

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Newsletter and Issues Workbook

USFWS Announces Start of CCP for Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is pleased to announce that we are beginning the development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Management for Thacher Island is also included in this CCP process.

About the Refuge

Parker River NWR occupies 4,662 acres on the southern three-fourths of Plum Island, which is located off the northeastern coast of Massachusetts. The Refuge was established in 1942 to provide feeding, resting, and nesting habitat for migratory birds. Parker River NWR is a vital stopover site along the Atlantic Flyway for waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds. The primary purpose of the Parker River NWR is to preserve and manage habitat for a diversity of species, particularly migratory birds and wintering American black ducks.

Parker River NWR also administers Thacher Island NWR, a 22 acre refuge off the coast of Rockport. Thacher Island was established in 1972 for the same purposes as Parker River NWR: to provide feeding, resting, and nesting habitat for migratory birds. The Refuge is managed to protect migratory birds, endangered species, and other wildlife and their habitats.



Wetland on the refuge

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The CCP Planning Process

The first step in the planning process is to select a planning team that consists of representatives from the Refuge staff, the State, and affected Tribes. This core team will organize the information underlying the plan. Next, partners, stakeholders, and public involvement is sought to help identify issues that need to be addressed in the plan. This feedback will be incorporated as management alternatives are developed and analyzed, including current management. The plan can then be written, with additional opportunities for public involvement throughout the process.

Why Create a CCP?

According to the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, each refuge within the National Wildlife Refuge System is required to create a CCP by 2012. The CCP for Parker River and Thacher

Island NWRs will establish management goals and objectives for all Refuge programs over the next 15 years, while providing opportunities for compatible, wildlife-dependent public uses. We will evaluate Refuge wildlife, habitat, land protection and visitor services priorities during the planning process.



Piping plover

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Draft Vision Statement

We will continue to conserve a unique barrier island system with pristine beaches and dunes, maritime shrubs, and vast salt marshes in the increasingly urban landscape. Native fish and wildlife will raise their young and will find rest and nourishment during migration and winter in the Refuge's diverse habitats. We will manage Refuge lands and waters with an emphasis on species whose populations have declined by restoring ecological integrity.

As part of the largest saltmarsh system north of Long Island, we will work with partners in the Great Marsh and surrounding watersheds. The Refuge will continue to provide leadership in advancing the health and vitality of this unique ecosystem in the face of climate change and development.

The Refuge will serve as an outdoor classroom, where people of all ages will study nature's complexity, contributing to our understanding and appreciation of the natural world and the National Wildlife Refuge System. All those who visit will find enjoyment in the presence of healthy and abundant fish, wildlife, and their habitats, and will leave with a renewed personal commitment to natural resource conservation.

Creating a Vision for the Future

Our planning team has drafted this Vision and Goals for the Parker River and Thacher Island NWRs that reflect our values and commitment to provide quality habitat and visitor experience. We'd like your feedback and ideas on our initial draft.



Viewing scope on refuge

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Draft Goals

Goal 1: Perpetuate the biological integrity and diversity of the coastal habitats to sustain native wildlife and plant communities, including species of conservation concern.

Goal 2: Manage the Refuge's modified habitats to mimic natural functions and support native wildlife and communities, including species of conservation concern. Where appropriate, restore the biological integrity and diversity of these habitats.

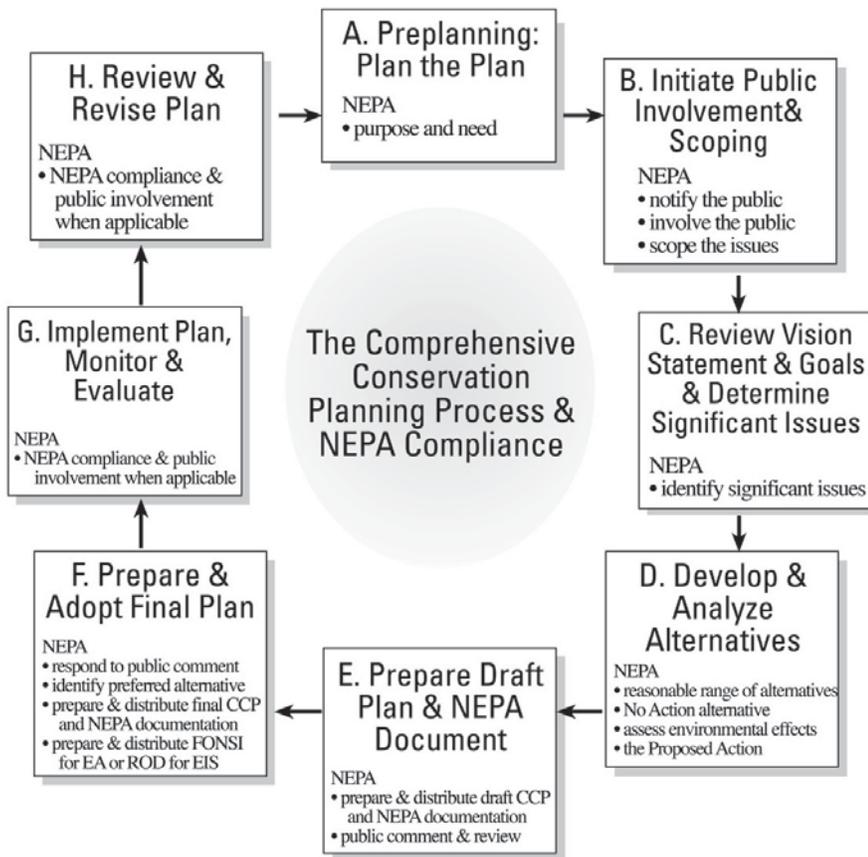
Goal 3: Develop Parker River NWR as an outstanding center for research and demonstration emphasizing land management techniques for restoring and sustaining healthy estuarine ecosystems in concert with the National Land Management Research and Demonstration (LMRD) program.

Goal 4: Promote enjoyment and stewardship of our nation's natural resources by providing quality, wildlife-dependent recreation and education opportunities on the refuge land and waters.

Goal 5: Work with partners to promote the natural and cultural resources and recreational opportunities of Thacher Island in support of the Refuge and NWR System.

Goal 6: Work with partners and local communities to enhance the resiliency of wildlife and its habitat to climate change impacts, reduce human footprints, and support strategic planning.

Goal 7: Provide leadership, while working with partners to ensure the biological integrity and environmental health of the Great Marsh and the surrounding watersheds to promote landscape-level conservation.



To stay informed, complete the mailing information on the back of this workbook. We look forward to seeing you at the public scoping meetings (see inset box for details). Please contact us at any time with further questions.

You can call, write or email us at any time to provide input. Please visit the website for updates and news. We will also schedule public meetings at various stages of the planning process to facilitate your input.

Contact Information

To learn more about Parker River or Thacher Island National Wildlife Refuges, please visit our websites:

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/parkerriver/>

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/thacherisland/>

You may reach refuge staff by telephone at 978/465-5753.

To learn more about the planning process contact:

Graham Taylor, Refuge Manager
Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
6 Plum Island Turnpike
Newburyport, MA 01950

Graham_Taylor@fws.gov
Phone: 978/465-5753

Or Visit the Refuge CCP Website:

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/refugeCCPs.html>

Public Meetings

The Draft Vision and Goals for the Parker River NWR will be presented for suggestions and comments at these public meetings. Please come meet the staff, learn about current refuge management, help us identify issues and concerns, and make recommendations about future refuge programs. We hope to see you there!

Date: March 22, 2011
Time: 7-9 p.m.
Place : The Crane Estate
290 Argilla Road
Ipswich, MA 01938

Date: March 23, 2011
Time: 7-9 p.m.
Place: Newbury Fire Dept.
3 Morgan Avenue
Newbury, MA 01950

How YOU can get involved

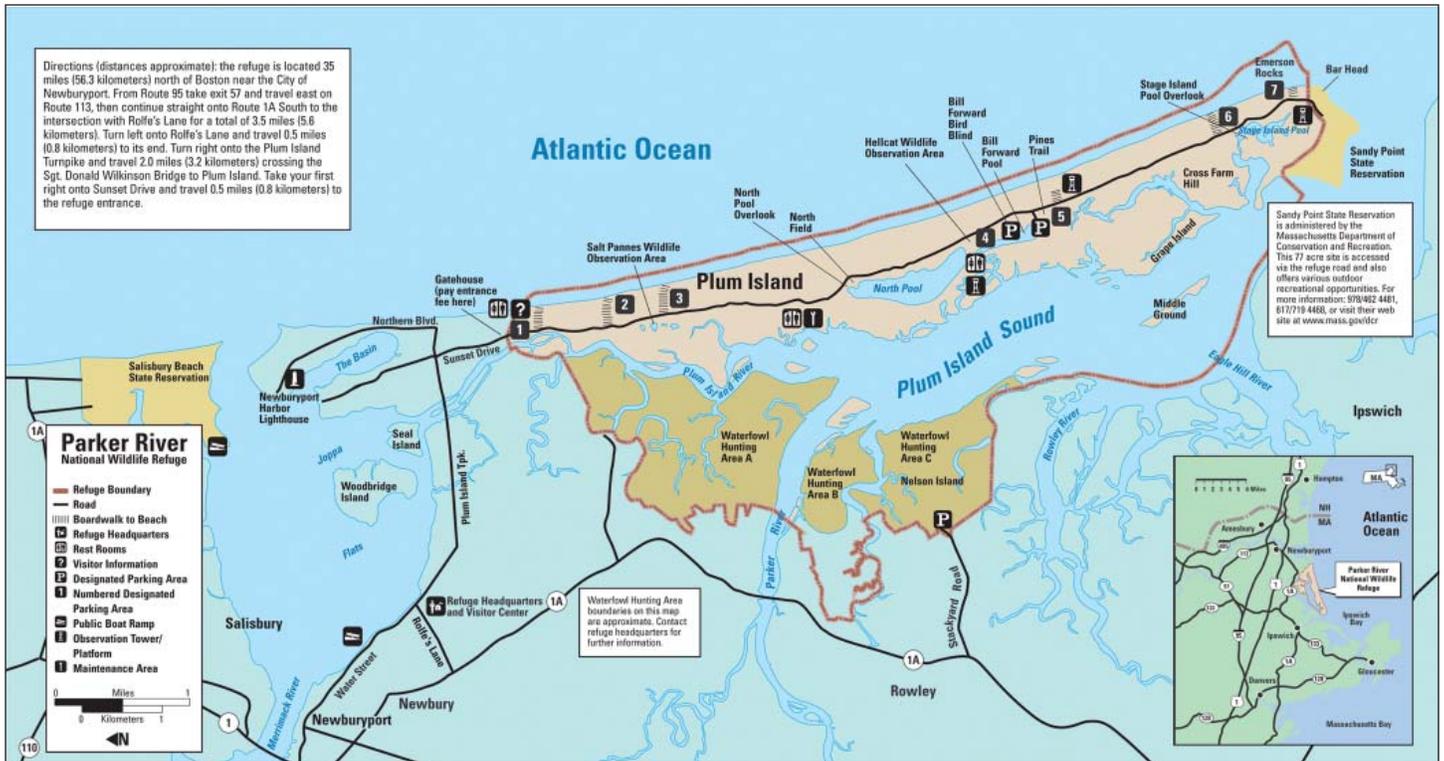
Including the local community, our partners, and other stakeholders throughout the planning process is vital to the ultimate success of the plan. In particular, we hope to engage local residents and community leaders in discussing ways the refuge could become a more integral part of the community. If you are interested in helping us plan this refuge's future, we encourage you to participate. You can start getting involved by completing and returning the enclosed workbook.



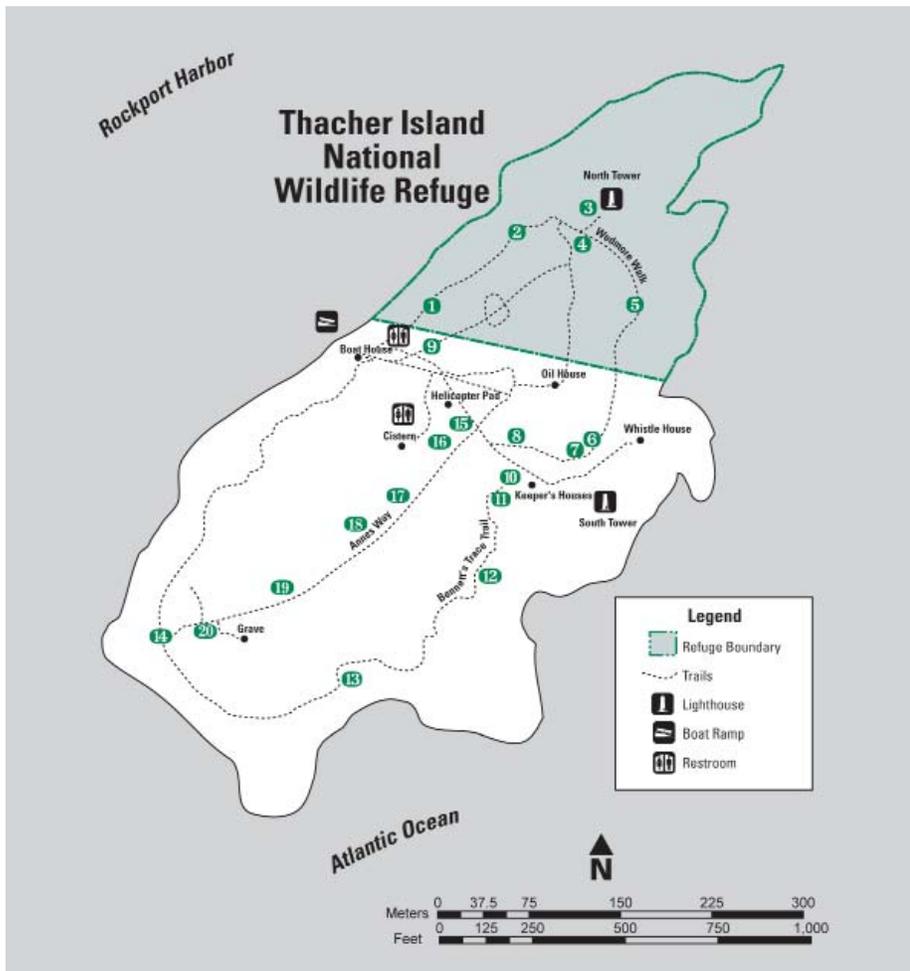
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Visitor services building





Parker River Refuge trails and facilities map.



Thacher Island trails and facilities map.



People fishing at the refuge

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Kayaking on the refuge

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Refuge staff with mallard

Let's Get Started

Participation by you and other interested groups and individuals is critical to the success of this planning process. Only with your participation can we develop effective management strategies which reflect your interests.

At this early stage in the planning process we are seeking your input via public meetings and this Issues Workbook. Our intent is to hear directly from folks like you - to learn how you feel about the refuge, to discuss any issues or concerns you might have, and to hear your ideas for getting things done.

The following workbook will be available at the public meetings, and will be shared with refuge visitors, neighbors, and partners who may not be able to attend the meetings. We have compiled a list of questions to provide a basis for comparing your comments with others we receive.

Please answer any or all questions that are important to you. Feel free to add additional comments in the space provided. Give us a call, e-mail or write us at the address below.

The comments we receive in the workbooks and at the public meetings will help us identify issues and develop goals and objectives.

Questions on Your Refuge Experience

1. How many days do you visit the refuge each year? _____ days per year

2. What activities have you participated in while visiting the refuge? Please check all that apply.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bird Watching | <input type="checkbox"/> Nature/Wildlife Viewing | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Bicycling | <input type="checkbox"/> Guided Interpretive tours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking/Nature Trails | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> Cross Country Skiing/snowshoeing | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

Which activity is most important to you? _____

What areas of the refuge do you usually visit?

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headquarters/visitor center | <input type="checkbox"/> Hellcat Swamp area | <input type="checkbox"/> Nelsons Island |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lot 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Pines Trail | <input type="checkbox"/> Beach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sub-headquarters/North Pool | <input type="checkbox"/> Stage Island Area | <input type="checkbox"/> Thacher Island |

3. Have you participated in any refuge-sponsored events or activities? If so, please check all that apply.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trail hikes | <input type="checkbox"/> Annual shoreline clean-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Walks and presentations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bird walks | <input type="checkbox"/> Fish and wildlife programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

4. What do you value most about Parker River National Wildlife Refuge?

What do you value most about the Great Marsh watershed?



Saltmarsh at refuge

5. What do you consider to be the most important problem facing Parker River National Wildlife Refuge?

What do you consider to be the most important problem facing the Great Marsh watershed?



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Greater yellowlegs

Questions on Natural Resources Conservation

The National Wildlife Refuge provides a wide diversity of habitat for migratory birds, resident fish and wildlife and state-listed threatened and endangered species. The Great Marsh provides unique habitat in Massachusetts for a number of rare plants and animal species. This plan will emphasize the need to conserve, protect, and enhance these habitats and the species dependent on them.

6. In your opinion, which species or habitats should be a management priority?

7. In your opinion, should the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service engage in protecting wildlife habitats outside of the existing approved refuge acquisition boundary?

Yes

No

8. If so, which options should the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pursue in protecting wildlife habitats outside of the refuge acquisition boundary? Please check up to 3 choices.

- land acquisition from willing sellers at market value
- conservation easements; e.g. purchasing development rights
- support partner efforts to conserve land
- environmental education
- habitat restoration partnerships with private landowners
- no active involvement
- other (please specify)



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American Black Duck



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Salt marsh on the refuge

Comments?



S. Hillebrand/USFWS

Bald Eagle

9. Are any of the following natural resource issues a concern to you in the Great Marsh watershed? If so, please rank your top three choices. 1=highest concern and 3=lowest concern of your three choices.

- _____ the development and fragmentation of habitats
- _____ invasion of exotic plant and animal species
- _____ increased use in sensitive habitat areas
- _____ degradation of water quality
- _____ lack of active management to improve wildlife habitats
- _____ habitat restoration
- _____ climate change/sea level rise
- _____ other issues (please specify)

10. If possible, please provide additional details on why you selected the above. In particular, we would be interested to know specific locations of concern.



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Headquarters sign

Questions on Recreation and Public Access

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 identifies six priorities for wildlife-dependent public use on national wildlife refuges: environmental education, interpretation, fishing, hunting, wildlife observation and photography.

Public uses are permitted when they are “compatible” with the purpose(s) for which a refuge was established. In determining compatibility the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) considers:

- anticipated impacts to natural resources;
- safety; and,
- budget and staffing

The Service maintains trails on the Refuge which are open for pedestrian use from dawn until dusk year-round. Fishing, shell fishing and restricted waterfowl and white-tailed deer hunting are permitted on refuge property. Volunteers help with refuge maintenance, habitat management, and environmental interpretation. This planning process will evaluate these and other opportunities for priority public use on the refuge.

11. Do our recreational facilities meet your needs?

Please Circle Only One									
Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	Very Well	Excellent		Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
1	2	3	4	5	Hiking/walking trails for wildlife viewing opportunities	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Outdoor education activities	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Access for people with disabilities	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Visitor information/orientation center	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Deer hunting opportunities	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Waterfowl hunting opportunities	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Fishing opportunities	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Shellfishing opportunities	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Kiosks or signs with information about the refuge or its wildlife	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Viewing areas with information about different wildlife habitats	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Directional signs for refuge	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Access for canoes and kayaks	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Educational information on historical sites	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Guided bird walks, lectures, presentations	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Website with information about the refuge and its activities	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Opportunity to interact with refuge staff	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Bicycle trails	A	B	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	Other services (please specify) _____	A	B	C	D

12. We are interested in the ways community residents engage in local or regional natural resource or environmental issues. Please indicate which of the activities you have participated in within the last 5 years.

Participation	Yes	No
1. Attending a public hearing or meeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Contacting or writing a state/federal agency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Contacting or writing a U.S. senator, member of congress, or state legislator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Joining a interest group (such as an environmental, sportsman's, animal rights, agriculture, or resource use organization)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. If YES, Please list organization (s) _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Leading an interest group (such as an environmental, sportsman's, animal rights, agriculture, or resource use organization)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



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Refuge staff with studying birds

13. Are there activities or services that you think should be allowed at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge that currently are not allowed?

No Yes (If yes, please list these activities)

14. Are there activities or services that you think should not be allowed at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge that currently are allowed?

No Yes (If yes, please list these activities)



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Birdwatchers kayaking at the refuge

15. Please include here any additional comments on recreation, education, and public access.

16. Please include here any additional comments on conserving fish and wildlife habitat.



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Boardwalk on refuge

17. Where did you obtain this workbook? Your answer will help us determine the most effective places to distribute these in the future.

Mail issues workbooks to:

Attn: CCP
Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
6 Plum Island Turnpike
Newburyport, MA 01950

For additional information,
contact the refuge:

Graham Taylor, Refuge Manager
Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
6 Plum Island Turnpike
Newburyport, MA 01950
Graham_Taylor@fws.gov
Phone: 978/465-5753

Or Visit the Refuge CCP Website:

[http://www.fws.gov/northeast/
planning/refugeCCPs.html](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/refugeCCPs.html)



M. Lim/USFWS

Painted Turtles

Federal Relay Service for the
deaf or hard of hearing:
1 800/877 8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

February 2011



That's it!

Thank you for your time.

Now that you are done, please mail the entire workbook back to us by April 11, 2011. We will summarize these public comments and those received at the public meeting in our next newsletter. Please help us keep our mailing list updated by completing the following.

If you wish to receive future "Planning Updates" about the National Wildlife Refuge comprehensive conservation plan, please fill in the appropriate information below and return it with the Issues Workbook.

_____ (Yes) Keep me on your mailing list/add me to your mailing list

_____ (No) Take me off your mailing list.

Name: _____
(Please Print)

Address: _____

City: _____

State _____ Zip Code: _____

If you are acting in an official capacity as the representative of an organization please complete the following two items.

Organization: _____

Title: _____

Please note that names on the CCP mailing list become part of the public record for this project. The Service must release names only, if requested, under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974. To retain you on our mailing list we need your permission. Please sign below.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
6 Plum Island Turnpike
Newburyport, MA 01950

