



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TRANSMITTAL SHEET

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| PART 602 FW 1, 3, and 4 | SUBJECT National Wildlife Refuge System Planning Refuge Planning Overview Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process Step-Down Management Planning | RELEASE NUMBER 355 |
| FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT Division of Refuges | | DATE June 21, 2000 |

EXPLANATION OF MATERIAL TRANSMITTED:

These chapters establish requirements and guidance for National Wildlife Refuge System planning, including Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP's) and step-down management plans. This policy incorporates the CCP provisions of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended.

DIRECTOR

FILING INSTRUCTIONS:

Remove:

602 FW 1, FWM 201, 06/23/96 (2 sheets)
None
602 FW 2, FWM 276, 11/12/96 (2 sheets)
Exhibit 1, 602 FW 2, FWM 201, 06/23/95 (1 sheet)
Exhibit 2, 602 FW 2, FWM 276, 11/12/96 (1 sheet)
602 FW 3, FWM 201, 06/23/96 (1 sheet)
None
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Insert:

602 FW 1, FWM 355, 06/21/00 (3 sheets)
Exhibit 1, 602 FW 1, FWM 355, 6/21/00 (1 sheet)
None
None
None
602 FW 3, FWM 355, 06/21/00 (4 sheets)
Exhibit 1, 602 FW 3, FWM 355, 6/21/00 (1 sheet)
Exhibit 2, 602 FW 3, FWM 355, 6/21/00 (1 sheet)
Exhibit 3, 602 FW 3, FWM 355, 6/21/00 (2 sheets)
Exhibit 4, 602 FW 3, FWM 355, 6/21/00 (1 sheet)
Exhibit 5, 602 FW 3, FWM 355, 6/21/00 (1 sheet)
602 FW 4, FWM 355, 06/21/00 (2 sheets)

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3.1 What is the purpose of this chapter? Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs) describe the desired future conditions of a refuge and provide long-range guidance and management direction to achieve refuge purposes; help fulfill the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) mission; maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System; and meet other mandates. The purpose of this chapter is to describe a systematic decision-making process that fulfills the requirements we are establishing for developing a CCP. This chapter provides guidance, step-by-step direction, and establishes minimum requirements for all CCPs. Experienced planners lead the CCP process. We require all of our planners and strongly encourage refuge managers and other key planning team members attend the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) course on Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Planning.

3.2 What is our policy for CCPs? The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service or we) must manage all national wildlife refuges according to an approved CCP. We will prepare a CCP by October 2012 for each refuge in existence at the time of passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. For refuges established after passage of this Act, we will prepare CCPs when we staff the refuge and acquire a land base sufficient to achieve refuge purposes, but no later than 15 years after establishment of the refuge. To the extent practicable, we will coordinate the development of CCPs with affected States. We will continue to manage each refuge or planning unit with existing plans effective prior to October 9, 1997, to the extent these plans are consistent with the Refuge Administration Act, until we revise such plans or new CCPs supersede them. Upon completion of a CCP, we will manage the refuge or planning unit in a manner consistent with the CCP. We will revise the CCP every 15 years thereafter, or earlier, if monitoring and evaluation determine that we need changes to achieve planning unit purpose(s), vision, goals, or objectives.

3.3 What are our goals for Comprehensive Conservation Planning?

A. To ensure that wildlife comes first in the National Wildlife Refuge System and that we manage each refuge to help fulfill the mission of the Refuge System, maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System, as well as achieve the specific purposes for which the refuge was established.

B. To provide a clear and comprehensive statement of desired future conditions for each refuge or planning unit.

C. To encourage use of an ecosystem approach when we conduct refuge planning. This includes conducting concurrent refuge planning for refuges within the same

watershed or ecosystem and considering the broader goals and objectives of the refuges' ecosystems and watersheds when developing management direction (see Ecosystem Approach to Fish and Wildlife Conservation [Part 052 of the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual]).

D. To support management decisions and their rationale by using a thorough assessment of available science derived from scientific literature, on-site refuge data, expert opinion, and sound professional judgment.

E. To ensure that the six priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses receive priority consideration during the preparation of CCPs.

F. To provide a forum for the public to comment on the type, extent, and compatibility of uses on refuges, including priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses.

G. To provide a uniform basis for budget requests for operational, maintenance, and capital improvement programs.

H. To ensure public involvement in refuge management decisions by providing a process for effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with affected parties, including Federal agencies, State conservation agencies, tribal governments, local governments, conservation organizations, adjacent landowners, and interested members of the public.

3.4 What is the Comprehensive Conservation Planning process?

A. The CCP process (see Exhibit 1) provides consistent guidelines for developing CCPs. We designed the planning process to result in the development of vision statements, goals, objectives, and strategies that achieve refuge or planning unit purpose(s); help fulfill the Refuge System mission; maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System; and meet other mandates.

B. Each CCP will comply with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through the concurrent preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will accompany or be integrated with the CCP. We have integrated NEPA compliance requirements directly into the CCP process. When preparing an EA, consider integrating it into the draft CCP. When preparing an EIS with a CCP, integrate the documents. Following completion of the final CCP/NEPA document, the product of the planning process will be a stand-alone CCP, separate from the EA or EIS.

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C. Our CCP planning process consists of the following eight steps. Although we display the steps sequentially, CCP planning and NEPA documentation are iterative processes. Cycling through some of the steps more than once or having several steps occurring simultaneously is normal. Actions within each of the eight steps may not be sequential.

(1) Preplanning: Planning the Plan

(a) Planning Team. The Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System, appoints the planning team leader. The planning team leader assembles the planning team, which consists of the planning team leader, the refuge manager and key staff members, and appropriate support staff or specialists from both regional and field offices (e.g., fisheries, cultural resources, endangered species, external affairs/outreach, realty, contaminants, migratory birds, water resources, etc.). We will provide representatives from appropriate State and tribal conservation agencies, and any public agency that may have a direct land management relationship with the refuge, the opportunity to serve on planning teams. The planning team leader will prepare a formal written request for participation by appropriate State and tribal conservation agencies for signature by the Regional Director. Included in this request is an invitation to attend the NCTC course on Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Planning. If we meet the requirements of Section 204(b) of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (Public Law 104-4), participation by these State and tribal agencies is not subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

(b) Identify Refuge Purpose(s), History, and Establishing Authority. Document the history of refuge establishment and management, as well as refuge purposes and authorizing authority (e.g., legislation [including wilderness designation, if applicable], executive orders, administrative memoranda). These will become driving forces in the process and subsequently be reflected in the refuge vision statement, goals, objectives, and strategies in the CCP.

(c) Identify Planning and Compliance Requirements and Special Designations. Review our agency and Refuge System mission statements and policies, as well as other existing legislation to help identify planning and compliance requirements. See Exhibit 2 for a list of laws and executive orders that may apply and Exhibit 3 for a checklist of elements we must include within a CCP. Identify and review other Service guidance such as *Fulfilling the Promise: The National Wildlife Refuge System* and mandates including laws, executive orders, regulations, and our policies, especially those with compliance requirements. Also review any existing special designation areas such as wilderness, research natural areas, wild and scenic rivers, wetlands of international importance (Ramsar sites), Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserves, etc., and specifically address the potential for any new special designations. Concurrent with the CCP process we will conduct a

wilderness review and incorporate a summary of the review into the CCP. (See Part 610 of the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual for guidance on conducting wilderness reviews.) Complete the inventory phase of the review during preplanning. If you identify a Wilderness Study Area, proceed with the study and recommendation phases of the review. (**Note:** An EIS is the NEPA document we must include in a recommendation or report on a legislative proposal to Congress [40 CFR 1506.8]. This requirement applies to all CCPs that contain wilderness recommendations.)

(d) Purpose and Need for the Plan. The purpose of developing the CCP is to provide the refuge manager with a 15-year management plan for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their related habitats, while providing opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses. The CCP, when fully implemented, should achieve refuge purposes; help fulfill the Refuge System mission; maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System; and meet other mandates. The CCP must be specific to the planning unit and identify the overarching wildlife, public use, or management needs for the refuge.

(e) Planning Area and Data Needs. Delineate the planning area on a map. Identify the relationship between the planning unit and its ecosystem(s) and watershed(s) as well as relationships between the planning unit and any other refuges or other important fish and wildlife habitats in the vicinity. Identify data available to address issues discussed in subparagraph (h), Internal Scoping. Obtain information from Federal, tribal, State and local agencies, and private landowners concerning land management issues that may impact or relate to the planning unit. To assist in determining species or resources of concern, consult the following: Federal threatened and endangered species lists; Migratory Nongame Birds of Management Concern in the United States; Partners in Flight Watch List; State lists of rare, threatened, endangered, or species of concern; National Audubon Society State Watch Lists; The Nature Conservancy's heritage program and ranking system; as well as State heritage databases and conservation data centers for additional sources of information. Also identify resource experts familiar with the key species and habitats in the planning area, and consult with these experts during the development of habitat objectives. Base CCPs on a comprehensive assessment of the existing scientific literature. Potential sources of information include planning documents, EAs, EISs, annual narrative reports, information from previously conducted or ongoing research, data from refuge inventories or studies, published literature on related biological studies, State conservation management plans, field management experience, etc. While we may not be able to develop new data for the CCP, we may identify the need for further data collection. A lack of data should not

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delay the completion of the CCP. Identify and describe the following conditions and their trends for the planning unit and, as appropriate, for the planning area:

- (i) Context of the planning unit in relation to the surrounding ecosystem.
- (ii) Structures, components, and functions of the ecosystem(s) of which the planning unit is a part.
- (iii) Natural and historic role of fire and other natural occurrences affecting ecological processes.
- (iv) Past land use and history of settlement, including a description of any changes in topography, hydrology, and other factors.
- (v) Current and historic description of the flora and fauna and the diversity of habitats and natural communities.
- (vi) Distribution, migration patterns, and abundance of fish, wildlife, and plant populations, including any threatened or endangered species, and related habitats.
- (vii) Fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats and communities that are rare and/or declining within the ecosystem.
- (viii) Water resources including quality and quantity.
- (ix) Archaeological and other cultural resources.
- (x) Significant problems that may adversely affect the ecological integrity or wilderness characteristics and the actions necessary to correct or mitigate the problems.
- (xi) Identify opportunities to improve the health of habitats or the functioning of ecosystems.
- (xii) Significant problems that may adversely affect the populations and habitats of fish, wildlife, and plants (including candidate, threatened, and endangered species) and the actions necessary to correct or mitigate the problems.
- (xiii) Known or suspected sources of environmental contaminants and their potential impacts on the planning unit (refer to the Contaminant Assessment Program).
- (xiv) Land acquisition or habitat protection efforts.
- (xv) Habitat management practices.
- (xvi) Existing administrative resources, including staffing, funding, and facilities.

(xvii) Existing transportation patterns and related visitor facilities.

(xviii) Potential need for administrative sites, transportation improvements, or visitor facilities and areas within the planning unit that are suitable for such sites.

(xix) Existing and potential opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation.

(xx) Existing special management areas, or the potential for such designations (e.g., wilderness, research natural areas, and wild and scenic rivers).

(f) Review All Available Information, Plans, Data, Maps, and Data Standards. Based on this review, determine what the initial planning area includes and identify any additional information and data needs, including mapping and GIS needs. **Note:** All Federal agencies and their contractors must comply with data standards endorsed by the Federal Geographic Data Committee (Executive Order 12906; 59 FR 17671, April 13, 1994). Of particular relevance to refuge planning are the National Vegetation Classification Standard (FGDC-STD-005) and the Classification of Wetlands and Deep Water Habitats (FGDC-STD-004). Compliance with these standards will facilitate the sharing and exchange of high-quality vegetation and wetland data among Federal agencies and their partners. We also are developing other data standards, such as cartographic standards for delineation of refuge boundaries and land status.

(g) Vision and Goals. Review the existing planning unit vision statement and goals and determine the need for revision. If these do not exist, prepare a draft vision statement and goals for consideration during public scoping. The vision statement should focus on what will be different in the future because of our efforts, capture the essence of what we are trying to do, and why. It should be future-oriented, concise, clear, compelling, and give a sense of purpose to our efforts. At a minimum, each refuge should develop goals for wildlife species or groups of species, habitat (including land protection needs), compatible wildlife-dependent recreation, other mandates (such as refuge-specific legislation, executive orders, special area designations, etc.), and fish, wildlife, and plant populations, as appropriate. The vision statement and goals will reflect planning unit purposes; help fulfill the mission of the Refuge System; maintain and, where appropriate, restore ecological integrity; and will be consistent with mandates and principles of sound fish and wildlife management. Planning unit goals also will reflect our ecosystem goals to the extent these goals do not conflict with the Refuge System mission or the purposes for which the refuge was established. We also may develop refuge goals for our other mandates. Subsequently, we will develop objectives for achieving planning unit goals (see 3.4C(4)(d), Objective Development). For additional information on

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developing goals and objectives, see the current edition of *Writing Refuge Management Goals and Objectives: A Handbook*.

(h) Internal Scoping. Begin the internal scoping process by identifying management concerns, issues, and opportunities to resolve them, as well as any potential impacts and alternatives that we may need to address in the CCP and NEPA analysis. Review the background, rationale, and the success or failure of any controversial management actions and identify any additional information and data needed where appropriate.

(i) Public Involvement/Outreach Planning. Prepare a Public Involvement/Outreach Plan indicating how and when we will invite the affected public to participate in CCP development. This plan will include establishing a mailing list and identifying appropriate techniques and materials to use in public involvement. We integrate public involvement and outreach into each step, and it continues throughout the planning process. For additional information on public involvement techniques, consult the *Public Participation Handbook* (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1985) or the *NCTC Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Planning Course Handbook and Reference Notebook*.

(j) Work Plan/Planning Schedule. Establish a work plan or planning schedule for the CCP. Determine who will be responsible for carrying out identified tasks, gathering information and data, and preparing products identified in the work plan or schedule. Identify all key NEPA compliance steps and public involvement activities. Identify any additional expertise, besides the planning team, required to prepare the CCP. This may include an economist, a facilitator for public and other meetings, other contracted professional services, etc.

(k) Planning Record. Establish a planning record to document the preparation of the CCP and NEPA compliance, and assign its maintenance to a team member. The planning record will serve as a valuable reference and provide important background and historical information. If there is a legal challenge to the CCP, use the planning record to construct the administrative record. For additional information on the planning record, consult the *NCTC Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Planning Course Handbook and Reference Notebook*.

(2) Initiate Public Involvement and Scoping

(a) Notice of Intent. Prepare a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a CCP, with appropriate NEPA compliance, and publish the NOI in the **Federal Register**. The NOI initiates public scoping for the CCP/NEPA planning and decision-making process. If we initially determine that we will prepare an EIS for the CCP, the NOI should specify that. If at any time during the planning process we decide to prepare an EIS, we will publish in the **Federal Register** a new NOI to

prepare an EIS and provide additional time for the public to comment. Should we publish a new NOI, we will use news releases and other appropriate means to notify the public.

(b) Public Scoping. Using news releases to the local media and other appropriate means, notify the affected public of the opportunity to participate in the preparation of the CCP and begin the scoping process. Involve the public and gather comments on any existing planning unit vision statement and goals. Encourage the public to help identify potential issues, management actions and concerns, significant problems or impacts, and opportunities or alternatives to resolve them. Public scoping will continue until we prepare a draft CCP/NEPA document.

(c) Issues and Data Needs. Analyze all comments gathered and recorded during the scoping process. Identify any new information, issues, concerns, or significant problems, opportunities to resolve them, and potential refinements or revisions of any existing planning unit vision statement and goals. Based on this analysis, identify any additional information and data needed.

(3) Review Vision Statement and Goals and Determine Significant Issues

(a) Vision and Goals. Review and evaluate the public's comments on the planning unit vision statement and goals. Based on this review, modify the vision and goals for the planning unit as appropriate.

(b) Determine Significant Issues. Review and evaluate all potential issues, management concerns, and problems and the opportunities to resolve them that the planning team and the public have identified. Identify those issues and concerns that are significant, and the appropriate scale at which to consider those issues. Document the rationale for selecting significant issues, as well as the rationale for not selecting the other issues and concerns (e.g., outside the scope of the CCP, does not contribute to achieving refuge purposes, Refuge System mission, etc.). Significant issues typically are those that are: within our jurisdiction, suggest different actions or alternatives, and will influence our decision. We will refer those issues identified outside the scope of refuge planning to the pertinent Service program office or division.

(4) Develop and Analyze Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action. This part of the process is not sequential, it is iterative. Iterative procedures in this step of the process include: issue assessment; refinement and development of goals, objectives, and strategies; analysis and comparison of impacts and benefits of management actions; and the packaging or combining of similar themes or programs to develop preliminary alternatives and assessment of their environmental consequences. The alternatives should reflect different sets of objectives and strategies to achieve refuge purposes, vision, and goals, help fulfill the Refuge System mission, and resolve issues. Prepare maps depicting the

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different strategies reflected in each alternative. Also display this information in a matrix comparing issues, impacts, and benefits for each alternative.

(a) No Action Alternative. Define the No Action Alternative, which is usually a continuation of current planning unit objectives and management strategies, with no changes or changes that would have occurred without the CCP.

(b) A Range of Alternatives. Develop a range of alternatives, or different approaches to planning unit management, that we could reasonably undertake to achieve planning unit goals and refuge purposes; help fulfill the Refuge System mission; maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System; meet other mandates, and resolve any significant issues identified. Alternatives consist of different sets of objectives and strategies for management of the refuge. Give equal effort to each alternative regarding specific objectives and strategies so that the decision maker can make an informed choice. NEPA requires an equal and full analysis of all alternatives considered for implementation.

(c) Proposed Action. The planning team will recommend a proposed action in the NEPA document for the CCP identifying the alternative that best achieves planning unit purposes, vision, and goals; helps fulfill the Refuge System mission; maintains and, where appropriate, restores the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; addresses the significant issues and mandates; and is consistent with principles of sound fish and wildlife management. The proposed action is, for all practical purposes, the draft CCP for the planning unit.

(d) Objective Development. Develop objectives to address each goal. Word objectives so it is clear what we can measure during monitoring to assess progress toward their attainment. Consult the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual chapters on habitat management, populations management, wilderness management, and wildlife-dependent recreation during the development of objectives. Develop detailed, measurable objectives using available scientific literature and other appropriate information. Develop objectives with consideration of regional and Service ecosystem goals and objectives. Develop objectives for specific refuge habitat types, management units, key species (e.g., migratory birds and threatened and endangered species), wildlife-dependent recreation, monitoring populations of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats, and other areas of management, as appropriate. Objectives also may deal with refuge information needs (for example, including the development of baseline data), administrative needs, and any other issues we need to address to meet the goals of the refuge. Document in a short narrative summary the rationale, including appropriate literature citations, that supports each objective. Also consult the current edition of *Writing Refuge*

Management Goals and Objectives: A Handbook. Developing detailed objectives at this stage will expedite development of step-down management plans when required.

(e) Strategy Development. Develop strategies to identify the specific actions, tools, or techniques that are necessary to accomplish each objective. Strategies represent specific projects that provide the detail required to assess and develop funding, staffing, and partnerships needed to implement the plan. Develop inventory and monitoring strategies to measure implementation results in quantifiable and verifiable ways. We may require step-down management plans to provide the specific details of how to achieve goals and objectives identified in the CCP.

(f) Environmental Consequences. Assess the environmental consequences (direct, indirect, and cumulative) of implementing each alternative as required by NEPA. Compare the consequences of implementing each alternative in relation to the No Action Alternative, which serves as a baseline. Describe the adverse and beneficial impacts of implementing each alternative on fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats; any threatened or endangered species; cultural resources; the local economy; the ability to provide opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses; conflicts between priority uses and other uses; and other issues identified earlier in the planning process. This analysis must provide the level of detail necessary to assess the compatibility of all proposed uses. Describe each alternative's ability to achieve planning unit purpose(s), vision, and goals; help fulfill the Refuge System mission; ensure that we maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; and address the significant issues and mandates. This assessment also will identify the funding, staffing, and facilities required for implementation of each alternative.

(5) Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA Document

(a) Draft CCP and NEPA Document. Concurrently prepare the draft CCP and appropriate NEPA documentation (EA or EIS). When preparing an EA, consider integrating the draft CCP with the EA. When preparing an EIS with a CCP, integrate the documents. If the decision is to prepare a separate EA, see Exhibit 4 for a recommended CCP outline. If the documents are separate, the proposed action in the EA must contain all of the major actions of the draft CCP. If the decision is to merge the CCP and EA, see Exhibit 5 for a recommended outline. During the process of preparing the CCP, refer to Exhibit 3 to ensure inclusion of all required elements in the plan. Ensure compliance regarding other programs and policies, including: Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act; Sections 401 and 404 of the Clean Water Act; Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act; Section 14 of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act; Executive Order 13007 - Indian

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Sacred Sites; Executive Order 11988 - Floodplain Management; Executive Order 11990 - Protection of Wetlands; etc. See Exhibit 2 for a list of mandates to consider during the planning process.

(b) Compatibility Determinations. Complete new compatibility determinations or re-evaluate existing compatibility determinations as part of the CCP process for all individual uses, specific use programs, or groups of related uses associated with the proposed action. Prepared concurrently with the CCP, incorporate the draft compatibility determinations into the draft CCP as an appendix. We require public review and comment for all compatibility determinations. We can achieve this concurrently through public review and comment of the draft CCP and NEPA document. While other alternatives do not require compatibility determinations, assess the environmental consequences, and, for all practical purposes, compatibility of all uses proposed in those alternatives in the NEPA document.

(c) Pre-acquisition Compatibility Determinations. If our proposed action includes expanding the planning unit by acquiring new lands, the draft CCP and NEPA documents also must identify any existing wildlife-dependent recreational public uses deemed compatible that we will allow to continue after acquisition. Incorporate these pre-acquisition compatibility determinations into the draft CCP and NEPA document.

(d) Internal Review. Submit the draft CCP and NEPA document for internal review within the Region following established procedures. Include in the review refuge program managers, ecosystem managers, refuge staff and other appropriate Service programs and divisions, as well as other agency partners. Also submit these documents for internal review to the Regional and Washington Office Planning Coordinators. Consider all comments received from the internal reviews and make appropriate changes to the draft document. Print the draft CCP and NEPA document and prepare for public review.

(e) Public Notice, Review, and Comment. Prepare a Notice of Availability of the draft CCP and NEPA document and publish it in the **Federal Register**. Notify the affected public of the availability of these documents through other appropriate means, as identified in the Public Involvement/Outreach Plan. Public notices will make clear that we are seeking concurrent review on compatibility determinations. Provide a minimum of 30 days for public review of a draft CCP with an EA and 45 days for a draft CCP with an integrated EIS. Make copies of the draft CCP and NEPA document available to appropriate elected officials; Federal, State, and local agencies; tribal governments; organizations; libraries (including NCTC); resource experts; adjacent landowners; and individuals requesting them. Conduct appropriate public involvement activities as called for in the Public Involvement/Outreach Plan. Document all

public comments, both written and oral, received on the draft CCP and NEPA document as part of the planning record.

(6) Prepare and Adopt Final Plan

(a) Public Comment, Analysis, and Response. Review and analyze all written and oral comments received from the public on the draft CCP and NEPA document. Determine which comments are substantive and warrant written response. Modify the document(s) as appropriate. Prepare a summary of the public comments received and a statement of the disposition of concerns expressed in those comments, noting where we have changed the document(s) or why we did not make such changes. Incorporate the summary and statement of disposition into the final document(s) (usually in the NEPA document or a CCP appendix).

(b) Final CCP and NEPA Document(s). Identify the preferred alternative and prepare the final CCP and appropriate NEPA documentation. The preferred alternative can be the proposed action, the no action alternative, another alternative, or a combination of actions or alternatives discussed in the draft CCP and NEPA document. Following completion of the final CCP/NEPA document, the product of the CCP process is a stand-alone CCP (the preferred alternative for the planning unit). During the process of preparing the final plan, refer to Exhibit 3 to ensure inclusion of all required elements.

(c) Internal Review. Submit the final document(s) for internal review within the Region according to established procedures. Refer to 3.4C(5)(d) for a list of those to include in the review. Consider all comments received from the internal review and make appropriate changes to the final document(s).

(d) Decision Document. The decision document (either a Finding of No Significant Impact [FONSI] or a Record of Decision [ROD]) will certify that we have met agency compliance requirements and that the CCP, when implemented, will achieve the purposes of the refuge and help fulfill the Refuge System mission.

(i) CCP with an EA and FONSI. The refuge manager and planning team leader submit the final CCP and FONSI through line supervision for concurrence and approval by the Regional Director. The Regional Director will sign and date both the FONSI and the final CCP. Following approval, print and distribute the final document(s) and appropriate appendices. Provide the FONSI to all interested and affected parties. Concurrent with the distribution of the FONSI, provide the final, approved, stand-alone CCP or a summary to all interested parties. In some cases we may require a 30-day public review period for the FONSI (see 550 FW 3.3 B(4)(c)). In these cases, we may not sign or release the final CCP until the end of the 30-day review.

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(ii) **CCP with an EIS and ROD.** The refuge manager and planning team leader submit the final EIS/CCP through line supervision for concurrence and approval to release these documents to the public. Provide these documents to interested and affected parties for at least 30 days prior to issuing a ROD. Following this period, submit the ROD through line supervision for concurrence and approval by the Regional Director. The Regional Director will sign and date both the ROD and the final CCP. Following approval, print the final documents and appropriate appendices. Provide the ROD or notification of its availability to all interested and affected parties. Concurrent with the release of the ROD, provide or make available the final, approved, stand-alone CCP or a summary to interested parties. Effective with the signing and release of the ROD, implement the CCP.

(iii) **Stand-Alone CCP.** The final product of the CCP process is a stand-alone CCP (the preferred alternative for the planning unit).

(e) **Public Notice.** Prepare a Notice of Availability of the final approved CCP and NEPA document(s) and publish it in the **Federal Register**. Notify the affected public of the availability of the final document(s) through other appropriate means, as identified in the Public Involvement/Outreach Plan. Send copies of all final documents to the Regional and Washington Office Planning Coordinators. Make copies of the final approved CCP and NEPA document(s) available to appropriate elected officials; Federal, State, and local agencies; tribal governments; organizations; libraries (including NCTC); adjacent landowners; and individuals requesting them.

(7) **Implement Plan, Monitor, and Evaluate.** Following approval of the CCP and public notification of the decision, begin implementing the strategies identified in the CCP. Allocate funding and staff time to the priority strategies as defined in the CCP. Initiate the monitoring and evaluation process identified in the CCP to determine if we are making progress in achieving the planning unit purpose(s), vision, and goals. Monitoring should address habitat or population objectives, and the effects of management activities. See 701 FW 2. Describe the sampling design sufficiently so it may be replicated. Through adaptive management, evaluation of monitoring and research results may indicate the need to modify refuge objectives or strategies.

(8) **Review and Revise Plan**

(a) **Plan Review.** Review the CCP at least annually to decide if it requires any revisions. Modify the plan and associated management activities whenever this review or other monitoring and evaluation determine that we need changes to achieve planning unit purpose(s), vision, and goals.

(b) **Plan Revision.** Revise the CCP when significant new information becomes available, ecological conditions change, major refuge expansion occurs, or when we identify the need to do so during plan review. This should occur every 15 years or sooner, if necessary. All plan revisions should follow the procedures outlined in this chapter for preparing plans and will require NEPA compliance. Document minor plan revisions that meet the criteria of a categorical exclusion in an Environmental Action Statement, in accordance with 550 FW 3.3C. Contact the Regional NEPA Coordinator for an up-to-date list of categorical exclusions and for other NEPA assistance. If the plan requires a major revision, then the CCP process starts anew at the preplanning step. See 602 FW 3.4C(1).

(c) **Ongoing Public Involvement.** Continue informing and involving the public through appropriate means.