

Chincoteague

National Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Final Plan is Now Available

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has released the signed comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) for Chincoteague and Wallops Island National Wildlife Refuges (NWR). The 15-year management plan will guide refuge practices to achieve our wildlife conservation mission and to support public use on the refuge. Modifications were made to the preferred alternative proposed in the draft CCP based on considerable input from stakeholders and further evaluation by the planning team and refuge management.

Where to Get a Copy of the CCP

You can download an electronic copy of the plan from our website at: www.fws.gov/refuge/Chincoteague/what_we_do/conservation.html



Current Recreational Beach

USFWS

Natural Resource Management

Chincoteague NWR was established in 1943 under authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act as a sanctuary for migratory birds, especially migrating and wintering waterfowl. Since that time, the objectives have been expanded to include the protection and management of threatened and endangered species and other wildlife, and to provide for wildlife-oriented public use. Chincoteague NWR will continue to meet the purposes for which it was established.

■ Restoring oyster reefs:

Using oyster reefs, a living shoreline will be restored along Beach Road and the Service Road. These reefs will increase resiliency of the roadsides by slowing wave action during storms. The oysters clean water by filtering out sediment and some contaminants, so the reefs will also improve water quality and nourish the aquatic ecosystem.

■ Managing loblolly pine forests:

To lessen impacts of southern pine bark beetle outbreaks we will increase forest diversity by varying the age range of trees & forest structure. Healthy forests support Delmarva fox squirrels and improve breeding habitat for birds like the brown-headed nuthatch and eastern towhee.

Visitor Use and Experience

■ Hunting/Fishing Opportunities:

Current hunting opportunities will be maintained, and may be expanded in the future by adding species, extending hours, and providing special events and opportunities for youth and women. The refuge will continue sika hunting and will conduct research to identify a desired population size. The refuge will continue to manage opportunities for recreational fishing, shellfishing and crabbing.

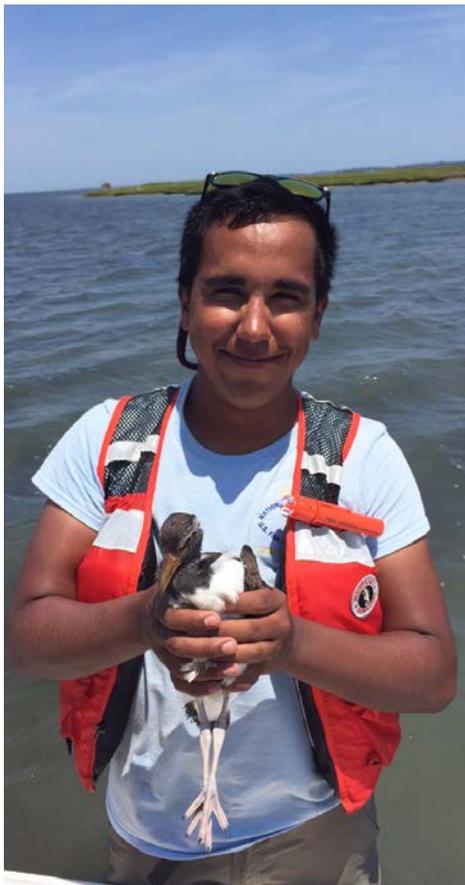
Cultural Resource Management

■ Lighthouse Access:

Visitor access to Assateague Lighthouse will continue to be offered by Chincoteague Natural History Association.

■ Chincoteague Ponies:

The Chincoteague ponies are owned and managed by the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company and have a strong cultural tie to the local community. The refuge will implement a pony management plan that meets multiple objectives such as allowing events, managing visitor viewing and the grazing program. The refuge will continue to allow a maximum herd size of 150 ponies.



Intern holding American Oystercatcher

USFWS

New Elements in the Final Plan Resulting from Public Involvement

The Beach Road causeway across Toms Cove will remain open each year to seasonal oversand vehicles (OSV) and hikers from September 16 to March 14 south to Fishing Point. Beach Road will continue to be open to vehicles year-round as far as the vicinity of the South Pony Corral.

The existing Toms Cove visitor contact station will remain open and serve as a base for environmental education after the new FWS/NPS contact stations is completed. The NPS and other environmental education entities will continue to offer programs there until it becomes unserviceable over time.

Swans Cove Bike Trail will remain open.

The Service Road will remain open to hikers year-round north to the Assateague Island National Seashore boundary.

Recreational Beach Relocation:

The new FWS/NPS Assigned Area will consist of the relocated 1-mile recreational beach, associated parking areas, and a new visitor contact station. It will also extend to include an additional mile south to the terminus of the Swan Cove Bike Trail, with one-half mile open year-round to OSV. This additional mile will allow certain uses, such as fishing, walking, and watching wildlife. This change extends the assigned area by an additional mile, doubling its length.

There will be accessible parking areas in close proximity to the new beach, and we will work closely with the National Park Service to design, refine and analyze visitor services and beach infrastructure in the planning process.

In the CCP, we estimated that beach relocation will cost up to \$20 million. We will implement the project as funding and staffing resources are available.



Children at beach



Piping plover chick

Carol Duffy

Current Beach Access and Parking:

Although significant federal resources have been expended during this time to fortify the current recreational beach parking areas, they have been unsuccessful due to the high vulnerability of this area, which is referred to as the “Overwash”. For decades the current recreational beach parking lots have experienced significant overwash from storms. More recently, even high tides have begun to overwash the parking areas.

The National Park Service-Assateague Island National Seashore (NPS-ASIS) is responsible for beach parking lot maintenance and repair through an agreement with Chincoteague NWR, which allows us to provide financial assistance for these tasks.

Contingency planning will occur during the interim period before the new recreational beach and parking lot are opened because additional storm damage is practically inevitable given the vulnerability of the location of the existing parking lots. The refuge, in consultation with NPS-ASIS, will provide management strategies for maintaining the current beach and parking areas in the interim until the newly located recreational beach is ready for visitor use. The two limiting factors which have always affected the USFWS and NPS ability as Federal agencies to respond are the degree of storm damage to the current beach and infrastructure, and adequate funding to conduct repairs.

NextSteps:

As we prepare to move the recreational beach, a site design plan will be developed for parking and access to the new location 1.5 miles north of the existing beach. The beach move will involve environmental and public review under the National Environmental Policy Act in addition to what was done as part of the CCP process.

We are developing a memorandum of understanding with the Town of Chincoteague, Accomack County, National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and NASA to facilitate the planning process.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge
PO Box 62
Chincoteague Island, VA 23336**

757-336-6122

www.fws.gov/refuge/Chincoteague

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