



Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 3 - March 2011

Greetings!

This is the third 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.

The purpose of this update is to announce the availability of the draft CCP and environmental assessment (EA) for public review and comment. We will also hold a public meeting on April 6, 2011 to take your comments. On page 4, you will find information regarding the public review process, as well as information on how to obtain a copy of the document and where to send your comments.

Inside this update:

- Update from the Refuge Manager...1
- Why Prepare a CCP.....2
- What is a draft CCP/EA.....2
- We Invite Your Comments.....3
- Vision and Refuge Purposes.....2
- Management Alternatives.....3
- Achieving Refuge Goals.....4
- Frequently Asked Questions.....4
- Where to Send Your Comments.....5
- Contact Information.....5
- CCP Planning Schedule.....6

Update from the Refuge Manager

Overall, 2010 was a very busy year on the Refuge. In addition to finalizing the draft CCP/EA, we also worked on a variety of projects ranging from improving nesting platforms for the endangered light-footed clapper rail to removing invasive plant species and replacing them with seedlings grown in our new native plant nursery. These and other accomplishments were only possible because of the addition of a part-time maintenance worker, Mark Beaty, assistance from several new volunteers and interns, and the continued efforts of our loyal and hardworking volunteer core.

2010 was also a good year for our endangered species programs. We estimate that our light-footed clapper breeding population in 2010 was 25 pairs, up by six pairs from 2009. We also had a record 265 California least tern nests at NASA Island. A total of 230 chicks were banded, but sadly many of these chicks were later lost due to predation by at least one great horned owl.

We are grateful to our Refuge volunteers, interns, and the Friends of Seal Beach NWR who provided invaluable assistance in all aspects of Refuge management ranging from special events, tours, and outreach to habitat restoration, endangered species management, and maintenance.

As we start the new year, we are looking forward to the completion of our CCP. The draft CCP/EA and accompanying draft Integrated Pest Management Program and draft Mosquito Management Plan are now available for review. I encourage you to read these documents and share your comments with us.

We appreciate your continued involvement in this planning effort and look forward to receiving your comments.

Kirk Gilligan
Refuge Manager

YOU ARE INVITED TO A PUBLIC MEETING

One of the goals of the CCP process is to ensure public involvement in refuge management decisions. Public review of the draft CCP/EA is an opportunity for you to get involved. We invite you to attend a public meeting on

Wednesday, April 6, 2011 at 6:00 p.m.
City of Seal Beach Fire Station 48, Community Room
3131 North Gate Road, Seal Beach, CA

where you can learn more about the draft CCP/EA and provide your comments. For directions and more information, contact the Refuge Planner or visit our website (see page 5 for contact information).

Why Prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Seal Beach NWR?

We have prepared a CCP for the Seal Beach NWR to describe the desired future conditions of the Refuge and to provide guidance to the Refuge Manager and others for how this Refuge should be managed to best achieve Refuge purposes. Further, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act requires that every Refuge have a CCP by 2012. Once it is final, the CCP for the Seal Beach NWR will provide a 15-year plan that addresses how the Refuge will manage and conserve fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their related habitats, while also providing opportunities for compatible public use.

What is a Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Assessment?

A draft CCP/EA integrates the requirements of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act for preparing a CCP with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires all Federal agencies to consider the environmental effects of the actions they undertake. To comply with NEPA, an EA has been integrated directly into the draft CCP for the Seal Beach NWR. Within the draft CCP/EA, the primary components of the EA include Chapter 1, which addresses the purpose and need for the proposed action; Chapter 3 which presents the proposed action and the alternatives to the proposed action; Chapter 4, which describes the affected environment; Chapter 5, which presents the environmental consequences of the proposed action and the alternatives; and Appendix B, which lists the agencies and persons consulted. The issues addressed in the draft CCP/EA include the potential effects of the various alternatives on the physical environment, biological and cultural resources, and the social/economic environment. The adverse and beneficial effects of implementing the alternatives are generally described in the following action categories: habitat and wildlife management, pest management, and public use.

Three alternatives, including a No Action Alternative (as required by NEPA), are described, compared, and assessed for the Seal Beach NWR in the draft CCP/EA. These three alternatives are summarized on page 3.

What are the Vision and Purposes of the Seal Beach NWR?

Our vision for the future of the Seal Beach NWR:

Tidal channels meandering through a sea of cordgrass deliver moisture and nourishment to support a healthy marsh ecosystem. As the quiet calm of the morning is interrupted by the clacking of a light-footed clapper rail, school children and other visitors, standing on the elevated observation deck, point with excitement in the direction of the call hoping for a glimpse of the rare bird. Shorebirds dart from one foraging area to another feasting on what appears to be an endless supply of food hidden within the tidal flats. California least terns fly above the tidal channels searching for small fish to carry back to their nests on NASA Island. A diverse array of marine organisms, from tube worms and sea stars to rays and sharks, and even an occasional green sea turtle, thrive within the tidal channels and open water areas of the Refuge's diverse marsh complex, while Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrows and other upland birds find food and shelter within the native upland vegetation that borders the marsh.



Tidal channels of the Seal Beach NWR
Photo: K.Gilligan/USFWS

The purposes for which the Seal Beach NWR was established include:

- 1) Preservation and management of habitat necessary for the perpetuation of two endangered species, the light-footed clapper rail and California least tern; and
- 2) Preservation of habitat used by migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and other waterbirds.

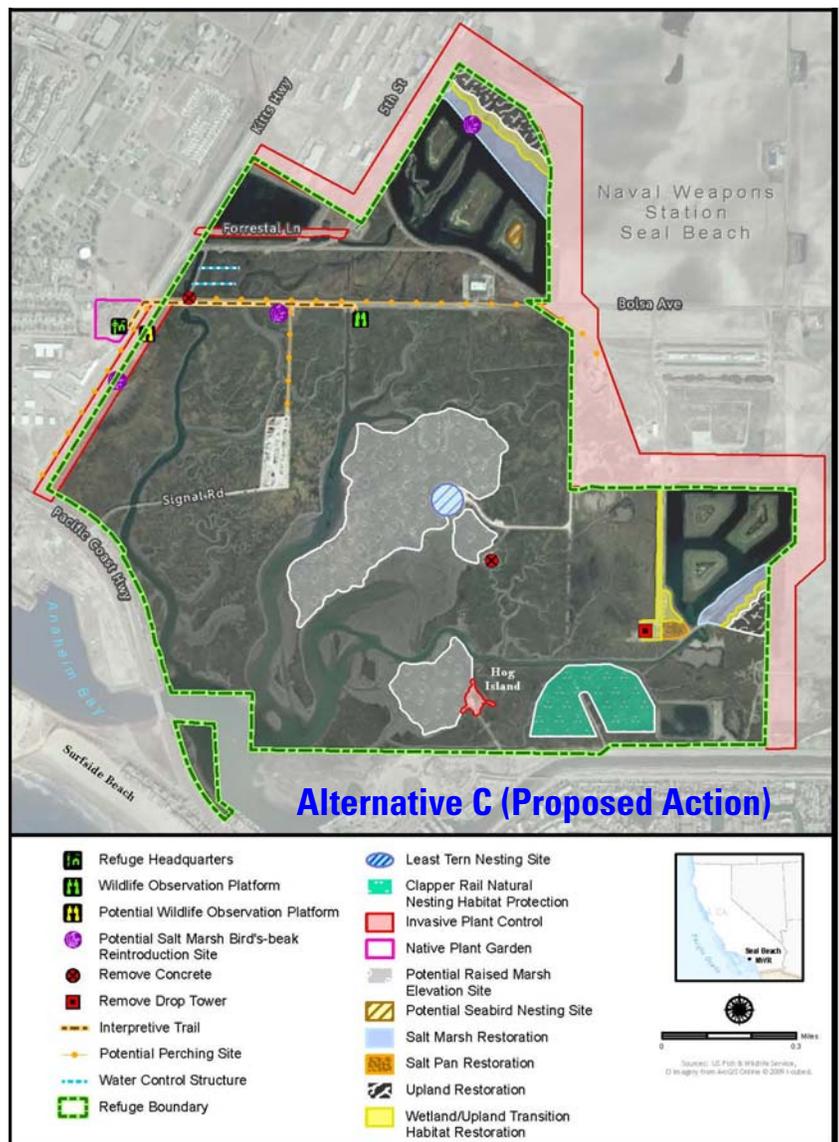
Management Alternatives Presented and Evaluated in the Draft CCP/EA

The CCP planning team was tasked with developing a range of alternatives for how the Seal Beach NWR should be managed over the next 15 years. As a result, three alternatives were developed and analyzed in the draft CCP/EA. The 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. Alternative C is identified in the draft CCP/EA as our proposed action. 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. The three alternatives analyzed in the draft CCP/EA are summarized below.

Alternative A, No Action: This alternative assumes no changes in current wildlife and habitat management programs or public use programs. It serves as the baseline to which all other action alternatives are compared.

Alternative B, Maximize Salt Marsh Restoration, Continue Current Public Uses: Under this alternative, current wildlife and habitat management activities would be expanded to include evaluation of current baseline data for fish, wildlife, and plants on the Refuge, identification of data gaps, implementation of species surveys to address data gaps as staff time and funding allows, and support for new research projects that would benefit Refuge management and resources. Also proposed is the restoration of about 22 acres of salt marsh and intertidal mudflat habitat and 15 acres of wetland/upland transition habitat. Pest control would be implemented through an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program and mosquito monitoring and control would be guided by a Mosquito Management Plan. No changes to the current public use program are proposed.

Alternative C (Proposed Action), Optimize Upland/Wetland Restoration, Improve Opportunities for Wildlife Observation: The management activities proposed under this alternative are very similar to those proposed under Alternative B, including the implementation of an IPM program and a Mosquito Management Plan. The primary difference between Alternatives B and C is that Alternative C emphasizes the restoration of upland and wetland/upland transition habitat, while Alternative B focuses on restoration of intertidal habitats. Under Alternative C, about 12 acres of currently disturbed upland would be restored to native upland habitat, ten acres would be restored to wetland/upland transition habitat, and 15 acres would be restored to intertidal habitat. Alternative C also includes some expansion of the current public use program, including new opportunities for wildlife observation.



View all of the Alternatives on the CCP Website (details on page 5)

Achieving the Goals of the Seal Beach NWR

Outlined below are the goals for the Seal Beach NWR. Although the goals are the same for each of the three alternatives, there are a variety of ways in which to achieve these goals. Therefore, the objectives and strategies for achieving each goal, which are described in Chapter 6 of the draft CCP/EA, vary among the three alternatives. The Refuge goals include:

- 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 migratory birds, as well as other native fish, wildlife, and plant species.
- 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 NWR and Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach, while preserving our respective missions.

Frequently Asked Questions About Reviewing a Draft CCP/EA

How long will I have to review the draft CCP/EA?

You will have 45 days to review and provide comments on the draft CCP/EA. To be sure your comments receive full consideration, they should arrive via mail, email, or fax by close of business on **Wednesday, May 11, 2011**.

What documents will be available for review?

Those documents that are available for review and comment include: 1) the draft CCP/EA; 2) Compatibility Determinations for a) Wildlife Observation, Interpretation, and Environmental Education, b) Scientific Research, and c) Mosquito Management (all provided as Appendix A of the CCP/EA); 3) a draft Integrated Pest Management Program (provided as Appendix C); 4) a draft Mosquito Management Plan (provided as Appendix D); and 5) a Wilderness Inventory (provided as Appendix H).

What options are available for reviewing the draft CCP/EA?

Documents that comprise the draft CCP/EA are available for review electronically and in print. All of the documents are available electronically on our Refuge Complex website, <http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov> (*Just click on Seal Beach NWR CCP in the Refuge Planning box in the upper left-hand corner of the webpage*). Printed versions of the draft CCP/EA are available for review at the Seal Beach Public Library and the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex headquarters (addresses provided on page 5). To save paper, reduce energy use, and keep costs down, all of the documents are provided on one easy to use Compact Disc (CD). A limited number of printed copies will be provided upon request. To request a CD or printed copy of the document, contact Victoria Touchstone (contact information provided on page 5).



Splish splash, a marbled godwit taking a bath.
Photo: USFWS/K.Gilligan

Where to Send Your Comments -

All comments on the draft CCP/EA should be received no later than **Wednesday, May 11, 2011**. Comments may be mailed, faxed, or emailed to the San Diego NWR Complex. Comments sent by mail should be addressed to:

Victoria Touchstone
USFWS, San Diego NWR Complex
6010 Hidden Valley Road, Suite 101
Carlsbad, CA 92011

Faxed comments should be directed to Victoria Touchstone at (760) 930-0256, and e-mailed comments, which should have "Seal Beach CCP" included on the subject line, should be directed to Victoria_Touchstone@fws.gov.

Comments should be specific and should address the document's adequacy and the merits of the alternatives described. Environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft stage may be waived if not raised until after the completion of the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

All comments received from the public will be placed in the Service's record for this action. As part of the record, comments will be made available for inspection by the general public, and copies may be provided to the public. For persons who do not wish to have their names and other identifying information made available, anonymous comments will be accepted.

Copies of the draft CCP/EA have been made available for review at the following locations:

San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex Headquarters - 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, CA
Office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Seal Beach/Mary Wilson Library - 707 Electric Avenue, Seal Beach, CA 90740
Call (562) 431-3584 for library hours.

Contact Information

For more information about the CCP process, 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@fws.gov

View the draft CCP/EA and the Alternatives Graphics on our CCP website:

<http://www.fws.gov/sandiegorefuges/>

(once at the site, click on Seal Beach NWR CCP in the Refuge Planning box located at the upper left-hand corner of the page)



**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
PAID
US Department
of the Interior
Permit G-77**

CCP Planning Schedule

April 2007	Initiated public scoping and held public scoping meetings
March 2011	Draft CCP/EA available for public review and comment
April 6, 2011	PUBLIC MEETING (see page 1)
May 11, 2011	Comment period on draft CCP/EA closes
June 2011	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).