

James River National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update Newsletter 2, November 2012



Cyrus Brame/USFWS

James River NWR

Hello Friends of James River NWR!

In April 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we, our) began developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for James River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge).

In 2012, we invited the public to participate in the planning process by publishing a notice in the *Federal Register*, and by sending out our first planning newsletter and a press release. We asked the public to submit comments in person and by email, regular mail, and fax.

This newsletter provides a summary of the comments we have received to date. We asked that public comments be submitted by October 15, 2012.

What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

A CCP is a 15-year plan that describes the desired future conditions for a refuge. CCPs provide long-range guidance and management direction to:

- Achieve the purposes of the refuge.
- Help fulfill the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- Maintain, and where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of the refuge and National Wildlife Refuge System.
- Help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- Meet other mandates.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Pub. L. 105-57) requires the Service to develop CCPs for each national wildlife refuge. To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, each CCP is also accompanied by either an EA or an Environmental Impact Statement that describes and analyzes the potential environmental consequences of the actions outlined in the CCP.

During the public scoping comment period, we convened a government partners meeting on September 11th in Richmond, Virginia, and hosted two open house meetings on September 12th in Prince George, Virginia. At each meeting, brief presentations on the CCP process and James River NWR were followed by discussions between attendees and refuge planning staff. The public meetings attracted a total of 16 attendees,

including community members and representatives from non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and government agencies. We recorded meeting attendees' comments.

We appreciate your involvement in this planning process. This planning process will continue through 2013, and we encourage your continued participation in the development of the 15-year management vision for James River NWR.



Osprey

Ron Holmes/USFWS

We received many comments and prepared the following brief summary of these comments, grouped into six broad categories.

The complete comment set is available online at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/jamesriver/ccphome.html>

Landscape-scale and Ecosystem-wide Issues

Comments regarding the refuge's role in the larger landscape and ecosystems included suggestions to:

- Acquire additional lands and protect native habitats to support wildlife of conservation concern.
- Analyze the impacts of climate change in the CCP.
- Manage shoreline erosion into the James River.
- Tie refuge habitat management and public use activities with those of other conservation lands and plans.

Biological Program

We received many comments regarding the existing biological program at the refuge. Comments included:

- Suggested revisions to the draft habitat management goals.
- Support for our existing forest management and suggestions for minor improvements that we could make to benefit wildlife.
- Concern about our ability to adequately manage the deer herd.
- Suggestions for expanding refuge inventory and monitoring activities to assess threats to species.

Cultural Resource Program

In recognition of the refuge's cultural resources and historical importance, commenters suggested that we consider:

- Conducting archaeological digs.
- Improving interpretive messages about cultural resources in the area.
- Encouraging participation of Virginia Indian Tribes or their representatives.

Public Use

We received a wide variety of comments regarding public uses on the refuge. While some expressed concern about the current public uses, others expressed support for maintenance of the existing public uses. We also received suggestions that we consider increasing public use and access to the refuge by:

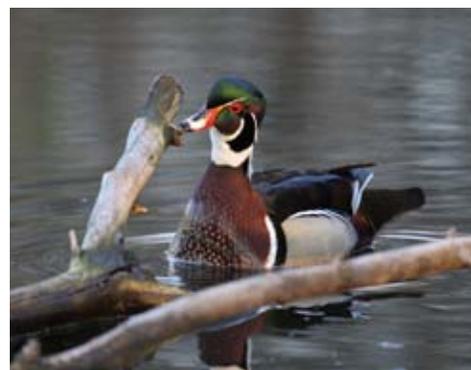
- Expanding water access.
- Opening the refuge to other hunting opportunities (e.g., coyote, turkey) and expanding the deer hunt.
- Opening the refuge to fishing.
- Creating more wildlife observation and environmental education opportunities.

Commenters also noted that the public generally does not know about the refuge and suggested that the refuge increase its visibility.

Commenters also expressed concern about the conflict between hunting and other public uses.

Facilities and Staffing

We received requests to increase staff and funding allocations to



Wood duck

Mike Scott/USFWS

the refuge in order to improve the effectiveness of management activities.

Commenters suggested improving existing and creating new refuge infrastructure and facilities, including designated trails, boating access sites, and designated wildlife observation sites.

Community Relations, Outreach, and Local Economy

Numerous State and Federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations offered to share data, information, technical assistance, and other resources with the refuge.

Many of our partners expressed that continued collaboration is important to the conservation of wildlife and habitats throughout the region. Building upon our existing partnerships with other government agencies, conservation organizations, academic institutions, and interest groups would further expand our ability to achieve shared conservation goals.



Refuge road and forest

Daniel Lay

Next Steps

Our next step is to work with the comments received to:

- Refine our draft vision statement and draft goals.
- Create and improve refuge management objectives.
- Develop a range of management alternatives and strategies to consider.

As we work through these next steps, we encourage the public to continue to submit comments and suggestions, particularly as we start to develop management alternatives in the winter and spring of 2013.

We will keep you informed of our progress on James River NWR's Planning Web site at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/jamesriver/ccphome.html>.

We are aiming to have a draft CCP/EA prepared for your review in the fall of 2013. At that time, we will invite the public to participate in our public open houses to discuss the plan and provide feedback during a 30-day public comment period.

Share Your Thoughts With Us*

You have great questions and ideas, so please continue to share them with us. See the contact information box for more details on where to send comments.

**Your entire comment and accompanying personal information may be made publicly available if requested under the Freedom of Information Act. You may request that your information not be released; we will honor your request to the extent allowed by law.*



USFWS

Bald eagle



James River NWR Sign

Cyrus Brame/USFWS

Contact Information

About the CCP

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About the Refuge

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 Please type "James River CCP" in the subject line

Do you know of a club, school, business, or any other group that would like us to give a presentation about our CCP development for James River NWR? We would be happy to do so! Please contact Meghan Carfioli, our Natural Resource Planner.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

Federal Relay Service for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing: 800/877-8339



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 NWRs - Refuge Planning
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 Hadley, MA 01035

Planning Process Timeline for James River NWR CCP/EA

Planning Steps and Activities	Status	Target Dates	Public Involvement	Public Involvement Dates
A. Preplanning	Completed	Winter - Fall 2012		
B. Initiate Public Involvement and Scoping	Completed	Fall 2012	Attend public open houses and write to share goals and concerns	Held open houses on September 12, 2012. Public scoping period ended October 15, 2012.
C. Review Vision Statement and Goals; Determine Significant Issues	Underway	Fall - Winter 2012	Provide comments about the goals and concerns, as well as ideas for developing alternatives	Ongoing
D. Develop and Analyze Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action		Winter - Spring 2013	Provide comments to consider during the development of action alternatives	Ongoing
E. Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA Document		Spring - Fall 2013	Attend public meetings and write to provide review and comments on draft CCP/EA	30-day public comment period
F. Prepare and Adopt Final Plan		Fall - Winter 2013		
G. Implement, Monitor, and Evaluate Plan		Beginning in January 2014		
H. Review and Revise Plan		Before or by Winter 2029		