



# U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Otay-Sweetwater Unit and Vernal Pools Stewardship Project

*Planning Update 1 - May 2006*

**Mark Your Calendar**  
Public Scoping  
Meetings scheduled  
for June 14 and June 15.

### Greetings From the Refuge Manager

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The San Diego National Wildlife Refuge is about to embark on an important multi-year process to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). This plan will provide guidance on how the Refuge should be managed over the next 15 years. Your ideas and comments will be an important part of the process, so I encourage you to participate.

Included in this Planning Update is background information intended to acquaint you with the National Wildlife Refuge System, the CCP process, and the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge. Additional updates will be sent to you throughout the process to keep you up-to-date on our progress and to let you know how you can continue to be involved.

Your first opportunity to get involved will be at one of the upcoming scoping meetings described in this Planning Update. At these meetings, you can help us identify issues and concerns, share your visions for the future of the Refuge, and get answers to any questions you may have about the Refuge.

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions. Our contact information is provided on page 7. I hope to see you at one of the upcoming meetings, so you can help us plan the future of the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge.

Val Urban  
Refuge Manager  
San Diego National Wildlife Refuge

### Notice of Public Scoping Meetings

**Wednesday, June 14, 2006 - 2:00 to 4:00 PM**  
**Otay Water District Office, Training Room**  
**2554 Sweetwater Springs Boulevard, Spring Valley**

Directions: From Highway 94, take the Sweetwater Springs Blvd. exit. Once on Sweetwater Springs Blvd. continue south, crossing over Jamacha Blvd. After crossing this intersection, look for the Otay Water District driveway on the right. Follow the one-way roadway up the hill, continue through the first parking lot and park in the lower lot. We will have signs to guide you.

**Thursday, June 15, 2006 - 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM**  
**Jamul Primary School, Multipurpose Room**  
**14567 Lyons Valley Road, Jamul**

Directions: From Highway 94 (Campo Road) turn onto Lyons Valley Road and travel about 1.5 miles to the Skyline Truck Trail/Lyons Valley Road stop sign. Turn right, continuing on Lyons Valley Road to the second driveway on your right (look for the Jamul Primary School sign).

**For more detailed directions, contact Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner**  
**(See page 7 for contact information.)**

## What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the nearly 96 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System and 8,000 waterfowl production areas encompassing 1.9 million acres in the prairie pothole region of the United States. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices, and 78 ecological services field stations.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, and helps foreign governments with their wildlife and habitat conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid Program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and game agencies. Many of the Service programs directly benefit both wildlife and citizens of California.

## What is the National Wildlife Refuge System?



In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt protected an island with nesting pelicans, herons, and roseate spoonbills in Florida's Indian River from feather collectors who were decimating their colonies. In doing so, he established the nation's first bird sanctuary, known as Pelican Island, and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his tenure. This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand, later becoming the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System). Today, a little over 100 years later, the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) represents one of more than 545 National Wildlife Refuges encompassing over 96 million acres.

The Refuge System is the largest system of lands in the world dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. It is spread across 50 states, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and several Pacific Islands. These refuges are home to more than 700 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 reptile and amphibian species, and

more than 200 species of fish. They provide habitat for more than 250 Federally listed threatened and endangered plants and animals.

In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, which provided significant new guidance for the management of the Refuge System. The Improvement Act, included a new statutory mission statement and directed the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to conserving wildlife and maintaining the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of ecosystems. This law requires the Service to complete comprehensive conservation planning for each refuge. Six wildlife-dependent recreational uses, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation, were identified as appropriate activities on refuges when determined to be compatible and not inconsistent with refuge purposes.

## Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System

*"The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."*

This mission of "wildlife first" differs from other Federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, which focuses on forest stewardship and sustainable forest uses; the Bureau of Land Management, whose efforts are directed toward the productivity and multiple use of the land; and the National Park Service, which conserves scenery, wildlife, and historic objects for people's enjoyment. As we move forward to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the San Diego NWR, we must ensure that all of our proposals are consistent with the mission of the Refuge System.

***"Wild beasts and birds are by right not the property merely of people who are alive today, but the property of unknown generations whose belongings we have no right to squander."***

***President Theodore Roosevelt***

## What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, and Why is it being Prepared?

A Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is a “blueprint” for how a specific refuge should be managed. It is intended to provide a clear vision of the desired future conditions for that refuge and to ensure consistent management of the refuge over a 15-year period. A CCP contains the Refuge goals, objectives, and management strategies that when implemented will assist in achieving the mission of the System, reflect the purposes for refuge establishment, maintain the refuge’s biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health, and provide opportunities for compatible public uses. The CCP also provides the public with an understanding of how and why specific management directives were developed and includes opportunities for public involvement.

We prepare CCPs in accordance with the provisions of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. When Congress passed the Improvement Act, it included a requirement that a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) be prepared for each refuge in the Refuge System. A CCP is to be completed for every refuge by 2012.

Once a CCP has been approved for a refuge, the refuge is to be managed in accordance with the approved CCP.



Evidence of Bobcat Activity on the Refuge

## Compatibility of Refuge Uses

Prior to allowing various public uses on a refuge, federal law requires that the Service first determine that these specific uses are “compatible.” A compatible use is a proposed or existing use of a National Wildlife Refuge that, based on sound professional judgment of the Refuge Manager, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the refuge. The Service’s Compatibility Policy contains guidance for determining compatibility, which includes the need to determine that the use is not inconsistent with public safety. When a determination is made as to whether a proposed use is compatible or not, this determination is provided in writing and is referred to as a compatibility determination. Compatibility determinations prepared for the San Diego NWR will be integrated into the CCP document, providing the public with the opportunity for review and comment concurrent with the review of the Draft CCP.



## About the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge

### Refuge Location

The San Diego NWR, which was established in 1996, includes both the Otay-Sweetwater Unit and the Vernal Pools Stewardship Project. The approved Acquisition Boundary, which is illustrated in Figure 1, encompasses approximately 52,080 acres, of which 43,860 acres are located within the approved Acquisition Boundary of the Otay-Sweetwater Unit and 8,220 acres are located within the Vernal Pools Stewardship Project. The Acquisition Boundary extends from Otay Mesa in south San Diego County to Del Mar Mesa in west-central San Diego County. This boundary represents the area in which the Service is allowed to negotiate with willing participants to acquire their lands for inclusion within the San Diego NWR.

The majority of the 8,280 acres currently owned by the Service and managed as part of the San Diego NWR are included within the Otay-  
(continued on page 5)



# San Diego National Wildlife Refuge

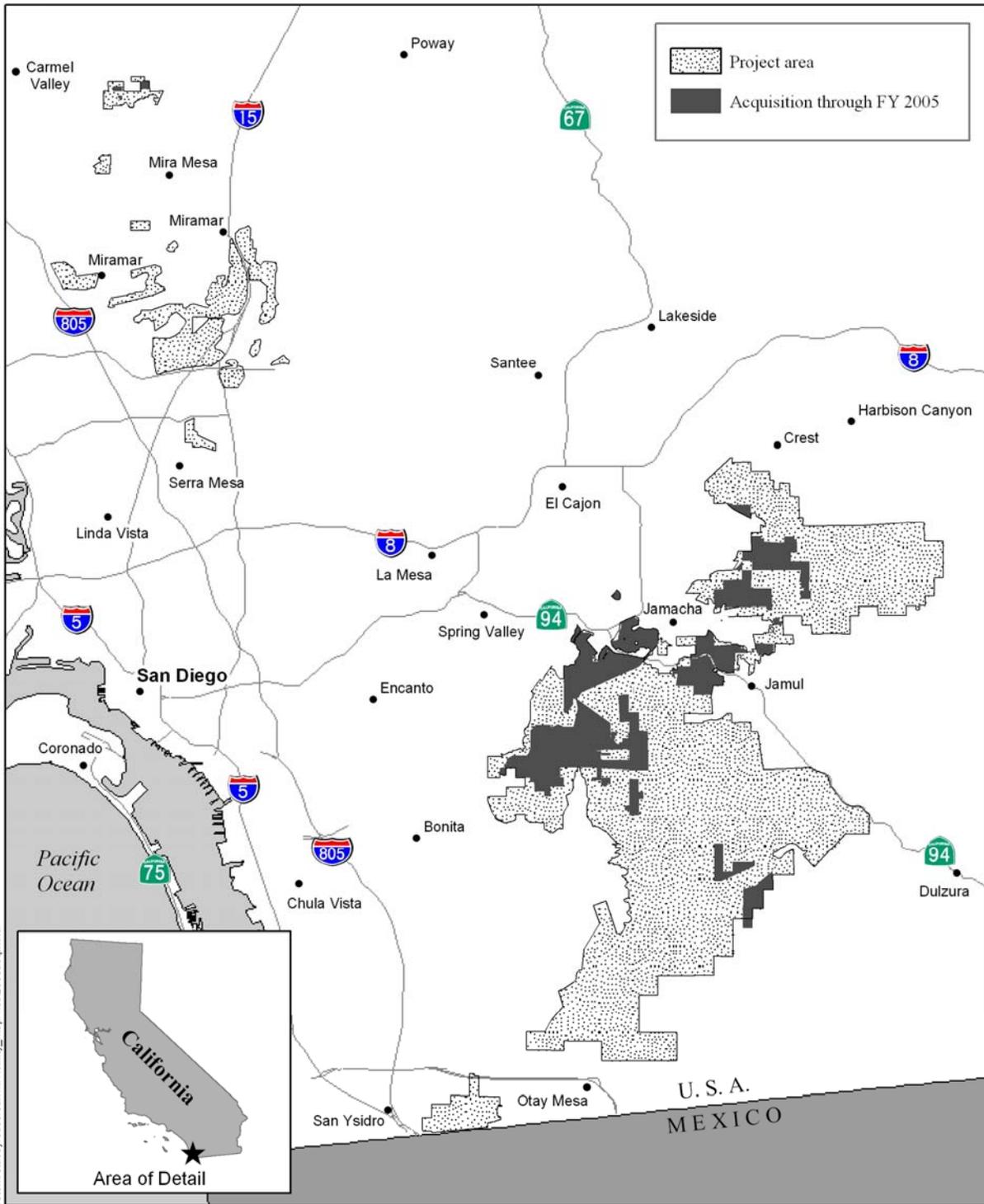


Figure 1 - Approved Acquisition Boundary for the San Diego NWR

Sweetwater Unit . These lands are located at the eastern edge of the San Diego metropolitan area in southwestern San Diego County, generally between northeastern Chula Vista and the unincorporated communities of Jamul, Dehesa, and Crest. About 60 acres within the Vernal Pools Stewardship Project area have also been acquired by the Service. This property is located on Del Mar Mesa in northwestern San Diego.

The management decisions that will be made during the CCP process will only apply to those parcels that are owned by the Service. Privately-held parcels and parcels owned by other agencies would not be subject to the management directives in the Final CCP.

### Refuge Habitats and Species

The dominant plant communities within the Refuge include coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and grasslands. The vernal pool, oak woodland, riparian woodland, riparian scrub, Tecate cypress forest, and freshwater marsh habitats located within the Refuge boundary are also important, as they support many of the federally listed species found on the Refuge. Thirteen federally listed species, including several species of birds, plants, amphibians, crustaceans, and a butterfly, occur within the Refuge's Acquisition Boundary and several other listed species are likely to occur here. The Refuge also supports a variety of species covered under the San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP).

### Refuge Establishment

The San Diego NWR was established to:

- ◆ Contribute to the recovery of the endangered, threatened, and rare species supported within the Refuge;
- ◆ Support the native biodiversity of the southwestern San Diego Region by conserving large blocks of native habitat;
- ◆ Contribute to the development of a regional preserve under the MSCP, and;
- ◆ Provide potential opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, compatible with refuge purposes.



Chocolate Lilies

### Public Uses

Although trails are present on portions of the Refuge, no official trail plan has been established for the Refuge and the Refuge is currently closed to hunting and fishing. Wildlife-dependent recreational uses, defined as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation, do occur on lands surrounding the Otay-Sweetwater Unit. Upland game species, such as dove and quail, are hunted on private lands and within the California Department of Fish and Game's Hollenbeck Canyon Wildlife Area. Existing and future opportunities for wildlife observation, photography, outdoor environmental education, and interpretation are available along regional and sub-regional trail corridors and pathways planned for the general area by the County of San Diego and City of Chula Vista. No public uses are currently permitted on the Refuge parcels in Del Mar Mesa.



Endangered Quino Checkerspot Butterfly  
Found on the San Diego NWR  
(Photo by Phil Rouillard)

### Refuge Purposes

The purposes for the San Diego NWR are defined by language in a number of acts of Congress which grant the Service general authority to acquire land for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The purposes for establishment of the San Diego NWR include:

“ . . . to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species . . . or (B) plants . . . ” 16 U.S.C. §1534 (Endangered Species Act of 1973)

“ . . . for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources . . . ” 16 U.S.C. §742f(a)(4) “ . . . for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude . . . ” 16 U.S.C. §742f(b) (1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

## The CCP Process

The CCP process involves a number of key planning steps, as illustrated below. Up to this point, we have been involved in the pre-planning steps of the process. Pre-planning consists of establishing a planning team, compiling data, identifying information and data needs, and beginning internal scoping to identify management concerns, issues, and opportunities. The preparation of this Planning Update and the publishing of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register represent the initiation of the public scoping phase of the CCP process. During this phase, the public is encouraged to assist us in identifying potential issues, management actions and concerns, significant problems or impacts, and opportunities or alternatives to resolve them. Public scoping will continue until we prepare a draft CCP/NEPA document.

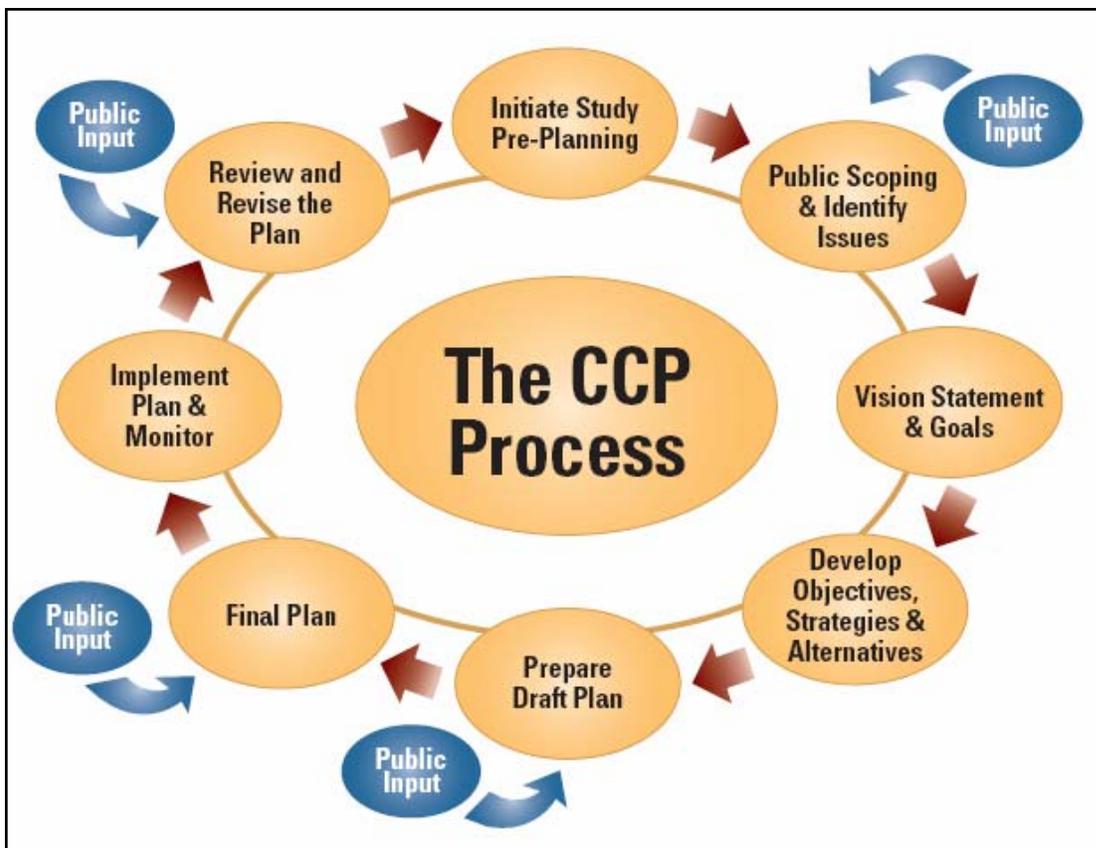
Throughout the CCP process, the following goals of CCP planning should be considered: decisions of the Refuge should be based on an ecosystem approach that considers the broader goals and objectives of the refuge's ecosystems and watersheds; management decisions and their rationale should be supported with a thorough assessment of available science derived from scientific literature, on-site refuge data, expert opinion, and sound professional judgment; the six priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses should receive priority consideration during the preparation of the plan; and a forum for the public to comment on the type, extent, and compatibility of uses on the refuge, including priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses, should be provided.

Public involvement is also an important goal of the CCP process. To ensure public involvement in refuge management

decisions, a process for effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with affected parties, including Federal agencies, State conservation agencies, tribal governments, local governments, conservation organizations, adjacent landowners, and interested members of the public will be provided.

Finally, each CCP must comply with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through the concurrent preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The CCP process integrates NEPA compliance requirements directly into the CCP process by providing a combined draft CCP/EA or EIS. Following completion of the final CCP/NEPA document, the product of the planning process will be a stand-alone CCP, separate from the EA or EIS.

The key planning steps listed below will be described in greater detail in future Planning Updates so you can understand and follow our progress throughout the planning process.



## Issues for Consideration in the Plan

During the initial pre-planning phase of the CCP process, the planning team identified a number of issues of concern that should be addressed in the CCP. Presented below are just a few of those issues.

- 1) **Habitat Management:** Habitat quality varies within the Refuge. What actions should be taken to sustain and restore priority species and habitats over the next 15 years?



Studying the Vernal Pools of Del Mar Mesa

- 2) **Management of Water Quality and Quantity:** Water quality and groundwater levels are affected by activities occurring upstream of the Refuge. How can we ensure that adequate water quality and water supplies will be available in the future to support Refuge resources?
- 3) **Public Use:** Wildlife-dependent recreational uses are to receive priority consideration in Refuge planning. Which public uses should occur on the Refuge (at which locations and at what levels of use)?
- 4) **Land Acquisition:** Approximately 24 percent of the area within the approved Acquisition Boundary has been acquired and incorporated into the Refuge System. How should the issue of future acquisition be addressed? What influence, if any, should proximity to existing Refuge lands, size of a parcel, adjacency to development, quality of habitat, or the presence or absence of listed species have on future acquisition decisions?

During the scoping process, we will expand this list to include those Refuge issues that you have identified as important to you. All we need are your comments. You can provide them at the public scoping meeting (see the cover page), or by sending us a letter, email, or fax (see contact information on this page). We look forward to hearing from you!

## What's in a Name?

Many people confuse Federal and State fish and wildlife agencies because their names are similar. The Service is a Federal agency within the U. S. Department of the Interior. The State fish and wildlife agency in California is the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), included within the California Resources Agency. Our names are similar and so are our missions: both agencies are dedicated to wildlife conservation for the benefit of present and future generations. Our jurisdictions are different. The Service is the lead agency responsible for Federally listed species and migratory birds, whether they are located on Federal, State, or private lands. The DFG has primary responsibility for resident fish and wildlife on State and private lands, and oversees State-listed species and streambed alteration issues throughout California.

The Service is responsible for managing the San Diego NWR as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve, another large area of public land located near the San Diego NWR, is managed by DFG. Effective management of the resources being conserved on these properties requires ongoing coordination between both agencies.

## Please feel free to contact us!

We are available to provide additional information about the San Diego NWR and to answer any questions you might have about the planning process. You can contact us by phone, mail, or e-mail.

### Please send your scoping comment to:

#### Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner

San Diego NWR Complex  
6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, CA 92011  
760-431-9440 ex. 349 (phone), 760-930-0256 (fax)  
Email: Victoria\_Touchstone@fws.gov

### Concerns regarding current Refuge operations can also be directed to:

#### Val Urban, Refuge Manager

San Diego NWR  
13910 Lyons Valley Rd, Suite R, Jamul, CA 91935  
619-669-7295 (phone), 619-669-7292 (fax)  
Email: Val\_Urban@fws.gov



**United States Department of the Interior  
Fish & Wildlife Service  
San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
6010 Hidden Valley Road  
Carlsbad, CA 92011**

**First Class Mail  
Postage and Fees  
PAID  
US Department  
of the Interior  
Permit G-77**

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### **Planning Schedule**

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>May 2006</b>      | <b>Initiate Public Scoping</b>   |
| <b>June 14, 2006</b> | <b>Public Scoping Meeting - 2:00 to 4:00 PM - <i>Otay Water District Offices</i></b> |
| <b>June 15, 2006</b> | <b>Public Scoping Meeting - 6:30 to 8:30 PM - <i>Jamul Primary School</i></b>        |
| <b>August 2007</b>   | <b>Issue Draft CCP/NEPA Document</b>   |
| <b>February 2008</b> | <b>Publish Final CCP</b>   |

**We have set up a webpage for the San Diego NWR CCP at our San Diego NWR Complex website. You can visit this site throughout the CCP process to keep up-to-date with the CCP process and to learn more about the San Diego NWR. Go to: <http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov>. Once at the website, click on "Comprehensive Conservation Plans."**

**If you did not receive this *Planning Update* through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, or if you would like to be removed from the list, contact the Refuge Planner (see page 7 for contact information). Please feel free to pass this *Planning Update* along to anyone you think might be interested in the CCP process for the San Diego NWR. Thank you!**