

**Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Draft CCP/EA
Public Scoping Summary**

July 23, 2010

Public Involvement Process

The notice of intent (NOI) to begin the Montezuma CCP/EA was entered into the federal registry on May 7, 2010. Following the release of the NOI, the public was informed and their input was solicited through a variety of additional mechanisms. CCP process information was posted on the refuge website. In addition, news releases requesting public input as part of the CCP/EA scoping process were sent to 49 local and regional newspapers. A flyer requesting input and advertising the public meetings was made available at the refuge Visitor Center. Additionally, public scoping newsletters and public meeting invitations were sent (via email or hardcopy) to over 430 individuals (private citizens, interest groups, academia, and representatives of local/state/federal agencies, and Tribes, etc.). Included in the newsletters were "Issues Workbooks", designed to help elicit responses from the public. On May 18, 2010, two public scoping meetings were held at the refuge Visitor Center. Attendees included 24 members of the public, refuge and regional USFWS staff, a New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC) representative, and USFWS consultant. After an introductory refuge and CCP process overview, public issues, comments, ideas and concerns were fielded and documented. In addition, as part of the scoping process, the refuge conducted an interagency issues and ideas workshop. On May 24, 2010 invitations were sent to over 50 individuals representing 13 federal, state, and local agencies. Prior to the workshop, agendas and background information on the refuge were sent to the invitees. The workshop was held on June 23, 2010 at the Montezuma Audubon Center located in Savannah, NY. The following agencies/groups were represented: Cayuga County Planning, Friends of the Montezuma Wetlands Complex, National Park Service (Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor), NYDEC, New York State (NYS) Canal Corporation, NYS Thruway Authority, Town of Tyre (Code Enforcement), and US Forest Service (Fingerlakes National Forest). The scoping period ended on June 30, 2010.

Summary of Comments, Issues, and Ideas Collected

During the scoping period, over 175 comments (both verbal and written) were received at the public meetings, interagency workshop, via 12 completed *Issues Workbooks*, and from emails. In the *Issues Workbook*, respondents could write comments as well as select from various lists of issues/needs. Those responses have been summarized in the Appendix.

The following section summarizes the scoping comments that have been received. Comments have been organized into six broad categories:

- **Landscape Scale/Ecosystem-wide Issues (Climate Change, Land Protection, Water Quality)**
- **Biological Program Issues (Management, Protection, Restoration, Monitoring, Inventories, Research)**
- **Other Refuge Use Issues (Conflicts, Impacts)**
- **Community Relations/Local Economy**
- **Public Use Program Issues (Range or Quality of Programs, Access, Conflicts, Impacts)**
- **Facilities, Infrastructure, Staffing Issues Safety, Suitability, Accessibility**

Landscape Scale/Ecosystem-wide Issues (Climate Change, Land Protection, Water Quality)

- Mitigate impacts to wildlife movement & hydrology due to the NYS Thruway (I-90)
- Address contaminant issues
- Evaluate/mitigate impacts associated with utility and transportation corridors
- Assess whether newly acquired lands are best suited to conversion to impounded wetlands
- Increase understanding of the abiotic functions (e.g. water quality, carbon storage) of impounded wetlands
- Climate change needs to be considered in future refuge planning efforts
- Evaluate potential impacts of hydrofracking on the refuge
- Increase land acquisition efforts to return the Complex as much as possible to historical wetlands
- Water quality is the most important problem facing the refuge (especially Black Brook)
- Balance the need for acquiring additional lands with the ability to adequately manage new acreage

Biological Program Issues (Management, Protection, Restoration, Monitoring, Inventories, Research)

- Increase monitoring of rare herpetological species on the refuge
- Develop more scientifically-based biological goals (i.e. collaborate with academia)
- Evaluate if some restoration areas that have reverted to grassland need to be impounded (which would cause the loss of grassland bird habitat)
- Increase grasslands, not shrubland
- Consider bats when developing its biological goals
- Some grassland may be better suited for conversion to shrublands (to support shrubland birds)
- Address invasive species in refuge goals
- Need more information on non-bird species utilizing the refuge
- Consider new species to the refuge in the planning process
- Expand shorebird habitat
- Maintaining and restoring wetlands should be the highest priority
- Address impacts of fragmentation
- Managing furbearing species is the most important problem facing the refuge
- Increase/improve access to trappers
- Register the marsh with the NYDEC therefore being able to get it own seasons to regulate the population of the trapping species
- There should be more level ditching on Area C&D
- Protect the integrity of the refuge environment which will solve many issues
- Focus on the Seneca River and its importance to the refuge's mission
- Waterfowl and marsh birds should be a management priority
- Resist pressure from individuals and organizations to reduce or eliminate active habitat management from the refuge
- Use active timber management to maintain a diversity of healthy forest types and age structure
- Use prescribed burning, herbicides and integrated vegetation management for a variety of activities
- Cattail appear to have declined over the last 6-7 years

Other Refuge Use Issues (Conflicts, Impacts)

- Consider effects on the local community during land acquisition efforts

- Better explain refuge management actions to the public
- Address concern about loss in tax base for townships when land leaves private ownership
- Any thruway expansion into the refuge is not supported as it would displace additional habitat
- Construction has caused water issues (too low/high) at times

Community Relations/Local Economy

- Increase/improve efforts to boost area ecotourism
- Increase outreach efforts
- Better explain tax revenue sharing options to the local community
- Address the need for increased/improved partnerships (e.g. with Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, NYS Thruway/Canal Corp, Fingerlakes National Forest, Montezuma Audubon Center/MAC, academia, etc.)
- Evaluate linking (virtually and/or via driving tour) the refuge and Howland's Island/MAC
- Attract "casual visitors" to the refuge and Complex
- Help the community embrace the transition from an agri-based economy to ecotourism based
- Collaborate with the Chamber of Commerce to promote ecotourism

Public Use Program Issues (Range or Quality of Programs, Access, Conflicts, Impacts)

- Need for "Complex Brochure"
- Need for increased environmental education
- Current Visitor Center is unable to support needed programs
- Hunting opportunities need to be expanded (i.e. more species)
- Fishing opportunities need to be increased
- Waterfowl hunting opportunities need to be increased
- Carp-fishing opportunities on the refuge need to be evaluated
- Evaluate allowing guided tours on refuge
- Connect the refuge with the Complex through the use of maps, tours, birding trails, guides, etc.
- Increase volunteer base and reduce turnover
- Increase access to Tschache Pool and Knox-Marsellus for wildlife watchers
- Encourage the use of the refuge by private industry
- Evaluate boat tour (access) opportunities
- Increase public awareness about refuge facilities (trails, floating dock)
- Will the refuge start charging entrance fees?
- Increase the number of photo blinds (volunteers could help place, construct & maintain these)
- Increase outreach efforts to younger generation
- Increase public use opportunities for young people
- Expand the use of webcams
- Develop educational programs for a greater variety of species, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.
- Wildlife observation and hunting are mutually exclusive
- Address the issue of visitors leaving their cars on the driving tour
- Evaluate camping on the refuge
- The refuge has become too responsive to some of the demands of area birder groups
- The refuge should continue to pursue the construction of a parking area along the NY thruway
- The CCP should include climate change information in environmental education programs
- Allow spring and fall turkey hunting on the refuge

- Allow walkers and bikers on the wildlife loop
- Develop a trail system that includes local wineries to draw additional visitors
- Increase hiking trails (such as on Unit 17)
- Interpretive information needs to include geologic history of the Complex
- Maintain restrictions on public uses to minimize disturbance to birds and wildlife
- Open areas preserved for plants and animals to public recreation
- Hunting is incompatible with local conservation objectives
- Only non-consumptive uses should be allowed on the refuge
- Do not increase public access except through staff-guided tours

Facilities, Infrastructure, Staffing Issues Safety, Suitability, Accessibility

- Insufficient staffing of the refuge needs to be addressed
- Need to improve some refuge roads
- Increase/improve directional signs on area roads
- Improve/increase parking areas to address congestion where limited off-highway parking is available

Appendix – Summary of Responses of *Issues Workbook* Questions (#6, 11 & 14)

The following questions in the *Issues Workbook* allowed for the selection of multiple responses (see the refuge planning site for details:

http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Montezuma/pdf/May2010_CCPNewsletter_lowres.pdf). The responses have been summarized below, based on the 12 workbooks received.

Question 6: What technical services would you like refuge staff to provide to your local community?

Technical Services	Number of Responses
wetlands management/restoration	7
management of endangered species	5
habitat management to benefit wildlife	7
land protection funding	3
control of invasive plant and animal species	8
volunteer opportunities	5
grants for habitat management	2
other	3

Question 11: Which options should the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pursue in protecting important habitats in the Montezuma Wetlands Complex?

USFWS Options to Protect Important Habitat	Number of Responses
land acquisition	8
conservation easements (purchase development rights)	3
partnerships with private land owners	7
work with conservation groups	4
environmental education	6
grants programs	3
habitat restoration	10
no active involvement	0
other	2

Question 14: Are any of the following natural resource issues a concern to you in the Montezuma refuge area?

Potential Natural Resource Issues of Concern	Number of Responses
fragmentation of important habitats	5
invasion of exotic plant and animal species	10
overdevelopment of fragile habitats	5
increased recreational use in sensitive habitat areas	7
water quality	6
lack of active management to improve wildlife habitats	4
other	1