

# Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge

## *Release of Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment*

*March 2017*

Kourtnie Bouley

### **Greetings from Massasoit 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 Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The draft CCP/EA is now available for a 60-day public review and comment period that closes on May 16, 2017.

In this newsletter, we summarize the two different management alternatives we evaluated in the draft plan for the refuge. We also explain how you can obtain and comment on the draft plan and attend our upcoming public meetings.

### **The Refuge**

Massasoit NWR is located in Plymouth, Massachusetts and lies adjacent to Myles Standish State Forest.

Massasoit NWR is one of eight refuges managed by the Eastern Massachusetts NWR Complex, which is headquartered in Sudbury, Massachusetts.

The refuge was established on September 21, 1983 to conserve the federally endangered northern red-bellied cooter. The refuge is designated critical habitat for this turtle. In addition, refuge lands protect other wildlife and plant species, including rare moths and other native pollinators, migratory songbirds, and small mammals.

The 209-acre refuge consists of pine-oak upland forest and wetlands, including open water, coastal plain ponds, and associated shoreline habitats.

Most of the refuge is comprised of the Crooked Pond parcel (184 acres), but there are also two smaller parcels located on Island Pond (15 acres) and Hoyt Pond (10 acres).

### **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.

Massasoit NWR has been closed to the public since its establishment due to both staffing limitations and the presence of the cooter, a species that is very sensitive to disturbance. Exceptions have been made for occasional interpretive and environmental education programs either led by staff, or under a special use permit (SUP) that we issue to education partners.



*Crooked Pond at Massasoit NWR; rare buckmoth found in pitch pine-scrub oak habitat; northern red-bellied cooter.*

USFWS; PB. STATE.NY; USFWS

### Draft Goals for Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge

**Goal 1.** Perpetuate the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the pitch pine-oak forest habitat type and associated coastal plain ponds and wetlands on Massasoit NWR to sustain native wildlife, especially species of conservation concern, such as the federally listed northern red-bellied cooter.

**Goal 2.** Promote awareness and support for the protection of sensitive resources on Massasoit NWR through community outreach and opportunities for connecting the public to the refuge's natural resources.

**Goal 3.** Enhance collaborations with Federal and State agencies, conservation organizations, and local communities to promote species and habitat conservation across the pitch pine-oak landscape in southeastern Massachusetts, and to support Massasoit NWR's purpose and the Refuge System and Service missions.

### Management Alternatives Considered

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

#### Alternative A – Current Management

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

#### Wildlife and Habitats

Continue to:

- Protect the refuge's wildlife and habitats by protecting existing pond habitat from human disturbance.
- Increase nest success and hatchling survival by maintaining high quality nesting habitat for the northern red-bellied cooter.
- Manage upland habitats to reduce hazardous fuel loading through mechanical clearing and prescribed fire.

#### Public Uses

Continue to:

- Keep refuge closed to all public uses, except for occasional environmental education and interpretation programming via special use permit (SUP) or staff-led events.
- Conduct community outreach through partnerships.

#### Partnerships

Continue to:

- Work with the northern red-bellied cooter recovery team, species experts, and local and regional wildland and structural fire management professionals, to make informed management decisions.

#### Alternative B – Expanded Management (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 and respond to key issues.

#### Wildlife and Habitats

- Expand northern red-bellied cooter nesting habitat enhancement work to additional refuge pond shorelines.
- Further increase northern red-bellied cooter nest success and hatchling survival by installing nest enclosures and through the headstarting program.
- Expand the spatial extent and purpose of prescribed fire and mechanical clearing to improve habitat for breeding migratory songbirds.
- Initiate additional biological baseline inventories.

#### Public Uses

- Provide more opportunities for wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation programs, public information dissemination, and community outreach through partner collaboration.
- Pursue administrative requirements to evaluate potential hunting opportunities on the Crooked Pond parcel.

#### Partnerships

- Work with a greater diversity of partners to help conduct refuge wildlife and habitat research, as well as to promote priority public uses.



*Pine forest on the refuge*

## Public Meetings

Please consider attending either of the upcoming public meetings about the draft CCP/EA for Massasoit NWR. At each meeting, we will give a short presentation on the draft CCP/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 meeting attendees to submit written comments.

The Service is committed to providing access to these meetings for all participants. Please direct all requests for sign language interpreting services, closed captioning, or other accommodation needs to Libby Herland, 978/579 4026 (telephone), [northeastplanning@fws.gov](mailto:northeastplanning@fws.gov) (email), or 800/877 8339 (TTY), at least 5 days in advance of the meetings.

## How to Obtain a Draft Plan and Provide Comments

You may view and download the draft CCP/EA online: [http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Massasoit/what\\_we\\_do/conservation.html](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Massasoit/what_we_do/conservation.html). To request a hard copy or 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, and emails during a 60-day comment period. To be considered, all comments must be received or postmarked by May 16, 2017.

**April 26, 2017**  
**2:00pm to 4:00pm**  
*Presentation begins at 2:15pm*

**6:00pm to 8:00pm**  
*Presentation begins at 6:15pm*

**Plymouth Public Library**  
132 South Street  
Plymouth, MA 02360

## Contact Information

Email: [northeastplanning@fws.gov](mailto:northeastplanning@fws.gov)  
(Please put "Massasoit CCP" in subject line)  
Mail: Libby Herland, Project Leader  
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Phone: 978/579 4026  
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**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
**1 800/344 WILD**  
<http://www.fws.gov>

**Federal Relay Service**  
**for the deaf and hard-of-hearing**  
**1 800/877 8339**

**March 2017**



*Arrowhead plant*

Alexey Zhinovjev & Irina Kadis

*Island Pond shoreline on Massasoit NWR*

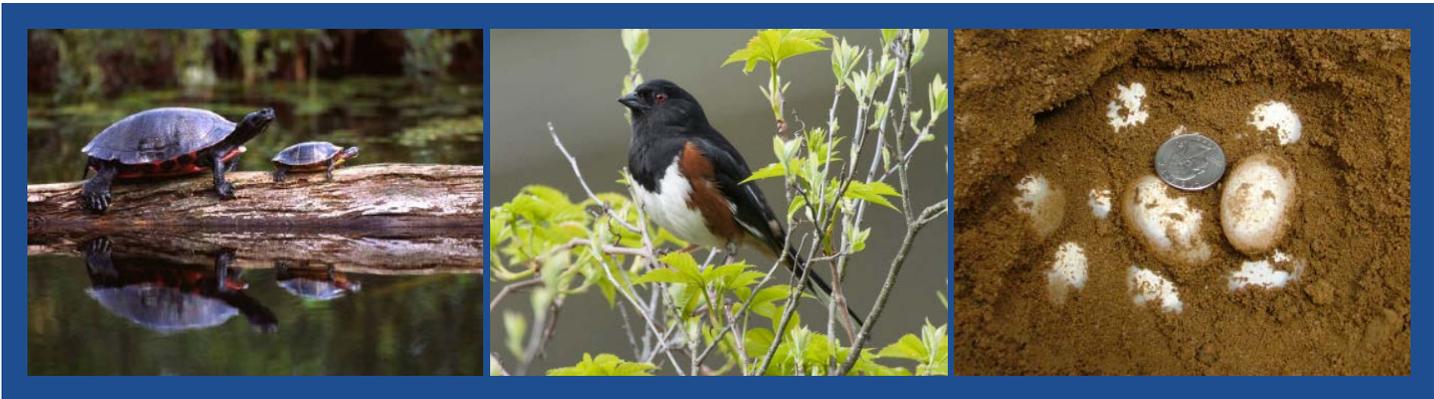


USFWS

### Draft Vision Statement for Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge

The pine-oak habitat and coastal plain ponds that comprise Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge are an integral component of the southeast Massachusetts landscape and its biodiversity, and are part of the largest contiguous pitch pine-oak habitat north of the Long Island Sound. This dynamic, fire-dependent ecosystem supports numerous invertebrate and bird species of conservation concern. The kettle-hole ponds in this system also support and contribute to the recovery of the federally endangered northern red-bellied cooter, a geographically distinct population found only in Massachusetts.

Through public and partner engagement, we promote ecologically responsible stewardship of the resources on the refuge and in the larger landscape and foster an appreciation and understanding of the intrinsic value of these resources.



Bill Byrne/MDFW; Bill Thompson; USFWS

*Northern red-bellied cooter and eastern painted turtle; eastern towhee; Northern red-bellied cooter nest.*

**Eastern Massachusetts NWR Complex**  
73 Weir Hill Road  
Sudbury, MA 01776

