

Next Step - Developing Management Alternatives

Currently, we are evaluating issues and concerns identified during scoping, and developing a range of management alternatives. The alternatives will be analyzed in the

draft CCP/EIS, including a no action (no change) alternative which provides an environmental baseline to compare the potential impacts of the other alternatives.

Each alternative will represent a specific management concept or theme; various levels of management

intensity relevant to wildlife, flora, refuge administration, public use, and cultural resources; and degrees of facility development.

We encourage you to stay involved in refuge planning and comment on the draft alternatives when we present them in the Spring/Summer of 2009.

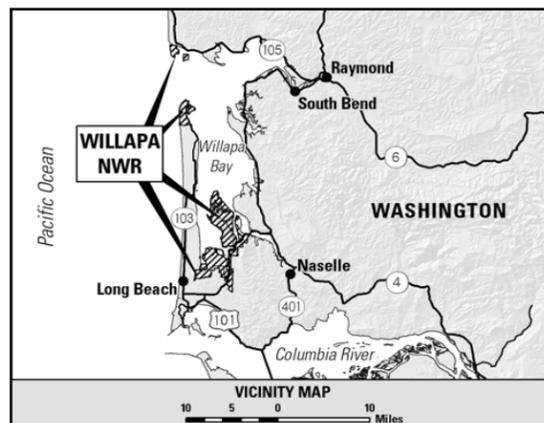
Any Questions or Concerns?

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Change of address requested.

In this issue:

A summary of the comments we received is provided.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Willapa National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 2, August 2008



Black brant with chick / USFWS

Thank You for Participating!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Willapa National Wildlife Refuge (refuge), located in Pacific County, Washington. When the CCP is completed, it will guide refuge management for 15 years.

As part of the CCP planning process, we requested public comments on management issues, concerns, and opportunities. A summary of the comments we received is on page 2, and the status of the planning process is on page 4.



Northern red-legged frog / USFWS

A detailed description of the comments we received is available in a Scoping Report posted on our website: <http://www.fws.gov/willapa/WillapaNWR/Index.html>.

Public Involvement in CCP Planning

In March 2008, approximately 400 copies of Planning Update 1 were distributed to local interest groups; conservation and research organizations; local, State, and Federal agencies; Tribes; and others interested in refuge planning. It was also available at the refuge and various local meetings. It described the CCP process; refuge purposes; draft wildlife, habitat, and public use goals; and preliminary issues.

Eight local newspapers and other media contacts received our news release announcing CCP development and requesting public input. Information was also posted on our website at www.fws.gov/willapa/.

On March 25 and 26, 2008, the refuge hosted two public meetings in South Bend and Ilwaco Washington,

respectively, to provide a brief overview of the refuge, explain the planning process, answer questions, and receive public comments. Ninety-seven people provided comments, concerns, and suggestions for managing the refuge.

In this planning update, we summarized and categorized the comments into a list of management issues we will use to draft alternatives and refine preliminary goals and objectives.

We would like to thank everyone who provided comments. Public involvement opportunities will occur throughout the planning process. We invite you to continue sharing your ideas with us. Your participation is critical to the success of this planning effort.



A 4th grader looking for frogs and salamanders during a field trip / USFWS



An endangered Western snowy plover / USFWS



A refuge employee planting pink sand verbena for a dune habitat restoration project / USFWS



Canada geese protecting their young from predators / USFWS



A refuge volunteer working on a project to reintroduce freshwater mussels to a stream / USFWS

What Were Your Concerns for the Refuge?

We received comments regarding broad, long range issues, as well as specific strategies for achieving biological or public use objectives. Many refuge visitors who observe and photograph wildlife, or hunt waterfowl, provided comments. Most comments suggested changes to public use programs, such as:

- Expanding areas where wildlife observation, photography, waterfowl hunting, and hiking are allowed.

- Altering the timing or location of uses to reduce user conflicts.
- Expanding interpretation and environmental education programs.
- Partnering with agencies and organizations that have common goals for the ecosystem.

Comment topics regarding wildlife and habitat management included: restoring native saltwater tidal marsh habitats through dike removal; controlling invasive species; improving

or expanding waterfowl habitat; and protecting endangered species. All comments and issues will be considered during development of the draft CCP. We are currently developing preliminary management alternatives and refining draft goals and objectives.

Your comments will be considered again when we draft strategies to meet biological and public use goals and objectives. We categorized most comments under the following six major planning issues.

Habitat Management: Is tidal marsh restoration a desirable action? If so, which units should be considered? On which units if any, should current management practices be continued?

Several commenters advised us to identify the proper balance between intensively managed habitats (wetlands, pastures, and croplands) and habitats that function naturally (diverse forests, wetlands), and manage resources accordingly.

Other comments stated that the refuge should be managed primarily to benefit waterfowl; while some commenters felt that restoration of native habitats should take priority in refuge management.

Some commenters expressed concern for the cost-benefit of maintaining dikes and water control structures. It was suggested that we should research tidal marsh

restoration projects to identify successes and failures; and consider the implications of climate change and sea-level rise to tidal marsh habitat, as part of the planning process.

Response: *We will examine a range of alternatives for maintaining and enhancing existing habitats, in addition to examining options for habitat restoration, during development of the draft CCP.*

Refuge Boundary Expansion: Should refuge boundary expansion be considered? If so, which properties should be considered and for what reasons?

Some commenters stated that land acquisition should be a priority where sensitive habitats are in need of protection. Others added that the refuge should strive to continue to acquire lands that would create a more efficient land pattern to

manage; and top priorities should be expanding the refuge and controlling invasive species.

It was noted that development and the cost of available land will continue to increase, therefore, now is the time to buy as much land as possible. Lack of public access to recently acquired lands was a concern for additional land acquisition.

Response: *Several land acquisition recommendations were made. We will consider these, examine the overall landscape, and potentially propose modifications to the existing land acquisition boundary. If funding becomes available and there are willing sellers, acquiring land within the existing approved acquisition boundary is the refuge's current acquisition priority.*

Western Snowy Plover Protection: What management actions would better protect Western snowy plovers from disturbance and predation while measures to protect and restore habitat are occurring?

Comments were made in support of protecting the plover. Other endangered/threatened species comments focused on critiquing current protection strategies.

Response: *Current and future protection and recovery efforts for the Western snowy plover and its habitat will be addressed in the CCP.*

Leadbetter Unit Elk Management: What management actions would alleviate threats to rare plants and animals, caused by elk on the Unit?

Many commenters favored hunting, to decrease, but not completely remove, the number of elk from the unit. Some suggested issuing special

elk hunting permits or tags in conjunction with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Some commenters stated that they enjoy walking on the unit's beaches and trails, and oppose hunting. Some asked if capturing and relocating elk is being considered.

There is also concern that if an elk hunt is established, elk would move on to and damage nearby private lands, specifically, agricultural lands producing cranberries.

Response: *We will address elk management in detail in the CCP.*

Forest Management: What forest management practices would restore the refuge's forest complexity and biodiversity?

Public comments indicated that restoring forest habitat should be a management focus. Some advocated partnering with adjacent landowners, universities, and scientists to restore

forests and streams. Others stated that the welfare of endangered forest species—marbled murrelets and spotted owls—should be considered, and surveys should be conducted to maintain their habitat.

Establishing a staff forestry position was suggested. Many commenters

supported forest restoration, but were concerned that road removal would limit access for hunting.

Response: *Through the CCP planning process, we will examine forest resources at the ecosystem and refuge levels, and develop appropriate objectives and strategies.*

Public Use: Should the Refuge's wildlife-dependent recreational uses be expanded or reduced? What opportunities are available that would satisfy public needs and conserve resources?

Some comments were in support of current hunting opportunities and some comments noted concern that too much focus is on hunting and not on other public uses. Several

comments expressed concern with the goose hunt and associated pasture maintenance at the Riekkola Unit. Some suggested notifying refuge visitors using signs, when hunters may be present. Some comments advocated expanding environmental education and increasing the Salmon Art and Cutthroat Climb Trails' operating hours.

Response: *In the CCP we will analyze a number of public use issues, including how to accommodate diverse user groups, and which refuge areas could facilitate public uses while meeting the refuge's wildlife conservation mission.*

Other Comments: Several comments about funding were made, including needing more funds to adequately manage the refuge and to implement the CCP. Comments regarding research and scientific studies primarily emphasized the need for

more collaborative biological research, noting that better baseline data is needed for refuge management. A number of meeting attendees had ideas about how community groups, agencies, and others, could assist us with accomplishing our mission.

Response: *We will examine research and monitoring needs and opportunities, and develop strategies for incorporating the results into refuge management. We will also examine and pursue additional partnership opportunities.*