

Frequently Asked Questions

Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA) for Butte Sink, Willow Creek-Lurline, and North Central Valley Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)

CCP Process

Q: Why is the Service preparing a CCP?

A: A Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) identifies goals, objectives, and strategies that will guide management of Butte Sink, Willow Creek-Lurline, and North Central Valley WMAs for the next 15 years. When completed, the CCP will:

- ensure that management of the WMAs reflects their purposes and the mission, policies, and goals of the Refuge System;
- provide the public and easement landowners with information about and opportunities to provide input on management actions planned for the WMAs;
- ensure the compatibility of current and future uses on Service-owned lands;
- provide long-term continuity in WMA management; and
- provide budget justifications for operation, maintenance, and facility development requests on Service-owned lands.

Q: When is the Draft CCP/EA going to be available for public comment?

A: The Draft CCP/EA is available to the public for review and comment through September 9, 2015. The Draft CCP/EA and instructions about how to provide comments on the document are available on the Sacramento NWR Complex's website:

<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Sacramento/CCP/WildlifeManagementAreas.html>

Public meetings are scheduled in July and August 2015. Please see Planning Update #4, on the website provided above, for more information.

Q: How can you provide input to the Service right now?

A: You can provide input at any time by emailing us at fw8plancomments@fws.gov (please use "WMAs CCP" in the subject line).

Q: Why has the Draft CCP taken so long?

A: Work on the CCP was suspended by other priorities; however, we recognize the importance of the CCP and are once again turning our attention to it. The WMAs' CCP/EA is one of six CCPs and numerous other planning efforts ongoing in the region.

Easements

Q: What are conservation easements?

A: Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements between landowners and government agencies or qualified conservation organizations. These easements limit the type and amount of development that may take place on a property in the future.

The Service proposes to purchase partial interest in lands using two types of conservation easements: wetland easements and agricultural easements. Agricultural easements allow landowners to keep lands in the production of agricultural crops that benefit specific wildlife species, whereas wetland easements protect wetland habitat in perpetuity and do not allow for agricultural production outside of livestock grazing. With both easements, landowners maintain ownership of the property, but transfer some of their development and other ownership rights to the Service. Under conservation easements, the land ownership

and property rights, including control of public access, would remain with the participating landowner. In addition, participating properties remain on local tax rolls and the landowner retains responsibility of paying property taxes.

Q: How does the Service pay for conservation easements?

A: Easements would be acquired only from willing landowners and when funding becomes available. Funds for easement acquisition would primarily come from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF). These funds are generated from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps and are not directly affected by annual agency operating budgets. Though MBCF funding for easement acquisition varies from year to year and may not be available at all during some years, it is important to view land protection as a long-term project. For many refuges, acquisition occurs over many years or even decades.

Acquiring and managing easements is a cost effective means to protect habitat. After the easement is purchased, the Service’s main responsibility is to ensure compliance with the easement agreement. Unlike fee-title properties, the Service is not responsible for operation and maintenance costs of easement lands. Private landowners retain the habitat management rights on easement properties and are responsible for any costs they incur. Our past experience has proven easement programs to be a highly economical means of conserving habitat for ducks, geese, and other wetland-dependent wildlife.

Public Scoping Meetings

Q: What were the issues and concerns raised at the December 2009 public Scoping Meetings?

A: The following table summarizes the issues identified through public scoping comments. Public scoping comments will be described in more detail in the Draft CCP/EA.

Issue Categories	Number of Comments Received	Percentage of Total Comments
Non-breeding waterfowl habitat – <i>water issues</i>	10	19%
Non-breeding waterfowl habitat – <i>easement acreage goals</i>	7	14%
Breeding waterfowl habitat	7	14%
Climate change	6	13%
Crop depredation	4	7%
Partnerships	3	6%
Law enforcement	3	6%
Landscape protection	3	6%
Other comments & questions	8	15%
Totals	51	100%

Q: Where were the 2009 scoping meetings held and how many people attended?

A: Colusa, Gridley, and Davis. 19 people attended the 3 scoping meetings.

Coordination with Other Conservation Programs

Q: How does the WMAs' conservation easement program relate to or differ from the Service's other conservation programs, such as Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs)?

A: The Service has multiple programs that are dedicated to natural resources conservation. The WMAs easement program and the HCP program are implemented under separate authorities and funding, often for different species. The two programs coordinate as needed at the regional level (within the Service's Pacific Southwest Region). The WMAs easement program is focused on the protection of wetlands and wetland-dependent species. The HCP program is focused on endangered species conservation, which may include wetlands and wetland-dependent wildlife, but also includes other species.

WMAs – Through the Service's conservation easement program, the Service enters into easement agreements with willing landowners to protect existing wetlands and future restored wetlands within the WMAs. Easements are voluntary agreements that private landowners enter into with the Service to help meet the habitat restoration and protection objectives of the Central Valley Joint Venture's 2006 Implementation Plan and support the *waterfowl* population goals of the Service's 2012 North American Waterfowl Management Plan. For more information, see *Q: What are conservation easements?*

HCPs – The Service is the primary agency tasked with implementing the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA is a mechanism for the Service to work with others (such as private landowners, local and state governments, and corporations) to conserve and protect species and their habitats on non-federal lands. Non-federal entities may apply for a section 10(a)(1)(B) permit when an activity they are proposing is likely to result in incidental take of at least one federally ESA-listed animal. Application for a section 10(a)(1)(B) permit is voluntary, but provides a way to reduce conflicts between ESA-listed species and economic development activities, and to provide a framework that would encourage "creative partnerships" in the interests of species and habitat conservation on non-federally owned land.

Source: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/hcp.pdf>

Q: Which counties have existing regional HCPs?

A: Existing HCPs include:

East Contra Costa County HCP/NCCP, permit TE160958-0 (Contra Costa County)

Natomas Basin Revised HCP and Litigation Resolution - City of Sacramento, Sutter County, and Natomas Basin Conservancy; permits TE073665-0, TE073663-0, TE073667-0 (Sacramento and Sutter Counties)

San Joaquin County HCP, permit TE043280-0 (San Joaquin County)

Butte County (valley floor only) HCP/NCCP

Placer County (valley floor only) HCP/NCCP

South Sacramento County HCP

Yolo County HCP/NCCP

Yuba-Sutter Counties HCP/NCCP

Solano County HCP

East Contra Costa County HCP/NCCP

San Joaquin County HCP

Source: http://ecos.fws.gov/conserv_plans/PlanReportSelect?region=8&type=HCP

Q: How does the Service coordinate the objectives of the WMAs' easement program with the objectives of the HCPs within a given county?

A: The two programs coordinate as needed at the regional level (within the Service's Pacific Southwest Region). Although the WMA conservation easement program has not been implemented within an HCP boundary, the two programs are intended to complement each other. HCP wetland easements may contribute toward meeting the objectives of the WMA's wetland conservation easement objectives for that county depending upon the specific HCP's biological goals and objectives.

Q: How does the WMAs' conservation easement program relate to the planning efforts on-going in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta?

A: To date, the WMA conservation easement program has not been active in Contra Costa, Solano, and San Joaquin Counties in the Delta. With the exception of lands that are higher than 500-foot elevation above mean sea level, lands within the Legal Delta boundary (Section 12220 of the Water Code) typically do not meet the objectives of the wetland conservation easement program.

Service-owned Lands

Q: Why is the Service acquiring 3,321 acres of fee-title lands from willing sellers within the North Central Valley WMA?

A: While fee-title acquisition of wetlands and restorable agricultural lands is not the primary emphasis of the WMAs, in some cases it may be more appropriate for the Service to purchase and manage the lands. In some circumstances fee-title land acquisition might be necessary to provide minimum waterfowl sanctuary or to resolve management issues. Specific management issues where fee-title acquisition may be considered include: the purchase of properties that improve the administration and management of refuge lands and the protection of sensitive habitats that are vulnerable to degradation in private ownership. The Service's policy is to work only with willing sellers and consult with affected counties prior to acquisition. Objective 1.5 in the Draft CCP/EA (Chapter 4, page 126) provides more information about the Service's rationale and strategies to acquire lands in fee-title.