



Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update

Moving Forward

This newsletter updates our progress in comprehensive conservation planning for the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge. The separate CCP for the Shawangunk Grasslands refuge is scheduled for release to the public this winter.

We are now fine-tuning the objectives and strategies of the Wallkill River CCP, and are working on its accompanying Land Protection Plan to expand the current refuge acquisition boundary and authorize the Service to purchase land from willing sellers in new areas.



K. Holcomb/USFWS

Refuge staff monitor and protect bog turtles and their habitats.

We met with our land protection partners at the refuge in August to discuss lands now protected and lands in need of protection in and around Sussex County. The discussion included staff from local Senate and Congressional offices, State, County and municipal offices, and representatives of the National Park Service, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Trust for Public Land, New Jersey Audubon Society, and The Nature Conservancy. Many of us ate lunch outdoors simply to enjoy the weather on one of the few dry, sunny days of the summer!

Planning Timeline

This fall and winter, we will continue to fine-tune objectives and strategies, create maps, research information for the LPP, and format the document. We have scheduled the public release of the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment, including the LPP, in the spring of 2006. The draft will be available on compact disc, on the Web, and in print. Soon after its release, we will provide opportunities for the public to comment. Forty-five days after its release, the public comment period will end and we will make necessary changes to the draft. We hope to have a final CCP by the winter of 2006.

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Foreground K. Halpin, Background E. Henry/USFWS

Meet your new refuge manager, Edward Henry

Refuge News

Staff Shorts: **Steve Kahl**, former Wallkill River refuge manager, has taken a post at Shiawassee refuge in Michigan. The new refuge manager, **Edward Henry**, came to the refuge this spring from our Northeast Regional Office in Hadley, MA, and has been busy ever since. Henry is from the Catskills, not far from Sussex. In his spare time, he enjoys hiking, camping, photography, and freelance writing.

Former Office Assistant **Fran Stephenson** has accepted a new position as administrative assistant at Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Former Maintenance Worker **Charles Glock** has taken the position of Region 5 Heavy Equipment Coordinator at Montezuma refuge in New York. **Jamie Britt**, formerly the refuge's Law Enforcement Officer, took a new job as a zone officer in charge of law enforcement for refuges in New Jersey, Long Island, and Eastern Pennsylvania. **Kevin Holcomb** continues his service as Refuge Biologist.



The Service and our partners convened at the Refuge Headquarters in August to discuss possibilities for future land protection.

K. Holcomb/USFWS

Complexing Refuges

Over the past few years, Region 5 has placed several refuges near each other in refuge complexes to cut down on administrative costs. Earlier this year, we placed Great Swamp refuge in Basking Ridge, NJ and Wallkill River refuge in such a complex. Both refuges will remain self-sufficient, but will now be better equipped to share resources.

Summarizing the Draft Alternatives

The three alternatives in the draft CCP/EA address some key issues identified by the planning team and the public. Alternative A is the "No Action" alternative, which continues current refuge management. Alternative B is the Service "Proposed Alternative," which presents our recommended actions and strategies. The draft CCP/EA will compare the three alternatives in detail. Each will identify objectives and strategies for meeting refuge management goals.

Alternative A

- Carry out refuge priorities for species and habitat management, which include protecting bog turtle sites and managing for grassland-dependent landbirds of concern and migratory waterfowl.
- Monitor and manage the one bog turtle site confirmed on the refuge to reduce purple loosestrife, among other things.
- Manage early successional fields and grasslands for grassland-dependent birds by mowing and converting some former corn fields to warm-season grasslands. Seasonally flood portions of the 350-acre Liberty Marsh to create emergent

wetlands for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds.

- Maintain the status quo for public use, with no increases in visitation expected.
- Keep the refuge open for fall deer, spring turkey, and winter resident Canada goose hunting.
- Provide barrier-free hunting opportunities upon request.
- Continue to provide fishing access to the Wallkill River at Oil City Road and Bassetts Bridge.



Tom Sampson, USFWS Realty Specialist, explains the current refuge acquisition boundary.

K. Holcomb/USFWS

- Continue to provide public opportunities for wildlife observation and photography on the Wood Duck Trail, the Liberty Loop Trail and the Dagmar Dale Trail.
- Extend the Wood Duck Trail and include additional parking, a bridge and rest rooms.
- Provide improved interpretive materials at kiosks and at refuge headquarters; provide interpretive programs, school, and scout programs on request. Owens Station would remain underutilized.
- Maintain present levels of refuge staffing; continue to acquire land from willing sellers within current acquisition boundary.

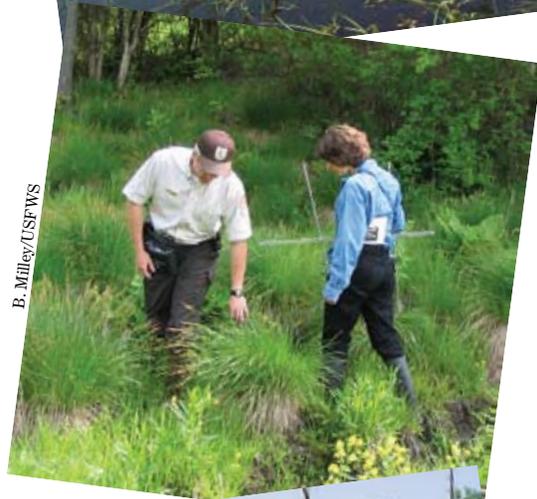
Alternative B

- Identify, map and field-survey all suitable bog turtle sites on the refuge; develop a site management and monitoring plan for potential sites; and experiment with different habitat management techniques on current sites.

Top to bottom: View of Liberty Marsh; Kevin Holcomb and Beth Goldstein tracking bog turtles; fishing is a priority public use at Wallkill River refuge.



K. Holcomb/USFWS



B. Milley/USFWS



K. Halpin/USFWS

Refuge Goals

Refuge Goals were developed early in the planning process to help focus thinking about management actions. Goals describe the desired future condition of the refuge and provide a framework for writing objectives.

1. Protect and enhance habitats for federal trust species and other species of special management concern, with particular emphasis on bog turtle, grassland dependent migratory birds, migratory waterfowl, and wintering raptors.
2. Manage to enhance regionally significant ecological communities, including large grassland complexes, limestone fens, riverine forested floodplains, and Atlantic white cedar swamps.
3. Promote actions which contribute towards a healthier Wallkill River.
4. Continue land acquisition and land management partnerships to support accomplishment of species, habitat, and ecosystem goals in the watershed.
5. Increase opportunities for environmental education and other priority, wildlife-dependent uses.
6. 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.

- Expand the refuge acquisition boundary to include significant wetlands associated with bog turtle habitat and large grassland complexes.
- Expand hunting opportunities to include all State seasons.
- Provide fishing access to the Wallkill River at Scenic Lakes Road and to a pond at the Mt. Bethel property, once that property has reverted to the Service.
- Remove adult mute swans and addle mute swan eggs to limit reproduction.
- Improve the quality of interpretive materials at existing trails.
- Increase refuge staff by adding three permanent positions: a Biologist, Outdoor Recreation Planner and Maintenance Worker.

- Develop a river restoration plan to restore natural hydrology and allow all fields in the 100-year floodplain to naturally succeed to forest.
- Allow deer hunting and resident goose hunting according to State seasons.
- Survey potential prehistoric sites and share archeological information through interpretive programs; maintain the status quo in other public use programs.
- Continue to acquire land from willing sellers within current acquisition boundary; seek cooperative management agreements on all nationally significant habitats in a defined focus area.
- Increase refuge staff by adding two permanent positions: Private Lands Biologist and Supervisory Wildlife Biologist.

Alternative C

- Pursue a proposal to restore 200 acres of emergent wetland behind refuge headquarters.
- Provide high-quality, sustainable, and reasonably manageable grassland habitat on priority, large (>150 acre) grassland complexes; allow smaller grassland fields to revert to shrub habitat over the next 15 years.
- Provide no active management of bog turtle sites, but enforce laws against poaching.
- Focus habitat management on allowing areas to revert to historic conditions, mainly forest.
- Allow grassland and shrubland habitats to succeed to shrubland and forest.

For further information

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