

Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and Carlton Pond Waterfowl Production Area

Release of the Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan is Now Available!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we) is pleased to announce the release of the final comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge) and Carlton Pond Waterfowl Production Area (WPA).

This CCP represents our 15-year management plan for the refuge and WPA. The plan furthers the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System; provides direction to achieve the refuge and WPA's purposes, vision, and goals; and contributes to State and regional conservation plans. Implementing the plan will help achieve the refuge and WPA's important role in conserving and managing wildlife resources in Maine.

How to Access the Final Plan

You may view or download the final CCP from our Web site at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Sunkhaze%20Meadows/ccphome.html>. You may also request a printed copy or CDROM version by contacting refuge staff (see "Contact Information" on the last page).



Osprey in Flight

Robert Burton, USFWS

Public Comments on the Draft Plan

We released the draft CCP and Environmental Assessment (draft CCP and EA) for public comment from April 23 to May 31, 2013.

We thank everyone who provided comments. We received 17 sets of comments on the draft CCP and EA during the comment period, including those submitted at public meetings, and those submitted via email, fax, or mail.

The comments covered a variety of topics including habitat management; invasive species control; species of conservation concern management; cultural resource interpretation; refuge facilities; environmental education; boating access; and hunting opportunities.

Our responses to comments are in Appendix G, "Summary and Response to Public Comments," in the final CCP.

Changes Made to the Plan

The final CCP is based on alternative B (the Service-preferred alternative) in the draft CCP and EA. In response to the comments we received, we made several minor changes to alternative B for the final plan. These minor changes include actions such as exploring the possibility of including the Benton Unit trail as part of a regional trail system and maintaining a spur trail off Johnson Brook Trail. A list of all of the minor modifications is presented in appendix G of the final CCP.

We selected alternative B for the final CCP, with minor changes, for several reasons. First, we believe it will best achieve the refuge and WPA's purposes, vision, and goals; Refuge System policies; and the goals of other State and regional conservation plans. Second, we believe that this alternative most effectively addresses the key issues raised during the planning process. The full basis and rationale for our



View across Carlton Pond.

Kirk Rodgers

decision is documented in Appendix G, "Finding of No Significant Impact," in the final CCP.

Highlights of the Final Plan

Here is a brief description of the planned management for the units comprising Sunkhaze Meadows NWR and Carlton Pond WPA. For more detailed information, please refer to the final CCP.

At all refuge units and the WPA, we will continue to monitor and control where possible, invasive plants, pests, and wildlife diseases. We will also continue to provide opportunities for fishing, hunting, wildlife observation and photography, as well as environmental interpretation and education.

In addition to these activities across all refuge units and the WPA, the final CCP outlines additional management emphasis and actions planned for each unit.

Sunkhaze Meadows Unit

Habitat management will continue to focus on the preservation of the peatland-wetland complex and mature forest within the Sunkhaze Meadow Unit.

If resources allow, we will work with partners to initiate a monitoring program to evaluate long-term trends in ecological integrity and priority species use at Sunkhaze Meadows Unit.

We will also work to enhance public use activities, such as providing additional parking areas and improving maintenance of some existing trails. We will stop maintaining the Buzzy Brook Trails.

Our environmental education and interpretation program will be improved by eventually providing Service-led environmental



American black duck in flight.

education programs, in addition to programming conducted by partners and the Friends of Sunkhaze Meadows.

Benton Unit

Habitat management will focus on expansion of grassland habitat and management, where feasible. We will collaborate with interested partners in monitoring priority grassland bird species.

We will also create a pedestrian connector trail from the parking area to the existing snowmobile trail.

Sandy Stream Unit

Planned improvements at Sandy Stream Unit include increasing riparian forest, maintaining some shrubland, and working with the snowmobile club to relocate the existing snowmobile trail to reduce fragmentation of shrubland habitat.

Carlton Pond WPA

Management of Carlton Pond WPA would continue to focus on providing habitat for breeding black terns and waterfowl.

We will increase our efforts to work with neighboring landowners and interested partners to protect lands around Carlton Pond and collaborate in monitoring of priority species like the American black duck.

Our environmental education and interpretation program will also be improved by eventually providing Service-led environmental education programs, in addition to programming conducted by other partners.

Implementing the Plan

We will begin implementing the CCP immediately. To successfully achieve our vision and goals, it is critical that we continue to maintain and develop partnerships and sustain our invaluable volunteer

involvement. We encourage you to stay involved during the plan's implementation.

Contact Information

To learn more about the refuge, please visit our Web site at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/me/sunkhazemeadows/> or contact:

Beth Goettel, Refuge Manager.

Phone: 207-594-0600 ext. 2

Email: Beth_Goettel@fws.gov

Mail: Sunkhaze Meadows NWR and Carlton Pond WPA
P.O. Box 1735
Rockland, ME 04841

To download or learn more about the final CCP, please visit our Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Sunkhaze%20Meadows/ccp/home.html> or contact:

Lia McLaughlin, Natural Resource Planner.

Phone: 413-253-8575

Email: northeastplanning@fws.gov

Mail: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov>

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Trail at Sunkhaze Meadows Unit.