

# Appendix C

## Finding of No Significant Impact

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### **Eastern Shore of Virginia and Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuges**

### **Comprehensive Conservation Plan**

The Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (Draft CCP/EA) of March 2003 for Eastern Shore of Virginia and Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) evaluated four management alternatives, carefully considering their impacts on the environment, and their potential contribution to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and each refuge's purposes and goals. A brief summary of the four alternatives follows.

**Alternative A:** This was the No Action Alternative in the Draft CCP/EA required by the Council of Environmental Quality's regulations on implementing the National Environmental Policy Act. Under this alternative, there would be no change from our current resource management programs on refuge lands. We would continue to manage for the existing diversity of habitat types—hardwood forests, shrub and grasslands—for a variety of bird species. Public use programs would be maintained at existing levels and the Wise Point boat ramp on the Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR would be managed much like it was under the former owner, the Wise Point Corporation. We would maintain our current, approved Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR land acquisition boundary and continue to pursue, from willing sellers, the 310 acres that are not yet acquired. We would not renew the Verizon Virginia, Inc. communications tower lease after it expires in 2007, and would require them to remove the structure.

**Alternative B:** This alternative was the Service's Proposed Action in the Draft CCP/EA. Under this alternative, we would focus our management on protecting, restoring, and enhancing habitat for forest- and shrub-dependent Neotropical and temperate migratory birds of conservation concern. To further protect essential habitat for these species, we would expand the approved land acquisition boundary on the Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR to include an additional 6,030 acres on the lower Delmarva Peninsula. We would also increase monitoring and surveying for Federal-listed species, such as the threatened piping plover and northeastern beach tiger beetle, as well as beach-dependent nesting birds. The quality of our priority public use and outreach programs would be enhanced, with new infrastructure and new opportunities for hunting and wildlife observation. We would also upgrade facilities at the Wise Point boat ramp, providing safe and improved access for recreational anglers and commercial watermen. As in Alternative A, we would require Verizon Virginia, Inc. to remove the communications tower in 2007 with lease expiration. We will also evaluate the need for, and alternative locations for, continued use of the switching station adjacent to the tower.

**Alternative C:** Under this alternative, we would focus our management efforts on protecting, restoring, and enhancing habitat for grassland- and open habitat-dependent Neotropical and temperate migrant birds. As in Alternative B, we would increase monitoring and surveying for Federal-listed species and expand Eastern Shore of Virginia NWRs approved land acquisition boundary to include an additional 6,030 acres. We would increase hunting opportunities, but not as much as proposed in Alternative B. We would also open Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR's southern tip beach to surf-fishing. We would manage the Wise Point boat ramp as proposed in Alternative B, but design a smaller parking lot and reserve fewer parking spaces for commercial watermen.

**Alternative D:** Under this alternative we would focus our management on maintaining and restoring the natural dynamics of the ecosystems of the lower Delmarva Peninsula. We would primarily allow natural succession to occur. We would pursue the 6,030 acre expansion of the Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR boundary similar to Alternatives B and C. Our outreach and education programs would focus on the

importance of historic ecological communities to migratory birds. We would not expand hunting or fishing opportunities. The Wise Point boat ramp would be improved, but the capacity for parking and boat docking and mooring would be reduced. We would also remove several artificial structures on the refuges similar to Alternative B.

The draft CCP/EA was distributed for a 45-day public review and comment period from September 26<sup>th</sup> to November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003. After consideration of all public comments, I have determined that this Environmental Assessment is sufficient to support my findings.

After careful review of the proposed management actions, and based on the analysis provided in the EA and the comments received during the review period, I have selected Alternative B (the Service's Proposed Action in the Draft CCP/EA) for implementation, with the following four modifications:

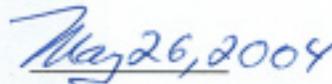
- 1) We will complete a wilderness review on both the Eastern Shore of Virginia and Fisherman Island NWRs within three years of final CCP approval;
- 2) We will also evaluate Skidmore and Fisherman Islands for their Research Natural Area potential within three years of final CCP approval;
- 3) We will coordinate with other authorities to ensure Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) are secure and do not pose a safety hazard before we allow unrestricted access in their vicinity; and
- 4) We will modify our habitat prescription in Management Unit 8 on Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR to promote a shrub habitat type.

I have selected Alternative B, with the modifications noted above, because it helps fulfill the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System; best achieves each refuge's purposes, vision, and goals; maintains and, where appropriate, restores the ecological integrity of both refuges; addresses the significant issues identified during the planning process; and is consistent with principles of sound fish and wildlife management.

I find that the implementation of modified Alternative B will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment in accordance with Section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act. It adheres to all legal mandates and Service policies. As such, I have concluded that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and this Finding of No Significant Impact is appropriate and warranted.



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Date