



M. Litr/USFWS

**Appendix K**

*View of the beach at Target Rock refuge.*

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**



## **Finding of No Significant Impact Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plan**

In June 2006, we published the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA) for the Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex). The Complex includes the Amagansett, Conscience Point, Elizabeth A. Morton, Oyster Bay, Seatuck, Target Rock, and Wertheim refuges, the Lido Beach Wildlife Management Area and the Sayville Unit of the Wertheim refuge. That draft evaluates three alternatives for managing the Complex over the next 15 years, and carefully considers their impacts on the environment and their potential contribution to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) and refuge purposes and goals. Its appendixes provide additional information supporting the assessment. None of the alternatives proposes that we acquire additional land at this time. A brief overview of each alternative follows.

**Alternative A:** The Council of Environmental Quality regulations on implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require this “No Action” alternative. It would not change our resource management programs on refuge lands. Partnerships with federal, state, county, town, and non-governmental organizations and volunteers will continue to form the core of management activities. The priorities of the biological program will continue focusing on threatened and endangered species, habitat restoration, and the management of invasive or nuisance species. We will continue to promote white-tailed deer management at Wertheim refuge with a controlled public hunt. Fishing opportunities will remain as they are, but with improvements to the fishing access site at Wertheim. Other priority public use programs will continue—primarily wildlife observation, nature photography, and interpretation. Those will focus on units in the Complex that offer such visitor facilities as parking, nature trails, information kiosks, and restrooms. Selecting this alternative would maintain the status quo in refuge management over the next 15 years. Thus, it provides a baseline for comparing or contrasting the two “action” alternatives.

**Alternative B:** The draft CCP/EA identifies this alternative as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)-proposed action. Selecting this alternative would increase our protection and management of endangered, threatened or other species of concern, including migratory wildlife. It is designed to expand and improve opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and allow the complex to benefit from its proximity to New York City and urban communities.

**Alternative C:** Under this alternative, we would implement a stricter approach to managing the Complex and its biological resources with less emphasis on providing visitor services. It is designed to minimize human intrusion or intervention, except when necessary to protect threatened or endangered species, control invasive species, respond to natural disasters, or enforce regulations. It would focus on maintaining such public use infrastructure as nature trails and information kiosks, but would restrict access and the number of public programs offered. Outreach and law enforcement efforts will have to be increased using current staff to communicate the changes in management under this alternative. The Complex will maintain a volunteer program, rely more on partners to help conduct biological inventories and monitoring and organize environmental education and interpretation programs, but limit the use of seasonal employees and interns.

We distributed the draft CCP/EA for a 31-day period of public review and comment from June 19, 2006 through July 19, 2006. We received 29 written responses, plus additional comments at public meetings. Appendix I in the final CCP includes a summary of those comments and our responses to them.

After reviewing the proposed management actions, considering all public comments and our responses to them, I have determined that the analysis in the EA is sufficient to support my findings, described below.

I am selecting draft CCP/EA Alternative B (the Service-proposed action) as the final CCP for implementation, with these clarifications.

1) Safety will be our paramount consideration in further developing the hunting program. Hunters must abide by all state and federal safety regulations related to hunting near roads and dwellings. New York State hunting regulations make it illegal to discharge a hunting weapon so that its load, shot or arrow, passes over any part of a public highway or within 500 feet of any building. We will continue to implement hunts for white-tailed deer, and design the resident Canada goose hunt with the utmost consideration for the safety of refuge hunters, visitors and refuge neighbors. As one example, we will post highly visible signs at the refuge entrance and at strategic locations along the refuge perimeter well before the hunt begins. Youth hunters are required to be accompanied by a New York state licensed adult, and all hunters must participate in a refuge-specific hunter orientation. Each hunt provides a management tool to help control overabundant populations, and also wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for local sportsmen.

2) The Service's preferred alternative features constructing a new facility on refuge property at the location specified in the CCP. Some reviewers proposed we utilize an abandoned school property adjacent to Wertheim NWR for the new headquarters site. The Service remains interested in seeing the school property protected, as it features habitat that can provide for wildlife. The Service did make an earlier attempt to acquire the school property for use as a headquarters/visitor center, but this effort could not be completed. We are concerned that rehabilitation costs for the school facility would be high, will not provide the administrative or public facilities needed, and will not be as cost effective (including operational costs) of a newer and more energy-efficient facility. If new information that addresses Service concerns becomes available at a later date, the Service will consider the information as part of the future decision-making process.

3) We received comments urging us not to tear down the "hunting lodge" currently used at the refuge office at Wertheim once the new headquarters/visitor center is constructed. No decision has been made on the future of the existing office building, although the Service is interested in re-establishing habitat along the west side of the Carmans River once the new facility is built.

4) Extending and adding trails at Morton NWR and Conscience Point NWR will be carefully considered. We must first detail, inventory and map the archaeological and cultural features, sensitive habitats and species currently present before we can determine the appropriateness and compatibility of new trails on the refuges. Safety will be another important consideration. The Service understands the public's desire to be able to view plants and wildlife in representative natural landscapes, and we will explore ways to be able to facilitate future access.


5) The Service will strive to increase public awareness of the refuge at Oyster Bay. We will work with our partners to explore ideas to enhance the refuge's presence and visibility, and promote a positive effect on protecting the resources.

6) The Compatibility Determination for Maintenance Dredging included in the draft CCP/EA will be withdrawn from the final CCP. The Service instead will evaluate maintenance dredging at Seatuck and Morton refuges to maintain existing navigable waterways on a case-by-case basis, and will issue special use permits if found appropriate and compatible with the purposes for which both refuges were established.

7) Region 5 has recently identified "areas of emphasis" with regards to the six priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses for every refuge. The Long Island NWR Complex has been identified for environmental education and interpretation. Thus, we will further consider this recognition as we implement the strategies of the CCP over the next 15 years.

I have selected Alternative B as modified for several reasons. It helps fulfill the mission of the NWRS; best achieves the refuge purpose, vision, and goals; maintains and, where appropriate, restores the ecological integrity of the refuge; addresses the major issues identified during the planning process; and is consistent with the principles of sound fish and wildlife management.

I find that implementing Alternative B adheres to all legal mandates and Service policies, and will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment, in accordance with Section 102(2)(c) of the NEPA. Therefore, I have concluded that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and this Finding of No Significant Impact is appropriate and warranted.



Acting

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8-31-06  
Date

