Coastal prairie and coastal woodlots support over 150 migratory and resident landbird species, including 9 species of grassland birds and 7 species utilizing woodland habitats listed as Rare and Declining within the Coastal Prairies Region of Texas (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department 2000). Overall, wetland, prairie and woodland habitats on the Refuge Complex provide habitat for 33 avian Species of Conservation Concern in the Gulf Prairies Bird Conservation Region (under the North American Bird Conservation Initiative).

The "Wetland Preservation Program, Category 8 – Texas Gulf Coast" was a joint effort between Federal, State, and Private participants to identify high-value wintering waterfowl habitat along the Texas coast that required little or no additional development. The USFWS had ranked the Texas Gulf coast as Number 8 out of 33 categories on a national priority scale based on its importance to the Nation's waterfowl resource. Further, the USFWS had ranked the Texas Gulf coast Number 4 as a national "Important Resource Problem (IRP) area. In early 1977, a group of conservationists representing Ducks Unlimited, sportsmen, businessmen, Texas General Land Office, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the USFWS delineated 25 key areas of habitat along the Texas Gulf coast having high value to the waterfowl resource. These 25 areas were ranked by a team of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas General Land Office, and USFWS personnel; and, acquisition of the private lands was recommended for the top 20 areas as being necessary for habitat preservation. This plan and report was "updated" in August of 1981. Within the Chenier Plain region of the upper Texas Gulf coast, the "Category 8 Plan" identified the following five high-value wintering waterfowl habitats: (#1) Oyster Bayou Marsh, (#4) Lake Surprise area, (#5) McFaddin Marsh, (#7) Sea Rim Marsh, and (#10) Robinson Bayou Marsh. (The numbers indicate that area's "Preservation Effort Priority" ranking). All of these five high-value wintering waterfowl habitats are included in this expansion alternative.

The Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-645) was enacted by the United States Congress to: "Promote the conservation of migratory waterfowl and to offset or prevent the serious loss of wetlands by the acquisition of wetlands and other essential habitat, and for other purposes". In compliance with this Act, the USFWS has prepared the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan. The National Plan provides the framework, criteria, and guidance for identifying wetlands warranting priority attention for Federal and State acquisition. Its primary purpose is to help decision-makers focus their acquisition efforts on the more important, scarce, and vulnerable wetlands in the Nation. The National Plan requires each of the seven USFWS Regions to prepare Regional Wetlands Concept Plans that address the wetlands of each State within each Region.

The USFWS' Region 2 encompasses the States of Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. In 1990, Region 2 published its Regional Wetlands Concept Plan addressing the wetland issues of each State separately. The Regional Wetlands Concept Plan steps down the National Plan to the local, site-specific level and discusses the wetland functions, values, threats and other issues on a state by state basis. The Regional Plan contains a list of priority wetlands sites that have been evaluated through the wetlands assessment threshold criteria of the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan and qualify for acquisition under the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act. The wetlands in Texas were broadly grouped into six categories: 1) Gulf coast salt and freshwater marshes; 2) bottomland hardwood forests in the river valleys of East Texas; 3) playa lakes of the Panhandle region; 4) freshwater springs and their headwater streams of Central and Southwest Texas; 5) West Texas riparian areas; and 6) coastal pothole wetlands

of South Texas. Each group is addressed in terms of the following three criteria used for prioritization: 1) Wetland Loss, 2) Wetland Threats, and 3) Wetland Functions and Values. Within the Chenier Plain region of the upper Texas Gulf coast, the Regional Plan identified the following four areas as “Texas Priority Wetlands for Acquisition Consideration”: 1) Middleton Marsh, 2) Horseshoe Marsh, 3) Lower Marsh, and 4) Robison Bayou Marsh. Each of these four wetland sites meets all threshold criteria and qualifies for acquisition consideration under provisions of the National Wetlands Conservation Plan. All four of these wetlands sites are included in this expansion proposal.

The Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 also requires the USFWS to conduct wetland status and trend studies of the Nation’s wetlands at 10-year intervals and report the results to Congress. The latest report, published in December of 2000, is entitled; Status and Trends of Wetlands in the Conterminous United States 1986 to 1997. It reports that 98% of all losses recorded during its study were to freshwater wetlands. Freshwater emergent marshes and freshwater forested wetlands each lost an estimated 1,200,000 acres between 1986 and 1997. The net loss of all freshwater wetland types was 633,500 acres because the numeric losses of freshwater wetlands were partially offset by gains in freshwater shrub wetlands (1.1 million acres) and freshwater ponds (631 thousand acres). The long-term trends in freshwater wetlands since the 1950s, show that freshwater emergent wetlands have declined by the greatest percentage of all wetland types with nearly 24% lost (8 million acres) while freshwater forested wetlands have sustained the greatest overall loss in area (10.4 million acres).

The USFWS, in cooperation with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas General Land Office, reported on the status and trends of coastal Texas wetlands in accordance with the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act of 1990 (Title III of Public Law 101-646). Their report, published in 1997, analyzed data from a 12.8 million acre coastal Texas study area. Aerial photographs from the mid-1950s and early 1990s were analyzed to detect changes in wetlands, deepwater habitats, and uplands acreage. Palustrine (freshwater) emergent wetlands (fresh marsh, wet prairie, etc.) declined by about 29 percent, with an estimated net loss of 235,100 acres. This was the largest acreage change for any wetland category studied. Most of the palustrine emergent loss was to upland agriculture and other upland land uses (i.e. development).

The USFWS defined the various wetland types in Classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats of the United States (FWS/OBS-79/31, December, 1979). Further, the USFWS classified seven of these wetland types as “decreasing” in its Land Acquisition Priority System (LAPS). The “decreasing” wetland types are; 1) Palustrine Emergent, 2) Palustrine Forested, 3) Palustrine Scrub-Shrub, 4) Estuarine Intertidal Emergent, 5) Estuarine Intertidal Forested, 6) Estuarine Intertidal Scrub-Shrub, and 7) Marine Intertidal. Using National Wetlands Inventory data available at <http://nwi.fws.gov>, the USFWS’ Region 2 GIS Coordinator mapped the proposed acquisition areas identifying the wetland areas and the areas of aggregated decreasing wetland types. Using the seven aggregated decreasing wetland types, he developed summary tables which compare decreasing wetland types to non-decreasing wetland types and wetlands to uplands. A summary table is presented for the boundary expansion proposal.

Over 9 million acres of native tallgrass prairie once occurred along the western Gulf Coast in Texas and Louisiana (Smeins *et al.* 1991). Based on remnant stands of native grasslands, prairies on the upper Texas coast were characterized by little bluestem, brownseed paspalum, and Indiangrass or eastern gammagrass and switchgrass associations, depending on hydrology (Diamond and Smeins 1984). It is now estimated that 99.8% and 99.6% of little bluestem prairies and

	Acres	Percentage of Boundary Expansion
Boundary Expansion		
Alternative C	64,260	100%
Habitat Type (Upland or Wetland) of Alternative B Expansion		
Uplands	21,360	33%
Wetlands	42,900	67%
Declining Wetland Types	38,520	
Non-declining Wetland Types	4,380	

eastern gamma grass/switchgrass prairies, respectfully, have been lost in Texas (McFarland 1995). The little bluestem-brownseed paspalum community has been identified as a “threatened natural community” and the eastern gammagrass-switchgrass community has been identified as an “endangered natural community” by the Texas Organization for Endangered Species (Diamond *et al.* 1992). The Texas Organization for Endangered Species (TOES) defines “threatened natural community” as any series-level natural community vulnerable to extirpation in Texas, with six to twenty occurrences in Texas and 100 or fewer occurrences globally. TOES defines “endangered natural community” as any series-level natural community in immediate danger of extirpation in Texas, with five or fewer known occurrences in Texas and 100 or fewer occurrences globally. Both communities are assigned a Global conservation status rank of “Critically Imperiled” (G1) by The Nature Conservancy (2002).

Many animal species typical of northern prairies, such as Henslow’s Sparrows, Smooth Green Snakes, and Prairie Voles, were all found year-round in the Gulf coastal prairies. Dickcissels still nest in these coastal grasslands, and many other avian species utilize Gulf coastal prairies as wintering and/or migratory habitat. Many of the birds that would benefit from protection and management of native coastal prairie habitats under this Alternative are species that are declining in the Coastal Prairies Region of Texas (Shackelford and Lockwood 2000), and/or are among several species recently listed by the USFWS as “Avian Species of Conservation Concern” in the Gulf Prairies Bird Conservation Region (USFWS 2002). For example, Mottled Duck, White-tailed Hawk, Northern Bobwhite, Yellow and Black Rail, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Short-eared Owl, Sedge Wren, and LeConte’s Sparrow are all species of conservation concern that would benefit from conservation of prairie habitats.

The Mottled Duck is a southern species that spent its whole life cycle in coastal prairies and adjacent marshes. The historical prairie-wetland continuum of the upper Texas coast provided nesting cover and brood habitat in close proximity. In a study of Mottled Duck nesting in agricultural lands in Louisiana, the habitat category that was most like native coastal prairie, permanent pasture with knolls, provided better nesting habitat than any other (Durham and Afton 2003). The dense nesting cover and mima mounds that are characteristic of coastal prairie probably provided excellent nesting habitat for resident Mottled Ducks. Stutzenbaker (1988) identified shallow depressional wetlands found in the prairie zone, known as “sennabean ponds,” as valuable brood rearing habitat. Protecting extant coastal prairie and restoring adjacent prairie and wetland habitats will increase quality nesting habitat for Mottled Ducks on the upper Texas coast.

Statewide in Texas, the coastal prairie has seen the greatest industrial development since World War II (Schmidly 2002). Most of the original coastal prairie has been lost because of direct conversion to other cover types, i.e. improved pasture, cultivated rice and other crops, and industrial, urban or suburban development. Additionally, remaining areas have been altered through a number of factors, primarily changes in fire, herbivory, and hydrology. Native prairies managed as pastures face such threats as homogenized burn regimes, overgrazing, and application of broadleaf herbicides. All these management practices are thought to reduce the floristic diversity that exemplifies coastal prairies (Allain and Johnson 1997). The introduction of non-native plant species has also impacted native coastal prairies on the Gulf Coast, and invasive exotic species such as Chinese tallow pose a significant threat to remnant prairies.

The USFWS’ proposed boundary expansions of the Moody and Anahuac NWRs under this Alternative contain important coastal prairie habitats. The Nature Conservancy’s Gulf Coast Marshes and Prairies Ecoregional Conservation Plan identified the “Middleton Prairie” and “Robinson-Oyster Bayou” areas in Chambers County as important conservation areas because they contain remnants of both “Critically Imperiled” prairie plant communities (The Nature Conservancy 2002). Both areas contain an historical topographic feature called “mima mounds”. These mounds provide the topographic and hydrological variability believed responsible for much of the floristic diversity found in high quality coastal prairies (Grace *et al.* 2000).

III. PROPOSED ACTION AND OBJECTIVE

The purpose of implementing a refuge boundary expansion proposal is to help the USFWS achieve larger mandates provided by law and treaty that are related to the protection of migratory birds and other trust resources. Implementation of a boundary expansion proposal is expected to assist the USFWS meet its goals and objectives of the ecosystem plan for the Texas Gulf Coast. Although achievement of the refuge purposes is not necessarily dependent upon additional land acquisition, the possible inclusion of other lands within the refuges should assist the USFWS in achieving its larger ecosystem-wide goals and objectives to ensure the long-term sustainability of migratory bird populations. Expansion of any of the Complex's constituent refuge acquisition boundaries would thereby authorize the USFWS to work with willing sellers using the acquisition standard and parameters defined in USFWS law, policy, and government regulations. Lands acquired by the USFWS would be managed as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Expansion Proposal

This proposal continues the four refuge's historic focus on land acquisition primarily in the coastal marsh and adjacent agricultural uplands. Much of the acquisition would still focus on habitats of particular value to the waterfowl resource and other wetland dependent migratory birds. The wetlands portions of this expansion proposal concentrate on high-value wintering waterfowl habitats near the coast that are contiguous to existing refuges. This focus supports the goal of the Gulf Coast Joint Venture Chenier Plain Initiative which is stated as follows: "The goal of the Chenier Plain Initiative is to provide wintering and migration habitat for significant numbers of dabbling ducks, diving ducks, and geese (especially lesser snow and greater white-fronted), as well as year-round habitat for mottled ducks." Priority is given to those wetland areas which have long been identified as high-priority areas for acquisition in USFWS documents such as the "Wetland Preservation Program, Category 8 – Texas Gulf Coast" and the "Emergency Wetlands Resources Act, Region 2 Wetlands, Regional Concept Plan".

In addition to these primarily wetland areas, this proposal includes two areas of important coastal prairie with high habitat value for resident mottled ducks, many species of grassland-dependent migratory birds, and a wide variety of other native wildlife species. The primary habitat type for these areas is non-saline prairie, of which a significant component is prairie/grassland which is a unique community type within the Texas Chenier Plain. One of these areas, "Middleton prairie", is probably the largest remnant native coastal tallgrass prairie remaining on the Upper Texas Coast.

Besides the two above-described types of high biological value habitats, this proposal contains those areas identified by refuge management as necessary for the following reasons:

- lands that "fill in the gaps" in earlier single-ownership based expansions and complete logical biological/geographical boundaries,
- lands hydrologically linked to adjoining already-acquired refuge lands,
- lands whose acquisition would contribute to more effective management of the already acquired lands.

Expansion of the existing acquisition boundary is proposed for each of the four refuges in the Complex as follows:

<u>Refuge</u>	<u>Size of Boundary Expansion</u>
Moody NWR	7,920 acres*
Anahuac NWR	47,750 acres*
McFaddin NWR	7,190 acres*
Texas Point NWR	1,400 acres*

** All acreage figures are approximate*

The 64,260 acre expansion proposal for the entire Complex is depicted on the Locator Map in Appendix H.

IV. PROTECTION ALTERNATIVES

No action: No additional areas would be slated by acquisition by USFWS and the lands would remain in private ownership. Current activities on the private lands, including prescribed burning, grazing, hunting, and rice farming, would likely continue as long as these activities are economically feasible for the landowner. Active rice farming, which provides valuable wildlife habitat and food sources, is declining in the acquisition areas and much of the acreage in the USDA farm program is now either fallow or converted to improved pasture. Agricultural areas are being managed for grazing and areas not grazed may be invaded by Chinese tallow and deep-rooted sedge, which provide little wildlife benefit and increases expenses to convert the area back to rice production. The future of the lands would be subject to the discretion of the landowner whether the land would stay in an undeveloped agricultural setting or converted to other uses in the long-term, which may include eventual development. There are no large conservation acquisition projects being proposed in the area by State agencies or private non-profit conservation organizations.

USFWS acquisition: For all land and interests in land acquired by the USFWS, title is taken by the United States of America. The USFWS acquires most land in one of two ways: 1) in fee, or 2) conservation easement. The “fee” means virtually all of the rights and interests in the land, that which would be generally recognized as “ownership of the land”. Fee acquisition removes the land from the tax rolls. Fee acquisition gives the USFWS exclusive possession and use of the land which would allow for compatible public recreational activities. Fee acquisition allows the USFWS to perform any of the management activities (i.e. water control, burning, etc.) deemed necessary for habitat conservation on that land. The fee acquisitions are typically subject to reserved or outstanding subsurface mineral interests and other existing surface easements, such as pipelines or other rights-of-way. The purchase of a conservation easement is the acquisition of a much lesser interest in the land. “Ownership of the land” does not transfer to the United States and the land remains on the tax rolls with the underlying private landowner having the tax obligations. Conservation easements can consist of one or more of the two following categories of interests in land: 1) negative covenants, which prevent a specific use (i.e. no development) and 2) possessory interests, which grant a specific use right (i.e. public hunting). Conservation easements are an acquisition option when adequate habitat conservation can be achieved without the USFWS acquiring full ownership of the land. Conservation easements are not always a viable option with willing sellers because some sellers wish to dispose of all of their interests in the land for various reasons. Conservation easements are appraised and purchased in the same way as fee acquisitions. Also, the USFWS generally accepts donations of both fee and conservation easements.

Both fee acquisition and the acquisition of conservation easements have been used in the past on the refuges in the Texas Chenier Plain NWR Complex. At Moody NWR, all of the USFWS’ interests in land are in the form of a conservation easement. At Anahuac NWR, all of the USFWS’ interests in land are in fee except for a public access road easement. At McFaddin NWR, the mix of the USFWS’ interest in land is 86% fee and 14% conservation easement. At Texas Point NWR, all of the USFWS’ interests in land are in fee. The USFWS will consider both fee and conservation easement for future acquisitions dependent upon the habitat conservation requirements and the willing seller’s agreement.

In a few instances, the USFWS acquires interests in land by lease, right-of-way easement, or agreement. These are typically either for a shorter period of time or for more limited use purposes compared to fee and conservation easements.

Although the USFWS, like all agencies of the United States Government, has condemnation authority, it is the USFWS’ policy to acquire land and interests in land from **willing sellers only**. No lands have been condemned in the past for any refuge in the Texas Chenier Plain Complex and the USFWS does not propose condemnation of any lands in the future. The USFWS can acquire land or interests in land **only within an approved refuge boundary**. In fact, the USFWS can’t even accept a donation of land outside of an approved refuge boundary. Lands in any of the refuge boundary expansions would be acquired only from willing sellers as funding becomes available. Landowners within an expanded refuge boundary

would be completely free to keep their land, to sell their land to whoever they wished, to leave their land to their heirs, or to change uses of their land.

Including lands within a NWR boundary does not require the landowner to sell only to the USFWS nor does it limit that landowner's other conservation options and opportunities. The USFWS actively encourages all private landowners who are interested in wildlife or environmental conservation, whether their lands are within an approved refuge boundary or not, to avail themselves of the many other conservation programs and options available.

V. ACQUISITION ALTERNATIVES

The USFWS has only two primary land acquisition funding sources: 1) the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, and 2) the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act of 1934, as amended (16 U.S.C. 718-718h) requires all waterfowl hunters 16 years of age and over to annually purchase and carry a Federal Duck Stamp. Approximately 98 cents of every Duck Stamp dollar goes directly into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to purchase wetlands and wildlife habitat for inclusion into the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since 1934, more than \$500 million has gone into this Fund to purchase more than 5 million acres of primarily waterfowl habitat. The Fund is administered by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission and acquisition expenditures from this Fund require the approval of the governor of the state where the land to be purchased is located. This Fund has been the primary source of funding for land acquisition for all of the refuges within the Texas Chenier Plain NWR Complex and it is expected that it will remain the primary source of funding in the future. This discretionary land acquisition funding source is very actively competed for on a national level within the USFWS.

The other primary land acquisition funding source was authorized by the Land Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, as amended (16 U.S.C. 4601-11). The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) appropriations are derived from Outer Continental Shelf oil & gas leases, tax on motorboat fuels, and the sale of certain surplus Federal lands. Forty per cent or more of Land and Water Conservation Funds are appropriated for Federal land acquisition for the National Park System, the National Forest System, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the Bureau of Land Management. The balance of the Funds provides financial assistance to the States for planning, land acquisition and development of outdoor recreation opportunities. The LWCF is not a discretionary funding source and Congress appropriates money to a specific project or refuge for land acquisition. Some LWCF money has been appropriated to purchase land at McFaddin NWR but it has been a minor amount compared to the amount of Migratory Bird Conservation Funds used for land acquisition on the Complex.

VI. COORDINATION

Major issues related to the proposed actions were actively solicited from the general public, local public officials, local governmental entities, affected landowners, federal and state agencies, private organizations and the USFWS' interdisciplinary core Planning Team. Public scoping efforts to date include two series of public scoping meetings, public workshops, a town hall meeting, multiple briefings for local government officials and their staffs, and a waterfowl hunters' forum. A mailing list of over 1200 persons and organizations is maintained at the Refuge Complex Office and was used to distribute planning newsletters, and public meeting announcements.

The USFWS planning team, in particular the Complex Project Leader, made extensive efforts to inform and involve the counties and other local governments in the planning process. A number of formal briefings were provided for the Jefferson, Chambers, and Galveston County Judges and various County Commission members. Briefings were also provided for several local Drainage Districts and School Districts. Additionally, many of the County and other local government officials attended and participated in almost all of the public meetings held in their jurisdictions.

The USFWS recognizes that both the USFWS and the State fish and wildlife agencies have authorities and responsibilities for management of fish and wildlife on national wildlife refuges, as described in 43 CFR 24. Consistent with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, the Director of the USFWS will interact, coordinate, cooperate and collaborate with the State fish and wildlife agencies in a timely and effective manner on the acquisition and management of national wildlife refuges. The USFWS wanted to ensure coordination and cooperation with the State fish and wildlife agency early in the process of developing the Texas Chenier Plain NWR Complex EIS/CCP. Therefore, in February of 2000, the USFWS invited the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to name a representative to participate as a member of the core planning team for this project. TPWD nominated Jim Sutherlin, Project Leader of the Upper Texas Coastal Ecosystem Office, as TPWD representative on the planning team.

In January of 2002, the USFWS requested a meeting with the TPWD representative to present draft conceptual refuge management alternatives and to obtain comments/suggestions. The meeting at Anahuac NWR headquarters was attended by TPWD staff biologist, Michael Reszutek, representing Mr. Sutherlin. At a May 15, 2002, meeting with TPWD Project Leader Jim Sutherlin at J.D. Murphree WMA in Port Arthur, Texas, the draft conceptual refuge boundary expansion alternatives along with draft maps were presented and discussed. There was also discussion on the draft conceptual refuge management alternatives, earlier presented to Mr. Reszutek.

On May 18, 2004, the Complex Manager and lead planner met with senior TPWD staff at TPWD headquarters in Austin, Texas. They presented an overview of the EIS, CCP, and scoping processes to date and a summary of the two sets of draft refuge management and refuge boundary expansion alternatives proposed for the draft document. Proposed changes/enhancements to waterfowl hunt and habitat management programs were highlighted along with details of the refuge expansion/land acquisition being proposed. There was considerable discussion about the two sets of draft alternatives which developed some useful suggestions and comments. A preliminary draft of this complete document was also presented to both local TPWD staff and the senior TPWD staff in Austin, Texas, for final comments prior to publication.

VII. SOCIOCULTURAL IMPACTS

Overall, most people's lifestyles and social interactions (including community cohesion, community stability, and social organization) would essentially remain the same as current conditions. Any social and/or lifestyle effects from the boundary expansion proposal on individuals and groups would be lessened because the USFWS would only acquire lands from "willing" sellers; it must be assumed that a willing seller has individually determined that any associated impacts from this land transfer to the USFWS is acceptable, or the transaction would not be made. Issues would also arise when management activities are perceived to adversely impact adjacent landowners or reduce economic benefits to the community. Those management actions that would continue to be controversial and have localized impacts include water management and prescribed fire activities.

The land and water of the Texas Chenier Plain have a rich heritage of public and commercial recreational activity. While recreation plays an important part in the economy of the area, outdoor recreation opportunities are also a traditional and substantial part of the social structure and lifestyles of the area. The USFWS is constantly struggling to balance recreational opportunities with its goal of protecting natural resources. Under any of the alternatives being considered, this struggle would continue, and no matter which expansion actions were implemented, there would continue to be considerable disagreement within the nearby population over the proper amount, locations, and access to recreational resources within the Refuge Complex.

VIII. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

Introduction

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has identified the properties that fall within the **preferred** boundary expansion alternative (**Alternative C**) for each of the refuges (Moody, Anahuac, McFaddin & Texas Point) and prepared Refuge Boundary Expansion Maps & Land Ownership Lists. The records for the Land Ownership Lists are based on the 2003 edition of the county tax appraisal rolls obtained from the Chambers, Galveston & Jefferson county appraisal districts.

The purpose of the Refuge Expansion Maps and Land Ownership Lists is to graphically represent the parcels of land that fall within **Alternative C** and identify the respective landowners.

Maps - Locator Map & Refuge Expansion Maps

The Locator Map and Refuge Boundary Expansion Maps are a graphical representation of **Alternative C** and indicate the lands which lie within the proposed boundary expansion for each refuge.

Map Locator

The Map Locator provides the context of the Texas Chenier Plain Refuge Complex and illustrates the refuge expansions in relation to each other. The Map Locator provides an overview of all four of the existing refuges and delineates their proposed expansion boundaries for **Alternative C**. The proposed expansion area for each refuge is divided into numbered sections that indicate on which Refuge Expansion Map individual parcels can be located.

Refuge Expansion Maps

The refuge expansion maps illustrate in detail the proposed **Alternative C** expansion boundary and the lands within the proposed boundary for **each individual refuge**. Each refuge expansion has its own set of maps along with an accompanying land ownership list. Tract numbers on the expansion maps correlate to records in the land ownership list with the same tract number.

Land Ownership List

Following each set of refuge expansion maps is the corresponding land ownership list for that refuge expansion. The land ownership list provides detailed information for the lands that fall within the expansion boundary. The following provides a description for each of the headings used in the ownership list and the information that can be found under each heading.

Tract Number - An arbitrary but unique number assigned by the USFWS to distinguish parcels of land within each refuge boundary expansion. The tract number on the Refuge Expansion Map directly corresponds to the record in the land ownership list with the same tract number. The tract number is used solely for the purpose of joining the delineated parcels on the maps to their corresponding data in the refuge expansion ownership list.

Name - Denotes the **primary** owner listed on the county tax appraisal rolls for lands associated with the tract number. Where **multiple landowners** exist for a single tract number, the **primary** landowner's name is followed by "**et al.**" indicating there are other owners. Though only the **primary** owner's name is denoted in the land ownership list, parcel tax id numbers for **every** owner associated with that tract number are listed.

Map Number - Indicates the map number(s) where each tract of land can be located on the refuge expansion maps. The maps illustrate the proposed expansion boundaries and the lands that fall within them by **each individual refuge**. Lands within each of the proposed expansion boundaries can be found on the following:

- Moody NWR Expansion / Map #1
- Anahuac NWR Expansion / Map #2A – D
- McFaddin NWR Expansion / Map #3A –C
- Texas High Point NWR Expansion / Map #4A –D

In some cases, a single tract of land may fall within two different refuge expansion boundaries. Since each refuge expansion has its own set of maps, the tract number would be located on both map sets.

Deeded Acreage -The deeded acreage for each tract was obtained from the county tax appraisal rolls. In cases where a single tract number may represent multiple parcels of land involving multiple owners, the deeded acreage figure reflects the **total** deeded acreage for the **combined** lands associated with the tract number.

Priority - Priorities for land acquisition were developed from the alternatives presented in the EIS. Tracts with a (1) priority are contained in the EIS Alternative B and are primarily coastal march with some refuge management components. Tracts with a (2) priority are those areas not in Alternative B but added to Alternative C. These additional areas are primarily coastal prairie with some wetland components. Tracts with a (1 & 2) priority are tracts that divided between the 1 & 2 priority areas.

Parcel Tax ID – All parcel tax ID numbers associated with the land(s) for each tract number are listed. Though only the name of the **primary** owner name will be listed for tracts with multiple owners, the parcel tax id number for **every** owner is shown.

