



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and Coachella Valley NWR

Planning Update 3 - July 2013

Greetings!

This is the third in a series of *Planning Updates* for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex 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 planning 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 hold public meetings on July 30 and July 31, 2013 to take your comments. Information regarding where you can review the draft CCP and EA, how you can provide comments, and when and where we will hold public meetings can be found on pages 6 and 7.

Update from the Refuge Manager

Over the past year, we have been focusing on the completion of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Refuge Complex, while also working with partners to address the changing conditions at the Salton Sea. As the Salton Sea recedes, habitat to support wetland-dependent migratory birds is lost. To address this loss, we have been evaluating various proposals for restoring important foraging areas along the southern edge of the Sea. In April, the Refuge was informed by the California Department of Water Resources Salton Sea Restoration Program that our proposal to restore shallow water habitat in the Red Hill Bay area of the Salton Sea has been tentatively selected for funding. This phased restoration project, which is fully described in the draft CCP and EA, proposes to restore about 420 acres of foraging habitat to support shorebirds, waterfowl, and other waterbirds.

To find out more about this and other management actions that may be implemented on the Sonny Bono Salton Sea and Coachella Valley Refuges, we encourage you to review the draft CCP and EA, along with the accompanying draft Integrated Pest Management Plan and draft Predator Management Plan. On page 6, you will find information on how to share your comments with us. We have also scheduled two public meetings where you can provide comments.

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

Chris Schoneman, Refuge Manager
Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex

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**SHARE YOUR COMMENTS
AT THESE UPCOMING PUBLIC MEETINGS**

**July 30, 2013 from 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm in Palm Desert, CA
and
July 31, 2013 from 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm in Brawley, CA**

Public involvement is an important part of the CCP process and public review of the draft CCP and EA is another opportunity for you to get involved. Two public meetings have been scheduled for your convenience, one in Imperial County and one in Riverside County. At these meetings, we will provide an overview of the draft CCP and EA and an opportunity for you to share your comments with us. For more details, see page 6.

Why Prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

One of the primary reasons for preparing a CCP is to provide guidance on how best to achieve the purposes and goals of a refuge. The CCP describes the desired future conditions of the refuge and provides direction to the refuge manager and others on how to achieve those future conditions. CCPs are intended to ensure consistent management overtime, while also addressing the potential for adapting management actions when monitoring indicates that current actions are not accomplishing the anticipated results. CCPs also provide important background information such as why a refuge was established and what are its primary purposes. The information contained in a CCP also informs the public about the importance of the resources being conserved on a refuge and the opportunities available to enjoy and learn more about these resources.

Why were the Sonny Bono Salton Sea and Coachella Valley NWRs Established?

The Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and the Coachella Valley NWR are both part of the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex. Although both Refuges are located within the 8,000-square-mile Salton Basin of the Colorado Desert, the purposes of these two Refuges are as different as the habitats and species they protect. The Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR, which consists of approximately 37,660 acres, is situated at the south end of the Salton Sea, approximately 20 miles north of El Centro in Imperial County, California. Its purposes include the protection and management of a



Snow Geese on the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR

Photo: USFWS

diverse array of migratory birds, including providing green forage for wintering waterfowl in an effort to attract geese and other waterfowl away from commercial cropland in the area.



Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard

Photo: Ginny Short, Center for Natural Lands Management

About 75 miles to the northwest is the 3,577-acre Coachella Valley NWR, located approximately 10 miles east of Palm Springs in Riverside County, California. The purpose of this Refuge is to protect the federally threatened Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard (*Uma inornata*) and the federally endangered Coachella Valley milk-vetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus var. coachellae*), as well as to preserve the active sand dune and sand field habitat that is essential to the survival of these species.

What is a Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment?

The Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWRC draft CCP and 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. The draft CCP and EA includes a discussion of the purpose and need for the CCP; an outline of each Refuge's purposes, vision, goals, and objectives; a description of the affected environment (e.g., physical, biological and cultural resources, surrounding social and economic conditions); a presentation of the various refuge management alternatives being considered; and the potential effects to the environment (the environmental consequences) of implementing the various alternatives. The draft CCP and EA provides the public and various agencies with an understanding of the actions we are considering for achieving Refuge purposes and meeting the goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System. It also explains how the implementation of these actions could affect the environment.

Management Alternatives Presented and Evaluated in the Draft CCP and EA

In *Planning Update #2*, we discussed how the range of alternatives would be developed for each Refuge and invited you to share your comments regarding the primarily alternatives drafted by the planning team. We received a variety of comments, all of which were considered as we refined the alternatives and prepared the draft CCP and EA.

Summarized below are the management alternatives evaluated in the draft CCP and EA for each Refuge. Each alternative differs in the extent and focus of the wildlife and habitat management actions to be implemented, as well as in the types and intensity of public use opportunities to be provided. Although a proposed action has been identified for each Refuge, a final decision on which alternative to implement will not be made until after the draft CCP and EA has completed public review and all of the comments provided have been considered.

Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR

Alternative A - No Action: Under the No Action Alternative, present management activities would remain unchanged. Current conservation and management actions, including cooperating with other agencies to restore habitat in the Salton Sea, would continue per available funding and existing public use programs would continue at current levels. This alternative represents the baseline from which other “action” alternatives will be evaluated.

Alternative B - (Proposed Action) Restore and Enhance Habitat Quality; Expand Opportunities for Wildlife

Observation, Environmental Education, and Interpretation: In addition to the management activities currently being implemented on the Refuge, this alternative includes proposals to enhance and restore habitat quality within the Refuge to better achieve Refuge purposes. A proposal to restore open water habitat in the Red Hill Bay portion of the Salton Sea is included in this alternative. Also included are various proposals to increase opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreational use on the Refuge.

Alternative C - Restore and Enhance Habitat Quality; Improve the Quality of Existing Public Uses: Alternative C includes all of the proposals included in Alternative B that relate to wildlife and habitat management, habitat restoration, and general refuge operations. However, the public use proposals in Alternative C differ from those presented in Alternative B, with the emphasis under this alternative focused on improving existing facilities and/or the quality of the public use experience.

Coachella Valley NWR

Alternative A - No Action: Alternative A assumes no changes to current management practices, which would continue per available funding. The majority of the Refuge would remain closed to public access with the exception of the regional trail that extends along the western boundary and through the northern edge of the Refuge and special guided tours to support environmental education. This alternative represents the baseline from which other “action” alternatives will be evaluated.

Alternative B (Proposed Action) - Expand Management Actions to Support Listed and Sensitive Species; Expand Public Outreach: Alternative B expands current management actions to include a more defined role for Refuge staff in species monitoring; expanded control of invasive plants; restoration of mesquite hummocks; and long-term sand transport monitoring in partnership with others. Occasional guided tours would continue, the existing public trail would remain, and an off-Refuge interpretive program would be developed.

Alternative C - Expand Management Actions to Include Restoring Creosote Bush Scrub; Expand Public Outreach: Most the proposals in Alternative B area also included in Alternative C, however, rather than simply enhancing disturbed areas, Alternative C proposes to restore 400 acres of disturbed old agricultural fields to creosote bush scrub. In addition, this alternative proposes to install interpretive signage along the existing public trail.

Achieving Refuge Goals

Outlined below are the goals for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and the Coachella Valley NWR. Although the goals are the same for the three alternatives considered for each Refuge, there are a variety of ways in which to achieve these goals. Therefore, the strategies for achieving each goal vary among the alternatives.

The Refuge goals for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR include:

- Goal 1: Protect, manage, enhance, and restore foraging, loafing, and nesting habitats on the Refuge to support migratory birds.
- Goal 2: Protect, manage, and, where appropriate, enhance or restore habitat to support the recovery of federally and State listed threatened and endangered species and other species of concern known to occur on the Refuge.
- Goal 3: Manage and protect remnant native desert scrub habitat, tree rows, and riparian areas on the Refuge to support resident bird and other wildlife species, as well as nesting habitat for Neotropical bird species.
- Goal 4: Work in partnership with other Federal, State, and local agencies and tribes to restore, enhance, and adaptively manage habitat functions that support fish and bird life, as well as to protect other resources of region-wide significance, in and around the Salton Sea.
- Goal 5: Enhance the public's awareness, appreciation, and enjoyment of the Refuge's biological resources by providing opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses.

The Refuge goals for the Coachella Valley NWR include:

- Goal 1: Protect, restore, and enhance Refuge lands to contribute to the recovery of the federally threatened Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard and endangered Coachella Valley milk-vetch, as well as to conserve other species of concern supported on the Refuge.
- Goal 2: Through participation in a coordinated management effort involving all of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) partners, sustain the ecological and evolutionary processes necessary to maintain the viability of the natural communities and habitats that support the species identified in the CVMSHCP and manage these communities and habitats adaptively to be responsive to short- and long-term environmental change.
- Goal 3: Enhance the public's awareness, appreciation, and support for the Refuge's listed and sensitive species, as well as the ecological functions and geological processes that sustain these species, through compatible opportunities of environmental interpretation.

General Contact Information

For more information about the CCP process:

Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner

San Diego NWR Complex

P.O. Box 2358, Chula Vista, CA 91912

619-476-9150 ex. 103 (phone), 619-476-9149 (fax)

Email: victoria_touchstone@fws.gov

Concerns regarding Refuge operations:

Chris Schoneman, Project Leader

Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex

906 W. Sinclair Road, Calipatria, CA 92233-9744

760-348-5278 ex. 227 (phone), 760-348-7245 (fax)

Email: christian_schoneman@fws.gov

A Regional Perspective

The refuges of the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWRC, shown in yellow on the map, are located within the 8,360-square-mile Salton Basin, a large natural depression that extends for almost 200 miles through the Colorado Desert (a portion of the larger Sonoran Desert) from a narrow point at the base of the San Gorgonio Pass in Riverside County trending southeast to the Gulf of California in Mexico. The basin, which is the result of a deep, down-dropped fault block, occurs along the San Andres Fault at a point where two major tectonic plates, the North American Plate and the Pacific Plate, move past one another.

The Salton Basin is included within the boundaries of the Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC), a self-directed, non-regulatory regional partnership formed and being developed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as interested public and private entities in the Mojave, Sonoran, and Chihuahuan Desert regions of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. The Desert LCC, a collaborative effort that brings together resource managers, stakeholders, communities and others engaged in or supporting natural and cultural resource conservation within the LCCs geographical boundaries, focuses on acquiring and sharing information to support the development of landscape level strategies for understanding and responding to climate change impacts and other large-scale ecosystem stressors such as land use change, invasive species, wildfire, and drought. For more information visit: <http://www.usbr.gov/dlcc/>.



Providing Your Comments

Now available for your review is the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex draft CCP and EA. We invite you to provide us with your comments. Written comments on the draft CCP and EA can be provided via mail, fax, or email. Written and verbal comments can also be presented at the upcoming Public Meetings to be held in Palm Desert and Brawley (details below).

To enable us to analyze and respond to the comments at one time and to use this input in the preparation of the Final CCP, your comments should be provided no later than Thursday, August 15, 2013. 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).

Mailed, faxed, or emailed comments should be directed to:

Victoria Touchstone
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, San Diego NWR Complex
P.O. Box 2358, Chula Vista, CA 91912
Telephone - (619) 476-9150, extension 103
Facsimile - (619) 476-9149
Email - Victoria_Touchstone@fws.gov (include "Salton Sea CCP" in the subject line).

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 considered.



Notice of Public Meetings

We invite you to share your comments related to the draft CCP and EA for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex (Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and Coachella Valley NWR) at one of the following public meetings:

Coachella Valley Area

Tuesday, July 30, 2013 - 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm

University of California, Riverside-Palm Desert Graduate Center, 75080 Frank Sinatra Dr. (Room B114), Palm Desert, CA 92211

For directions go to: http://palmdesert.ucr.edu/about/maps_and_directions.html

The entrance is located on Frank Sinatra Drive.

You must be traveling westbound on Frank Sinatra Drive to enter the Center.

Imperial Valley Area

Wednesday, July 31, 2013 - 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm

Brawley Inn, 575 W. Main Street, Brawley CA 92227

Located in the northeast corner of W. Main Street and N. Las Flores Drive.

For directions, call Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner, (619-476-9150 ex. 103) or Chris Schoneman, Project Leader, (760-348-5278 ex. 227)

Frequently Asked Questions About Reviewing a Draft CCP and EA

How long do I have to review the draft CCP and EA?

You have 30 days to review and provide comments. To ensure that your comments receive full consideration, they should be provided by one of the methods described on page 6 no later than August 15, 2013.

What documents will be available for review?

Documents available for review include: the draft CCP and EA; Compatibility Determinations for all proposed public uses (Appendix A of the draft CCP and EA); draft Predator Management Plan for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR (Appendix C); draft Integrated Pest Management Plan for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex (Appendix D); and a Hunt Plan for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR (Appendix E).

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

All documents are available for review electronically and in print. Documents can be reviewed and/or downloaded at the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex website (http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Sonny_Bono_Salton_Sea/what_we_do/conservation.html). Printed versions of the draft CCP and EA are available at:

Brawley Public Library

400 Main Street, # 1

Brawley, CA 92227

Call (760) 344-1891 for library hours

Calipatria Branch Library

105 S. Lake Ave.

Calipatria, CA 92233

Call (760) 348-2630 for library hours

Palm Desert Public Library

73-300 Fred Waring Drive

Palm Desert, CA 92260

Call (760) 346-6552 for library hours

Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex Headquarters

906 W. Sinclair Road

Calipatria, CA 92233-9744

Call (760) 348-5278 for office hours

To save paper, reduce energy use, and keep costs down, all of the documents are provided on one easy to use Compact Disc (CD). To request a CD, contact Victoria Touchstone (contact information provided on page 4).

More information regarding the review and public comment period for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex CCP is provided on page 6.



**United States Department of the Interior
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Planning Schedule

September 2010	Initiated Public Scoping
July 2013	Draft CCP and EA available for public review and comment
July 30, 2013	Coachella Valley Public Meeting (see page 6)
July 31, 2013	Imperial Valley Public Meeting (see page 6)
August 15, 2013	Comment period on draft CCP and EA closes
September 2013	Publish Final CCP

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 4 for contact information). Please feel free to pass this *Planning Update* along to anyone you think might be interested in the CCP process for Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex. Thank you!