



FLORIDA CHAPTER
OF
THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

414 N. E. 21st Avenue
Ocala, Florida 32670

2 September 1977

Mr. Joe D. White
Refuge Manager
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
Post Office Box 68
St. Marks, Florida 32355

Dear Mr. White:

As requested in your letter of July 1, 1977, the Florida Chapter of THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY has reviewed the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge draft timber management plan. The following comments are a compilation of critiques made by six members that I feel were well qualified to review this plan. We have tried to make our review as objective as possible, keeping in mind that when timber and wildlife conflicts arise on a National Wildlife Refuge, wildlife values will not be sacrificed to facilitate economic return. We also recognize that this is a draft plan and hope that our comments will assist you in formulating your final plan for the refuge.

We believe that a wildlife management plan, of which timber management is a part, should be developed for the refuge. Wildlife objectives should be clearly stated and, where appropriate, timber management plans should be formulated to assist in meeting these objectives.

The entire plan should be reorganized. It was extremely confusing to review and repetitive in places. Early in the plan objectives should be established and how forest manipulation can meet these objectives discussed. A type map should also be included in the plan.

A major problem that several reviewers had was in the basic objectives of forest management on the refuge. Is the major objective to create optimum wildlife habitat or to maintain economically oriented forest values while demonstrating how wildlife can be enhanced through practical silvicultural modifications? This seems to be an important issue that must be decided.


Another problem that kept arising was what species of wildlife are we trying to emphasize. Much of the plan referred to game species yet non-consumptive users make up the majority of the visitors to the area. Of course game species can be viewed just as enthusiastically as non-game. Somehow a decision should be made as to which species will receive emphasis on what forest types.

Examples of uncut forests should be maintained throughout the refuge on different sites. These uncut forests should be large enough so that current silvicultural methods can be shown to be advantageous to these "control" sites in terms of specified wildlife benefits. It is probable that uncut, unmanaged stands will benefit some species more than currently used forestry practices. These "control" areas are sorely needed as long-term research projects.

Longleaf pine type should be managed as an important indigenous habitat type which offers intrinsic wildlife, aesthetic, and historic values. Mechanical site preparation in this type should be restricted unless positive wildlife benefits can be shown.

Specific comments referenced to page and paragraph of the plan are enclosed. We appreciate having had the opportunity to review this draft document and commend the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service for requesting this level of input. If we can be of any further assistance in your planning process please feel free to contact us. We would appreciate having the opportunity to review your final plan for the refuge.

Sincerely,



Nicholas R. Holler
President, Florida Chapter of
THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Specific Comments, Florida Chapter of THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY
on the
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
Draft Timber Management Plan

<u>Page</u>	<u>Para.</u>	
1	1	Saying longleaf areas are understocked gives the appearance that timber objectives are being immediately set. How does this understocking relate to wildlife values?
	5	There is disagreement as to whether the wild turkey is in fact increasing as you have so stated. There are indications that the population is low due to disease or habitat change.
	5	We are hazy as to what current environmental impacts you are referring to.
	1	The system you are speaking of is only one method of habitat management, not necessarily "the proper procedure".
	2	How does controlled burning improve the scenic beauty of an area? Each of us has ideas on what is scenic and we feel that your thinking should be clarified here.
	3,4,5	Should not refer to "red book" species. This publication was rendered obsolete by the Endangered Species Act of 1973. This section should be separated as to Federal and State listed Endangered and Threatened Species, both plant and animal.
	4	It is difficult to see how removing surplus timber maintains habitat for wildlife indigenous to North Florida. Again, different wildlife species have different habitat requirements. This timber removal is undoubtedly good for some but possibly detrimental to others.
	1	Do the demonstration aspects have a number 4 priority as it appears here? It appears that the demonstration aspects could be exhibited on much less than the approximately 30,000 acres now included.
	3	This wildlife list adds little to the plan and it is questionable if these actually receive the most benefits from the plan - the grey squirrel for example would benefit more from a longer rotation in hardwoods.

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7	4	Why is the ratio of 20% regeneration, 30% pulpwood, and 50% sawtimber necessary for balanced habitat conditions.
8	2	Why is it necessary to artificially regenerate longleaf pine? Are there not enough seed trees for regeneration, even if a fully stocked stand is not the result? <u>Site preparation</u> such as you are describing is felt by many to be detrimental to some species of wildlife, due to increased vegetational ground cover. There is also controversy as to possible long range alterations of some plant communities due to mechanical site preparation.
8	3	We disagree that even-aged management is necessarily the most efficient method to improve wildlife habitat. This is simply too all-encompassing.
9	3	Less than 10,000 acres are presently in longleaf. Since this type is rapidly being converted throughout much of its range we urge that this indigenous forest type be given special consideration.
9	4	It is possible that wet soil types also contributed to this slow growth?
12	1,2	<u>Service Policy</u> should be at the beginning of the plan so that "ground rules" are established early.
16	3	Prescribed burning should also be tried in summer, at least experimentally. The list of wildlife benefits under <u>Prescribed Burning</u> is again too all encompassing. Not all wildlife benefits from succulent sprouts and not all bird life prefer a brush and herbaceous understory. Has this four year burning cycle been carefully thought out? It seems that this cycle would depend on the site and which species of wildlife you expect to benefit.
18	2	Why remove pines adjacent to live oaks to prevent damage to oaks? We do not understand this. It seems that leaving pines uncut around the oaks would offer more diversity.
18	5	Why should crooked and diseased trees receive first priority in marking unless you are considering the economic value of these trees as ranking above wildlife values.

Page

Para.

18

7

In your discussion of unmerchantable trees it sounds like you are permitting some cavity or most trees to remain even though they are unmerchantable. Since wildlife takes priority on St. Marks, then it would seem that whether the tree was unmerchantable or not would be immaterial.

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It seems strange that St. Marks would have need of three foresters to carry out their forestry wildlife program, and yet have only one wildlife biologist on the staff.