

Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement

FAQs Focus on Vermont

Lewis Pond overlook on the Nulhegan Basin Division of Conte refuge.

The Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (draft CCP/EIS) evaluates four alternatives for managing existing and proposed refuge lands. Alternative C is identified in the draft CCP/EIS as the Service's preferred alternative. Our intent is to implement the Refuge's Congressionally mandated purposes to conserve and actively manage habitats for Federal trust species while allowing recreational uses that do not conflict with the needs of wildlife.

Here we outline some **Frequently Asked Questions** on topics that are of particular interest in Vermont. We highlight how our preferred alternative C addresses those topics, including what current actions we would continue, and actions that would be new, if alternative C were selected for implementation.



A bull moose on the Nulhegan Basin Division of Conte refuge.

What land protection practices would remain the same?

We would maintain the existing refuge landbase in Federal ownership administered by Conte Refuge staff. Currently the Nulhegan Basin Division is 26,605 acres and the Putney Mountain Unit is 285 acres.

What land protection practices are proposed to change?

We propose to establish four Conservation Partnership Areas (CPAs) in Vermont that would support conservation activities on non-refuge lands. We also propose to expand the Nulhegan Basin Division to 32,541 acres, largely with acquisition of the McConnell Pond property. We also propose to create four new refuge divisions: Ompompanoosuc, Ottaquechee, White River, and West River. Additional details on the proposed new divisions are provided in appendix A of the draft CCP/EIS.

What conservation and habitat management practices would remain the same and/or continue?

Current species and habitat management practices we plan to continue are:

- Actively managing for early successional forest habitat.
- Inventorying key species such as Canada lynx, forest bats, and woodcock.
- Managing furbearers.
- Collaborating with Trout Unlimited and Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VTFW) on in-stream habitat restoration.

What conservation and habitat management practices are proposed to change?

We would introduce a broad-based forest management program to support a diversity of priority wildlife species. Details of these management practices would be outlined in subsequent Habitat Management step-down plans once the CCP is final.

Would there be changes to current hunting and fishing programs?

Hunting and fishing opportunities would continue on existing refuge lands according to both State and refuge-specific seasons and regulations. We would also continue to host hunter and trapper education programs. Target shooting and shooting from, along, or across roads open to vehicle traffic would continue to be prohibited.

We propose minor changes to the hunting and fishing programs. In a continuing effort to provide information related to Canada lynx, we would work with VTFW to maintain a contact list of those training and hunting with hounds. Assuming we acquire the McConnell Pond property, we plan to open those lands to hunting, fishing, and furbearer management (with similar regulations to the Nulhegan Basin Division), and establish public fishing access to McConnell Pond. We would also create three additional access points for fishing on the North and Black Branches of the Nulhegan River. We would also work with the State to promote and encourage the use of lead-free ammunition and tackle.

On all lands proposed for acquisition, we would initiate procedures to open them to hunting, fishing, and furbearer management, where compatible.

What environmental education and outreach opportunities would be available?

We would continue to offer environmental education activities at the Nulhegan Basin Division's visitor contact station. In addition, we would continue to communicate and promote youth employment, career, and volunteer opportunities.

We plan to initiate new visitor service opportunities that include working with partners to provide quality interpretive programs, and utilize intern and volunteer programs to provide more "personal" contact with visitors.

How would other recreational opportunities be managed?

Regular daily access and allowed modes of transportation would remain the same. The use of ATVs on all refuge lands would continue to be prohibited.

Proposed changes we would implement to other recreational uses include:

- Allowing bicycling on all refuge roads open to vehicle traffic.
- Allowing commercial guiding that supports, and is consistent with, compatible refuge uses.

- Working with conservation partners to develop and maintain new pedestrian trails.
- Installing a campsite along the Nulhegan River.
- Requiring that all pets be on a leash.

How would snowmobiling on refuge lands be affected?

We would continue to allow access on State-designated snowmobile trails maintained by snowmobile clubs. We would also support the construction of a new 1.4 mile trail that would connect our visitor contact station on the Nulhegan Basin Division to an extensive off-refuge trail network to the south. Once this trail is open, we would close approximately 2 miles of redundant trail segments in the interior of the Nulhegan Basin Division. Snowshoers and cross-country skiers would be allowed to use snowmobile trails, as is customary on neighboring lands.

Would there be changes to the recreational cabin program?

No. We would continue to administer the recreational cabin program as we do currently. Any cabins existing on newly acquired refuge lands would be administered according to current practices, including a 2049 sunset date.



Holly Gabourian/USFWS

Snowmobiling on the Nulhegan Basin Division of Conte refuge.

For More Information:

For additional information about refuge or the comprehensive conservation planning process, please visit our website at: http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Silvio_O_Conte/. You may also reach refuge staff at our Nulhegan Basin Division at: 802/962 5240; or at refuge headquarters in Sunderland, Massachusetts, at: 413/548 8002.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
<http://www.fws.gov>

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Tom LaPointe/USFWS

The Yellow Branch of the Nulhegan River on the Nulhegan Basin Division of Conte refuge.