



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Illinois River

National Wildlife and Fish Refuges Complex

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Project Update

September 2004

Comprehensive Conservation Plan Receives Final Approval

In September 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced the completion of the comprehensive conservation plan for the Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuges Complex (Refuges Complex).

The Refuges Complex includes: Meredosia NWR, Emiquon NWR, and Chautauqua NWR.

The comprehensive conservation plan, or CCP, is intended to outline how the Complex refuges will fulfill their legal purposes and contribute to the National Wildlife Refuge System's wildlife, habitat and public use goals. The plan articulates management goals for the next 15 years and specifies the objectives and strategies needed to accomplish these goals. While the planned future condition is long-term, we anticipate that the plan will be updated every 5 to 10 years based on information gained through monitoring habitat and wildlife, as well as recreational usage.

The Refuges Complex stretches along 124 miles of the Illinois River in west central Illinois. Its three refuges total 12,163 acres comprising a mix of backwater lakes, bottomland forests, floodplain wetlands, and a small amount of upland forest and prairie.

Where You Can Find the CCP

Copies of the CCP are available in libraries in communities surrounding the refuges. They are also available on-line at <http://midwest.fws.gov/planning/IllinoisRiver/index.html>. The CCP is available in portable document format (pdf) on a CD-ROM. To receive a copy, please call the Refuges Complex at 309/535-2290.

The Planning Process

The Illinois River NWFR Complex CCP effort began in 1999 with internal scoping of the issues among Refuge and

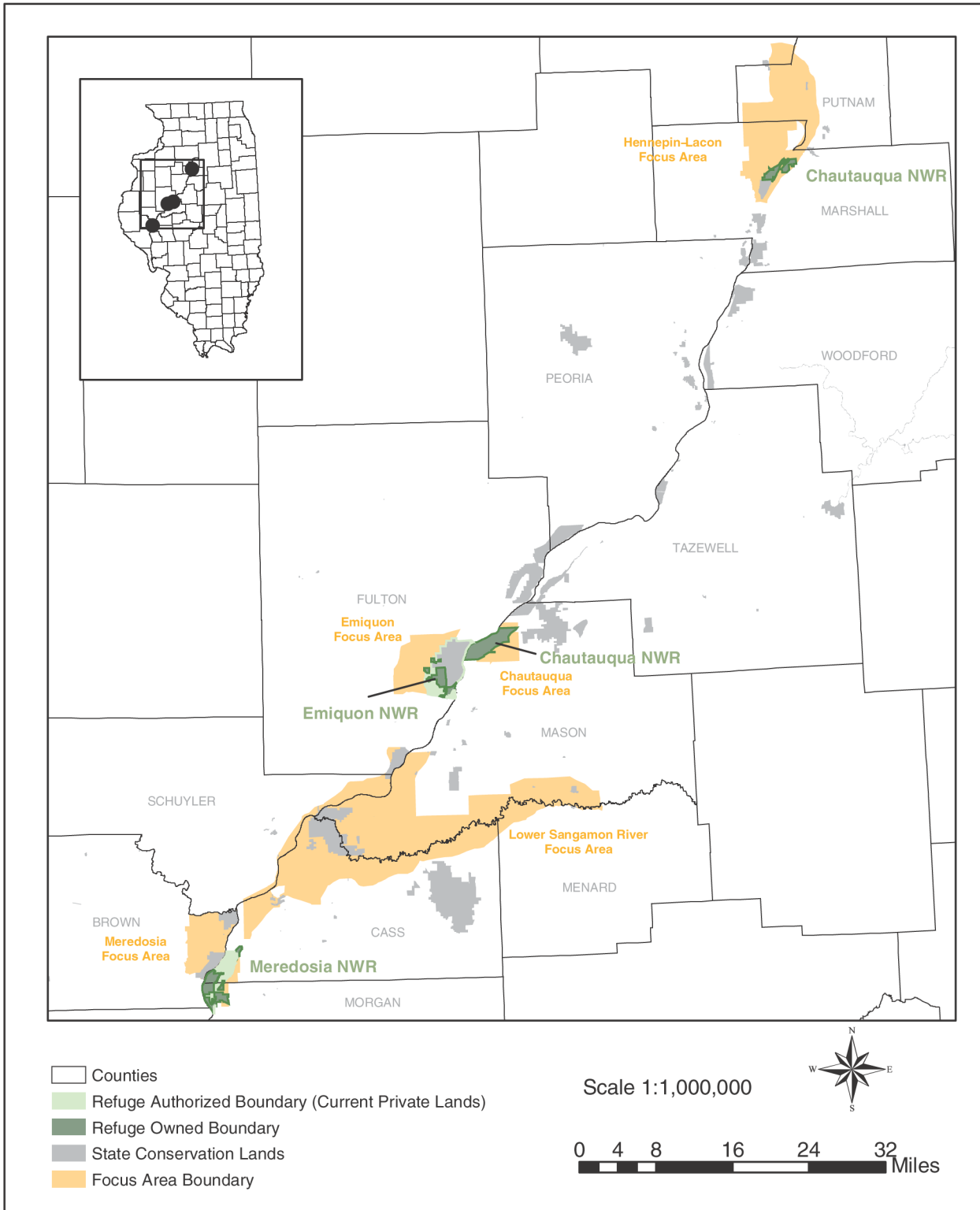


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Regional Office staff. Public meetings were held between April 19-21, 1999, in the communities of Meredosia, Henry and Lewistown, Illinois, to solicit public comment on refuge planning. Refuge staff met with the Illinois Division of Water Resources, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and several non-government organizations. Staff participated in several technical groups and met with local organizations. Refuge staff and planners hosted a public meeting at the Dickson Mounds Museum to discuss the CCP. In addition, Refuges Complex staff and planners asked for regional office comment on the issues that should be considered in planning.

The Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan was released for public review in September 2003. The Service asked that comments be returned by October 20, 2003. Three open house meetings were conducted to give people interested in the future of the Refuges Complex a chance to speak directly with Refuge staff and Service planners. These meetings were conducted on September 23, 2003, in Meredosia, Illinois; September 24, 2003, in Lewistown, Illinois; and September 25, 2003, in Henry, Illinois. The CCP was revised based on the comments we received and the final document was approved in August 2004.

Illinois River National Fish and Wildlife Refuges Complex



The CCP addresses many issues that were raised by members of the public, state conservation officials, other federal agencies and non-governmental organizations. These issues include:

Wildlife Management Issues

- Protect listed species
- Perpetuate waterfowl and other migratory birds
- Recover native fish and mussels
- Safeguard biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health
- Wildlife are creating crop depredation
- Avian botulism as a problem on Lake Chautauqua

Habitat Management Issues

- Loss of wetlands
- Loss of native forest
- Loss of native grasslands
- Loss of native savanna
- Habitat is being degraded
- Oxbow restoration on Emiquon NWR is affecting drainage on local land
- Sedimentation is filling in areas in the Illinois River Corridor

Visitor Services Management Issues

- Recreational opportunities identified by the public
- Recreational facilities need improvement for safety and universal accessibility
- Refuges Complex needs increased visibility and understanding of its mission
- The quality of waterfowl hunting in the area is seen as a function of management on the Refuge Complex.

Who We Are and What We Do

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Our specific responsibilities include enforcing federal wildlife laws, managing migratory bird populations, restoring nationally significant fisheries, administering the Endangered Species Act, and restoring wildlife habitat such as wetlands. The mission of the Service is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Service's role also includes managing the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest collection of lands specifically managed for fish and wildlife. The System is a network of more than 540 national wildlife refuges encompassing more than 93 million acres of public land and



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water. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Refuges are also unique places for people. When it is compatible with wildlife and habitat needs and the purpose for which the refuge was established, they can be used for wildlife-dependent activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and environmental interpretation.

Refuge Complex Vision Statement

“Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuges Complex is a wild and thriving place where abundant grasslands and savannas, bottomland forests, and backwater lakes support diverse and productive populations of plants and animals. With numerous opportunities to learn about and utilize its resources, the Refuge Complex serves as a regional and national destination for visitors seeking high quality educational and recreational experiences. Through outreach with others, the Refuge Complex has expanded the public's understanding and appreciation of Illinois River fish and wildlife resources, and in doing so, has perpetuated these resources within the communities surrounding the Refuge Complex.”

Refuge Complex Goals

The CCP established clear goals for the Illinois River NFWR Complex over the next 15 years. Objectives for achieving each goal and strategies for achieving each objective are detailed in the CCP. Goals for the Refuges Complex are:

- *Wildlife Management Goal:* Perpetuate listed species, waterfowl and other migratory birds, and native fish and mussels, within the Illinois River Corridor while

restoring and conserving the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge Complex.

- **Habitat Management Goal:** Provide the most productive habitat possible within the Illinois River Corridor for the benefit of listed species, waterfowl and other migratory birds, native fish and mussels, and native biological diversity.

- **Visitor Services Management:** Provide the public with abundant and high-quality wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities on Refuge land including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

- **Administration Goal:** Provide leadership and support to federal, state, local and private partners at the Refuge, ecosystem and landscape scales that are proactive in addressing a wide range of conservation opportunities and issues.



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Management Direction

In the next 15 years, management of the Refuges Complex will focus on restoring wildlife habitat and increasing wildlife-dependent recreation. As funding allows and as willing sellers emerge, we will complete land acquisition within the authorized boundaries of Emiquon NWR and Meredosia NWR. We will concentrate conservation efforts in five focus areas in the hope of developing additional voluntary partnership agreements in these areas.

Implementing the Plan

Personnel

Currently the staff of the Refuges Complex consists of six positions: refuge manager, refuge operations specialist, administrative technician, private lands biologist, maintenance mechanic, and maintenance worker.

As the Refuge Complex activities have expanded and Refuge visitation has increased with a demand for higher quality wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, it has become difficult to efficiently run the refuges to meet the demands of the resources and the public. To meet these needs, our plan is to add a full-time park ranger to coordi-

nate the public use program, a full-time law enforcement officer, and a full-time private lands biologist as funds and positions become available.

New and Existing Projects

The future management of the Refuges Complex will require consistent operational and maintenance funding to implement the strategies in this Plan. The costs to implement the strategies and projects identified in this CCP are captured in Service budget databases, including the Refuge Operating Needs System (RONS), Maintenance Management System (MMS), and Land Acquisition Priority System (LAPS). The following list contains examples of the highest priority Refuges Complex projects (Tier 1), as chosen by the Refuges Complex staff. A listing of the top priority unfunded Refuge projects can be found in Appendix F of the CCP.

Tier 1 RONS projects include:

- Improve Refuge public use and outreach by adding an outdoor recreation planner to the staff.
- Improve resources data analysis on the Illinois River Refuges by adding a biologist position.
- Construct an accessible platform at Chautauqua NWR.
- Undertake prairie restoration on the Shearl and Skinner tracts on Meredosia NWR.
- Improve the entrance road to the Refuge Complex headquarters.

The CCP details program planning levels that are above current budget allocations. As such, the Service will use the plan for strategic planning and programs. The CCP is not a commitment for staffing or operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.

Additional Information

For additional information, please call the Refuge Complex Headquarters at 309/535-2290 or write to the Refuge Manager at:

Illinois River National Fish and Wildlife Refuges
19031 E County Road 2110 N
Havanna IL 62644