

Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Plan Release

Vision for the Future

“The Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge promotes the environmental health and works to strengthen the biological diversity of associated habitats within the Wallkill River Valley. Through active management, the refuge protects and conserves wetland dependent species, especially the federally listed bog turtle. We also support protection for state-listed species, migratory birds and regionally rare plant communities.

“Local communities realize quality of life benefits as residents and visitors enjoy the refuge’s natural beauty and biological diversity. Visitors engage in a variety of wildlife dependent activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. Through these programs, we share the ecological significance of the Wallkill River Valley and the refuge’s links with other natural areas.”

Greetings!

We are pleased to announce the release of our Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge (refuge). Over the past year we evaluated three proposed management alternatives. We published our analysis in a draft CCP and environmental assessment (EA). The public comments we received on that draft plan guided us in preparing our final CCP.

You may view or download the documents online from our website, at <http://library.fws.gov/ccps.htm>. Please be patient with the online version; its numerous maps and photos can slow some computers.

You may also obtain a print copy or CD-ROM of the final plan from the refuge headquarters in Sussex, N.J. The public Sussex-Wantage library in



A kayaker on the Wallkill River

USFWS

Wantage, N.J., will also have a print copy. Because printing copies of the CCP uses so much paper and is costly, we encourage you to use the CD-ROM.

Refuge Setting

The Wallkill River refuge lies approximately 60 miles northwest of New York City in the northeastern section of Sussex County, New Jersey (Wantage, Hardyston, and Vernon), and in southern Orange County, New York (Minisink and Warwick). The refuge encompasses nine miles of the Wallkill River and lays in a rolling valley between the Kittatinny Ridge to the west and the Hudson Highlands to the east. This valley contains headwater wetland complexes of riverine habitats, ponds, emergent marshes, fens, scrub-shrub wetlands, wooded swamps, mixed hardwood upland forests, grasslands and farmlands. The refuge was created in 1990 with a 7,500-acre acquisition boundary, and currently protects over 5,100 acres of a combination of wetland and upland habitat supporting migratory birds, federal- and state-listed species, and regionally significant wildlife and plant communities in the Wallkill River watershed.

Highlights of the CCP

The CCP is our 15-year management plan for this refuge. It furthers the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, achieves the purposes, vision and goals of the refuge, and contributes to state and regional conservation plans. Implementing the plan will enable us to fulfill the refuge’s important role in conserving and managing wildlife resources.

Our draft CCP/EA identified and addressed several issues in its chapter 1, “The Purpose of and Need for Action.” In that document, we developed three alternatives to respond to the issues. Alternative A represented current management, alternative B focused on managing for priority species and habitats, and alternative C proposed to establish and maintain the ecological integrity of natural communities on the refuge and surrounding landscape without specific emphasis or concern for any particular species or species groups.

We selected alternative B, the Service-preferred alternative from the draft CCP/EA, for implementation. It

Refuge Goals

1. *Protect and enhance habitats for federal trust species and other species of special management concern, with particular emphasis on migratory birds and bog turtles.*
2. *Promote actions that contribute to a healthier Wallkill River.*
3. *Increase or improve opportunities for hunting, fishing, environmental education, interpretation, wildlife observation and wildlife photography.*
4. *Cultivate an informed and conservation-educated public that works to support the goals of the refuge and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

includes an array of management actions that, in our professional judgment, most effectively address the key issues.

Upon implementation of the CCP, we will expand the refuge's original acquisition boundary by 9,550 acres, creating a new refuge acquisition boundary of 17,050 acres. The expansion area will fully complement and enhance the federal, state, and private conservation partnerships actively involved in protecting this unique ecosystem.

We will also allocate more resources toward managing and monitoring federal-listed species such as bog turtles and Indiana bats, that occur or historically occurred on the refuge. In addition, we will take a more proactive approach to restoring wetlands, and establish a 100-meter forested riparian corridor along either side of the Wallkill

River. Three grassland focus areas will be established on the refuge, and we will let other small fields revert to scrub-shrub habitat.

We will open the New Jersey portion of the refuge to bear hunting according to State seasons, and provide at least one additional fishing access site within the original refuge acquisition boundary. Access to Service-owned lands will be increased by opening at least two new trails and extending an existing trail. We will also develop new interpretive materials, and work with partners to expand our environmental education programs.

Thank You for Your Interest and Participation!

We greatly appreciated the level of public interest and involvement in our planning, and benefited from our discussions during open houses and public meetings. Many responded to our planning update newsletters and notices in the Federal Register.

In our final CCP, appendix I, "Consultation and Coordination with Others," summarizes our coordination with others in writing this plan.

We released the draft CCP/EA for public comment from February 4 to April 9, 2008. We held public meetings in Augusta, N.J., on February 20, 2008, in Wantage, N.J., on February 21, 2008, and in Warwick, N.Y., on March 6, 2008. We evaluated all comments received during the comment period, and included our responses to those comments as appendix J, "Summary and Response to Public Comments," in the final CCP. Those comments helped us improve the management objectives in the CCP in many ways, and we are indebted to those who took the time to contribute.

What's Next?

After the release of the CCP for the Wallkill River refuge, the implementation of priority projects decided upon by the refuge manager will begin immediately.

We encourage you to stay involved during its implementation. To accomplish its goals and objectives, we must develop partnerships, enhance our volunteer program, and support our Friends Group.



Hooded Merganser

Tim McCabe/USFWS

Come visit us soon, and often!

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Federal Relay Service for the deaf and hard-of-hearing:
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