

Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan

October 2010

Vision for the Future

Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, known locally as part of the “Alabama Swamps” will be the ecological “puzzle piece” for western New York by creating and maintaining unsurpassed habitats including wetlands, grasslands, shrublands, and forests for migratory birds and other wildlife. By encouraging compatible wildlife dependent recreation and working with partners, a deep understanding and appreciation for the Refuge’s ecological integrity will be fostered in its visitors, regardless of generational, economic, or social boundaries. Through these efforts, future generations will cherish Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge’s interconnectivity to the much larger National Wildlife Refuge System.

Refuge Setting

Iroquois NWR was established in 1958 under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act for “... use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” (16 U.S.C. 715d.)” The refuge consists of more than 10,800 acres within the rural townships of Alabama and Shelby, New York, midway between Buffalo and Rochester. Freshwater marshes and hardwood swamps are bounded by forests, grasslands, and wet meadows. These areas serve the habitat needs of both migratory and resident wildlife, including waterfowl, songbirds, mammals, and amphibians, as well as numerous indigenous plant species.

Status of our Conservation Plan

In 2008, we began developing a comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment for the Refuge. Once final, that plan will guide wildlife and habitat management, land conservation, and public use programs on the Refuge for the next 15 years. We are proud to announce that we now have available a draft plan for public review and comment.



Sutton's Marsh at Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge

USFWS

Details of the Draft Plan

Our draft plan presents three fully developed, distinct planning alternatives. The team consists of regional planners, biologists, Refuge staff, and resource specialists from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. We also carefully considered public input from scoping meetings and workshops.

Description of the Alternatives

We based our three alternatives on the purposes for establishing the Refuge, its vision and goals, and the issues and concerns identified by the public, state agencies, and the Service during the planning process. The issues included drainage of water control structures, invasive species management, development, hunting opportunities, law enforcement, and public access and uses on the Refuge.

Alternative A

Current Management

This alternative is the “No Action” alternative, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Alternative A defines our current management activities, and serves as the baseline against which to compare

the other alternatives. A selection of this alternative would maintain the status quo in managing the Refuge for the next 15 years. No major changes would be made to current management practices. This alternative provides a basis for comparing the other two alternatives.

Under current management, Refuge impoundments will not change in respect to existing conditions. There will be no change in the amount of open water and emergent marsh available to wildlife in Alternative A. Early successional habitat including grasslands and shrublands will decrease in comparison to existing conditions. Refuge forests are the only habitat under this alternative that will increase in acreage. The increase is a result of the natural succession of shrubland and grassland habitat to forest. We would maintain opportunities for visitors to engage in wildlife observation, photography, and environmental education and interpretation, as well as existing hunting and fishing opportunities on the Refuge. We would maintain existing infrastructure and buildings, and maintain current staffing levels.

Alternative B

Service-preferred Alternative

This alternative is the one we propose as the best way to manage this refuge over the next 15 years to achieve the refuge purposes, vision, and goals and the goals of other state and regional conservation plans. We also believe it most effectively addresses the key issues raised during the planning process.

Under Alternative B, some Refuge habitat conditions will change in response to management decisions that focus on decreasing habitat fragmentation and restoring native habitats. Like Alternative A, management of Refuge impoundments will not change and there will be no expected changes in the amount of open water and emergent marsh available to wildlife. Early successional habitat including grasslands and shrublands will increase slightly compared to Alternative A and forest acres will increase more than any other habitat.

Under Alternative B, we propose to follow the lead of most other National Wildlife Refuges and restrict public access to designated areas of the Refuge year-round. The Refuge would allow wildlife observation, hiking, and walking on established nature trails. Access to other parts of the Refuge would be allowed under authorized programs like hunting, and environmental education. Closing the Refuge to unrestricted wandering would reduce disturbance on Refuge when waterfowl and other migrating birds are resting and feeding. The Refuge is also proposing to increase some existing wildlife-dependent recreational activities including hunting and wildlife observations.

We propose to colocate the Lower Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office currently located in Amherst, New York with a new visitor contact station and administration building at Iroquois NWR. The building will include a sales outlet for Friends of Iroquois NWR, exhibit hall, multi-purpose room, conference room and offices to house staff from Refuges, Fisheries, and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The new building will be created by adding on to the existing building which will be remodeled to serve as the visitor contact section of the new building. The new portion of the building will be placed in an area

that has already been disturbed when the current building was built.

Alternative C

Improved Biological Integrity

Alternative C, prominently features additional management that aims to restore (or mimic) natural ecosystem processes or function to achieve Refuge purposes.

Under Alternative C, Refuge habitat conditions would change as a result of management decisions that target a more natural state (less management) and emphasize restoration to historical habitats. Refuge impoundments will no longer be actively managed and some will be removed. This will result in a decrease of approximately 329 acres of open water and emergent marsh habitat. Grassland acres will be reduced by 50% as only the two largest grassland units will be managed. Management of shrublands will be discontinued and the only shrub habitats that will remain are small native shrub swamps. Forest cover will increase (1,548 additional acres) under this alternative in response to the reversion, succession and conversion of conifer plantations, grasslands, shrublands, emergent marsh and open water to forest.

Similar to Alternative B, we propose to restrict public access to designated areas of the Refuge year-round, allowing wildlife observation, hiking and walking on established Refuge nature trails. Also, we propose to colocate the Lower Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office currently located in Amherst, New York with a new visitor contact station and administration building at Iroquois NWR.

Public Review and Comment on the Plan

Public involvement is crucial in the planning process and we encourage your participation. Your comments will help shape the final plan. We are



Ruby-throated hummingbird

releasing the draft plan for a period of public review and comment.

We ask that you submit your comments by November 8, 2010, by regular mail or email.

Please send your comments to Thomas Bonetti, Planning Team Leader, at the address provided. You can also submit comments at our public meetings (see below for date and location).

How to Obtain a Copy of the CCP/EA

The draft plan is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/iriquois/ccp.html>. To request the document in print or on CD, contact:

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Hadley, MA 01035
Phone: 413/253-8307
E-mail: northeastplanning@fws.gov
(Please put "Iroquois NWR CCP" in the subject line)

Public Meetings

Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge
At Refuge Headquarters
1101 Casey Road
Basom, NY 14013

Wednesday
October, 20 2010

3:00-5:00 pm

6:00-8:00 pm

For Further Information:

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov>

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