



Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge and Black River Unit of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge Planning Update 2, November 2011



Western sandpipers roosting / Jan Weiser, USFWS

Thank You for Participating

Greetings

The Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge Complex is developing comprehensive conservation plans and associated environmental assessments (CCP/EA) for the Complex's Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge or NWR) and Black River Unit (Refuge) (collectively Refuges). When completed, the CCPs will guide management of the Refuges for 15 years. Your participation in the CCP process is critical to its success.

As part of our CCP process, we requested public input on Refuge management issues, concerns, and opportunities. We would like to thank everyone who provided comments, and invite you to continue sharing your ideas with us. In this update we provide summaries of the public comments we received on pages 2 and 3.

Public Involvement

To kick off the CCP process, we distributed Planning Update 1 in early May 2011. In it we described our process and the Refuges' purposes and preliminary issues. We also announced two public meetings, held consecutively in Aberdeen and Littlerock, on May 18 and 19, 2011. We provided information and gathered written and verbal comments at the meetings. We also received written comments in letters and e-mails. A detailed public scoping report is available on our CCP webpage: <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/main/docs/wa/docsgraysblack.htm>

Commenters covered broad and long-range issues or identified very specific or detailed strategies that could address biological or public use issues. The CCP planning team reviewed, categorized, and summarized all the comments under topics on the following pages.

As you will see in the summaries, commenters offered diverse and sometimes opposing views on the same issue. These comments and issues will help provide the basis for the preliminary management alternatives, objectives, and strategies we are developing.

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Dunlin / Jan Weiser, USFWS



What are the Refuges' Key Issues?

Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge

The Refuge visitors who observe and photograph wildlife and other interested stakeholders provided many comments and questions about wildlife and habitat issues, and suggestions for changing the Refuge's visitor services. Brief summaries of the concerns and issues commenters would like us to address in the CCP/EA follow.

Habitat Management and Restoration

- Reduce sediment buildup on mudflats for shorebirds.
- Create an inventory and monitoring program to assess shorebird habitat, vegetation changes, and sediment buildup.
- Assess Refuge water resources.
- Protect, monitor, and evaluate shorebird habitat outside the Refuge, such as areas around Ned's Point and west of Bowerman Basin.
- Address climate change and sea level rise effects on Refuge resources.
- Identify threats and work to minimize stressors on shorebirds, wildlife, and habitats.

Invasive Species Control

- Control invasive nonnative species on the Refuge, particularly knotweed and phragmites.
- Explore methods for controlling invasive species on the Refuge, including using herbicides.

Contaminants

- Identify sources of contaminants on and around the Refuge (i.e., sewage treatment ponds, fill areas, former landfills and dredging).

Visitor Services

- Develop new walking trails and bike paths on Refuge and adjacent roadways.
- Provide on-site staff.



Grays Harbor's boardwalk / M. Bailey, USFWS

- Improve signage and trail information.
- Improve environmental education (EE) and outreach.
- Expand EE, provide guided walks and talks throughout the year.
- Provide EE on hunting, wildlife populations, and conservation.
- Develop a visitor center with partners, such as the City, County, and others.
- Develop a small visitor facility.

Visitor Services: Hunting and Fishing

- Provide hunting and fishing opportunities on the Refuge, including barrier-free access.
- Provide waterfowl hunting.

Black River Unit of Nisqually NWR

Commenters, including many neighbors, had questions about wildlife habitat, land acquisition, visitor services, conservation partnerships, and the mixture of private and public land ownerships within the Refuge's approved boundary. Brief summaries of the concerns and issues commenters would like us to address in the CCP/EA follow.

Land and Water Protection

- Expand the Refuge's current acquisition boundary to protect and enhance areas with diminishing wildlife habitats, including prairie, oak woodlands, and forests down to tribal lands or the Chehalis River.
- Identify land acquisition priorities within the current acquisition boundary and a timeline for potential acquisitions.
- Protect high quality wildlife habitats, lands, and water in the unique Black River Watershed.

- Consider adding Satsop watershed to the Refuge.

- Partner with natural resource agencies/organizations and landowners to protect the network of habitats in need of conservation.

Habitat Management and Restoration

- Protect, manage, monitor, and map wildlife habitat.
- Protect threatened and endangered species.
- Assess and improve water quality and quantity in the Black River and its tributaries.

- Improve the health and diversity of wildlife and habitats by protecting oak, prairie, and anadromous fish habitats and rare plant and animal species; and managing grasslands.
- Improve habitats within the boundary and develop strategies to improve habitat connectivity.
- Identify climate change effects and the actions needed to protect habitats and wildlife populations from climate change stressors.

Invasive Species Control

- Control invasive nonnative species, particularly purple loosestrife, knotweed, reed canary-grass, scotch broom, Himalayan blackberries, New Zealand mud snails,

Continued on next page →

Next Step-Developing Management Alternatives

Currently, we are evaluating the issues and concerns identified in public comments, and developing a range of preliminary management alternatives. For your consideration, we will share the preliminary

alternatives with you in Planning Update 3. We will further analyze the alternatives in the Draft CCPs/EAs, which will include a no action (no change) alternative that describes our current management

activities on the Refuges. The no action alternative will provide a baseline to compare the potential impacts of the other alternatives. We encourage you to stay involved in this planning process.

Black River Unit continued

and feral cats. Provide invasive species control information to local landowners.

Refuge Structures, Public Safety, and Security

- Remove derelict and vacant structures.
- Maintain old buildings if they are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. If they are not eligible, remove them.
- Improve safety and security. Curtail trespassing, garbage dumping, and other illegal activities in and around Refuge barns, vacant houses, and other facilities.
- Identify and address increased future visitation at the Refuge and related impacts to adjacent private property from trespassing and illegal dumping.

Visitor Facilities

Keep development of this Refuge for visitors to a minimum. Secure areas for wildlife and minimize wildlife impacts.

- Develop a visitor center and information kiosks.
- Develop accessible barrier-free trails and viewing blinds at 123rd Avenue and 110th Avenue.
- Find a balance between providing new wildlife viewing opportunities and minimizing wildlife disturbance.
- Provide safe off-road parking to view elk and other wildlife.

- Coordinate with Rails-to-Trails planning in Thurston County.

Visitor Facilities: Boating and River Access

- Improve river access, boat launch sites, signage, sanitation facilities, and parking areas.
- Coordinate with the Washington Department of Natural Resources regarding access to the 110th Avenue boat ramp and access to the Refuge via 123rd Avenue.
- Allow nonmotorized boats only.
- Allow access for motorized boats.

Visitor Services: Education and Outreach

- Provide more information on your Web site, and through interpretive signs and educational materials.
- Build volunteer and outreach programs.
- Offer neighboring landowners education and programs for improving wildlife habitat.
- Explain why public uses are closed.

Visitor Services: Hunting and Fishing

- Consider hunting opportunities on the Refuge.
- Acknowledge Federal Duck Stamp funding by providing hunting opportunities.



Black River / D. Ellison, USFWS

- Open the Refuge to hunting, to the fullest extent safety allows.
- Identify areas where hunting could occur safely.
- Provide waterfowl hunting.
- Provide fishing opportunities.
- Provide opportunities for barrier-free hunting and fishing access.

Conservation Partnerships

- Coordinate planning, management, protection, restoration, and interpretation activities for the Black River corridor lands and waters, with State resource agencies, law enforcement agencies, Thurston County, Capitol Land Trust, and The Nature Conservancy.

Planning

- Provide planning information on your Web site.
- Create user friendly planning documents.



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In this issue: We provide summaries of public comments and issues regarding the future management of Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge and the Black River Unit of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge.

Project Contacts

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CCP webpage:

www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/main/docs/wa/docsgraysblack.htm

The Refuges' Web sites:

Grays Harbor NWR:

www.fws.gov/graysharbor/

Black River Unit:

www.fws.gov/nisqually/management/bru_general.html

Planning Schedule

- May 2011** Planning Update 1 completed
- May 2011** Public Meetings completed
- Fall 2011** Planning Update 2: Results of public comments (current step)
- Winter 2011-2012** Planning Update 3: Preliminary alternatives for consideration
- Spring-Summer 2012** Draft CCPs/EAs and Planning Update 4 for public comments
- Winter 2012** Final CCP/Decision and Planning Update 5

Dates are tentative and may change as the planning process progresses.