



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge

*Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan
and Environmental Assessment*

March 2017



Front and back covers:

*Crooked Pond on Massasoit National
Wildlife Refuge*

Kourtne Bouley/USFWS



*This blue goose, designed by
J.N. “Ding” Darling, has become
the symbol of the National Wildlife
Refuge System.*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, comprising over 850 million acres of lands and waters, including five national marine monuments, more than 565 national wildlife refuges, and 38 wetland management districts. The Service also operates national fish hatcheries and ecological services field stations. It enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves, and restores wildlife habitat, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. The Service oversees the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program that manages over 10 grant programs to state agencies for wildlife and fish conservation and to support hunting, sport fishing, and recreational boating opportunities.

Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs) provide long-term guidance for management decisions on refuges and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes. CCPs also identify the Service’s best estimate of future needs. These plans detail program levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning and program prioritization purposes. CCPs do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.



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Vision Statement

The pine-oak habitat and coastal plain ponds that comprise Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge are an integral component of the southeast Massachusetts landscape and its biodiversity, and are part of the largest contiguous pitch pine-oak habitat north of the Long Island Sound. This dynamic, fire-dependent ecosystem supports numerous invertebrate and bird species of conservation concern. The kettle-hole ponds in this system also support and contribute to the recovery of the federally endangered northern red-bellied cooter, a geographically distinct population found only in Massachusetts.

Through public and partner engagement, we promote ecologically responsible stewardship of the resources on the refuge and in the larger landscape, and foster an appreciation and understanding of the intrinsic value of these resources.



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Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan *March 2017*

Summary

Type of Action: Administrative—Development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Lead Agency: U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service

Location: Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge
Plymouth, Massachusetts

Administrative Headquarters: Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Sudbury, Massachusetts

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This draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment analyzes two alternatives for managing the 209-acre Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge) over the next 15 years. This document also contains four appendixes (appendix A to appendix D) that provide additional information supporting our analyses. Following is a brief overview of each alternative:

Alternative A: *Current Management*—Alternative A satisfies the National Environmental Policy Act requirement of a “no-action” alternative, which we define as “continuing current management.” It describes our existing management priorities and activities for Massasoit NWR, and serves as a baseline for comparing and contrasting alternative B.

Alternative B: *Expanded Management (Service-preferred Alternative)*—Alternative B represents an extension and progression of all areas of refuge management. Under alternative B, new biological program activities would be initiated. Northern red-bellied cooter habitat management and monitoring would be expanded. Management tools, such as prescribed burning and mechanical thinning, would be targeted toward increasing structural habitat and species diversity to benefit a wide array of species of conservation concern such as

eastern towhees, prairie warblers, and New England cottontail. Wildlife population and habitat monitoring surveys and inventories would be continued on an ongoing basis to provide the data needed to evaluate the effectiveness of refuge programs and practices, and to adapt management as warranted to achieve long-range refuge goals and objectives.

Under alternative B, new compatible, wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities are provided. Most of the Crooked Pond parcel would be opened for wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education on special occasions when led by refuge staff or partners working under a special use permit. Refuge staff would also undertake a separate planning process that could result in opening the refuge to white-tailed deer and wild turkey hunting, and possibly other hunt seasons. This involves the preparation of another environmental assessment and public comment period before any decisions are made about which hunt seasons could be offered on the refuge.

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