

Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Planning Update

Greetings from the refuge!

We continue to work on the draft comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) for Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. The CCP/EIS is a 15-year strategic plan that will guide management for all refuge programs, including our habitat management, land conservation, outdoor recreation, and environmental education.

The planning process began in 2006 when we first held scoping meetings to gather public input and identify key issues and concerns. The project has been many years in the making because of its complexity, large scale, and the need to work closely with diverse stakeholders and the four states within the Connecticut River watershed: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. We appreciate your patience as we continue to develop the best possible plan for the refuge.

Our timeline

We intend to complete our draft CCP/EIS for the refuge this winter. When it is released, we will provide opportunities for public review and comment for 60 days. Information about public meeting dates, times, and locations will be distributed at that time.



Wood thrush

Billtaular/Flickr/Creative Commons



Nulhegan Basin Division in northern Vermont

USFWS

We will address comments that we receive during the public comment period in the final plan. With your involvement, we will develop a CCP that will ensure that the refuge and the Connecticut River watershed remain special places for wildlife and people.

What will be in the draft CCP/EIS?

The draft CCP/EIS will describe and evaluate four alternative ways of managing the refuge, including comparing the environmental impacts of each of the four alternatives. These alternatives all meet the refuge's purposes and goals, which are outlined on the next page. One of the alternatives represents our current management approach and will serve as a baseline for comparing the other three alternatives.

Next steps

We look forward to discussing the draft CCP/EIS with you. Public input on the draft CCP/EIS is invaluable and will help us to refine our management proposal to best achieve our shared vision and goals for the watershed. Once the draft CCP/EIS is complete, it will be available for review on our website at: <http://www.fws.gov/r5soc/index.html> and at

About the refuge

The refuge was established in 1997 to conserve, protect, and enhance native fish, wildlife, and plants, and the ecosystems they depend upon throughout the Connecticut River watershed.

The 7.2-million acre watershed covers portions of four states. The watershed provides important migrating habitat for hundreds of species of birds and is home to several federally threatened and endangered plant and animal species.

The refuge currently consists of 35,987 acres on nine refuge divisions and eight refuge units. The largest refuge divisions are the Nulhegan Basin Division in northern Vermont and the Pondicherry Division in New Hampshire.

The refuge is named after the late U.S. Congressmen Silvio O. Conte from Massachusetts who dreamed of conserving the Connecticut River watershed's natural resources for future generations.

refuge offices. A limited number of hard-copies and CD-ROM versions of the draft CCP/EIS will be available upon request from refuge staff.

Latest news from the refuge

- In May 2012, the Connecticut River was recognized as the first National Blueway for its significance as an environmental and economic asset, and for its land conservation, outdoor recreation, environmental education, and other related economic opportunities.
- We are currently building a universally accessible birding and nature trail at the Fort River Division in Hadley, Massachusetts, with the help of Student Conservation Association interns, the Youth Conservation Corps, and volunteers. The trail will open to the public this fall, although only half will be wheelchair accessible at that time.
- The Mud Pond Trail at the Pondicherry Division was recently designated by the Secretary of the Interior as a National Recreation Trail.
- We recently acquired the nationally significant Venture Smith homestead as part of the Salmon River Division in

Connecticut. Venture Smith was the son of a West African prince who was kidnapped and enslaved in America. He purchased his freedom in 1765, became a successful businessman, and prospered in farming, fishing, lumbering, and river commerce. His former homestead included houses, a wharf, warehouses, and a blacksmith shop.

- We continue to make progress in our battle against the invasive water chestnut and other “silent invaders.” Over the last several years, volunteers have logged thousands of hours pulling the plant by hand in 26 lakes, ponds, and coves in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Because of persistent efforts, water chestnut populations have been declining at these sites.
- One outstanding example is the Chicopee River where only about a thousand pounds were removed this year in just one day—down from 10 tons and 256 person hours in 2007.
- The refuge's mobile visitor center, the Watershed-on-Wheels Express (WoW Express) is on the road spring through fall. Call 413/658 5403 to schedule an event or to find out when the WoW Express will be in your area.



Ryan Hagerty/USFWS

Canadian bunchberry

Contact information

For additional information about the refuge or this planning process, please visit our website at: <http://www.fws.gov/r5soc/index.html>. You may also reach refuge staff by telephone at: 413/548 8002.

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Goals for Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

Goal 1. Habitat conservation

Promote the biological diversity, integrity, and resiliency of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems within the Connecticut River watershed in an amount and distribution that sustains ecological function, supports healthy populations of native fish, wildlife, and plants, especially those of conservation concern, and that anticipates the effects of climate, land use, and demographic changes.

Goal 2. Education, outreach, and interpretation

Inspire residents and visitors to actively participate in the conservation and stewardship of the exceptional natural and cultural resources in the Connecticut River watershed, in both its urban and rural settings, and promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the role of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge and our partners in protecting those resources.

Goal 3. Recreation

Provide a diversity of high quality, public recreational opportunities on refuge lands that complement and connect with opportunities on other ownerships throughout the Connecticut River watershed, with emphasis on promoting National Wildlife Refuge System priority public uses and connecting people with nature in the outdoors.

Goal 4. Partnerships to conserve and enjoy the Connecticut River watershed

Enhance the conservation, stewardship, and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources throughout the Connecticut River watershed by initiating, supporting, and promoting diverse partnerships with public, private, and Tribal agencies and organizations and leveraging resources among those partners to achieve mutual goals.