

[Response to Commercial Forest Management Compatibility Determination]

To whom it may concern:

Thank you for submitting comments during the recent 30-day public review period for the draft Compatibility Determination on Commercial Forest Management at Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge in West Virginia. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received a significant amount of feedback on the proposal.

I have decided not to pursue commercial forest management on the refuge at this time. Rather, over the next few years, my staff and I will initially proceed with non-commercial forest management activities described in the refuge's comprehensive conservation plan, or CCP, which was publicly vetted and finalized in 2011.

With a goal of creating and maintaining young, or early-successional, forest, we will cut a limited number of trees--in accordance with the CCP--to establish experimental habitat plots along forest edges. We'll monitor how wildlife--including priority species such as American woodcock--responds to these managed habitats, and that information will inform planning for broader commercial forestry operations on refuge land in the future.

The practice of increasing habitat diversity on the refuge will directly benefit priority wildlife species listed in our CCP including songbirds such as the brown thrasher, eastern towhee, and field sparrow. We plan to establish demonstration plots, where refuge staff will work closely with interested partners to document the effects of forest management at the refuge. Our work will be conducted using sound science and best management practices, with attention to protecting water quality, preventing erosion, and minimizing disruption to wildlife.

I appreciate the information and/or viewpoints you shared in your written comments regarding commercial forest management on the refuge. Our success in managing Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge is incumbent on working with others to conserve its resources for both wildlife and people. I look forward to your ongoing interest and engagement as we continue to evaluate the merits of forest management.

Thank you again for your time and comments.

Ron Hollis  
Refuge Manager  
Canaan Valley NWR