

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Scoping Summary



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Northeast Regional Office
Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Presquile National Wildlife Refuge
11116 Kimages Rd
Charles City, VA 23030

November 29, 2012



James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

Introduction

This document summarizes the government and public scoping meeting to draft refuge vision, goals, and issues for the James River National Wildlife Refuge (James River NWR, the refuge) draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA). First, it details pre-planning activities and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (we, our, the Service) efforts to encourage involvement of the public and conservation partners: other Federal and State agencies, Federally recognized tribes, county and municipal officials, civic groups, non-governmental conservation and education organizations, and user groups. It then summarizes the comments of those attending agency and public scoping meetings or those providing written comment on issues for consideration at the refuge.

This summary does not detail the dozens of meetings, events, and informal discussions the refuge manager and staff have had where the CCP was a topic of conversation. Those involved a wide range of audiences, including conservation groups, elected officials or their staffs, educators, refuge visitors and other interested individuals. During those discussions, the refuge manager and his staff would provide an update on CCP progress and encourage comments and participation.

Summary of CCP Scoping Process Steps

Step A: Initial Planning

We began preparing a CCP for James River NWR in April 2009. Initially, we focused on collecting information on the refuge's natural and cultural resources and public use program. We identified members of the CCP core team. We received confirmation of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) participation on May 11, 2009.

Development of a CCP for James River NWR was delayed from 2009 until early 2012. James River NWR staff are shared with three other refuges in the Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex. Refuge staff worked to finalize the Rappahannock River Valley NWR CCP during 2009 and focused on developing a CCP for Presquile NWR from 2010 through 2012. Also during this time, we experienced turn-over in five of the eight refuge staff positions.

We reconfirmed VDGIF's participation on the James River NWR CCP core team on January 11, 2012. On March 27 and 28, 2012, the CCP core team of refuge staff, Regional Office staff, and one representative from VDGIF held an internal scoping meeting to discuss existing information, draft a vision statement and goals, and prepare for the upcoming public scoping meetings and a technical meeting of State and Federal partners.

Step B: Public Scoping

We initiated the public scoping process when the notice of intent to prepare a CCP for James River NWR was published in the *Federal Register* on January 12, 2012 (77 FR 7716). Our first planning newsletter was distributed in late August 2012 to 557 parties on our mailing list (including media outlets) and posted announcements on the refuge Web site. The planning newsletter included location, date, and time information about upcoming public scoping meetings that would serve to inform the public about current refuge management and elicit input on topics of interest to the public.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

We hosted two public scoping meetings in Prince George, Virginia, at the Prince George County Human Services Building on September 12, 2012. These meetings were open houses, held from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. and from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. A total of 16 individuals attended these meetings. Planning team staff were also in attendance at both meetings, but not included in the participant attendance noted.

We received 34 correspondences (i.e., emails, letters, scoping comment forms, faxes, and phone calls) containing comments from interested parties since our announcement to prepare a CCP was published in the *Federal Register* on January 12, 2012. We asked that comments be provided by October 15, 2012. All comments received to date are included in the summary below. General information inquiries and requests to be added to our mailing list are not included in this total.

Steps C and D: Vision, Goals, and Alternatives Development

We invited 83 representatives of various local, State, and Federal agencies and 6 Virginia Indian Tribes to attend an agency scoping meeting to be held on September 11, 2012, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The workshop was attended by 8 representatives from various State and Federal agencies, as well as the Crater Planning District Commission. Refuge and planning team staff were also in attendance at this workshop, but not included in the participant attendance noted. The purpose of the meeting was to identify issues, determine the significant resource values attributed to the refuge, and seek advice from technical experts on what resources of conservation concern in the refuge planning area should be a management priority. We will continue to consult with experts throughout 2012 and meet regularly with the core team, as we develop draft alternatives that incorporate the scoping comments detailed below.

Comment Summary

The core planning team members, refuge staff, state and federal agency staff, and concerned members of the general public identified numerous issues during project scoping. Comments have been sorted into broad categories to facilitate their consideration in the planning process.

The Service will continue to refine this list of issues as comments are received to determine significant issues to be addressed in the CCP. The planning team welcomes continued participation of organizations and the public. Additional opportunities for public comment will be provided in the upcoming months as the draft CCP is developed.

This document summarizes all of the substantive comments we received, grouped by subject. Unless noted otherwise, comments were submitted by the general public.

Planning Process

1. Preparation of an environmental assessment is not appropriate for this plan. An environmental impact statement is required under the National Environmental Policy Act.

2. We can consider longer planning horizons, but our implementation would focus on next 15 years which is the CCP planning horizon. We need a starting point, but it is okay that our vision and desired future condition might have an 80-year horizon. (Government Partners)

Refuge Vision Statement

1. Before asking for input on the vision statement, define what a refuge does. There are lots of different kinds of public lands management areas out there (e.g.,

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

preserves, parks, Wildlife Management Areas). Public perception is that all the public lands are similar; they don't tend to distinguish what refuge lands are particularly about.

2. The first sentence of the draft vision statement is too long. Overall, it is good but it needs to be concise.

Landscape Scale/Ecosystem-wide Issues

Environmental Setting

1. The CCP should address ongoing environmental threats. (Defenders of Wildlife)
2. James River National Wildlife Refuge is one of the biggest conservation and public land parcels on the southern James River. There is support for additional land acquisition (e.g., Flowerdew Hundred and riparian areas to the west). There is a "land conservation values" map developed by state agencies that should be consulted. Look at lands identified around the refuge. These maps identify high value lands for high resource values, wildlife, water quality, and public utilization. There are also "tomorrow lands" identified and program to finance easements and restoration work. (Government Partners)
3. VDGIF supports management of the refuge in a manner that serves to protect, manage, and enhance bald eagle and anadromous fish habitats and resources within the refuge because:
 - a. Bald eagle nests, roosts, and the James River Summer and Winter Concentration Zone are known from within or near the refuge.
 - b. James River, Powell's Creek, Flowerdew Hundred Creek, and Wards Creek are documented Anadromous Fish Use Areas from the refuge and surrounding areas.
(VDGIF)

Climate Change

1. The CCP must consider and analyze the impacts of climate change. We believe that climate change is among the most "significant problems" affecting plants and animals today, and thus the potential impacts of climate change should be a central consideration in the development of refuge CCPs.

Specifically,

- a. the vision should acknowledge the important role that climate change will play in shaping the future conditions of the refuge.
- b. Secretarial Order 3289 explicitly directs that climate change be considered in Department planning exercises. This should be expressed in the CCP.
- c. Describe current and historic temperature and precipitation, observed trends, and projected future conditions.
- d. Incorporate information on how climatic changes could affect refuge resources.
(Defenders of Wildlife)

Wildlife and Habitat Management

1. Support for initiatives to restore and protect native habitats on site, particularly those that support unique or imperiled wildlife. (VDGIF)
2. Outline a strategy for improving habitat connectivity. (Defenders of Wildlife)

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

3. Think about wildfire resiliency. Need more wildfire resistant properties. This is an issue we need to keep in perspective as we consider management. (Government Partners)
4. Shoreline and gully erosion occur along numerous stretches of the James River, Powell's Creek, and to a lesser extent Flowerdew Creek within the refuge. Consideration should be given to stabilizing the bluffs where erosion is occurring at its worst. By stabilizing the bluffs, trees used by eagles to roost and perch can be protected from falling off the bluffs. Protecting these trees will benefit additional bird and small mammal species. Managing the erosion will also prevent significant amounts of annual sedimentation in the James River and will eventually benefit water quality for area fish and wildlife species.

Socioeconomic Issues

1. Population growth associated with Fort Lee civilian population is affecting Chesterfield more than other communities. (Government Partners)
2. Does the Service pay taxes on refuge land? The refuge manager used to go to the County to hand over the payment, but no representative has visited the County office to do so in lately.
3. With availability to hunting areas increasingly curtailed for many Virginians, the funding for fish and game management through Robertson-Pittman collections will continue to decline if we do not provide places for the average citizen to hunt and fish. James River NWR offers a large area with excellent hunting and fishing potential that is not far from urban populations, thereby making this a critical opportunity to encourage Virginians to continue purchasing hunting and fishing licenses on an annual basis.
4. Wildlife watchers outspend wildlife hunters by 20 to 1, so you are consigning an area to poverty when you encourage wildlife hunters to come out.

Relationship to Other Programs, Plans, and Initiatives

1. A consistency determination must be prepared for the CCP. It should include an analysis of the proposed activities in light of the enforceable policies of the Virginia Coastal Management Program and a commitment to comply with the enforceable policies. There are advisory policies of the Virginia Coastal Management Program. (Virginia Department of Environmental Quality)
2. The Virginia Outdoors Plan is being updated this year. It should be done before the CCP is done, but the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (VDCR) offered to include details on the refuge in that plan if there is interest. In any case, VDCR is a potential partner for recreational needs and opportunities. One Service representative is on technical advisory team for Virginia Outdoors Plan Plan, providing input regarding refuges. (Government Partners)
3. The Prince George County Comprehensive Plan is currently under development, at about half to two-thirds completed. The "environment part" of the plan may be of interest to the refuge. The completion date is anticipated to be the end of calendar year 2012. The plan has to be done every 5 years; however, the planning horizon is up to 20 years. The plan focuses on historic, recreation, and

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

- tourism opportunities. How will the 15-year CCP dovetail and enhance conservation for Prince George County? The two plans should be complementary. The fact both agencies are currently developing plans presents an opportunity for collaborating and communicating on providing public access to the outdoors and promoting conservation and stewardship. (Prince George County)
4. The Petersburg Planning Office would be interested in discussing the plan.
 5. Learn more about what people would like to see for the James River area from the *Envision the James* community-based effort. Glean useful information for the CCP effort. (Government Partners)
 6. Reconnecting families with nature over the long term is a Chesapeake Bay Access Plan initiative. Generations are becoming increasingly removed from nature. It is important for public health (as a stress reduction) and the long-term conservation of resources to keep people connected with nature. Tying access, activities, and regional connections of the refuge with other conservation land programs should be pursued. (Government Partners)
 7. James River NWR is identified as an “urban refuge” in the Service’s vision document. Connecting with urban communities is a high priority initiative for the Service. (Government Partners)
 8. The recent Virginia Resources survey indicated that having more trails and access to state waters are the top two priorities identified by people. This refuge has some opportunities. (Government Partners)
 9. The proposal to prepare a CCP for James River NWR is in full accord with the Crater Planning District Commission’s environmental policy directives, and it supports the request. (Crater Planning District Commission)

Refuge Administration and Operations

1. Existing limited budget and staffing currently limit how much the four refuges in the Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex can accomplish. If these limitations are expected to continue, then resource management activities will continue to be limited as well. Generally speaking, the current forest and visitor management activities appear to serve the James River NWR well.
2. Consider additional forest thinning along state roads and refuge roads to reduce the number of trees and dead wood falling onto the roads and disrupting refuge access. This would also aid access for fire control and aid driver safety.
3. Work with the Virginia Department of Transportation to maintain highway ditches and drainage easements, as well as replace non-functioning culverts on state roads used within the NWR.
4. Continue to allow lawfully licensed concealed carry permit holders to carry their weapons while on the refuge. The purpose of these licenses and handguns is not for hunting or harming wildlife, but to protect the permit holder against violence and for self-defense. A concealable handgun is generally not appropriate or

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

suited to hunting, and poses a limited if any risk to wildlife, but is meant for protection of the person carrying the weapon.

Staffing Issues

1. How does the CCP decision support staffing? Is there a projected staffing to drive the level of opportunities or new actions to undertake? (Government Partners)
2. The Rappahannock River Valley NWR and Presquile NWR CCPs talk about 3 new refuge staff positions shared among the four refuges in the Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex. Is that enough? This is limiting the Service's ability to provide programs. How can you manage these refuges without having adequate staff? It should be stated explicitly in plans what staffing is required for desired future condition. (Government Partners)
3. Increasing partnerships can help some. (Government Partners)
4. The refuge area is in the "urban crescent," so perhaps staffing should be also based on population density of the surrounding area. (Government Partners)
5. Adequate staffing will be needed to protect the increased facility investments.
6. Seasonal housing would permit work crews to improve the refuge while discouraging illegitimate use of the resource. (VDCR)

Biological Program

Draft Goal for Wildlife and Their Habitat

1. Identify that native species is important. This should be emphasized in the goal and objectives. (Government Partners)
2. Does the wildlife/habitat goal capture the need to control invasive species? We often have to defend use of herbicides and other control measures. It may be inherent in the goal, but we should make sure that invasive species control actions will be covered under this goal. (Government Partners)
3. Add words to "contribute and protect" to the long term ecological integrity in goal. (Government Partners)
4. Habitat goals should take into account what future management is proposed. We might want to split out habitat goals where distinctive management is likely to occur in subsequent refuge habitat management plans. (Government Partners)
5. Additional habitats that should be emphasized and promoted, such as savannah habitat (for redcockaded woodpeckers and older, thinned forest stands), riparian forests, coastal plain forest ecosystems, and aquatic habitats. (Government Partners)

Water Quantity and Quality

1. Include an assessment of water resources in the CCP. (Defenders of Wildlife)

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

2. It was interesting that at neither James River nor Presquile meetings did the subject of Kepones (as I recall that was the chemical) come up. Has the last been heard of the decades old spills upstream by Petersburg?
3. The site in Chesapeake Bay, with its runoff from factory farms, is not providing safe healthy water for any animals in this site.
4. Water quality is a concern and its effects on hickory shad and herring. There are overall concerns with any potential for introducing sediments into the river and tributaries. (Government Partners)
5. What has refuge management done about the *Pfiesteria* in Chesapeake Bay?

Forest Management

1. What is the end point of current forest management? What is the goal at 15 or 40 years?
2. Continue the existing forest management.
3. Consider maintaining a dynamic forest. (Government Partners)
4. Not all pines should be going to savannah end point. Young forest species need the very high stem densities that only come from clear cutting. Woodcock, for example, need 5-10,000 stems/acre for nesting and brood rearing. Chats, blue grosbeaks, buntings, towhees, prairie warblers, most sparrows, bobwhites--they all need high stem densities.
5. Develop a realistic forest management/maintenance plan.
6. Forest management is encouraged, as it has been, with the additional consideration of introducing longleaf pine. (Government Partners)
7. Best forest management in the State that the commenter has seen. This refuge is a great demonstration area.
8. Spectacular progress in timber management, particularly the pines. Understory is far superior under thinned/burned stands. Nothing like pine needles to result in starvation. Amazing contrast to the untreated stands. There are no insects until you hit the thinned/burned stands. Green vegetation means there are bugs.
9. Increase size of log decks (and not triangular) to increase attractiveness to singing woodcock males, quail, rabbits, etc.
10. Maintenance of log decks should be included in forest management contracts.
11. Appears less maintenance is happening on the refuge. Need more mowing to maintain openings.
12. The Maycock opening is not being maintained and it looks like it will all get closed in again soon.
13. Refuge needs people on tractors to maintain forest openings.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

14. Use disking as a technique as it might be better than mowing with a tractor.
15. Create more forest openings and make sure existing ones are maintained for the benefit of wildlife.
16. A 1 or 2 acre opening for every 100 acres would benefit wildlife.
17. Up to 1 acre openings would be good for woodcock singing habitat.
18. Bobwhite could benefit from habitat management activities. (Government Partners)
19. Is there any clear-cutting at all? Clear-cutting is important for all wildlife and should be done more. Look at developing cuts up to 50 acres. Don't cut 1,000 acres at a time. This would improve habitat for deer, turkey, and other early forest species.
20. Discontinue use of prescribed burning.
21. Limit the fire burnout of the refuge. "Although the burned areas provide nutrients for the trees, I believe they provide less benefit to wildlife."
22. Do not stop thinning and burning sterile old pine stands. Pine seedlings are already beginning to take over.
23. Use fire to burn seedlings that are invading. Burning enhances the understory, not suppress. Burning increases forbs (such as *Bidens*, *Desmodium*, *Liatris*) 10 to 100 fold.
24. Burning does destroy some ground-nesting bird nests, but those species would not even be present if it were not for the burning. The burning begets the habitat. Stop burning, and those species go elsewhere or nowhere at all--a sink is created.
25. Clemson folks have looked at burning to generate stronger oak stands. May be worth tracking down some of their literature for management of the hardwood stands after shelterwood cuts of inferior hardwoods.
26. Forestry activities have occurred over the centuries on the site. "Logging can be done without rutting--just plan for harvest in the dry season and stipulate that logging cease if rutting commences. Burning certainly does not impact covered sites. I imagine any combustibles at the sites decayed centuries ago, or at least many decades ago for the more recent Civil War sites. If they still are bringing some forestry activities to a halt, consider using the sites as "ring around sites (see Tall Timbers literature for use of the technique or I can discuss further). As you get into larger burn units, ring around sites are probably much to the benefit of wildlife anyhow.
27. Are there areas needing reforestation? (Government Partners)

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

28. Northern longleaf restoration is a potential; recommend discussing it in the future. Virginia Department of Forestry has done a lot of work raising native seedlings. A supply is available to the public with the goal to see it reestablished in southern Virginia. The seedlings are thriving north of the James River. Determine if the refuge has suitable sites for longleaf reestablishment, given soils. If sites are suitable, then the Virginia Department of Forestry would recommend consideration of restoring longleaf seedlings as part of the current loblolly management. Successful establishment of longleaf has occurred in nearby state lands. (Virginia Department of Forestry)
29. Develop an interagency memorandum of understanding for a fire plan with the Virginia Department of Forestry, especially for assistance with wildland fires, similar to what is set up for Great Dismal Swamp NWR (Government Partners)

Wildlife Species Management

1. Manage the wildlife resources as the top priority. (Government Partners)
2. River herring (specifically alewives and blueback herring) populations are at historic lows. If there is a way that to improve herring spawning areas, that would be great. Restoring or helping the local populations recover in the James River NWR would help. This could be accomplished through habitat protection and wetland improvements on known spawning grounds. (VDGIF)
3. Does the refuge offer stop-over habitat for Bicknell's Thrush? (Government Partners)
4. Improving American woodcock breeding populations should be a priority for the refuge.
5. Consider redcockaded woodpecker management in hardwood forests and pine ecosystems. (Government Partners)
6. What is the current management of forest, and how does it relate to hunting and wildlife habitat management strategy? The range of species that could be managed for hunting or wildlife observation using forest management may be broader. Consult with hunting groups to find out how to be conduct forest management to benefit wildlife.
7. Refuge is not doing a good job at managing the deer herd. There has been a terrible increase in herd numbers. Adjacent farms are being devastated. Powhatan Hunt Club has a 3,000 acreage tract on Noble Road, and they have to bring in hunt clubs every week on their land because deer herd is out of control. That is evidence that proper management is not being followed on the refuge since the problem is originating on the refuge. That is where the deer are coming from. There has been an increase in deer vs. car collisions on Route 10.
8. The refuge has an ethical and moral responsibility to manage deer. Disease is likely to happen without management. Commenter has seen in other states the effects disease has on deer. "It is shameful to see full sized bucks dying from disease from poor management. This could happen on the refuge if you don't start managing herd."

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

9. With the limited days to still hunt in the James River refuge it will be very difficult to maintain the deer herd at a healthy level.
10. What do we know about invasive species? (Government Partners)

Bald Eagles

1. What is the status of eagles in the area? (Government Partners)
2. "In my opinion, we have four populations of bald eagles: resident, summer migratory, winter migratory, and transient. Transient birds are those that are neither migratory nor resident and are the birds hatched on the James, the Bay and the rest of its tributaries that stay regional. Birds born on the James and around the Bay will probably visit the James a number of times over the first 4-6 years of their lives as they become mature (at about 4 years old) and as they continue their quest for a mate and their own territory."
3. It would be good to find out what the bald eagles territory is, but that requires a lot of attention from different angles – viewing from the river is the best, as you can probably see most, if not all their territory that borders the river.
4. Bald eagles cause "a stigma." Their presence causes too many restrictions. Other land management agencies close areas to public access because of bald eagles. This is all overly restrictive.
5. Bald eagles are a success story. They are everywhere, including along roads and other areas where there are lots of activity.

Inventory, Monitoring, and Research

1. What habitats and wildlife is the refuge monitoring besides bald eagles? (Government Partners)
2. Obtaining basic distribution information is really important for assessing species that are vulnerable. The lack of it is a real problem for planning conservation. (VDGIF)
3. Small mammals are a particular concern and under-inventoried and monitored. The whole southern coastal plain is weak with species information, especially small mammals. Bats are a particular concern; understanding their distribution is really important - not only for cave dwelling species, but bat tree species too. (VDGIF)
4. Would like to see the refuge to serve more as a site for research and monitoring, especially with regard to documenting changes to species and their distribution resulting from climate change. Refuge could serve as a baseline area for monitoring environmental changes. Want the refuge to be used more for research (Government Partners)
5. The CCP should outline an Inventory and Monitoring Plan related to climate change variables and trends. (Defenders of Wildlife)

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

Cultural Resource Program

1. Participation from Virginia Indian Tribes or their representatives is important for this refuge. (Government Partners)
2. Archaeological sites are obviously abundant and significant on the refuge.
3. Consider conducting archaeological digs, identifying Indian sites, and investigating human occupation history.
4. The area is considered as an evocative landscape as first defined in Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail (NHT) plan. (National Park Service [NPS])
5. The pristine quality of Powell's Creek, with its breadbasket marsh of wild rice, tuckahoe, pickerel weed, burdock, and other staples of the Native American diet, make it an excellent candidate for the indigenous landscape sought after along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT. (VDCR)
6. The acquisition of land or conservation easements along riparian areas west of Powell's Creek would protect that experience for future users of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT. (VDCR)
7. Need improved interpretive messages about cultural resources because the area has a richness of information to be shared. (NPS)

Public Use

Refuge Access and Uses

1. Is there a liability issue to allowing/opening public uses on the refuge?
2. Can people call and ask to hike on the refuge on any given day?
3. How many days do you need to call in advance to get permission/permit to visit the refuge?
4. One important question is whether the current permit requirements should remain in place. What refuge access control might be relaxed if staffing is increased?
5. Maybe permitting should continue until staffing is built up. (Government Partners)
6. Think about seasonal use or other types of limitations needed to both protect resources while providing public access to the refuge.
7. Relax restrictive controls on public uses of the refuge's resources (e.g., access to refuge trails, expand hunting opportunities, and open refuge to new public uses).
8. Public access to the refuge should be allowed at levels appropriate to protect resources. The demand is huge for water resource opportunities, especially canoe and kayak (e.g., non-motorized). We recognize that the Service has policies regarding public use appropriateness and compatibility, but we hope for additional public use opportunities.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

9. The past and current Prince George County Comprehensive Plans emphasize a strong desire by the public for limited access to the James River. This should be considered on the refuge with consideration of sensitivity to resources.
10. Both land and water access are important, although water access may be more important because Prince George County expects water activities to grow over the next 20 years. The County is hoping that other large landowners along the river will allow limited access, while protecting the shoreline and rural community atmosphere. Don't want to see what is happening in the Williamsburg area happen here.
11. How much public access is the refuge seeking? Are there capacity limits identified? Does the refuge want families in their cars to just drive in and out? What is the intent or what are the limits, given refuge purposes?
12. Need to carefully develop a public use system based on the range of public uses you want, where you want to have it, the infrastructure you need, and the management to control it. (Government Partners)
13. Support for allowing continued public access for wildlife-related recreation: wildlife watching, white-tailed deer hunting, nature photography, and environmental education. (VDGIF)
14. Maintain existing visitor use opportunities.
15. Consider expanding recreational opportunities that would be compatible with refuge goals to serve the citizens of Prince George County and the Commonwealth, as well as increasing understanding about the agency and challenges associated with fulfilling its mission. (VDCR)
16. Land acquisition seems like it could be very important for increasing opportunities. (Government Partners)
17. Develop an access program with the adjacent property known as "Flowerdew Hundred."
18. Increasing public access to recreational lands is of State interest, especially paddling opportunities. (VDCR)
19. Follow a model similar to Back Bay NWR which allows public access to the refuge on foot, on bike, by canoe, and limited motorized (tram) traffic.
20. State has defined routes on both sides of the James River for bicycling routes. Might consider tying in with regional bike trails, especially on south side of river as there are few places for people to access and stop and use facilities. (Government Partners)
21. Refuges offer a unique, wilderness experience to visitors than our state and national parks do not. Though preservation of habitat and protecting wildlife are clearly the priority, encouraging citizens to see and experience these types of habitats, first hand, is an educational and life changing experience. If managed

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

correctly, these facilities not only foster future generations of species; they promote future generations of wildlife stewards.

22. Do not isolate this as an off-limits refuge that people don't know, understand, or appreciate. Create a management plan that promotes unique educational, health, and recreational opportunities that are sustainable and encourage long-term support and stewardship by the public.
23. Opening the refuge to additional public use would “expand the public’s use of their property,” provide a means of raising needed funds for refuge projects, and encourage public interest in participating with needed projects at the refuge.
24. Allow primitive hiking, biking, paddling, and camping opportunities for people to truly experience nature in a wilderness setting.
25. Provide public access to the James River.
26. Could there be consideration for increased canoe or kayak access but with seasonal restrictions to protect bald eagles? (Government Partners)

Hunting

1. “Stop working only for the NRA. Stop working for the gun wackos in Virginia. They are few in number, diminishing every single year in numbers and the general American citizenry, who pay your salaries, deserve to use the site in safety from the gun wackos psychotics who murder animals.”
2. “Using the code words ‘wildlife dependent’ always means you have wildlife slaughter going on. This agency likes to hide the crap and meanness to animals that is behind their work.”
3. Opposition to offering hunting on all refuges, including James River NWR.
4. Support to continue offering hunting on all refuges, including James River NWR.
5. Satisfied that Virginia offers a good bit of land for hunters to help control game populations.
6. Close James River NWR to hunting.
7. Willingness to participate in planning to ensure that hunting continues to be available.
8. Hunters need constant supervision to stay within the law.
9. Hunters are driven by laws, rules, and ethics. Hunters are among the most law-abiding citizens. Violations are minimal among hunters.
10. Does hunting conflict with bald eagle protection?
11. The refuge needs a comprehensive hunting plan.
12. What are the existing hunting opportunities on the refuge?

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

13. Why are the hunting opportunities at the refuge set up the way they are? For example, why are there only 25 hunting days on the refuge?
14. How long will it take to change the existing hunting opportunities or open the refuge to new hunting opportunities?
15. Support for maintaining the existing deer hunting opportunities. If hunting opportunities on refuge was to be reduced, support of a critical part of our stakeholders, conservation partners, hunters, and their state wildlife agencies would be lost.
16. Opportunity to hunt on refuge is “way too tight.” Support for relaxing hunting restrictions and expanding opportunities.
17. Would not like to see the refuge opened up too widely with no controls like some other areas because people will get hurt, refuge resources will get damaged, or enforcement problems will result.
18. Expand the hunting opportunities on this refuge for all categories of game “on this great land as my Indian brothers had in the past.”
19. The refuge’s existing deer hunt lottery draw system is way too restrictive. Don’t understand why it is used, since VDGIF has expansive hunting on their management lands. That hunting program is done well, professionally, and responsibly.
20. Public participation in refuge hunting opportunities is “far below what anyone would consider normal. A lot of this is due to the restrictive practices that are utilized at the refuge... [*which*] are a deterrent [*to hunter participation*]... [*which in turn*] have brought problems to our community. Properties surrounding the refuge bare testimony to the fact that the deer herd numbers are growing beyond reasonable capacity.” Hunter participation would increase if scheduled, public, organized hunts were less restrictive. Organized hunts can be orchestrated in a manner where they can be controlled very well because of the refuge’s location and layout, as well as serve as a model for other refuges.
21. Expand existing deer hunt. “We don’t need another wasting disease type of epidemic in our deer populations to teach us the value of selective herd management that hunting provides.”
22. Prior to refuge establishment, residents were apprehensive with the idea of government ownership of the property and hunting access. The current hunt program is not adequate. There are 89 hunting days open under the State season, and only 25 days are open on the refuge to hunt deer. That is a far cry from what was expected. Hunters feel misled from what was promised. If local hunters were told that the refuge would only be open 25 days for hunting, establishment of the refuge would not have been supported.
23. Increase number of deer hunting days because the deer herd is growing and there are not enough days open at the refuge to manage them.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

24. Why can't the refuge be open to hunting every day of the 89 hunting days open under the State season?
25. Why can't shotgun days be increased?
26. Maintain areas where you can sit in a tree and not get impacted by people roaming around underneath. Commenter enjoys sitting in a tree where it is quiet. The hunt at Cavalier is a good model as it works well. There are ways to manage hunters so they don't impact other hunters, such as requiring that hunters draw their stand by 12:00pm. No walking around after that.
27. Open the refuge to allow use of hunting dogs for organized hunts. The practice of using hunting dogs for deer hunting has been a part of Virginia's heritage since Virginia was founded. Virginia is the largest hound hunting state in the country. The practice is supported by the VDGIF. The practice should be allowed on all Federal and State lands. Refuge lands were bought with hunter tax paying dollars. Hunters should have a seat at the table when hunting seasons are parsed out.
28. Opposition to hound hunting every day of the week, but supportive of some opportunities with dogs.
29. Open the refuge to have three or four days scheduled for "dog hunts" which would be the most efficient means of leveling the herd. A dog hunt that is properly organized can be a very effective means of reaching a healthy herd and, at the same time, be safe for all parties.
30. Given the size of the refuge, there should be opportunities for all types of hunting.
31. Consider expanding the hunting opportunities to allow hunt for coyote, rabbit, and turkey (spring and fall).
32. Open the refuge to turkey hunting because would offer the best new hunt opportunity in the vicinity and would have minimal impact on protected resources. (Government Partners)
33. Promote youth hunting opportunities. This is a huge initiative for VDGIF, is very popular, and would garner local support. There are numerous partner organizations that would like to help on a youth hunt. Even one youth day would be popular. Resources would likely be available for expanding this opportunity. (VDGIF)
34. Promote youth hunting season(s) that coincide with the State's youth seasons.
35. Opportunities for disabled hunters are popular on state lands and should also be encouraged on the refuge. (VDGIF)
36. It is important that hunting opportunities have clear objectives and desired outcomes regarding reaching hunters with certain messages. Hunts need to be well-organized and supported to make sure people are reached as desired.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

(VDGIF)

37. Why do personnel need to escort hunters if it is a public facility? Hunters don't need to be escorted. The public should be allowed to use it with adequate information provided. Use signage and accountability so you can find people. I understand you want to know where everybody is in the woods.
38. Opposition to hunting on Sundays, "as we don't believe that hunters should take all of VA resources all week during the hunting season. This is unfair use of public lands."
39. Support for hunting on Sundays as a tool to more efficiently manage game populations on this refuge.
27. Consider charging up to a \$20 for a hunt permit if the hunter would actually get an opportunity to hunt (and not just register to hunt).
28. Organized hunts can be a major fund raiser for the refuge. 4300 acres can easily accommodate up to 75 hunters per day, and hunters would gladly pay \$25 a day to participate; this would generate \$7500 by offering 4 organized hunts.

Fishing

1. Why has the refuge remained closed to fishing? (Government Partners)
2. Open the refuge to fishing for casting along waterways and from its shoreline, including construction of facilities (e.g., piers, boat access) to support this use.

Wildlife Observation

1. Continue to allow wildlife observation.
2. Support for eagle watching and would "love to do more."

Environmental Education

1. Develop fact sheets about various topics: environment, climate change, trees, shrubs, animals, birds, and reptiles.
2. Develop refuge maps showing roads, trails, geography, and forests.
3. Foster relationship with a local Boy Scout Troop to educate adults about the refuge (as the boys talk about their experiences with their parents) and develop a positive relationship with members of the community who may be in the area for many years.
4. Inform visitors about migratory and resident bald eagles.
5. Inform visitors about the incredible comeback of the bald eagle, which can be done rather easily with a few facts that blow most people away. The biggest fact is that there is no other place in the country that shows a better comeback of the bald eagle than the James River.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

Interpretation

1. Interpretive messaging with each opportunity would be important and should be considered in conjunction with the Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT, which needs to be captured in the refuge's CCP. (NPS)

Other Uses

1. Do not open the refuge to trapping.
2. Open the refuge to hiking, possibly on a limited/seasonal basis.
3. Open the refuge to boat access, particularly canoes.
4. Open the refuge to tent camping and camping in cabins.
5. Open the refuge to horseback riding and charge a fee for this use.

Potential User Conflicts

1. "There seems to be a trend with the government to lease these lands out to private entities. When that happens, it is no longer public. It may be 'officially' owned by the government but for as long as the lease goes, it is private. This is not fair to the body of the people we call 'Public'.... Please do not allow leasing out of these properties. The government has a responsibility to us, our children and their children to protect these lands FOR us, not FROM us."
2. The biggest user conflict is wildlife hunting versus every other use of this site.
3. "My vision for this site is a peaceful site for wildlife and birds, not a killing field. Wildlife have so little land left they need lands saved for them to be natural. Mankind has taken over 95% of all earth."
4. Liberal opportunities are provided for wildlife photography and birdwatchers. It is offensive that hunting is more restrictive. We can work together like we do at other places (e.g., State Wildlife Management Areas) where hikers, bikers, photographers are also allowed on hunting lands.
5. Horseback riders could be accommodated outside of the refuge hunting days.

Facilities Supporting Public Uses

1. Do not construct new roads.
2. Encourage reasonable use of trails and existing roads in the refuge.
3. Open up the areas along the river and construct a "river drive" road along the south side of the James River, which could start at Route 156 and go to the Williamsburg barge at Surry.
4. Expand parking within reasonable proximity to areas being visited. Currently visitors are often found parked partially on state roads within the NWR creating safety concerns and impeding access.
5. Expand existing trail system by establishing more hiking trails for accessing natural areas and wildlife viewing opportunities.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

6. A trail system within the southwest corner of the refuge could tie into the Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT, as well as the James River Heritage Trail.
7. Support for regional trail connections, such as the East Coast Greenway and Blueways Trails, and other walking and biking opportunities to get people out and on the refuge. There is infrastructure already on the refuge to do this (e.g., roads). Commenter has worked on getting grants for trails and been very successful. This could be coupled with outdoor classrooms and interpretive centers connecting those off and on the refuge.
8. Maintain the trails so that ticks do not bite the hikers. Mowing is the only way of effectively eliminating the ticks.
9. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings would enable trail users and other visitors to learn more about the refuge and the importance of protecting habitat both at the refuge and at home in their yards (VDCR)
10. Construct a nature visitor center.
11. Create a visitor center that includes a supply shop for fishing, bait, and hunting.
12. Construct camping cabins.
13. Create viewing stations or “human perches” for visitors to see the eagles’ favorite perches. A bald eagle’s favorite perch, or perches, always gives them a clear view of their nest. It may be 3/4 a mile away from, but they can clearly see their nest. The river is usually the best place to see them.
14. Construct a public boat ramp to increase public access:
 - a. because the best way to view wildlife on the land, in the air, and in the water is from a large body of water with unobstructed views. (Prince George County)
 - b. it would provide access for citizens and tourists to view the abundant natural resources of the area. (Prince George County)
 - c. it could help to showcase this unique habitat in a controlled manner. (Prince George County)
 - d. the idea has been submitted to the Prince George County Capital Improvement Program as a long-range comprehensive effort to increase tourism and broaden access to the community. (Prince George County)
 - e. it would provide access to the James River, which is the #1 concern of Virginia residents based on recent surveys.
 - f. because there are no public ramps for 35 miles on the river.
 - g. because there used to be a boat landing/pier at Blairs Wharf.
15. Consider additional water-based access at other locations, particularly at the quarry if land can be acquired. It would be good if The Nature Conservancy would consider purchasing Hitch gravel and providing a boat ramp. Its deep water at that spot and would be a good location for a ramp. Other areas along the mouth of Powell’s Creek may be too shallow. Need to be careful where you put a new boat ramp, but seems like Hitch gravel area would be a good place.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

16. Some restriction on high-speed or gas-powered boats in Powell's Creek would improve the experience for fishermen and paddlers who want to keep noise levels low.
17. Develop the soft kayak access on Powell's Creek with a paved or gravel road, parking area, and a kayak/canoe access that is ADA-accessible. (Government Partners)
18. The nearest public canoe/kayak launches outside of the refuge are located at Hog Island Wildlife Management Area, Chippokes Plantation State Park, Lawrence Lewis Park, City Point Park, and Hopewell. These are all kind of far to tie a paddle trip together. (Government Partners)
19. What other locations for kayak take-outs can be considered on the refuge? What about the Blueways trail opportunities and allowing access in other areas besides the one you are using now? (Government Partners)
20. Powell's Creek, forming the western boundary of the refuge, is identified as one of the most evocative landscapes in the Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT plan. It is very important to keep that in mind. (NPS)
21. Construct a public, 300+ yard shooting range on the refuge for rifle, shotgun, and handguns.
22. "The General Assembly is making it [*easier*] for citizens of the Commonwealth to carry handguns, but there are very few places where one can learn to become proficient in their use. Those places that do exist are almost prohibitively expensive to use and thus greatly curtail practice. It is almost unconscionable that one be issued a permit to carry a handgun and then not know how to use it properly or to become proficient in its use. Nearly all the ranges that are 'public' ranges are for long gun use only. And not all those long gun shooters are hunter. Many are 'recreational' shooters and have full access and use of the public ranges in the Commonwealth."
23. "Similarly, many citizens of the Commonwealth own handguns not only for self-protection but also for recreational use. These folks need and deserve a facility to shoot as much as do long gun shooters."
24. In much the same manner as Cavalier Rifle and Pistol Club, a public shooting range on the refuge could be staffed and maintained by volunteers and/or members. The proceeds from time rentals could be used to further enrich the refuge.
25. Given the recent upsurge in the general interest in shooting sports, constructing a public shooting range on the refuge would be a profitable enterprise. Also, such ranges tend to attract competitive events and the local revenue they generate. The greater Richmond Virginia area is uniquely poised to become the premier area for shooting sports in the country.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

Community Relations/Outreach/Local

Partnership Goal

1. Partnership development and potential was discussed quite a bit under each of the other goals. Should we keep a separate partnership goal? (Government Partners)

Communications and Outreach

1. "I've been here 11 years and embarrassed to say I never knew about the refuge and I am an outdoor enthusiast. You have a hidden gem here with the refuge."
2. The refuge is a gem that must be preserved but promoted a lot more than it has in the past.
3. With Fort Lee and a growing and educated population, there could be a lot of use. I'd rather keep it quiet and "have it to myself."
4. Many people don't know about the refuge, or they know it is there but they don't know who to get information from (other than a website).
5. Additional information about the refuge history and current management is requested because it is not available on the refuge's website.
6. Communication and outreach strategies are important and they potentially could be more strategic and effective. Could seek partnerships in these areas too (e.g., media). (Government Partners)
7. State and Federal wildlife agencies do a poor job of promoting accomplishments. Need to broadcast achievements. The strong partnerships among agencies generate good press, not to mention the benefits to natural resources. Having good press and outreach materials to give to Congressionals, for example, is a great advantage. Need to get ahead in planning for outreach materials that highlight accomplishments. (Government Partners)
8. Suggestion that the Service do a better job of informing the County about refuge activities. Improving communication with the County is important. Should exchange Web site addresses and make a link on the County Website to refuge announcements (www.princegeorgeva.org). The County posted an announcement of our public scoping meetings and the newsletter. (Prince George County)
9. Suggest the Service attendance at County Board meetings (twice per month on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday nights) to provide updates and announcements perhaps on a quarterly or 6-month basis. There is a place on their regular agenda for public announcement time. This would be a good way to get the word out. The media is there and can help facilitate communicating with the public. Call County administrator and let them know the Service wants to attend a board meeting and make an announcement. (Prince George County)
10. Encourage the Service to participate in School Board meetings. (Prince George County)

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

11. Existing refuge signage is inadequate. There is no refuge sign on Route 10. I've been off Flowerdew Hundred Road and never knew the refuge is there. Just having adequate signage would be helpful.
12. Inform the public about refuge resources, especially the number of bald eagles.
13. Inform the public about how to promote making public land open to hunting and fishing.
14. There is not enough communication about existing refuge hunting opportunities.
15. Interest in volunteering opportunities.

Coordination with Adjacent Private Property Owners

1. Acquire adjacent private property.
2. Can you acquire land if the landowner is not a willing seller? (Government Partners)
3. What is the intent of the new owner of the Flowerdew Hundred property? (Government Partners)
4. Would the refuge allow the Hitch Gravel landowners access to get the gravel out over land as a condition of purchase? Maybe you could set a time limit? (Government Partners)
5. It might be worth trying to expand the impact of the refuge to neighbors, particularly thinking of Hitch Gravel. You may be able to offer some site restoration suggestions to benefit wildlife that will at the same time help them expedite reclamation process via Virginia Mines & Minerals Department.

Coordination with Non-governmental Entities

1. Partner with the Citty of Henricus to develop an Indian site.
2. Partner with Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden by exchanging trips to observe various types of growth. Contact Phyllis Laslett, Director of Education.
3. The Center for Conservation Biology will be moving their headquarters nearby, so the Service could develop that partnership further.
4. The Chesapeake Conservancy is a great partner, has been helpful with funding, and they work throughout the Chesapeake Bay. (Government Partners)
5. The James River Association is another great partner opportunity that could be developed. (Government Partners)
6. The Friends of Lower Appomattox River is another outdoor environmental organization that might have some interest in partnering. (Government Partners)
7. The Virginia Master Naturalists are another partner opportunity, but need to go to them with a specific task. They are currently doing some work on the refuge, but the relationship could be enhanced. (Government Partners)

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

8. The Boy Scouts of America are another potential partner, especially Eagle Scout projects. They have already done some work on the refuge, and the Service is evaluating project proposals on a case-by-case basis. Encourage projects that can really benefit the refuge and that can be done in close coordination with refuge staff. (Government Partners)
9. The local Counties focus on regional tourism includes working with Friends of Lower Appomattox River. How much do you want this refuge to be a regional tourist destination? There is an opportunity to partner with the Counties to help get the word out to the Petersburg community. (Government Partners)
10. The existing Audubon Society partnership could be expanded. (Government Partners)
11. Consider developing a stronger relationship with universities. (Government Partners)
12. Contact Virginia State University which has a new environmental studies program. Virginia State University is probably the closest college to the refuge, and as a traditionally black college with a long history, it could be a great asset to our cultural resource program. (Government Partners)
13. The refuge could benefit from creating a Friends Group. Presently, the Friends of Rappahannock and the James River Association and other non-profits' Friends Groups are being tapped into. The Service vision document mentions that all refuge should have one, so this should be addressed. (Government Partners)
14. Participate in open discussions with the Virginia Hunting Dog Alliance to gain a better understanding and appreciation for "proper and professional organized" hunts and comments made by the State Chairman of this organization.

Coordination with Other Government Agencies and Programs

1. Work with Prince George County to incorporate the CCP recommendations into their Comprehensive Plan. (Prince George County)
2. Work with Prince George County to rezone properties along Route 10 to promote the James River National Wildlife Refuge as a destination. Williamsburg has done the promotion on the north side of the James River. Prince George County should promote the south side of the river. Provide tax incentives for businesses to invest in new restaurants, art studios, hotels, and historical sites along Route 10. Incentives could include a tax reinvestment zone and provide for limited county taxes for up to ten years. Additional incentives could include waiver of environmental laws (Chesapeake Bay Program and USACE regulations), zoning setbacks, parking reductions, and fast paced zoning approvals at the county, state, and Federal levels. This area within Prince George County is truly unique in the United States.
3. VDGIF is happy to assist with the refuge's annual white-tailed deer hunt, as needed. (VDGIF)
4. Continue working with AmeriCorps. (Government Partners)

James River National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Scoping Summary

5. Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) programs should be explored. The refuge could use YCC crews already established and supervised by State Parks staff in a partnership arrangement.
6. The U.S. Army Base at Fort Lee is a partner that Friends of Lower Appomattox River uses. Staff from Fort Lee do a lot of projects for the State.
7. There is a large initiative in the Chesapeake Bay among agencies, nonprofits, and others. Meeting was held at the National Conservation Training Center recently to discuss large landscapes based on river tributaries. We need to stay tuned with this initiative and how they are developing plans. (Government Partners)
8. Contact VDCR for suggestions on possible linkages to additional partners who could be drawn into the use and care of the refuge with increased recreational use. (VDCR)