



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Roanoke-Tar-Neuse-Cape Fear Ecosystem Planning on Refuges

## *Comprehensive Conservation Planning in Eastern North Carolina and Virginia*



### **Background**

The Roanoke-Tar-Neuse-Cape Fear Ecosystem (RTNCF) located in southeastern Virginia and eastern North Carolina covers an area of approximately 40 thousand square miles, making it roughly the size of the State of Kentucky. Land uses include industrial and residential complexes, some of which exceed over 1.5 million residents, agriculture, timber production, mining, and tourism. The RTNCF is in the heart of one of the fastest growing regions in the United States and is experiencing rapid environmental changes.

The RTNCF is rich in fish and wildlife resources. For example, the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds and associated rivers support a dockside commercial fishery valued at over \$54 million annually. The commercial harvest includes blue crabs, southern flounder, striped bass, striped mullet, white perch, croaker, and spot, among others. Fifty-nine federally listed endangered and threatened species utilize this area for habitat.

Working cooperatively or in active partnerships with others, the living trust resources of the RTNCF are managed by 18 field stations representing virtually all program areas of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Representative activities include fish propagation and the monitoring of fishery resources; listing and recovery of imperiled plants and animals; habitat management and restoration on public and private lands; outreach and education; and the direct management of over 500,000 acres on 11 National Wildlife Refuges.

### **Issue and facts**

The 1997 Improvement Act requires each National Wildlife Refuge to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan by the year 2012. The RTNCF Ecosystem hired a planning staff to facilitate development of plans for refuges in the ecosystem by 2005. Due to recent administrative and policy changes, the more realistic completion date for refuge comprehensive plans in the RTNCF could be as late as 2008.

The planning process will involve varying levels of public input from individuals, agencies and groups of the public concerning future uses and management of the refuges as well as staff input.

### **National Wildlife Refuges involved in the planning process**

Alligator River NWR, Back Bay NWR, Currituck NWR, Cedar Island NWR, Great Dismal Swamp NWR, Mackay Island NWR, Mattamuskeet NWR, Pea Island NWR, Pocosin Lakes NWR, Roanoke River NWR, Swan Quarter NWR

### **Purpose of Plan**

- ☑ Provide a clear statement of direction for management of the refuge.
- ☑ Provide refuge neighbors, visitors, the public, and government officials with an understanding of Service refuge management actions on and around the refuge.
- ☑ Ensure that U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service management actions are consistent with the mandates of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- ☑ Ensure that the management of the refuge considers federal, state, and county plans.

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**Management Tools**

- ☑ Water Management
- ☑ Prescribe Fire
- ☑ Habitat Restoration
- ☑ Mowing
- ☑ Control of Noxious Plants
- ☑ Discing
- ☑ Forest Management Techniques

**Public Use Opportunities**

- ☑ Hunting
- ☑ Fishing
- ☑ Trapping
- ☑ Wildlife Photography
- ☑ Wildlife Observation
- ☑ Environmental Education
- ☑ Environmental Interpretation

**Habitat Types**

- ☑ Low Pocosin
- ☑ High Pocosin
- ☑ Pone Pine Woodland
- ☑ Pine Savannah
- ☑ Wet Pine Flatwoods
- ☑ Bottomland Hardwoods
- ☑ Coastal Fringe Evergreen Forest
- ☑ Maritime Forest/Shrub Swamps
- ☑ Bay Forest
- ☑ Peatland Atlantic White Cedar Forest
- ☑ Cypress-Gum Swamp
- ☑ Managed Wetlands/Moist Soil
- ☑ Fresh/Brackish/Salt Marshes
- ☑ Salt Flats
- ☑ Beach/Dune Grass
- ☑ Natural Lake Shoreline
- ☑ Open Water

- ☑ Provide long-term guidance and continuity in refuge management.
- ☑ Provide the basis for the development of budget requests on the refuge’s operational, maintenance, and capital improvement needs; and land acquisition.
- ☑ Ensure that the planned public use of refuge programs and facilities provide maximum benefit to the users without negatively impacting the wildlife resources and habitat that support those uses.

**Questions and Answers**

*Why are the plans being developed?*

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires all National Wildlife Refuges to develop comprehensive conservation plans by 2012. The requirement is in response to the need for a plan to provide long-term guidance and continuity in refuge management.

*How is this different from other planning processes?*

One of the main differences between CCP’s and other planning efforts is that the public, refuge neighbors, cooperating agencies and other interested groups are asked to contribute to development of the refuges’ goals and objectives.

*What uses are allowed on National Wildlife Refuges?*

The focus for public use programs and facilities on refuges is: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and wildlife interpretation. Those uses may be restricted seasonally or spatially by needs of wildlife on the refuge or the refuge’s ability to administer the activity. Other uses may be allowed.

*How will the plan affect privately owned land surrounding the refuge?*

The use and management of private land surrounding the refuge will be considered in planning use and management of land on the refuge to provide certain types of habitat. Local landowners will know what is planned for the refuge land. They will also know what needs have been identified in the planning process for additional refuge land, land under conservation easements, or improved management of private land.

*When will the refuge in my neighborhood be planned?*

Public announcements will be made for each meeting at each refuge approximately 15 days before each meeting.

**Purpose of Public Meetings**

*First forum:* describes comprehensive conservation planning process, describes current land uses and management practices on the refuge, solicits input from the public on future land uses and management practices

*Second forum:* presents alternative land uses and management strategies (held about 180 days after first forum)

*Third forum:* evaluates selected alternatives developed through public involvement in the two previous meetings (held within 18 months of the first forum)

