U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update Number 3, October 2011

Greater yellowlegs

A Message from the Refuge Manager

The Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA) for Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge continues to move forward. In our last update, we summarized the feedback we received from you during public scoping and we shared with you our preliminary refuge goals.

Since then, we have considered your comments and conducted analyses to develop three preliminary management alternatives. These include objectives and strategies that could be used to meet refuge goals. In this update, we provide an overview of the three alternatives that we are considering.

Our next step is to prepare a Draft CCP/EA that will include information about the refuge, its resources, and its purposes. We will conduct an analysis of each alternative and determine their effects on key environmental, community, and socio-economic resources. This information will be combined to form a Draft CCP/EA. Once the draft is published, we will formally invite your continued input through an open comment period.

In the meantime, please feel free to contact the refuge if you have questions, ideas, or concerns.

Erin Holmes
Refuge Manager
Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge

Savannah sparrow

In this issue

Summary of Preliminary Alternatives
Refuge System Mission
Refuge Unit Maps
Next Steps

The Heart of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Preliminary Goals, Alternatives, Objectives and Strategies

A CCP describes management actions that help bring a refuge closer to its vision. A vision broadly reflects the refuge purposes, the National Wildlife Refuge System mission, and the role the refuge plays in the community. As we develop the CCP, we describe goals, identify alternatives, and define objectives and strategies to meet the goals. In our last planning update, we shared our preliminary goals and our draft vision.

What is a Goal?
A refuge goal is a descriptive and open-ended statement that conveys what the refuge will look like in the future.

What is an Alternative?
Alternatives are required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Alternatives represent a minimum of two options of how the refuge could reasonably achieve refuge purposes and goals, help fulfill the Refuge System mission, and resolve issues. For Tualatin River Refuge, we have prepared three alternatives for consideration.

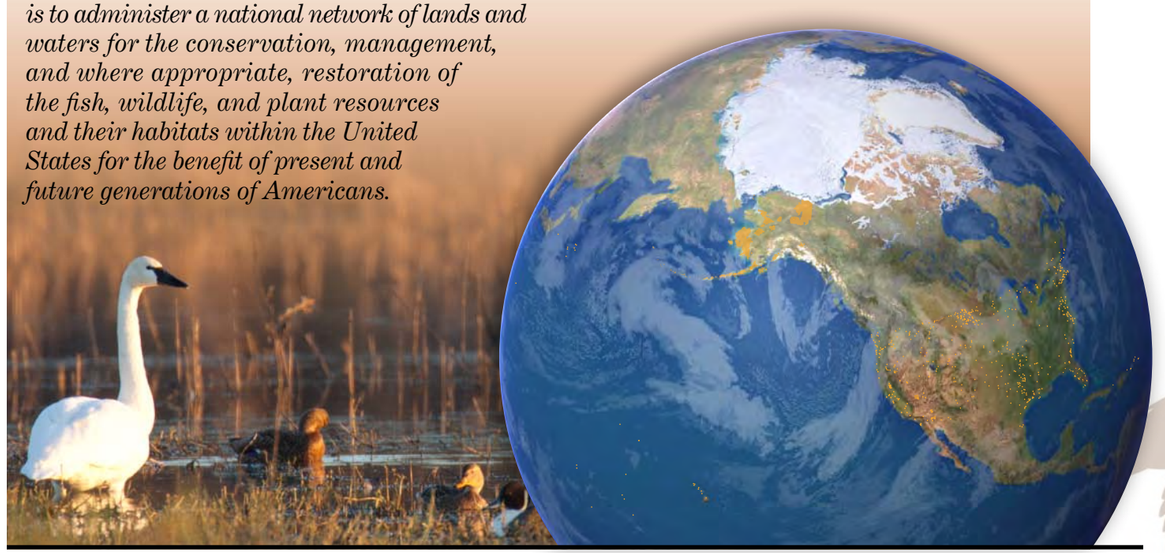
Refuge Purposes
Even as an urban refuge that serves many people, "wildlife first" remains our focus. Following are the purposes for which the refuge was established:

- "...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds..."
- "...for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources..." and "...for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services...."
- "...for the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions...."

You Can Find Planning Updates 1 & 2 at:
www.fws.gov/tualatinriver/refugeplanning.htm

Supporting the Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System

The Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is 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.



Features Common to All Preliminary Alternatives

Certain aspects of refuge management and programs will occur regardless of which alternative is ultimately selected for implementation. Highlighted below is a sampling of features common to all alternatives. A comprehensive list will be included in the future Draft CCP/EA.

Appropriateness and compatibility
Consistent with relevant laws and policies, any public and/or commercial use of the refuge will need to be found appropriate and determined compatible with the purposes of the refuge.

Climate change
In order to better understand and address potential effects of climate change, the refuge will participate in and contribute to climate change assessment efforts, including those at a landscape scale. The refuge will continue to take steps to mitigate effects of climate change and reduce its carbon footprint.

Fees
The refuge will continue to evaluate the desirability of establishing entrance fees to supplement Federal appropriations, grants and other less reliable funding, and volunteer support. If monetary contributions and volunteer support are adequate and sustainable, they may eliminate the need for fees.

Funding and staffing
Implementation of the No Action Alternative 1 would likely require increased funding to maintain current operations. Full implementation of Alternatives 2 or 3 would require funding levels substantially above current budget allocations The selected alternative will be implemented over a period of 15 years, consistent with available funding and staffing.

Goose management
Goose management, as it pertains to the declining populations of dusky Canada geese and the increasing populations of cackling Canada geese, remains an important issue for the refuge. All CCP alternatives include surveys of refuge goose use and winter sanctuary areas that provide resting and foraging habitats for geese and other waterfowl. However, cropland management specifically for geese is unlikely to be incorporated in any alternative.

Integrated pest management
Control of non-native species, especially invasive species, and other pest plants and animals will remain a high-priority refuge management activity and will be undertaken consistent with the principles of integrated pest management.

Mosquito management
Mosquito populations on refuge lands will continue to be allowed to fluctuate and function unimpeded unless they pose a threat to human health. In the case of an identified human health threat, State and/or local vector control agencies will be allowed to control mosquito populations on the refuge in a manner consistent with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service policy.

Public uses and facilities in Atfálat'i Unit
At least the same types of public use opportunities and same facilities now available in the Atfálat'i Unit will continue to be available in the future under all CCP alternatives. Depending upon funding levels, the magnitude of these opportunities could change.

Participation in planning and review of regional development activities
The Service will continue to participate in local planning and studies pertaining to future commercial, industrial, residential, and other urban development.

Regulatory compliance
All activities in all alternatives will undergo appropriate reviews and consultations. Permits and clearances will be secured as necessary to comply with legal and policy requirements.

Site restrictions
Selected tracts of land within the refuge boundary are encumbered with restrictions that limit the manner in which those tracts can be managed for fish, wildlife, and public use. These site-specific limitations will remain according to existing management agreements and mitigation requirements.

Wapato Lake Water Management Planning Study
The Service is coordinating with the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Oregon Water Science Center and others to conduct studies and evaluations to support planning for the Wapato Lake Unit. Results from these studies will allow the refuge to better define and evaluate the effects of water management and associated habitat restoration alternatives for the Wapato Lakebed.

Water management (Interim) at Wapato Lake
Water retention in and discharge from Wapato Lake will continue as it has in the recent past until final decisions and associated changes, if any, are made to the lakebed's levees, canals, ditches, and pumps. In cooperation with other agencies and partners, ongoing maintenance and repair of existing infrastructure will be implemented. It is unlikely that the CCP's selected alternative will include delivery of irrigation water from the Wapato Lake Unit, although the Service will continue to assist the Tualatin Valley Irrigation District (TVID) to find other means of delivering irrigation water to local farms if any changes are made to the existing infrastructure.

Wildlife-dependent public uses
Refuge System legislation identifies six wildlife-dependent public uses—hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation—that will be given special consideration in refuge planning and management.

USFWS

A world of discovery awaits visitors through our many public use programs

Summary of Preliminary Alternatives

Refer to Pages 6 & 7 for Unit Maps

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 describes continued implementation of the refuge's current management program and philosophy. This is known as the "No Action" Alternative.

Habitat and Wildlife
The refuge would continue efforts to acquire, restore, and conserve wetlands and other habitats to benefit native fish and wildlife resources. Migratory birds, including wintering waterfowl, would remain a focus.

Habitats on the refuge would be actively managed. A large focus of management would be on wetland habitats where levees, water diversions, water control structures, pumps, canals, and ditches would be used to manage water levels to mimic historic seasonal flooding and draining cycles. Wetland basins would be periodically mowed, disked, and/or selectively treated with herbicides to mimic natural disturbance cycles, limit plant succession, and suppress invasive plant species.

Future habitat restoration would consider soils, elevation, hydrology, adjacent relic habitats, habitat connectivity across the landscape, and other factors when determining what habitats to restore and manage on the refuge.

Refuge habitats, such as prairies, oak savannas, wetlands, and forests would be restored using a suite of techniques. These include: removal of non-native plants; planting native grasses and forbs; planting native shrubs and trees; and weed control. Wildfire suppression would remain the only element of the refuge's fire management program. A cooperative farming program would provide winter forage for migratory birds and other wildlife and suppress invasive species as an interim measure prior to restoration.

The refuge would continue to monitor, protect, restore, and/or control selected fish and wildlife species. The screened diversion and fish ladder on Chicken Creek would be operated to protect migrating fish. The refuge would plant Nelson's checker-mallow to assist with recovery of this threatened plant species. Problem animals, such as beavers, nutria, and feral cats, would be removed.

Visitor Services
The refuge would continue to offer quality wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation programs with an emphasis on serving the local urban population. There would remain no hunting or fishing opportunities. Programs would be supported by existing facilities. The refuge would offer teacher training and a handful of special events. There would continue to be no visitor activities or facilities offered at other refuge parcels within the Sherwood Units or at the Wapato Lake Unit. The Atfálat'i Unit would remain the focus of all refuge uses, facilities, and events. With a growing urban population in the Portland area, the refuge's popularity, and continued promotion and awareness of the refuge, it is expected that visitation would gradually increase over the next 15 years.

Administration
Existing staffing levels would remain the same with six full-time permanent employees. Additional seasonal employees and other positions would continue to be filled as monies become available both from discretionary funds and from partners and grants.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 is the Service's draft "Preferred Alternative." This alternative represents a balanced approach among the many competing needs and issues that the refuge currently faces and is likely to experience in the next 15 years.

The refuge is currently composed of a mosaic of fragmented habitats. This proposed action would strive to combine these fragments into larger contiguous blocks of native habitat types within the landscape and also restore relic or disappearing habitat types. This alternative would benefit imperiled species that rely on prairie, scrub-shrub, and oak savanna habitats. It would capitalize on opportunities to work with regional partners and increase the continuity of habitats as well as recreational connections beyond the boundaries of the refuge. Prescribed fire would be added as an additional habitat management technique.

Habitat and Wildlife
Alternative 2 is largely driven by the typical hydrologic flows in the Tualatin River with limited water control manipulation on the refuge. Prescribed fire would be added as an additional habitat management technique.

The habitat types of the Tualatin River and Rock Creek Units, primarily riparian forest, scrub-shrub wetland, and herbaceous wetland, would not substantially change under this management alternative. In the upland, the oak savanna would convert to mixed forest. The limited water manipulation on the Tualatin River Unit would continue.

Habitats on the Riverboat Unit would largely remain the same as Alternative 1 except that active water control management that artificially maintains a 30-acre herbaceous wetland would be discontinued. The wetland would be allowed to evolve into a mixture of wet prairie and scrub-shrub wetland. Approximately 10 acres of riparian forest on this unit would convert to wet prairie.

At the Atfálat'i Unit, Chicken Creek would be restored to its historical footprint. The current channelized Chicken Creek would be filled and existing narrow band of riparian vegetation removed. The existing water diversion structure would be relocated to the east, allowing water management on approximately 155 acres of herbaceous wetland, 69 acres less than what is currently managed. These wetlands would be enhanced (e.g. recontouring ground surface and updating water control structures) in order to manage them more effectively.

Alternative 2 (continued)

The remaining acres would be converted to a mixture of wet prairie, oak savanna, and scrub-shrub wetland. An additional 20 acres located in the northern portion of the unit would convert from seasonal wetlands and wet prairie to floodplain riparian forest.

Management of the Onion Flats Unit would take advantage of soils that are rare in the Willamette Valley and historically supported the disappearing scrub-shrub wetland type. Dependent on further land acquisition, Onion Flats Unit would convert from cooperative farming into a scrub-shrub wetland and oak savanna. These changes could benefit declining dusky Canada geese and the threatened Nelson's checker-mallow plant. This alternative would also include restoring channelized Rock Creek to its historical channel.

Management of the Wapato Lake Unit would include a mixture of free-flowing hydrology and intensive water control with the intention of a more natural hydrology being implemented over the long term. Actual management activities of the lakebed will be determined based upon a Wapato Lake water management planning study. Other actions included in this alternative intend to restore a mosaic of wetlands, riparian forests, oak savannas, prairies, and streams.

Visitor Services
In this alternative, existing visitor service programs would remain and new opportunities would be added. A junior waterfowl hunt program would be developed in the northern portion of the Riverboat Unit. Other expanded visitor services would include: 1-3 additional wildlife photography blinds; an environmental education off-trail study area; a fishing program from the River Overlook; and a nature exploration play area. The refuge would explore opportunities to connect to regional trail projects.

At the Wapato Lake Unit, opportunities for public use, such as hunting, photography, fishing, wildlife observation areas, a nature trail, and interpretive exhibits would be explored as adequate land and access are acquired and habitat restoration decisions are made. In the near-term, the refuge would pursue environmental education and wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities in the community.

Administration
Expanding the refuge program to increase habitat restoration projects and public use opportunities would require, at a minimum, six additional full-time permanent employees. The refuge would continue to pursue additional staff over the life of the CCP.

USFWS

USFWS

The refuge has a proud history of connecting a large urban population with nature through high quality visitor experiences, including wildlife observation and environmental education.

Dragonfly

Alternative 3

Under Alternative 3, the refuge would be managed with very little water manipulation, instead relying on natural hydrologic cycles of the area. Habitat restoration and management would favor restoring large patches of contiguous riparian forest and mixed forest, with smaller areas of scrub-shrub wetlands. Prescribed fire would be added as an additional habitat management technique. Visitor services would focus less on expansion of opportunities and more on improving the quality of the existing programs.

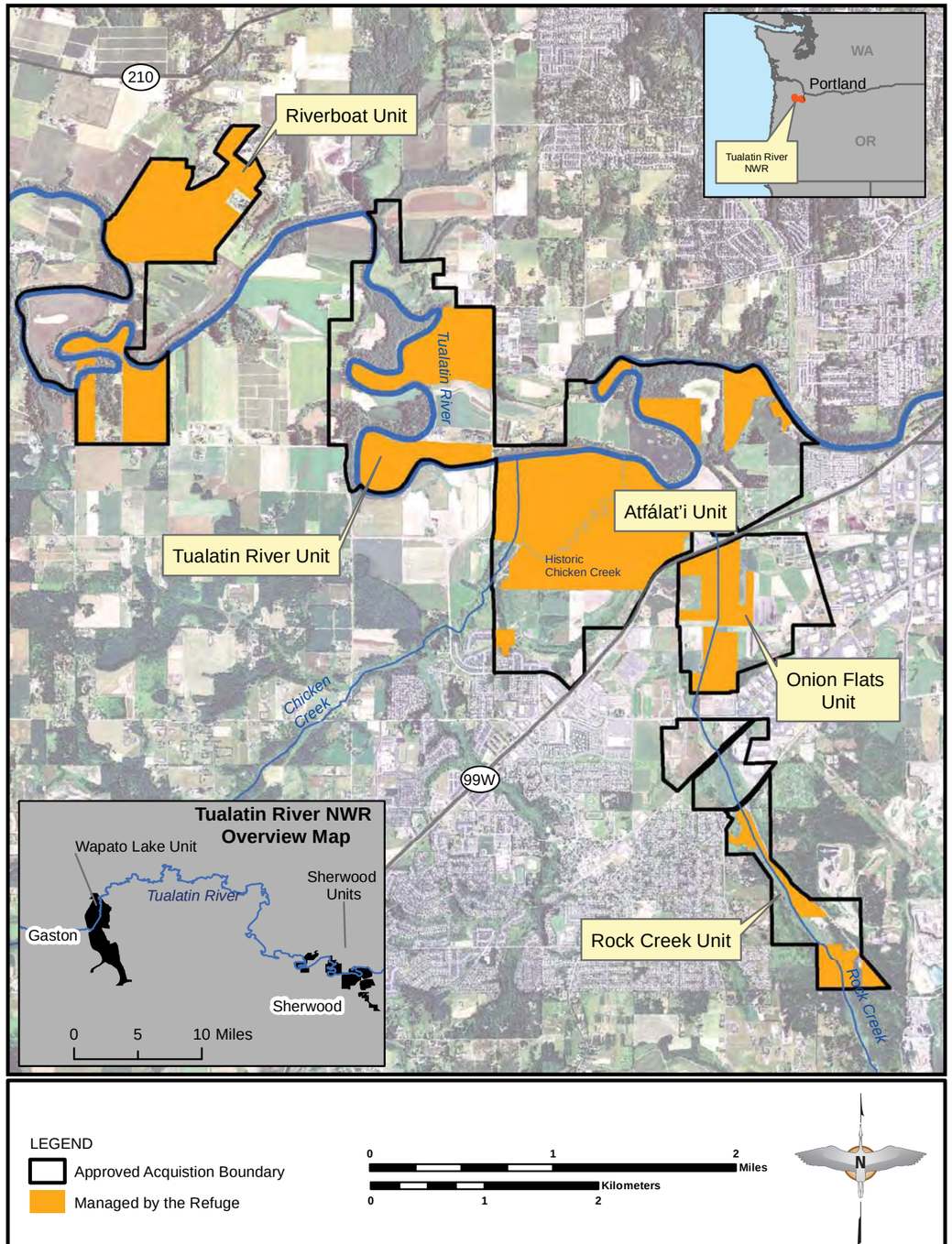
Habitat and Wildlife
In the Tualatin River Unit, the existing 330 acres of riparian forest would be expanded to cover approximately 390 acres. The remainder of the unit would be covered with mixed forest. At the Atfálat'i Unit all but 70 acres of the current 250 acres of emergent wetland would be converted to riparian forest and scrub-shrub wetlands. The oak savanna, emergent wetland, and wet prairie in the northeastern portion of the unit would be converted to expanded riparian forest.

Like Alternative 2, this alternative would remove cooperative farming from the Onion Flats Unit. The hydrology would result in the same scrub-shrub wetland as in Alternative 2. The upland areas surrounding the scrub-shrub wetland would be managed to become mixed forest. At the Riverboat, Rock Creek, and Wapato Lake Units, Alternative 3 would remain the same as that described in Alternative 2.

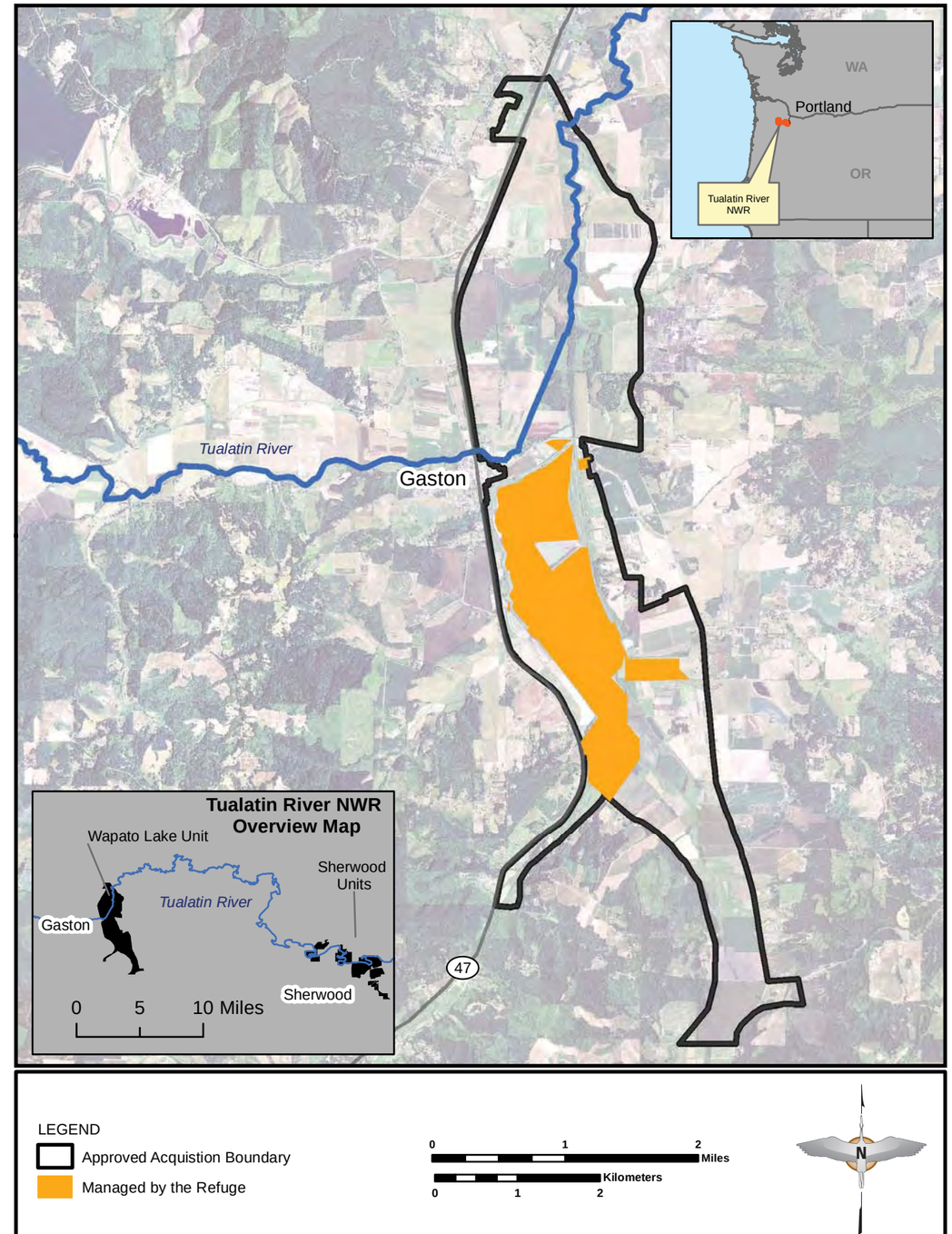
Visitor Services
Like Alternative 2, the refuge would continue to explore opportunities for connecting to regional trail projects. At the Wapato Lake Unit, opportunities for public use on the refuge would be explored as adequate land and access are acquired and habitat restoration decisions are made. In the near-term, the refuge would pursue education and recreation activities in the community.

Alternative 3 provides a more limited expansion of the environmental education and recreation programs on the Sherwood Units than Alternative 2. Alternative 3 does not include an off-trail study area, nature play area, junior waterfowl hunt, additional photo blinds, or a fishing program. However, more emphasis would be placed on improving the quality of public use through evaluation of existing programs.

Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge
Sherwood Units



Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge
Wapato Lake Unit



Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge
19255 SW Pacific Highway
Sherwood, OR 97140

Next steps for the CCP

Preparing a Draft CCP and Environmental Assessment:
A draft CCP and environmental assessment will be released for public review and comment in late Spring or early Summer 2012.

Final CCP:
A Final CCP will be approved in December 2012 and be published thereafter.

Questions or Concerns? Please contact us.
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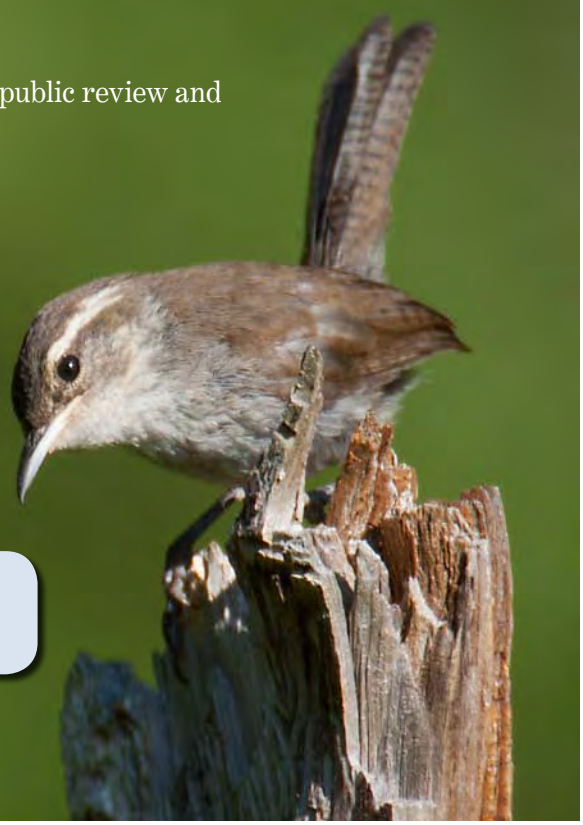
You Can Follow the Entire Planning Process Online at:
www.fws.gov/tualatinriver/refugeplanning.htm



Bewick's wren

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