

# Appendix B

## *The Public Involvement Process*

The scoping process concerning the future management of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges consisted of two meetings, two stakeholder workshops, and a comment packet. The first public scoping meeting was held on July 27, 1999. The participants (24) were invited as potential members of the comprehensive conservation plan stakeholders' team. The second public scoping meeting on September 21, 1999, was widely advertised and the participants (approximately 40) represented user groups and the general public. The scoping meeting goals were to:

- Present background information about the National Wildlife Refuge System and about the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges, in particular;
- Present the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System to the participating public;
- Present the planning process required to develop the comprehensive conservation plan; and
- Provide opportunities for the public to share their thoughts about the refuge by sharing comments at the scoping meeting and by returning an individual comment sheet.

During the welcoming comments, the refuge managers presented a thorough and engaging overview of the refuges and the comprehensive conservation planning process. These presentations included a video on the National Wildlife Refuge System entitled, "America's National Wildlife Refuge System, Where Wildlife Comes First," and a slide presentation on both Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges. Comment sheets on which participants could individually respond to key issues concerning the future management of the refuges were passed out and explained. The refuge managers asked for the comment sheets to be returned by October 21, 1999.

After the presentations, the facilitator asked the participants to work in self-selected sub-groups. Three sub-groups were formed (at both meetings) and each group met for 50 minutes discussing the future management of the refuges. Each sub-group selected a recorder who wrote the major comments of each individual.

Attachment One is a summary of the major issues and concerns raised in both meetings. Attachment Two presents the unedited easel paper notes from the meeting on September 21, 1999, and Attachment Three contains the notes from the July 27, 1999, meeting. Since there was no attempt in the sub-groups to create consensus suggestions, some of the comments generated in the sub-groups were diametrically opposed to each other. During the final comments, participants appreciated the chance to hear the comments of others. Also during the scoping process, two stakeholder workshops were held. The first workshop was held on August 12, 1999, with 26 participants representing the following groups: Fish and Wildlife Service; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Florida Department of Environmental Protection; Florida's Nature Coast Conservancy; Save Our Suwannee; Cedar Key Garden Club; University

of Florida; Cedar Key Historical Society; Development Advisory Services, Inc.; Cedar Key Chamber of Commerce; Nature Coast Canoe and Kayak; Suwannee River Chamber of Commerce; and the Suwannee River Water Management District. The purposes of the workshops were to develop vision statements for each refuge and to review a comment packet that would be distributed to the public.

Following the September public scoping meeting, another stakeholder workshop was held to discuss the range of reasonable alternatives that the planning team should consider. The 16 participants at this meeting created a framework for goals, objectives, and strategies to be developed within the comprehensive conservation plan. Stakeholders at this meeting represented the Fish and Wildlife Service; Florida Department of Environmental Protection; Save Our Suwannee; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Cedar Key Garden Club; Suwannee River Chamber of Commerce; Suwannee Audubon Society; and the Suwannee River Water Management District.

The final mechanism used to gather public input was a comment packet (Attachment Four). This packet contained general information about the refuges; management statements to agree or disagree with; open-ended questions which allowed the respondent to elaborate on the values, issues, and concerns of the refuges; and a mailing request form and release. This packet was available at the public meeting (September 21, 1999), from the refuge office, and on the Internet at the refuge's web site. A total of 250 packets was distributed at the public meeting, at community meetings, and from the refuge office. It is unknown how many packets were viewed or printed from the Internet.

Forty-three comment packets were returned to the refuge office. Several of these were printed from the refuge's web site. The data from these packets were analyzed and evaluated along with the comments from the public meetings and stakeholder workshops, and from letters received at the refuge office. All comments, whether written or oral, were given equal consideration during preparation of these comprehensive conservation plans. A planning update newsletter (Attachment Five) was developed and sent to all names on the mailing list (Attachment Six).

The following is a summary of what the public valued most about the refuges:

#### **Value Statements**

- Diversity of wildlife and habitats
- Quality of the ecosystem
- Water quality
- Natural, unspoiled, wild beauty
- Protection of plant and animal life and habitat, especially from development
- Serenity and isolation
- Public access
- Opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, especially hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and wildlife photography
- Research opportunities
- Environmental education programs
- Refuge staff
- Partnerships

Several key issues and concerns surfaced during the scoping process. The planning team reviewed the issues and concerns raised by the approximately 100 people who participated in the scoping process and in comments received in the 43 comment packets that were returned to the refuge office. This list was based on the team's knowledge of the area, information gathered during the scoping meetings, and written comments submitted by the public. Following each statement is the Service's response to the issue, concern, or recommendation.

## Key Issues and Concerns Summary

### *Wildlife Habitat Management*

**WH1** Not enough is known about the wildlife or habitat of the refuges.

The plan addresses these deficiencies in the strategies developed for the wildlife and habitat management goals. These strategies outline a systematic approach for surveying and monitoring trust species and for evaluating refuge habitat management practices, such as forest thinning, restoration, and prescribed fire. The end result is a set of goals, objectives, and strategies to systematically collect and analyze data and tailor management programs to best meet the needs of the wildlife that use refuge habitats.

**WH2** Staff is needed to monitor and manage habitat for endangered species, migratory birds, and resident wildlife.

Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1979, but only recently received staffing and funding to begin monitoring trust species and to evaluate refuge habitats. Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge is an unfunded and unstaffed refuge. Neither station has biological staff dedicated to developing a comprehensive biological program. These comprehensive conservation plans outline an aggressive wildlife and habitat monitoring, management, and evaluation program to address this need. This program can only be achieved if appropriate staffing and funding are received.

**WH3** Staff should initiate research partnerships with U.S. Geological Survey and Suwannee River Water Management District to assist and expand water flow and water quantity impact studies on refuge habitat.

Within the comprehensive conservation plans, several strategies are identified to address this need. Dynamic partnerships with the Suwannee River Water Management District, the University of Florida, and other resource agencies would be developed and expanded. Partnerships throughout the 10,000-square-mile Suwannee River Basin would be fostered. The value of these partnerships lies in the increased opportunity to protect the Suwannee River ecosystem, the wildlife and habitats found within the basin, and to ensure water quality and quantity are protected.

**WH4** Staff need to monitor and manage impacts of human use on wildlife and habitat.

While the public valued the opportunities to participate in wildlife-dependent recreation on the refuges, there was an overwhelming concern that public use be monitored and managed. One suggestion centered around clustering public use areas within the refuges in order to limit degradation of resources to certain areas. Other areas would remain natural, without the development of public use facilities. The plan clusters public use areas and improves the facilities available in these areas. However, the plan also allows for the development of trails and facilities in other areas if wildlife compatibility is addressed.

Monitoring the impacts of public use will be accomplished through biological and habitat management programs. For example, an eagle's nest is located on North Key. The beaches of this island are open year round and the nest is located near the beach. If beach use (including wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and fishing) disturbs the nesting pair, then the area around the eagle's nest would be closed during the nesting season to ensure that wildlife use of the area has first priority.

**WH5** Management activities should preserve and restore refuge ecosystems.

Many of the lands acquired to establish Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge were severely degraded or were intensively altered by land use practices. Thousands of acres of longleaf, native slash, and scattered loblolly pines were cut and replanted with genetically improved slash pine in plantations that were harvested on a 16- to 20-year rotation. In addition, thousands of acres of mixed pine/hardwood stands were converted to slash pine plantations. Intensive site preparation, which altered the understory vegetation, was needed to make these sites suitable for pine trees. Additionally, an extensive network of roads and ditches was developed to facilitate timber management. Finally, most of the forested land in the swamps and bottoms is second or third generation; there are only a few remnant stands of old growth timber.

The objectives and strategies listed under the habitat management goal outline a plan to restore native ecosystems. Strategies identified include reforestation with longleaf pine and wiregrass, silvicultural thinnings to reduce stand density and create more natural forest conditions, and prescribed fire to reduce woody stems and promote herbaceous understories which were historically present. The Forest Management Plan will address hardwood silvicultural management concerns as well.

Management of refuge habitats on Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge is opposite to management of Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge. Cedar Keys Refuge has been protected from development since 1929, and four of the islands are designated as Wilderness Areas. Refuge habitats are pristine and for the most part, unaltered. With the exception of exotic plant removal, management of the islands has been "hands off." The comprehensive conservation plans outline strategies for preserving these delicate coastal ecosystems without using intensive management techniques.

### *Public Use*

**PU1-LS** Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge should continue to provide the public with compatible consumptive and non-consumptive uses and access in a manner that minimizes conflicts between user groups and does not significantly impact habitat.

The comprehensive conservation plan specifically addresses this need by clustering public use areas and by establishing non-hunting areas in both counties. One of the major concerns expressed by user groups was safety during the hunting season. Currently, the Shell Mound and River Trail areas in Levy County are closed to hunting. These areas are used by an estimated 60,000 visitors a year. The plan proposes closing the Shired Island and Fishbone Creek areas in Dixie County. These areas contain 194 and 58 acres of uplands, respectively, but are mainly characterized as coastal marsh. An estimated 40,000 visitors annually use these two areas. A portion (16 acres) of the Fishbone Creek area

is leased to Dixie County Schools for environmental education. Additionally, Resource Project No. 10 calls for the establishment of environmental education facilities (e.g., pole shed, picnic tables, and restrooms) to be located in this area. Closing this area to hunting would ensure public safety and would minimize conflicts between user groups. Approximately 35,000 acres of suitable habitat will remain open to hunting. The remaining acreage is comprised of marsh and the closed areas referenced above.

**PU2-LS** Hunter groups requested better management and access for hunting activities on Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge.

As discussed above, approximately 35,000 acres of refuge habitats are open to hunting. To provide access to these areas, the refuge maintains 50 miles of improved limerock roads for public vehicle traffic and an additional 50 miles of secondary roads, which are open to bicycle and foot traffic. The public may also access the refuge via boat from the Suwannee River and its many creeks. Refuge staff believe that this extensive network of roads and river entry provide adequate access opportunities for hunters as well as other user groups.

A few hunters requested access to the refuge via 3- or 4-wheelers. A majority of the public, however, opposed this type of access. When the refuge was established, this activity was found to be an incompatible use. Further, hunters may access the refuge by automobile on primary refuge roads, by foot or bicycle on secondary refuge roads, or by boat from the river. Current hunting regulations provide for special all-terrain vehicle access by mobility impaired hunters. Those hunters that meet the criteria of “mobility impaired” can apply for a Special Use Permit that allows all-terrain vehicle use within designated areas of the refuge.

Hunter groups suggested that the hunting experience could be improved, as well as the overall game species health, by establishing food plots. Many hunters believed that game populations are low on the refuge because inadequate forage is available. While refuge managers support improving habitat conditions for all wildlife species, they do not support the establishment of food plots. The first concern of refuge management is safety. It is the staff’s opinion that hunters would be concentrated at food plots, thus increasing the risk of a hunting accident. Additionally, staff believe that habitat management techniques currently employed; e.g., forest thinnings and prescribed fire, stimulate growth of grasses and forbs, offering native forage. In the book entitled “Wildlife Management” Yarrow and Yarrow (1999), it states “Native foods should be inventoried, evaluated, and managed before investing in wildlife food plantings. In most cases, managing existing native wildlife plants constitutes a more practical and cost effective method of enhancing wildlife habitat.” Therefore, the staff feels it should inventory and evaluate what is present before establishing food plots. Finally, hunter bag reports are consistent from year-to-year and deer analyzed by the Southeastern Cooperative Disease Study Unit are healthy.

**PU3-LS** Other user groups requested more opportunities for passive recreational uses on Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge.

There are six priority uses on national wildlife refuges as defined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (1997): hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation. Of these, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and interpretation would be considered passive recreational opportunities. As mentioned previously, Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge has

clustered public use areas in each county. At Shell Mound, 2 short walking trails and a 400-foot boardwalk are available. The River Trail is a 43-mile trail with a 400-foot boardwalk and observation platform on the Suwannee River. In Dixie County, 4 public use areas have been established. At Salt Creek, there is a boardwalk overlooking the salt marsh. Connecting Salt Creek and Shired Island, the Dixie Mainline Trail is a 9-mile driving, bicycle, or foot trail. Spectacular views can be seen from the observation platform on Fishbone Creek. Finally, on Shired Island and at the end of the Duck Pond Road, 3 short walking trails offer views of a small beach, coastal island habitat, and a natural pine forest, respectively. All of these facilities offer opportunities for passive recreation.

In the comprehensive conservation plan, several new public use facilities would be constructed and the areas mentioned above would be enhanced. The trails at Shell Mound would be marked with interpretive panels. At Dennis Creek, an observation platform would be constructed to offer marsh views. On the Levy County Loop Road, an observation platform would offer observers an opportunity to view an interior freshwater marsh and the wildlife therein. At Salt Creek, a loop trail through several different habitats is planned. Finally, kiosks housing refuge information and interpretive materials would be located in the public use areas to improve the visitor's experience. These projects would enhance passive recreational opportunities on the refuge.

- PU4-CK** The public urged Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge to continue to provide only limited public uses to protect sensitive wildlife habitat.

The comprehensive conservation plan continues the provisions that guide public use on Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. Currently, all refuge island interiors, except Atsena Otie Key, are closed to public use for the protection of island flora and fauna. Additionally, there are healthy populations of venomous snakes on most of the island interiors. On Atsena Otie Key, the closest island to the town of Cedar Key, a kiosk, restroom, and short hiking trail provide visitors an opportunity to enjoy the natural environment and to learn about the natural and cultural history of the area. The beaches of all the islands, except Seahorse Key, are open year round for activities such as wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and fishing. Seahorse Key and a 300-foot buffer around the island is closed to all public entry from March 1 through June 30, annually, to protect nesting colonial wading birds.

The number of tourists visiting Cedar Key has grown exponentially in the last 10 years. Refuge staff will closely monitor the numbers of people visiting the refuge islands and the impact this visitation may have on the refuge environment and wildlife. Additional closures and other protective measures may be employed to ensure the ecological integrity of these fragile coastal islands.

- PU5** Staff is needed to expand environmental education and interpretation programs and increase involvement with public schools.

The comprehensive conservation plan outlines objectives and strategies to greatly improve our environmental education program and to expand partnerships with the schools, agencies, and organizations that are involved in environmental education in the area of the refuge. However, these objectives and strategies can only be met with additional staffing to develop these programs

and to nurture their growth. The comprehensive conservation plan calls for the employment of an outdoor recreation planner and a volunteer coordinator. These two positions would serve both refuges. In addition to these two positions, a cadre of volunteers would be trained to implement our environmental education program not only in the schools, but in civic organizations (e.g., scouts) as well.

- PU6** Environmental education and outreach should include adult groups as well as youth groups.

While the focus of the environmental education program for the refuges will be involvement with school youth, the comprehensive conservation plan does include programming for adults. An outdoor recreation planner and volunteer coordinator would be employed to facilitate these programs. The plan calls for the establishment of quarterly activities, such as canoe tours, butterfly and wildflower walks, and birding trips. It also continues participation in community events and festivals, such as Naturefest and the Cedar Key Spring Arts and Fall Seafood Festivals. Adults would comprise most of the volunteers recruited by the volunteer coordinator. These volunteers would develop educational programs for the young and young at heart.

- PU7** The public thought staff and facilities should be increased, particularly for Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge and the Dixie County portion of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge.

Currently, Cedar Keys Refuge is unstaffed and unfunded. Management activities occur when staff and funding are available from Lower Suwannee Refuge. The comprehensive conservation plan identifies the staffing needs of Cedar Keys Refuge. Staff to be hired include a refuge operations specialist (assistant refuge manager) and a biological technician. A biologist and outdoor recreation planner would also be hired and shared between the two refuges.

At Lower Suwannee Refuge, all staff are based out of the Levy County compound and administrative area. The Dixie County portion of the refuge is more than 50 miles from the administration area. Because of a lack of staff presence on a daily basis, vandalism and littering are growing problems. If staff were stationed in this county, maintenance issues could be addressed on a daily basis. Staff could also forge relationships with the local people and work to establish ownership of the refuge by the local people, i.e., wanting to care for the refuge instead of trashing it.

A small administrative area is located in Dixie County. The compound currently includes a 5-bay pole shed, fuel tanks, and an abandoned, dilapidated trailer. The plan calls for the construction of an enclosed shop with a crew room and restroom facility. The maintenance worker stationed in Dixie County would work out of this office.

Finally, with the hiring of additional staff, a new office/visitor contact station is needed. The plan identifies two options: a multi-million dollar visitor center or a new administrative office with a display area. Professional staff from Cedar Keys and Lower Suwannee Refuges would be based out of this office. Technical and maintenance staff would be based out of the existing shop office and crew space. The current office would be converted to housing for volunteers, interns, and visiting researchers as outlined in the plan.

- PU8** Staff should recruit student interns and more volunteers to assist with projects and research.

The comprehensive conservation plan addresses this need by 1) hiring a volunteer coordinator and 2) by providing training opportunities for these individuals. It also calls for the formation of a Friends Group. This group would serve as another mechanism for recruiting volunteers.

*Partnerships to Manage and Protect the Refuge*

- P1** The refuge should maintain and enhance partnerships with state, county, and community agencies; universities and educational institutions; user groups; natural resource based organizations; and other entities.

The comprehensive conservation plan outlines objectives and strategies to accomplish this need. Specifically, it calls for the hiring of additional staff to conduct day-to-day refuge operations. This would allow the project leader to devote more time to developing and expanding partnerships. Additionally, professional staff over biological and public use programs would also be involved in partnerships. Finally, several partnership projects are proposed.

- P2** Additional land acquisition and/or cooperative management agreements would improve the Service's ability to protect existing and potential refuge resources.

The comprehensive conservation plan proposes an aggressive land acquisition program. The limiting factor in implementing this program is funding. An alternative to purchasing land is to establish management agreements or conservation easements with the landowners to bring in conservation partners like The Nature Conservancy or The Trust for Public Lands. It calls for creative solutions to the ever-growing problem of insufficient funding.



# Attachment One

## *Summary of Public Scoping Comments*

### **Summary of Appreciation and Suggested Changes Comments**

#### *Wildlife Habitat Management*

- There is a need to conduct more research on species and habitats to enhance the native biodiversity and integrity of both refuges and to maintain traditional public uses.
- There is a need to preserve Cedar Keys Refuge for wildlife, except Atsena Otie Key.
- There is a need to assure that water of sufficient quality and quantity is available to maintain wildlife populations and habitats and to also restore and conserve the natural diversity, abundance, and ecological function of both Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys Refuges.
- There is a need to reduce the increasing number of exotic and invasive plant and animal species that are negatively impacting wildlife and habitat on both refuges.
- There is a need to assess the feasibility of re-introducing the black bear.
- There is a need to assess the feasibility of developing food plots after tree removal to improve the health of the animals and increase observation opportunities.
- There is a need to assess the feasibility of creating a management plan for wild turkeys.

#### *Public Use*

- There is a need to create more compatibility of uses throughout the year between hunting and environmental education and interpretation.
- There is a need for increased access to the Lower Suwannee Refuge for observation of wildlife and its habitat in a quiet environment and for active recreational uses.
- There is a need for Lower Suwannee Refuge to enhance its access for hunting.
- There is a need to expand the environmental education and interpretation programs.
- There is a need to develop outreach programs with the local communities, user groups, and the general public.

#### *Partnerships*

- There is a need for both refuges to develop more partnerships with state, county, and community agencies; universities and educational institutions; user groups; and natural resource based organizations.
- There is a need to hold more community functions to assist funding of both refuges.

#### *Administration*

- There is a need for more staff, student interns, and volunteers to implement the desired programs identified at the scoping meetings.
- There is a need for funding to implement the program and infrastructure needs identified during the scoping meetings.

# Attachment Two

*Public Scoping Meeting (September 21, 1999)*

## **Easel Notes (Unedited) of the Three Dialogue Sub-Groups**

The listed recommendations were made for actions that individual participants would like to see continued, started, or stopped.

### *Group One*

- Make feeding plots after removing trees to improve the health of the animals and increase observation opportunities.
- Create a controlled checkpoint for hunting access so you know who goes in and out. Utilize student volunteers.
- Increase law enforcement.
- Construct a Refuge Education Center.
- Provide more organized tours of refuge.
- Increase research and monitoring of water quality.
- Buy more lands and increase the size of the refuge.
- Maybe we should plant a wider variety of pines?
- Provide more hunting days.
- Provide fewer hunting days.
- Create a management plan for wild turkeys.
- Post designated hunting areas for visitors.
- Provide more information to public about refuge and its uses via the newspapers, radio, television, and Internet. Most of the public doesn't know the refuge exists.
- Don't over-inform the public so the refuge will not be overused. Wildlife should come first before the public.
- Add more staff and funding, particularly Public Use Specialists, to work with schools and home schoolers.
- Use refuge lands to release "rehabbed wildlife."
- Check toxicity level in birds to know health of habitat.

### *Group Two*

- Maintain the natural habitat.
- Preserve Cedar Key Refuge for wildlife except Atsena Otie Key.
- Maintain and restore the natural drainage.
- Increase the natural plant program.
- Remove invasive and exotic species.
- Continue the excellent hunting program and expand if possible. Have a spring hog season. Pursue the introduction of black bear.
- Allow electric wheelchairs throughout the refuge.
- Increase law and citizen enforcement for actions like stopping noisy and speeding boats off the river.
- Increase litter control.
- Increase access around the cabin.
- Share money and staff between our refuges and other refuges so we can provide more species.

*Group Three*

- Hold more community functions to assist funding of these two local refuges.
- Need more funds for this refuge for staff and programs. Need more law enforcement and education staff.
- More research on habitat to maintain fisheries and wildlife.
- Provide more education in schools on wildlife management and environment.
- Limit entry from river so we can have stricter enforcement of public property being abused next to refuge. More directions need to be provided to use wastebaskets, etc.
- Extend the general gun season to coincide with state regulation or the first of December.
- Hold hog hunting at the same time as small game hunting season.
- Burn refuge one side of the river at a time and allow hunting on the other side.
- Develop wildlife feedplots.
- More doe tags.
- No introduction of black bear.
- Provide more and better signage at entrances; e.g., weapon uses such as bows, black powder, and guns not loaded in vehicles and on roads.
- Open up more inside access roads.
- Have fewer inside access roads.
- More bike trails.
- More river access to refuge by docks, walks, observation towers, etc.
- Make walks more compatible for people with disabilities and mark benches as to how far apart they are.
- Better maintenance of boat ramps.
- Adequately mark islands as to public access.

# Attachment Three

*Public Scoping Meeting (July 27, 1999)*

## Easel Notes (Unedited) of the Three Dialogue Sub-Groups

### *Group One*

#### **Appreciate the refuges for the following:**

- Can be alone in the woods.
- Love those wild flowers.
- Road openings create greater access to wild fire.
- A place for wildlife conservation.
- Diverse habitat of flora and fauna.
- Lack of facilities.
- Presence of birds.
- Large area with public access.
- Greater photo opportunities.
- Conserved land with no development.
- Easy access.
- It is free.

#### **Recommend the following changes:**

- Pursue the introduction of black bear.
- Greater educational programs.
- More intense deer management for improved harvesting and habitat and herd quality.
- Better boat launching facilities
- No boat launching changes.
- A couple of non-hunting days every week during the hunting season.
- Better communications and exchange of information between agencies developing programs to attract researchers.
- Remove exotic plants.
- Increased state and federal funding.
- Publicity.

### *Group Two*

#### **Appreciate the refuges for the following:**

- Appreciate the trails available at the present time (Lower Suwannee).
- Presence and protection of wildlife and habitat (both).
- Appreciate public access at Atsena Otie.
- Serenity and isolation of refuges.
- Appreciate the wildlife but like public access we don't have the feeling that we are kept out.
- Environmental education like the fact that the university has access privileges to refuges and programs.
- Appreciate Water Management District with Atsena Otie.
- Appreciate Ken Litzenberger.
- Appreciate partnerships.

- Appreciate interest of the Office of Greenways and Trails to cooperate interconnecting trails throughout Lower Suwannee.
- Size and diversity of refuge also uniqueness (both).

**Recommend the following changes:**

- Would like to see a trail down the Levy side.
- Would like to see Cedar Keys linked somehow to Lower Suwannee (ferry, water taxi).
- Need more marked trails on Lower Suwannee (interp. signs).
- Need designated campgrounds (limit number of people and sites) for Lower Suwannee.
- Would like to see compatibility of uses-primarily hunting versus trail/walking/interpretation.
- Establish a wildlife rehabilitative program.
- Expand/strengthen volunteer program (both refuges).
- Increase dollars for research (from grants, government).

*Group Three*

**Appreciate the refuges for the following:**

- The fact that it is there.
- Unspoiled beauty.
- Bio-diversity.
- Especially the lack of people.
- General health of the refuge.
- Open for hunting and fishing.
- Remoteness.
- Habitat diversity.
- Water quality and quantity.
- Artistic and photographic paradise.
- Quality of seafood (yummy) shellfish and finfish, etc.

**Recommend the following changes:**

- Need botanist.
- Need biologist.
- Need more staffing!!!
- Need visitor and interpretive center.
- Partnership with Aquatic Preserve.
- Partnerships with other state and local agencies.

# Attachment Four

## *Comment Packet*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges that will guide their management for the next 15 years. We would like to know the issues and concerns about the refuge that are important to you.

This Comment Packet is divided into three sections: Background Information, Comment Sheet, and Mailing Request Form. These materials will provide you with information concerning the refuge and planning process. If you would like to give us your ideas, please complete the Comment Sheets. Use additional sheets if the space provided is not adequate to fully address your ideas and concerns. If you wish to be on our mailing list, please complete the Mailing Request Form. You may return some or all of the sections to the refuge mailing address found inside or outside the packet. This packet may be reproduced.

### **Background Information**

**National Wildlife Refuge System.** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife and their habitat. As a part of its major responsibility for migratory birds and fish, endangered species, and certain marine mammals, the Service manages the National Wildlife Refuge System. The System began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated Pelican Island, a pelican and heron rookery in Florida, as a bird sanctuary.

The System, now consisting of more than 500 refuges, is a "network of lands and waters managed for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans" (Refuge Improvement Act of 1997). In the management of the National Wildlife Refuge System:

- Wildlife has first priority.
- Recreation uses are allowed as long as they are compatible with wildlife conservation.
- Wildlife-dependent recreational activities will be emphasized.

**Refuge Environment.** Established in 1979, the purpose of Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge is to "develop, advance, manage, conserve, and protect fish and wildlife resources." The refuge encompasses nearly 53,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods, upland pine forests, salt and freshwater marsh, and oak hammocks. The refuge flanks 20 miles of the lower reaches of the Suwannee River and fronts more than 20 miles of the Gulf of Mexico. It provides habitat for migratory birds, wading birds, threatened and endangered species, and several species of special concern, such as the gopher tortoise and swallow-tailed kite.

**Refuge Vision.** *The watershed and estuary of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge contain valuable water resources and fish and wildlife habitat. The refuge will be managed for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitat, with special emphasis on the protection and restoration of wetland and upland communities. Educational, research, and wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities will be available,*

*insofar as they are compatible with refuge health and preservation. Management will partner with local, state, and federal agencies, community organizations, and individuals to ensure the protection and conservation of the vast Suwannee River ecosystem for current and future generations.*

*The refuge's diversity of wildlife species, coupled with excellent access roads and public use structures, provides opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation.*

**Refuge Environment.** Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1929 as a "refuge and breeding ground for the birds and wild animals." The refuge contains 13 islands and nearly 800 acres. Four of the islands, Snake, Deadman's, Seahorse and North Keys, are designated wilderness areas. Atsena Otie Key is owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District, but managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the refuge. The lighthouse at Seahorse Key is leased by the University of Florida for marine research and environmental education.

The forested habitat contains live oak, red bay, cabbage palm and laurel oak. The lower elevations of the islands, comprising nearly 40 percent of the refuge, are subject to frequent flooding and dominated by salt marsh and mangrove trees. The most significant wildlife resource is the colonial wading bird rookery found on Seahorse Key. Other birds that nest on the islands include pelicans, bald eagles and osprey.

**Refuge Vision.** *The Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge is a group of fragile coastal islands that contain significant natural and cultural resources. The refuge will be managed for the conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat, with special concern for migratory and breeding birds and threatened and endangered species. Management will protect cultural resources and support environmental education, research and where appropriate, other compatible uses. Management will partner with local, state and federal agencies, community organizations and individuals to ensure the protection of these resources for present and future generations.*

Public use opportunities are limited because the refuge is relatively small and inaccessible and can only sustain limited public use if it is to be maintained for the purpose for which it was established. The refuge provides critical habitat for ibis, herons, and egrets; habitat that is disappearing rapidly throughout Florida. The beaches of the islands, except Seahorse Key, are open year-round for compatible activities such as wildlife observation, photography, fishing, environmental education and interpretation.

**Comprehensive Planning.** A planning team, consisting of persons from government agencies, state universities, conservation organizations, and community groups, has been assembled to assist in this comprehensive conservation planning effort. They will:

- Gather information about the refuge environment;
- Identify problems affecting the refuge;
- Evaluate the impacts of various management alternatives; and
- Recommend a plan of action to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In keeping with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will look at, and seriously consider, all reasonable alternatives in the development of the plan. The planning team will actively seek public input in the preparation of the comprehensive plan. To carry out the project, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has begun a six-step planning process:

Step 1. Gather information on the refuge environment

Step 2. Hold a public meeting to identify issues and concerns

Step 3. Identify management alternatives, and evaluate their effects

Step 4. Prepare and release a draft comprehensive plan and environmental assessment

Step 5. Hold a public meeting on the draft plan and environmental assessment

Step 6. Prepare the final comprehensive conservation plan

**Involvement Opportunities.** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is looking for your ideas concerning the future management of Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges. Please give us your ideas at a public meeting on September 21, 1999 at 7:00 p.m. at the Tommy Usher Center. The Center is located at 506 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue (CR 345), Chiefland. This meeting will give you an opportunity to learn more about the refuge and express your ideas about issues, concerns, and needed management programs.

This packet will be given to everyone who attends the public meeting or requests a copy from the office. If you cannot attend the meeting, your comments will still be considered if you complete the comment sheet and mail it to: Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 16450 NW 31<sup>st</sup> Place, Chiefland, FL 32626.

**The packet provides:**

- Background information on the refuge, the refuge system, and the planning process
- A way to share your concerns, ideas, and thoughts on refuge management
- An effective way to make certain your thoughts will be taken into consideration

The comment sheet should be returned to the refuge no later than **October 21, 1999.**



**LOWER SUWANNEE AND CEDAR KEYS  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES**

**COMMENT SHEET**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing a new management plan that will guide future management of both refuges. Please take a few minutes to give us your ideas about various refuge programs and the course of future management. Your responses are voluntary and completely anonymous.

1. Listed below are some of the issues concerning the future management of the refuges. These issues were generated by the Planning Team, consisting of representatives from local, state, and federal agencies, community organizations and private individuals. Some of the issues overlap, while others are specific to a particular refuge.

**To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Circle the number that best reflects your opinion.**

Issues	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
Build a visitor and education center that will be used by both refuges	4	3	2	1	0
Conserve habitat for native wildlife and plants	4	3	2	1	0
Develop a volunteer program	4	3	2	1	0
Expand environmental education and interpretative programs	4	3	2	1	0
Increase law enforcement to protect refuge resources	4	3	2	1	0
Increase staff and funding to support refuge programs (e.g., Biological, Public Use, Maintenance)	4	3	2	1	0
Increase research opportunities and research funding	4	3	2	1	0
Protect the whole biological system	4	3	2	1	0
Protect threatened, endangered species and wildlife of special concern	4	3	2	1	0
Remove and control exotic, invasive species	4	3	2	1	0
Work closely with community organizations	4	3	2	1	0
Maintain water quality and quantity on Lower Suwannee NWR	4	3	2	1	0
Maintain the hunting and fishing programs on Lower Suwannee NWR	4	3	2	1	0
Manage game species more intensively to improve the hunting program on Lower Suwannee NWR	4	3	2	1	0
Pursue the re-introduction of the Florida Black Bear to the Big Bend Area with Lower Suwannee NWR as the core habitat	4	3	2	1	0
Improve public use facilities (e.g., trails, boat launches, boardwalks) on Lower Suwannee NWR	4	3	2	1	0
Limit the amount of new public use facilities (e.g., trails, boardwalks, boat launches) on Lower Suwannee NWR	4	3	2	1	0
Improve accessibility of Lower Suwannee NWR	4	3	2	1	0
Promote Lower Suwannee NWR to increase public knowledge and participation in refuge programs	4	3	2	1	0
Provide more recreational opportunities at Lower Suwannee NWR	4	3	2	1	0

Please answer the following questions. Provide as much information as you like. *Use additional sheets if necessary.*

2. What do you **VALUE** about Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge? (List all that comes to mind).

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3. What are your major **CONCERNS** about Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, current refuge management, or its future direction?

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4. Are there other issues about Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge that concern you?

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5. Have you ever visited the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge?  Yes  No

6. Listed below are **SOME** of the recreational activities occurring Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge. Please check which activities, if any, you would like to do.

<input type="checkbox"/> wildlife observation	<input type="checkbox"/> photography	<input type="checkbox"/> hunting
<input type="checkbox"/> canoeing/kayaking	<input type="checkbox"/> boating	<input type="checkbox"/> hiking
<input type="checkbox"/> fishing	<input type="checkbox"/> bicycling	<input type="checkbox"/> other (list below)
<input type="checkbox"/> interpretation/environmental education (e.g., self-guided trails)		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>

7. What activities, if any, should **NOT** be allowed on Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge?

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8. Where do you reside **MOST** of the year? City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

9. Are you attending the public meeting as a member of an organization?  Yes  No  
If yes, what is its name? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Where did you obtain the Comment Sheet? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please fill out the next page if you would like to comment on Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge.**

11. To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements? *Circle the number that best reflects your opinion.*

Issues - Cedar Keys NWR	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
Provide more recreational opportunities at Cedar Keys NWR	4	3	2	1	0
Improve public use facilities (e.g., trail, boat dock) at Cedar Keys NWR	4	3	2	1	0
Limit the amount of new public use facilities (e.g., trails, restrooms, boat docks) at Cedar Keys NWR	4	3	2	1	0
Make Cedar Keys NWR more accessible to the public	4	3	2	1	0
Limit public access to Cedar Keys NWR to protect wildlife	4	3	2	1	0
Promote Cedar Keys NWR to increase public knowledge and participation in refuge programs	4	3	2	1	0

12. What do you **VALUE** about Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge? (List all that comes to mind).

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13. What are your major **CONCERNS** about Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge, current refuge management, or its future direction?

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4. Are there other issues about Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge that concern you?

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15. Have you ever visited Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge?  Yes  No

16. Listed below are **SOME** of the recreational activities occurring on Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. Please check which activities, if any, you would like to do.

<input type="checkbox"/> wildlife observation	<input type="checkbox"/> photography	<input type="checkbox"/> fishing
<input type="checkbox"/> canoeing/kayaking	<input type="checkbox"/> boating	<input type="checkbox"/> beachcombing
<input type="checkbox"/> interpretation/environmental education (e.g., self-guided trails)	<input type="checkbox"/> other (list below)	
	_____	
	_____	

17. What activities, if any, should **NOT** be allowed on Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge?

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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COMMENTS!** Please place the blue and green sheets in the Comment Box at the Public meeting or mail it to: Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 16450 NW 31<sup>st</sup> Place, Chiefland, FL 32626. Your comments are needed by **October 21, 1999**.

**MAILING REQUEST FORM**

To place your name and address on our mailing list, we must have your written permission. The reason for this is that federal government mailing lists must be released to the public upon request. If you wish to receive future information about Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment, please complete the information below and return the form to:

Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
16450 NW 31<sup>st</sup> Place  
Chiefland, FL 32626

**Yes, I wish to be on the mailing list to receive future information about the comprehensive conservation plan for Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges. I understand that the names and addresses on federal government mailing lists must be released to the public upon request, under the provision of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

If you are acting in an official capacity as the representative of an organization, please complete the following two items:

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: After you have completed the Comment Sheet and / or Mail Request Form, simply fold it in half (with the return mailer on the outside), and tape or staple it together. Attach the proper postage and drop it in the mail. Your comment sheet must be received by **October 21, 1999**. Thank you for your comments.

# Attachment Five

*Planning Update*

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## Planning Update

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*Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges*

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### Public Supports Refuge Planning Process

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initiated Comprehensive Conservation Planning for Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges in June 1999. During the summer and the fall, public meetings, workshops and presentations were conducted to explain the master planning process and to solicit input from the public. In addition, a comment packet was distributed to approximately 250 individuals. Of these, 43 packages were returned to the refuge office. This Planning Update reports what participants considered important on the refuges.

The most important value expressed about the refuges was the conservation and management of the land for wildlife. Conserving habitat received the strongest support at public meetings and in the questionnaire. When asked what they valued most about the refuges, diversity of wildlife and habitat on Lower Suwannee and protection of Cedar Keys' plants and animals were the most frequent responses. This strong support for wildlife and habitat will be emphasized in the management plan.

Supporters also expressed a strong interest in having adequate access to the refuges for wildlife-oriented recreation. Their primary purpose for coming to the refuges is to observe wildlife and to enjoy the natural environment. In the Plan, we will include methods to improve visitor opportunities for these kinds of activities. Environmental education also received strong support and ideas for expansion will be incorporated into the Plan. Traditional uses, such as hunting and fishing on Lower Suwannee were also important and will be continued.

***The biggest concern that the public had is that the refuges will become overused through increased tourism and that the refuge does not have the staff or budget to monitor and manage these increased demands.***

These comments were used to generate issue statements which will be addressed in the Plan. These issues were also used in two public workshops in which participants drafted a vision for each refuge and formulated goals to achieve this vision. The issues, visions and goals are included in this Planning Update.

***In this issue...refuge receives public input for management plan; visions and goals formulated for both refuges; becoming involved!***

The draft Plan is presently being written. When completed it will be distributed through our mailing list and will also be available on the Internet. Public meetings will be conducted to gather input for changes prior to the final version. We hope to hear from you then. In the meantime, if you would like to be on our mailing list, please fill out the form on the last page of this update and return it to the refuge office. Thank you for your continued support of Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges!

Ken Litzenberger  
Refuge Manager

### Comment Packet Results

*1. To what degree do you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statements. Rated on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing strongly Disagree and 4 representing strongly Agree. The values represent the average for each statement.*

Conserve Habitat	3.86
Protect Water Quality	3.81
Protect Endangered Species	3.74
Protect Biological System	3.70
Remove Exotic Species	3.50
Increase Staff and Funding	3.48
Increase Research Funding	3.30
Develop Volunteer Program	3.26
Expand Environmental Education and Programing	3.19
Increase Law Enforcement	3.12
Work With Community Organizations	3.10
Reintroduce Florida Black Bear	3.09
Build a Visitor and Education Center	3.05
Limit New Public Use Facilities	2.88
Increase Public Participation in Refuge Programs	2.88
Improve Public Use Facilities	2.73
Maintain Hunting and Fishing Programs As Is	2.64
Manage Game Species to Improve Hunting	2.24
Provide More Recreational Opportunities	2.21
Improve Accessibility	2.05

2. What do you VALUE most about Lower Suwannee NWR?

COMMENT	%
Diversity of wildlife and habitat	34
Natural, wild beauty	29
Protection of plant and animal life	27
Wildlife Compatible Recreation	22
Peace and Quiet	20
Research and study of habitat	15
Hunting	15
Fishing	7
Photography & Education	5
Quality of the ecosystem & island habitats	2

3. What are your major CONCERNS about Lower Suwannee NWR, current management or its future direction?

CONCERNS	%
Increased tourism	39
Increased hunting	17
Maintain or increase staffing	11
Keep in natural state	8
<b>Also mentioned: Community education, decreased hunting rights, looting and vandalism, pollution, becoming too restrictive, pollution, improving biological data, access for disabled, closure during budget cuts, volunteer programs, game decreasing due to adjacent private land management, hunting and trapping, wild turkey management, airboats, may pave roads</b>	



Whitetail Deer

4. Are there other issues about Lower Suwannee NWR that concern you?

COMMENTS
Need food plots to keep wildlife in area, increase in public use without increase in staff, relations with people in Dixie County, disabled use of motorized vehicles, commitment to river and ecosystem, too few does harvested, should restrict harvest of young bucks, litter, commitment to wildlife, pollution from dairies and other sources, lack of visitor center, not capitalizing assets, safety courses, forest fires, habitat destruction, more interested in roads than habitat, pine beetles, restoration of habitat, reduce timber harvest, add a shooting range, add archery only area in Levy Co., hunting and trapping, improve turkey habitat, poaching, might add A.T.V. trails, adequate law enforcement, irresponsible boaters, keep from becoming a tourist attraction, feral hogs, protecting the manatee

5. Have you ever visited Lower Suwannee National Refuge?

95% of the people answering had visited the refuge.

6. Listed below are SOME of the recreational activities occurring on Lower Suwannee NWR. Please check which activities you would like to do. Number of people responding was 42. Activities in the Other category were written in and are currently not available on the refuge.

ACTIVITY	RESPONSES
Wildlife observation	40
Hiking	31
Canoeing / kayaking	28
Environmental education	27
Photography	26
Fishing	24
Boating	21
Bicycling	21
Hunting	13
Other - Horseback riding, target range, A.T.V. trail.	5

### 3 Planning Update

7. What activities should NOT be allowed on Lower Suwannee NWR? Out of the 43 worksheets, 36 answered this question.

ACTIVITY	RESPONSES
A.T.V.'s, off-road vehicles	14
Hunting	7
Camping	6
Airboats, jet skis	5
Commercial Development, horses, hunting with dogs, motor boating, timbering without replanting	3
Increased hunting, recreational development, swamp buggies	2
All, anything that would adversely impact refuge, bicycling, dirt bikes, fishing, hunting bears, hunting raptors, mining, motorized vehicles (except wheelchairs), night use, pine plantations, planting bait crops, RV's, speeding, trapping	1



Snowy Egret

8. Where do you reside MOST of the year?

Levy County	24
Dixie County	3
Gilchrist County	5
Other - Florida	7
Other - Out of State	3

9. Are you attending the public meeting as a member of an organization?

Yes	10
No	26
Blank	7

10. Where did you obtain the Comment Sheet?

Refuge	10
Mail	8
Public Meeting	10
Internet	4
Person	5
Blank	6

11. To what degree do you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statements. Rated on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing strongly Disagree and 4 representing strongly Agree. The values represent the average for each statement.

Limit public access to Cedar Keys NWR to protect wildlife	3.42
Limit the amount of new public use facilities (e.g., trails, restrooms, boat docks)	3.38
Promote Cedar Keys NWR to increase public knowledge and participation in refuge programs	2.69
Provide more recreational opportunities at Cedar Keys NWR	2.11
Improve public use facilities (E.g., trail, boat dock)	2.11
Make Cedar Keys NWR more accessible to the public	1.76

12. What do you VALUE about Cedar Keys NWR?

COMMENT	%
Protection of plants, animals, marsh, especially from development	36
Diversity, abundance of wildlife and habitat (birds =27%)	33
Natural, wild beauty	15
Wildlife Compatible Recreation - Observation & Photography	15
Remoteness	12
Peace and Quiet, not crowded	9
Research and study of habitat	9
Water Quality	3
Wildlife Compatible Recreation - Fishing	3

4 Planning Update

13. What are your major CONCERNS about Cedar Keys NWR, current management or its future direction?

COMMENTS	%
Increased tourism, too many people, too commercial, overused	38
Increase staffing to meet growing responsibilities, not enough law enforcement	21
<b>Also mentioned: Hunting and trapping, keep in natural state, loss of beauty, community education on value of refuge, outreach, pollution, erosion and storm damage to nesting areas on Seahorse Key, allow hunting, exotic species removal, too much boat traffic, too many snakes, no concerns</b>	

14. Are there other issues about Cedar Keys NWR that concern you?

COMMENTS
Adequate Law Enforcement, increase in public use without an increase in staff, keep from becoming tourist attraction, maintaining commitment to wildlife, hunting and trapping on the refuge, lack of a visitor center, litter, poachers, need to open lighthouse more often, looting of archaeological sites, not capitalizing on assets, Atsena Otie was made into interpretive area, air boats and jet skis, no concerns

15. Have you ever visited Cedar Keys NWR?

87% of those answering had visited the refuge.

16. Listed below are SOME of the recreational activities occurring on Cedar Keys NWR. Please check which activities you would like to do. Number of people responding was 34. Activities in the Other Category were written in and are currently not available on the refuge.

ACTIVITY	RESPONSES
Wildlife observation	31
Photography	22
Canoeing/kayaking	20
Interpretation/Environmental Education	19
Fishing	15
Boating, beach combing	14
Other- Biking, hiking, hunting	1

17. What activities should NOT be allowed on Cedar Keys NWR? Out of 38 forms returned, 31 answered this question.

ACTIVITY	RESPONSES
Camping	13
Hunting	9
Anything that would adversely impact refuge	6
Other comments: Motor boating, entry to interior of islands, beach activities ( wind surfing, swimming, etc.), All activities, commercial development, jet skis, large-scale recreational development, Trapping, fires, poaching, littering	1

## Issue Statements

### Wildlife Habitat Management



Pine Warbler

- WH1 There is not enough known about the wildlife or habitat of either refuge.
- WH2 There is a need to monitor and manage habitat for endangered species, migratory birds and resident wildlife.
- WH3 There is a need to manage the water flows and water quantity impacts on the habitat of the refuges.
- WH4 There is a need to manage the impacts of human use on wildlife and habitat for the refuges.

WH5 There is a need to preserve and restore the ecosystems of the refuges.

### Public Use

- PU1-LS There is a need to provide public consumptive and non-consumptive use and access to Lower Suwannee refuge in a manner that minimizes conflicts between user groups and does not significantly impact habitat.
- PU2-LS There is a need for better management and access for hunting activities on Lower Suwannee refuge.
- PU3-LS There is a need for more opportunities for passive recreational uses on Lower Suwannee refuge.
- PU4-CK There is a need to continue to only provide limited public uses on Cedar Keys refuge to protect sensitive wildlife habitat.
- PU5 There is a need to expand the education and interpretation programs with increased involvement with public schools.
- PU6 There is a need to provide adult education and outreach.
- PU7 There is a need to increase staff and facilities, particularly for Cedar Keys refuge and the Dixie County portion of the Lower Suwannee refuge.
- PU8 There is a need to recruit and train more student interns and volunteers.



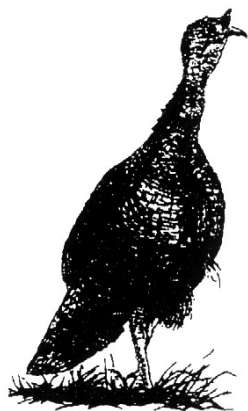
**Partnerships to Manage and Protect the Refuge**

- P1** There is a need to maintain and enhance partnerships with state, county and community agencies, universities and educational institutions, user groups, natural resource-based organizations and other entities.
- P2** There is a need to protect refuge resources through additional acquisition and/or cooperative management agreements.

- **Landscape Management.** Promote interagency and private landowner cooperation and partnerships for the management and protection of natural and cultural resources within the Big Bend area of Florida, the Suwannee River Basin, and the North Florida Ecosystem to benefit wildlife, water quality and quantity, and the American people.

## Lower Suwannee NWR Vision and Management Goals

*The watershed and estuary of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge contain valuable water resources and fish and wildlife habitat. The refuge will be managed for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitat, with special emphasis on the protection and restoration of wetland and upland communities. Educational, research, and wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities will be available, insofar as they are compatible with refuge health and preservation. Management will partner with local, state, and federal agencies, community organizations, and individuals to ensure the protection and conservation of the vast Suwannee River ecosystem for current and future generations.*



Wild Turkey

- **Wildlife.** Expand scientifically-based monitoring and research to support management decisions on wildlife habitat and populations.
- **Habitat.** Restore, conserve, and enhance the natural diversity, abundance, and ecological function of refuge habitats, with an emphasis on managing habitat to benefit threatened and endangered species and species of special concern in the State of Florida.
- **Protection of Resources.** Protect refuge natural and cultural resources to ensure their integrity and to fulfill the Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- **Public Use.** Provide opportunities for environmental education, interpretation and wildlife-dependent recreation in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Act of 1997.

## Cedar Keys NWR Vision and Management Goals

*The Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge is a group of fragile coastal islands that contain significant natural and cultural resources. The refuge will be managed for the conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat, with special concern for migratory and breeding birds and threatened and endangered species. Management will protect cultural resources and support environmental education, research and where appropriate, other compatible uses. Management will partner with local, state and federal agencies, community organizations and individuals to ensure the protection of these resources for present and future generations.*

- **Wildlife and Habitat.** Manage and conserve the natural diversity, abundance, and ecological function of refuge flora and fauna, with an emphasis on protecting the colonial wading bird rookery of Seahorse Key, Threatened and Endangered species, and Species of Special Concern in the State of Florida.
- **Protection of Resources.** Protect refuge natural, cultural and wilderness resources to ensure their integrity and to fulfill the Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- **Public Use.** Provide opportunities for environmental education, interpretation and wildlife-dependent recreation when compatible with the purpose, mission and vision of the refuge and that will not negatively impact critical or sensitive habitats.
- **Partnerships.** Promote collaboration and partnerships with private citizens and other agencies to increase research and environmental education opportunities and to protect the coastal ecosystem.

***Credits:** Sandra Palfy, data entry, typing, distribution; Lyne Askins, design, layout, editing; Ken Litzenberger, Editor. All graphics: USFWS.*

**MAILING REQUEST FORM**

To place your name and address on our mailing list, we must have your written request. The reason for this is that federal government mailing lists must be released to the public upon request. If you wish to receive future information about Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment, please complete the information below and return the form to:

Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
16450 NW 31<sup>st</sup> Place  
Chiefland, FL 32626

First Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Last Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

If you are acting in an official capacity as the representative of an organization, please complete the following two items:

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**Yes, I wish to be on the mailing list to receive future information about the comprehensive conservation plan for Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges. I understand that the names and addresses on federal government mailing lists must be released to the public upon request, under the provision of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

US Fish and Wildlife Service  
Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge  
16450 NW 31<sup>st</sup> Place  
Chiefland, FL 32626