

Alternative A, Current Management (No Action)

Alternative A is the no-action alternative, which represents the current management of the refuge. This alternative provides the baseline against which to compare the other alternatives. It also fulfills the requirement in the National Environmental Policy Act that a no-action alternative be addressed in the analysis process.

Under alternative A, management activity currently conducted by the Service would remain the same. The Service would continue to manage and monitor refuge habitats at current levels. The Bitterroot River would continue to migrate through the refuge, eroding some levees and trails. Invasive species would be treated primarily with mechanical and chemical methods as resources become available. Water supply and management structures would be inadequate to properly manage many of the wetland impoundments. Cattail monocultures would be treated. The current staff of five would perform limited, issue-driven research and monitor only long-term wildlife and vegetation changes. Visitor services programs and facilities would be maintained or expanded as resources become available. Funding and staff levels would follow annual budget allocations provided for refuge operations on Service lands.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

This alternative focuses on the expansion and restoration of native plant communities on the refuge, including grasslands, shrublands, and gallery and riverfront forests. Some areas that are currently part of wetland impoundments would be restored to native communities, including forest and shrubland. A significant focus of restoration proposals would be controlling invasive species and preventing further spread. Grasses and shrubs native to the uplands, including the alluvial fans, would begin to be restored to provide habitat for native wildlife, including grassland-dependent migratory birds. Some wetland impoundments and Service (nonpublic) roads would be removed or reduced in size to allow for river migration and to restore native gallery and riverfront forest for riparian-dependent wildlife. The remaining impoundments would be managed to mimic natural conditions for wetland-dependent migratory birds.

The Service would expand and improve the refuge's compatible wildlife-dependent public use programs, in particular the wildlife observation, environmental education,

and interpretation programs. The visitor contact area would be expanded into a visitor center, with new displays and a combination conference room and environmental education classroom. New displays would be professionally planned and produced. The refuge would work with Ravalli County staff to designate the county road in the refuge as an auto tour route, which would include pulloffs and some form of interpretation. A seasonal hiking trail would be added, and current trails would be improved for wildlife observation and photography. Interpretation and environmental education programs would be expanded, using added staff and volunteers. All public use programs would provide visitors a consistent message about the purposes and values of the refuge and the mission of the Refuge System. The refuge staff would be expanded to include an assistant refuge manager, two biological science technicians (one full time and one career seasonal), and a visitor services specialist who would serve as a visitor center manager and volunteer coordinator.

Increased research and monitoring, staff, funding, infrastructure, and partnerships would be required to accomplish the goals, objectives, and strategies associated with this alternative. Additional staff and funding would be added depending on the regional priorities for those funds allocated to the Service for management of lands and waters within the Refuge System.

Alternative C

Alternative C contains many of the elements found in alternative B related to expanding visitor service programs and facilities. However, habitat management would be focused on maintaining the wetland impoundments and attempting to restrict the movements of the Bitterroot River throughout the refuge. Habitat efforts would be primarily focused on providing waterfowl and other waterbird habitat.

Public Meeting

A public meeting, to be held at the refuge headquarters in Stevensville, MT, will be announced through the local media and the refuge's Web site www.fws.gov/leemetcalf.

Next Steps

After this comment period ends, we will analyze the comments and address them in the form of a final CCP and NEPA finding.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, email 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.

Dated: February 29, 2012.

Matt Hogan,

Acting Deputy Regional Director, Mountain-Prairie Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R2-R-2012-N019;
FXRS12610200000S3-123-FF02R06000]

Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge, Liberty County, TX; Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request for comments.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce the availability of a draft comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and an environmental assessment (EA) for Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge, NWR), located approximately 50 miles northeast of Houston, Texas, for public review and comment. The Draft CCP/EA describes our proposal for managing the refuge for the next 15 years.

DATES: To ensure consideration, please send your written comments by May 4, 2012. We will announce upcoming public meetings in local news media.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments or requests for copies or more information by any of the following methods. You may request hard copies or a CD-ROM of the documents. Please contact Stuart Marcus, Refuge Manager, or Joseph Lujan, Natural Resource Planner.

Email: Joseph.Lujan@fws.gov. Include "Trinity River NWR draft CCP and EA" in the subject line of the message.

Fax: Attn: Joseph Lujan, 505-248-6803.

U.S. Mail: Joseph Lujan, Natural Resource Planner, U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service, NWRS Division of Planning, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, NM 87103.

In-Person Drop-off, Viewing, or Pickup: In-Person Drop-off: You may drop off comments during regular business hours (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at 500 Gold Street SW., 4th Floor, Room. 4305, Albuquerque, NM 87102.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stuart Marcus, Refuge Manager, Trinity River NWR, CCP—Project, P.O. Box 10015, Liberty, TX 77575; phone: 936–336–9786; fax: 936–336–9847.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

With this notice, we continue the CCP process for the Trinity River NWR. We started this process through a notice in the **Federal Register** (72 FR 45059; August 10, 2007).

The Trinity River NWR, which consists of over 25,000 acres, is located approximately 50 miles northeast of Houston, and 40 miles west of Beaumont Texas. The primary purpose of the refuge is to protect a remnant of the bottomland hardwood forest ecosystem along the Trinity River. The refuge was officially established on January 4, 1994, and continues to acquire, restore, and preserve bottomland hardwood forests.

Background

The CCP Process

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd–668ee) (Refuge Administration Act), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, 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 plan 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 wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. We will review and update the CCP at least every 15 years in accordance with the Refuge Administration Act.

Public Outreach

Formal scoping began with publication of a notice of intent to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment (EA) in the **Federal Register** on August

10, 2007 (72 FR 45059). In September 2008, a letter was sent to individuals at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), formally inviting them to participate in the development of the CCP. We received input from TPWD in January 2009, and have continued to involve them throughout the planning process. Information sheets were sent to the public, and news releases were sent to a variety of media outlets. The news release also aired on KSHN 99.9 FM Radio in Liberty, Texas. Three public open house meetings were held from November 30 through December 2, 2009. Additional written comments were received prior to these open house meetings. The meetings were held at three locations in the area, on three separate evenings. A variety of stakeholders contributed feedback at the open house meetings and via written comments; we used the feedback in development of the CCP.

CCP Alternatives We Are Considering

During the public scoping process with which we started work on this draft CCP, we, other governmental partners, Tribes, and the public, raised multiple issues. Our draft CCP addresses them. A full description of each alternative is in the EA. To address these issues, we developed and evaluated the following alternatives, summarized below.

Alternatives	A—No action alternative (current practices)	B—Improved habitat management and public use alternative	C—Optimal habitat management and public use (proposed action) alternative
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Issues

Habitat and Wildlife Management Issues

1. Native Flora/Fauna Conservation.	Conserve/restore bottomland hardwood forests. Restore native flora; reintroduce native fauna; manage native nuisance flora/fauna.	Same as Alternative A, plus use prescribed fire for resource management and initiate baseline monitoring for flora and fauna.	Same as Alternative B.
2. Invasive Flora/Fauna Management.	Remove exotic and invasive flora/fauna as resources permit; prevent reintroduction of exotic and invasive flora/fauna as resources permit.	Same as Alternative A, plus develop invasive species strike team and map “hotspots” to prioritize management efforts.	Same as Alternative B.
3. Wetland Management	Maintain the integrity of water control structures/levees; conduct water-quality sampling and fish surveys.	Same as Alternative A, plus conduct small-scale restoration of hydrological flow at Champion Lake South unit.	Same as Alternative B.
4. Land Acquisition	Acquire lands from willing sellers within the approved acquisition boundary on a case-by-case basis.	Update Trinity River Floodplain Habitat Stewardship Program and Land Protection Plan to update the acquisition boundary; assign refuge realty specialist to Trinity River NWR.	Same as Alternative B.
5. Climate Change	Plant trees to sequester carbon; use “green” technologies whenever possible, and recycle.	Same as Alternative A, plus gather baseline inventory and monitoring data.	Same as Alternative B.

Alternatives	A—No action alternative (current practices)	B—Improved habitat management and public use alternative	C—Optimal habitat management and public use (proposed action) alternative
6. Resource Protection	Assign refuge law enforcement officer to patrol 25,000 acres, backed up by opportunistic observations by other refuge staff.	Same as Alternative A, plus add patrols using other refuges' law enforcement officers.	Same as Alternative B, plus add an additional officer to patrol up to 80,000 acres.

Visitor Services Issues

1. Hunting	Designate units open to hunting by permit only, for big game, upland game, and waterfowl, as is currently the case in eight units.	Same as Alternative A, plus open one additional unit for big game hunting at Champion Lake South unit.	Same as Alternative B, plus open one additional unit for big game and upland game hunting at Palmetto unit.
2. Fishing	Direct visitors to Champion Lake and Pickett's Bayou.	Same as Alternative A, plus direct visitors to McGuire and Silver Lake units when piers are developed.	Same as Alternative B, plus direct visitors to Brierwood unit once pier is developed.
3. Wildlife Observation	Open refuge to wildlife observation; direct visitors to eight public use areas.	Same as Alternative A plus open one additional area at Champion Lake South unit.	Same as Alternative B, plus open one additional area at Palmetto unit.
4. Wildlife Photography	Open refuge to photography; direct visitors to eight public use areas.	Same as Alternative A plus construct photo blind at Brierwood unit.	Same as Alternative B, plus construct photo blind at McGuire unit.
5. Environmental Education	Do not develop environmental education programs on the refuge.	Develop off-refuge environmental education curricula, working with local schools to meet State requirements.	Same as Alternative B, plus develop on-refuge program, upon the completion of the educational facility at Champion Lake Public Use Area.
6. Interpretation	The refuge hosts two on-refuge annual festivals, on Earth Day and on Free Family Fishing Day; host approximately six off-refuge annual events, such as county jubilee and various public speaking events.	Same as Alternative A, plus host approximately 10 additional off-refuge events, as requested; develop and provide self-guided interpretative materials at Champion Lake and Brierwood units.	Same as Alternative B, plus develop interpretive programs at visitor center; develop and provide kiosks in all areas with public use facilities.

Facilities Issues

1. Public Use Access	Allow vehicular on designated unpaved roads; allow walk-in-only access on eight designated units; allow boating access on Pickett's Bayou and Champion Lake.	Same as Alternative A, plus improve road to McGuire Pond; establish canoe/kayak launch site at Brierwood unit.	Same as Alternative B, plus open trail at Champion Lake South unit.
2. Public Use Facilities	Maintain current limited facilities at Champion Lake Public Use Area, including fishing pier, butterfly garden, parking, and portable toilet. Seven other public use areas have only one parking lot and one photo blind each.	Rehabilitate the Lodge at Champion Lake Public Use Area, pave the road at Champion Lake Public Use Area, and construct fishing pier at McGuire unit.	Construct visitor center adjacent to headquarters; construct fishing piers at Brierwood unit; construct full-service bathroom at Champion Lake Public Use Area.
3. Administrative Facilities	Maintain refuge-owned headquarters and storage facility along FM 1011.	Construct a maintenance shop at Champion Lake equipment storage area.	Rehabilitate the two-room log cabin at Champion Lake for use for staff and volunteer offices.

Public Availability of Documents

In addition to using any methods in ADDRESSES, you can view or obtain documents at the following locations:

- Trinity River NWR Headquarters Office, 601 FM 1011, Liberty, TX 77575, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

- Our Web site: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/Plan/publicinvolvement.html>.

- The following public libraries:

Library	Address	Phone No.
Liberty Municipal Library	1710 Sam Houston Ave., Liberty, TX 77575	936-336-8901
Dayton Library	307 W. Houston, Dayton, TX 77535	936-258-7060
Austin Memorial Library	220 S. Bonham, Cleveland, TX 77327	281-592-3920
Tarkington Community Library	3032 FM 163 Rd., Cleveland, TX 77327	281-592-5136

Submitting Comments/Issues for Comment

We consider comments substantive if they:

- Question, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of the information in the document;
- Question, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of the environmental assessment (EA);
- Present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the EA; and/or
- Provide new or additional information relevant to the assessment.

Next Steps

After this comment period ends, we will analyze the comments and address them in the form of a final CCP and finding of no significant impact.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, email 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.

Dated: January 31, 2012.

Joy E. Nicholopoulos,

Acting, Regional Director, Southwest Region.

[FR Doc. 2012-7400 Filed 3-27-12; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R4-R-2011-N-170; 40136-1265-0000-S3]

Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge, LA; Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Finding of No Significant Impact for Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: We, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce the availability of our final comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and finding of no significant impact (FONSI) for the environmental assessment for Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in St. Martin and Iberville Parishes, Louisiana. In the final CCP, we describe how we will manage this refuge for the next 15 years.

ADDRESSES: You may obtain a copy of the CCP by writing to: Mr. Daniel Breaux, Southeast Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Bayou Lacombe Centre, 61389 Highway 434, Lacombe, LA 70445. Alternatively, you may download the document from our Internet Site: <http://southeast.fws.gov/planning/> under "Final Documents."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Daniel Breaux, at 985/882-2030 (telephone), 985/882-9133 (fax), or Daniel_breaux@fws.gov (email).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

With this notice, we finalize the CCP process for Atchafalaya NWR. We started this process through a notice in the **Federal Register** on January 9, 2009 (74 FR 915). For more about the refuge, see that notice.

Atchafalaya NWR is one of eight refuges managed as part of the Southeast Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex). Atchafalaya NWR is located in the lower Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System. Atchafalaya NWR is bounded on the north by U.S. Highway 190, on the south by Interstate 10, on the west by the Atchafalaya River, and on the east by the East Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee.

Atchafalaya NWR was established in 1986, when 15,255 acres were purchased from the Iberville Land Company, as directed by Public Law 98-548. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) have also purchased fee title land adjacent to and within the Atchafalaya NWR, which brings the current acreage to approximately 44,000. The USACE has authority to purchase additional lands within the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System.

Approximately 12 percent of the refuge is inundated open water, with isolated cypress trees and willow stands. Bottomland hardwood forest is the primary habitat.

Background

The CCP Process

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee) (Administration Act), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, 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 plan 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 Administration Act.

Comments

We made copies of the Draft CCP/EA available for a 30-day public review and comment period via a **Federal Register** notice on May 24, 2011 (76 FR 30190). A news release was sent out to four local, state, and regional newspapers, six online media outlets, and two local radio networks. Copies of the Draft CCP/EA were posted at refuge headquarters and on the Service's Internet Web site and more than 100 copies were distributed to local landowners; the general public; and local, state, and federal agencies. Respondents representing the following submitted comments: LDWF; Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism; Jena Band of Choctaw Indians; National Park Service; Audubon Society; Friends of the Atchafalaya; The Nature Conservancy; Gulf Restoration Network; Atchafalaya Basinkeeper; Louisiana Crawfish Producers Association—West; Sierra Club—Delta Chapter; Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper; Louisiana Environmental Action Network; and local citizens.

Selected Alternative

The Draft CCP/EA identified and evaluated three alternatives for managing the refuge over the next 15 years. After considering the comments we received and based on the professional judgment of the planning team, we selected Alternative B for implementation. Alternative B best signifies the vision, goals, and purposes of the refuge. Under Alternative B, emphasis will be on restoring and improving the resources needed for wildlife and habitat management and providing appropriate and compatible wildlife-dependent public use opportunities, while addressing key issues and refuge mandates.

The compatibility determinations for (1) Wildlife observation/photography; (2) recreational fishing; (3) recreational hunting; (4) environmental education and interpretation; (5) walking, hiking, and jogging; (6) forest management; (7) scientific research; (8) kayaking,