



Beach Access News

Town of Chincoteague
Assateague Beach Access Committee

July 2014

Draft CCP comments due!

The US Fish & Wildlife Service released the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan on May 15th for public review. Comments are due by August 15th.

The draft CCP/EIS can be considered a great success for both the USFWS and the Town of Chincoteague because of the way that public comment has been acknowledged and incorporated.

The draft CCP explains how 3 alternative strategies would continue the current management, or would propose changes along with the selection of a **preferred alternative** that FWS supports.

Comments

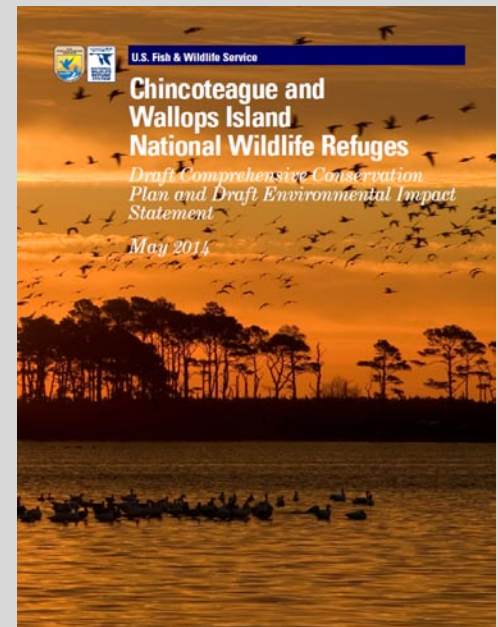
(Accepted through August 15, 2014)

Send to:

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Hadley, MA 01035
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Email: northeastplanning@fws.gov

(Please put "Chincoteague" or "Wallops Island" in the subject line).



Almost 1,000 pages describe 3 alternative management strategies for the future.

View the document here:

<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/chincoteague/>

"In order to comply with what we believe was the intent of Congress in passing P.L. 85-57, the US Fish & Wildlife Service has conveyed primary jurisdiction for beach use and recreation within the 'assigned area' to the National Park Service. Language from P.L. 85-57 makes it clear that Congress intended for a recreational beach to be constructed and maintained on the refuge. It is also apparent that Congress believed or anticipated that 'traditional' beach recreation could be compatible with refuge purposes..." Draft CCP – Chapter 1 / Page 1-33

USFWS makes good progress with public comments from 2 years ago

- ✓ **Recreational Beach ACCESS** (no reduction) will be assured by more than a Refuge Manager's Compatibility Determination (i.e. Beach Road from Chincoteague Island to the Atlantic Ocean Seashore)
- ✓ **Recreational Beach USE** (no reduction) will be assured by more than a Refuge Manager's Compatibility Determination (i.e. Over 4 miles of shoreline set aside and assigned for public recreation on the southern end of Assateague Island)
- ✓ **An assigned area for NPS** management of the public recreational beach and the inter agency agreement will be a part of the draft and final CCP document.
- ✓ **The Pony Management Plan** will be a part of the draft and final CCP document.
- ✓ **1,000 Parking Spaces** (no reduction) will continue to be maintained in close proximity to the recreational beach.
- ✓ **Transit shuttle service** to the public recreational beach will only be provided in addition to the minimum 1,000 spaces of convenient individual vehicle parking.
- ✓ **Federal purchase of land** within the Town of Chincoteague will not proceed without local support

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Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) – Public Comment

The majority of public opinion expressed so far has requested a plan which has not yet been presented by the USFWS.

This plan would be based on Alternative A (current management practices to keep the exceptional recreational beach and infrastructure in place at Toms Cove), **plus** actions taken to build up and maintain the land base necessary to provide resilience under changing environmental conditions.

This plan would allow for a long term transition to Alternative B only when studies and design of a relocated recreational beach to the north are approved under an agreement with partners including the Town of Chincoteague and Accomack County.

CCP Review – What is Missing?

- How do you know that Alternative B will provide the same exceptional visitor experience?
- What happens if the USFWS uses a destructive ‘Let it Go’ policy for managing the island both north and south of the recreational beach?
- What about the NPS General Management Plan that may create greater restrictions on water use?
- Will critical habitat designations and biological opinions for endangered species shut down the recreational beach use and access?
- What protection from storm damage will be used for visitor facilities?
- How much new land will be placed in conservation use over the next 20 years and removed from the tax base?
- What about the public health hazard from biting insects?

Top Town Issues for Chincoteague

It is important for the gateway community to the Wildlife Refuge and Seashore, which provided over 700 comments on the CCP Scoping Alternatives, to carefully review the CCP/EIS document and work together for the best combination of management plan actions for the next 20 years. The draft CCP includes new information which raises new concerns:

- **Exceptional Visitor Experience**
A master plan and economic impact statement should be prepared for Alternative B to understand the new visitor experience and to comply with NEPA/EIS review.
- **Public Safety**
US Army Corps of Engineers storm damage reduction study is needed for the entire Assateague Island before a change in management policy is adopted in the CCP.
- **Mosquito Control**
Effective biting insect control program required for the new recreational beach.
- **NPS Management Area**
8.5 acres of parking area (exactly) and 1 mile of recreational beach for Alternative B will adversely limit NPS management options.
- **Endangered Species/Wilderness**
Major federal programs will ‘unbalance’ Alternative B unless a public recreation area is set aside from critical habitat & wild lands.
- **Emergency Plan**
A strategy and actions are needed to keep the beach open following a major storm or Government shut down.

Let’s Provide ‘Substantive’ Comments!

Everyone is encouraged to provide support for the draft CCP, or object to portions which do not make good common sense. **Comments which make a difference are called ‘substantive’.**

USFWS recommends that comments should:

- be clear, concise, and relevant to the analysis of the proposed action
- be polite and respectful
- be solution oriented and provide specific examples
- contribute to developing alternatives that address the purpose and need for the action



For Chincoteague NWR, proposed changes should achieve the refuge's purposes, vision, and goals, FWS policies, the goals of other State and regional conservation plans, and should effectively address significant concerns raised during the planning process.

Several key concerns which the USFWS included in this CCP/EIS are:

- Climate change/sea level rise
- Regional conservation
- Balance between public use and habitat and wildlife conservation
- Public access to the refuge, in particular to the recreational beach, and impact on visitor experience and the local economy

Please provide substantive comments!