

contrasting other alternatives. It continues to focus on restoring hydrology and habitat, maintaining roads, acquiring 4,000 acres of land inside the refuge boundary as it becomes available from willing sellers, restoring 1,000 acres of Atlantic white cedar, and enhancing 2,000 acres of pocosin/pine habitat for reintroduction of red-cockaded woodpeckers. It continues to provide current levels of environmental education and interpretation, boating and fishing on Lake Drummond, and annual deer hunting.

Alternative B (the Service-preferred alternative) directs the refuge toward an optimal level of habitat management and public use based on the vision for the refuge at the time of its establishment in 1974. Alternative B proposes the restoration of 8,000 acres of Atlantic white cedar habitat; the restoration of 10,000 acres of red-cockaded woodpecker habitat; and the restoration of a remnant marsh to its original 250 acres from its present 30 acres. We would establish a neotropical migratory bird focus area near Jericho Lane, in which we would focus habitat management and modeling, population surveys, and education and interpretation related to neotropical migratory bird populations. As a part of our preferred alternative, we have proposed to implement a limited bear hunt. This hunt would occur on a total of 2 days during November and December, with a total maximum of 100 permits issued. We anticipate a harvest of approximately 11 bears with a harvest limit target of 20 bears. If 10 or more bears are taken the first day, various parameters will be evaluated and the second hunt day may be cancelled. As with the deer hunt, dogs will not be allowed as a means to hunt bears. The bear hunt is currently authorized in the code of federal regulations (50 CFR part 32), but has never been implemented.

Our preferred alternative also proposes the following building projects: The development of an environmental education site at Jericho Ditch in Suffolk, Virginia. We will also develop an exhibit to be sited at the downtown visitor center that is run by the City of Suffolk. Additionally, we propose the conversion of the current administrative building for concessions, and the construction of a new visitor center and headquarters between the old and new Route 17 in Chesapeake, Virginia, and the construction of new trails, observation and photography platforms, or towers. The CCP proposes to enhance environmental education and outreach, establish hunter safety and youth hunting programs, and

provide interpretative canoe or kayak tours through a concessionaire.

Alternative C (limited habitat management) reduces our emphasis on habitat management compared to current refuge operations, but significantly expands visitor services and public use. It also emphasizes monitoring and researching opportunities.

All three alternatives share some priorities. They manage invasive or exotic species and pine/pocosin habitats. They manage hydrology to slow the rate of surface drainage from the refuge, maintain normal flooding patterns, manage stands of Atlantic white cedar, and conserve water for suppressing fires. Finally, they continue to provide opportunities for compatible public use such as hunting, fishing, environmental education and interpretation, wildlife observation and photography, and off-refuge outreach and partnerships.

A Wilderness Review was also conducted for Great Dismal Swamp NWR as part of this planning process. No areas were recommended for designation because none of the wilderness inventory areas met wilderness criteria.

Dated: February 24, 2006.

Marvin E. Moriarty,
Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Red River National Wildlife Refuge

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Red River National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana.

SUMMARY: This notice advises the public that the Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region, intends to gather information necessary to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act and its implementing regulations.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, requires the Service to develop a comprehensive conservation plan for each national wildlife refuge. The purpose in

developing a comprehensive conservation plan 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 Service policies. In addition to outlining broad management direction on conserving wildlife and their habitat, plans identify wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities available to the public, including opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

The purpose of this notice is to achieve the following:

- (1) Advise other agencies and the public of our intentions, and
- (2) Obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to include in the environmental document.

DATES: Announcements will inform people of opportunities for written input throughout the planning process. Public scoping meetings are planned and will be announced in local newspapers approximately 10 days prior to the meetings.

ADDRESSES: Comments and requests for more information regarding the Red River National Wildlife Refuge planning process should be sent to: Lindy Garner, Natural Resource Planner, North Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex, 11372 Highway 143, Farmerville, Louisiana 71241; Telephone: (318) 762-4222, ext. 5; Fax: (318) 726-4667; E-mail: northlarefuges@fws.gov. To ensure consideration, written comments must be received no later than April 12, 2006.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The refuge was created by Congress on October 13, 2000, with the passage of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge Act. Land acquisition for the refuge commenced in August 2002. There are three purposes of the refuge, as stated in the Red River National Wildlife Refuge Act:

- To provide for the restoration and conservation of native plants and animal communities on suitable sites in the Red River basin, including restoration of extirpated species.
- To provide habitat for migratory birds, and
- To provide technical assistance to private landowners in the restoration of their lands for the benefit of fish and wildlife.

The refuge's enabling legislation authorizes it to acquire up to approximately 50,000 acres of Federal lands and waters along that section of

the Red River between Colfax, Louisiana, and the Arkansas state line, a distance of approximately 120 miles. The refuge growth will be strategically planned within the following five focus units:

- Lower Cane River (Natchitoches Parish).
- Spanish Lake Lowlands (Natchitoches Parish).
- Bayou Pierre Floodplain (Desoto and Red River Parishes).
- Headquarters Site (Bossier Parish).
- Wardview (Caddo Parish).

Currently, the refuge consists of 7,721 acres of fee title lands comprised of restored bottomland hardwood forest, moist soils, shrub/scrub, and fallow agricultural lands within four of the separate units. A headquarters/visitor center site is included near Shreveport/Bossier City. Another 1,100 acres of lands are under a management agreement at the Spanish Lake Lowlands Unit.

The Service will conduct a comprehensive conservation planning process that will provide opportunity for state and local government agencies, organizations, and the public to participate in issue scoping and public comment. Comments received by the planning team will be used as part of the planning process. All comments received from individuals become part of the official public record. Requests for such comments will be handled in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA regulations [40 CFR 1506.6(f)].

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

Dated: February 21, 2006.

Cynthia K. Dohner,

Acting Regional Director.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Draft Recovery Plan for *Hackelia venusta* (Showy Stickseed)

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of document availability for review and comment.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ("we"), announce the availability of the Draft Recovery Plan for *Hackelia venusta* (Showy Stickseed), for public review and comment.

DATES: Comments on the draft recovery plan must be received on or before May 12, 2006.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the draft recovery plan are available for inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the following location: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Central Washington Field Office, 215 Melody Lane, Wenatchee, Washington 98801 (telephone: 509-665-3508). Requests for copies of the draft recovery plan and written comments and materials regarding this plan should be addressed to the Field Supervisor, Ecological Services, at the above Wenatchee address. An electronic copy of the draft recovery plan is also available online at <http://endangered.fws.gov/recovery/index.html#plans>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim McCracken, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, at the above Wenatchee address.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Restoring endangered or threatened animals and plants to the point where they are again secure, self-sustaining members of their ecosystems is a primary goal of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and our endangered species program. The ESA (16 U.S.C. 1533 (f)) requires the development of recovery plans for listed species unless such a plan would not promote the conservation of a particular species. Recovery plans help guide the recovery effort by describing actions considered necessary for the conservation of the species, establishing criteria for downlisting or delisting listed species, and estimating time and cost for implementing the measures needed for recovery (16 U.S.C. 1533 (f)).

Section 4(f) of the ESA also requires that public notice, and an opportunity for public review and comment, be provided during recovery plan development. We will consider all information presented during the public comment period in the development of each new or revised recovery plan. Comments received may result in changes to the draft recovery plan. Comments regarding recovery plan implementation may be forwarded to appropriate Federal or other entities so that they can take these comments into account during the course of implementing recovery actions. Individual responses to comments will not be provided.

Showy stickseed (*Hackelia venusta*) is a perennial plant with showy white or blue-tinged flowers in the forget-me-not plant family (Boraginaceae). The species is a narrow endemic, being known from

only 1 population of roughly 600 individuals in Chelan County, Washington. It occurs primarily on Federal lands, but a very small portion of the population is on private lands. Within its limited range, *Hackelia venusta* is found in open areas of steeply sloping, highly unstable granitic sand and granite cliffs. The common feature to its habitat appears to be the relatively sparse cover of other vascular plants and low canopy cover.

Hackelia venusta was listed as an endangered species on February 6, 2002 (67 FR 5515). The major threats to *Hackelia venusta* include collection and physical disturbance to the plants and habitat by humans, mass wasting (landslides), nonnative noxious weeds, competition and shading from native trees and shrubs due to fire suppression, some highway maintenance activities, and low seedling establishment. The small population size and limited geographic extent of the species exacerbates all of these threats, and renders *Hackelia venusta* highly vulnerable to extirpation or extinction from either human-caused or random natural events.

Objectives of a recovery plan would be to reduce the threats to *Hackelia venusta* and increase population size and geographic distribution. The first step in the recovery strategy for the species would be to protect and stabilize the existing population. This would include management to maintain an open habitat, noxious weed control, minimizing the damage of collection and trampling within the population, seed collection and long-term seed banking to protect the genetic resources of the species, and the development and implementation of management plans. In addition, to reduce the potential for extinction due to loss of the single population, recovery actions will likely require establishing additional populations within the estimated historical range of the species.

Public Comments Solicited

We solicit written comments on the draft recovery plan described in this notice. All comments received by the date specified above will be considered in the development of this plan.

Authority

The authority for this action is section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f).