

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 scheduled to be available to the public for review and comment in mid-2015. The Draft CCP/EA and instructions about how to provide comments on the document will be on the Sacramento NWR Complex website: <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Sacramento/>

We will send out a planning update and news release when the Draft CCP/EA is available for review and public meetings are scheduled. Please check our website for updates prior to that time or to view information that was previously provided.

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.