

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge Newsletter



January 2018

From the Desk of the Acting Refuge Manager

First and Foremost, I would like to extend my appreciation to our dedicated staff, volunteers, members of our community and our visitors for another successful year of operations. Our mission of conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats would not be possible without your support and that of our federal, state, municipal, and non-profit partners. Our previous Refuge Manager, Kevin Sloan, retired in October and took a position with the non-profit American

Conservation Experience. In his new employment, he will be finding job opportunities for young professionals with public lands agencies. His position remains open at this time, and we will attempt to fill this position as soon as possible.

Until then, I look forward to serving in this capacity. Prior to this, I served as the Deputy Refuge Manager at Chincoteague NWR for the past two years, coming from the Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR where I was also a Deputy since 2004. Prior to my duties within the

Complex, I previously served in FWS as a facility manager, a maintenance technician and a bio tech.

I look forward to what this year has to offer, including recurring events such as the annual Chincoteague Pony Swim, Waterfowl Week, Beach Cleanup, and opportunities that showcase our unique refuge which continues to attract visitors near and far.

With My Appreciation,
Robert "Bob" Leffel
Acting Refuge Manager
Chincoteague NWR Complex

About the Refuge

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge includes more than 14,000 acres of beach, dunes, marsh, and maritime forest. Established in 1943 to provide habitat for migratory birds, the refuge today provides habitat for waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, and song birds as well as other species of wildlife and plants including threatened and endangered species. The refuge also provides wildlife dependent recreational opportunities such as fishing, hunting, wildlife photography and observation, interpretation, and environmental education.

Expanded Hunt Opportunities



Above: Veteran hunters at Kiptopeke State Park's Pier.

The Freedom Hunters, a veteran non-profit outreach group successfully hunted White-Tail Deer and Sika Elk in November. The group also hunted White-Tail Deer at the Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR in October and December.

As an added event during

that hunt, the refuge partnered with the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation's Kiptopeke State Park to offer a special night-time pier fishing opportunity. During that event, veterans had the opportunity to try their luck at landing Bluefish, Flounder and Rockfish from the fishing pier.

This year marks the first year of expanded public hunting opportunities at our Complex in a concerted effort to align it closely with the Commonwealth of Virginia's hunting regulations and season.

In an effort to expand

hunting, hunt fees and the daily lottery system were eliminated. Orientation, information brochures, hunt permits and hunting zone maps were also placed on our website to

streamline the experience. We look forward to this managed hunt next year.

Below: Rangers Chase Sands & Matt Jasikoff with hunters at Chincoteague NWR.



Recreational Beach Re-Location Update

Planning

Planning and discussions are underway for the recreational beach relocation, associated parking lot and access options. This past July, the refuge hosted an open house where public comments regarding the three beach parking alternatives were received.

A fourth planning workshop was held in November by state, local and federal partners where the public comments from July were discussed. As a result of this workshop, an alternative was created based upon the comments and cost/benefit

TIGER Grant

Accomack County applied for a grant to construct a new access road and associated parking lots at the proposed new beach area. These funds are administered through the US Dept. of Transportation's (USDOT) Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program.

According to the USDOT, since 2009 nearly \$5.1 billion in funding has become available to fund projects with a significant impact on the nation, a region or metropolitan area. Other Virginia recipients include the Virginia Port Authority (2009), the City of Richmond (2010) and the

analysis. This alternative option will now be analyzed further with additional design work.

It is anticipated that a draft plan will be ready for release to the public in the Spring of 2018 as part of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). According to the Environmental Protection Agency, NEPA procedures commence when a federal agency develops a proposal to undertake major federal action, such as the building of highways or construction on public property.

Also still in design is an engineering project to

Greater Richmond Transit Company (2014). Awards from this latest found of applicants will be announced in 2018.

Resiliency Funds

Recently, additional monies were made available to the refuge from the Department of Interior's Hurricane Sandy coastal resiliency fund. These funds are intended to strengthen the resiliency of coastal natural areas to withstand storms and protect communities.

determine the size of water control structures needed to control the water level in multiple impoundments. The refuge manages these impoundments as freshwater units for the benefit of foraging waterfowl and shorebirds. Water level management will be extremely important for the protection of infrastructures associated with the new beach area. Redesign of the current system is needed to enable the release of fresh water prior to a large storm event or to discharge salt water after the storm. Other items still in process include final wetland determinations and cultural/historical surveys.

The refuge will soon begin clearing trees from Beach Road to the D-Dike area to reduce the hazards associated with large numbers of trees recently damaged or killed by the Southern Pine Beetle. This work will also create a road corridor to the potential beach relocation site.

Below: Staff meeting at a Southern Pine Beetle suppression site



Species Spotlight: Snow Goose (*Chen Caerulescens*)

One of the most abundant waterfowl in the nation, the Snow Goose flocks in large numbers. They usually flood the refuge water impoundments by the thousands!

As they cover the area in a snowy white *blanket* a few dark bodies may be seen among their mass. This is because the species has a color variant named the Blue Goose, which has a white head and a dark-colored body. The Blue Goose is the iconic symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Interested in seeing some Snow Geese but are unsure of their arrival? Our refuge is a dedicated eBird site (www.ebird.org) where visitors can track their migration to our refuge, and check other observations.

Our bird checklist, trail maps, brochures, and recent eBird observations are also available on our website to download, view, save to your mobile device or print before you arrive so you can start exploring sooner.



For more information:
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/chincoteague>

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