

Information About CCPs

During the CCP planning process, we will consider many elements of refuge management, including wildlife, habitat, and visitor services management. Public input during the planning process is essential. The CCP will describe the refuge purposes and desired conditions for the refuge and the long-term conservation goals, objectives and strategies for fulfilling refuge purposes and achieving desired conditions.

Refuge Overview

Columbia Refuge was established “as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife,” and “for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” It fills an important role in the management of mallard, northern pintail, and lesser Canada goose populations during migration and wintering periods, and is the primary migratory stopover area for the Pacific Coast population of the lesser sandhill crane. The refuge covers almost 30,000 acres in the arid Columbia Basin of south-central Washington State straddling Crab Creek, between Potholes Reservoir and the Columbia River in both Grant and Adams Counties. The refuge is divided into six management units primarily arranged according to land type. Most of the refuge is within the Drumheller Channels National Natural Landmark. It is also located along the Pacific Flyway and has become a particularly important stopover and wintering ground for migratory birds and waterfowl. In addition, cackling geese, sandhill cranes, and neotropical birds consume the refuge’s grain crops. Birds of prey, such as red-tailed hawks, hunt for rodents and other small mammals living in the refuge’s agricultural fields.

Various visitor services and activities take place on the refuge, including hiking, boating, fishing, hunting, wildlife observation and photography, nature and cultural resources interpretation, and environmental education.

Preliminary Issues and Concerns

We have identified the following preliminary issues, concerns, and opportunities that we may address in the CCP. We may identify additional issues during public scoping.

- How can we best protect and restore populations of priority species on the refuge?
- How can we best achieve optimal habitat conditions on the refuge for priority species?

- How can we protect refuge habitats from invasive species, wildfire risks, over-grazing, vandalism, and other disturbances and threats, and restore habitat values?

- Which compatible wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities on the refuge should be expanded, developed, or modified?

- What are the refuge’s land acquisition priorities within its approved boundary, and should boundary expansion be considered?

- How can we meet refuge staffing needs?

Public Open House Meeting

A public open house meeting will be held on June 16, 2009, from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the City of Othello’s Municipal Building (City Hall), City Council Chambers, 500 East Main Street, Othello, WA 99344, to provide information on the CCP and receive public comments. Opportunities for public input will be announced throughout the CCP planning process.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

All comments and materials we receive from individuals on our NEPA documents become part of the official public record. We will handle requests for such comments in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, NEPA, and Department of the Interior and Service policies and procedures.

Dated: May 19, 2009.

Don Weathers,

Acting Regional Director, Region 1, Portland, Oregon.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R4-R-2009-N0075; 40136-1265-0000-S3]

Mandalay National Wildlife Refuge, Terrebonne Parish, LA

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability; draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce the availability of a draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment (Draft CCP/EA) for Mandalay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) for public review and comment. In this Draft CCP/EA, we describe the alternative we propose to use to manage this refuge for the 15 years following approval of the final CCP.

DATES: To ensure consideration, we must receive your written comments by June 29, 2009.

ADDRESSES: Send comments, questions, and requests for information to: Mr. Paul Yakupzack, Refuge Manager, Mandalay NWR, 3599 Bayou Black Drive, Houma, LA 70360. The Draft CCP/EA is available on compact disk or in hard copy. The Draft CCP/EA may also be accessed and downloaded from the Service’s Internet Site: <http://southeast.fws.gov/planning/>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Paul Yakupzack; telephone: 985/853-1078; fax: 985/853-1079; e-mail: paul_yakupzack@fws.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

With this notice, we continue the CCP process for Mandalay NWR. We started this process through a notice in the **Federal Register** on March 19, 2007 (72 FR 12811).

Background

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee) (Improvement Act), which amended the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, requires us to develop a CCP for each national wildlife refuge. The purpose for developing a CCP is to provide refuge managers with a 15-year strategy for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife management, conservation, legal mandates, and our policies. In addition to outlining broad management direction on conserving wildlife and their habitats, CCPs identify wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities available to the public, including opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation. We will review and update the CCP at least

every 15 years in accordance with the Improvement Act.

Mandalay NWR, approximately 5 miles west of Houma, Louisiana, was established on May 2, 1996, with the purchase of 4,416 acres under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The refuge, predominantly freshwater marsh and cypress-tupelo swamp, provides excellent habitat for waterfowl, wading birds, and neotropical songbirds. Access is by boat, except for the headquarters building on Highway 182 (Bayou Black Drive) and a nearby nature trail. Mandalay NWR is administered as one of eight refuges of the Southeast Louisiana NWR Complex, headquartered in Lacombe, Louisiana.

CCP Alternatives, Including Our Proposed Alternative

We developed three alternatives for managing the refuge and chose Alternative B as the proposed alternative. A full description is in the Draft CCP/EA. We summarize each alternative below.

Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, no new actions would be taken to improve or enhance the refuge's current habitat, wildlife, and public use management programs. Species of Federal responsibility, such as threatened and endangered species and migratory birds, would continue to be monitored at present levels. Additional species monitoring would occur through the use of volunteers as they become available. Current programs of marsh management would be maintained. No progressive wetland restoration projects would be implemented. All public use programs of fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation would continue at present levels and with current facilities.

Acquisition of lands into the refuge would occur when funding is appropriated and willing sellers offer land that is quality waterfowl habitat. Staff would consist of a manager and a biologist for both Mandalay NWR and Bayou Teche NWR, along with supplementary support from the Southeast Louisiana NWR Complex staff when needed. The refuge headquarters would serve as an administrative office, with no enhancement of the grounds for public use.

Alternative B—Natural Resource Management (Proposed Alternative)

Alternative B would emphasize management of the natural resources of

Mandalay NWR based on maintaining and improving wetland habitats, monitoring targeted flora and fauna representative of the Terrebonne Basin, and providing quality public use programs and wildlife-dependent recreational activities. All species occurring on the refuge would be considered and certain targeted species would be managed and monitored, in addition to species of Federal responsibility. These species would be chosen based on the criteria that they would be indicators of the health of important habitat or species of concern.

Wetland loss would be documented and, whenever possible, the lost wetlands would be restored. Public use programs would be improved by offering more facilities and wildlife observation areas. Public use facilities would undergo annual reviews for maintenance needs and safety concerns. Overall public use would be monitored to determine if any uses would negatively impact refuge resources. Education programs would be reviewed and improved to complement current refuge management and staffing. Archaeological resources would be surveyed.

Land acquisition within the approved acquisition boundary would be based on importance of the habitat for target management species. The refuge headquarters would house a small administrative office. The staff would offer interpretation of refuge wildlife and habitats, as well as demonstrate habitat improvements for individual landowners. The main interpretive facilities would be housed at the Southeast Louisiana NWR Complex Headquarters in Lacombe, Louisiana.

In general, under Alternative B, management decisions and actions would support wildlife species and habitats occurring on the refuge based on well-planned strategies and sound scientific judgment. Quality wildlife-dependent recreational uses and environmental education and interpretation programs would be offered to support and explain the natural resources of the refuge.

Alternative C—Maximized Public Use

Alternative C would emphasize managing the natural resources of Mandalay NWR for maximized public use activities. The majority of staff time and efforts would support hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation. Federal trust species and archaeological resources would be monitored as mandated.

All refuge programs for conservation of wildlife and habitats, such as monitoring, surveying, and managing marsh, would support species and resources of importance for public use. More emphasis would be placed on interpreting and demonstrating these programs. Access, through means such as trails for walking and dredged areas for boat access, would be maximized, and we would provide public use facilities throughout the refuge.

Land acquisition within the approved acquisition boundary would be based on importance of the habitat for public use. The refuge headquarters would provide a small administrative office and a visitor center, which would be developed for public use activities.

In general, Alternative C would focus on expanding public use activities to the fullest extent possible and conducting only mandated resource protection.

Next Step

After the comment period ends, we will analyze the comments and address them.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Authority: This notice is published under the authority of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105-57.

Dated: April 21, 2009.

Jacquelyn B. Parrish,

Acting Regional Director.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[CO-921-05-1320-EL; COC-70615]

Notice of Public Meeting, To Receive for Comments on an Environmental Analysis, Finding of No Significant Impact, Maximum Economic Recovery Report, and Fair Market Value for Coal Lease Application COC-70615

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.