

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



June 2013
Final Report:

A Landscape-Scale Approach to Refuge System Planning

The Refuge System can be a catalyst for change throughout the greater conservation planning community and become a primary partner in advancing the Service's conservation design efforts.



Wilderness Planning

The Refuge System contains 20 percent of America's National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) with 20 million acres of designated wilderness on 63 refuges. The Refuge System also protects 1.9 million acres of proposed wilderness on 21 refuges. By law and policy, we are responsible for preserving the wilderness character of these designated and proposed wilderness areas. We do this, in part, by effective wilderness planning and by establishing goals and objectives in CCPs and in step-down WSPs.



Bison; photo: USFWS

Recommendations

- Prepare and update WSPs for all 63 designated wilderness areas in the Refuge System that will guide the preservation, management, and use of the refuge's wilderness to ensure that wilderness is unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. The WSP will identify desired future conditions, establish indicators, standards, conditions, and thresholds beyond which management actions will be taken to reduce human impacts to wilderness resources.
- Charter a Refuge System Wilderness Council, as part of the 50th anniversary of the NWPS in 2014, to evaluate the 21 proposed wilderness areas and wilderness study areas, and prepare a national strategy to advance priority wilderness proposals to Congress for designation.
- Charter a National Wilderness Planning Team to develop training, templates, and other tools; to assist the Wilderness Council; and to assist regions in preparing WSPs. Training and tools should include guidance on how to address climate change issues in wilderness.
- Complete wilderness reviews on all units of the Refuge System to identify areas with wilderness character and potential. Once wilderness study areas are identified, enter these areas into the Cadastral National Dataset.
- Identify at least one LCD during the LCD pilot planning phase that includes designated wilderness; and evaluate wilderness issues, values, and conservation potential at the landscape scale.