

Chapter 5. Administration



USFWS

Osprey

Introduction

Management and administrative staff for the Complex will be headquartered in the Complex's new office facility that was completed in 2001 and is located on Blackwater NWR, 10 miles south of Cambridge, Maryland. In addition to administering Blackwater, Martin, and Susquehanna NWRs, and their respective divisions, future consideration will be given to adding administrative responsibilities for Eastern Neck NWR.

Refuge Staffing

Current and future staff positions are identified in the Staffing Chart (Appendix D). Additional positions identified will be subject to availability of funding and appropriations. However, the base number of full-time equivalent positions for the current Complex has been determined to be 19 staff: three managerial positions; four biologists; a forester; three visitor services specialists; a law enforcement officer; two administrative personnel; and five maintenance professionals. Three of these positions (forester, visitor services specialist, and heavy equipment mechanic) are currently vacant and will be hired by the end of FY 2007. Seven additional positions (four associated with the Nanticoke division) will be required to fully accomplish the plan's goals and objectives, and these positions will be hired as funds become available. Seasonal positions and interns will be hired for specific projects, also as funding becomes available. Interns will typically work 8-12 weeks each summer, and be offered free housing in the bunkhouse or other temporary quarters.

In addition to the operational staff positions identified above, the fire management program will be supported by the following full-time positions: Fire Management Officer, dispatcher, fire control officer, wildfire specialist, a lead forestry technician; and a forestry technician/firefighter. Four seasonal forestry technicians/firefighters will be hired annually. All of these positions are currently funded, and no additional positions are needed to achieve CCP objectives.

Refuge Funding

Successful implementation of the CCP relies on our ability to secure funding, personnel, infrastructure, and other resources to accomplish the actions identified. The existing annual operating budget for the Complex is approximately \$2.1 million, plus an additional \$500,000 for the annual fire management program. Full implementation of the actions and strategies in this CCP would incur one-time costs of an additional \$9.2 million and annual recurring costs of an additional \$2.4 million. The existing Refuge Operating and Needs (RONS) database presents a list of specific projects, and identifies associated one-time costs and recurring costs to fully implement this plan. Refuge staff can provide information about projects in the database. Grants and donations are also important funding components for the Complex, generating hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. These funds, often acquired through the cooperative agreement with the Friends of Blackwater, a non-profit refuge support group, are essential for operating many programs. Partnerships with local, regional, national, and international stakeholders and other interested parties are likewise very important, and will be pursued.

Step-down Management Plans

The Refuge Manual (Part 4, Chapter 3) lists a number of stepdown management plans generally required on most refuges. These plans describe specific management actions refuges will follow to achieve objectives or implement management strategies. Some require annual revisions, such as hunt plans, while others are revised on a 5-to-10 year schedule. Some of these plans require NEPA analysis before they can be implemented. A list of Step-Down Management Plans can be obtained from the refuge.

Maintaining Existing Facilities

Periodic maintenance of existing facilities is critical to ensure safety and accessibility for refuge staff and visitors. Existing facilities include the refuge headquarters, maintenance compound, Bunkhouse, numerous parking areas and gates, numerous kiosks, trails, and roads. Some of these facilities are not currently Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant; upgrading is needed. The System Asset Maintenance Management System (SAMMS) is database list of maintenance needs for the refuge. Please contact the refuge for information about the current list.

Compatibility Determinations

Federal law and policy provide the direction and planning framework to protect the Refuge System from incompatible or harmful human activities and to ensure that Americans can enjoy Refuge System lands and waters. The Administration Act, as amended by the Refuge Improvement Act, is the key legislation on managing public uses and compatibility. Before activities or uses are allowed on a national wildlife refuge, we must determine that each is a “compatible use.” A compatible use is a use that, based on the sound professional judgment of the Refuge Manager, “...will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the Refuge System or the purposes of the refuge.” “Wildlife-dependent recreational uses may be authorized on a refuge when they are compatible and not inconsistent with public safety (Refuge Improvement Act). Compatibility Determinations (CDs) were distributed (in the draft CCP/EA) for a 40 day public review in May – July 2005. These CDs have since been approved, and will allow the continuation of the following public use programs: wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, interpretation, fishing, and hunting. All comments were considered and utilized in the revision. These new CDs are now final and included in Appendix E.

Additional CDs will be developed when appropriate new uses are proposed. CDs will be re-evaluated by the Refuge Manager when conditions under which the use is permitted change significantly; when there is significant new information on effects of the use; or at least every 10 years for non-priority public uses. Priority public use CDs will be re-evaluated under the conditions noted above, or at least every 15 years with revision of the CCP. Additional detail on the CD process is in Parts 25, 26, and 29 of Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations, effective November 17, 2000.

Appropriate Uses

To allow the use of a national wildlife refuge, the refuge manager must find that the use is both appropriate and compatible. A policy for dealing with determinations of appropriateness was released to the public on July 20, 2006 and became final in July of 2006. The policy requires that each refuge develop determinations of appropriateness for all activities that occur on the refuge within one year of the final policy, unless they are adequately described in a refuge CCP. This CCP addresses all of the allowed uses for the Complex. Any future compatibility determinations will include findings of appropriateness.

The appropriate uses policy states that refuges are first and foremost national treasures for the conservation of wildlife. Through careful planning, consistent Refuge Systemwide application of regulations and policies, diligent monitoring of the impacts of uses on wildlife resources, and preventing or eliminating uses not appropriate to the Refuge System, we can achieve the Refuge System conservation mission while also providing the public with lasting opportunities to enjoy quality, compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation.

The “Appropriate Uses” policy provides refuge managers consistent guidelines to administer and structure recreational activities. The policy provides a framework to determine if activities that are not wildlife-dependent may be appropriate for a particular refuge.

Wilderness

As required by Service policy, the refuge staff evaluated the lands of each national wildlife refuge included in this CCP for consideration of Wilderness designation. The Wilderness Act of 1964 established the National Wilderness Preservation System and requires that federal lands be reviewed for appropriateness for inclusion in that System. Appendix F provides the Wilderness Review that was conducted.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This Final CCP covers a 15-year period. Periodic review of the CCP is required to ensure that established goals and objectives are being met, and that the plan is being implemented as scheduled. To assist this review process, a monitoring and evaluation program will be implemented, focusing on issues involving public use activities, and wildlife habitat and population management.

Monitoring of public use programs will involve the continued collection and compilation of visitation figures and activity levels. In addition, research and monitoring programs will be established to assess the impacts of public use activities on wildlife and wildlife habitat, assess conflicts between types of refuge uses, and to identify compatible levels of public use activities. We will reduce these public use activities if we determine that incompatible levels are occurring. We will monitor refuge habitat management programs for positive and negative impacts on wildlife habitat and populations and the ecological integrity of the ecosystem. The monitoring will be of assistance in determining if these management activities are helping to meet refuge goals. Information resulting from monitoring would allow staff to set more specific and better management objectives, more rigorously evaluate management objectives, and ultimately, make better management decisions. This process of evaluation, implementation and reevaluation is known simply as “adaptive resource management”.

Monitoring and Evaluation for this CCP will occur at two levels. The first level, which we refer to as implementation monitoring, responds to the question, “Did we do what we said we would do, when we said we would do it?” The second level of monitoring, which we refer to as effectiveness monitoring, responds to the question, “Are the actions we proposed effective in achieving the results we had hoped for?” Or, in other words, “Are the actions leading us toward our vision, goals, and objectives?” Effectiveness monitoring evaluates an individual action, a suite of actions, or an entire resource program. This approach is more analytical in evaluating management effects on species, populations, habitats, refuge visitors, ecosystem integrity, or the socioeconomic environment. More often, the criteria to monitor and evaluate these management effects will be established in step-down, individual project, or cooperator plans, or through the research program. The Habitat and Wildlife Inventory and Monitoring Plan, to be completed, will be based on the needs and priorities identified in the HMP.

Adaptive Management

This CCP is a dynamic document. A strategy of adaptive management will keep it relevant and current. Through scientific research, inventories and monitoring, and our management experiences, we will gain new information which may alter our course of action. We acknowledge that our information on species, habitats, and ecosystems is incomplete, provisional, and subject to change as our knowledge base improves. Objectives and strategies must be adaptable in responding to new information, as well as changes in time and location. We will continually evaluate management actions, through monitoring or research, and to reconsider whether their original assumptions and predictions are still valid. In this way, management becomes an active process of learning “what really works”. It is important that the public understand and appreciate the adaptive nature of natural resource management.

The Refuge Manager is responsible for changing management actions or objectives if they do not produce the desired conditions. Significant changes may warrant additional NEPA analysis; minor changes will not, but will be documented in annual monitoring, project evaluation reports, or the annual refuge narratives.

Additional NEPA Analysis

NEPA requires a site specific analysis of impacts for all federal actions. These impacts are to be disclosed in either an EA or EIS. Most of the actions and associated impacts in this plan were described in enough detail in the draft CCP/EA to comply with NEPA, and will not require additional environmental analysis. Although this is not an all inclusive list, the following programs are examples that fall into this category: protecting and restoring wildlife habitat, implementing priority wildlife dependent public use programs, acquiring land, and controlling invasive plants.

Two actions described in the draft CCP/EA have been addressed under separate EA's. The Atlantic white cedar restoration and the reintroduction of red-cockaded woodpeckers are projects that have moved forward under these project-specific EA's. A few actions may not be described in enough detail to comply with the site specific analysis requirements of NEPA. Examples of actions that may require a separate EA include: future habitat restoration projects not fully developed or delineated in this document or any identified projects that may have changed significantly from what is described in the draft CCP/EA. Monitoring, evaluation, and research can generally be increased without additional NEPA analysis.

Plan Amendment and Revision

Periodic review of the CCP will be required to ensure that objectives are being met and management actions are being implemented. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be an important part of this process. Monitoring results or new information may indicate the need to change our strategies.

The Service's planning policy (FWS Manual, Part 602, Chapters 1, 3, and 4) states that CCPs should be reviewed at least annually to decide if they require any revisions (Chapter 3, part 3.4 (8)). Revisions will be necessary if significant new information becomes available, ecological conditions change, major refuge expansions occur, or when we identify the need to do so during a program review. At a minimum, CCPs will be fully revised every 15 years. We will modify the CCP documents and associated management activities as needed, following the procedures outlined in Service policy and NEPA requirements. Minor revisions that meet the criteria for categorical exclusions (550 FW 3.3C) will only require an Environmental Action Statement