



Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge Proposed Habitat Management Plan

Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR or refuge) is located in Ashley, Bradley, and Union Counties, Arkansas, about eight miles west of Crossett, Arkansas on U.S. Highway 82. Established in 1975 as mitigation for the creation of the U.S. Corps of Engineers' (USACE) Ouachita and Black Rivers Navigation Project and Felsenthal Lock and Dam, this 65,000 acre refuge is named for the small Felsenthal community located at its southwest corner, and contains an abundance of water resources dominated by the Ouachita and Saline Rivers and the Felsenthal Pool.



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waterfowl habitat. These wetlands, in combination with the pine and upland hardwood forest on the higher ridges, support a wide diversity of native plants and animals.

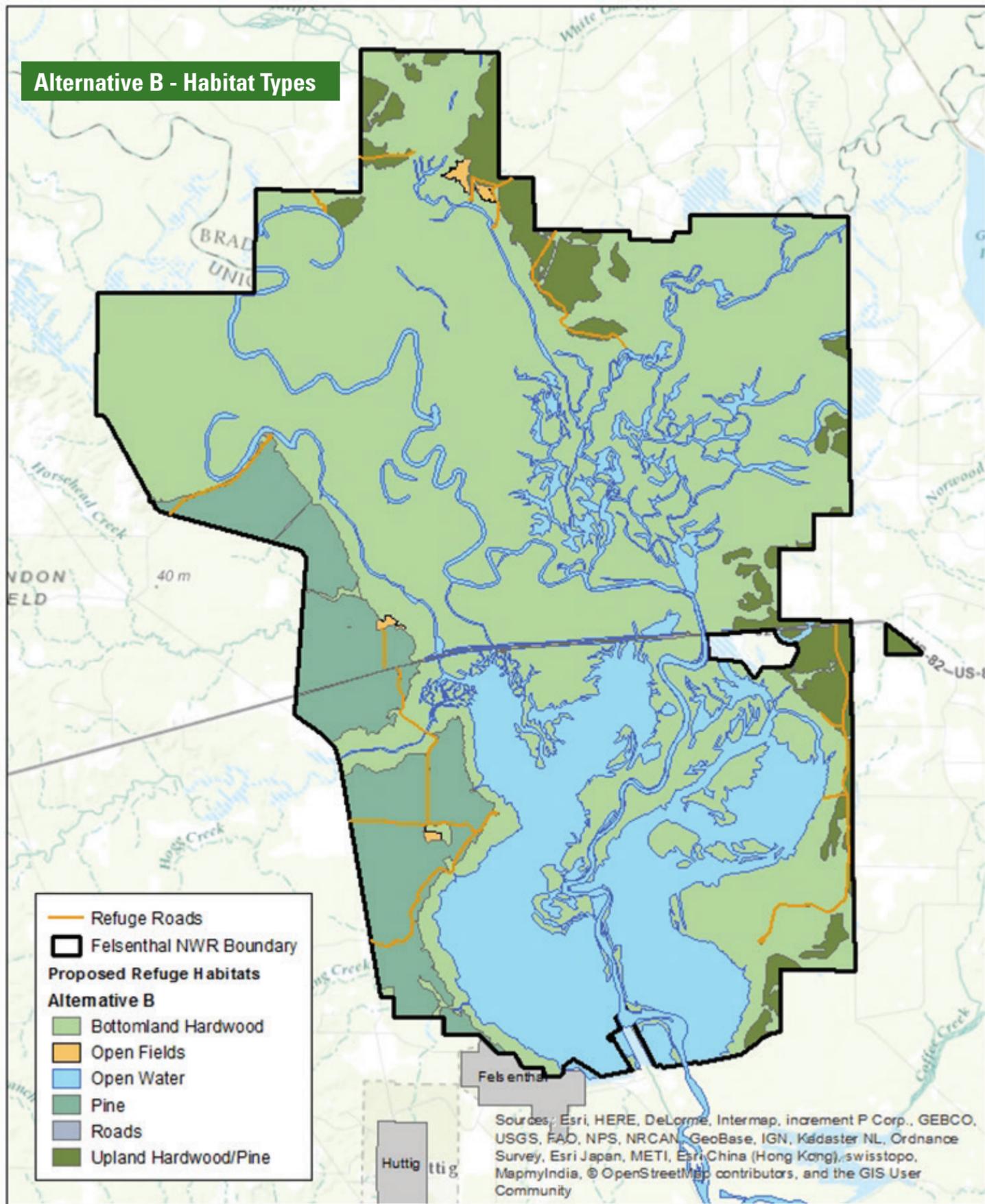
Purpose of the Draft Habitat Management Plan and Environmental Assessment

The Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) developed in 2010 and this Draft Habitat Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (Draft HMP/EA) are the primary tools used to guide refuge staff in achieving refuge objectives and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Although much of the information in the CCP is still relevant, the Draft HMP/EA will modify the Refuge's

objectives and strategies based on current information.

The purpose of Felsenthal NWR Draft HMP/EA is to ensure that refuge management will strategically address four key areas of concern. Strategic here means approaches that are ecologically sound and sustainable in light of physical and biological change, practical, viable, or economically realistic, and responsive to the following four key areas of concern:

- 1) abide by and contribute to the mission, mandates and policies of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Refuge System;
- 2) meets the refuge's goals;
- 3) addresses key issues; and
- 4) responds to public concerns.



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While explained in more depth in the draft plan, briefly, this HMP will address:

- 1) The need to discontinue flooding the green-tree reservoir in winter due to forest health concerns;
- 2) Relocate the waterfowl sanctuary;
- 3) A proposal to drawdown the Felsenthal Pool one foot every three years; and
- 4) Reduce ATV trails from 59.25 to 41 miles.

The development of a Draft HMP/EA addresses six resource management needs. First, since the development of the CCP objectives in 2010, new information will result in modifying and replacing refuge objectives and strategies through this HMP. Secondly, management practices should be consistent with current policies; the new HMP will bring the refuge into conformity with all current law and policies.

The six resource management needs this Draft HMP/EA addresses are:

- Water management as it pertains to overall forest health, moist soil management (pool drawdown), and waterfowl disturbance.
- Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) management as it pertains to the RCW Recovery Plan, and in conjunction with neighboring landowners with RCWs.
- Allowing the natural succession or through forest management the conversion of upland pine to hardwood/pine forests in upland areas that do not meet the criteria for red-cockaded woodpecker management.
- Water quality.
- Invasive and noxious plant and animal species management.
- ATV/UTV use and its impacts on water quality, spread of invasive species, and wildlife disturbance.

The table at right gives a comparison of the three alternatives.

Alternative A describes the refuge's existing management activities and serves as a baseline for comparing and contrasting Alternatives B and C. Implementing Alternative A would continue current habitat management regimes in their present format.

Alternative B, the Service's proposed alternative, combines actions that we believe would most effectively achieve

Objectives	Alternative A (Current Management – No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Proposed Alternative)	Alternative C
Objective 1 Upland Pine (Open Pine)			
Acres	9,000	6,200	8,159
Fire Managed Acres	9,490	6,200	8,159
Uneven-aged Managed	None	None	500 acres
RCW Cluster (population objective)	22	13-14	18
Consider Neighboring Population of RCWs	No	Yes	Yes
Open Fields	Not mentioned in the CCP	132 acres	132 acres
Objective 2 Upland Hardwood/Pine			
Acres	188 acres (no objective in CCP but is mentioned)	3,388 acres	1,219 acres
Objective 3 Bottomland Hardwoods			
Acres	40,000 acres	40,000 acres	40,000 acres
Passively Managed Acres (an effort will continue to control invasive species)	None	5,551 acres	5,551 acres plus all lands between 65' and 67' msl
Objective 4 Water Management/ Sanctuaries			
GTR Management	No flooding for 2-3 years Mimic historic winter flooding Various scenarios can be utilized but fluctuate	None – Allow natural winter flood events	Starting December 15 raise the pool one tenth/day until the 68' msl level is reached. Start the drawdown on January 16 to 65' msl
Sanctuary	9,050 acres	6,910 acres (old area removed would be opened to small game, big game hunting and fishing)	9,050 acres
Objective 5 Drawdown of the Felsenthal Pool/Moist Soil			
Drawdown	None	1 foot drawdown every 3 years	1 foot drawdown every year
Objective 6 Aquatic Resources			
Water Quality Monitoring and Mussel Bed Survey	None	Yes	Yes
ATV Trails	Maintain existing	Eliminate 18.3 miles of ATV trails	Eliminate 5.8 miles

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refuge purposes, vision and goals, and respond to public needs. Alternative B also incorporates the principles of strategic habitat conservation and focal species management, as both reflect the most recent advances in the fields of conservation science and delivery of conservation actions on the ground by the Service.

In Alternative B, the habitat objectives and general management strategies include the following:

- Managing for natural range of conditions in upland habitats (native forest, early successional, and shrubland habitats) to restore lost elements of biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health for priority resources of concern.
- Managing the refuge's forested wetland and aquatic systems consistently with biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health, and considering their sustainability in an altered hydrological system.



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- Restoring mature upland forested habitats, active forest management, to manage for priority resources of concern (endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and forest interior-dwelling birds).
- Increasing avian diversity and abundance of targeted focal bird species.

Alternative C habitat management emphasizes a return of a water management program that that would raise water levels in the pool to 68' msl from December 15 to January 15 with every third year the pool would not

be raised in an effort to try and mimic natural hydrological processes. In addition, a portion of the upland pine (RCW habitat) would be managed under an uneven-aged management protocol and only the small isolated pines tracts would be converted to upland hardwood. Annual drawdown of the Felsenthal pool would put an increased emphasis on waterfowl.

Proposed Schedule

Public Comment Period
October 26 - November 27, 2015

Public Meetings

Thursday, November 5, 2015
Eldorado Conference Center,
Murphy Hall I
311 South West Avenue
Eldorado, AR
6 pm – 8 pm

Tuesday, November 10, 2015

Warren Court House
Old Courtroom
101 East Cedar Street
Warren, AR
6 pm – 8 pm

Thursday, November 12, 2015

First Baptist Church
Multi-Ministry Center
703 Pine Street
Crossett, AR
6 pm – 8 pm

Two Information Open Houses

November 7 and November 14, 2015
10 am - 2 pm
Felsenthal NWR Visitor Center
5531 Highway 82 West
Crossett, AR

Winter 2015-2016

Develop the final Habitat Management Plan and associated National Environmental Policy Act documentation for a decision by the Southeast Regional Director.

For More Information

Please visit our web page at
<http://www.fws.gov/felsenthal>

Service Contacts

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