



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Summary of the Draft Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

Innoko National Wildlife Refuge

What are we doing?

Innoko National Wildlife Refuge is revising its Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). Since the first CCP for Innoko was completed in 1987, laws and policies have changed, issues may have arisen, and new scientific information has become available. The revised plan addresses these changes and will provide management direction for the next 15 years. The draft revised CCP and environmental assessment (EA) are available for public review. Comments are due July 22, 2008.

What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

A CCP guides overall refuge management. It ensures that management actions comply with all appropriate laws, regulations, and policies, and keeps the Refuge focused on the purposes for which it was established. A CCP provides a framework for management decisions and ensures consistency in those decisions through time. It is also an opportunity for the public to be involved in setting the future direction for Innoko Refuge management.



Diverse habitats at Innoko National Wildlife Refuge – Robin Corcoran, USFWS

What is in this summary?

This summary of the draft revised CCP includes:

- the Refuge vision statement;
- a summary of the major issues raised during scoping;
- Refuge goals; and
- management alternatives developed during the planning process.



Alaska Bull Moose – Donna Dewhurst, USFWS

See the last page of this summary for information on how you can obtain a full copy of the draft plan and environmental assessment.

Innoko Refuge Vision

The Innoko National Wildlife Refuge encompasses a largely unaltered ecosystem dominated by numerous rivers flowing among diverse habitats, including muskeg, tundra, and dense boreal forest. Remote even by Alaskan standards, the natural forces of fire and water, now apparently affected by climate change, dominate the landscape. The Refuge is not accessible by road, and only the occasional visitor discovers the many opportunities to hunt, fish, and view wildlife. The Refuge hosts hundreds of thousands of breeding and molting waterfowl, and is important rearing habitat for salmon and other species of fish. In addition, moose, black and grizzly bears, and furbearers are abundant. Refuge lands have been important to subsistence hunters for generations, and the area has a rich gold-rush history. A main portion of the Historic Iditarod Trail, the overland winter route from Seward to the gold fields of Nome, crosses refuge land. The Innoko Refuge is a place to discover the vastness and diversity of interior Alaska, to reflect upon Native Alaskan and mining history, and to experience nature in solitude for generations to come.

Why was the Refuge established?

Section 302(3)(B) of ANILCA states that the purposes of Innoko Refuge include:

(i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, waterfowl, peregrine falcons, other migratory birds, black bear, moose, furbearers, and other mammals and salmon;

(ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;

(iii) to provide the opportunity for continued subsistence by local residents;

(iv) to ensure water quality and necessary water quantity within the Refuge; and

(v) [Innoko Wilderness – from the Wilderness Act] to secure an enduring resource of wilderness, protect and preserve the wilderness character of the wilderness area as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, and administer the area for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave it unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.



Snow machines at Innoko field camp –Robin Corcoran, USFWS



Innoko Refuge is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The mission of the National Wildlife 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 Administration Act, as amended).

Refuge Goals

We developed management goals for the Refuge. Each goal has numerous objectives that specify how it is to be achieved.

Goal 1: Fish and Wildlife

Improve knowledge of fish and wildlife species on the Refuge to maintain healthy populations in their natural diversity.

Goal 2: Habitat

Perpetuate ecosystem processes that shape habitats within the natural range of variability.

Goal 3: Subsistence

Provide the opportunity for continued subsistence uses of the Refuge, consistent with the subsistence priority and with other refuge purposes.

Goal 4: Recreation/Public Use

Provide opportunities for quality wildlife-dependent recreation, emphasizing short-term, low density uses that require minimal facility development or habitat disturbance.

Goal 5: Wilderness

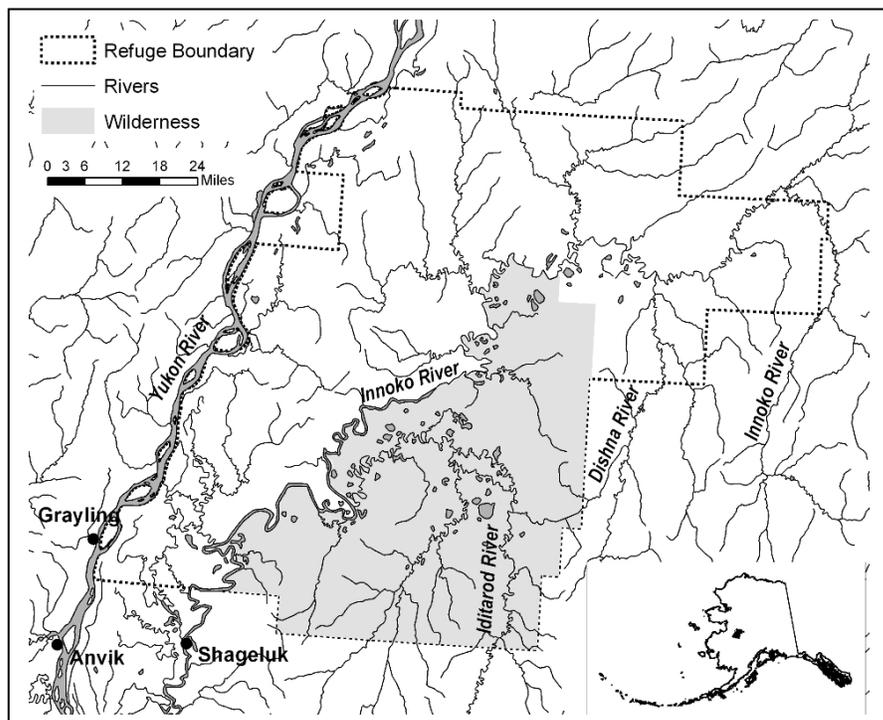
Preserve and enhance in perpetuity wilderness values of designated Wilderness.

Goal 6: Outreach and Environmental Education

Provide outreach and environmental education programs to develop/increase a sense of stewardship for wildlife, cultural resources, and the environment.

Goal 7: Cultural Resources

Conserve cultural and archeological resources of the Refuge.



Innoko National Wildlife Refuge

Goal 8: Administrative

Provide and maintain the facilities and equipment necessary to ensure and administer a safe and secure environment for the visiting public and Service personnel.

Issues

How will the Refuge address intensifying competition to harvest moose?

The number and range of comments received during scoping from the public about moose and moose hunting indicates this is a multi-dimensional concern shared by a large proportion of refuge users. Many people expressed the belief that moose numbers in and around the Refuge are in decline. They believe this is most likely due to pressure from a large and growing hunter population. Local area residents regard “outside” (both out-of-state and out-of-region) hunters as a primary threat; “outsiders” emphasized that they too have a

legitimate stake in refuge management. This local versus non-local tension is a second dimension of the issue. Air taxis are also regarded as contributing to moose hunting increases – those comments are addressed in a separate section below. Finally, a few suggested that predator management is needed in response to declining moose numbers.

The Refuge proposes to address this issue through implementation of the Yukon-Innoko Moose Management Plan in cooperation with the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Completed December 2006, this plan was designed to address many aspects of this issue. Refuge goals and objectives will also address the issue.

How will the Refuge manage air taxis to balance demand for visitor access with user experience and resource protection?

Public comments about air taxis were closely linked to concerns about moose hunting. Several people suggested that air taxis are directly responsible for increased hunting activity. One person suggested that air taxis are already “over-regulated,” making refuge access difficult. Others expressed concerns about difficult access, and at least one implied that air taxis provide access for activities other than hunting.

The Refuge proposes to address this issue through continued monitoring of air taxi operators and potential future visitor service planning.



Wild Iris – USFWS photo

How will the Refuge address threats to water quality from off-refuge mining?

There are at least two dimensions to this concern. The perceived threat of future mining development and the threats from existing mines were both mentioned in scoping comments.

The Refuge proposes to address this issue through continued cooperation with the State of Alaska Departments of Environmental Conservation and Natural Resources and through monitoring identified in goals and objectives in the plan.

How will the Refuge enhance its relationship with communities?

Public comments suggest that some people feel that they are not sufficiently engaged in, or informed about, refuge management issues. One person suggested that the Refuge consider a co-management arrangement with Native organizations, and another suggested that the Refuge might better engage the regional public by enhancing volunteer opportunities.

Several objectives outlined in the plan address refuge plans for improving and enhancing communication with the public and local communities.

How will the Refuge monitor and address the effects of climate change?

Three public comments referenced global warming specifically. One of the comments was from outside Alaska, one was from McGrath, and one was from a Holy Cross Village resident. The effects of climate change are also of concern for Refuge staff.

The Service is addressing climate change effects at national, regional, and local levels. Goals and objectives displayed in the plan propose monitoring climate change effects on the Refuge.

How will the Refuge respond to the proposed Alaska Department of Fish and Game wood bison project?

Two comments referred to wood bison specifically. The first, from Safari Club International, supports having wood bison in the Refuge area, while the second opposes having wood bison in the area.

The Service has indicated it has no objection to the State of Alaska’s proposed wood

bison project near the Refuge. However, the Service has indicated that there is a need to carefully monitor wood bison to assure there are no unanticipated or unacceptable adverse effects on Refuge resources. Objectives presented in the plan identify implementation of studies to monitor effects. If adverse effects are detected, appropriate actions would be taken in consultation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

How will the Refuge integrate regional policies and guidelines into its management?

Management of refuges in Alaska is governed by Federal laws (i.e., the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 [Refuge Administration Act] and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980), by regulations implementing these laws, by treaties, by Service policy, and by principles of sound resource management, all of which establish standards for resource management and may address the range of potential activities that may be allowed on refuges. Management policies and guidelines described in the plan were developed for national wildlife refuges in the Alaska Region. These policies and guidelines are essentially the same for all of the refuges in this region.



Northern pike – Robin Corcoran, USFWS



Salmon drying on rack at Kaltag – Polly Wheeler, USFWS

What are alternatives?

Alternatives represent different options for future actions. They are different ways to respond to issues and meet refuge goals and objectives. Alternatives are developed with the refuge system mission and the refuge's purposes in mind.

How do we address the issues?

Federal law requires that we develop a range of reasonable alternatives. We considered two alternatives, both of which continue to protect the Refuge and its resources. Traditional subsistence activities, recreational wildlife-dependent activities, and current methods of access would continue to be allowed.

Our alternatives have the same amount of land within the Minimal and Wilderness management categories. Minimal management maintains the natural environment with very little evidence of human-

caused change. Wilderness is managed to retain "its primeval character and influence."

Alternative A (Current Management): This is the "No-Action" alternative, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. It describes what would happen if current management activities were to continue. Refuge lands have been classified in a mixture of Minimal and Wilderness management, and would be managed according to the policies and guidelines governing each category.

Alternative B (The Proposed Action): This alternative manages Refuge lands under the same management categories as Alternative A, but incorporates new management policies and guidelines and goals and objectives. Tables 1 and 2 on the following pages display how the alternatives address the issues and compare other aspects of the alternatives.

Why do we have different management categories?

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) requires us to designate areas according to their resources and values and to specify programs and uses within those areas. To meet this requirement, Minimal, Moderate and Intensive management categories were established as part of the Service's Alaska-wide planning effort. Permissible uses of designated Wilderness areas are subject to the Wilderness Act and ANILCA. Only the Minimal and designated Wilderness categories apply to Innoko Refuge. Appropriate activities, public uses, commercial uses, and facilities are identified in the plan for each management category.



Natural fires reshape and rejuvenate Innoko's landscape – USFWS photo

Steps in CCP Development

CCPs follow a process guided by the National Environmental Policy Act, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service policies, and other legal direction. This process includes:



We expect to publish the final plan in the fall of 2008.

*** We are at this stage in the process.**

Table 1. Evaluation of the Alternatives Based on Issues

Issue	Alternative A (Current Management)	Alternative B (Proposed Action)
How will the Refuge address intensifying competition to harvest moose?	The Refuge would implement the Yukon-Innoko Moose Management Plan in cooperation with the ADF&G; continue to monitor harvest data closely and improve communication with the public to keep them informed on what we know about the numbers of moose and hunters.	Same as Alternative A, plus the Refuge would implement moose population and habitat related objectives identified in section 2.1 of the Draft Revised CCP/EA.
How will the Refuge manage air taxis to balance demand for visitor access with user experience and resource protection?	The Refuge would monitor the number of air taxis in conjunction with figures on number of moose hunters, moose harvest, and moose population. If hunter success rates continue to decline as in recent years, the Refuge would consider reducing the number of special use permits.	The Refuge proposes to address this issue through continued monitoring of air taxi operators and potential future visitor service planning.
How will the Refuge address threats to water quality from off-refuge mining?	The Refuge would continue to cooperate with the State of Alaska Departments of Environmental Conservation and Natural Resources on water quality efforts.	Same as Alternative A, plus the Refuge would implement water resource-related objectives identified in section 2.1 of the Draft Revised CCP/EA.
How will the Refuge enhance its relationship with communities?	The Refuge would maintain current relationships, and levels of communications with local communities.	The Refuge would enhance relationships with local communities through implementation of several related objectives identified in section 2.1 of the Draft Revised CCP/EA.
How will the Refuge monitor and address the effects of climate change?	The Refuge would participate in the Service's national and regional efforts to monitor the effects of climate change.	Same as Alternative A, plus the Refuge would implement several related objectives identified in section 2.1 of the Draft Revised CCP/EA.
How will the Refuge respond to the proposed reintroduction of wood bison by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)?	The Refuge would not conduct studies to assess the possible effects of reintroduction on Refuge resources.	The Refuge and ADF&G would conduct studies in advance of wood bison reintroduction and monitor the effects on Refuge resources.
How will the Refuge integrate regional policies and guidelines into its management?	The Refuge would implement management direction identified in the 1987 Comprehensive Conservation Plan and associated Record of Decision as amended by law, policy, step-down management plans, etc.	The Refuge would implement new regional management direction, policy, and guidelines; and goals and objectives identified in the Draft Revised CCP/EA.



American wigeons, northern pintails and northern shovelers on the Refuge – Eric Duerkop, USFWS

Table 2. Comparison of the Alternatives

	Alternative A (Current Management)	Alternative B (Proposed Action)
Management Categories		
Minimal Management	2,246,795 acres (61.1% of total)	Same as Alternative A
Designated Wilderness	1,321,890 acres (34.5% of total)	Same as Alternative A
Specific Management Direction		
Ecosystem and Landscape Management		
Research and Management Facilities	Structures built for administrative use primarily to facilitate field work logistics, which are available for emergency use by the public, are permitted in Minimal management and may be built in Wilderness if needed for the protection of public health and safety.	Permanent or temporary structures or camps including weirs, counting towers, and sonar counters may be allowed in Minimal and Wilderness management categories.
Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management		
Habitat Management – Chemical Treatment	Introduction of either organic or inorganic chemicals on an annual or temporary basis to an aquatic environment to control the production of a target fish species may be permitted in the Minimal and Wilderness management categories. In the Wilderness management category, permanent facilities would normally not be permitted.	Use of chemicals to remove or control non-native species may be allowed in Minimal and Wilderness management categories.
Fish and Wildlife Population Management		
Native Fish Introductions	Introduction of fish species native to North American outside of their original range may be permitted in Minimal and Wilderness management categories on a case-by-case basis.	Movement of native fish species within a drainage on the Refuge to areas where they have not historically existed may be allowed in Minimal and Wilderness management categories.
Public Use and Recreation Facilities		
Visitor Contact Facilities	A variety of staffed and unstaffed structures where the public can obtain information on the Refuge and its resources would not be provided in the Minimal and Wilderness management categories.	A variety of staffed and unstaffed facilities (ranging from visitor centers to kiosks and signs) that provide information to the public on the Refuge and its resources may be allowed in the Minimal management category but not the Wilderness management category where visitor contact facilities are generally not allowed.
Cabins		
Administrative Cabins	Structures built for administrative use primarily to facilitate field work logistics, but that are available for emergency use by the public, would be permitted in the Minimal management category. In the Wilderness management category, such facilities may be built if needed for the protection of public health and safety.	Any cabin primarily used by Refuge staff or other authorized personnel for the administration of the Refuge may be allowed in Minimal and Wilderness categories.

	Alternative A (Current Management)	Alternative B (Proposed Action)		
Administrative Facilities				
Administrative Field Camps	Structures built for administrative use primarily to facilitate field work logistics would be permitted in the Minimal management category. In the Wilderness management category, such facilities may be built if needed for the protection of public health and safety.	Temporary facilities used by Refuge staff and other authorized personnel to support field projects may be allowed in Minimal and Wilderness management categories.		
Boat Launches and Docks	Designated access sites where boats can be put into lakes and rivers—may vary from simple clearings to permanent camps—would not be permitted in the Minimal and Wilderness management categories.	Designated sites for launching and storing watercraft or tying up a float plane may be allowed in Minimal and Wilderness management categories.		
Commercial – Mineral Exploration				
Surface Geological Studies	Surface rock collection and geological mapping activities (includes helicopter or fixed-wing access) may be permitted in Minimal and Wilderness management categories subject to refuge special use permit conditions.	Surface rock collecting and geological mapping activities (includes helicopter or fixed-wing access) may be authorized in the Minimal management category; not allowed in Wilderness.		
Other Geophysical Studies	Helicopter supported gravity and magnetic surveys (and other minimal impact activities that do not require mechanized surface transportation) may be permitted in Minimal and Wilderness management categories subject to refuge special use permit conditions.	Helicopter-supported gravity and magnetic surveys and other minimal impact activities that do not require mechanized surface transportation may be authorized in the Minimal management category; not allowed in Wilderness.		
Staffing and Budget Needs				
	Short-Term	Long-Term	Short-Term	Long-Term
Permanent Full-Time Staff	11	13	12	14
Permanent Seasonal Staff	2	3	4	4
Temporary Seasonal Staff	2.5	3	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A
Volunteers	4-6	6-8	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A
Annual Budget Needs	\$2,025,000	\$2,650,000	\$2,225,000	\$2,975,000

We Would Like to Hear Your Comments?

The full length Draft Revised Innoko NWR CCP/EA is available online at: <http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/innpol.htm>. Please contact us if you would prefer a paper copy or a compact disk (CD) of the document. We will be hosting public meetings in the near future (times and places will be announced). Comments, requests for CDs, or further information about the planning effort should be directed to: Rob Campellone, Planning Team Leader, USFWS, 1011 E. Tudor Road, MS-231, Anchorage, AK 99503-6199; phone: (907) 786-3982; email: fw7_innoko_planning@fws.gov. Comments should be submitted to the address above by **July 22, 2008**.

For more information about the Refuge visit: <http://innoko.fws.gov> or contact the Refuge directly at: Innoko NWR, 40 Tonzona Ave., Box 69, McGrath, Alaska 99627; phone: (907) 524-3251.