

# BIG BRANCH MARSH

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

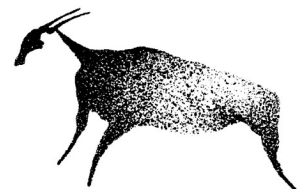
### Planning Workshop I

Lake Pontchartrain



December 9-11, 2003  
Lacombe, LA

## FINAL REPORT



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*A Collaborative Workshop:*

United States Fish & Wildlife Service  
The Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (SSC/IUCN)



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# **BIG BRANCH MARSH**

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

### **Planning Workshop I**

December 9-11, 2003  
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**BIG BRANCH MARSH**  
*National Wildlife Refuge*  
**Planning Workshop I**

**December 9-11, 2003**  
**Lacombe, LA**

**Section 1**  
*Executive Summary*



# Executive Summary

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## A. Introduction and Workshop Process

### Introduction to Comprehensive Conservation Planning

This workshop was designed to contribute to the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) of Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. The Plan is a required element of the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 which states that all refuges will be managed in accordance with an approved CCP that when implemented will achieve the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (System) and the Refuge purpose.

The National Wildlife Refuge System was created to conserve fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats and this conservation mission will be facilitated by providing Americans opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation (National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997). For the purposes of the Act:

- (1) The term ‘compatible use’ means a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the Refuge.
- (2) The terms ‘wildlife-dependent recreation’ and ‘wildlife-dependent recreational use’ mean a use of a refuge involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, or environmental education and interpretation.

### The Mission of the System

“The Mission of the System as defined by the Improvement Act 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.”

### Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge and its Purpose

The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) authorized the establishment of Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge (BBM) on September 29, 1994 under the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986. The acquisition boundary for the Refuge included 12,000 acres of marshlands and forested wetlands between Cane Bayou on the west, Lake Pontchartrain on the south and the Southern Railroad trestle on the east. The initial acquisition occurred on October 13, 1994 when The Conservation Fund (TCF), with funding from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, donated 3,660 acres of wetland. The refuge acquisition boundary went through two expansion phases. The first expansion proposal, which was approved in December, 1996, included 10,000 acres at 3 expansion sites: Oak Harbor, a 2,931 acre tract, Fritchie Marsh covering 6,500 acres and a 500 acre tract along the east side of Lacombe Bayou. The second expansion proposal was approved in April, 1998 and included 1,770 acres of wetlands, hardwood ridges and pine flatwoods adjacent to existing refuge lands. These small tracts of land also included the current 110-acre headquarters site for Southeast Louisiana Refuge Complex



headquarters. Additional acquisitions were made possible by the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and Land and Water Conservation Act funds as well as donations from TCF. Currently, BBM is approximately 15,000 acres of fee title lands within the 24,000 acre acquisition boundary of marshlands and forested wetlands. Additionally, the Refuge manages through a Cooperative Agreement with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, St. Tammany Wildlife Refuge, which is 1,300 acres of marsh adjacent to BBM.

The wetlands of the Refuge were threatened by urban expansion from the city of New Orleans. The establishment of the refuge and the approved expansions were supported by several local organizations, including Northshore Coastal Watch, the St. Tammany Sportsman's League, Coalition of Restore Coastal Louisiana, and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation. These organizations lobbied Senator J. Bennett Johnson and Congressman Robert Livingston to save this important wetland area.

The purposes of the Refuge were defined by the establishing authorities:

#### Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986

(1) for the conservation of the wetlands on the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions.

#### North American Wetlands Conservation Act

(1) to protect, enhance, restore, and manage an appropriate distribution and diversity of wetland ecosystems and other habitats for migratory birds and other fish and wildlife in North America;

(2) to maintain current or improved distributions of migratory bird populations;

(3) to sustain an abundance of waterfowl and other migratory birds consistent with the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the international obligations contained in the migratory bird treaties and conventions and other agreements with Canada, Mexico, and other countries.

The Refuge purposes were further defined in the 1994 Final Land Protection Plan and two subsequent Supplemental Environmental Assessments (1996, 1998) for expansion of BBM as the following management objectives:

(1) to provide habitat for natural diversity of wildlife associated with Big Branch Marsh;

(2) to provide wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl;

(3) to provide nesting habitat for wood ducks;

(4) to provide habitat for non-game migratory birds;

(5) to provide opportunities for public outdoor recreation, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, bird watching, and environmental education and interpretation, whenever they are compatible with the purposes of the refuge.

The most striking characteristic of the Refuge is the diversity of habitats in a relatively small area. The Refuge is a mixture of marshes, pine islands, pine ridges, hardwood hammocks and cypress breaks along the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. Lake Pontchartrain is a shallow, flat-bottomed, fresh-to-brackish water lake with varying salinity levels, depending on rainfall

and wind direction. Heavy rainfall refreshes the lake and its adjacent marshes, while strong easterly winds during periods of low rainfall will cause higher saline water to move into the area. The shoreline consists of sandy, narrow beaches with near shore grass beds. Several small bayous and erosional cuts provide water exchange between Lake Pontchartrain and Big Branch Marsh. The tidally influenced marsh, which grades from brackish to intermediate to fresh, is interspersed with shallow ponds. The transition from marsh to pineland is distinct and abrupt. The pinelands near the marsh edge are prone to shallow flooding and an understory of wiregrass is present in some areas. Pine species present are predominantly slash and loblolly, with a few pockets of longleaf.

The diverse habitats attract many species of shorebirds, wading birds, neotropical migratory birds and wintering waterfowl. The Federally listed species, such as the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and the bald eagle, nest on the Refuge. Mammals common in the area include white-tailed deer, mink, nutria, raccoon and river otter. The refuge contains numerous estuaries, ponds and bayous that provide critical spawning and nursery habitat for commercially-important fish, shrimp and crabs. It also offers saltwater and freshwater fish for a recreational fisherman. Species common include largemouth bass, redfish, speckled trout, catfish and bream.

### **Introduction to the Workshop**

This workshop was organized to assist the Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge staff and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) begin the CCP process by developing a vision for the future of the Refuge and drafting goals, which are a framework for action on how to create the desired future, working with the resources and opportunities of today.

A concerted effort was made to identify and invite stakeholders that had expressed interest. Participants were invited from a variety of organizations including representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, The Nature Conservancy, local public, and individuals and organizations that had expressed interest (See Appendix IV).

The goals of this workshop were to: 1) develop a vision for the future of the Refuge; and 2) develop goals for achieving the Refuge purpose and vision. This report presents the results of the enormous amount of effort and energy the participants contributed to the workshop. The results presented here are preliminary and subject to review and revision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### **Workshop Process**

The workshop was organized at the request of the Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge Office of the U S Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in collaboration with the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) of the Species Survival Commission of the World Conservation Union. To assure credible, fair, and independent conduct of the workshop and of the workshop results, CBSG was requested to design the workshop process, provide facilitation for the workshop, and to assemble and edit the report. Editing of the final report was done with the assistance of the workshop participants. Outside review by non-participants was not part of the process. No content changes were made by the editors and the participants checked that accurate presentations were made of the work they had done during the workshop.

The workshop was conducted December 9-11, 2003 at the Southeast Louisiana Refuge Complex Office in Lacombe, LA. This site was chosen because it is in the Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge and allows easy access to the workshop by invited members of the local community. The workshop extended over 3 days with all lunches brought in for maximum use of the time available. There were 27 participants with most present the entire duration of the workshop. This provided for sustained interactions and the benefit of full attention to the goals and process of the workshop. Participants in the workshop were divided into three groups, identified as Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3, throughout this report. Groups were assigned with an effort to have members from different organizations and the public distributed evenly throughout.

The CBSG team used a combination of Future Search (Weisbord and Janoff, 2000) techniques modified to achieve the outcomes identified for the workshop. The intent was that the stated goals would be accomplished and information and analysis generated in this workshop would feed back to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and become the base material for writing the Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

The workshop began with a series of presentations covering background information that would be helpful to the group over the course of the 3-day workshop. Much of this information was also included in a briefing book handed out to all participants. Charlotte Parker, Southeast Louisiana Refuge Complex Biologist, opened the meeting by welcoming all the participants and presenting the goals of the workshop. She described that this workshop was organized to assist the Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge staff and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) begin the CCP process. She was pleased to see such a diverse group of stakeholders present, and wanted to use the knowledge of the group present to develop a vision for the future of the Refuge and goals for achieving the Refuge purpose and vision. Onnie Byers, CBSG Executive Officer, followed with an introduction to the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) and the workshop process that CBSG designed to assist in the development of the Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge CCP (for more information on CBSG see Appendix V). Elizabeth Souheaver, Southeast Louisiana Refuge Complex Project Leader, then presented an overview of the Refuge and background on the CCP process.

Before getting started with the first task of this workshop, participants were asked to introduce themselves and write out and then read aloud answers to three introductory questions. This process allows for expression of individual perspectives without being immediately influenced by previous responses. This process indicates potential areas of common ground and provides a first insight into the diversity of perceived issues present in the group. The process also provides a check on whether the workshop deliberations respond to the concerns and issues that are raised. Answers to these questions can be found in Appendix II of this report.

## **B. The Draft Vision: Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge**

In working groups, participants created draft vision statements based on themes identified in the futures exercise (see Section 4 of this document). A synthesis group comprised of one member from each working group took these statements and drafted a 'synthesized' draft vision statement that was presented to plenary for discussion. After the large group discussed it, a newly constituted synthesis group met again to revise the vision statement, and agreed on the following draft statement. After this workshop, the statement will be reviewed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The underlined parts are where consensus was not reached on the appropriate wording.

### ***The Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge Vision Statement***

*The Big Branch Marsh (Lake Pontchartrain) National Wildlife Refuge, spanning the entire north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, embraces significantly diverse species and habitats of local to international importance.*

*The unique/distinctive nature of the refuge encompasses the open waters of Lake Pontchartrain, grass beds and estuarine marshes, and pine flatwoods, interspersed with hardwood hummocks, bayous, and cypress sloughs. These refuge habitats, sustained within a highly developed yet environmentally aware urban area, provide for a wide array of wildlife species. The natural diversity of plants, fish and wildlife is maintained through habitat management activities that adapt to and mitigate the effects of external threats. The refuge models land stewardship and restoration practices that promote sound habitat management techniques beyond refuge boundaries. The refuge also recognizes its rich cultural heritage. Significant Native American and contemporary cultural resources are protected, and, where practical, interpreted for the public.*

*The refuge maintains and nurtures the tradition of community involvement and ownership that led to its formation, and continues to benefit from an expanded advocacy by refuge supporters and partners. The refuge is recognized as a hub/center/destination for environmental education and wildlife-related recreation, which foster appreciation of the natural and cultural heritage of the area, and create a strong conservation ethic within the community.*

*As one of the last remaining undeveloped, contiguous tracts of wildlife habitat in the region, the refuge provides broad opportunities for public use, from waterfowl hunting in the refuge's marshes to birding and wildlife photography in the restored pine forests. Simply experiencing the Refuge's intense natural beauty replenishes the spirit.*

## C. The Draft Goals: Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge

The groups were tasked with developing draft goals, which are a framework for action on how to create the desired future working with the resources and opportunities of today. Using the themes identified in the vision statement formulation exercise, the groups developed a list of broad, long-term goals or program focus areas that will build towards the shared vision. These draft goals were presented and discussed in plenary. Each working group was assigned goals to re-work, keeping in mind the comments made by the large group. This resulted in the following draft goals. For complete plenary discussion notes see Appendix I. These goals will be reviewed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### *The Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge Goals*

*(Potential Objectives and/or Strategies are in bulleted lists below the goals)*

#### MANAGEMENT/WILDLIFE HABITAT GOALS

- 1. To restore & conserve a large undeveloped area of native ecosystems (such as estuarine marshes & pine flatwoods) because they are essential to the survival & viability of diverse plant, fish & wildlife populations.**

##### Guiding Objectives:

- Threatened & endangered & special concern species
- Model for land management practices
- Scientific basis
- Technologies
- Facilitate research on Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge compatible with resource protection, with an emphasis on research that provides the necessary information to practice adaptive management (previously a research goal).

##### Strategies/ tools

- Fire use
- Invasive/ exotic eradication
- Hunting/ fishing
- Fish stocking
- Population controls
- Evaluate impacts of mosquito spraying on refuge wildlife

- 2. Develop land protection alternatives that address the environmental integrity/survival of/ health of/address the needs of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin ecosystem.**

##### Guiding Objectives:

- Partner with local, state, national & international entities to
- Northshore/ Lake Pont. Basis strategic assessment

##### Strategies/ tools

- direct acquisition
- conservation easements

## **PUBLIC USE**

- 1. Promote a deeper appreciation, knowledge and understanding of BBMNWR compatible with its resource protection needs to the general public.**
  - Provide and maintain public access while minimizing habitat impacts.
  - Ensure that public facilities maintain a minimal standard established by the Service.
  - Mark boundaries clearly.
  - Construct new visitor center.
- 2. Protect the resource and ensure a safe outdoor experience for all users.**
  - Provide Law Enforcement on the refuge to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- 3. Provide quality public use and visitor experience to foster public support.**
  - Provide a rich diversity of educational, interpretive, and recreational opportunities for the general public
- 4. Provide a model of land stewardship while maintaining biological integrity.**

## **EDUCATION**

- 1. Inform the public/Enhance the public's knowledge about the natural wonders of the BBMNWR and promote environmental awareness and appreciation. (why? Instill in the public a sense of pride, ownership and support of the refuge; create among the general public advocates for the plants, wildlife and habitats with which they live)**
  - provide information of economic impact and value of the resource.
- 2. Preserve the cultural resources and cultural history of the Refuge, which are valued and connect Refuge staff, visitors, and the community to the area's past.**
  - Develop avenues for public interaction with refuge staff and programs related to cultural resources through innovative outreach and education (may be applicable to other education goals). Educate the public about the presence of cultural and historical resources to increase awareness and to protect these sites.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

- 1. Maintain/Protect/ the environmental integrity of the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain (through partnerships)**
  - Work with partnerships
  - Work with area Partners to establish greenways, corridors, and conservation areas.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE/ADMINISTRATION**

- 1. Enhance and protect the ecological integrity of the refuge (include adjacent habitats) habitats, fish and wildlife of the Lake Ponchartrain estuarine system (this goal is looking beyond the refuge boundaries).**
  - Acquire additional lands to meet refuge management objectives
  - Partners for zoning
  - Minimize and mitigate external threats and impacts

- Evaluate and re-mediate contaminant levels on the refuge
2. **The refuge provides models of land stewardship that extend wise, resource-friendly management practices into the community.**
    - Provide high quality, welcoming and attractive infrastructure and facilities that reflect well on the Service and the Refuge

## **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

1. **Preserve, protect and interpret our natural and cultural history and resources so that present and future generations know and appreciate those things that help to mold us as a people and guide the management of the Refuge.**
  - Develop a long-range plan for the management of Bayou Gardens and associated buildings
  - Inventory cultural resources on the Refuge
  - Research, document and protect historical sites on the refuge

**BIG BRANCH MARSH**  
*National Wildlife Refuge*  
**Planning Workshop I**

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**Lacombe, LA**

**Section 2**  
*Understanding the Past*





# Understanding the Past

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## Understanding the Past I: Timeline Individual Reports

The purpose of this exercise was to develop a shared picture of the history of the development of Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. Each individual made notes on the memorable personal, local (the Refuge and surrounding communities), and national milestones, key events, or turning points in the history of the development of Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. Then they transferred their notes to the corresponding timelines posted on the walls. The resulting events on the timelines are listed below.

### PERSONAL

#### *1950s*

- Some of us were born and attended school, grew up in simpler times
- Spent weekends and holidays on Bayou Lacombe at a camp in Marsh
- Started camping, hiking and learning to appreciate the outdoors
- Hunt, fish, trap and dodge hurricanes

#### *1960s*

- Friends of the National ZOO (FONZ) member – appreciation of/interest in animals
- Lots of pets, responsible for taking care of them
- Grew up in San Diego, influenced by informal education in public school system (zoo outreach conservation camp in State park system), developed a respect and appreciation for nature early on.
- First camping trip
- First deer hunting trip – successful restocking
- Family moved from LA to TN – began education
- Active in Boy Scouts, became an Eagle Scout, appreciated nature, wildlife and conservation.
- Grew up on Illinois farm
- Received degree in Chem and Bio sciences
- Traveled around the world from 1968-71 and developed an appreciation for the beauty of nature in so many different terrains and respect for wildlife
- Parents built camp on U. Atchafeloya Basin Levee, spent time fishing, etc. there
- Got married – still spent time fishing, hunting, trapping on Bayou Lacombe
- Fishing with brothers and dad
- Camping with family in National Parks and State Areas, Appalachians, Rockies, Green Mountains

#### *1970s*

- Introduced to hiking – lengthy trips, wilderness exposure, remote locations. This fostered an appreciation of the outdoors and protected areas.
- First experiences enjoying the outdoors and wildlife by fishing hiking, camping, trawling for shrimp, walking in the woods, etc... began career at San Diego Zoo.

- Enrolled in wildlife management curriculum in college, started career with LBWF
- Began outdoor recreational pursuits (horses, hunting/fish, motorbikes)
- Returned to LA and began college education in Forestry
- Moved to Lacombe, Oct. 1972, teacher at Holy Redeemer, taught Bio and Math and Chem, fished on Bayou Lacombe, hiked in forest that is presently Big Branch Refuge.
- Developed interest in Entomology, insect collection, took college courses in ecology, zoology, botany, and various courses that helped me form my attitudes and satisfy my interests
- College education in wildlife science
- Sad to see VA Beach develop so fast, started environmental interests
- Local natural history museum and nature station created, hung out there.
- Set up permanent residence on Bayou Lacombe in Marsh
- Personal love of nature blossomed, decided to make it my career focus
- Witness strong work ethic from mother and father

### *1980s*

- College introduction to environmental issues, membership in many environmental organizations – realization of organization true goals and refining memberships.
- College – exposure to the academics of animal care/wildlife management, interest evolving from animal health to wildlife management
- Earned math and science and biology degrees. Researched endangered carnivore endocrinology at San Diego Zoo research department. Worked as a formal/informal wildlife educator for the San Diego Zoo.
- Started to become more environmentally conscious and aware of things like pollution, runoff, water quality and rights, green house effect, etc.
- Broadened experience in wildlife management working on wetland restoration projects.
- Student summer job on Refuge
- Completed college education in forestry and continued in wildlife management.
- Started forest/wildlife management career (public and private)
- Career move to natural resources/parks and recreation
- Started bird-watching
- Moved to New Orleans
- Moved to LA as PL for Bogue Chitto Complex
- Three years at rural LA college to learn Environmental Science
- Trained as a manager trainee on complex while attending LSU as a graduate student
- Worked as environmental educator at local nature center, mentored under ecologist
- Commercial fishing, fighting shell dredging, helping establish LPBF
- Went to work for state wildlife agency

### *1990s*

- Moved to New Orleans area, interested in area wildlife, helped establish B.S and BBM national wildlife areas.
- Initiating forming Big Branch Refuge
- Lead field trip with LA native plant society

- Started paddling and hiking the Refuge (surprised had not been to areas before, but they weren't public then)
- Assigned in the work place to responsible care
- Became aware that environmental law is becoming a political baseball. To heavily influenced by radical groups and not good science and common sense.
- Exposure to many viewpoints but still very specific goals
- Changing from being task oriented to broader perspective – not so focused on the product, but more on the process
- Moved to New Orleans from Southern California – suffered major culture shock, worked as an animal curator/wildlife educator at Audubon Zoo. Continued to use State and National Park systems worldwide
- Worked closely with private landowners in habitat management.
- Environmental science major, masters in Environmental Policy, job with LPBF
- Developed EIS for Bayou Sauvage
- Greater involvement in Regional issues of forest/wildlife management and private lands issues
- Married and had children (thinking change)
- Worked closely with TCF on land acquisition for BBM and BSNWRs
- Decided I wanted a career in Natural Resource/Wildlife Management. Begin working with Fish and Wildlife Service
- Moved from NPS to FWS
- St. Tammany Parish Mosquito Abatement, developed an integrated mosquito management plan for activities with the Big Branch Refuge, granted a special use permit for activities with the Refuge
- Brought property inside Big Branch refuge area before it was a refuge. Built minimal impact house of Boy Scout road, took high school students on field trips.
- Moved to St. Tammany Parish from SW LA and began working t SEL

### **2000s**

- Professional commitment to providing areas to children similar to what I had growing up
- Began working for USFWS
- Desire to be professionally challenged, broaden experience, step outside comfort zone
- Continued to escort groups – paddling and hiking in refuge
- Retired, began to get more involved and more aware of need to give back
- Began working in informal wildlife education at Audubon Louisiana Nature Center
- As a teacher, took students on wildlife field trips inside present Big Branch wildlife refuge, completed minimal impact road to our property, cleared site to build small cabin
- Started administrative career, participated in Grande Cote NWR biological review
- LPBF took over habitat protection program and evolved into having a larger proactive approach to conserving local resources and helping the community.
- More involvement in National and Regional as well as Local issues
- Begin working at Southeast Louisiana Refuges. Despite numerous obstacles, dedicated my life to conservation, protection, and enhancement of plant and animal species and their habitats, so that children and grandchildren can enjoy nature's wonders
- Finally bought that boat, love fishing on lake and in Bayous

- Graduated UNO in environmental planning, started work and interest in Slidell/Parish area.
- Birded in Big Branch, volunteered for FWS for RCW

## **LOCAL**

### ***1950s***

- Causeway
- Fishing, hunting, shrimping, etc. are major economic force
- Rural area
- MRGO
- Shell dredging
- Northshore known as an oasis for New Orleans residents sick to heal
- Construction of Mississippi River Levee System
- Fountainebleu State Park and adjacent state lands already established
- Levees on Mississippi River long established
- Smokey Bear

### ***1960s***

- Second Causeway
- Rural area
- Hurricane Camille
- Spillway finished
- Increased effort of fire control, i.e., “fire is bad”
- Increased drainage projects and roads in parish

### ***1970s***

- Transportation access to parish, I-12, I-59, Causeway second span
- St. Tammany growth boom started – urban flight
- Oil and gas production facilities expand – effecting land dynamics
- Population increase becoming concern
- Increased land use changes and fragmentation of wildlife habitat, pine plantations replace natural forests
- Community changing from subsistence and recreational based to caretaker and residential

### ***1980s***

- Local growth management systems became inadequate to guide growth
- St. Tammany fastest growing Parish in LA
- Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation established in response to public outcry and interest
- Large commuter population develops in parish
- Public concern over loss of greenspace, recreation and hunting areas
- Bogue Chitto NWR established
- Commercial fishery collapsed
- Economy based on oil industry collapsed
- Losing too much natural habitat to development

- Economy boom/bust affects development
- Logging companies
- LA Department of Wildlife and Fisheries natural heritage program and The Nature Conservancy formed in LA

### *1990s*

- Bought property on Bayou Lacombe inside Refuge area
- Refuge established
- Increased problems with crime and schools in city
- Federal protection through refuge establishment
- Friends of SE LA refuges established
- PBF works with local citizens and others in helping establish the Big Branch NWR
- Talked to Sen. J. Bennett Johnston and he directed FWS to assess value of NWR
- Commercial and industrial development
- Flight of New Orleans residents to Northshore – growth rate 30% annually.
- Refuge lands and canals become more accessible to outdoor public.
- Discovery of red-cockaded woodpeckers and eagle on Refuge
- Bayou Sauvage NWR established
- Formed group of citizens and leaders to promulgate Refuge and local support
- Started compatibility determinations for used on refuge
- TNC preserves (local) established
- Pine park beetle outbreak impacts local forests
- Multiple partners surfaced to protect marshlands
- Refuge visibility increased on Northshore
- Economic boom results in tremendous development

### *2000s*

- Science education takes a backseat to literary and numeracy in public school systems
- St. Tammany Parish growth management plan process started
- St. Tammany Parish Mosquito Abatement developed a management plan for mosquito management with the Big Branch Refuge
- Purchase of fitchey marsh for inclusion into Big Branch elimination of saltwater from fitchey marsh by introduction of fresh water from Sidell and Pearl Rivers
- Sprawl and tremendous habitat loss continues (750,000 acres of habitat lost/altered between 1982-2000)
- Major quality of life impacts unplanned development, all/most of parish waterways not meeting their designated uses
- Development of 2025 and 2050 plans
- Planning by State and Federal agencies, conservation agencies also
- Significant traffic congestion generates public outcry for major road improvements
- Slidell masterplan
- SELA headquarters moves to Lacombe
- CCP process
- Lake Marrepas WMA established

- Woodlands HCP moves more RCWS to Big Branch
- Big Brand Refuge identified as important for biodiversity conservation to 5 state Ecoregion
- Maintenance costs increased for administrative facilities and public us areas
- Refuge visibility high profile during 2003 Centennial Celebration for Refuge System
- Development pressures environment

## **NATIONAL**

### ***1950s***

- Baby boom
- Growth of suburbs
- Traditional family structure
- Prosperity
- Restocking of deer in LA

### ***1960s***

- Refuge recreation act ('62)
- Land and water conservation fund and wilderness act and national wildlife refuge system administration act ('64)
- National wildlife refuge system act ('66)
- Vietnam war
- Desegregation
- Counter revolution
- "Silent Spring" widely read
- Construction of national interstate system (the nation became mobile)
- Endangered species act
- Wetlands conservation act
- Impacts of DDT realized
- EPA is created (?)
- Political and social changes in country began shaping society
- Civil rights movement

### ***1970s***

- Environmental movements/causes become popular
- NEPA (public involvement in federal decision making)
- 1974 Amendment to Fish and Wildlife Act of '56 = U.S. Fish and Wildlife service
- President carter's support for FWS/refuges
- Oil and gas exploration boom
- Earth day/ environmental movement began
- Endangered species act/clean water act/clean air act
- Bald eagle listed as endangered
- Environmental movement flourishing
- 1<sup>st</sup> awareness of letter on national level (Native American commercial aired)
- Wetlands protection

### ***1980s***

- LA Congressional delegation supported establishing NWRs and land acquisition
- TCF became involved with FWS in land acquisition nationally
- Boom in technology
- Faltering of environmental interest at the national level
- Red-cockaded wood pecker listed as endangered
- Economy souring but technology advancing
- No net loss in wet lands
- Emphasis in educating public about refuge benefits/needs
- North American waterfowl management plan protects ducks
- Computer age began

### ***1990s***

- NAWMP passed by congress/NFWF established – matching grant \$ for land acquisition
- Refuge improvement act
- CWPPRA started
- Met with Senator Benett Johnston in Covington and presented plan to form refuge and gained his support
- More awareness of ecotourism (possibly first use of the term)
- Concern about development in and along coastal areas arises
- Violence in schools
- Drought- catrophic fire seasons
- Food quality and protection act m- 1996
- Economic boom and technical milestones
- Stronger environmental issues
- Individuals losing sense of responsibility
- Several refuges established in LA
- No significant controversial refuge issues; great refuge (urban location) for marketing conservation message

### ***2000s***

- Science based reaction/modification to earlier legislation
- Conservation ideas/values change with local/state/national elections.
- High degree of interest in protecting habitat and other environmental resources both locally, regionally, and even on larger landscapes/scales
- Drought catrophic fire seasons
- National fire plan
- Change in administration, relaxing of environmental regulation, challenged the Service to work with a different viewpoint from the establishing administration.
- Start of national awareness of LA wetlands problem as national problem
- SWG – state wildlife grants program
- National disaster affects/reawakens country



## Understanding the Past II: Timeline Summary Report

Working Groups convened to identify themes and patterns in the history of the development of Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge and discuss the timelines, with particular reference to the following questions:

1. Looking at the Personal timeline, what story can you tell about us - the people in this room and our contribution to the development of Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge?
2. Looking at the Local timeline, what story can you tell about the ways in which the community impacted the development of the Refuge?
3. Looking at the National timeline, what story can you tell about the broader influence on development of Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge? How does this story relate to those developed from the two other perspectives?

### Group 1

#### Personal Timeline Summary

*Group members: Charlotte Parker, Elizabeth Souheaver, Lyndon Bijou, Kenny Ribbeck, Larry Burch, Denise Bonck, Jill Mastrototano, Richard Hale, Byron Almquist*

- 1950s Simple life and times  
Few born during this time period  
Outdoor activities enjoyed by individuals
- 1960s More born during this time period  
More enjoyment of outdoor activities  
First outdoor experiences versus just LA experiences
- 1970s More started careers in field of environmental/biology/science field  
More outdoor interests
- 1980s More environmental consciousness noted through variety of venues (school, private environmental organizations, environmental education forums, formal college training)  
More moved into the local area  
More started school in environmental field 30% of audiences
- 1990s Well established in careers (Managers, technical experts, decision-makers)  
Recognized realities/politics of protecting natural resources  
More activism in environmental issue,  
Personal life more settled

2000s Increase education related awareness,  
Personal commitment and enjoyment of natural resources  
Activism for future investment, more stewardship  
Give back to the community

## **Group 2**

*Group members: Paul Orr, Howard Poitevint, Roger Boykin, Dennis Tauzin,  
Amy LeGaux, Byron Fortier, Barbara Boyle, Conrad Porbes*

### **Summary of National issues from the past**

There were social trends, legislative trends, and governmental trends  
We decided to summarize by decade

50's - beginning of baby boom and suburban sprawl, continued rural migration to cities  
economic prosperity

60's - social upheaval, significant legislation on environmental issues, transportation  
systems/interstate highways promote travel and suburban growth, move toward grass roots  
social action for change, first alarms about pesticides and pollution,

70's - broad consensus leads to environmental legislation, regulatory legislation, End Species  
Act. Clean Water and Air acts, environmental education movement/Earth Day, oil and gas  
boom leads to development, prominence of environmental organizations - Sierra Club,  
etc., changes in farming led to clearing of agricultural lands, cleavage in environmental  
groups vs. use groups (polarization), evolution of thinking about public use on refuges -  
many had been closed, required coordination with state agencies

we reviewed history of oil crises of 70's

80's - local cong support for refuge establishment; many refuges established nationally, total  
acreage more than doubled, “preserving the dirt”, no net loss policy for wetlands,  
computers begin to affect science, beginning of emphasis in refuges on Environmental  
Education, opening of refuges leads to conflicts among user groups(led to refuge  
improvement act later) and between users vs. Wildlife, NGO’s become involved (TNC,  
TCF) in acquisition, litigation over environmental issues became common

90's - computers begin to affect communication, (we debated impact of computers in various  
arenas), Environmental legislation had been subject to emotion and effects of legislation  
were felt, a sense that more good science and common sense was needed, reaction to  
implementation and enforcement of these laws in the 80s and 90's led to reaction; and  
moves to modify or relax and base more on science than emotion, court challenges to env  
laws. Some difficulty placing these trends into a decade. National plans: NAWCA,

CWPPRA, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Fire Plan, Global Warming issues emerged

2000's - successive administrations use environment as political 'football', polarization of political parties, national fire plan implemented - led to WUI dollars, emergence/awareness of refuges in local ecotourism and economic picture,

### **Group 3**

*Group members: Curt Burnette, Joe Bernard, Cliff and Connie Glockner, Bill Vermillion, Shelley Stiaes, Jimmy Anthony, Chuck Palmisano, Nelwyn McInnis, Dan Breaux*

#### **Local Milestones**

1950s - Beginning of more intensive development of Northshore area. Causeway built. Easier access accelerated development. Population growth started increasing. Northshore still considered rural area, peaceful retreat. Fountainebleu created.

1960s – Second span of Causeway finished. Interstate system started. I-10 and I-12. Continued growth and development. Beginning of problems such as drainage. Increased fire suppression due to more population and public attitudes.

1970s – Twin Spans created even better access and more development. This led to urban flight since it was much easier to commute. Local environmental awareness began as parish became more urban in some areas. Population increases and change in forestry practices led to habitat fragmentation. Development increasing in wetland areas.

1980s – Below I-12 corridor definitely shifting to more urban than rural. Commuter population growing. Even greater concern on loss of greenspace and natural habitat. Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) established. Fragmentation of habitat continuing resulting in wildlife population stress. More environmental awareness and action. Pearl River, Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, Nature Conservancy, Natural Heritage Program, Bayou Sauvage NWR (1990) all established. Much of wetland degradation result of human impact.

1990s – Obvious theme developing and continuing into the 90s. Development continues. Habitat destruction continues. More environmental awareness. More enforcement of protection of federal property causing decrease of uncontrolled and commercial activities. Big Branch Marsh NWR established due to help of Conservation Fund. Friends of Southeast Refuges group created. Pine bark beetle causes severe damage. Nature Conservancy preserves created. Largest growth rate in state in St. Tammany Parish.

2000s – Big Branch Marsh (BBM) refuge continues to grow. Growth management plans begin to be developed by government and concerned citizen groups. Coastal management plans develop. Urban growth results in urban problems such as traffic congestion, drainage, flooding, sprawl. Years of uncontrolled growth resulting in lots of planning now. More active management of programs on refuge.



**BIG BRANCH MARSH**  
*National Wildlife Refuge*  
**Planning Workshop I**

**December 9-11, 2003**  
**Lacombe, LA**

**Section 3**  
*Focus on the Present*



# Focus on the Present

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## Focus on the Present I: Issues on the Refuge

### Group 1

#### Theme Discussion:

- Information—refuge information by species, staff regulations, management related -1
- Education--1
- Public Relations—Seasonal (monthly, more regular) calendar events, list on web page, contacts, outreach 1
- Public Access- facilities 1
- Refuge Misnamed (Lacombe Marsh NWR)
- Services—(things you offer the public) (photo blind, overlooks, trails, boardwalks, boat launches) 1
- Law Enforcement & Regulations 3
- Reducing trash, litter 8
- Preserve vs. Zoo, Balance of primary purposes, Conservation/public Use Balance 7
- Mgt of Plants, Forests, Wildlife 4
- Mgt. Of Non living factors Soil erosion, water quality, air quality, sunlight, shade 4
- Internal/External Factors
- Management of Public Use Access/Programs (hunting, fishing, trapping, etc.)
- Education/Awareness (different age groups, networking with partners, outreach)
- Land Acquisition 4
- Outside Problems/Forces (St. Tammany Plan?)
- Administrative Mgt. (staffing and funding) 2
- Planning 6
- Forestry 4
- Fire Mgt. 4
- Outreach/Education (Signage, Interpretive, Volunteers, Training) 1
- Maintenance of facilities, (trash) 4
- Recreation Activities 2
- External Threats (Bonne Carre Spillway) 5
- Ecotourism 7
- Development Dynamic Mgt. Plan
- Funding 2
- Cooperative Public Use (Mtg. Needs of consumptive and non-consumptive users) 7
- Overuse considerations 7
- Wildland Urban Interface 5
- Restoration and Maintenance of Habitat Diversity 4
- Exotic Control 4
- Water Quality/Rights 5
- Urban Sprawl/Development 5
- T & E species, Species of Concern 4



- Partnerships to further protection 9
- Assess Fish & Wildlife Populations Integrity/viability 4
- Contaminants 5
- Pre-settlement Restoration 4
- Volunteers/Community support 2
- Adaptive Management 6

Education  
 Administration  
 Law Enforcement/Regulation  
 Habitat Mgt.  
 External Threat/Impact  
 Management Plan  
 Balance Conservation & Public Use  
 Trash  
 Partnerships  
 Land Acquisition

Provide Public Opportunities & Information  
 Maintenance of Biological Significant Natural Resources of Area  
 Address External Threats  
 Find Balance between Conservation and Public Use  
 Expand Refuge through Appropriate Land Acquisition  
 Managed Refuge with support of volunteers and partnerships

## **Group 2**

1. Welcoming the public:
  - Access and or facilities-restrooms, roads, signs
  - Returning phone calls and/or email
  - Trash and dumping issue
  - parking
2. Facility Improvements/ Development:
  - Trails
  - Boat Launch
  - Photo Blind
  - Bank fishing
  - Deer clearing stations
3. Facility Maintenance:
  - Permanent boundary marking

*(We're trying to be to detailed, no we're just using examples under the themes)*

Trash pick up  
Hunter parking areas  
Trails

4. Education:

Garbage/Trash management  
Dumping

4a.. Formal environmental education for schools  
(may need another category for education: stewardship, issue oriented)

5. Volunteers:

Internships  
Full-time residents  
Part-time community volunteers  
Need someone dedicated to developing program full-time

6. Partnerships:

7. Law Enforcement:

Increased  
After hours accessibility

*Are we getting too detailed in what we are trying to accomplish?*

8. Urban Interface:

Fire Breaks  
Manage impacts  
(most of list falls into this category)

9. Land acquisition of critical areas before development

How do we impact our neighbors (controlled burn, alligators, mosquitoes)  
How do our neighbors impact us (pollution, over-use, trash, other waste)  
inholdings  
capture critical areas  
prioritize acquisitions

10. Habitat Management:

Fire  
Water Quality  
Invasives  
Fisheries  
Restoration  
Forest

11. Estuary management effects the public not sure if it goes in this category? Or is a category. You can manage a habitat directly or indirectly. Adjacent lake etc...

How important are the different themes/clusters we have created, prioritize. What are our key concerns for the next 15 years.

Where does recreational use fall? Facilities development.

This piece of ground we are on should be managed differently than the rest of the refuge

12. Management of 110 acre HQ tract:

- future facilities
- grounds/gardens

13. Visitor center

- exhibits
- interpretation
- future facilities
- ground

concentrate public use in public area (bait & switch) rest of refuge would be used in a different way. People tend to interpret the boardwalk and not other areas.

What is there about furthering science using the refuge as a research area for baseline studies. How do we manage it if we don't know what we have? Maybe need an inventory category.

14. Public Use:(Consumptive/non-consumptive)

- The Big Six- provide opportunities for and management of
- Hunting
- Canoeing
- Wildlife photo
- Environmental ed.
- Interpreting
- Wildlife observing

15. What about wildlife conservation? Estuarine Mgt.- baseline inventory and monitoring

Can't fish during migratory duck season, how do you separate one from the other? Both are shut down because of one even though the two don't conflict. Need more effective management.

## **Group 3**

### **Prioritization and Groupings of Issues**

#### ***Issues***

Law Enforcement Needs

Mosquito Control

Public access- improvements to current facilities, reduce current facilities, increase current facilities, handicapped needs

Marsh Restoration

Public Use – hunting, fishing, birding, etc. Need to attempt balance with wildlife needs/management practices.

Environmental Education/Outreach/Marketing

Wildlife/Habitat Management

Invasive Species

Fire Management

Litter Abatement

Land Acquisition

Wild/Urban Interface

Research Issues/Monitoring of environment

Boundary Issues

Regional Stressors

Funding

Stewardship(volunteers)

Partnerships with local groups and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Maintenance of facilities

Staffing Needs

Fisheries

Endangered Species

Compatibility/Balance Issues

#### **Groupings of Issues**

##### ***Wildlife Management***

Habitat management

Fisheries

Fire

Endangered species

Invasive species

Land acquisition

Monitoring effects

##### ***Public Use***

Access

Balance

Litter

Law Enforcement

*Facility /Infrastructure*

Funding

Staffing needs

Maintenance of facilities

*Outreach/Education*

Volunteers/stewardship

Partnerships/planning

*Wildland/urban Interface*

Regional stressors

Mosquitoes

Land acquisition

*Research*

Restoration

Habitat management

Species biology

*Contaminants*

*Boundary*

*Compatibility*

**Rankings of Groupings**

Wildlife Management (10 votes)

Public Use (7)

Outreach/Education (6)

Wildland/Urban Interface (4)

## Focus on the Present II: Prouds and Sorries

The purpose of this exercise was to reflect on and accept the group's feelings about what is currently being done at and for the Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. Each participant was allowed to contribute comments regarding his or her stakeholder group only. This was an exercise in owning up to what is, not blaming or problem solving. Each group brainstormed two lists (prouds and sorries), asking themselves:

1. What are we doing right now that we are PROUD of in relationship to Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge?
2. What are we SORRY or disappointed about?

### Group 1

#### ***Proud:***

- Environmental Education Programs, Wild Things/ BBM
- LDWF Provided land for refuge
- Trips to Refuge (Byron)
- RCW study Volunteers (NSBC)
- Establish Refuge (LPBF) (NNC)
- Planning Process involvement (Denise)
- Involved with Friends Group (Denise)
- Funding Wetland Restoration grant
- Establish/Assist Land Acquisition. (ES)
- Represent/work for Refuge (CP)
- Existence of Refuge (LB, NNC)
- Wild Things (BA NSBC)
- Fundraising for Friends Group—Trip Donations (BA)
- Partnerships (ES)
- Habitat Integrity (ES)
- Trash Clean-up (BA)
- Wetland Workshops Resource Planning Example, local involvement (LPBF)

#### ***Sorry:***

- LDWF should be more aggressive (LB)
- More of an Advocate hike trail along pipeline canal (BA)
- Land donor acknowledge (Uddo tract) (LPBF)
- Volunteer More (NSBC)
- Enjoy Refuge More (DB)
- Land acquisition to reach refuge boundary (LB)
- More political/funding support (ES)
- Wish we could clean up refuge more (CP)
- Planning delay (CCP) (DB)
- Bureaucratic structure (CP)

## **Group 2**

### ***Prouds***

- That Big Branch Marsh NWR was established by the FWS in response to public request
- That FWS acquired and restored HQ site
- That Audubon La Nature Center is associated with BBM NWR
- That FWS allows staff and managers to figure out best ways to manage the refuge rather than dictating
- That FWS has continued to seek public involvement from stakeholders in refuge mgt programs
- That I am able to serve on this group and have a voice in what my “front yard” will be like in the future
- Proud of volunteer group’s restoration of areas at headquarters site
- Proud of expertise that staff offers to marsh restoration, EE, etc.
- Proud of relationship between LA Division of Forestry and FWS in management of fire

### ***Sorries***

- That personally I haven’t been more capable of expanding our efforts/being more effective in restoring treasures of HQ site
- Sorry that I don’t live closer and can visit more often
- Friendly Flames program has not been more well attended
- That we haven’t been able to develop a more effective volunteer organization in support of the refuge
- That we don’t do a better job of planning ahead but seem to always be reactive
- That FWS hasn’t been successful in obtaining funding and support for a true first class visitor center at refuge
- That FWS had to be told by the public that this was an important piece of ground
- That we haven’t finished the Lake Rd boat launch and pier
- That FWS has not been able to do a better job of maintaining facilities on the refuge

## **Group 3**

### ***Proud***

- To be working in a field that love to be in
- St. Tammany Parish is proud to have developed plan with Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) for integrated mosquito mgmt.
- Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with FWS to manage St. Tammany Refuge
- Public is proud to be part of process of refuge development
- Audubon Louisiana Nature Center (ALNC) proud to work with FWS Env. Ed. Programs
- Public is proud to be part of establishment of BBM
- Public is proud to be a partner with all that helped establish refuge

- Proud FWS to have responded to public to acquire BBM and manage in sound fashion (public access, threatened & endangered species, Env. Ed., waterfowl)
- Proud The Nature Conservancy (TNC) identified BBM as priority site in 2 regional plans
- Proud TNC identified BBM as important conservation area in St. Tammany land use
- Proud TNC has MOU with FWS including fire
- Proud to participate in continued development of refuge activities
- Proud FWS supports Rx burns on refuges with inherent dangers involved
- Parish is proud to be working with American Mosquito Control Association (AMCA) & FWS to develop mosquito control manual (National Mgmt. Plan)
- Proud LWFD is working partner in bio review and scoping process
- Public is proud to be involved with conservation of land
- Proud FWS actively involves publics concerns and issues
- Proud TNC provides info to congress & policy makers that could impact refuge mgmt. & is involved in bio. Review

### *Sorry*

- TNC has yet to find money to expand BBM
- There is lack of communication between FWS Ecological Services, BBM, TNC, red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) coordinator
- resulting in lack of RCW expansion on TNC property in preferred time frame
- Public is sorry did not get improvements to Lake Rd. before leaving office
- Public is sorry more people do not understand about not littering
- LWFD has not removed burned house on Lake Rd.
- Parish is sorry Mosquito Management Manual has not been completed
- Job has moved from more active mgmt to paperwork oriented
- Don't have better knowledge of hunting regulations.
- Sorry haven't expanded expertise to better help BBM
- Image of public use facilities is bad
- Don't outreach to public in better fashion





# **BIG BRANCH MARSH**

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

### **Planning Workshop I**

**December 9-11, 2003**  
**Lacombe, LA**

## **Section 4**

### *Exploring the Future*



# Exploring the Future

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## Exploring the Future I: An Ideal Future for the Refuge

First, the group was asked to imagine the ideal Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge of the future. Each working group developed some kind of visual depiction of this vision and then presented or performed it in front of the large group. While each group presented their ideal future, the other groups wrote down trends they saw. Then each group reviewed the themes identified during the 'ideal futures' plenary presentations and synthesized and agreed upon dominant themes. Using these themes, they crafted a draft vision statement for Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge.

### Group 1

#### Ideal Future Refuge:

- Refuge renamed to Lake Pontchartrain NWR
- Open Savannah in forested areas (Longleaf Pine Savannah)
- Balance in Public Use and Wildlife/Habitat Protection
- Refuge Expansion (extends from Slidell to the East to Manchac to the West)
- Lush Marsh with abundant species of wintering waterfowl
- Clean roadsides, access points, and waterways (Dec. in trash)
- Bald Eagles & RCW populations available for viewing
- Abundant Food Resources available to attract migratory birds and resident species for public viewing
- Facilities available for PublicUse/Viewing, while primitive areas are maintained for more challenging (off-the-beaten path) experiences
- Refuge has a large base of public support (locally, regionally, and nationally). Abundant volunteers and large Friends Group (400-500 members)
- Educational opportunities abound
- T & E Species and Species of Concern have recovered and have enlarged populations
- Waterways are cleaner & supporting viable populations of aquatic species
- Refuge has national recognition for its longleaf savannah restoration
- Exotics (plants and animals) have been eradicated and/or are under control
- 100% compliance with Refuge regulations
- Refuge cooperates in Global Efforts and Partnerships (ie. Neotropical Migrants, Conservation, Restoration efforts, etc...)
- Marsh shoreline loss arrested & interior marsh rebuilding
- CCP goals accomplished and new plan being developed
- More availability for remote public use opportunities
- Limited but improved opportunities facilities for educational opportunities
- Increased use of prescribed burning
- Full compliment of appropriate staffing and funding

**Roles:** Kris Bly---Photographer/Editor National Geographic  
Lyndon Bijou---Visitor Center (VC) Contact  
Charlotte Parker---Refuge Manager  
Richard Hale---Birder  
Larry Burch---Fisherman  
Elizabeth Souheaver--- Biologist in Marsh  
Denise Bonck---Foreign Research Scientist  
Byron Almquist---Canoeing Guide in  
Kenny Ribbeck---New Planner @ VC

**Skit:**

Begins with Kris Bly (National Geographic) entering VC to do story on Lake Pontchartrain NWR. Kris is doing a story on the Award the Refuge received for successfully completing CCP process, and being instrumental in wetland and habitat restoration.

Kris meets with VC Contact Lyndon Bijou. Lyndon Bijou orients Kris with the Refuge. Lyndon discusses:

- Name change of National Wildlife Refuge from Big Branch Marsh to Lake Pontchartrain
- Expansion of Refuge to 80,000 acres extending from Slidell (East) to Manchac (West)
- How partnerships with State of Louisiana, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Conservation Fund (TCF), and the Friends Group led to expansion of Refuge
- Refuge has large support base locally, regionally and nationally. Has large volunteer base and friends group (400 members)
- Friends Group was instrumental in obtaining new State-of-the-Art Visitor Center (VC--3400 sq. ft., interpretive panels, dioramas, interactive displays, etc..)

Lyndon then introduces Kris to Refuge Manager Charlotte Parker. Charlotte talks about Restoration projects, diversity of the Refuge, Open Savannah stands, T & E Species and Species of Concern, trash abatement and eradication on the Refuge, and control of Invasive/Exotic species. Charlotte then brings Kris out on the Refuge.

Charlotte and Kris encountered Richard (birder/volunteer). Richard expounds on the Open Savannah areas and restoration of these areas and the surrounding marshes. He discusses the forestry practices (thinning, prescribed burning, exotic/invasive eradication, etc..) that lead to these thriving habitats.

Next Charlotte takes Kris around the Refuge and they encounter a consumptive user Larry (fisherman/hunter). Larry raves about the great hunting and fishing opportunities on the Refuge. He also talks about water quality, the cleanliness of the Refuge (no trash), and good and healthy duck populations.

On the next stop on the Refuge, Charlotte and Kris encountered Biologist (Elizabeth) and Foreign Research Scientist (Denise) working out in the field. Elizabeth talked about habitat & wetland restoration efforts, water quality, and management techniques on the Refuge. Denise

discussed the Refuge being a model for wetland restoration projects. Denise also discussed partnerships and Global cooperative efforts.

The next individual encountered was Canoe Guider Byron. Byron talked about the expansion of the refuge from Slidell to the East and Manchac to the West. He also discussed the increased public use opportunities, facilities, interpretive signs, marked canoe trails, overlooks, etc...

Lastly, Charlotte and Kris ended up back at the Visitor Center, in which they met Kenny, the new Refuge Manager. Kenny was satisfied with all of our accomplishments in the 2003 CCP, but he talked about where the Refuge needed to go in the future.

## Group 2

### Discussion prior to skit:

- Specific things need to be done - not just up to the public
- No too intensive development
- Future should be restorative (marsh)
- Pressures to use refuge in traditional ways will diminish as habits change and as culture of users changes (computer/tv generation) - users will want more developed facilities
- Many users do not get out as much as past generations – less hunting, fishing. This new user desires boardwalks, facilities. Afraid or unsure of the “natural” habitat
- Maybe use HQ site as site of heavy use, preserving the refuge proper
- The public recognizes the value and role of the refuge as preserve of natural terrain, a remnant of the natural scene. Sense of stewardship is strong, school kids all visit the refuge. Quality of life issues. Sense of ownership.
- Importance of inculcating youth in parish with appreciation of refuge values.
- Volunteer and community involvement strengthened, more integrated into the life of the area
- Adult outreach and education is needed
- Dev. Bayou Gardens as a drawing card
- Not much additional infrastructure needed - bring existing up to standard
- What will staff be doing? How many are there? LE? EE? Maintenance?

### Skit

Overview: *Eagle returns home and gives an aerial perspective as well as landing to visit with some friends (human and animal).*

1) Howard - (Volunteer at Chef Pass area) Volunteering to post the refuge, which has expanded to include all of Fritchie Marsh to the east. Utilizing new hovercraft, which was donated by industrial pattern Textron.

Eagle: Notice lack of land development

2) Conrad - (Posing as an alligator in Fritchie Marsh) Hi Roger and Friends, This marsh restoration program has really worked to improve the quality of my home – salt water abatement, freshwater addition pollution and nutria control have increased the vegetation growth. I see

more fish, ducks and alligators – all have grown in population size and individual health. Muskrats and river otters are returning. The marsh is coming alive again and flowering. It is now a true asset to everyone.

Eagle: Notice the green belts north of refuge towards Interstate 12. The refuge has done an excellent job partnering with St. Tammany Parish's planning commission to establish greenways along the rivers to protect the bayous' water quality from erosion and runoff. And corridors so wildlife can move from the refuge to other undeveloped areas of St. Tammany that are not part of the refuge.

3) Byron - (Park Ranger at the headquarters talking to over 300 volunteers) Good evening, good evening. There are a couple of seats here in the front, and more standing room along the side. We're really happy to see all of you here - it looks like there must be 200 of you! Welcome to our refuge headquarters.

With me is our Friends group president, Michele Hubert, and we're here to tell you about upcoming volunteer projects at BBM.

This Saturday we'll be doing our monthly litter pickup along Paquet Rd. Fortunately there isn't as much litter as there used to be along there so it should only take us a couple of hours. Here's a map to the Boy Scout Rd parking area. I see that we have 15 folks already signed up but we could use a few more.

On the 15th of this month our partner, the Shell Oil Co. will be spearheading the marsh grass planting along the Lake Pont shore. They are furnishing several boats and are expecting about 30 of their employees to be on hand. The Friends group will be cooking up their great gumbo afterwards so be sure to stick around for that. As you know, funding for this project came from the Louisiana coastal restoration bill passed by Congress in 2004 - it is still paying big dividends for us now.

Next month the Kiwanis club is helping to host the Boy Scout merit badge fair at the Bayou Lacombe Center. There will be about 300 scouts working on badges in forestry, wildlife management, and ornithology. If you're interested we could use a few assistants to help with this annual activity.

### **Group 3**

What does refuge look like in the future?

Discussion:

- Minimal development.
- Have environmental conditions improved or declined? If this is ideal situation, it's all good. Have population of environmentally-educated adults because of USFWS outreach efforts. There's been a mind-set shift.

- How much reality has to be considered in this effort (specifically population increase). Connie – this was realized and it was the impetus behind creating the refuge – to preserve some of it, in realization of the increasing loss of the habitat.
- What do we envision the refuge boundaries to be in 2018? Acquire rice field areas near Madisonville, Wheems Island. Look to acquire woodland areas in addition to marsh areas.
- No more tallow, cogon grass, exotic species controlled.
- Currently 15 K acres, 7K woods, 8k marsh.
- Marsh restored, because salt water intrusion stopped, degraded areas replanted.
- Discussion of saltwater intrusion. What canals, bayous, etc., need attention. Some impacts are natural, but effects may be magnified by man's actions (Phil). Salinity spikes in Lake in July – October. Now spikes higher because of MRGO, no bars to restrict saltwater inflow from channels.
- Let's dream. Ideal situation – exotic plants removed, marsh restored or stabilized. How much additional land has been acquired? Refuge has doubled in size? Like to acquire Fritchie Land (big dream). (Some possibility of the Parish setting aside some land).
- With acquisition of Fritchie Land, refuge would consist of 70 – 80K acres.
- Some of the marsh will have stabilized and some of the ponds have filled in. Roseau Cane, cattail, sawgrass (marsh has freshened up), bulrush, oaks have come in along stabilized shoreline, cypresses have germinated, diverse submerged aquatic grasses Ruppia, Vallisineria, coontail, etc., have been restored.
- Pine open savannah/flatwoods– large trees with longleaf pine dominating, diverse grasses and forbs, with RCW, Bachman's sparrow, quail, dove, Henslow's sparrow, scattered large oaks, retained hardwood drains and unique areas.
- What about Native American historic elements? Will that be part of the future condition? Possibly have some interpretive information offered to public. Sites protected.
- Maintain historical names.
- Vision is maintaining historical perspective.
- Wildlife in marsh –response. Fisheries will improve. Freshwater fisheries will improve – largemouth bass, crabs, sunfish, etc. Recreational fishing will increase. More ducks, more puddle ducks, more nesting wood ducks and mottled ducks. Stable, managed alligator, nutria, muskrat.
- Eagle nesting territories maintained and possibly slightly increased.
- RCW stable – reached refuge goals and translocating offspring.
- Eagle's been delisted. Gulf Sturgeon population determined to be stable. With grassbed returns manatee refuge nearshore waters. Boaters are educated about manatee.
- Burning – entire refuge burned every 2-3 years with the exception of drought years. Public educated and support fire program.
- Hunt-able stable populations of deer, waterfowl, rabbit, squirrel, dove, woodcock and quail exist. Ideally hogs have been eradicated on refuge.
- Management tools – high-tech. Continued use of GIS, heightened GPS tech.
- Large enthusiastic volunteer corps.
- Litter problem no longer an issue. Products are widely recycled.
- Complete and accurate plant and animal species inventory has been completed for refuge.
- BBNWR staffing needs have been fully met.



More partnerships have been developed in support of refuge goals – schools involved, businesses in support, parish govt., overall community support and focus on the refuge, chamber of commerce, politicians- everyone is generally more aware. Schools have a program to bring students for a week of environmental education on the refuge.

### **Skit notes**

Mosquito – vision must include balance between refuge and others whose focus is not ecological restoration/preservation. Onnie – what does that mean in terms of our ideal situation? What partnerships do you see? What impacts do you see?

Raw beauty touches the soul and spirit. It rejuvenates and refreshes. How can the pop. Experience it?

Developers and businessmen enjoy the same thing. In 15 years, stress will only be greater and so the refuge will be that much more important. How does that become a reality?

You'll maintain the integrity but allow the public to access the site within controlled sideboards.

Idea to present our ideal would be the form of a staff meeting. Each person would take a subject. Present report that would indicate success of refuge.

### **Subjects:**

Marsh restoration - Cliff

Exotic vegetation-Danny

Forest mgmt., including fire – Danny

Hunting fishing - jimmy

Partnerships - mosquito

Education/outreach - Shelley

Endangered species – bill

Cultural resources – Bernard

Water quality - Bernard

Land acquisition- Bernard

Litter-shelly

Staffing/facility-Connie

Access/boat launches - Connie

LE - Shelley

Bernard – concern about population increase and water quality in the future. Some combination of acquisition, easements, public education.

We determined to present ours in the form of a staff meeting.

We watched one presentation. Joe liked the name the group used in their presentation – Lake Pontchartrain National Wildlife Refuge.

**Skit components:**

Connie: Welcome to the staff meeting. I'd like to inform you that our projected staffing needs have been met with the recent hiring of Chuck. Our new visitor center has been completed and is up and running. We've met our trail establishment goals but all indications are that the raw natural beauty of the area is not being impacted by public use. Now, I'd like to go around the table and ask you to report on your activities. Let's begin with Cliff. Please tell us about your marsh restoration efforts.

(Cliff gave off the cuff presentation). Shoreline stabilized, interior ponds recovering, little and big-blade sawgrass returning. Abundant submerged aquatic vegetation. Some shoreline expansion occurring in areas. Marsh has filled in and open water has decreased within boundaries of shoreline and uplands.

Connie: Great Cliff. Thanks for that. Danny, please fill us in on the status of forest management on the refuge.

Danny: Last Monday we completed the last longleaf pine savannah spring burn with help from United States Geologic Survey and the National Park Service. Louisiana Office of forestry informed the neighbors how to prepare their homes for protection from wildfires. All the refuge neighbors have been given brochures for fire-wising their yards.

We've just completed the 15 year monitoring report on the growing season burns on unit 25. The report explains the restoration increase of pitcher plants, orchids, and toothache grass over 5 burn cycles.

The planted longleaf pines on units 11 and 12 are now 20 feet tall and are responding to the burning.

A small patch of cogon grass was found in the Madisonville unit. Refuge employee Boudreaux was dispatched last week to eliminate it from taking a foothold on the refuge. The last known Chinese tallow tree on the refuge was killed by the burn on the Pointevent Unit.

Connie: Great Danny. Jimmy, update us on our hunting and fishing activities on the refuge.

Jimmy: our excellent habitat conditions, thanks to Danny, have resulted in all-time high deer harvests. Several trophy class bucks have been harvested, including an impressive 16-pointer that will surely smash some Boone and crockett records. Also, for the 15 th straight year, there were no reported hunting accidents during that season.

Waterfowl use-days exceeded refuge goals. A new harvest record was set. Our woodduck box program is producing lots of birds as well.

Due to our pine savannah restoration efforts, we've experienced 10% increase in quail population from last year. All hunters report taking limits. Also, that management has resulted in quite a few woodcock being taken by quail hunters, they're really excited about that.

Small game populations are doing well also.

Regarding fisheries, fishing use days last year produced a new record for the refuge. Stocking Florida strain largemouth bass with LDWF assistance has produced some monster fish, including an impressive 28 pounder. Crappie fishing has been excellent, and salt-water fishing on the southern end of the refuge has been going gangbusters.

Connie: Excellent! Chuck, tell us about education and outreach and partnerships.

Chuck: I met with a few groups recently. I met with the environmental committee of the Chamber of Commerce; they agreed to take part in the Madisonville Marsh Restoration Project. The Chamber will be making a generous contribution to help enhance the wildlife and habitat. They will continue to work with our congressional delegation for matching funds for this and future projects.

Also met with St. Tammany Parish officials. They continue to show great progress in the 2025 plan they developed. They have just announced the acquisition of another 1000 acres of land to serve as buffer for the refuge, green space, and parks and recreation.

I met with the head of the St. Tammany Parish School Science Curriculum. She was well pleased with the field trips that some of the schools took. She said the 2<sup>nd</sup> grades from Mandeville Elementary learned a lot from the coloring books given to them by the Service. She also said that the wildlife management course developed by the Service for 10<sup>th</sup> grade biology students is now incorporated with all public school classes.

I also will be meeting with the Rotary Clubs to talk about the awards to be presented to the top 3 St. Tammany Parish school kids chosen to have the best wildlife management project. Hibernia Bank will contribute a cash award.

Connie: Thanks, Chuck. Bill, fill us in on our Endangered species program.

Bill: We're in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of post de-listing monitoring for Bald Eagles on the refuge. La. Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) flew their eagle survey recently and we currently have 6 active nests on the refuge. Nest production averaged at 2 nestlings per nest.

Our Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) population on the refuge is stable; we've met our refuge goals. We've banded all the nestlings from last year, and have completed our translocation of juveniles to the nature conservancy's lands. We're now prepared to begin a translocation project to move RCW's to Beau Rivage's pine savannah mitigation area in Mississippi. Also, the Service has recently been petitioned to downlist the RCW to threatened, based in part on the excellent work that has occurred with the species on this refuge.

Manatees are using refuge waterways in greater numbers, due to the profusion of submerged aquatic vegetation resulting from Cliff's marsh restoration efforts. Our law enforcement folks have their public notification system in place and local boaters are being advised when the

manatees show up on the refuge. No wake zones have been implemented and we're getting great compliance from boaters.

LDWF and Service fisheries personnel are continuing to monitor gulf sturgeon populations on the refuge waterways. Indications are that the population is stable and a petition to delist the species is expected soon.

Our volunteers are currently monitoring sensitive bird species such as Bachman's sparrow and Henslow's sparrow. Indications are that we've got stable to increasing populations of both. They've also been active in inventorying other species on the refuge. They're finished compiling a list of amphibians and their list of reptiles has just been published and is ready for public distribution. They're embarking on a survey of the fungi that occur on the refuge.

Connie: it's great to hear that we've been so successful that we're providing surplus individuals to other areas. Shelley, what do you have to report from our volunteer corps, law enforcement, and litter issues?

Shelley: As Bill mentioned, our volunteer group has been very active. The large and enthusiastic group has implemented and sustained all the flora and fauna monitoring studies. They're so numerous and gung ho they bring us lunch in the field on a regular basis. They've continued the refuge ambassador program to the general public at every and any venue they can find.

The litter abatement programs have experienced a 98% success rate. The remaining 2% is being recycled and reused on the refuge.

Regarding law enforcement, notice of violations are down, so to keep LE busy they are currently working with LDWF to establish check stations on the expanded land acquisition. LE has also recruited the assistance of the large volunteer base of consumptive users as lookouts or eyes in the field for LE purposes.

Connie: Great Shelley. Joe, what's the latest on cultural resources, land acquisition and water quality?

Joe: Choctaw middens on the refuge have been identified and protected. We've enlisted the assistance of some Choctaw individuals to do some interpretive programs about those sites and their heritage.

We're working with the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and the state Dept. of environmental quality to monitor and maintain water quality on the area streams. We're getting better enforcement and thus compliance with sewage discharge regs. E. Coli levels on the latest battery of tests were nil. We're actively soliciting partners for our adopt-a-stream program and are enlisting a lot of help.

Connie: Thanks to all of you for your excellent work. 15 years ago we sat in this same room and developed some lofty goals for the refuge. Thanks to all of your efforts, we've not only achieved those goals, but actually exceeded them.

## **Exploring the Future II: Vision Statements**

### **Group 1**

#### **Common Themes in Visions Exercise:**

- 1) Wildlife & Habitat Management
- 2) Habitat Restoration
- 3) Wildlife Populations (restoration)
- 4) Public Education
- 5) Refuge Expansion
  - Buffer Zones
- 6) Balanced Uses of Refuge w/Habitat Management
- 7) Water Quality Improvement
- 8) Partnerships
- 9) Volunteers
- 10) Cultural & Historical Resources
- 11) Access/Facilities
- 12) External Impacts on the Refuge
  - Pollution
  - Urban Growth
  - Noise
  - Wildlife Corridors
  - Green Spaces

#### **Balance?**

- External (Off Site) vs. Internal (On Site) sustainability
- External Threats
- Participate in Parish Planning, State, City, Regional
- Public Uses vs. Protection of Wildlife & Habitat
- Public users vs. protection of wildlife and habitat
- Refuge users = public (consumptive/non-consumptive), staff, researchers

#### **Why BBMWR is unique and diverse**

- Has large blocks of undeveloped land along north shore of Lake Pontchartrain
- Riparian areas bordering bayous
- Estuarine marsh
- Long leaf pine savannah
- Hardwood hummocks/Relic ridges
- Diversity in species – intact and viable
- Edge habitat – gradient
- Uses compatible with NWFS guiding principals and mission statement

- Compatible uses that don't affect wildlife population
- Sustainability
- BBM possesses significant ecologically diverse habitats and wildlife

Started Outline of vision statement

1.) Description of why the refuge is special and unique (e.g., transition from the water to the marsh to the woods)

**First sentence of vision statement:**

*Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge (BBM NWR) possesses significantly diverse habitat supporting resident and migratory species of extreme national, regional, and local interests. From the open waters of Lake Pontchartrain through the grassbeds and marshes to the long leaf pine savannah uplands dispersed by its hardwood hummocks and riparian corridors, BBM NWR (Lake Pontchartrain NWR) provides a niche for a rich diversity of wildlife species nestled within a highly developed yet environmentally awakened urban area, providing opportunities for broad uses.*

**Group 2**

**Ideas**

- Specific things need to be done - not just up to the public
- No to intensive development
- Future should be restorative (marsh)
- Pressures to use in traditional ways will diminish as habits change - users will want more developed facilities
- Could use HQ site as site of heavy use, preserving the refuge proper
- The public recognizes the value and role of the refuge as preserve of natural terrain, a remnant of the natural scene. Sense of stewardship is strong, school kids all visit the refuge. Quality of life issues. Sense of ownership.
- Importance of inculcating youth in parish with appreciation of refuge values.
- Volunteer and community involvement strengthened, more integrated into the life of the area
- Adult outreach and education is needed
- Dev. Bayou Gardens as a drawing card
- Not much additional infrastructure needed - bring existing up to standard
- What will staff be doing? How many are there? LE? EE? Maintenance?

**Vision Statement - commonalities**

- Land Acquisition
- Marsh restoration
- Public access
- Volunteerism
- Education
- No litter - maintenance of refuge appearance
- Partnerships

- Visitor center
- Longleaf pine flatwoods
- Marsh habitats
- Diversity of wildlife w/ priority species

### **Ideas to capture**

- Principal purpose of refuge is to preserve marsh habitat surrounding Lake Pontchartrain, with associated uplands and edge habitats - fast disappearing
- Refuge cooperates with local governments to minimize impacts to refuge and mitigate
- Refuge is important in preserving water quality in Lake Pontchartrain
- Big 6 - provide opportunities for
- Should volunteers be in vision or is it a goal?
- The refuge is a diverse mosaic of important habitats which protect the health and viability of the Lake Pont ecosystem from Lake Maurepas to Lake Borgne, including forests and marshes.
- The refuge plays a pivotal role in the community's contact with the natural world and provides avenues for education and appreciation of the natural heritage of the area through appropriate wildlife-dependent recreation.
- Refuge protects and interprets Native American cultural resources and aspects of the built environment.
- A natural diversity of wildlife is maintained through habitat management activities that adapt to and mitigate the effects of threats such as rising salinities, rising sea levels, and increasing urbanization.
- The refuge maintains and expands the tradition of community involvement and ownership that led to its formation, and continues to benefit from the advocacy of refuge supporters and partners.
- The refuge provides models of land stewardship that extend wise, resource-friendly management practices into the community.

### **Draft Vision**

*The refuge is a diverse mosaic of important habitats which protect the health and viability of the Lake Pont ecosystem from Lake Maurepas to Lake Borgne, including forests and marshes.*

*The refuge plays a pivotal role in the community's contact with the natural world and provides avenues for education and appreciation of the natural heritage of the area through appropriate wildlife-dependent recreation.*

*Refuge protects and interprets cultural resources including Native American and other historical sites.*

*A natural diversity of wildlife is maintained through habitat management activities that adapt to and mitigate the effects of threats such as rising salinities, rising sea levels, and increasing urbanization.*

*The refuge maintains and expands the tradition of community involvement and ownership that led to its formation, and continues to benefit from the advocacy of refuge supporters and partners.*

*The refuge provides models of land stewardship that extend wise, resource-friendly management practices into the community.*

## **Group 3**

### **Common Themes**

- Land acquisition/expansion
- Large volunteer group
- New visitor center
- No more litter problem
- Marsh restoration
- Education/outreach
- Invasive species removal
- Partnerships
- Active forest management program that includes burning
- Stable or increasing native wildlife species, including Federally-listed threatened and endangered species
- Healthy population of native game and sportfish species, utilized by the public
- Public access balanced with wildlife conservation

### **Ideas to capture**

- Need to stress the diversity of habitat within a relatively small area – lots of transition
- Big Branch Marsh Natural Wildlife Refuge is a unique and diverse ecosystem on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.
- Habitats – sandy narrow beaches, nearshore grassbeds, brackish and fresh marshes, hardwood hammocks and swamps to pine flatwoods
- Last relatively undisturbed habitat on the north shore
- Habitats in order from lake to forest – nearshore grassbeds, sandy narrow beaches, brackish marsh, fresh marsh, swamps, hammocks, pine flatwoods, pine savannahs.
- Question about undisturbed vs. disturbed habitat. Whether BBNWR qualifies.
- Big Branch Marsh Natural Wildlife Refuge is a unique and diverse ecosystem on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. One of the last remaining undeveloped large tracts of wildlife habitat on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.
- Big Branch Marsh NWR is one of the most unique and diverse ecosystems on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. One of the last remaining undeveloped tracts of wildlife habitat in the region, the refuge's habitats are dynamic, ranging from tidal marshes to swamps to pine flatwoods interspersed with stands of hardwoods, tied together by a network of streams and bayous.
- Discussion of what a hammock is.
- Discussion of watershed issues. Whether to call the area a tributary.



## **Draft Vision**

*Big Branch Marsh NWR is one of the most unique ecosystems on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. One of the last remaining undeveloped, contiguous tracts of wildlife habitat in the region, the refuge's habitats are diverse, ranging from tidal marshes to swamps to pine flatwoods interspersed with stands of hardwoods, all tied together by a network of streams and bayous. The refuge supports a wide range of migratory and resident birds and wildlife, along with freshwater and estuarine-dependent fish and shellfish. The diversity of habitats is critical for protecting the environmental integrity of the north shore.*

*The refuge was created by a mandate coming from a diverse partnership of local citizens, businesses, and non-governmental agencies. Those partnerships, and new ones forged since that time continue to play an active role in the day-to-day operations of the refuge.*

*An active outreach and education program in the surrounding communities increases public awareness and appreciation of their refuge, and creates a strong conservation ethic.*

*Volunteers and refuge support groups fortify refuge staffs with their gift of time, skills, and energy and are integral to the future of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

*The refuge is utilized by consumptive and non-consumptive users. Visitors can hunt the abundant waterfowl in the refuge's marshes. Others may seek opportunities to see rare species of pine and grassland birds. Or one may simply experience the area's intense natural beauty, to replenish the spirit with the tonic that only comes from outdoor experience.*

## **Synthesis Group**

One member from each group met to try to synthesize the vision statements from all three groups into one shared vision statement. One member from each working group participated so that they could represent the views and discussions of their group. Then this vision was presented in plenary and the large group commented. Below is the synthesized vision with the plenary comments and concerns noted.

*The Big Branch Marsh (Lake Pontchartrain) National Wildlife Refuge, spanning/extending/expanding across the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, embraces/supports significantly diverse species and habitats of international, national, regional and local importance. (restoring?)*

Or

*The Big Branch Marsh (Lake Pontchartrain) National Wildlife Refuge, restored to support resident and migratory species of international, national, regional and local importance embraces/supports significantly diverse habitats extending/expanding across the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.*

*Estuarine needs to be included*

*From the open waters of Lake Pontchartrain through the grass beds and tidal marshes to the pine savannah (flatwoods) uplands, interspersed with hardwood hummocks (define?) and riparian corridors (include bayous/streams), the Refuge provides habitat for a rich diversity of wildlife species nestled within a highly developed yet environmentally aware urban area. The natural diversity of plants, fish and wildlife is maintained through habitat management activities that adapt to and mitigate the effects of external threats (note: include a statement of the refuge's management for the preservation of cultural/historical resources).*

*The refuge maintains and extends (invites) the tradition of community involvement and ownership that led to its formation, and continues to benefit from an expanded advocacy of refuge supporters and partners. These partnerships play an active role in the continuing management direction of the refuge (revisit). The Refuge plays a pivotal role in the community's exposure to and contact with nature by providing opportunities for environmental education and appreciation, of the natural heritage and cultural resources of the area, creating a stronger conservation ethic within the community. (Note: this paragraph is repetitive)*

*The refuge provides models of land stewardship and restoration that extend wise, resource-friendly management practices locally and globally. As one of the last remaining undeveloped, contiguous tracts of wildlife habitat in the region, the refuge provides opportunities for broad use. Abundant waterfowl in the refuge's marshes provide hunting opportunities while the restored longleaf pine savannahs lure birders and wildlife photographers (RCW?) (Note: this statement may need work). Simply experiencing the Refuge's intense natural beauty replenishes the spirit.*

After the plenary session, a synthesis group was formed with new members from each group and revised and presented again in plenary. Below is the result, which is the final draft vision from this workshop. The underlined parts are where the exact wording was not agreed upon.

## **Final Draft Vision**

### ***The Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge Vision Statement***

*The Big Branch Marsh (Lake Pontchartrain) National Wildlife Refuge, spanning the entire north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, embraces significantly diverse species and habitats of local to international importance.*

*The unique/distinctive nature of the refuge encompasses the open waters of Lake Pontchartrain, grass beds and estuarine marshes, and pine flatwoods, interspersed with hardwood hummocks, bayous, and cypress sloughs. These refuge habitats, sustained within a highly developed yet environmentally aware urban area, provide for a wide array of wildlife species. The natural diversity of plants, fish and wildlife is maintained through habitat management activities that adapt to and mitigate the effects of external threats. The refuge models land stewardship and restoration practices that promote sound habitat management techniques beyond refuge boundaries. The refuge also recognizes its rich cultural heritage. Significant Native American*

*and contemporary cultural resources are protected, and, where practical, interpreted for the public.*

*The refuge maintains and nurtures the tradition of community involvement and ownership that led to its formation, and continues to benefit from an expanded advocacy by refuge supporters and partners. The refuge is recognized as a hub/center/destination for environmental education and wildlife-related recreation, which foster appreciation of the natural and cultural heritage of the area, and create a strong conservation ethic within the community.*

*As one of the last remaining undeveloped, contiguous tracts of wildlife habitat in the region, the refuge provides broad opportunities for public use, from waterfowl hunting in the refuge's marshes to birding and wildlife photography in the restored pine forests. Simply experiencing the Refuge's intense natural beauty replenishes the spirit.*

# Refuge Goals

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The groups were tasked with developing draft goals, which are a framework for action on how to create the desired future working with the resources and opportunities of today. Using the themes identified in the vision statement formulation exercise, the groups developed a list of broad, long-term goals or program focus areas that will build towards the shared vision. Each working group's goals are below.

## Group 1

### **Draft Goals For Achieving Vision Statement:**

- 1) Create a North shore Conservation Corridor from the Pearl River Basin to Manchac thru conservation partnerships and land acquisitions by expanding our Refuge acquisition boundary
- 2) Maintain Biological integrity while sustaining quality public use and visitor experience (Note: need limits on accessibility/use on developed facilities)
- 3) Restore & maintain habitats (pine savannahs, estuarine marshes, and other important habitats) to historic conditions to promote ecologically functioning systems
- 4) Educate and share the natural wonders of BBM NWR with the public to promote environmental awareness, thereby instilling a strong sense of pride, support, and stewardship for the Refuge (Notes: Natural Wonders; Vital Roles in survival of Refuge Systems).
- 5) Minimize/Mitigate external threats and impacts to protect Refuge habitats and wildlife
- 6) Provide appropriate management and oversight of BBM NWR to effectively fulfill the vision for the refuge
- 7) Integrate BBM NWR goals with other conservation plans

### **Revised Goals:**

- 1) Create a Northshore Conservation Corridor from the Pearl River Basin to Manchac thru conservation partnerships and land acquisitions by expanding our Refuge acquisition boundary

Goal for Land Acquisitions: Expand Big Branch Marsh NWR along the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain from the Rigolets to Manchac WMA, to preserve large undeveloped areas of habitat to support and enhance a thriving ecosystem of plants and wildlife.

- 2) Goal for Public Use: Maintain Biological integrity while sustaining quality public use and visitor experience, to foster support from the public and provide a model of land stewardship.

3) Goal for Habitat Management: Restore & maintain habitats (pine savannahs, estuarine marshes, and other important habitats) to historic conditions to promote ecologically functioning systems.

4) Goal for Education: Educate the public about the natural wonders of Big Branch Marsh NWR to promote environmental awareness, thereby instilling a strong sense of pride, support, and stewardship for the Refuge.

5) Goal for External Threats: To minimize and mitigate external threats and impacts to protect the integrity of the Refuge habitats and wildlife

6) Goal for Administration: Provide appropriate management and oversight of Big Branch Marsh NWR to effectively fulfill the vision for the refuge

7) Goal for Partnerships: Integrate Big Branch Marsh NWR goals with other local, regional, national & international conservation plans to strengthen partnerships and advanced conservation and restoration of Global ecosystems.

## **Group 2**

### **Goals session**

*1st attempt:*

Develop/provide Adult interpretive and educational programs utilizing a drawing card or attraction.

Restore marsh and migratory waterfowl habitat

Positively impact water quality on the North Shore of Lake Pontchartrain

Manage Big Branch Marsh to improve/conserv habitat for threatened and endangered species

Expand refuge influence across the north shore area

Develop land protection alternatives that will protect the Lake Pontchartrain ecosystem on its northern shore

Promote a conservation ethic and an appreciation of refuge resources by refuge visitors

Provide rewarding recreational experiences in traditional consumptive activities such as hunting and fishing

(We scrapped these and started over, basing our discussion on the draft vision statement of our group)

## **Goals**

Provide high quality, welcoming and attractive infrastructure and facilities that reflect well on the Service and the refuge.

Develop long-range plan for mgt. Of Bayou Gardens and associated buildings

Inventory cultural resources on the refuge

Work with local, state, and national and international partners to develop land protection alternatives that address the Lake Pont. Ecosystem on its northern shore.

Restore and conserve the function of coastal marshes and forested wetlands to enhance and maintain the diversity of wildlife on Big Branch Marsh

Provide a rich diversity of educational, interpretive, and recreational opportunities for the general public that promote a deeper appreciation, knowledge and understanding of BBM compatible with its resource protection needs.

## **Group 3**

### **Development of goals:**

Research and protect historical sites on the refuge. Educate the public about their presence to increase awareness and to protect the sites.

Refuge mgmt. programs emphasize threatened and endangered species, and species of special concern.

Restore and manage native ecosystems to support the full range of diversity of plant and animal species and their habitats.

- Restore and manage BBMNWR marshes for migratory waterfowl, secretive marsh birds, and other wetland-dependent bird species.

- Conserve BBMNWR's population of alligators and furbearers. Institute population controls as necessary.

- Assess fisheries stocks and implement management techniques such as stocking as desired or necessary.

Use the best available scientific information to determine and guide refuge management actions.

- Implement research programs as necessary to determine and monitor effects of management actions.

Manage to control effects of invasive species on native habitats and wildlife.

Use fire as a tool to maintain and restore natural habitat.

Maintain existing habitat and restore additional habitat in marsh and pine areas through careful use of prescribed fire. Research and monitor the effects of differing season and intensity of burns, and adjust management as necessary.

Provide and maintain public access while minimizing habitat impacts.

Ensure that public facilities maintain a minimal standard established by the Service.

Mark boundaries clearly.

Construct new visitor center.

Develop avenues for public interaction with refuge staff and programs through aggressive and innovative outreach and education.

Provide Law Enforcement on the refuge necessary to ensure a safe outdoor experience for all users, and compliance with applicable wildlife laws.

Work with area Partners to establish greenways, corridors, and conservation areas to maintain the environmental integrity of the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

Restore and maintain all habitats for plants, wildlife and fish species, while maintaining a balance between public use and wildlife protection, using all scientific tools available.

Evaluate and remediate contaminant levels on the refuge.

Evaluate impacts of mosquito spraying on refuge wildlife.

Acquire additional lands to meet refuge management objectives and to enhance overall integrity of the Lake Pontchartrain estuarine system.

## **Revised Goals**

Each group presented their goals in plenary, and recorded any comments. Then, goals with similar themes were redistributed to the groups to synthesize. The goals were assigned as follows.

***Group 1 was assigned all of the Habitat/Wildlife Management goals to synthesize.***

### Group 3's Habitat and Management Goals

- Refuge mgmt. programs emphasize threatened and endangered species, and species of special concern
- Manage to control effects of invasive species on native habitats and wildlife
- Use fire as a tool to maintain and restore natural habitat.
- Maintain existing habitat and restore additional habitat in marsh and pine areas through careful use of prescribed fire. Research and monitor the effects of differing season and intensity of burns, and adjust management as necessary.
- Restore and maintain all habitats for plants, wildlife and fish species, while maintaining a balance between public use and wildlife protection, using all scientific tools available.

- Restore and manage native ecosystems to support the full range of diversity of plant and animal species and their habitats.
- Restore and manage BBMNWR marshes for migratory waterfowl, secretive marsh birds, and other wetland-dependent bird species.
- Conserve BBMNWR's population of alligators and furbearers. Institute population controls as necessary.
- Assess fisheries stocks and implement management techniques such as stocking as desired or necessary.
- Use the best available scientific information to determine and guide refuge management actions.

#### Group 2's Habitat and Management Goals

- Work with local, state, and national and international partners to develop land protection alternatives that address the Lake Pont. Ecosystem on its northern shore.
- Restore and conserve the function of coastal marshes and forested wetlands to enhance and maintain the diversity of wildlife on Big Branch Marsh (note: include uplands)

#### Group 1's Habitat and Management Goals

- Expand Big Branch Marsh NWR along the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain from the Rigolets to Manchac WMA, to preserve large undeveloped areas of habitat to support and enhance a thriving ecosystem of plants and wildlife.
- Create a Northshore Conservation Corridor from the Pearl River Basin to Manchac thru conservation partnerships and land acquisitions by expanding our Refuge acquisition boundary
- Restore & maintain habitats (pine savannahs, estuarine marshes, and other important habitats) to historic conditions to promote ecologically functioning systems.

***Group 2 was assigned the Infrastructure, Administration, Research, Contaminants, External Threats and Cultural Resource goals to synthesize***

### **Infrastructure/Administration**

#### Group 3

- Acquire additional lands to meet refuge management objectives and to enhance overall integrity of the Lake Pontchartrain estuarine system.
- Provide high quality, welcoming and attractive infrastructure and facilities that reflect well on the Service and the refuge.

#### Group 1

- Provide appropriate (*effective?*) management and oversight of Big Branch Marsh NWR to effectively (*successfully?*) fulfill the vision for the refuge

### **Research**

#### Group 3

- Implement research programs as necessary to determine and monitor effects of management actions.
  - Evaluate impacts of mosquito spraying on refuge wildlife.
  - Research document and protect historical sites on the refuge



## **Contaminants**

### Group 3

- Evaluate and re-mediate (clean up) contaminant levels on the refuge.

## **External Threats:**

### Group 1

- To minimize and mitigate external threats and impacts to protect the integrity of the Refuge habitats and wildlife

## **Cultural resources**

### Group 3

- Develop long-range plan for mgt. of Bayou Gardens and associated buildings
- Inventory cultural resources on the refuge

*Group 3 was assigned the Public Use, Education, Outreach and Partnership goals to synthesize*

## **Public Use goals**

### Group 3

- Provide and maintain public access while minimizing habitat impacts.
- Ensure that public facilities maintain a minimal standard established by the Service.
- Mark boundaries clearly.
- Construct new visitor center.
- Provide Law Enforcement on the refuge necessary to ensure a safe outdoor experience for all users, and compliance with applicable wildlife laws.

### Group 2

- Provide a rich diversity of educational, interpretive, and recreational opportunities for the general public that promote a deeper appreciation, knowledge and understanding of BBM compatible with its resource protection needs.

### Group 1

- Maintain Biological integrity while sustaining quality public use and visitor experience, to foster support from the public and provide a model of land stewardship.

## **Education/Outreach/Partnerships**

### Group 3

- Educate the public about the presence of cultural resources to increase awareness and to protect the sites.
- Develop avenues for public interaction with refuge staff and programs through aggressive and innovative outreach and education. Educate the public about historical sites and to increase awareness and to protect the sites.
- Work with area Partners to establish greenways, corridors, and conservation areas to maintain the environmental integrity of the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

### Group 1

- Educate the public about the natural wonders of Big Branch Marsh NWR to promote environmental awareness and *appreciation*, thereby instilling a strong sense of pride, support, and stewardship for the Refuge. (ownership)
- Integrate Big Branch Marsh NWR goals with other local, regional, national & international conservation plans to strengthen partnerships and advanced conservation and restoration of Global ecosystems.

## **Synthesized Goals**

The groups synthesized the goals above and then presented them in plenary. This process resulted in the following goals, which are the final draft goals from this workshop. These goals will be advisory to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The goals are presented in this section under each working group that revised them. A list of all the goals together can be found in Section 1 on page 12.

### **Group 1**

#### **Notes:**

Maintain

Restore – restore & maintain habitats

Ideal habitat w/ refuge seen as the model

Expansion/ increase land protection

Big Branch NWR is a mosaic of natural diversity supporting an array of plants & animals. In order to retain & improve this fully functioning landscape...

To restore & conserve a large undeveloped area of native ecosystems (such as estuarine marshes & pine flatwoods) that are essential to the survival of diverse populations of plants & wildlife that depend on these areas so that these species can continue to grow & return to thriving populations

To acquire large, undeveloped areas of habitat to support & enhance a thriving ecosystem of plants & wildlife

Land Acquisition: Expand Big Branch Marsh NWR along the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain from the Rigolets to Manchac WMA, to preserve large undeveloped areas of habitat to support and enhance a thriving ecosystem of plants & wildlife.

- Create a Northshore Conservation Corridor from the Pearl River Basin to Manchac through conservation partnerships and land acquisitions by expanding our refuge acquisition boundary

## **GOAL 1 Habitat/Management**

*To restore & conserve a large undeveloped area of native ecosystems (such as estuarine marshes & pine flatwoods) because they are essential to the survival & viability of diverse plant, fish & wildlife populations.*

### Guiding Objectives:

- Threatened & endangered & special concern species
- Model for land management practices
- Scientific basis
- Technologies

### Strategies/ tools

- Fire use
- Invasive/ exotic eradication
- Hunting/ fishing
- Fish stocking
- Population controls

## **GOAL 2 Habitat/Management**

*Develop land protection alternatives that address the environmental integrity/survival of/ health of/address the needs of the Lake Pont. Basin ecosystem.*

### Guiding Objectives:

- Partner with local, state, national & international entities to
- Northshore/ Lake Pont. Basin strategic assessment

### Strategies/ tools

- Direct acquisition
- Conservation easements

## **Group 2**

### **GOAL 1 Infrastructure/Administration**

*Enhance and protect the ecological integrity of the refuge (include adjacent habitats) habitats, fish and wildlife of the Lake Ponchartrain estuarine system (this goal is looking beyond the refuge boundaries).*

#### Objectives

- Acquire additional lands to meet refuge management objectives
- Partners for zoning
- Minimize and mitigate external threats and impacts
- Evaluate and re-mediate contaminant levels on the refuge

### **GOAL 2 Infrastructure/Administration**

*The refuge provides models of land stewardship that extend wise, resource-friendly management practices into the community.*

#### Objectives

- Provide high quality, welcoming and attractive infrastructure and facilities that reflect well on the Service and the Refuge

### **GOAL 3 Research**

*Facilitate research on Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge compatible with resource protection, with an emphasis on research that provides the necessary information to practice adaptive management.*

#### Objective

- Evaluate impacts of mosquito spraying on refuge wildlife

### **GOAL 4 Cultural Resources**

*Preserve, protect and interpret our natural and cultural history and resources so that present and future generations know and appreciate those things that help to mold us as a people and guide the management of the Refuge.*

#### Objectives

- Develop a long range plan for the management of Bayou Gardens and associated buildings
- Inventory cultural resources on the Refuge
- Research, document and protect historical sites on the refuge

## **Group 3**

### **GOAL 1 Public Use**

*Promote a deeper appreciation, knowledge and understanding of BBMNWR compatible with its resource protection needs to the general public.*

#### Objectives

- Provide and maintain public access while minimizing habitat impacts.
- Ensure that public facilities maintain a minimal standard established by the Service.
- Mark boundaries clearly.
- Construct new visitor center.

### **GOAL 2 Public Use**

*Protect the resource and ensure a safe outdoor experience for all users*

#### Objective

- Provide Law Enforcement on the refuge to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

### **GOAL 3 Public Use**

*Provide quality public use and visitor experience to foster public support.*

#### Objective

- Provide a rich diversity of educational, interpretive, and recreational opportunities for the general public

### **GOAL 4 Public Use**

*Provide a model of land stewardship while maintaining biological integrity.*

### **GOAL 5 Education**

*Inform the public/Enhance the public's knowledge about the natural wonders of the BBMNWR and promote environmental awareness and appreciation. (why? Instill in the public a sense of pride, ownership and support of the refuge; create among the general public advocates for the plants, wildlife and habitats with which they live)*

Objective

- Provide information of economic impact and value of the resource.

**GOAL 6 Education**

*Preserve the cultural resources and cultural history of the Refuge, which are valued and connect Refuge staff, visitors, and the community to the area's past.*

Objective

- Develop avenues for public interaction with refuge staff and programs related to cultural resources through innovative outreach and education (may be applicable to other education goals). Educate the public about the presence of cultural and historical resources to increase awareness and to protect these sites.

**GOAL 7 Partnerships**

*Maintain/Protect/ the environmental integrity of the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain (through partnerships)*

Objectives

- Work with partnerships
- Work with area Partners to establish greenways, corridors, and conservation areas

**BIG BRANCH MARSH**  
*National Wildlife Refuge*  
**Planning Workshop I**

**December 9-11, 2003**  
**Lacombe, LA**

**Appendix I**  
*Plenary Notes*



# Plenary Notes

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## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2003

### Personal timeline

It would be interesting to see a real old-timer tell us about all the change in the area. The change never seems to be positive, only negative with the urbanization.

We're all feeling the affects personally.

Some things have improved – we have a refuge.

### Local timeline

1990s – involvement of the Conservation Fund with regards to the growth of the acreage. They really made things happen over a short period of time, that's the reason the Refuge is as large as it is today.

### National timeline

Global warming issue will affect Big Branch in the future.

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2003

*Comments on draft visions from each working group.*

### Group 1 Vision

- Need more about public use
- How do you protect the existing cultural resources?
- Hummock? We should define this for outside visitors - hardwood ridges?
- Need to address environmental education and balance
- Mention stakeholders?
- Size of refuge?
- This is what we have now, is it visionary?

### Group 2 Vision

- Could be more visionary
- Wildlife first
- Like: “natural diversity of wildlife...”
- Need to be more descriptive of the area
- Define forests and marshes
- Mention more about management
- Last sentence great
- Providing facilities for handicapped people
- Give a sense of place



### **Group 3 Vision**

- Lots of the same ideas as group 2
- Second paragraph has some about the past
- Do we need to mention litter? Or is that included in stewardship and environmental ethics?
- Need to include cultural resources
- Mention international value?
- Wildlife and habitat first, then public use compatible with that
- Need to be more visionary
- Improve and expand what you're doing now
- Add "habitats restored"

## **THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2003**

### **Synthesized Vision**

#### *First Paragraph*

- Expanding land
- Restoring ecosystems
- Mention Bayous
- Include estuarine, because it is specific to this refuge and is what makes it unique

#### *Second Paragraph*

- Repetitive
- Extend/expand support to community
- "day to day" operations? To specific, FWS can't have public input in every day nuts and bolts, but are required by law to include public in management direction
- preservation of cultural resources
- differences in interpretation of preservation of cultural resources

#### *Third Paragraph*

- Remove "tonic"
- Keep the verbiage unique to BBMNWR

### **Synthesized Goals**

#### *Group 3 – Public Use Goals*

- Combine goals 1 and 2
- Goal 2 is an objective: to ensure all users comply with applicable laws and regulations

#### *Group 3 – Education Goals*

- Goal 1: why? Need to add a statement instilling ownership, pride and support of the refuge -so they can be ambassadors advocates of plants, wildlife and habitats with which they live.

-“educate public”- is that implying they are stupid? Maybe say enhance public’s knowledge/inform

-Objective: provide information of economic impact and value of the resource

- Goal 2: don’t understand “avenues” (ways? programs?) – that’s an objective
- “aggressive outreach”? Remove aggressive.

#### *Group 3 – Partnership Goals*

- Working with partnerships is an objective, if you take that out it’s not a partnership goal anymore.

#### *Group 2 – Infrastructure Goals*

- No whys
- Add fish in front of wildlife
- Refuge ... “and adjacent” ... habitats
- LP estuarine ecosystem? This is large
- Looking beyond refuge (how big do you go?)

#### *Group 2 – Research Goal*

- Decided this was a better objective than goal
- Maybe add as an objective under another goal

#### *Group 2 – Cultural Resources*

- “...mold us as a people and the Refuge”, add: “guide the management of the Refuge”

#### *Group 1 – Habitat/Management*

- Goal 1: there’s a lot in this goal
- Goal 2: address “maintenance, survival, health or needs, environmental integrity”?
- All three groups have a goal similar to protecting LP ecosystem (partnerships as an objective under each goal)
- New Goal: Partner with local, state, national and international entities
  - meet partners on own turf and their turf, so important, part of vision, etc.
  - need partners to achieve goals
- Always say: fish, wildlife, plants, etc. can we combine these into just wildlife? Need to be consistent anyway. Fish and Wildlife Service, so needs to mention both.



**BIG BRANCH MARSH**  
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**Appendix II**  
*Participant Introduction Questions*



## Personal Goals and Conservation Issues

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The first task in the workshop process was for each person to introduce themselves and to write out and then read aloud answers to three introductory questions. This process allows for expression of individual responses without being immediately influenced by previous responses. The responses indicate potential areas of common ground and provide a first insight into the diversity of perceived issues present in the group. The responses also provide a check on whether the workshop deliberations address these concerns.

### **Question 1: Please provide your contact information and a brief description of organization/affiliation, area of expertise, and area of primary interest.**

1. Cliff Glockner Jr.  
PO Box 128  
Lacombe, LA, 70445  
One of the first to initiate forming Big Branch Refuge, Retired Commercial Fisherman of 45 years.
2. Kenny Ribbeck  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries  
[ribbeck\\_kf@wlf.state.la.us](mailto:ribbeck_kf@wlf.state.la.us),  
225-765-2942 (office)  
225-763-5456 (fax)  
225-278-0429 (cell)  
Wildlife Biologist/Forester, Habitat Management.
3. Barbara Boyle  
[Barbara\\_boyle@fws.gov](mailto:Barbara_boyle@fws.gov)  
985-882-2014  
Deputy Project Leader  
Wildlife Biology background – mostly with migratory bird but also large ungulates (moose, caribou, deer)
4. Denise Bonck  
City of Slidell  
Planning Department  
PO Box 828  
Slidell, LA, 70459-0828  
985-646-4389  
985-646-4356 (fax)  
[dbonck@cityofslidell.org](mailto:dbonck@cityofslidell.org).  
The city of Slidell Planning Department is in the process of creating a masterplan for the city – it will guide land use, transportation, housing and environmental quality for the next 20 years. Area of expertise is B.S. in Environmental Biology, master's in Environmental Planning. I am currently on the board for Friends of LA wildlife refuges and on the planning team for Earth Day Northshore.

5. Shelley Stiaes,  
[shelley\\_stiaes@fws.gov](mailto:shelley_stiaes@fws.gov)  
Refuge Operations Specialist  
Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge  
US Fish & Wildlife Service, visitor services, outreach, environmental ed, operations of refuge.
6. Daniel Breaux  
61389 Hwy 434  
Lacombe, LA, 70445  
Forester, Management of resources  
[Daniel\\_breaux@fws.gov](mailto:Daniel_breaux@fws.gov).
7. Charlotte Parker  
USFWS  
61389 Hwy 434  
Lacombe, LA  
985-882-2029  
[charlotte\\_parker@fws.gov](mailto:charlotte_parker@fws.gov).
8. Jill Mastrototaro  
Environmental Coordinator  
Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF)  
PO Box 6965  
Metairie, LA, 70009  
504-836-7208  
[jill@saveourlake.org](mailto:jill@saveourlake.org).  
Habitat protection program, land conservation, public involvement in environmental issues.
9. Michele Hubert  
61389 Hwy 434  
Lacombe, LA, 70445  
Friends of LA Wildlife Refuges, President 5 years, environmental concerns, urban.
10. Lyndon Bijou  
[lyndon\\_bijou@fws.gov](mailto:lyndon_bijou@fws.gov))  
USFWS – Southeast LA Refuges Complex  
Refuge Management, Natural Resource Management/Wetland Restoration/Endangered Species.

11. Byron Fortier  
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61389 Hwy 434  
Lacombe, LA, 70445  
Supervisory Park Ranger, Education and Outreach  
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[byron\\_fortier@fws.gov](mailto:byron_fortier@fws.gov)
  
12. Howard Poitevint  
USFWS  
[howard\\_poitevint@fws.gov](mailto:howard_poitevint@fws.gov)  
229-246-4949  
refuge management, fire management and overall public use/access to the resource.
  
13. Byron Forties  
Doug Hunt  
volunteer group working to save the treasures of Bayou Gardens.
  
14. Roger Boykin  
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Atlanta, GA, 30345  
404-679-7191  
[roger\\_boykin@fws.gov](mailto:roger_boykin@fws.gov)  
USFWS, Regional fire management. Coordinator, Forest and fire management, Habitat management.
  
15. Amy LeGaux  
Audubon Louisiana Nature Center  
Education Curator, Environmental and Interpretive education/biology. Education and promoting active stewardship of the natural world  
(504)378-4111 (office)  
(504)234-4186 (cell)  
[alegaux@auduboninstitute.org](mailto:alegaux@auduboninstitute.org).
  
16. Paul Orr  
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LA Department of Agriculture and Forestry  
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Baton Rouge, LA, 70821-1628  
[paul\\_o@ldaf.state.la.us](mailto:paul_o@ldaf.state.la.us)  
urban and community forestry and wildland urban interface issues, environmental education, wildfire prevention.



17. Conrad Porbes  
985-847-1369  
53239 Hwy 433  
Slidell, LA, 70461.  
Retired: I use the Eastern portion of the Refuge everyday to fish and live on the edge of the Refuge.
18. George Dornas  
President of Northshore Bird Club  
was contacted by FWS to provide a participant, I volunteered. Represent Northshore Bird Club in Slidell, amateur ornithologist, primary interest in preservation of habitat for non-game wildlife and expansion of refuge to preserve marsh and critical habitat.
19. Jimmy Anthony  
LA department of wildlife and fisheries  
Wildlife management/habitat mangement
20. Joe Bernard  
61532 Fish Hatchery Road  
Lacombe, LA 70445  
Phone:985-882-7488  
Retired teacher  
Since 1990, my family has inholding property in BBM and we're very interested in its development.
21. Curt Burnette  
Management Director  
Audubon LA Nature Center  
504-378-4115  
[cburnette@auduboninstitute.org](mailto:cburnette@auduboninstitute.org)  
Experience/interest: environmental education, captive animal care, local wildlife
22. Larry Burch  
106 Holly Lane  
Mandeville, LA 70471  
985-778-3926  
St Tammany ND2025 Growth Management Plan Stering Committee  
Nature conservancy - Conservation planning  
North Lake Nature Center – President  
Tammany Trace Foundation  
Geologist

23. William (Bill) Vermillion  
Fish and Wildlife Biologist  
USFWS  
646 Cajundome Blvd., Ste. 400  
Lafayette, LA 70506  
337-291-3133  
[William\\_vermillion@fws.gov](mailto:William_vermillion@fws.gov)  
Experience: Nongame wildlife, migratory birds, USFWS – federal agency trust resources,  
Endangered and threatened species, migratory birds, wetlands
24. Nelwyn McInnis  
North Shore Program Manager  
The Nature Conservancy  
PO Box 1497  
Covington, LA 70434  
984-809-1414  
Expertise: Natural resource management; botany/wildlife biology  
Primary interest: pine flatwood ecosystem, longleaf pine ecosystem. Lake Pontchartrain  
Estuary
25. Byron Almquist  
[Byron@canoeandtrail.com](mailto:Byron@canoeandtrail.com)  
Canoe and Train adventures – outdoor guide and wilderness skills instructor.  
Primary area of interest: access to the refuge for outings and the public.
26. Chuck Patrisano  
Director, St. Tammany Parish Mosquito Abatement District.  
I am a medical entomologist and direct a parish wide integrated mosquito management  
program.
27. Ray Herndon  
Real Estate Associate  
The Conservation Fund  
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703-525-6300

***Question 2: What is your personal goal for this workshop?***

1. Marsh restoration and preservation
2. To understand the objectives of this NWR and be able to provide appropriate input to aid obtaining the goals and objectives.

3. Come away with a vision for how and what we want to be in the future. Gives us something to work towards. Establish a framework, give us direction – not specific objective but broader in scope.
4. To see an example of how people participate in a planning process to plan for the future of a wildlife refuge. To learn more about Big Branch Environmental planning. I want to see and increase in membership in Friends of the Refuges because of this process – everyone in this room should be a member!
5. Participate and educate myself and others listen to different ideas, opinions and viewpoint, concerns.
6. To develop a plan/guide for wise refuge resource management to refer to as support for step down management planning and implementation.
7. To set the standard for the future of Big Branch standard not to high – must be realistic and learn about planning.
8. Maintain and ensure the future, viability of the Refuge for the Ponchartrain community.
9. To gather information and knowledge of BBM and make the public aware of what BBM has to offer. Save the area for the future generations to come.
10. To participate in the planning process for developing missions, goals and objectives for the future of Big Branch Marsh.
11. To gain guidance and a measure of consensus on educational and interpretive program priorities.
12. To help plot/plan a good overall management strategy for the refuge for the next 10-15 years. This will involve listening to and incorporating the interests and needs of other stakeholders.
13. Affect the vision of the service to include areas developed in the past old historical as well as economic value worth preserving, and using as a draw to educate.
14. Make sure the FWS mission is well integrated with community needs/desires.
15. To become more familiar with the refuge and what contributions the nature center education staff can continue to make in partnership with FWS education.
16. Hope to learn something about management issues, in relation to wildland/urban interface.
17. Make sure that the area is available for use year ‘round.
18. Give insight to participants on use of Refuge and value fro non-game users. Represent viewpoint of birders on threatened and dwindling bird species that use Refuge habitats.
19. Learn more about BBMNWR and the scoping process
20. To learn about and be a part of the development of the refuge and to work with the USFWS
21. Sitting in today only to understand direction and purpose of workshop
22. Balance conservation and public access to refuge. Promote ecotourism – responsible use of refuge generating a positive impact for community.
23. Assist refuge staff with planning; ensure federal trust resources (i.e., migratory birds, federally listed threatened and endangered species) are adequately represented in refuge future plans.
24. Observe and compare natural resource planning effort to benefit TNC planning efforts in LA. Provide scientific input to affect planning to develop best management strategy for biodiversity conservation in Northshore/Lake Ponchartrain region.

25. To learn how this planning process works; to continue to have access to the refuge for organized outings; to increase access to the refuge by foot and canoe.
26. To learn more about the USFWS objectives and mission with regards to the Big Branch Marsh and how the activities of the St. Tammany Parish Mosquito Abatement can be compatibly integrated into the mission of the Service.
27. learn more about the resources and understand the future ambitions of Big Branch

***Question 3: What do you see as the primary conservation issue facing Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge over the next 15 years?***

1. Salt water intrusion. The #1 cause of erosion in the state. Solution: water control structure in the MRGO.
2. Being able to carry out the appropriate management practices across the refuge in light of a continuously building and surrounding human population, all with unstable funding.
3. Habitat Restoration and protection from encroaching development. What impact does encroaching development have and how does it affect ecosystem health. Restore natural systems to support the diversity of wildlife unique to this refuge that are threatened by the encroaching urban development.
4. Public education and outreach with all activities inside the refuge and activities that affect the refuge (litter, water pollution, vandalism, etc.) from outside of the refuge. Volunteering and activism is one of the keys to success! Land acquisition is important but we can't get in over our head – we have to be able to properly and successfully maintain what we currently have.
5. Urban Sprawl > Environmental Ed > invasives (plants and animals), water quality (runoff), trash. Industry > Pollutants, runoff, destruction of habitat, use of existing land, zoning, noise poll, footprints.
6. That management programs be dynamic in that as technology and knowledge grows and changes, the refuge is able to flow in change of management and not be constrained by an age old plan.
7. To preserve the wildlife and habitat of the area and meet the diverse uses by the public. To keep the refuge “rustic” natural.
8. The need to expand the refuge (i.e. acquisition of more acres) encourage habitat protection.
9. Hunting – I would like to see the public better educated with the hunting area and the key is what can actually be hunted. We also have many birdwatchers and would like them to enjoy birding w/o the fear of hunters being around. How can these two parties work together? “balance”, “common ground”, “preserve for future generations”.

10. Urban sprawl and development, water quality, wetland restoration, invasive/exotics. Because of the boom in urban sprawl and development, critical habitat for wildlife and plant communities are being gobbled up in large amounts. One of the main reasons for the listing of many Endangered Species is not enough suitable habitat. Controlling invasive/exotic species is imperative. I/E such as wild hogs, nutria, Chinese tallow, etc. out-competes and displaces native wildlife.
11. To maintain the integrity of refuge resources as area growth and development place it under increasing pressures.
12. How does the FWS accommodate the public use demands on Big Branch NWR over the next 10-15 years without adversely impacting the natural resources.
13. Overcrowding and excessive use, making revisions, tracks and viewing stands alters the preserve and deteriorates the wildlife.
14. Wild and urban interfaces and human impacts on the Refuge may affect the ability of the Refuge to carry out some needed habitat management programs: (1) forest management – aesthetics, (2) fire management – smoke impacts.
15. I'm not familiar enough yet with Big Branch to answer this question since I've only been in my current job for 2 months. A conservation issue that is important to me personally is to continue to be able to reach young children while their conservation ethics and feelings are in the development stage, through a variety of creative programs and funding sources. Lack of interest of the local system or too much competition from other outreach/fieldtrip venues.
16. Development encroachment from north and subsidence and erosion from south. Various negative impacts to management of refuge. One specific – homeowners who object to prescribed fire and the smoke it generates. Real issue maybe difficulty of land future and prescribed fire as a management tool – both forest and marsh.
17. (1) Trash from adjacent neighborhoods with canal is a catch all for trash (which flows into the Refuge); (2) Overuse in the future; (3) Saltwater intrusion.
18. Adding acreage to Big Branch before marshland and undeveloped land along Lake Ponchartrain disappears. An example of this would be the Futchie Marsh/salt Bayou area and pine savannah south of 190 and shortcut highway.
19. The wise interface of public use of the refuge with the mission of the refuge.
20. I'm not sure what the primary issue is now; the acquisition of the lands being the 1<sup>st</sup> step was the most important. Where it goes from here – this process will help resolve that. One primary conservation concern is maintenance of water quality of Bayou Lacombe.
21. Education eg local residents to value and purpose of refuge so they will support it fully.

22. Urbanization of surrounding area. St Tammany is the fastest growing parish in LA. Development pressure impacts water quality, hydrology, conservation, land availability.
23. Wildlife management in an urban setting (wildlife – urban interface (esp. prescribed burning). Refuge has population of federally endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers. Management for this species involves frequent (every 2-3 years) prescribed burning which is already difficult for refuge staff at current residential development levels. Also, marsh is burned for waterfowl. Increasing development around the refuge will also increase impacts of feral cats, dogs, etc and may impact such activities as hunting. Water quality/hydrology can be affected as well, and noise and disturbance levels, some refuge management activities subject to more scrutiny and potential opposition.
24. The ability to restore and maintain indigenous wildlife and habitats in an environment of encroaching urban development. Some issues include acquiring contiguous, unfragmented habitat, ability to conduct prescribed burns, mosquito abatement issues; visitation from public, invasive exotics.
25. Maintain the refuge in it's natural state - which is best left to the professionals (access facilities, invasive species, fires and smoke, etc.) Access to the refuge by commercial outfitters.
26. Finding common ground among public use and interest regarding the Refuge and activities and goals of the Service. I think this is the primary conservation issue because there could exist a wide array of ideas for use, and to lend harmoniously we need to come to agreement.
27. Urbanization of the surrounding areas.



**BIG BRANCH MARSH**  
*National Wildlife Refuge*  
**Planning Workshop I**

**December 9-11, 2003**  
**Lacombe, LA**

**Appendix III**  
*Participant List*





## Participant List

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Byron Almquist  
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**BIG BRANCH MARSH**  
*National Wildlife Refuge*  
**Planning Workshop I**

**December 9-11, 2003**  
**Lacombe, LA**

**Appendix IV**  
*Workshop Invitation List*



# Invitation List

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Israel Batiste  
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**BIG BRANCH MARSH**  
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**Appendix V**  
*About CBSG*



## About CBSG

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CBSG is part of IUCN — The World Conservation Union. With 975 volunteer members, CBSG is one of the largest of more than 110 Specialist Groups comprising the Species Survival Commission (SSC), one of six IUCN Commissions. CBSG has over 10 years of experience in developing, testing and applying scientifically based tools and processes for risk assessment and decision-making in the context of species and habitat management. These tools, based on small population and conservation biology, human demography, and the dynamics of social learning are used in intensive, problem-solving workshops to produce realistic and achievable recommendations for both conservation and management.

CBSG's workshop process provides an objective environment, expert knowledge, and neutral facilitation to support the exchange of information across diverse stakeholder groups in order to reach some agreement on the important issues facing both humans and wildlife. With this understanding, meaningful and practical management recommendations can be made. The process has been remarkably successful in uncovering and integrating previously unpublished information vital to the decision making process.

CBSG has learned a host of lessons in more than 100 workshop experiences in 40 countries. Traditional approaches to endangered species problems have tended to emphasize the lack of information and the need for additional research. This has been coupled with a hesitancy to make explicit risk assessments of species status and a reluctance to make immediate or non-traditional management recommendations. The result has been long delays in preparing action plans, loss of momentum, dependency on crisis-driven actions or broad recommendations that do not provide useful guidance to the managers.

CBSG's interactive and participatory approach produces positive effects on management decision-making and generating political and social support for conservation actions by local people. Workshop participants recognize that management policies and actions need to be designed as part of a biological and social learning process. CBSG workshops provide tools for designing management decisions and programs on the basis of sound science, while allowing new information and unexpected events to be used constructively to adjust management practices. Timely production of workshop reports has immediate impact on stakeholders and decision makers.

Our basic set of tools for workshops include small group dynamic skills, explicit use in small groups of problem restatement, divergent thinking sessions, identification of the history and chronology of the problem, causal flow diagramming (elementary systems analysis), matrix methods for qualitative data and expert judgments, paired and weighted ranking for making comparisons between sites, criteria, and options, utility analysis, stochastic simulation modeling for single populations and metapopulation and deterministic and stochastic modeling of local human populations.

CBSG is funded by annual voluntary donations from more than 150 institutions and individuals worldwide. Support for individual projects comes from conservation organizations, private foundations, zoos, aquariums and regional zoo associations, corporations and wildlife agencies.

**Moriya Rufer**  
*Program Assistant*

B.A., Biology, St. John's University/College of St. Benedict, 1999

Moriya joined CBSG in September 2000 after completing a marine mammal training internship at Shedd Aquarium in Chicago. She has experience as an interpretive naturalist and in insect rearing and studied marine biology for a semester at the University of Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Moriya's main biological interests have evolved to include wildlife ecology, entomology and taxonomy. This background has helped her in her role as recorder and process assistant at CBSG workshops as well as when assisting the CBSG Program Officers with assembling workshop briefing books, editing reports, and other workshop preparation. Moriya also graphically designs report covers, designed and now updates the CBSG website and edits the CBSG Newsletter.

**Dr. Onnie Byers**  
*Executive Officer*

B.S., Animal Science, University of Wisconsin, 1983  
M.S., Animal Physiology, University of Minnesota, 1987  
Ph.D., Animal Physiology, University of Minnesota, 1990  
Post Doc., National Zoological Park/Smithsonian Institution, 1990-1993

Onnie earned her Ph.D. in reproductive physiology from the University of Minnesota and completed a post doctoral fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo in Washington D.C. She was a member of the National Zoological Park's Mobile Laboratory Research team, and participated in reproductive studies involving cheetah, pumas, tigers and the giant panda.

Onnie joined the CBSG staff in 1991 as a Program Officer. In addition to serving as a reproductive specialist in workshops conducted by CBSG and other conservation organizations, Onnie is responsible for organization, design and facilitation of CBSG's Population and Habitat Viability Assessment, Conservation Assessment and Management Plan and Organization-based workshops. She also has been collaborating with the SSC and the IUCN Red List office to develop a process for feeding species threat assessments made at CBSG workshops directly into the global IUCN Red List. Onnie is dedicated to the transfer of these tools and processes to conservationists around the world through the establishment and nurturing of regional and national CBSG Networks.