

McNary and Umatilla Refuges - Overview

Establishment: Located about an hour's drive apart, the two Refuges have similar histories, habitats, and uses. Both Refuges were designated after plans began for the construction of dams on the Columbia River. Each Refuge was originally established under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, which mandates consideration for wildlife resources whenever waters are impounded under federal permit. McNary Refuge encompasses approximately 16,000 acres of land and water within and adjacent to Lake Wallula, the reservoir created by McNary Dam. Lands and waters managed as the McNary Refuge include islands north of Richland, Washington; bluffs near the Wallula Gap; and much of the river islands and aquatic habitat between them. Umatilla Refuge was designated on both sides of the Columbia River near Boardman and Irrigon, Oregon, within the reservoir created by John Day Dam. Umatilla Refuge encompasses approximately 26,700 acres of land, water and islands. (See map, page 4).

Habitats and Species: McNary and Umatilla Refuges each contain open water, slough, marsh, riparian woodlands and shrublands, cropland, old pastures, islands, cliffs, talus and shrub-steppe habitats. These habitats provide food, resting, and migratory habitat for a broad mix of species, ranging from inconspicuous and solitary creatures such as hoary bat to large flocks of wintering mallards, Western Canada geese, and various waterbirds. Native and non-native fish inhabit Refuge waters.

Public Uses: Fishing and hunting are popular activities at the Refuges. An auto tour route winds through shrub-steppe, riparian, and slough habitats on the McCormack unit of Umatilla Refuge, providing opportunities to view mule deer and other species. The refuges host several thousand school children each year for environmental education. Islands are an important sanctuary for colonial nesting birds like pelicans and terns, and are generally closed to public entry.

Administration: At each Refuge, part of the land base is owned directly by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The rest is owned by the Army Corps of Engineers, but managed under cooperative agreement by the Service. Both Refuges are administered through the Mid-Columbia River Refuges Complex, headquartered in Pasco, Washington.



Geese flocking over refuge upland fields planted to grain

C&G Bartlett



School children learning about refuge management and equipment

USFWS

What Are Refuges All About?

Refuges are places where wildlife comes first.

The National Wildlife Refuge System comprises the world's largest collection of lands set aside specifically for wildlife. Refuges provide important habitat for native plants and animals.

The mission of the Refuge System is: *To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans* (National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997). National Wildlife Refuges are administered by the Department of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service).

Issues for Consideration in the Plan

The planning team has identified the following issues of concern. We'd like your thoughts on these or other matters of importance to you. Please return the enclosed insert to us. Thanks for your time.

- 1) *Invasives species management:* Invasive plants and animals are widespread throughout Refuge habitats. What level of infestation is acceptable biologically, and which areas are priority areas for treatment?
- 2) *Habitat management:* Native habitats at both Refuges are fragmented and in poor condition. Some existing and potential habitat management strategies include native species plantings after wildfire, bulrush density reductions, and maintaining croplands for waterfowl feed. What actions should the Refuges take to sustain and restore priority species and habitats over the next fifteen years?
- 3) *Public uses:* Wildlife-dependent recreation is encouraged at National Wildlife Refuges, if compatible with the purposes of the refuge. The Refuge System names hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation as priority public uses. Which mix, at what levels of use, and in what locations should public use activities occur at McNary and Umatilla Refuges?

Excerpts from the Draft Vision for McNary and Umatilla Refuges

... the McNary and Umatilla National Wildlife Refuges link a network of diverse habitats stretching nearly 90 miles from Richland, Washington to Boardman, Oregon. The two Refuges 42,782 acres of shrub-steppe, basalt cliff, riparian, river islands and aquatic habitats will be managed to fulfill the needs of fish, wildlife, and plants native to this unique portion of the great American West. By actively restoring habitat, controlling exotic species, and enhancing existing habitats and resources, the Refuges will serve as anchors for biodiversity and models for habitat restoration and land management.

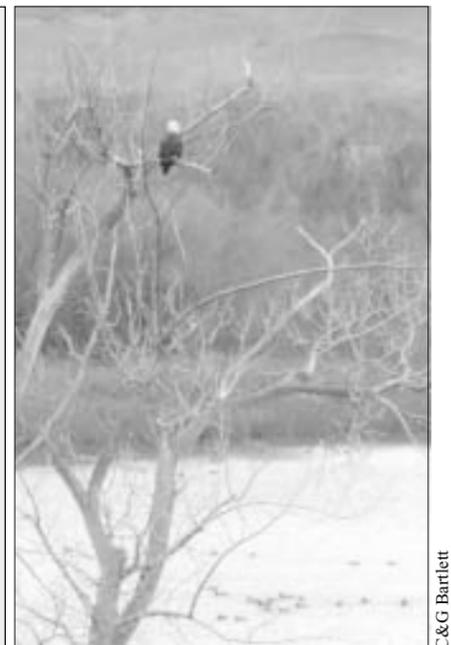
... Food, rest and protection will be provided for large concentrations of migratory and wintering waterfowl and shorebirds using the Refuges each year. Extensive corridors of riparian and floodplain habitat will be restored and enhanced for nesting and migrating neo-tropical songbirds. Management and enhancement of the Refuges' waters, shorelines, channels and bays will contribute to the needs and recovery of endangered salmon and steelhead passing through and rearing in Refuge waters...

... We will work with partners and volunteers to provide a wide range of high quality recreational and environmental education programs, build refuge support and attract visitors...

What Have We Done to Lay the Foundation for the Plan?

Our core team is made up primarily of Complex staff with a representative from the Army Corps of Engineers. We also identified an extended team that will help review our plan in detail at key milestones. To date, the planning team has completed the following tasks:

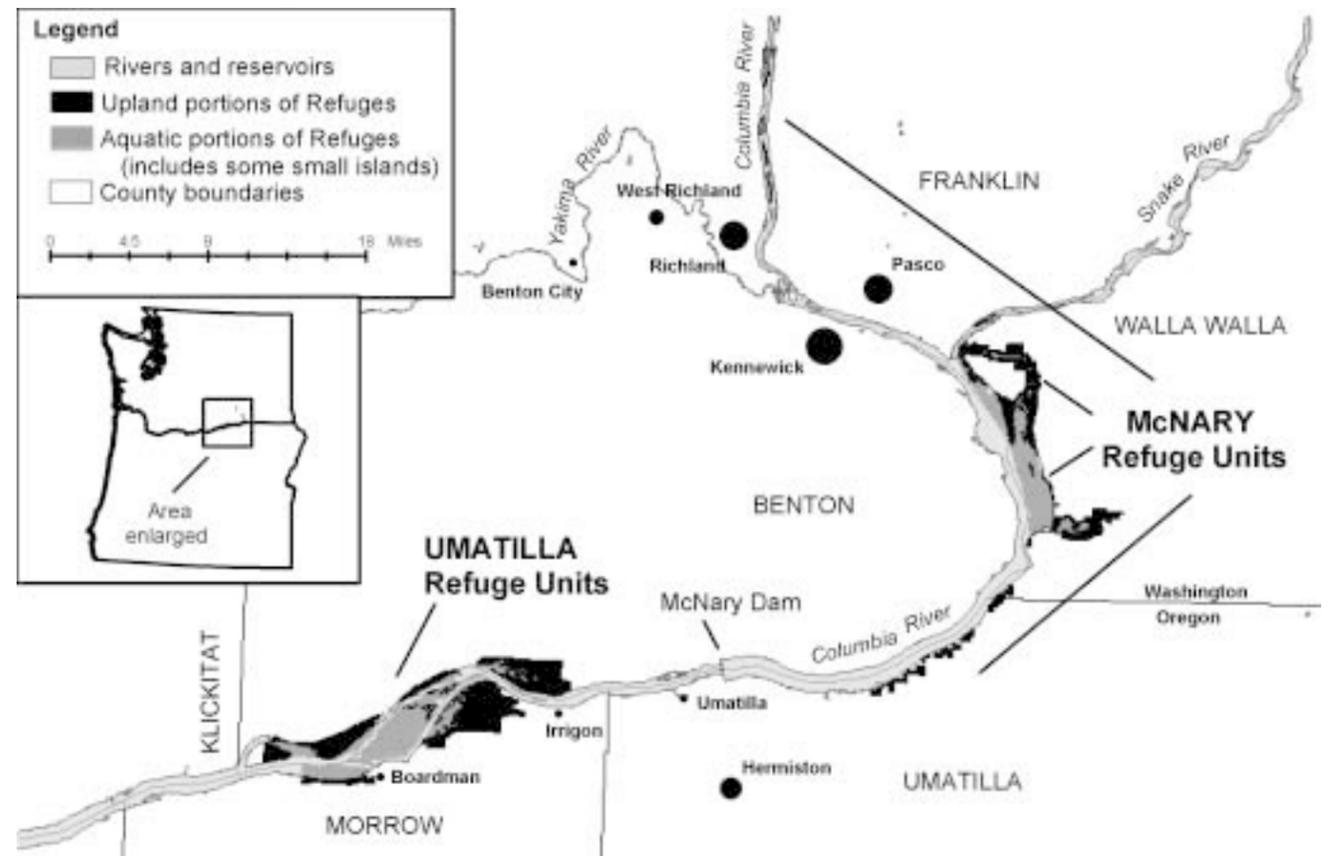
- Reviewed the establishment history of each Refuge;
- Studied various other plans relevant to these Refuges ecosystems and habitats;
- Conducted a review of current wildlife and management practices, which was attended by biologists and wildlife managers from around the region;
- Hosted a visitor services review. This review, like the wildlife and habitat review, provided information to consider for future management.
- Selected several conservation targets, or priority communities and species groups, that will receive special emphasis in the biological part of our planning. These conservation targets are: shrub-steppe, riparian, wetlands / deepwater habitats, islands, waterfowl, shorebirds, migratory birds. Invasives are highlighted as an anti-target.
- Initiated analysis of the conservation targets by identifying and studying their key ecological attributes (properties of the landscape or habitat needed to sustain the target).



Bald eagle perched over ducks at Wallula Delta

C&G Bartlett

Map of McNary and Umatilla National Wildlife Refuges

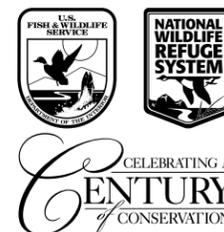


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We are on the web at <http://midcolumbiariver.fws.gov/>

Have you moved? If so, please send us updated address information. Thanks!

Refuge Open Houses June 16 and 23!



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Planning Update # 1, June 2004

McNary and Umatilla National Wildlife Refuges

A Note from the Project Leader

Mid-Columbia Refuges has initiated a planning process (Comprehensive Conservation Planning) to review the wildlife, habitat, and public use activities on two of the National Wildlife Refuges we manage, McNary and Umatilla.

As we walk through this three year process, we are provided the opportunity to look at our habitat management and public programs from fresh perspectives.

The purposes of the Refuges will remain the same as Congress intended when the areas were set aside to provide for waterfowl and wildlife habitats and to provide wildlife dependent recreation consistent with wildlife needs.

However, we have a chance to review each of our public programs such as fishing,

hunting, or environmental education, our placement of facilities such as trails, boat ramps, or signs, and our management of habitats such as wetlands, riparian zones and shrub-steppe. Your insights and observations are needed to provide a more complete and thoughtful process. We need to know what things are working well now and also which areas need improvement or are not working as well as they should.

As a first step in this process, we invite you to attend one of our two open houses listed on the left. If you are unable to attend but wish to comment on our programs, please send in the enclosed comment form and/or give me a personal call at 509-545-8588. Your thoughts are important to the success of this partnership effort.

Gary Hagedorn, Project Leader
Mid-Columbia River Refuges

Upcoming Public Scoping Meetings

June 16, 2004
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
McNary
Environmental Education Center,
Burbank, WA
(From Pasco: follow State Highway 12 over the Snake River and turn left onto Maple street, follow sign into Refuge parking lot.)

June 23, 2004
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Riverfront Center,
Boardman, OR
(From I-84, take City of Boardman Exit # 165. Turn onto Main Street, heading towards the Columbia River. Go across the railroad overpass. Turn right onto Marine Drive and follow for 1 mile to Riverfront Center.)

What is Comprehensive Conservation Planning?

Have you ever started a woodworking project without measuring your materials? Or pulled off a dinner party without putting together a menu? Have you been able to remodel a room without putting together a vision for what you want?

Without a plan, it's hard to get where you think you should be going.

As wildlife and public lands managers, we also recognize the need to develop plans for managing public lands. All refuges are now required to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP).

When carefully and thoughtfully developed, land management plans can:

- Improve habitat and infrastructure
- Foster continuity in management
- Facilitate management under Refuge System principles
- Gain community understanding and support
- Contribute to ecosystem conservation
- Resolve management problems
- Provide a guide for future decision-making
- Support budget requests



American White Pelicans at Burbank Slough



Mule Deer at McCormack Slough