



# Steigerwald Lake, Franz Lake and Pierce National Wildlife Refuges

**May 2001 - Planning Update #2**

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*Pierce NWR*

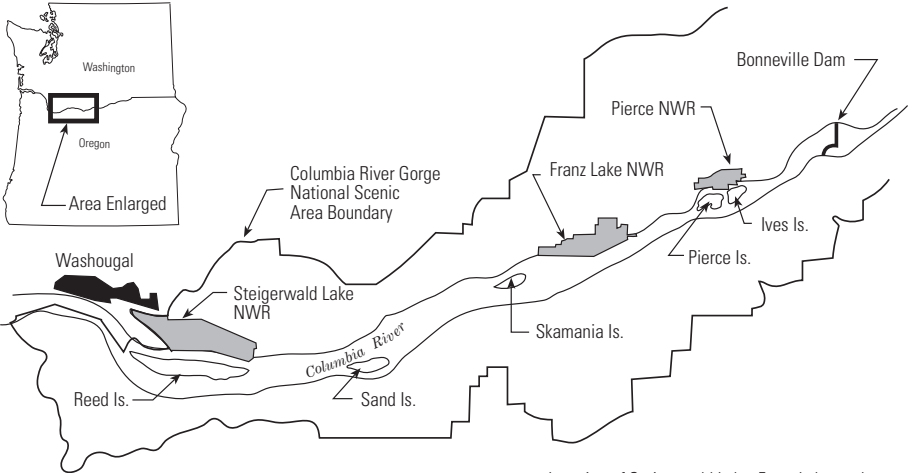
*Thank You  
For Participating!*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Steigerwald Lake, Franz Lake and Pierce National Wildlife Refuges (Refuges). This plan will guide the management of the Refuges for the next 15 years. As part of this process, we have been seeking input from the public, Tribes, conservation and research organizations, and local, state and federal government agencies. This planning update is to provide information on the status of the planning process and what we have heard from people so far.

In September 2000, the Service mailed approximately 125 copies of Planning Update #1, and several of you returned comments with suggestions for managing the Refuges. Planning Update #1 described the CCP process, identified preliminary issues and helped us expand our mailing list. Please let us know if you would like a copy of Planning Update #1.

This second update provides a revised schedule, summarizes the received comments, and lists the draft goals and visions for the Refuges.

We would like to thank everyone who has provided comments and we invite you to continue sharing your ideas with us. Your participation continues to be critical to the success of this planning effort.



Location of Steigerwald Lake, Franz Lake, and Pierce National Wildlife Refuges within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.



*Steigerwald Lake NWR*



*Franz Lake NWR*

## What were your concerns for the Refuges?

The public scoping period for preparation of a draft CCP and EA for the Refuges opened on August 28, 2000. Two public meetings were held in the towns of Washougal and Stevenson, Washington, on September 20 and 21, 2000. The Service planning team reviewed and categorized the comments under six planning issues described in this update. We are currently using your comments to draft management objectives and strategies for public review.

Many of your comments expressed concerns regarding public uses of the Refuges. Suggestions included providing cultural and environmental education, interpretation, and coordinating with local communities, Tribes, and other agencies for the future development of public recreational opportunities throughout the Gorge area. Other suggestions involved habitat restoration, fire and mosquito concerns, salmonid habitats, invasive species control and water management.

Many comments came from horse riding enthusiasts concerning their use of the Columbia River Dike Trail on Steigerwald Lake NWR. Horse riders voiced their concerns about a decision the Service made in 1999 to close a portion of the Columbia River Dike Trail to horses. Due to the high level of interest this decision generated, horse use along the dike trail will be reconsidered in the CCP.



*Northern flickers search for insects in the forest habitats of Pierce NWR. Photo courtesy of Jim Cruce.*

### *Vision statement for Pierce NWR*

The Refuge will be managed for the conservation and enhancement of native plants and wildlife and their habitats, with endangered and threatened species receiving management priority. The Service will encourage and facilitate research and monitoring of special status species. As one of the few remaining spawning sites for chum salmon in the Columbia River, the Refuge will play a critical role in recovery of this species. The Refuge will work with partners and neighbors to protect and enhance water quality in the Hardy Creek watershed. Opportunities for compatible, wildlife dependent education and interpretation will be provided in a safe manner.

### *Mosquito Control Update*



Local residents present at the public meeting in Skamania County were concerned about nuisance mosquito management at Franz Lake NWR. In response, the Service is cooperating with county agencies to begin a mosquito monitoring and research program. The research is to determine if mosquitos hatched at Franz Lake NWR are the source of nuisance complaints in the area. With these data, the Service and abatement agencies will further evaluate the direction of mosquito management on the Refuges. During 2001, the Service will continue to allow monitoring and treatment when necessary through the Special Use Permit process.

## What are the key issues for the Refuges?

The planning team and Service staff used input from the public, various organizations and other agencies to formulate the following issues that will provide the basis for drafting management goals, objectives and strategies for public review.

### Issue 1: What invasive species should the Refuges target and how should these species be controlled?

Invasive species are those species of plants and animals that have been introduced from other areas. They tend to be highly prolific and hardy and have invaded areas on all three of the Refuges. Because they have few predators or low value to wildlife, they usually outcompete native species for habitat thus leading to the overall reduction in native species populations. While the Service recognizes the problems caused by invasive species, controlling them can be complicated, labor intensive and expensive. Although it may be impossible to eliminate invasive species from the Refuges, measures can be taken to reduce their impact and prevent further invasions. The CCP will address these methods and determine which are appropriate for the Refuges.

### *Vision Statement for Franz Lake NWR*

Franz Lake NWR is the largest and most intact wapato, spikerush and bulrush marsh remaining on the lower Columbia River. Dynamic riverine processes will continue to be the dominant force shaping the wetlands. Management practices will be directed at maintaining and monitoring these processes. Knowledge gained through research and monitoring will contribute to our understanding of how the lower Columbia River floodplain can be managed to protect, restore and enhance native habitats and species. In keeping with this research and monitoring emphasis at Franz Lake NWR, human disturbances will be held to a minimum. The Refuge will provide a unique opportunity to see and learn about its valuable resources from remote viewing sites.

### Issue 2: What should be done to protect and restore aquatic resources, particularly rare and declining species?

Surface water is a common feature to all three Refuges. Numerous springs, streams, sloughs, and ponds provide important habitat for a great variety of native wildlife, including rare and declining species. Siltation of waterways, maintenance of spawning habitat and fish passage ways, and shoreline erosion are all components of this issue which identified in the scoping period. In the CCP, the Service will identify management techniques and strategies that will result in positive effects to aquatic species populations and their habitats.

### Issue 3: What should be the role of water level manipulations on the Refuges?

Water level manipulation can be an effective tool in sustaining a wide diversity of plant and animals on all three Refuges. The Service will identify opportunities to manipulate water levels with water control structures and internal dams and levees to benefit multiple species that may have diverse and possibly conflicting water level needs.



*American bald eagles nest near Franz Lake NWR and use the Refuge as their hunting area to find food for their young.  
Photo Courtesy of Jim Cruce.*

## What are the key issues for the Refuges? (cont.)

### Issue 4: What opportunities exist to restore riparian areas on the Refuges?

Riparian areas on the Refuges have been substantially altered from their historic condition as a result of cattle grazing, land clearing, stream diversions, levee construction and hydroelectric dams. Although some of these habitat altering factors cannot be controlled by the Service, others such as cattle grazing programs can and have been modified. The elimination of cattle grazing on Pierce NWR has resulted in significant regrowth of riparian understory plants on parts of the Refuge. It is the desire of the Service to continue to monitor the reestablishment of these riparian areas, particularly those areas adjacent to waterways used by salmon, and to identify those management tools that demonstrate benefits to a wide variety of wildlife species.

### Issue 5: How should the Service manage upland vegetation to benefit wildlife resources?

Upland areas of the Refuges support mixed coniferous and hardwood forests and grasslands. Bottomland forests were logged and converted to pasture for cattle grazing. These grasslands are now managed for Canada goose browse. The Service will be examining the current method of grassland management which utilizes weed control, haying, mowing and grazing to produce quality goose browse. The Service will evaluate current management techniques and explore additional management options to benefit a greater diversity of plant and wildlife species.



*Coyotes, caught between urban and natural environments, are often spotted on Steigerwald Lake NWR. Photo Courtesy of Jim Cruce.*

### *Vision Statement for Steigerwald Lake NWR*

The Service will actively protect, restore and enhance wetland, riparian and upland habitats on the Refuge to benefit a diversity of native wildlife and plants. Habitat improvements and management practices will benefit native species and habitats affected by construction and operation of Federal hydroelectric projects on the Columbia River and its tributaries. The Refuge will provide opportunities for quality, compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation, education and interpretation to enhance public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the Refuges located in the Columbia River Gorge. The Service will be an active partner in promoting and facilitating efforts in the local community to protect and restore fish and wildlife habitats.

## What are the key issues for the Refuges? (cont.)

### Issue 6: What opportunities exist for compatible public uses of the refuges and how should these uses be managed to protect resources?

Currently, the Refuges are closed to the public except for requested staff/volunteer led tours and educational activities conducted by special use permit. In the CCP, hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation will receive enhanced and priority consideration over other public uses. However, before we can allow any recreational use on the Refuges, we will determine if the proposed use is appropriate and compatible with the needs of the fish, wildlife and plant resources occurring on the Refuge. A visitor center and interpretive trails are currently being planned at Steigerwald Lake NWR with preparatory construction proposed for the summer of 2001. Staff concerns regarding public uses include impacts to threatened and endangered and other sensitive species, public safety and the need for funds to develop and sustain recreational programs for the Refuges. Through careful planning, the Service will provide the visiting public with a variety of opportunities to enjoy and appreciate the Refuges.

## Draft Goals for the Refuges

Goals are broad statements intended to provide direction for the future management of the Refuges. They are based on the purposes of the Refuges, the mission and policies of the National Wildlife Refuge System, input received through this planning process and the key issues identified as most significant to the Refuges. We are in the process of writing objectives and strategies that will be available for public review and comment when the draft CCP is released. The following are the draft goals.

### **Habitat**

Protect, restore and enhance the natural diversity of floodplain habitats, upland forest, and grasslands representative of the Lower Columbia River ecosystem.

### **Wildlife**

Protect and enhance populations of native flora and fauna with an emphasis on Federal and State threatened and endangered species, species of concern, and their habitats.

### **Research and Monitoring**

Monitor and study the status and response of selected species and habitat types to Refuge management, regional resource management and habitat restoration efforts.

### **Public Use**

Provide opportunities for high quality, compatible, wildlife-dependent public use with particular emphasis on environmental education and interpretation of the lower Columbia River ecosystem and its history.



*American bitterns use Steigerwald Lake as a nesting area. Photo Courtesy of Jim Cruce.*

## Planning Schedule

Planning Update #1 Issued .....	Completed
Open House-Issue Scoping Meeting .....	Completed
Planning Update #2 .....	May 2001
Planning Update #3 .....	August 2001
Public Review of Draft CCP .....	December 2001
Final CCP .....	March 2002

## What's Next?

The draft CCP will be available for public review and comment in December. It will provide you with an opportunity for input into the decisions being made to manage the Refuges over the next 15 years. A third planning update is scheduled just prior to the release of the draft CCP and will include highlights and information on how to receive a copy for review.

### *Who to Contact*

If you have any questions or want to be added to our mailing list, please contact us at:

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