

Chincoteague

National Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Plan Update

April 2013

As spring arrives, the planning team continues its hard work developing the comprehensive conservation plan for Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. We intended to release a draft CCP and environmental impact statement for public review and comment in March, however we are behind schedule. We now intend to release the draft for public review by the end of May. There will be opportunities for public review and comment, including information sessions and at least one public hearing, for 60 days following publication of the draft plan.

We continue to thoroughly analyze the wildlife conservation and recreational benefits, and the environmental and socio-economic impacts, of three proposed management alternatives. The alternatives have not changed:

- **Alternative A** is the status quo and current management alternative as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. This alternative continues current management strategies as established by the Master Plan approved in 1992.
- **Alternative B** would continue established habitat and wildlife management strategies but focus them in light of the new goals and vision established by the CCP. This alternative balances habitat management, public use and access, and administration of the refuge.
- **Alternative C** would direct staffing and funding towards maximizing habitat and wildlife management strategies. As a result of prioritizing habitat and wildlife management, public use activities and access may be reduced.

Each of the proposed management alternatives includes maintaining a one-mile long recreational beach administered by the National Park Service, with adjacent parking for private vehicles. None of the

alternatives would significantly change management of the Chincoteague ponies through the partnership with the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company.

Restoring Beach Access After Hurricane Sandy

Hurricane Sandy and winter nor'easters caused considerable damage to Beach Road and the beachside parking lots. In response, the National Park Service requested emergency funding from the Federal Highway Administration to repair the parking lots. Construction is underway with the goal of having the parking areas open by Memorial Day.

Temporary repairs were made to Beach Road that allowed access to the beach during the winter. Final repairs will begin once designs are completed and contracts are secured. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will receive funding from both the

Federal Highway Administration and the Hurricane Sandy emergency supplemental funding bill to repair the road.

Effects of Budget Sequestration at the Refuge

Like most federal agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's budget was reduced on March 1. The budget cuts and a hiring freeze will affect visitor services and biological programs at national wildlife refuges. At Chincoteague, one of the most notable results will be a reduction in youth career opportunities. For example, the refuge will not hire a Youth Conservation Corps crew or fill a number of other seasonal positions this summer.

Thank you for your patience as we complete work on the draft CCP and EIS. We look forward to presenting the draft plan and discussing it with the community and other stakeholders.



Aerial view of Toms Cove and the beach at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge