

Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update Newsletter 2, November 2012



Plum Tree Island NWR

Meghan Carfoli/USFWS

Hello Friends of Plum Tree Island!

In January 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we, our) began developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge).

We invited the public to participate in the planning process by publishing a notice in the *Federal Register*, and sending out our first planning newsletter and a press release. We asked the public to submit comments in person and by email, regular mail, and fax.

This newsletter provides a summary of the comments we have received to date. We asked that public comments be submitted by October 15, 2012.

During the public scoping comment period, we convened a government



Black skimmer

Gary Kramer/USFWS

What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

A CCP is a 15-year plan that describes the desired future conditions for a refuge. CCPs provide long-range guidance and management direction to:

- Achieve the purposes of the refuge.
- Help fulfill the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- Maintain, and where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of the refuge and National Wildlife Refuge System.
- Help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- Meet other mandates.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Pub. L. 105-57) requires the Service to develop CCPs for each national wildlife refuge. To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, each CCP is also accompanied by either an EA or an Environmental Impact Statement that describes and analyzes the potential environmental consequences of the actions outlined in the CCP.

partners meeting on September 13th in Poquoson, Virginia and hosted two open house meetings on September 13th and 14th in Poquoson, Virginia. At each meeting, brief presentations on the CCP process and Plum Tree Island NWR were followed by discussions between attendees and refuge planning staff. The public meetings attracted a total of 19 attendees, including community members and representatives from

non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and government agencies. We recorded meeting attendees' comments.

We appreciate your involvement and participation in this planning process. This planning process will continue through 2013, and we encourage your continued participation in the development of the 15-year management vision for Plum Tree Island NWR.

We received many comments and prepared the following brief summary of these comments, grouped into six broad categories. The complete comment set is available online at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/PTI/ccphome.html>.

Landscape-scale and Ecosystem-wide Issues

Comments regarding the refuge's role in the larger landscape and ecosystems included suggestions to:

- Work with Federal, State, and local government agencies to develop the CCP, particularly as it relates to unexploded ordnance and public uses in the vicinity.
- Analyze the impacts of climate change in the CCP.
- Reevaluate the "Danger Zone" boundary on the southern end of the refuge.

Biological Program

We received many comments regarding the existing biological program at the refuge. Comments included suggestions to:

- Improve the habitat management goals.
- Prioritize shoreline protection in the CCP.
- Expand inventory and monitoring activities to survey wildlife populations and assess threats to species.
- Control invasive and pest species.
- Assess and improve the water quality of the Plum Tree Island marshes and surrounding tributaries.

Cultural Resource Program

In recognition of the refuge's cultural resources and historical importance, commenters suggested that we:

- Determine if the fencing, concrete bunkers, or any other structures on the refuge are considered historic.

Public Use

While some commenters expressed concerns about opening the refuge to a broader range of public uses for safety reasons, other commenters suggested that we consider increasing public use and access to the refuge by:

- Opening the "Danger Zone" to fishing and waterfowl hunting.
- Allowing recreational uses in the northern portion of the refuge (e.g., environmental education, fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, and photography).
- Creating more environmental education opportunities.

Facilities, Infrastructure, and Staffing

We received suggestions to improve existing and create new refuge infrastructure and facilities, including better maintenance of fencing, removal of certain structures, and construction of trails and boardwalks.

Commenters also suggested creating an additional staff position in order to improve coordination with refuge partners.



Great blue heron

Steve Hillebrand/USFWS

Community Relations, Outreach, and Local Economy

Numerous State and Federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations offered to share data, information, technical assistance, and other resources with the refuge.

Many of our partners expressed that continued collaboration is important to the conservation of wildlife and habitats throughout the region. Building upon our existing partnerships with other government agencies, conservation organizations, academic institutions, and interest groups would further expand our capability to achieve shared conservation goals.



Waterfowl hunting blind on Cow Island

Meghan Carfoli/USFWS

Next Steps

Our next step is to work with the comments received to:

- Refine our draft vision statement and draft goals.
- Create and improve refuge management objectives.
- Develop a range of management alternatives and strategies to consider.

As we work through these next steps, we encourage the public to continue to submit comments and suggestions, particularly as we start to develop management alternatives in the winter and spring of 2013.

We will keep you informed of our progress on Plum Tree Island NWR's Planning Web site at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/PTI/ccphome.html>.

We are aiming to have a draft CCP/EA prepared for your review in the fall of 2013. At that time, we will invite the public to participate in our public open houses to discuss the plan and provide feedback during a 30-day public comment period.

Share Your Thoughts With Us*

You have great questions and ideas, so please continue to share them with us. See the contact information box for more details on where to send comments.

**Your entire comment and accompanying personal information may be made publicly available if requested under the Freedom of Information Act. You may request that your information not be released; we will honor your request to the extent allowed by law.*



Green-winged teal



Aerial view of Plum Tree Island NWR

USFWS

Contact Information

About the CCP

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About the Refuge

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Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex

Mailing Address

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EVRNWR - Charles City Sub-office
11116 Kimages Rd
Charles City, VA 23030

Email Address

EasternVirginiaRiversNWRC@fws.gov
Please type "Plum Tree Island CCP" in the subject line

Do you know of a club, school, business, or any other group that would like us to give a presentation about our CCP development for Plum Tree Island NWR? We would be happy to do so! Please contact Meghan Carfioli, our Natural Resource Planner.

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

Federal Relay Service for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing: 800/877-8339



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 NWRs - Refuge Planning
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 Hadley, MA 01035

Planning Process Timeline for Plum Tree Island NWR CCP/EA

Planning Steps and Activities	Status	Target Dates	Public Involvement	Public Involvement Dates
A. Preplanning	Completed	Winter - Fall 2012		
B. Initiate Public Involvement and Scoping	Completed	Fall 2012	Attend public open houses and write to share goals and concerns	Held open houses on September 13 and 14, 2012. Public scoping period ended October 15, 2012.
C. Review Vision Statement and Goals; Determine Significant Issues	Underway	Fall - Winter 2012	Provide comments about the goals and concerns, as well as ideas for developing alternatives	Ongoing
D. Develop and Analyze Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action		Winter - Spring 2013	Provide comments to consider during the development of action alternatives	Ongoing
E. Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA Document		Spring - Fall 2013	Attend public meetings and write to provide review and comments on draft CCP/EA	30-day public comment period
F. Prepare and Adopt Final Plan		Fall - Winter 2013		
G. Implement, Monitor, and Evaluate Plan		Beginning in January 2014		
H. Review and Revise Plan		Before or by Winter 2029		