

not allowing refuge uses and therefore require NEPA compliance. For more on compatibility determinations, see Appendix G.

A.2.5 Wilderness Stewardship Policy 610 FW 1-5

The Service's Wilderness Stewardship Policy provides an overview and foundation for implementing the Wilderness Act and the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended. The policy covers land management planning for congressionally designated Wilderness and addresses how to administer Wilderness in Alaska in light of ANILCA.

A.2.6 Refuge Planning 602 FW 1

The Refuge Planning Policy provides guidance for refuge planning, including the comprehensive conservation planning process and step-down management planning.

A.2.7 Comprehensive Conservation Planning 602 FW 3

Comprehensive conservation planning is a systematic decision making process founded on principles of sound fish and wildlife management and available science, and consistent with legal mandates and other policies, guidelines, and planning documents. The Service's planning policy provides guidance and step-by-step direction, and establishes minimum requirements for all comprehensive conservation plans.

A.3 Programmatic Guidance

Programmatic guidance developed by the Alaska Region, the Service, or DOI provides additional direction for the management of the Refuge System. Much of the management direction described in Chapter 2, and throughout this Plan, is influenced by general guidance from the programs and policies described in the next sections.

Several of these documents provide guidance that directs the Service to use an ecosystem approach in which the integrity of the entire ecosystem and its processes are considered when managing refuges. This broad-scale approach requires close collaboration with others in the form of effective landscape-level partnerships and coordinated efforts to address climate change. We provide a brief description of ecosystem management in the context of partnering and summarize the influential programs, strategies, and national and regional management plans that were reviewed during the development of this Plan.

A.3.1 Ecosystem Management and Conservation Partnerships

An ecosystem approach to refuge management was initiated by the Refuge System Improvement Act. The Service recognizes the complex and interconnected relationships that are present within ecosystems and across landscapes and recognizes that ecosystems may not be confined within the boundaries of a refuge, a state, or even the nation. The Service also recognizes that people and their socio-cultural and economic systems are important components of ecosystems. Therefore, working with people in conservation partnerships and other collaborative efforts is necessary in applying ecosystem management.

Creating and maintaining conservation partnerships across entire landscapes is crucial for reaching the goal of ecosystem management because fish, wildlife, and their habitats are not constrained by the administrative boundaries of specific protected areas. Without physical barriers, and with available habitat, fish and wildlife will freely move through ownerships and management jurisdictions. In the face of accelerating climate change and other environmental stressors, some species may shift their ranges into different ecosystems and political or administrative jurisdictions.

Conservation of biological diversity on refuge lands and outside refuge boundaries is an ambitious but fundamental goal of the Service's ecosystem approach to management. Through

