



# U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR & Coachella Valley NWR)

### Planning Update 1 - August 2010

#### Mark Your Calendar

Public scoping meetings are scheduled for

**Sept. 14, 2010 in Palm Desert** and

**Sept. 21, 2010 in Calipatria** (details on page 5)

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#### Greetings From the Refuge Complex

The Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex is embarking on an important year-long process to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) that will guide the management of the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and Coachella Valley NWR over the next 15 years.

Your ideas and comments will be an important part of the CCP process, which is why we encourage you to attend one of our upcoming public scoping meetings. At these meetings, you will have the opportunity to learn more about the CCP process and current management practices on the Refuge Complex. More importantly, we will have the opportunity to hear your thoughts and suggestions regarding the future management of these Refuges.

Two scoping meetings are scheduled, one in Calipatria near the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and the other in Palm Desert near the Coachella Valley NWR. Specific meeting details are provided on page 5.

Because not everyone will be able to attend one of these meetings, we have also prepared this Planning Update,

which provides you with information about the CCP process and the Refuges, as well as suggestions for how you can get and stay involved in the planning process.



**American white pelican, a species frequently observed at the Salton Sea**

Photo by Menke/USFWS

We encourage you to look over the information provided in this Planning Update and send any comments you may have to us via the Refuge Planner, whose contact information is provided on page 7. To be sure your comments are considered, we should receive them no later than November 8, 2010.

Additional Planning Updates will be provided throughout the CCP process to keep you up-to-date on our progress and to let you know how you can continue to be involved. Feel free to contact us at any time with your questions or comments. I look forward to your involvement.

Chris Schoneman, Refuge Manager  
Sonny Bono Salton Sea  
National Wildlife Refuge Complex



**Wind blown sand habitat in the Coachella Valley**

Photo by Avery/USFWS

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Who are we?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the nearly 150 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which includes 552 national wildlife refuges and other units and 37 wetland management districts. The Service also operates 65 fish and wildlife conservation offices and 70 national fish hatcheries.

The Service enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, and helps foreign governments with their wildlife and habitat conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance Program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and game agencies. Many of the Service programs directly benefit both wildlife and citizens of California.

## What is the National Wildlife Refuge System?



In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt protected an island with nesting pelicans, herons, and roseate spoonbills in Florida's Indian River from feather collectors who were decimating their colonies. In doing so, he established the nation's first bird sanctuary, known as Pelican Island, and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his tenure. This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand, later becoming the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS).

The Refuge System is the largest system of lands in the world dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. It is spread across 50 states, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and several Pacific Islands. These refuges are home to more than 700 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 reptile and amphibian species, and more than 200 species of fish. In addition, 280 of the 1,300-plus federally-listed threatened or endangered species in the U.S. are found on units of the NWRS.

In 1997, Congress passed the NWRS Improvement Act, which provided significant new guidance for the management of the Refuge System. The Improvement Act included a new statutory mission statement and directed the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to conserving wildlife and maintaining the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of ecosystems.

The Improvement Act states that compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation) are legitimate and appropriate general public uses of the NWRS. However, this statement is not intended to imply that all of these uses will be allowed on every refuge. After being evaluated for compatibility with refuge resources and purposes, as well as the mission of the NWRS, the uses permitted on a refuge may be further tailored to take into account such issues as legal commitments, community traditions, or constraints within a given location. Other public uses in addition to those described above might also be permitted on a refuge if they are deemed both appropriate and compatible.



**Interpreting Wildlife at the  
Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR**

## Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System

*“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 fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”*

This mission of “wildlife first” differs from other Federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, which focuses on forest stewardship and sustainable forest uses; the Bureau of Land Management, whose efforts are directed toward the productivity and multiple use of the land; and the National Park Service, which conserves scenery, wildlife, and historic objects for people's enjoyment. As we move forward to develop a CCP for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex, we must ensure that all of our proposals are consistent with the mission of the NWRS.

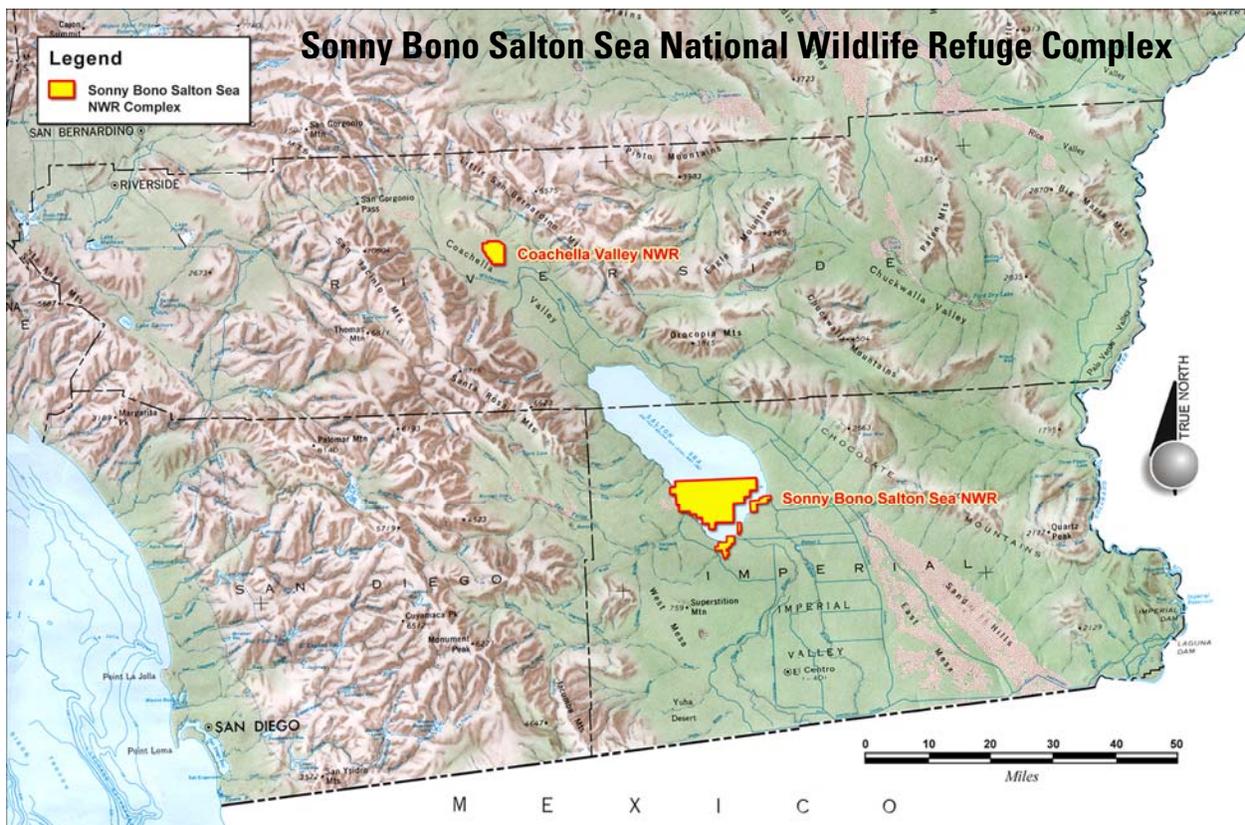
## What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, and Why is it being Prepared?

A Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is a “blueprint” for how a specific refuge should be managed over a 15-year period. It is intended to provide a clear vision of the desired future conditions for that refuge and to ensure consistent management of the refuge. A CCP contains the Refuge goals, objectives, and management strategies that when implemented will assist in achieving the mission of the System, reflect the purposes for refuge establishment, maintain the refuge’s biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health, and provide opportunities for compatible public uses. The CCP also provides the public with an understanding of how and why specific management directives were developed and includes opportunities for public involvement.

We prepare CCPs in accordance with the provisions of the NWRS Improvement Act. When Congress passed the Improvement Act, it included a requirement that a CCP be prepared for each refuge in the Refuge System. A CCP is to be completed for every refuge by 2012. Once a CCP has been approved for a refuge, the refuge is to be managed in accordance with the approved CCP.

## About the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NRW Complex

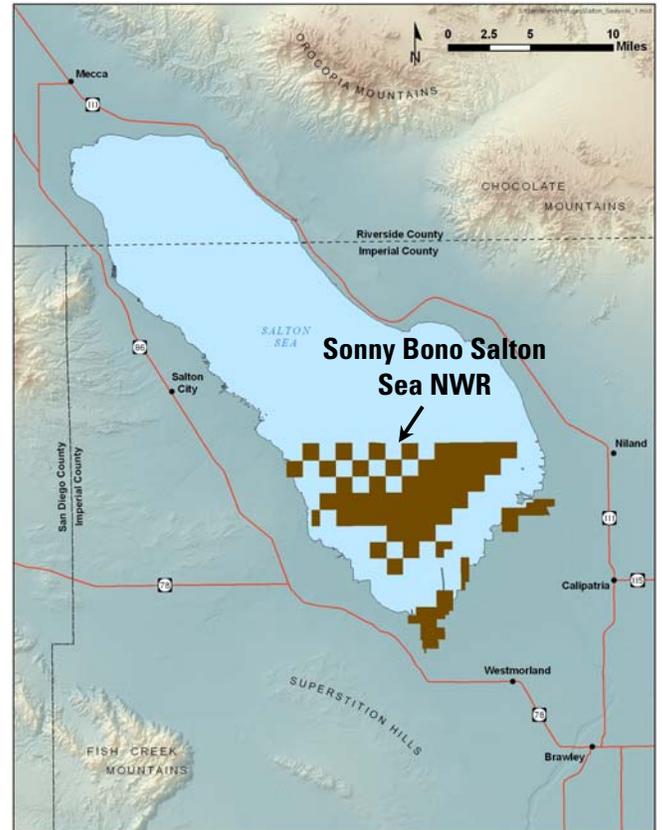
The Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex includes two distinct refuges - the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR, located in Imperial County, California, and the Coachella Valley NWR, located in Riverside County, California. Although both Refuges are located within the Salton Sea Transboundary Watershed, the habitats and species protected within each of these Refuges are very different. The Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR, situated at the south end of the Salton Sea, is managed to support an array of migratory birds that travel along the Pacific Flyway, while the Coachella Valley NWR, located in the western portion of the Colorado Desert, is managed to protect desert species and habitats once common in the Coachella Valley. (continued on page 4)



## Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR

In 1930, President Hoover signed an Executive Order establishing the Salton Sea Wild Life Refuge as a 32,766-acre sanctuary and breeding ground for birds and other wildlife. At the time of establishment, nearly 60 percent of the Refuge consisted of open saline lake. The remaining areas included shoreline alkali flats, freshwater marshes, native desert scrub, and farm fields. In 1940, management of federal wildlife refuges was shifted from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of the Interior and the refuge name was changed to the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge name was changed again in 1998 in memory of Congressman Sonny Bono, who was very active in the efforts to restore the health of the Salton Sea.

Between the 1930s and the mid-1940s, agricultural runoff into the Salton Sea increased, gradually inundating the land that had been set aside for the Refuge in 1930. To address these land losses, the Imperial Irrigation District in 1947 leased approximately 24,000 acres of land just to the south of the Salton Sea to the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), U.S. Navy, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Today, about 2,500 acres of manageable habitat are included within the Refuge boundary, with approximately 920 acres managed as wetlands to support resident and migratory birds and another 940 acres farmed to provide forage for wintering geese and other migratory birds. The remaining area includes dikes, shoreline, nesting islands, and salt flats.



The manageable habitat areas of the Refuge are included in two units located approximately 18 miles apart. Each unit contains managed wetland habitat to support shorebirds, seabirds, and other water-dependent bird species, as well as areas of intensely managed crop fields. The Refuge's managed wetlands also provide for the needs of year-round resident species such as the federally listed endangered Yuma clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris yumanensis*). Over 400 species of birds have been recorded at the Refuge and at least 93 species have nested here, including several species of nesting seabirds. About 41 species of mammals, 18 species of reptiles, four species of amphibians, and 15 species of fish have also been documented. One fish species of note on the Refuge is the federally listed endangered desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*).

Public uses include waterfowl hunting, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, interpretation, and research. Opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation have been enhanced through the construction of photo blinds and elevated observation platforms. Interpretive trails provide information about the existing habitats and associated species. (continued on page 5)

### Refuge Purposes:

**Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR** - Refuge purposes include “. . . a refuge and breeding ground for birds and wild animals . . .” (Executive Order 5498, dated 11/25/30); “. . . for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds” (16 U.S.C. § 715d, Migratory Bird Conservation Act); and “. . . for the management and control of migratory waterfowl and other wildlife . . .” (16 U.S.C. § 695, Lea Act).

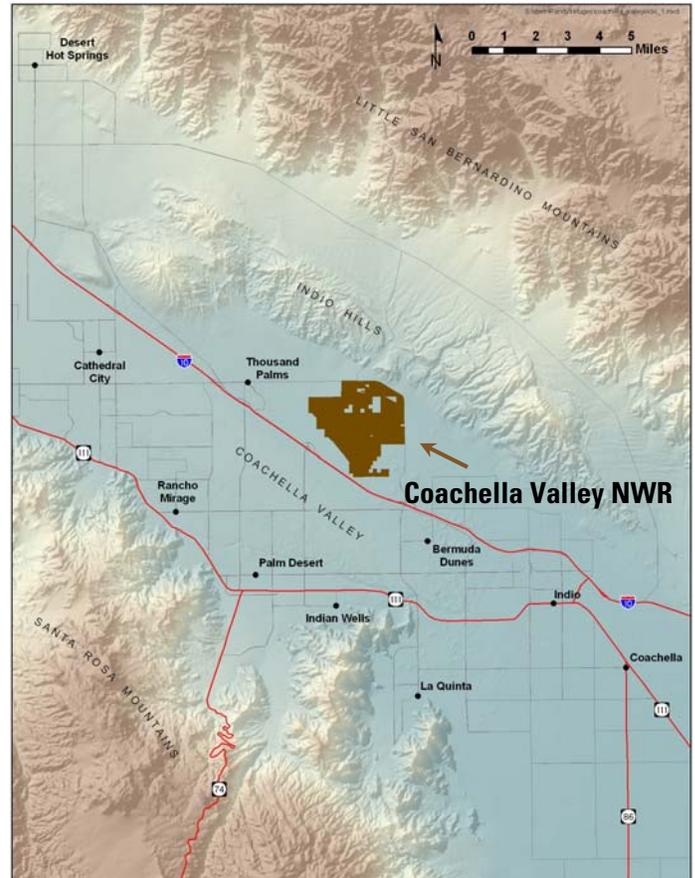
**Coachella Valley NWR** - The purpose of this Refuge is “. . . to conserve (A) fish and wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species . . . or (B) plants . . .” (Endangered Species Act of 1973).

## Coachella Valley NWR

The 3,709-acre Coachella Valley NWR, located in Riverside County, was established in 1985 for the purpose of protecting the federally listed threatened Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard (*Uma inornata*) and the wind blown sand habitat that supports it. The blow-sand fields located on the Refuge also support the federally listed endangered plant, Coachella milk-vetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus coachellae*) and the flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma macalli*).

The Refuge is part of the Thousand Palms Conservation Area, a federal, state, and private conservation effort organized within the larger Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Reserve System. The Coachella Valley NWR is located in the southern portion of the Conservation Area. Management of the lands within the Conservation Area is coordinated to maximize operating efficiencies among the various agencies and landowners, while continuing to maintain the specific missions and purposes of the individual land units as they are authorized to guide management efforts.

Public access on this Refuge is limited to a designated trail corridor in order to protect the sensitive habitat and listed species present on the Refuge.



## Notice of Public Scoping Meetings

Please join us at one of the following scoping meetings to discuss management of the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex (Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and Coachella Valley NWR):

### Coachella Valley Area

**September 14, 2010 - 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM**

**University of California, Riverside-Palm Desert Graduate Center, 75-080 Frank Sinatra Drive, Palm Desert, CA 92211**

For directions go to: [http://palmdesert.ucr.edu/about/maps\\_and\\_directions.html](http://palmdesert.ucr.edu/about/maps_and_directions.html)

The entrance to UCR Palm Desert is located on Frank Sinatra Drive. You must be traveling westbound on Sinatra to enter the center.

### Salton Sea Area

**September 21, 2010 - 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM**

**Calipatria Inn, 700 North Sorensen Avenue (Route 111), Calipatria, CA 92233**

Located on the west side of Route 111 at the north end of town.

**For more detailed directions, call**

**Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner, (760-431-9440 ex. 349) or Chris Schoneman, Project Leader, (760-348-5278 ex. 227)**  
(additional contact information is provided on page 7)

## The CCP Process

The CCP process involves a number of key planning steps, as illustrated below. Up to this point, we have been involved in the pre-planning steps of the process. Pre-planning consists of establishing a planning team, compiling data, identifying information and data needs, and beginning internal scoping to identify management concerns, issues, and opportunities. The preparation of this Planning Update and the publishing of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register represent the initiation of the public scoping phase of the CCP process. During this phase, the public is encouraged to assist us in identifying potential issues, management actions and concerns, significant problems or impacts, and opportunities or alternatives to resolve them. Public scoping will continue until we prepare a draft CCP/environmental assessment.

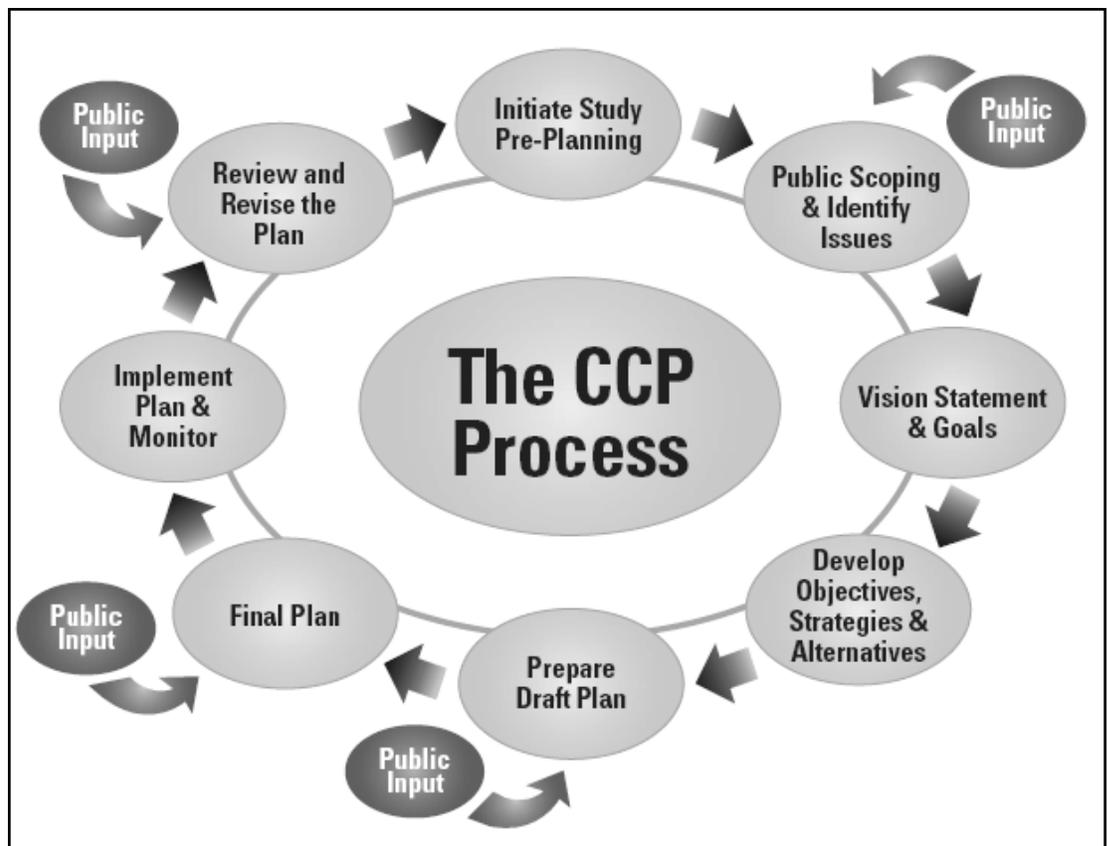
Throughout the CCP process, the following goals of CCP planning should be considered: 1) decisions of the Refuge should be based on an ecosystem approach that considers the broader goals and objectives of the refuge's ecosystems and watersheds; 2) management decisions and their rationale should be supported with a thorough assessment of available science derived from scientific literature, on-site refuge data, expert opinion, and sound professional judgment; 3) the six priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses should receive priority consideration during the preparation of the plan; and 4) a forum for the public to comment on the type, extent, and compatibility of uses on the refuge, including priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses, should be provided.

Public involvement is also an important goal of the CCP process. To ensure public involvement in refuge management decisions, a process for

effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with affected parties, including Federal agencies, State conservation agencies, tribal governments, local governments, conservation organizations, adjacent landowners, and interested members of the public will be provided.

Finally, each CCP must comply with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through the concurrent preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The CCP process integrates NEPA compliance requirements directly into the CCP process by providing a combined draft CCP/EA or EIS. Following completion of the final CCP/NEPA document, the product of the planning process will be a stand-alone CCP, separate from the EA or EIS.

The key planning steps listed below will be described in greater detail in future Planning Updates so you can understand and follow our progress throughout the planning process.



## Issues for Consideration in the CCP

During the initial pre-planning phase of the CCP process, the planning team identified a number of issues that should be addressed in the CCP.

Presented below are just a few of those issues.

### **Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR**

- 1) **Effects of Waterfowl Foraging on Adjacent Farmlands:** Reducing crop damage due to waterfowl foraging is one of the purposes of the Refuge. The numbers of snow geese migrating through the Imperial Valley are increasing, requiring higher productivity in fields managed by the Refuge as foraging habitat.
- 2) **Adapting to a Shrinking Salton Sea:** The waters of the Salton Sea are receding, resulting in increased salinity levels in the remaining waters and exposed soils that are highly susceptible to wind erosion. Both of these conditions will have a direct effect on how Refuge lands are managed in the future.
- 3) **Predation in Seabird Nesting Areas:** Predator management may be necessary to address the increase in predation of seabird chicks and eggs by raccoons and coyotes.
- 4) **Displacement of Nesting Seabirds:** Expanding nesting opportunities on the Refuge could reduce the displacement of some of the Refuge's nesting seabird species by other larger species of seabirds.

### **Coachella Valley NWR**

- 1) **Invasive Weedy Species:** Weedy non-native plants are increasingly invading the Refuge's blow sand habitat, jeopardizing habitat quality.
- 2) **Sand Movement:** Winds blowing across the Refuge can transport sand onto adjacent properties and roadways.
- 3) **Public Use:** Access is limited to an existing trail corridor, although illegal access onto other areas continues to be documented.

During the scoping process, we will expand this list to include those Refuge issues that you have identified as important to you. All we need are your comments. You can provide them at the public scoping meeting (see page 5), or by sending us a letter, email, or fax (see contact information on this page). We look forward to hearing from you!

## What's in a Name?

Many people confuse Federal and State fish and wildlife agencies because their names are similar. The Service is a Federal agency within the U. S. Department of the Interior. The State fish and wildlife agency in California is the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), included within the California Resources Agency. Our names are similar and so are our missions: both agencies are dedicated to wildlife conservation for the benefit of present and future generations. Our jurisdictions are different. The Service is the lead agency responsible for Federally listed species and migratory birds, whether they are located on Federal, State, or private lands. The Service is also the agency responsible for managing National Wildlife Refuges, including the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and the Coachella Valley NWR. The DFG has primary responsibility for resident fish and wildlife on State and private lands, and oversees State-listed species and streambed alteration issues throughout California. The Service coordinates with DFG during the CCP process to ensure that management actions proposed for refuges will also assist in achieving the State's habitat and species conservation goals.

### **Please feel free to contact us!**

We are available to provide additional information about the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex and to answer any questions you might have about the planning process. You can contact us by phone, mail, or e-mail.

#### **Please send your scoping comments to:**

##### **Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

6010 Hidden Valley Road, Suite 101

Carlsbad, CA 92011

760-431-9440 ex. 349 (phone), 760-930-0256 (fax)

Email: [Victoria\\_Touchstone@fws.gov](mailto:Victoria_Touchstone@fws.gov); please include "Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR CCP" in the subject line message.

#### **Direct your inquiries about Refuge operations to:**

##### **Chris Schoneman, Project Leader**

Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex

906 W. Sinclair Road, Calipatria, CA 92233-9744

760-348-5278 ex. 227 (phone)

Email: [Christian\\_Schoneman@fws.gov](mailto:Christian_Schoneman@fws.gov)



**United States Department of the Interior  
Fish & Wildlife Service, Refuge Planning  
6010 Hidden Valley Road, Suite 101  
Carlsbad, CA 92011**

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### **Planning Schedule**

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>September 2010</b>     | <b>Initiate Public Scoping</b>   |
| <b>September 14, 2010</b> | <b>Public Scoping Meeting in Palm Desert, 5:00 to 7:00 PM (see page 5 for details)</b> |
| <b>September 21, 2010</b> | <b>Public Scoping Meeting in Calipatria, 5:00 to 7:00 PM (see page 5 for details)</b>  |
| <b>May 2011</b>           | <b>Release Draft CCP for Public Comment</b>  |
| <b>September 2011</b>     | <b>Publish Final CCP</b>   |

We will periodically be posting information about the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex CCP on our website. You can visit this site throughout the CCP process to keep up-to-date on our progress. Go to: <http://fws.gov/saltonsea> and scroll down to the bottom of the page.

If you did not receive this *Planning Update* through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, or if you would like to be removed from the list, contact the Refuge Planner (see page 7 for contact information). Please feel free to pass this *Planning Update* along to anyone you think might be interested in the CCP process for Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex. Thank you!



# Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex

## Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR & Coachella Valley NWR

### *Planning Update 2 - January 2012*

#### Greetings!

This is the second in a series of *Planning Updates* for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). We provide these *Planning Updates* to keep you informed of our progress on the CCP and to solicit your input at various points throughout the process. In this update, we are seeking your comments regarding our draft Refuge goals and alternatives. We will further refine these alternatives after considering the additional input we receive from you over the next month. Once completed, the alternatives will be evaluated in the draft CCP, which will be available for review in Spring 2012.

#### Update from the Refuge Manager

It has been a busy year for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex. In addition to our normal management activities, we have been hard at work preparing for the development of the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP).

When we initiated the CCP last year, we requested and received comments from you telling us how you would like to see our two refuges in the Complex, the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and Coachella Valley NWR, managed over the next 15 years. After considering your comments, which are summarized on page 2 of this Planning Update, and conducting a review of the Refuge Complex's current wildlife and habitat management practices and public use programs, we developed draft goals and alternatives for each Refuge.

We encourage you to review the draft goals and alternatives, which are presented on pages 5 and 6 of this Planning Update, and over the next month provide us with any comments or suggestions that you feel should be considered during the preparation of the draft CCP. Guidance on how to provide these comments is provided on pages 4 and 7.

I appreciate your continued involvement and welcome your input on CCP and other refuge-related matters.

Chris Schoneman, Refuge Manager  
Sonny Bono Salton Sea  
National Wildlife Refuge Complex

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Opportunities for wildlife observation and photography have been expanded on the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR. This accessible observation deck extends over a portion of the Refuge's managed wetlands in Unit 1, where a variety of migratory shorebirds and seabirds can be observed throughout the year. We invite you to come check it out!

## Summary of Issues Raised during the Public Scoping Process

The issues, concerns, and recommendations received during the scoping process fall into several categories, including wildlife and habitat management, public use, refuge operations (e.g., law enforcement, facilities maintenance), and environmental effects.

The public and agency comments relevant to the **Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR** are summarized below.

### Wildlife/Habitat Management

- Optimize crop productivity in fields managed for foraging winter geese.
- Implement predator control to protect seabird chicks and eggs from predation.
- Expand nesting opportunities to improve seabird nesting productivity, particularly for gull-billed terns.
- Identify and implement strategies, including habitat restoration, to address the physical and biological effects of a shrinking Salton Sea.
- Ensure that Refuge planning is consistent with the larger restoration planning being conducted for the Salton Sea, including the Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Project.

### Public Use

- Continue to provide opportunities of waterfowl hunting and consider expansion of these opportunities on the Refuge, including allowing hunting in Unit 1.
- Expand waterfowl hunting to include wing shooting.
- Discontinue waterfowl hunting on the Refuge.
- Expand opportunities for bird watching and other wildlife observation, as well as interpretation and environmental education.
- Include the topic of climate change in environmental education programs.
- Improve trail accessibility.

### Cultural Resources

- Evaluate potential impacts to cultural resources and consult with affected tribal governments.

### Refuge Operations

- Increase staff, including the hiring of a law enforcement officer for the Complex, to implement refuge activities.
- Coordinate with surrounding landowners and other partners, and establish a Friends group.
- Implement repairs and improvements to public facilities, including restrooms and parking areas.
- Evaluate current and future land tenure issues.

### Environmental Effects

- Evaluate and implement measures to address air quality impacts associated with newly exposed Salton Sea sediments in areas managed by the Refuge.
- Evaluate long-term water availability for current and future management practices.
- Evaluate existing and future water quality issues including increases in temperature and concentrations of constituent of concern.
- Address the effects of climate change on Refuge resources and management.
- Evaluate the potential cumulative impacts of implementing the management proposals.
- Address effects of alternative energy development.
- Address potential geological hazards to Refuge structures.

Summarized below are the various comments received for the **Coachella Valley NWR**.

### Wildlife/Habitat Management

- Control invasive weeds on the Refuge.
- Describe how changes in sand transport could affect Refuge species.
- Enforce restrictions on vehicle use within the Refuge.

### List and Sensitive Species Management

- Monitor listed and other sensitive species which occur or have the potential to occur on the Refuge.
- Manage some areas of the Refuge to support the flat-tailed horned lizard.

### Public Use

- Provide opportunities for hunting upland bird and large and small game on the Refuge.
- Expand opportunities for wildlife observation and interpretation.

### Refuge Operations

- Increase staff, including the hiring of a law enforcement officer for the Complex, to implement refuge activities.
- Coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on flood control proposals for the Thousand Palms area.
- Coordinate with surrounding land managers and other partners, and establish a Friends group.
- Describe current land ownership and in-holdings.

### Environmental Effects

- Address the effects of climate change on Refuge resources and management.
- Evaluate the potential cumulative impacts of implementing the management proposals.

## Developing Goals for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and Coachella Valley NWR

Goals are one of the unifying elements of successful Refuge management. They identify and focus management priorities and provide a context for resolving issues and concerns raised during the scoping process. Refuge goals also guide specific projects, provide rationale for decisions, and offer a defensible link among the management actions, Refuge purposes, Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy, and National Wildlife Refuge System mission. The Refuge System defines a goal as a “. . . descriptive, open-ended, and often broad statement of desired future conditions that conveys a purpose but does not define measurable units” (Service Manual, 602 FW 1).

The CCP planning team drafted the following Refuge goals based on: 1) input provided during the scoping process for the CCP; 2) discussions with various public agencies and interested organizations; and 3) internal Fish and Wildlife Service review.

### Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR

- Goal 1: Manage suitable habitat for migratory birds, including wintering populations of waterfowl.
- Goal 2: Protect, restore, and enhance Refuge lands and waters for federally and state listed threatened and endangered species and species of concern.
- Goal 3: Support native wildlife diversity by providing appropriate upland and riparian habitat.
- Goal 4: Work in partnership with other federal, state, and local agencies and Tribes to develop an effective management program to preserve the habitat functions of the Salton Sea.



Photo by USFWS

Geese foraging on the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR

- Goal 5: Enhance the public’s awareness, appreciation, and enjoyment of the Refuge’s biological resources.

### Coachella Valley NWR

- Goal 1: Protect, restore, and enhance Refuge lands to ensure the survival of the federally threatened Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard and federally endangered Coachella Valley milk-vetch, as well as protect other species of concern.
- Goal 2: Work in partnership with federal, state, and local agencies, nonprofit land management organizations, and Tribes to support the implementation of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan.
- Goal 3: Enhance the public’s awareness and appreciation for the Refuge’s sensitive ecological functions and geological processes through compatible interpretive and environmental education opportunities.



Photo by Ginny Short

Flat-tailed horned lizard  
on the Coachella Valley NWR

## Refuge Purposes

A Refuge purpose is the purpose specified in or derived from the law, proclamation, executive order, agreement, public land order, donation document, or administrative memorandum establishing, authorizing, or expanding a national wildlife refuge, national wildlife refuge unit, or national wildlife refuge subunit. The Refuge purpose(s) for the establishment of the refuges within the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex are presented below.

**Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR** - Refuge purposes include “. . . a refuge and breeding ground for birds and wild animals . . .” (Executive Order 5498, dated 11/25/30); “. . . for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds” (16 U.S.C. § 715d, Migratory Bird Conservation Act); and “. . . for the management and control of migratory waterfowl and other wildlife . . .” (16 U.S.C. § 695, Lea Act).

**Coachella Valley NWR** - The purpose of this Refuge is “. . . to conserve (A) fish and wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species . . . or (B) plants . . .” (Endangered Species Act of 1973).

## Developing Management Alternatives for the Draft CCP

As part of the CCP process, the planning team is tasked with developing a range of alternatives for how a refuge should be managed. These alternatives are then analyzed in the environmental assessment (EA) to help determine which alternative would best achieve the Refuge purposes and goals. The process of developing alternatives involves analyzing current conditions, identifying various measures that if implemented would help achieve Refuge goals, and incorporating, as appropriate, input provided during the public scoping process and other information gathered during subsequent meetings and workshops and from various interested individuals, agencies, and organizations.

A summary of the management alternatives developed for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR is presented on page 5 and for the Coachella Valley NWR on page 6. (For a more detailed discussion of the draft alternatives for both refuges, please visit our CCP website located at <http://fws.gov/saltonsea> and scroll down to the bottom of the page, or contact the Refuge Planner [see page 7] to have this information sent to you.) As you review the various alternatives for each Refuge, you will find that the alternatives presented for a particular refuge differ in the extent and focus of the wildlife and habitat management actions to be implemented on the Refuge, as well as in the types and levels of public use opportunities to be provided.

We encourage you to provide us with your comments on the scope and range of management alternatives presented for each refuge. Let us know if there is an issue or management proposal that is not included within the current range of alternatives that you feel should be addressed. To have your comments considered in time for incorporation in the draft CCP, please provide any comments to Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner, by February 27, 2012 (contact information is provided on page 7). After considering any additional input, these alternatives will be refined and then fully described in the draft CCP/EA.

## We Invite Your Comments

One of the goals of the CCP process is to ensure public involvement in refuge management decisions. Many of you have participated in the public scoping process; we encourage your continued involvement. This is your opportunity to provide input regarding the draft refuge goals, as well as the management alternatives to be evaluated in the EA. If you have comments, please provide them via mail, fax, or email to the Refuge Planner (see contact information on page 7) no later than February 27, 2012.

We plan to release the draft CCP/EA for review and comment in Spring 2012. If you are not on our mailing list and would like to be notified when the draft is available, please contact the Refuge Planner.

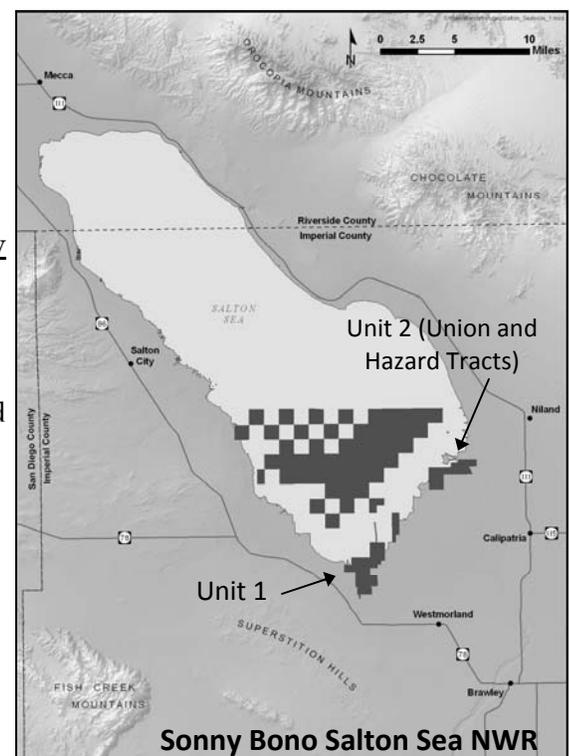
## Draft Management Alternatives for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR

We propose to analyze three alternatives for managing the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR over the next 15 years, including a no action alternative and two action alternatives. Under Alternative A (No Action), management of the Refuge would continue as it is occurring today. Alternative B, currently identified as the proposed action, proposes to restore and enhance habitat to support migratory birds and listed species and to make improvements to existing public use facilities and programs. Alternative C also proposes to restore and enhance habitats for migratory birds and listed species, although some management actions may differ from those described in Alternative B, and to expand current public uses on the Refuge. Each of these alternatives is summarized below.

**Alternative A - No Action.** Alternative A assumes no changes to current management practices. Current wildlife and habitat management and other Refuge operations would continue per available funding. Existing public use programs, involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education would continue. This alternative represents the baseline from which other “action” alternatives will be evaluated.

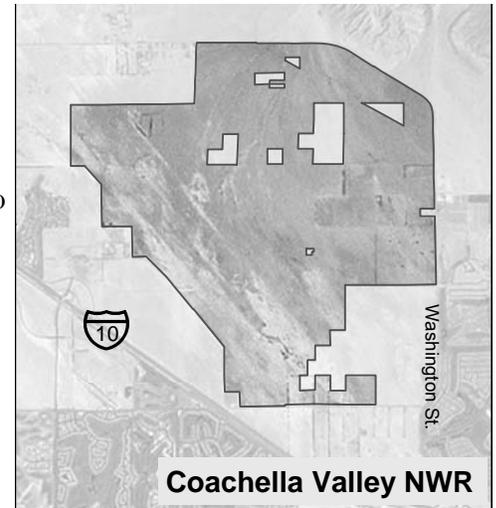
**Alternative B - Restore and Enhance Habitat to Support Migratory Birds and Listed Species; Improve Existing Public Use Facilities (Proposed Action).** Under this alternative, actions would be taken to restore or enhance existing managed habitats on the Refuge such as geese foraging fields, permanent cattail marshes, and shallow seasonal wetlands, as well as areas on the Refuge where the Salton Sea has receded leaving behind exposed seabed, such as in Red Hill Bay. The potential for permitting cooperative farming on the portions of the Refuge designated as foraging areas for wintering geese will also be evaluated. The Refuge’s Wildlife Disease Program would continue, but coordination with other agencies will be implemented to identify a new site for launching boats used in avian disease surveillance. A predator management plan is also proposed to control native and non-native predators responsible for taking seabird eggs and chicks. This alternative also includes a proposal to develop a robust program to monitor species abundance and diversity in the Refuge’s various managed habitats with the goal of identifying trends and variations that may occur as a result of changes at the Salton Sea, climate change, and/or changes in management practices. With respect to public use, a number of facility improvements are proposed including repairs to and possible expansion of the public restroom, repair or replacement of the walkways around the visitor contact station and public parking lot, upgrades to existing photo blinds, and surface modifications to the interpretive trails in Units 1 and 2 to improve accessibility. The hunting program would be modified to eliminate hunting on Wednesdays during the hunting season in the Union Tract, while also providing an additional hunting blind in this area for use on Saturdays and Sundays.

**Alternative C - Restore and Enhance Habitat to Support Migratory Birds and Listed Species; Expand Current Public Uses.** The majority of the wildlife and habitat management activities described in Alternative B would also be implemented under Alternative C. One exception is that under Alternative C consideration would be given to contracting some or all of farming operations on the Refuge designated as foraging areas for wintering geese. Expansion of public uses on the Refuge would include: a proposal to open a hunting area in Unit 1, where geese forage during the hunting season; development of a birding trail within the Hazard Unit for use outside of hunting season; and exploring with other partners the potential for developing a multiple agency auto tour route along the south end of the Salton Sea to interpret the fate of the Salton Sea, wetland restoration, migratory birds, water management, agriculture, geothermal development, and other issues important to this portion of the Imperial Valley.



## Draft Management Alternatives for the Coachella Valley NWR

We also propose to analyze three alternatives for managing the Coachella Valley NWR over the next 15 years, including a no action alternative and two action alternatives. Under Alternative A (No Action), management of the Refuge would continue as it is occurring today. Alternative B, currently identified as the proposed action, proposes to expand management activities to support listed and sensitive species and current public uses would be expanded to include off-Refuge interpretation at an appropriate site. Alternative C also proposes to expand management activities to support listed and sensitive species, as well as expand current interpretive opportunities. These alternatives are summarized below.



**Alternative A - No Action.** Alternative A assumes no changes to current management practices. Current wildlife and habitat management would continue per available funding. Existing public uses supporting wildlife observation and interpretation would continue and a public trail extending along portions of the Refuge’s western and northern boundary would remain. This alternative represents the baseline from which other “action” alternatives will be evaluated.

**Alternative B - Expand Management Actions to Support Listed and Sensitive Species; Maintain Current Public Uses on the Refuge (Proposed Action).** Under this alternative, Refuge management would be expanded to include: 1) greater staff involvement in annual protocol monitoring of listed species and species covered by the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan; 2) design and implementation of a long-term program to control Sahara mustard and other invasive plants through an integrated approach to pest management; 3) enhancement of disturbed desert habitat, such as the old vineyard site, by reseeded areas following invasive plant control with native desert annuals; and 4) development and implementation, in cooperation with other agencies and research partners, of a long-term sand transport monitoring plan and a plan to monitor and evaluate the effects of climate change on the resources preserved on the Refuge and within the greater Thousand Palms Conservation area. Also under this alternative, monitoring and enforcement of unauthorized pedestrian and vehicular access within the Refuge would be increased. Occasional guided tours would continue and the Service would develop an off-Refuge interpretive program for use at the Coachella Valley Preserve Visitor Center and/or other public facilities in the area.

**Alternative C - Expand Management Activities to Support Listed and Sensitive Species; Expand Current Public Use Program.** Alternative C includes the same wildlife and habitat management actions described in Alternative B, but rather than simply enhance disturbed desert habitat, this alternative proposes to develop and implement a comprehensive restoration plan for the old vineyard site. In addition to the public use proposals included in Alternative B, this alternative also proposes the design and installation of a roadside interpretive station at an appropriate location on the Refuge perimeter. Refuge staff would also coordinate with adjacent developers and local agencies in an effort to identify other opportunities for interpretation in areas immediately to the south of the Refuge along the edge of future residential development.

**A Note about Alternatives:** Following consideration of the comments received during public review of the draft CCP/EA, the proposed action for each Refuge may be altered as follows: 1) one or more of the actions addressed in another alternative may be added to the preferred alternative; 2) one or more actions included in the proposed action may be deleted or modified; or 3) one of the other two alternatives may be selected as the preferred alternative, either as described in the draft CCP/EA or as modified to include one or more actions included in the other two alternatives. The potential effects to the environment of all actions proposed in the various alternatives will be evaluated equally to ensure full disclosure of the potential effects of implementing the final version of the preferred management alternative.



At the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex headquarters, we are reducing our carbon footprint by taking advantage of our hot, sunny climate. Using funds provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), we have installed nine photo-voltaic arrays (eight 6.4 kilowatt arrays and one 6.8 kilowatt array) on five refuge building rooftops. Since the project's completion in September 2010, the Refuge's photo-voltaic project has produced over 81,659 kilowatt-hours of solar energy, providing a carbon dioxide emission savings of more than 69 tons. ARRA funding was also used to install new energy efficient air conditioning units within several of the complex buildings, reducing our overall annual energy consumption by about 22,300 kilowatt-hours.

## Contact Information

**Please send your CCP-related comments to:**

**Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner** (*Please note new mailing address*)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Post Office Box 2358

Chula Vista, CA 91912-2358

619-476-9150 ex. 103 (phone), 619-476-9149 (fax)

Email: [Victoria\\_Touchstone@fws.gov](mailto:Victoria_Touchstone@fws.gov); please include "Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR CCP" in the subject line message.

**Direct your inquiries about Refuge operations to:**

**Chris Schoneman, Project Leader**

Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex

906 W. Sinclair Road, Calipatria, CA 92233-9744

760-348-5278 ex. 227 (phone)



United States Department of the Interior  
Fish & Wildlife Service, Refuge Planning  
P.O. Box 2358  
Chula Vista, CA 91912-2358

First Class Mail  
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US Department  
of the Interior  
Permit G-77

### Planning Schedule

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| September 2010    | Initiate Public Scoping  |
| February 27, 2012 | Suggested Deadline for Providing Comments on Draft Goals and Alternatives<br>(this will ensure consideration of your comments in the draft CCP/EA) |
| April 2012        | Release Draft CCP/EA for Public Comment  |
| July 2012         | Publish Final CCP  |

We will periodically be posting information about the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex CCP on our website. You can visit this site throughout the CCP process to keep up-to-date on our progress. Go to: <http://fws.gov/saltonsea> and scroll down to the bottom of the page.

If you did not receive this *Planning Update* through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, or if you would like to be removed from the list, contact the Refuge Planner (see page 7 for contact information). Please feel free to pass this *Planning Update* along to anyone you think might be interested in the CCP process for Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex. Thank you!