



Willapa National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 6, March 2012



American widgeon / Tim McCabe, USFWS

The Refuge's CCP is Completed

Thank you for participating in our planning process!

Alternative 2, as described in the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (Final CCP/EIS), was selected for implementation at the Refuge. The Final CCP/EIS was released to the public in August 2011.

On September 29, 2011, Robyn Thorson, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Regional Director for the Pacific Region, signed a Record of Decision (ROD) adopting Alternative 2, our preferred alternative, as the basis for the final CCP. Alternative 2 was selected from three Refuge management alternatives that we analyzed in the Final CCP/EIS. The approved CCP, which includes the ROD, is now

available. The CCP contains guidance for managing Refuge resources and public use activities over the next 15 years. Some CCP actions may require new funding; those actions will be implemented as funding becomes available.

We developed the CCP to provide reasonable, scientifically grounded guidance for improving forests, estuarine wetlands, coastal dune, and grassland habitats for long-term conservation of migratory birds, fish, and native plants and animals.

Actions for protecting and sustaining the Refuge's natural resources, including habitats, migratory bird populations, and threatened, endangered, or rare species are identified in the CCP.

Priority public use programs—hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation—are also described in the CCP.

We sincerely appreciate the individuals and organizations who participated in our CCP process and contributed valuable input. Public comments and our responses are included in Appendix E of the CCP.

A copy of the CCP/ROD can be obtained by contacting the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge at phone (360) 484-3482, or by downloading it from our Web site: <http://www.fws.gov/willapa/CCP>.

Highlights of the CCP

We identified a number of Refuge management issues in our Draft CCP/EIS and received a number of public comments on them. Based on those comments, we revised Alternative 2 in the Final CCP/EIS, highlights follow.

- Current wildlife and habitat management will continue, and several wildlife habitat improvements will occur.
- We will restore the intensively managed pastures and impoundments to historic estuarine conditions, increasing open water, intertidal flats, and salt marsh habitat by 621 acres.
- On the Leadbetter Point Unit, we will control avian and mammalian predators as necessary, to help meet western snowy plover recovery goals.
- On the Riekkola Unit, 93 acres of short-grass fields will be managed as foraging habitat for Canada geese, elk, and other grassland-dependent wildlife.
- Grassland restoration on 33 acres will include establishing early-blue violet host plants to serve future reintroduction of the endangered Oregon silverspot butterfly.
- We will continue to implement our forest management plan, and maintain managed freshwater wetlands on the Tarlatt Unit.
- We will expand the approved Refuge acquisition boundary by 6,809 acres in the Nemah/Naselle, South Bay, and East Hills Units, and divest the Shoalwater and Wheaton Units (941 acres) from the Refuge.
- Improvements to the wildlife-dependent public use program will include developing an interpretive trail and observation deck along Willapa Bay that ties into our proposed Tarlatt Unit visitor/administrative facility.
- After estuarine restoration is completed, the waterfowl hunting area will expand to include 5,570 acres.
- An additional 100 acres and three blinds (including one barrier free blind) will be available for goose hunting, and two blinds (including one barrier free blind) will be added for waterfowl hunting. Walk-in hunters can access the blinds on a first-come-first-served basis.
- We will develop a year-round cartop boat launch, parking area, and 0.6-mile Porter Point trail to access Willapa Bay.
- A special permit elk hunt on the Leadbetter Point Unit, and elk and deer hunting in the South Bay and East Hills Units during state hunting seasons, are also proposed.



The Refuge manages old-growth forest habitat / USFWS



A Marbled murrelet / USFWS

Frequently Asked Questions about Estuary Restoration

Since we published the Draft CCP/EIS in 2010 there has been a lot of discussion about tidal restoration on the Refuge. The most frequently asked questions, the Service's responses, and links to additional information follow. If you have any questions, please contact the Refuge (contact information is on page 8).

Was Willapa Refuge established for the specific purpose of waterfowl conservation? Conserving waterfowl is one of the Refuge's purposes. The mission of the Service is to work with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Refuge was established in 1937 to protect migratory birds and other wildlife. Other purposes include conserving fish and wildlife resources

and endangered or threatened species, and developing fish and wildlife-oriented recreation. To learn more, see Chapter 1 in the CCP.

Was the Refuge purchased with monies from the sale of duck stamps?

Approximately 8,600 acres (52%) of the Refuge were purchased with funds from the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (MBCA). The original intent of the MBCA was to purchase and manage lands as inviolate sanctuaries for migratory birds in which all hunting was prohibited.

Amendments to the MBCA in 1949 and 1958, and the Fish and Wildlife Improvement Act of 1978, modified the MBCA to allow hunting on lands purchased with Duck Stamp funds, if certain provisions and conditions were met. Neither the original

MBCA nor subsequent amendments mandate hunting on lands purchased with Duck Stamp monies. To learn more, see Chapter 1 and Appendix E in the CCP.

Are freshwater habitats better for waterfowl than estuarine habitats?

Both freshwater and estuarine wetlands provide beneficial habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Estuaries are among the most productive natural systems on earth due to the mixing of nutrients from land and sea. Coastal areas, including estuaries, comprise less than 10% of the nation's land area yet support a significant number of wildlife species, including 75% of migratory birds, nearly 80% of fish and shellfish, and about half of all threatened and endangered species. Willapa Bay has lost 64% of its estuarine wetlands. However, due to

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Has estuary restoration succeeded in other locations in Washington? Yes, the Nisqually Delta Restoration represents the largest estuary restoration project in the Pacific Northwest. It was designed to aid in the recovery of Puget Sound salmon and wildlife populations, and is succeeding. Since 2009, five species of juvenile salmon – Chinook, pink, chum, coho, and cutthroat trout – have been documented in the restoration area. Thousands of migrating and wintering waterfowl, shorebirds, and other migratory birds are using the site. To learn more, visit <http://nisquallydeltarestoration.org>. / Jean Takekawa, USFWS



Black brant near Ledbetter Beach / © David Pitkin

habitat improvements, the number of ducks observed feeding in tidal areas adjacent to the Refuge has increased. This can be explained in part, by the Refuge's and partners' efforts to significantly reduce invasive spartina grass and increase native salt marsh vegetation in south Willapa Bay.

In contrast, the managed and seasonal freshwater habitat in the Lewis and Porter Point Units represents 20% of the freshwater ponds and lakes available within a 25-mile radius of the Refuge. Waterfowl primarily use the Refuge's managed wetland food resources for a few weeks during their fall migration. Once food—primarily smartweed—is depleted, waterfowl use in these units is much more infrequent through the rest of the year. To learn more, see Chapters 4 and 6 and Appendix E in the CCP.

Have other estuarine restorations had devastating effects on waterfowl and other wildlife species? The benefits of estuary restoration for a number of fish and wildlife species, including waterfowl, are well documented at projects along the Pacific coast. The focus of estuary restoration is not usually a single species. Estuaries are home to thousands of species of fish, birds, plants, and animals.

The goal of habitat restoration is to help rebuild a healthy, functioning natural system. Dike removal is only the first step in the restoration process. Restored sites generally take five years or longer to develop full wetland plant cover, and continue to transform for many more years.

To learn more about estuary restoration projects happening nationwide, please visit <https://neri.noaa.gov/neri/index.htm>

Will removing the dikes really help salmon? The Refuge's estuarine restoration will be beneficial to both adult and juvenile salmon by increasing the availability of overwintering and rearing habitat. In addition, natural connections to the Lewis and Porter Point streams will be restored. The Refuge's shallow estuarine habitats will also offer refuge from predators.

The importance of estuarine habitat to salmonids is well documented. Chum and Chinook salmon are the most dependent on estuarine habitat for food and shelter.

Restoration and enhancement of estuarine habitats can increase the production and acreage of salt marsh and other habitats, including the tidal creeks, eelgrass beds and

channels that furnish young salmon with feeding areas where they forage and grow before heading out to sea. To learn more, see Goal 2, Chapter 6 and Appendix E in the CCP.

Why destroy the fish ladders and habitat improvements on the Lewis and Porter Point Units, and miles of perfectly good dikes? The goal is to help rebuild a healthy, functioning, natural system in Willapa Bay. The Porter Point and Lewis stream fish ladders have provided fish limited access to wetlands and streams during the rainy season, and the existing dikes, tide gates, and fish ladders all have long-term, outstanding maintenance issues. Cost estimates for bringing the dikes up to general standards were \$30 million. The cost for removing the Lewis/Porter Point and the outer Riekkola dikes was calculated at \$15 million. While both estimates are probably high, costs will likely be significantly lower since Refuge staff will conduct a majority of the work.

The cost of maintaining any dike system over time is continuous and costly, and greatly exceeds the one-time cost of removing the dikes. To learn more, see Goal 2, Appendix E in the CCP.

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Why destroy grasslands which are important to the Dusky Goose?

The Final CCP was modified to maintain almost 100 acres of short grass fields for Canada geese and Roosevelt elk. Small numbers of dusky Canada geese (not an endangered species) overwinter in Willapa Bay, on the Oregon Coast, and as far south as California.

Although the Refuge does not serve as primary wintering habitat for dusky Canada geese, estuarine and pasture habitats in Willapa Bay are used by dusky geese as a migratory stopover and as a feeding and resting area for some wintering birds. The restoration will increase and enhance the quantity and quality of available estuarine habitats in Willapa Bay. To learn more, see Appendix E and Chapter 4 in the CCP.



The dusky Canada goose is a subspecies of Canada goose. To learn more about the dusky subspecies visit <http://www.fws.gov/WillametteValley/complex/dusky.html>.

Will removing the dikes eliminate the only walk-in goose hunting for senior and inexperienced hunters on Willapa Bay? Based on public comments the Final CCP/EIS was modified to include walk-in access to three blinds for goose hunting and two blinds for waterfowl hunting. Two of these blinds will be designed in compliance with the Architectural Barriers Act. This will provide quality hunting experiences for

hunters of all abilities. Walk-in access will be available seven days a week for waterfowl hunting, and goose hunting will occur according to State hunting regulations.

Exact placement of the blinds will be determined with input from hunter working groups and local hunters. In addition, a trail from the parking lot will provide walk-in hunter access to Porter Point.

Will removing the dikes create a safety issue for waterfowl hunters?

Hunting tidal waters provides a wealth of shooting opportunities that can't be found elsewhere, but there are also more challenges and risks involved, requiring additional planning and greater skills on the part of the hunter.

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Spring Chinook salmon / C. Anderson, USFWS



Roosevelt elk / George Gentry, USFWS

Waterfowl hunting in any open water area requires research, good equipment, and preparation in order to have a safe and successful hunt. Hunters will need to take a little time to get to know the area. Currently, Refuge hunters use the cartop boat launch and foot bridges at Porter Point to safely hunt the tidal marshes in front of the dikes. To learn more see: http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/waterfowl/hunting_water.html

Will removing the grasslands and opening a hunt in the South Bay force elk into local cranberry bogs? Based on public comments, the Final CCP/EIS was modified to reduce the size of the tidal restoration and maintain and manage 93 acres of short-grass fields on the Riekkola Unit. An additional 100 acres of short grass fields and upland grasslands will be maintained as foraging habitat for Canada geese, elk, and other grassland-dependent wildlife. Forest restoration efforts on the Refuge should also assist in creating additional elk habitat.

If we did not implement an elk hunt on the Refuge to manage the herd's population, the elk herd would outgrow the Refuge's available habitat, and move off the Refuge into surrounding areas in search of food. Implementing an elk and deer hunt in South Bay is expected to reduce the negative impacts a larger population of elk/deer would have on the local community. The current pasture at Riekkola represents only one percent of the approximately 11,500 acres of pasture found in the Willapa Bay watershed. To learn more, see Chapter 4 and Appendix E in CCP.

Why not close the Porter Point Unit and reopen the Lewis Unit? The Refuge doesn't own Jeldness Road, a private road located off of Highway 101 once used to access the Lewis Unit. When Jeldness Road was closed in 2008, the Refuge closed the Lewis Unit and opened the Porter Point Unit to provide public access for waterfowl hunting during the State season. Access to Porter Point occurs through the Riekkola Unit off of 67th Place in Long Beach.

Will removing the dikes destroy freshwater wetlands belonging to private property owners? Based on public comments, the Final CCP/EIS was modified to include raising an existing dike in the Riekkola Unit to Service standards, and installing two tide gates. This will eliminate impacts on privately owned freshwater wetlands, and on 67th Place, a designated tsunami evacuation route for Pacific County.

Why make any changes and/or select this plan? We selected Alternative 2 for implementation because it will best achieve the Refuge's purposes and fulfill the Service's mission. The CCP is consistent with the principles of sound wildlife management and will facilitate priority public uses that are compatible with the Refuge's purposes. The CCP is based on a land management approach that protects and enhances natural resources, habitats, and landscapes, and provides recreational public uses. We responded to public comments in Appendix E of the CCP and included modifications to address concerns.

Planning Schedule

- Planning Update 1 announced public scoping comment period and open house meetings..March 2008 completed
- Public Open House Meetings held in South Bend and Ilwaco, Washington.....March 2008 completed
- Planning Update 2 included a summary of scoping comments.....August 2008 completed
- Planning Update 3 included the preliminary alternatives.....July 2009 completed
- Draft CCP/EIS released for public comments; and summarized in Planning Update 4...January 2011 completed
- Final CCP/EIS released; and summarized in Planning Update 5.....August 2011 completed
- Record of Decision.....September 2011 completed
- Final CCP released; and summarized in Planning Update 6.....March 2011 completed



Oregon silverspot butterfly / USFWS



Willapa National Wildlife Refuge
3888 SR 101
Ilwaco, WA 98624-9707

In this issue:

The Refuge's CCP is completed. See a summary of the decision and highlights of the CCP.



Kids love to explore the Refuge!

For More Information

Questions regarding the management plan may be directed to Project Leader Jackie Ferrier, as follows.

Address: Jackie Ferrier, Project Leader
 Willapa National Wildlife Refuge Complex
 3888 SR 101
 Ilwaco, WA 98624-9707

Phone: (360) 484-3482

Fax: (360) 484-3109

Website: <http://www.fws.gov/willapa>

A printed copy of the CCP/ROD and the Final CCP/EIS is available at each of the following libraries.

- Ilwaco Timberland Regional Library,
158 1st Ave. North
Ilwaco, WA 98624
- South Bend Timberland Library
West 1st and Pacific
South Bend, WA 98586
- Ocean Park Timberland Library
1308 256th Place
Ocean Park, WA 98640
- Astoria Public Library
450 10th Street
Astoria, OR 97103

