

James River National Wildlife Refuge

Release of Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan

October 2014



Greetings from James River National Wildlife Refuge!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we) is pleased to announce the release of a draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for James River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The draft CCP and EA is now available for public review and comment until November 30, 2014.

In this newsletter, we summarize the three different management alternatives we evaluated for the refuge. We also explain how you can obtain and comment on the draft CCP and EA and provide details about upcoming public meetings.



Doug Letterman

Eastern Box Turtle

What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

A CCP is a 15-year strategic plan guiding management for all refuge programs. Each CCP will be revised at least every 15 years, or sooner if significant new information becomes available or conditions change.

Service staff began preparing a CCP for James River National Wildlife Refuge in April 2009.

The Refuge

The 4,324-acre James River NWR is located along the southern bank of the lower James River in Prince George County, Virginia, approximately 6 miles east of Hopewell and approximately 30 miles southeast of Richmond.

In 1991, James River NWR was established specifically for the protection of bald eagles which were federally and State endangered at that time. In 2007, the bald eagle was removed from the Federal list of threatened and endangered list. In was removed from the Virginia list of threatened and endangered species in 2013.

The bald eagle remains a species protected under the Federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) and the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

In addition to providing bald eagle habitat, James River NWR offers a diversity of protected feeding, breeding, and wintering habitats for migratory birds and other native wildlife, including pine-dominated, moist hardwood, and floodplain forests; freshwater marsh and shrub swamps; and erosional bluffs.

James River NWR is one of four refuges managed by the Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex.

Management Alternatives Considered

Each of the three alternatives aims to achieve the refuge's purposes, vision, and goals. We highlight key differences among the alternatives below. Complete descriptions of each alternative are in chapter 3 of the draft CCP and EA. A detailed analysis of the potential impacts resulting from implementation of each alternative is in chapter 4 of the draft.

Alternative A - Current Management

This alternative describes current management priorities and activities at the refuge. It serves as a baseline for comparing alternatives B and C.

Habitat Protection and Management:

- Promote pine-dominated forest health on the refuge and focus management on protecting this habitat for use by bald eagles and other species.
- Maintain existing moist hardwood forest, floodplain forest, freshwater marsh and shrub swamp, aquatic habitat, erosional bluff, and non-forested uplands at current acreages to support native species.

Cultural Resources:

- Limit ground disturbance throughout the refuge.

Public Use and Access:

- Continue to offer existing deer hunting opportunities.
- Use reservation system for visitors; require visitors to obtain a refuge-issued permit three business days in advance of proposed visit.
- Maintain key partnerships with State, local, and private entities.



Wild turkeys

Alternative B - Manage Forest Health with Pine-dominated Component; New, Enhanced, and Focused Public Use Opportunities (Service-preferred Alternative)

Alternative B is the Service-preferred alternative because it combines the actions we believe would best achieve the refuge's purposes, vision, and goals; respond to key issues; support species of conservation concern; and provide enhanced public use opportunities.

Habitat Protection and Management:

- Transition from pine-dominated forest to mature pine savanna, providing habitat for bald eagles as well as cavity- and ground-nesting species.
- Develop inventory and monitoring program to assess habitat quality.

Cultural Resources:

- Obtain more precise information about archaeological sites to protect known sites and better inform refuge management.

Public Use and Access:

- Expand deer hunting opportunities; open refuge to turkey and waterfowl hunting; and promote youth hunting opportunities.
- Designate area for visitor access for wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation.
- Expand current nature trail into a 3-mile trail.
- Designate two fishing areas.
- Expand current and form new partnerships to support public uses and research.

Alternative C - Manage Forest Health with Hardwood Conversion Component; New and Expanded Public Use Opportunities

Habitat Protection and Management:

- Promote transition of pine-dominated forest to dry hardwood forest, providing habitat for bald eagles and for species dependent on dry hardwood forest habitat.
- Further expand non-forested upland acres to create a natural mosaic of openings within the hardwood forest.

Cultural Resources:

- Same as alternative B.

Public Use and Access:

- Expand deer hunting differently than proposed in alternative B; open refuge to turkey hunting differently than proposed in alternative B; open the refuge to youth waterfowl hunting; and promote youth hunting opportunities.
- Develop a 2-mile wildlife drive in the southeast portion of the refuge.
- Designate three fishing areas.
- Expand current partnerships and form new partnerships as detailed in alternative B.



Brown-headed nuthatch

Public Meetings

Please consider attending the upcoming public meetings about the draft CCP and EA for James River NWR. On November 12, we will be having two different meeting sessions: one in the afternoon and one in the evening.

At each session, we will give a short presentation on the draft CCP and EA, followed by an open house. Attendees will have opportunities to speak directly with the planning team and ask questions about the plan. We will provide comment forms for individuals to write their comments.

Public Meetings - November 12, 2014

Session 1: Presentation begins at 1:00 p.m.

Session 2: Presentation begins at 5:30 p.m.

Location for both events:

Prince George Library

6605 Courts Drive

Prince George, VA 23875

Phone: (804) 458-6329 extension 3700

The Service is committed to providing access to these meetings for all participants. Please direct all requests for sign language interpreting services, close captioning, or other accommodation needs to refuge staff at (804) 333-1470 or the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Requests should be made at least 5 days in advance.

How to Obtain a Draft Plan and Provide Comments

You may view and download the draft CCP/EA online: http://www.fws.gov/refuge/James_River/what_we_do/conservation.html. To request a CD-ROM see the contact information below.

We invite you to share your comments about the draft plan in writing or at our public meetings. We will accept letters, faxes, phone calls, and emails. To be considered, all comments must be received or postmarked by November 30, 2014.

Contact Information

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James River Refuge Draft Goals

Goal 1. Protect, enhance, and restore the ecological integrity of inner coastal plain forest ecosystems of the lower James River to support native wildlife and plant communities, including species of conservation concern, and to ensure those ecosystems are resilient in anticipation of climate change.

Goal 2. Protect, enhance, and restore the ecological integrity of non-forest ecosystems of the lower James River to support native wildlife and plant communities, including species of conservation concern, and to ensure those ecosystems are resilient in anticipation of climate change.

Goal 3. Protect and conserve the refuge's cultural resources and landscape, and seek opportunities to increase knowledge and appreciation of the refuge's history as part of the lower James River.

Goal 4. Provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for visitors to connect with nature and foster enhanced stewardship of the lower James River, Chesapeake Bay estuary, and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Goal 5. Develop new partnerships and strengthen existing partnerships to promote natural and cultural resource stewardship and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

James River National Wildlife Refuge Vision Statement

James River National Wildlife Refuge safeguards nationally significant habitats along the lower James River for bald eagles and vulnerable species of the Chesapeake Bay. Healthy, contiguous forests of pine and mixed hardwoods offer respite to diminishing wildlife populations. As a living laboratory, the refuge supports environmental studies conducted by partner organizations and institutions recognized for their scientific excellence.

Visitors to this wild place are welcomed by gobbling wild turkeys, fragrant spring flowers, lush fall leaves, and inconspicuous wildlife awaiting discovery. Tracing the steps of native peoples and early settlers in a serene landscape invigorates the mind, body, and spirit, while nurturing a stewardship ethic. Recreational hunting opportunities at the refuge promote America's hunting heritage.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



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