

## **Erie NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan Public Scoping Issues Summary from 2008**

The public comment period was open from March 19 – April 30, 2008. Personalized written comments were received from slightly over 100 individuals, and 10 stakeholder groups including the Pennsylvania Game Commission. In addition, one petition was received. On March 19 and 20, 2008, we held four public meetings to provide opportunities for questions and comments on the upcoming Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). The times, locations, and meeting formats varied to provide many opportunities for public involvement. An open house style format in the afternoon, and a more structured evening meeting, were held in both Guys Mills and Meadville. Approximately 80 people attended over the 2 day period.

The variety of comments dealt with all facets of refuge management including wildlife and habitat management, facilities, staffing, environmental education, outreach, public access, recreational opportunities, timber harvesting, oil drilling, and roadways. Below, is a summary of the comments received organized by the following categories: the CCP process, public use, biology and habitat management, land acquisition, staffing and facilities, and cooperative farming.

### CCP Process

- Is this a new plan?
- Is there a preliminary vision?
- Are the Iroquois and Erie CCPs separate?
- What is the process to review the plan periodically?
- What will happen when something is included, or not included in the plan (such as timbering)?
- What happens in the meantime before the Plan is complete?
- Will the Plan get changed by the agency?
- Is the refuge working with the Township?

### Economic Concerns and Land Acquisition

- How was the refuge purchased?
- Residents will lose a valuable economic & recreational resource for their area.
- Allow local residents to benefit from economic and recreation aspects.
- The beaver must be controlled so they do not cause damage to Randolph Township roads. Economic responsibility of refuge.
- Consider connecting two units.
- Tourism is important for the county and youth.

### Public Use

- The refuge should evaluate the option of having people pay for a permit to fish.
- Environmental education is worth it; the refuge facilities should be open and staff/volunteers should outreach to the community.

- Could there be a stamp created to allow hunting on the refuge, and the funds remain here?
- Why is Area B limited for hunts?
- Open Area B to hunting.
- Opposed to paying a fee for hunting on refuge.
- Loss of visitor use if brush is allowed to grow. Poor management (i.e., decreasing farming) will interfere with continued opportunities for public use.
- Please continue to allow hunting, fishing, and trapping.
- Wish more of the lakes were open to fishing.
- Close areas to hunting, fishing, trapping as needed for specific species.
- Maintain and expand turkey hunting.
- Do not allow hunting.
- Reopen for woodcock hunting.
- Consider opening refuge to all state seasons.
- Hunting brochure should be online.
- Control geese with public hunting not other methods.
- Continue to exclude motorized vehicles, ATVs.
- Open refuge to off trail use for naturalists, bird watchers not just hunters and trappers.
- Do not limit public use.
- Expand environmental education (EE) to increase appreciation of birds and the IBA program.
- Provide EE and interpretation. Refuge facilities should be open and refuge staff and volunteers should outreach to community.
- Need longer hiking trails.
- Restore old hiking trail across Muddy Creek Flats.
- Host a cross country skiing event.
- Current management not conducive for public use.
- Continue two-day field experience for the local school children, the biennial nature photo contest and participation in the Guys Mills Heritage Festival.
- Consider building photo/observation blinds at various areas in the refuge
- A tall observation tower was planned to observe the extensive wetland area to the south of Swamp Road. We would like to see this observation tower constructed.
- Encourage historian to document past activities on the refuge.
- Continue trapping
- Stop trapping

#### Staffing and Facilities

- Participant reminded the group that many sportsmen's groups could be good partners in creating habitat on the refuge.
- What about volunteer groups? The refuge should do more outreach requesting volunteers.
- If there is not enough money to do basic things that the refuge was established for (waterfowl); how can we even talk about anything else?

- People can sign up for the refuge Friends group and volunteer.
- Are there liability issues related to volunteering?
- Does a smaller refuge still get money when funds do increase?
- Increased staffing is important.
- Increase funding and staffing for refuge.
- Look at being self-sustaining on funding.
- Refuge should look into timber harvest to raise funds for the refuge.
- Encourage using natural resources including oil drilling, timber harvesting to support refuge.
- Don't allow mining, drilling, logging.
- Money came to build a walkway, was that necessary?
- Oppose new roads.
- Concerned about high traffic on refuge roads (e.g., Swamp Road). More speed limit signs and enforcement?
- Continue involvement with YCC.
- Ask for volunteer help if staff/funding insufficient.

#### Cooperative Farming

- Why was farming cut back from the peak of 1,200 acres in the program? Does the refuge receive money from the farmers?
- Are there any environmental protections in place to reduce the effects of farming (herbicides, etc.)? Is there a baseline? Hold farmers accountable for pollutants if not following guidelines.
- Disagree with the Cooperative Farm Program Compatibility Determination. We should not rely on the data presented regarding waterfowl use, specifically, the Saint James Bay Canada Goose population, on the refuge. Is it possible to do a study? (Do not believe info on waterfowl and cropland management).
- Concerned with the farming program. Do not want to see those fields grow into red brush.
- Is the farming status going to stay as it is until the Plan is done?
- Is any land that hasn't been farmed available for farming?
- The refuge should not take away a management group (i.e. farmers) that has been managing the land and remove them from the refuge.
- What does the staff think of farming?
- Increase farming to 1,200 acres and evaluate it for 5 years.
- If crops don't feed wildlife, what will? Farm for wildlife.
- What have farms been converted to (percent, data)?
- Do away with trails and have more farming.
- Replace/reduce farming with native grasses and other native species.
- Multiflora rose threatens habitat if not managed by mowing/farming
- Refuge is draining ponds and letting croplands go to weeds. Not putting my Duck Stamp money to good use.
- Promises by RD Richard Griffiths need to be kept.
- Sad when any land is taken out of farming

- Increase farming on refuge.

### Biology and Habitat Management

- Have refuge staff done waterfowl studies/surveys recently?
- Are we still managing wood duck boxes?
- Are there any plans to cut down more pine trees?
- Will biologists have input into the Plan?
- Will there be any prescribed burns?
- Input on habitat management by use. Employ a forester or agronomist.
- Use good data for CCP
- Invasive species threaten refuge habitats. Control invasive species.
- When cropland is converted back to brush there is a drastic decline in migratory waterfowl.
- While crops provide some resources for waterfowl, the focus of the refuge should be on early successional forest habitat.
- Refuge should map old growth forests, rare and regionally significant plant and animal species.
- Leave mature oaks and hickory to benefit wildlife
- Cut trees, for timber and to decrease fire hazard
- Don't cut non-native trees
- Support active forest management to address forest health and wildlife management.
- Concern about American woodcock habitat (lack of?)
- Remove conifer plantations
- Reinstate clear cutting (to benefit wood cock?)
- Any timbering of mature forest should be selective thinning.
- Conserve/recover state/federally listed species
- Maintain diversity of avian species
- Actively manage to benefit bats
- Retain/maintain biodiversity
- Where will property be in 50 years? No fields and all forest and wetlands?  
Opposed to this.
- Expand avian inventory and monitoring.
- Provide active grassland management. Important for providing foraging for owls, hawks, and part-time habitat for woodcock and turkey.
- Suggest some larger fields (between Teepleville Flats Road and Muddy Creek) be maintained as fields/grasslands mowed late in the season.
- Need more grassland/cropland.
- Oppose prescribed burning.
- Reinstate long term management for early successional habitat (for woodcock).\
- Enhance native shrubs and vegetation
- Active water level management should continue.
- Maintain dikes and water control structures.
- More open water habitats

- Monitor water quality
- Clean up streams and keep free-flowing to keep from encroaching on private property.
- Better protect eagle nests.
- Mow more around refuge headquarters.
- Include annual trapping plan in management goals.
- Units E and F should be combined for beaver trapping.
- Any trapper who properly registers with the refuge should be allowed to trap for furbearers then in season without regard for designated units
- We are concerned that an over-abundance of species can be quite destructive to various bird nests