



Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 2 - August 2008

Greetings!

This is the second in a series of *Planning Updates* for the Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). We provide these *Planning Updates* to keep you informed of our progress on the CCP and to solicit your input at various points throughout the process. In this update, we are seeking your comments regarding our draft Refuge goals and management alternatives. The alternatives will be further refined following consideration of any additional input we receive over the next month. Once refined, the alternatives will be evaluated in the draft CCP, which will be available for review later this year.

Update from the Refuge Manager

As usual, it was a busy winter and spring here on the Refuge. We received more rain this winter than we have in quite some time, which has helped many of the native plants added to the native plant garden and elsewhere on the Refuge over the past few years. Unfortunately, the rains also helped the invasive plants. Many hours have been spent treating and removing invasive plants from the upland areas of the Refuge including restoration sites at Hog Island, north of Case Road Pond, and out near the observation deck. Although the invasive plants seem to be winning the battle at our Case Road site, most of the other areas are now looking fantastic and we continue to see new birds and insects utilizing these areas.

We have observed many more wading birds utilizing the area to the northeast of NASA Island this spring. This is most likely the result of improved tidal

circulation following the completion of our NASA Road culvert replacement project in early February. It appears that the improvements in tidal circulation have lead to larger numbers of small fish in this area, and thus greater numbers of foraging birds. Many thanks go out to all who worked on the project.

Another project that we completed earlier this year was the repair of the eroded levee in what we call the Bolsa Cell. This project was critical to maintaining the proper tidal regime in the Forrestal and Case Road Ponds. Just the other day, as one of our volunteers and I were walking along the repaired levee we spotted two four-foot-long leopard sharks. What a magnificent sight! I was reminded of how important this Refuge is to all the critters, both above and beneath the waterline. *(continued on page 5)*

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Two four-foot-long leopard sharks were recently observed exploring the restored subtidal habitat on the Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge.

Summary of Public Scoping Comments

The issues, concerns, and recommendations received during the scoping process fall into several categories, including wildlife and habitat management, listed species management, public use, cultural resources, refuge operations (e.g., law enforcement, fire management, regulatory signage, maintenance), and the CCP/NEPA process. The various comments are summarized below.

Wildlife/Habitat Management

- Expand the diversity of native habitats on the Refuge.
- Provide additional nesting habitat to support ground nesting seabirds.
- Evaluate the opportunities for restoring seasonal freshwater flows into Anaheim Bay to improve habitat quality in the intertidal zones, particularly in cordgrass-dominated salt marsh habitat.
- Restore disturbed areas to salt marsh, upland transition, and/or coastal sage scrub habitat.
- Protect salt pan habitat for the various tiger beetle species found on the Refuge.
- Monitor and address any adverse effects of erosion on marsh edges, nesting areas, and/or tidal circulation.
- Monitor and control as necessary invasive plant and animal species in wetland and upland areas.
- Monitor water quality and track changes in tidal elevations in Anaheim Bay.
- Remove concrete debris and unnecessary structures from the Refuge to improve habitat quality.

Threatened and Endangered Species Management

- Evaluate the potential for developing nesting areas for western snowy plovers.
- Reestablish salt marsh bird's-beak on the Refuge.
- Improving conditions for nesting light-footed clapper rails.
- Increase the area available for California least tern nesting, including converting Oil Island to a nesting island once oil extraction has ended at this location.
- Eliminate perching opportunities near the marsh for avian predators.

Public Use

- Improve public access onto the Refuge.
- Install a boardwalk to provide opportunities to observe marsh habitat and associated organisms.
- Construct an observation tower to provide better views of Anaheim Bay.
- Develop a visitor center on Oil Island once it is no longer needed for oil extraction and use the access point off Pacific Highway as the main entrance to the center to avoid conflicts with the mission of Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach.
- Encourage research projects that will provide information relevant to Refuge management.

Cultural Resources

- Identify and protect important cultural resource sites.

Refuge Operations

- Provide additional staff for implementing refuge activities.
- Provide the funding necessary to achieve Refuge goals and objectives.
- Encourage outside partnerships and coordinate with surrounding land managers and volunteer organizations to exchange information related to regional wetland needs and issues.
- Continue to provide staff support to the Friend's of Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge.

Expansion of the Refuge Boundary

- Expand the Refuge boundary to incorporate the Los Cerritos wetlands.
- Provide a new access point into the Refuge that does not require access through the Naval Weapons Station.
- When Oil Island is no longer needed for oil extraction, incorporate the island and access roads into the Refuge.

CCP/NEPA Process

- Ensure adequate coordination between the CCP and the Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan.

Seal Beach NWR - Refuge Purposes

To provide for the conservation, protection, and propagation of native species of fish and wildlife, including migratory birds, that are threatened with extinction.

Developing Goals for the Seal Beach NWR

The CCP planning team drafted the following goals for the Seal Beach NWR based on: 1) input provided during the scoping process for the CCP; 2) discussions with representatives from Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach, various public agencies, and interested organizations; and 3) internal Fish and Wildlife Service review.

- Goal 1: Support recovery and protection efforts for the federally and state listed threatened and endangered species and species of concern that occur within the Seal Beach NWR.
- Goal 2: Protect, manage, enhance, and restore coastal wetland and upland habitats to benefit native fish, wildlife, and plant species within the Seal Beach NWR.
- Goal 3: Enhance public appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of the Refuge's biological and cultural resources through outreach opportunities and quality wildlife-dependent recreation, including wildlife observation, environmental education, and interpretation.
- Goal 4: Further strengthen the management partnerships between the Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge and Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach, while preserving our respective missions.

Developing Management Alternatives for the Draft CCP

As part of the CCP process, the planning team is tasked with developing a range of alternatives for how a refuge should be managed. These alternatives are then analyzed in the environmental assessment (EA) to help determine which alternative would best achieve the Refuge purposes and goals. The process of developing alternatives involves analyzing current conditions, identifying various measures that if implemented would help achieve Refuge goals, and incorporating, as appropriate, input provided during the public scoping process and other information gathered during subsequent meetings and workshops and from various interested individuals, agencies, and organizations.

The management alternatives proposed for inclusion in the Seal Beach NWR EA are presented below. The various alternatives differ in the extent and focus of the wildlife and habitat management actions to be implemented on the Refuge, as well as in the types and levels of public use opportunities to be provided. We encourage you to provide us with your comments on this proposed range of management alternatives. Is there an issue or management proposal that is not included within the current range of alternatives that you feel should be addressed? If so, let us know. To have your comments considered in time for incorporation in the draft CCP, please provide any comments to Victoria Touchstone, our Refuge Planner, by September 22, 2008 (contact information is provided on page 5). After considering any additional input, these alternatives will be refined and then fully described in the draft CCP/EA. The potential environmental consequences of implementing the various alternatives will be analyzed in the accompanying EA. The draft CCP/EA is expected to be available for review this fall, at which time we will again be soliciting your comments. (*continued on page 4*)

We Invite Your Comments

One of the goals of the CCP process is to ensure public involvement in refuge management decisions. Many of you have participated in the public scoping process; we encourage your continued involvement. This is your opportunity to provide input regarding the draft Refuge goals, as well as the management alternatives to be evaluated in the EA. If you have comments, please provide them via mail, fax, or email to the Refuge Planner (see contact information on page 5) no later than September 22, 2008.

Later this year, we will release the draft CCP/EA for review and comment. If you are not on our mailing list and would like to be notified when the draft is available, please contact the Refuge Planner.

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Draft Management Alternatives:

We propose to analyze three alternatives for managing the Refuge over the next fifteen years, including a no action alternative and two action alternatives. Under Alternative A (No Action), management of the Refuge would continue as it is occurring today. Alternative B proposes to maximize salt marsh restoration, while maintaining current public use activities. Alternative C (the preferred alternative) proposes to optimize upland and wetland restoration and improve opportunities for wildlife observation. The details of each alternative are summarized below, with expanded information about each alternative provided on our CCP webpage (more information about our CCP Planning webpage is provided below).

Alternative A - No Action. Alternative A assumes no change to past and present management activities. Current conservation and management actions would continue per available funding. Existing public uses, including wildlife observation, environmental education, and environmental interpretation would continue. This alternative represents the baseline from which other “action” alternatives will be evaluated.

Alternative B - Maximize Salt Marsh Restoration, Continue Current Public Use Program. Under this alternative, the current wildlife and habitat management activities occurring on the Refuge would be expanded. Proposed activities intended to protect and aid in the recovery of the California least tern and light-footed clapper rail include improving nesting conditions for these species and working with the Navy to eliminate perching opportunities for avian predators. Data collection, surveys, and monitoring activities are proposed to establish baseline information related to such issues as water quality, species diversity, habitat quality, and tidal elevations. The restoration of approximately 20 acres of salt marsh habitat and 15 acres of wetland/upland transition habitat is proposed for the remaining areas of disturbed habitat within the Refuge. This alternative also includes a proposal to work in partnership with the Navy to develop a list of research projects for distribution to various educational institutions that if implemented could benefit Refuge resources and Refuge management.

No changes to the current public use program would occur under this alternative.

Alternative C - Optimize Upland and Wetland Restoration, Improve Opportunities for Wildlife Observation (Preferred Alternative). Many of the wildlife and habitat management activities described in Alternative B would also be implemented under Alternative C. However, the habitat restoration proposals under Alternative C place greater emphasis on the restoration of upland and wetland/upland transition habitat than does Alternative B. Under Alternative C, approximately 10 acres of coastal sage scrub habitat, 15 acres of wetland/upland transition habitat, one acre of salt pan habitat, and 8 acres of salt marsh habitat would be restored. This alternative also addresses management of habitat that supports various tiger beetle species and proposes to implement a program to release and monitor captive-bred light-footed clapper rails on the Refuge.

To improve opportunities for wildlife observation, the construction of a 20-foot-high observation tower along Kitts Highway is proposed. In addition, if oil and gas production on Oil Island ever ceases, this alternative proposes to evaluate the potential for developing a Refuge interpretive center on this site.

Alternative C is currently identified as our preferred alternative. However, a final decision on which alternative to implement will not be made until after the draft CCP/EA has completed public review and all of the comments provided have been considered.

Visit Our Seal Beach NWR CCP Website

For a more detailed description of the alternatives currently being considered for evaluation in the EA, visit our CCP website (<http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov>). Once at the website, click on “SB NWR CCP” located in the “Refuge Planning” box on the left side of the screen.

Update from the Refuge Manager

(continued from page 1)

Nesting season is upon us and California least terns have been raising their chicks, as have light-footed clapper rails and many other birds on the Refuge. Both of our endangered species have benefited from the hard work of our staff, Navy partners, contractors, and volunteers, whose accomplishments include deploying many new improved rail nesting platforms and completing improvements to the least tern nest site such as adding shell fragments to the sand and fortifying the electric fence that keeps ground predators out. Eyes on the Colony, our volunteer monitoring program for the California least tern, has also contributed to what looks to be a successful 2008 nesting season for the California least tern.

Development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for this Refuge has also required much attention. When we

initiated the CCP last year, we requested and received comments from you telling us how you would like to see the Refuge managed over the next 15 years. After considering your comments, we developed draft goals and alternatives, which are presented for your review and comment on page 3 of this Planning Update.

We encourage your continued involvement in the CCP process and welcome you to become more involved with the Refuge and our wonderful programs. Please don't hesitate to contact me at any time (contact information provided below).

Kirk Gilligan

Kirk Gilligan
Refuge Manager

Contact Information

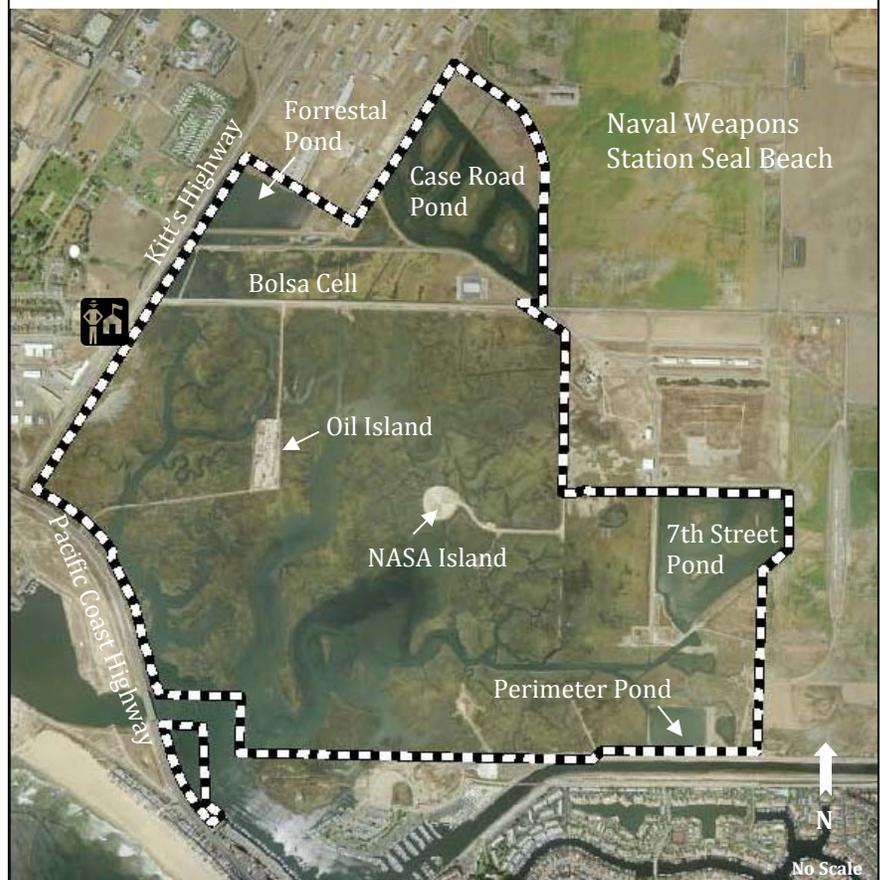
For information about the CCP process or to provide any comments, contact:

Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner
San Diego NWR Complex
6010 Hidden Valley Road, Suite 101
Carlsbad, CA 92011
760-431-9440 ex. 349 (phone)
760-930-0256 (fax)
Email: Victoria_Touchstone@fws.gov

Concerns regarding Refuge operations should be directed to:

Kirk Gilligan, Refuge Manager
Seal Beach NWR
800 Seal Beach Blvd., Bldg. 226
Seal Beach, CA 90740
562-598-1024 (phone)
562-799-3827 (fax)
Email: kirk.gilligan@navy.mil

Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge



 Refuge Boundary



Refuge Headquarters



**United States Department of the Interior
Fish & Wildlife Service
San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex
6010 Hidden Valley Road, Suite 101
Carlsbad, CA 92011**

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

CCP Planning Schedule

April 2007	Initiated Public Scoping and held Public Scoping Meetings
<u>Sept. 22, 2008</u>	Comments Due on draft Goals and Management Alternatives
Fall 2008	Publish Draft CCP/EA for Public Review and Comment
April 2009	Publish Final CCP

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.”

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 5 for contact information).