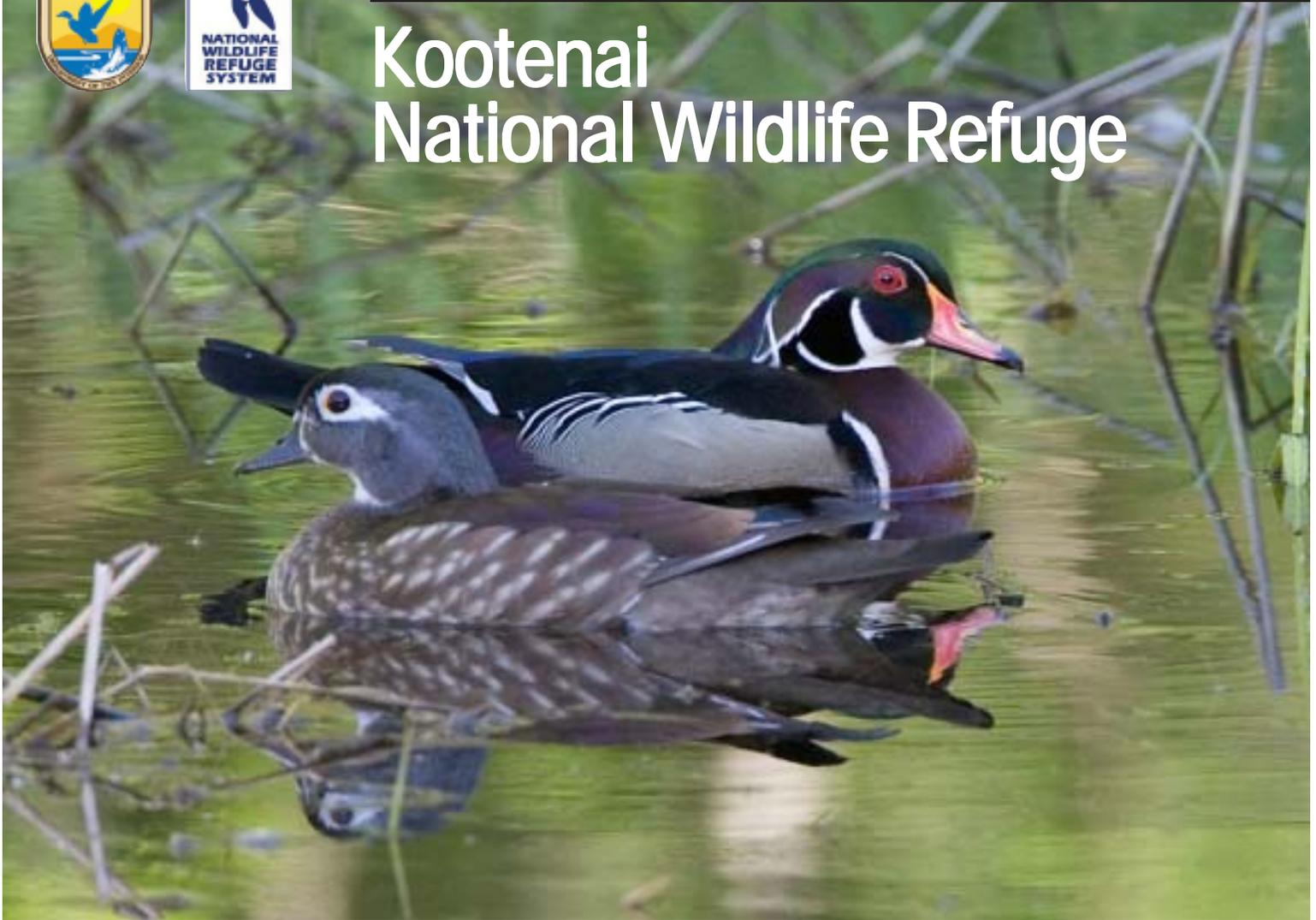




Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge



Wood ducks - Stan Bousson photo

Comprehensive Conservation Planning Begins at Kootenai Refuge

Greetings! Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge is initiating a planning process to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) that will guide how the refuge is managed over the next 15 years. This is the first in a series of planning updates we will distribute to keep you informed and invite your participation in the planning process.

As we work through this two-year CCP process, we have the opportunity to look at the Refuge's management from fresh perspectives.

The purpose of the Refuge will remain the same as when it was established—primarily to provide habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Through the planning process, however, we will review our management of habitats such as wetlands, forests, streams, agricultural lands, and riparian areas; and each of our public use programs, including wildlife observation and photography, hunting, fishing, environmental education, and interpretation.

Your insights and observations are needed to provide us with a more complete and thoughtful process.

We invite you to share your ideas with us by attending upcoming open houses in Bonners Ferry (January 23, 2009) or by submitting written comments (for contact information, see page 6). Your thoughts are important to the success of this effort!

—Dianna Ellis, Refuge Manager

Public Open House Meetings

Two Public Open House Meetings will be held January 23, 2009 in Bonners Ferry (see page 6 for details)

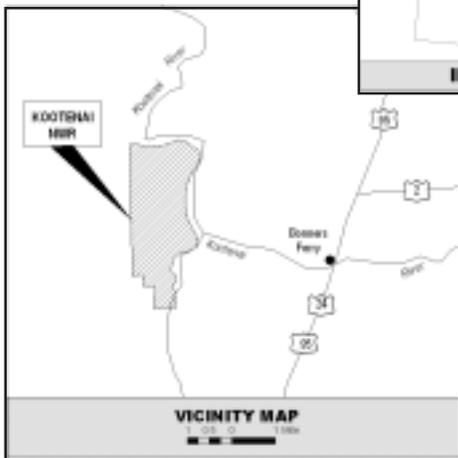
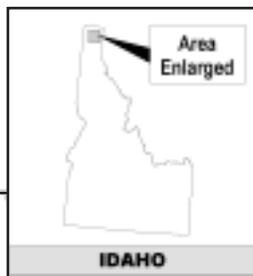
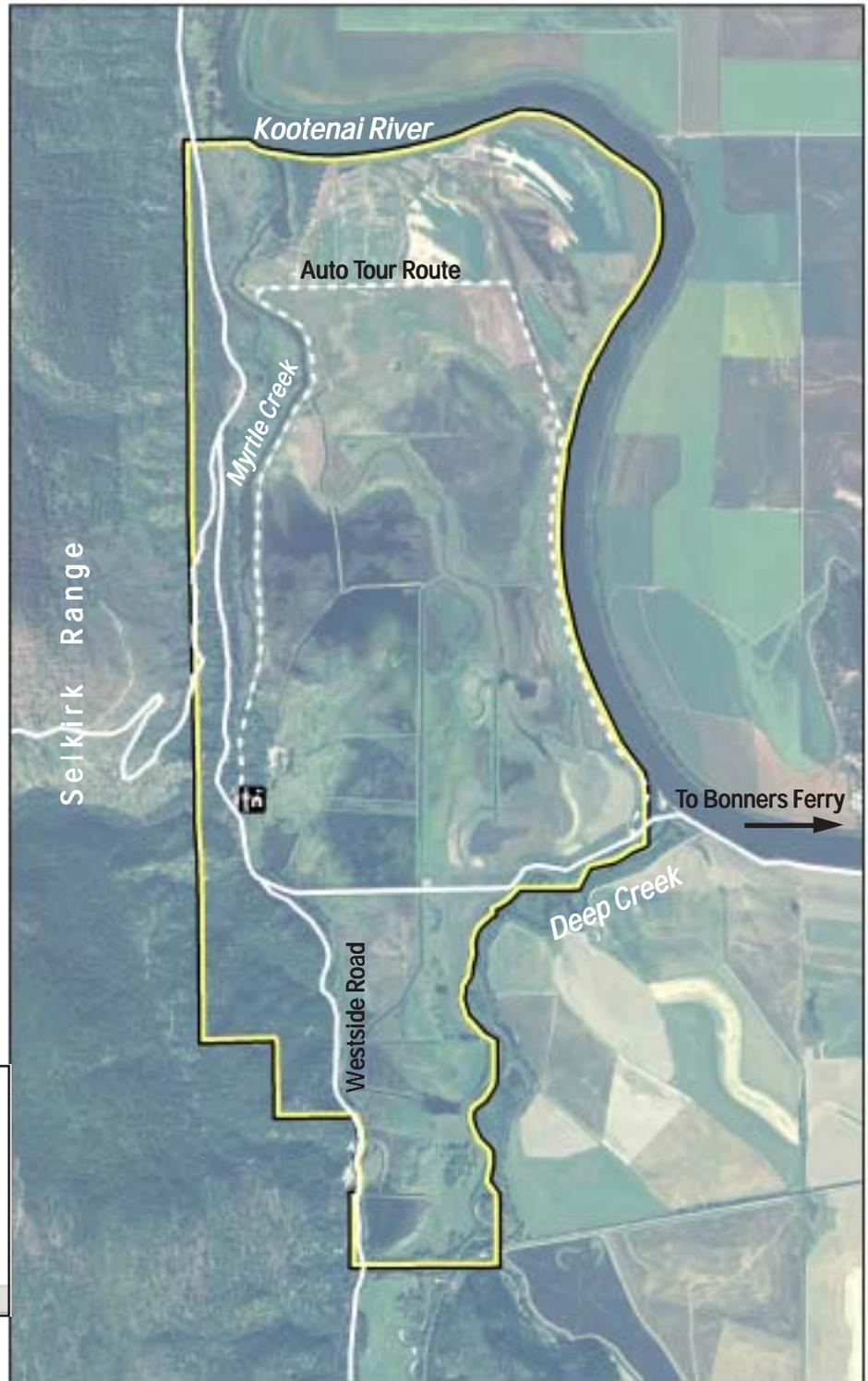
Your participation is critical to the success of this effort—we want to hear from you!

Refuge Overview

Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge is located in the Idaho Panhandle, between the Kootenai River and the Selkirk Range. The 2,774 acre Refuge, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) was established in 1964 to recreate a portion of the historic wetlands of the Kootenai River Valley and provide resting and feeding habitat for migrating waterfowl.

Most of the Refuge lies within the historic Kootenai River floodplain. Historically the Kootenai River flooded every spring, nourishing a vast maze of riparian forest and wetlands. Today the river is diked and dammed. The Army Corps of Engineers controls river levels to meet the needs of agriculture, power and flood control. To recreate historic wetlands, the Refuge pumps water from the Kootenai River, Myrtle Creek, and Deep Creek and manages the wetlands with a series of ditches and water control structures. In addition to these managed wetlands, the Refuge includes riparian forest, mixed conifer forest, croplands, and managed grasslands. These habitats support a wide variety of wildlife, including ducks, geese, swans, deer, elk, and moose. The Refuge is also a place where people can enjoy nature. Popular activities include observing and photographing wildlife from the Refuge's trails and auto tour route, walking and hiking, and waterfowl hunting.

Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge



LEGEND

- Refuge Headquarters
- Refuge Boundary
- Road
- Auto Tour Route

A compass rose showing North (N), South (S), East (E), and West (W). Below it is a scale bar in miles, with markings at 0, 0.25, 0.5, and 1 mile.

Preliminary Goals

Goals are broad statements intended to provide direction for future management of the Refuge. They are based on Refuge purposes, the mission and policies of the National Wildlife Refuge System, input received through this planning process, and key issues identified as most significant to the Refuge. The planning team has developed the following preliminary goals for the Refuge and would like your input on them.

Preliminary Wildlife and Habitat Goals

Goal 1: Provide, manage, and enhance a diverse assemblage of wetland habitats characteristic of the Kootenai River Valley.

Goal 2: Provide, manage, and enhance a diverse assemblage of riparian habitats characteristic of the Kootenai River Valley.

Goal 3: Annually provide agricultural crops as forage for migratory waterfowl.

Goal 4: Provide and manage a mixture of diverse, productive grassland habitats for foraging and nesting migratory waterfowl and grassland-dependent wildlife.

Goal 5: Provide, manage, and enhance a diverse assemblage of forest habitats characteristic of the lower elevation sites in the Selkirk Mountains.

Goal 6: Protect, maintain, and where feasible restore in-stream habitats on the Refuge to benefit native fishes and the species that depend on them.

Goal 7: Conduct inventory, monitoring and research in support of habitat and fisheries restoration efforts, and adaptive management decisions.



Cow moose and calf (Stan Bousson photo)

Preliminary Visitor Services Goals

Goal 1. Wildlife Observation, Photography and Interpretation: The Refuge will provide opportunities for visitors to observe and photograph a diversity of wildlife in a natural setting. Interpretation and education will enhance visitors' appreciation for and understanding of the Refuge's natural resources, and increase their success in seeing and photographing wildlife. Rewarding experiences will ultimately build support for the Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Goal 2. Hunting and Fishing: Waterfowl hunters of all ages and abilities will have the opportunity to participate in a safe, enjoyable, high-quality waterfowl hunt program that encourages a tradition of wildlife conservation and ethical, sportsmanlike behavior. The waterfowl hunt program will provide opportunities to observe and hunt a variety of species, with clear and enforced regulations, easy access, minimal crowding and minimal hunter conflicts. Other hunting and fishing opportunities will be provided where compatible, and where impacts to non-target species and habitats can be minimized.

Goal 3. Environmental Education: Students from area schools will participate in quality environmental education programs that tie into grade level curricula and provide memorable experiences that foster an appreciation for the natural world around them, a strong conservation ethic, and develops into a life-long relationship with the Refuge.

Goal 4. Friends Group: An active and committed Kootenai NWR Friends Group will assist Refuge staff in delivering quality visitor services programs, and in increasing public understanding and support of the Refuge.

Goal 5. Volunteers: An active and committed volunteer work force will assist Refuge staff in restoring and maintaining habitat, delivering quality visitor services programs, and building and maintaining the facilities needed to conduct those programs.

What is a National Wildlife Refuge?

Kootenai is one of more than 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), the world's largest collection of lands set aside specifically for wildlife. National Wildlife Refuges, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are the only Federal public lands where the conservation of wildlife has priority over other land uses. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is:

"To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Current Management and Issues

As part of the CCP process, a range of possible alternative management approaches will be explored and evaluated, including current management practices. The effects of the various alternatives on the biological resources and local communities will be evaluated in an EA (Environmental Assessment) that is prepared concurrently with the CCP, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The planning team has identified some potential issues to be considered. We encourage you to provide us with written comments on these issues and other concerns, and to meet us at our public open houses. If you aren't able to attend the meetings, please submit your comments in writing (see page 6 for contact information.)

Habitat management

Since the Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge was established to provide migration and nesting habitat for waterfowl, these “purpose species” have, and will continue to receive, priority consideration in determining how the refuge's habitats will be managed. But Refuge habitats also benefit other migratory birds (e.g. raptors and water birds), threatened and endangered species (e.g. bull trout), and species that contribute to the biological health and diversity of the surrounding ecosystem (for example, native amphibians, painted turtles, beaver, and moose).

Wetlands are central to meeting the Refuge purpose of providing migration and nesting habitat for waterfowl. When the Refuge was established, its bottomlands had been farmed for many years. Wetlands were re-created and managed through a system of diked impoundments, ditches, water control structures, and pumps. Crops were grown on some parts of the Refuge to provide additional food for waterfowl.



*Refuge wetlands seen from above.
(Photo: Vaughn Ruppert/USFWS)*

The current water delivery system is inadequate to optimally manage many wetland units, and is in need of repair or upgrading. The Refuge has water rights to Myrtle, Deep, and Cascade Creeks and the Kootenai River. However, the pumping and distribution system must be modified in order to fully exercise the refuge water rights so they are not lost. The Service also owns 8-1/2 miles of dikes along Myrtle Creek, Deep Creek, and the Kootenai River, and is responsible for their maintenance. Several sections of the Kootenai River dike have eroded and are vulnerable to breaching, which would threaten the Refuge's water delivery system and possibly its whole infrastructure.

Refuge grasslands have become an important food source for as many as 240 elk and 80 deer during the winter. This non-native grassland could be converted to riparian habitat. Riparian habitat, dominated by cottonwood and willow, supports a wide variety of wildlife. It once covered much of the Kootenai River Valley, but today only a small remnant of it remains. However, both natural regeneration and attempts to plant riparian trees on the Refuge have been hampered by intense browsing pressure from deer and elk.



*White-tailed deer
(Stan Bousson photo)*

Questions to Consider

- What fish and wildlife issues should the Refuge focus on?
- What should the Refuge's role be in conserving wildlife in the Kootenai River Valley?
- Should the Refuge maintain its current mixture of wetlands, croplands and grasslands?
- Should the Refuge convert some of its grasslands to riparian habitat?
- Should the Refuge convert some of its croplands to seasonal wetlands?
- Should the Refuge convert managed wetlands to a more natural wetland system?
- Should the Refuge continue to provide winter habitat for deer and elk at current population levels?
- How can the Refuge minimize winter deer and elk damage to riparian areas and plantings?

Forest management and proposed land exchange with Idaho Department of Lands

The Refuge contains approximately 532 acres of forest on the steep lower slopes of the Selkirk Range. Although this is second growth timber, some stands display old growth forest characteristics and have high value to wildlife. This forest also protects steep, unstable slopes from erosion, and reduces stream sediment. The Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) has approached the Service with an informal proposal to exchange (or lease) a 120-acre State-owned parcel of Deep Creek floodplain immediately south of the Refuge for a portion of the Refuge's forest land of equal value. The forest land could be logged by IDL to provide revenue for schools.

- How should the Refuge reduce fire risk in forest habitat while providing high quality habitat for wildlife?
- Should the Refuge exchange some of its forest land with the Idaho Department of Lands, for bottomlands along Deep Creek?

Fisheries and water quality

The Refuge contains portions of three creeks: Deep Creek and Myrtle Creek (which empty into the Kootenai River), and Cascade Creek (which empties into Myrtle Creek). Native fishes historically present in Refuge waters included bull trout, redband trout, kokanee, and burbot. Kootenai River white sturgeon probably used delta areas of Deep and Myrtle Creeks for foraging. Today, of these native species, only bull trout and possibly, redband trout still occur in Refuge waters. A number of native fish research studies and restoration projects are either ongoing or have been proposed by the Service, IDFG and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho.

There are issues with water quality in all three creeks. These creeks do not originate on Refuge lands, and significant portions of the watersheds lie outside the Refuge.



Bull trout (Photo: Bart Gammett, USDA Forest Service)

Restoring riparian habitat on the lower reaches of Myrtle Creek and Deep Creek would improve water quality; however, backflows of the Kootenai River, due to diking and the Libby Dam operations, have hampered riparian restoration to date.

- What should the Refuge's role be in supporting efforts by the Service, IDFG, and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho to study and restore native fish species?
- How can the Refuge work with neighboring landowners and agencies to improve water quality in its streams?



*Painted turtles (left);
Canada goose and goslings (right)*

Photos: Stan Bousson

Public use on the Refuge

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act encourages the Fish and Wildlife Service to provide compatible wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities on National Wildlife Refuges. "Compatible" means that the use does not interfere with achieving Refuge purposes. "Wildlife dependent" uses are defined by law and policy as wildlife observation and photography, hunting, fishing, interpretation, and environmental education. All of these uses are to receive equal consideration, and have priority over all other uses.

Providing people with opportunities to understand and appreciate wildlife ultimately helps achieve the Refuge System's mission of conservation of wildlife and their habitats. For example, revenues from the sale of "Duck Stamps" to waterfowl hunters provided the funding to acquire Kootenai and many other refuges; however, wildlife require undisturbed places to feed and rest, so some parts of refuges may be closed to public access to provide sanctuary areas for wildlife.

Wildlife observation and photography, waterfowl hunting, fishing, big and upland game hunting, environmental education, and interpretation are offered on the Refuge. In addition, some non-wildlife dependent uses, especially bike riding and dog walking, have become increasingly popular. The Refuge manages its public use programs with a very small staff. To date emphasis has been placed on maintaining visitor facilities; the programs themselves are mostly "self serve." As visitation has increased, this approach has become problematic. Crowding, law enforcement violations, safety, and wildlife disturbance have become issues with some programs.

Questions to Consider

- Should the Refuge continue to provide all of the public uses that it currently does?
- Should any uses be reduced or eliminated?
- Should any uses be added or expanded?
- Should the current sanctuary area be expanded?
- Should more of the Refuge be open to public use, or less?
- How should the Refuge address increasing demand and law enforcement issues with a very small staff?

How Do I Contact the Service or Provide Comments?

As we plan for the future, we need to hear from you. We're interested in your thoughts on the Refuge goals and issues described in this planning update, or others that you think the CCP should address. Please write to us at:

Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge
287 Westside Road
Bonners Ferry, Idaho 83805

or email your comments to:

FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov
(please put "Kootenai NWR CCP"
in the subject line.)

You are invited to the first Public Open House Meetings

We'd love to see you at our upcoming open houses. It's our chance to hear your thoughts about management of the Refuge over the next fifteen years.

January 23, 2009

City of Bonners Ferry Visitors Center
6373 Bonner Street (City Parking Lot)
Bonners Ferry, ID 83805

Session 1

3:00-5:00 pm
(presentation at 4:00 p.m.)

Session 2

6:00-8:00 pm
(presentation at 7:00 p.m.)

Planning Schedule

(Schedule dates are tentative and subject to change as the planning process progresses)

Planning Update 1	January 2009
Public Open Houses.....	January 2009
Planning Update 2	March 2009
Planning Update 3 (Preliminary Alternatives).....	August 2009
Public Review/Comment on Draft CCP/EA.....	January 2010
Final CCP.....	July 2010



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fish and Wildlife Service
Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge
287 Westside Road
Bonners Ferry, Idaho 83805
Phone: (208) 267-3888

Please visit our website at <http://www.fws.gov/kootenai>

*Have you moved? If so, please
send us updated address
information. Thanks!*

Refuge Open Houses: January 23 in Bonners Ferry