

Draft Environmental Assessment

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Headquarters and Coastal Education Center

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CHAPTER 1. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex includes five national wildlife refuges: Petit Manan, Cross Island, Franklin Island, Seal Island, and Pond Island. The first lands were purchased in 1972, and the refuge has rapidly grown. Its holdings now span roughly 250 miles of the Maine coastline and include 50 offshore islands and four mainland units, totaling more than 8,000 acres (see Map). The focus of the Refuge's strong biological program is the restoration of colonial nesting seabird populations (terns, puffins and other alcids, cormorants, storm-petrels, and common eiders), which is accomplished through intensive management of a small subset of islands. In contrast to the Refuge's strong biological program, its visitor services program is in its infancy.

The Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), published in April 2005, recommended, as part of its selected alternative, that a new headquarters and coastal education center be established in a mid-coast location, between Brunswick and Searsport, to provide a central location for management of the Refuge's offshore islands in this region. It would also provide a high-visibility education and outreach presence in an area accessible to the millions of seasonal visitors to Maine's coast, closer to resident Maine population centers, in proximity to major ferry and seabird-viewing tour boat ports, and closer to the offices of key partner organizations such as Maine Coast Heritage Trust, National Audubon Society, and the Service's Gulf of Maine Program. The purpose of the center is to raise the visibility of the Refuge and to help accomplish the environmental education and outreach goals and objectives laid out in the CCP (see Appendix A).

To cover the geographic spread of the Refuge and service seabird restoration projects on islands in both the mid-coast and downeast areas, Refuge employees are currently assigned to two offices in leased space. Due to the high monthly costs of leasing, the Service is moving toward occupying Service-owned facilities and co-locating programs, as described in the Regional Director's Order #06-02, dated August 4, 2006. While we do not intend to co-locate the Refuge with another program at this time, the intent of this policy is to avoid costly leases. The new headquarters and coastal education center being contemplated here will also accommodate the needs of the Rockport office staff, and allow the elimination of this leased office. The other office, two hours away in Milbridge, Maine, will also be replaced in the near future, but its replacement will be covered in a separate environmental assessment.

There are several possible alternatives for the location of the center. Chapter 4 of this Environmental Assessment will analyze each alternative to compare its:

- Fit to site criteria, including costs and construction impacts
- Effectiveness - which alternative best helps us meet our objectives?
- Environmental impacts –what are the positive and negative impacts?

Site criteria outlined in the CCP included:

- Within ½ mile of coastal Route 1 between Brunswick and Searsport

- On the waterfront, or with an unobstructed view of the water, and/or with foot access to the water
- No changes in zoning are required, or changes would not result in a protracted conflict with the local authority
- Is consistent with the neighborhood, e.g. would have limited impact on the neighbors
- Has good accessibility to utilities which do not require costly upgrades
- Has good access to emergency services
- Has minimal to no hazardous materials or contaminants
- Has safe ingress and egress, or development of such is reasonable
- Can accommodate a handicapped-accessible building(s) for Service staff, Friends Group, and partners, as well as an educational and interpretive facility, storage space for boats and maintenance equipment, and parking for cars and buses;
- Can accommodate anticipated visitation with minimal adverse impact
- Is readily accessible to an outdoor environment for educational and interpretive programs
- Is already Service-owned, or a willing seller is available and property is available at fair market value or less
- Facility and site construction environmental impacts would be minimal
- Costs of developing site are reasonable
- Can support construction of a facility modeled on the principles of sustainable design, (or can be retrofitted to accommodate) such things as active and passive solar, and a state-of-the-art septic system and well.

An important point to consider is the feasibility of having all the Refuge's mid-coast needs served from a single headquarters location. Refuge employees, with assistance from the National Audubon Society Seabird Restoration Program, currently run labor-intensive seabird restoration projects on six islands. These projects require researchers to be stationed on each island throughout the nesting season to displace and harass large gulls, perform other predator control, intensively monitor nesting birds, and band birds. Refuge employees must make frequent trips to the islands to re-provision the researchers. Habitat manipulation and facility maintenance activities are also carried out on the islands by Refuge staff (outside of the nesting season).

The Refuge employees stationed in Rockport manage the restoration projects on Pond Island, Metinic Island, Seal Island, and Matinicus Rock. To access Pond Island, the boat is trailered an hour west to Bath, Maine, and then the boat is driven for about 30 minutes to reach the island. To access the other islands, the boat is trailered 5.8 miles south to the public launch in Rockland, about a 10-15 minute drive. Once the boat is launched it takes a minimum of 45 minutes to reach Metinic Island (7 miles offshore), an hour and 20 minutes to reach Seal Island (20 miles offshore), and an hour and 45 minutes to reach Matinicus Rock (26 miles offshore). Travel time can be significantly slower in fog or rough seas. Since the round trip to a given island from this nearest boat launch routinely takes as much as half of an eight hour work day, it is critically important that the boat remains as close to the Rockland boat launch as possible. Trailering from Damariscotta would add at least an hour to the day, and from Searsport two hours. Driving the boat in the water from either location would take even longer, since boats in water travel at about half the speed of a vehicle on Route 1. Therefore, it makes sense to locate the boats near the Rockland boat launch. This necessitates building a separate boat garage in Rockland, Rockport or Thomaston instead of insisting this function be located at the headquarters/ education center; a boat garage in Rockport has been built into all of the alternatives.

The Service is authorized to purchase land and develop facilities by the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16USC 742f).

CHAPTER 2. ALTERNATIVES

Numerous alternatives have been suggested for the headquarters/education center and are compared in this document. See Map for locations.

Alternative A. No Action

In this alternative, no new headquarters or coastal education center would be established and the Rockport Office would continue to be located in leased space. The refuge manager, assistant refuge manager, and a biologist are currently located in an office in Rockport (Knox County). The Friends of Maine Seabird Islands, a non-profit group whose mission includes assisting the refuge, shares space at this location. This office, located just off Route 1 in an office park, consists of 2,250 square feet of space; approximately half of that area is for boat storage and maintenance operations. Since the office is off the main road, with only a few small Maine highway system standard blue signs on the highway and a small blue standard office park sign at the entrance among the many signs for other offices, this office is little known and rarely visited by the public. In addition, during most of the tourism season, the staff is often out in the field with no staff available for greeting visitors.

The Rockport staff members manage the restoration projects on Pond Island, Metinic Island, Matinicus Rock Island, and Seal Island. To access Pond Island, the boat is trailered an hour west to Bath, Maine. To access the others, the boat is trailered 5.8 miles south to the public launch in Rockland.

In 2012, when the current lease runs out, the staff would either renew the lease or find another lease in a similar situation in the Rockport/Rockland area. No coastal education center would be created. The current lease is \$37,911 per year.

Alternative B. Round Top Farm, Damariscotta

In this alternative, the Refuge would establish its headquarters and coastal education center in the former Round Top Center for the Arts building in Damariscotta. The Damariscotta River Association (DRA) now owns this 13.35 acre farm on Business Route 1 along the Damariscotta River 1.3 miles north of downtown Damariscotta (Lincoln County). Business Route 1 rejoins Route 1 0.8 miles north of the Round Top Farm. By the terms of the legal documents that created DRA's ownership, the site cannot be sold to the Service, so a mutually agreeable long-term lease would have to be worked out. There is an 1850 farmhouse on the site, which has plenty of room for offices, some areas that could be adapted for classroom activities, and two floors of former art gallery space (approximately 8,000 square feet) that could be converted into exhibit space.

There is a large barn that has already been renovated and is universally accessible; this building would continue to be controlled by DRA and many community events would continue to be hosted there. There will be sidewalks connecting the site to downtown and trails along the river connecting the site to other sites. There are lovely views of the Damariscotta River, but the scene is pastoral, not marine. The site is very near a state historic site, the Whaleback Shell Midden,

which consists of the remains of huge piles of oyster shells left along the river banks by native people.

DRA already has an active group of stewardship and education volunteers that may be available to help the refuge as well. Events at Round Top attract an estimated 6,500 visitors annually and events in Damariscotta attract an estimated 15,000 people annually; visitors to events may have some time to visit other attractions in the area.

This alternative is located closer to the partners Maine Coast Heritage Trust and the Service's Gulf of Maine Program than the other alternatives.

The building is 0.2 mile away from the Damariscotta Fire Station, 0.7 mile away from the police station and 1.7 miles away from the Miles Memorial Hospital. The building is on town water and sewer, and the zoning is commercial.

The buildings are sound, but some major renovations would be needed, including a new heating system, chimney, paint, insulation, additional restrooms, and modifications to make the buildings universally accessible. Renovations are estimated to cost \$237,500. Exhibits would be an additional \$1 million. This site is roughly 40 minutes west of Rockland via Route 1, 25 miles from the Rockland boat launch. Boat storage and trails would be provided at the Old County Road location, Rockport; a boat storage building there with a small office, storage space and plumbing, is estimated to cost \$250,000. The total construction costs, including exhibits, would be about \$1,500,000.

Annual costs for operating the buildings are estimated to be around \$21,000, which would likely be the Service's responsibility as part of the lease arrangement. Should several groups be able to share the office space, the costs might be shared proportionally. For additional investments, wind or solar power could be added at the site, although it is important to maintain the historic appearance of the farm.

Alternative C. Old County Road, Rockport

In this alternative, a new building would be built on the Old County Road in Rockport that would accommodate headquarter offices and the coastal education center. The Friends of Maine Seabird Islands recently received the donation of a 21 acre parcel of land in Rockport. The property is on the Old County Road, which runs roughly parallel to Route 1 from the Thomaston/Rockland line and joins Route 1 1.5 miles south of the existing office. The Friends accepted the property with the intention of donating it to the Service. Although the donor retains life rights to live in his house at the front of the property, an education center could be built here behind his house. Clearing trees at the rear of the property would reveal a good view of the Glen Cove/Clam Cove area of the Penobscot Bay.

This site is 3.6 miles from the Rockland public boat launch. The parcel is 2.8 miles away from the Rockland Fire Station, 3.7 miles away from the police station, and 1.2 miles away from the Penobscot Bay Medical Center.

The National Wildlife Refuge System in this region of the country uses standard facility designs for its new headquarters/ visitor facility construction. A small center, designed for a staff of less than ten and less than 70,000 visitors per year, contains 3,217 square feet of administrative space, 3,628 square feet for exhibits, and 1,175 square feet of classroom/meeting space, so the total area would be 8,020 square feet. These buildings use elements consistent with Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification standards. Construction costs for the access road, parking lot, and building are estimated to be \$4 million. For additional investment, wind or solar power could be added at the site. Exhibits would be an additional \$1 million.

A boat storage building would also need to be built, but no offices would be required, since the headquarters would provide these. This building is estimated to cost \$150,000 additional.

Total construction cost is estimated to be \$5,150,000. The annual costs to run the building, based on the costs of a similar building at the Nulhegan Basin Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (2008 costs) are about \$15,000.

Alternative D. Commercial Building, Rockland (Service's Preferred Alternative)

In this alternative, an existing commercial building would be purchased to serve as the headquarters and coastal education center. There is a 9,600 square foot commercial building for sale just south of the Rockland business district, less than 1/10th of a mile from where Route 1 makes a 90 degree turn from east to north and thence through downtown Rockland. This building was created from two older buildings, renovated and joined in the center by a connecting entrance building. It served as a day care center for the employees of the nearby waterfront headquarters of MBNA, before that corporation left the state. This building has adequate space in a good layout to provide offices, classroom space, restrooms and two large rooms for exhibits. Renovations required would be limited to creating some additional parking, exchanging toddler toilets for adult size in many of the restrooms, and removing some existing interior walls in the two exhibit rooms (and, of course, installing exhibits – common to all alternatives). The building is in very good condition, with nearly new heating and cooling systems, sprinklers, security system, and roof. It is already universally accessible - including two ramps from the outside, powered doors, ramps where necessary, and a modern elevator providing access to the second floor. The asking price is less than \$700,000. Necessary renovations are estimated to cost \$300,000. Exhibits would be an additional \$1 million. For additional investment, wind or solar power could be added at the site.

This building has views of the harbor, looking across a parking lot across the road. There is access to a boardwalk shore trail along Rockland Harbor. It does not have boat or maintenance storage or access to woodland trails. Boat storage would be provided at the Old County Road location, 3.6 miles away; a boat storage building there with a small office, storage space and plumbing, is estimated to cost \$250,000. Trails with a view of Penobscot Bay and islands would also be provided at the Old County Road location. Two state parks are located nearby; Birch Point State Park is 6.4 miles away and Owl's Head State Park is 4.6 miles away. State ferry service that provides access to the large, populated islands of North Haven, Vinalhaven, and Matinicus is located ½ mile north on Route 1.

Events in Rockland attract an estimated 90,000 people annually; visitors to events may have some time to visit other attractions in the area. In addition, the area has several museums that attract visitors; the Farnsworth Art Museum, the Owls Head Transportation Museum, the Maine Lighthouse Museum, the Sail, Power and Steam Museum, and Coastal Children's Museum.

Of the alternatives, this one is the most centrally located within the mid-coast area, so the refuge staff could efficiently build educational programs with many partners, including many boat captains that offer birding tours (from Camden, Rockland, and Port Clyde), the Damariscotta River Association and the Friends of Sears Island. The Service's partner in seabird management, National Audubon, maintains a Project Puffin "Puffin Center" in commercial space on the main street of Rockland and other functions in Bremen, Maine, the Island Institute offices are in Rockland, and the Outward Bound offices are in Camden.

The building is ½ mile from the Rockland public boat launch. The building is ½ mile away from the Rockland Fire Station and Police Station, and 3.8 miles away from the Penobscot Bay Medical Center.

Total purchase and construction cost is estimated to be \$2,250,000. Annual costs to operate this building are estimated to be \$23,000.

Alternative E. Commercial Building, Lincolnville Beach

In this alternative, an existing commercial building would be purchased to serve as the headquarters and coastal education center. There is a 3 acre parcel with two buildings for sale just south of Lincolnville Beach on Route 1. The larger building, 2,600 square feet, is new and has an open floor plan suitable for exhibits. The other is a recently renovated house built in 1920 that contains 1,200 square feet that could be used for offices. Although it does not have shore access, it does have a view of the water off the back of the property and is near the ferry to Isleboro. The asking price is \$595,000. Annual costs to operate this building are unknown, but likely to be less than the other alternatives due to its relatively small size.

The building is 14.8 miles from the Rockland public boat launch. The building is 0.2 mile away from the Lincolnville Beach Fire Station, 6.4 miles from the police station, and 7.8 miles away from the Penobscot Bay Medical Center.

Alternative F. Purchase Land and Build On Route 1 in Searsport

In this alternative, a suitable building lot would be purchased, and a new building built, to serve as the headquarters and coastal education center. A suitable parcel, offering visibility along and access from Route 1, a view of the ocean and perhaps some islands, and shore access would be purchased and road access, parking, a building, and trails would be developed. Commercially-zoned property with these characteristics is not commonly found, and is typically quite expensive. The most suitable property found for sale in current listings is 6.2 acres in Searsport, very close to Moose Point State Park, with 290 feet of road frontage on Route 1 and 315 feet of frontage on the Penobscot Bay. The asking price is \$1,050,000. This site is roughly an hour north of Rockland via Route 1 (36 miles from the Rockland boat launch). It is 1.8 miles south of

the Searsport Fire and Police Station, and 7.5 miles away from the Waldo County Hospital in Belfast.

The National Wildlife Refuge System in this region of the country uses standard facility designs for its new headquarters/ visitor facility construction. A small center, designed for a staff of less than ten and less than 70,000 visitors per year, contains 3,217 square feet of administrative space, 3,628 square feet for exhibits, and 1,175 square feet of classroom/meeting space, so the total area would be 8,020 square feet. These buildings use elements consistent with Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification standards. Construction costs for the access road, parking lot, and building are estimated to be \$4 million. For additional investment, wind or solar power could be added at the site. Exhibits would be an additional \$1 million.

Boat storage and trails would be provided at the Old County Road location, Rockport; a boat storage building there with a small office, storage space and plumbing, is estimated to cost \$250,000.

Total purchase and construction cost is estimated to be \$6,300,000. The annual costs to run the building, based on the costs of a similar building at the Nulhegan Basin Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (2008 costs) are about \$15,000.

Alternative G. Sears Island, Searsport

In this alternative, a new building would be built on Sears Island to serve as the headquarters and coastal education center. Sears Island is a 941 acre island with 5 miles of coastline, connected by a 1 mile long road and causeway to Route 1, 2 miles north of downtown Searsport (Waldo County). It is owned by the State of Maine and managed by the Maine Department of Transportation. For over 40 years, due to the availability of deep water on the west side of the island, various proposals to develop energy facilities (oil refinery, coal or nuclear plant) or port facilities (liquefied natural gas, containers) have created controversy and nothing has ever been built. In 2005, Governor Baldacci established a representative stakeholder group, the Sears Island Planning Initiative Steering Committee, to create an acceptable resolution to the stalemate between development and environmental concerns. By 2007, the Committee had developed a Consensus Agreement that described how marine transportation and commerce, outdoor recreation, education and conservation could all coexist and be compatibly managed. Following that, a Joint Use Planning Committee was charged to implement the provisions of the Consensus Agreement. A detailed Conservation Easement has been placed over 601 acres on the east and south quadrants of the island, leaving 330 acres on the northwest corner for transportation uses (possibly a container port). The landowner, Maine Department of Transportation, granted the easement to the Maine Coast Heritage Trust and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection is the Third Party Enforcer.

The Easement protects the 601 acre Natural Area for conservation, low impact outdoor recreation, as well as nature observation and study. It allows trails to be developed. Within the Natural Area, the Easement also makes a provision for an Education and Maintenance Center Area of 25 acres, wherein a facility of multiple buildings that do not exceed an aggregate of

10,000 square feet or 30 feet in height would be allowed to be built and operated, along with an access road in to the building and some parking. This would be located in the northeast quadrant of the island. The Department of Transportation will not sell this property to the Service; a low or no cost long-term lease would be offered. The site offers a marine view and shoreline access.

The National Wildlife Refuge System in this region of the country uses standard facility designs for its new headquarters/ visitor facility construction. A small center, designed for a staff of less than ten and less than 70,000 visitors per year, contains 3,217 square feet of administrative space, 3,628 square feet for exhibits, and 1,175 square feet of classroom/meeting space, so the total area would be 8,020 square feet. These buildings use elements consistent with Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification standards. Construction costs for the access road, parking lot, and building are estimated to be \$4 million. For additional investment, wind or solar power could be added at the site. Exhibits would be an additional \$1 million.

Boat storage and trails would be provided at the Old County Road location, Rockport; a boat storage building there with a small office, storage space and plumbing, is estimated to cost \$250,000. Total construction cost is estimated to be \$5,250,000. The annual costs to operate the building, based on the costs of a similar building at the Nulhegan Basin Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (2008 costs) are about \$15,000.

This site is roughly an hour north of Rockland via Route 1, 36 miles from the Rockland boat launch. The site is 2 miles away from the Searsport Fire and Police Station and 9.3 miles away from the Waldo County Hospital in Belfast. The Penobscot Maritime Museum is located in Searsport.

CHAPTER 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This chapter first describes the environment common to the whole area, and then describes specific attributes of each alternative site.

THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE MAINE COAST

Physical Environment

The Refuge is spread along the Maine Coast and is part of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem. Maine has a long and complicated geologic history. Igneous and metamorphic bedrock has been created and/or affected by a variety of continental collision and mountain building events, erosion, sedimentation, and glaciations. Soils are mostly glacial till and can be quite variable from place to place. The annual average precipitation is 42 inches, so there is plentiful water to fill the many lakes, ponds, streams and marshes. Although Maine has cold winters, the sea moderates the winter cold somewhat along the coast, although winter ice storms and fierce winter winds can shear coastal vegetation. The ocean also moderates the summer temperatures along the coast, resulting in cooler temperatures. Fog is relatively common in the summer. For more information, see Chapter 3 of the Maine Coastal Islands Comprehensive Conservation Plan at: http://library.fws.gov/CCPs/MaineIslands/maineislands_index.htm

Biological Environment

The Gulf of Maine is a biologically productive ecosystem. Its marine waters and shoreline habitats host about 2,000 species of plants and animals. Many northern bird species (Atlantic puffins and razorbills) are at the southern limit of their ranges, while several southern species (laughing gulls and roseate terns) are at the northern limit of their ranges here.

Bald eagles are increasing in numbers along the coast and have been recently de-listed, although they are still protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Roseate terns and piping plovers are the only federally endangered species found along the coast. Arctic terns, Atlantic puffin, and razorbills are all listed by the state as threatened due to their small population size, but they only nest off-shore. None of these species are found at any of the alternative sites.

For more information, see Chapter 3 of the Maine Coastal Islands Comprehensive Conservation Plan at: http://library.fws.gov/CCPs/MaineIslands/maineislands_index.htm

Socio-Economic Environment

According to the U.S. Census, Maine is gaining population and jobs at a slower rate, and has a lower median income than the rest of the United States. The population is slightly older than the average for the rest of the country, and much less diverse, with 96.5% of the population being white, and only 2.9% being foreign born.

The most densely settled areas in Maine are the coastal counties, with population density being the largest in the three southernmost counties (York, Cumberland and Androscoggin) and generally decreasing along the coast to the east. Household income likewise generally decreases

along the coast to the east. The majority of people are employed in the fields of “management/professional and related occupations,” followed by “sales and office occupations.” Retirees are disproportionately concentrated in southern coastal towns. The southern coastal areas are growing at a more rapid rate than is the rest of the state.

Damariscotta is in Lincoln County, Rockport and Rockland are in Knox County, and Lincolnville Beach, Northport and Searsport are in Waldo County. Table 1 displays selected socioeconomic indicators for these counties and allows comparison between them and against state numbers.

Table 1. SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR MAINE AND RELEVANT COUNTIES (from U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts Website)

	Lincoln County	Knox County	Waldo County	State of Maine
2008 population estimate	34,628	40,686	38,342	1,313,456
Persons per sq. mile (in 2000)	73.7	108.2	49.7	41.3
Population % change 2000-08	3.0%	2.7%	5.7%	3.3% (US 8%)
Median household income in 2007	\$45,816	\$44,619	\$40,441	\$45,832
% of persons below poverty in 2007	10.8%	10.6%	14.5%	12.2%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units (2000)	\$119,900	\$112,200	\$90,100	\$98,700
Mean travel time to work (2000)	23.4 minutes	18.9 minutes	26.4 minutes	22.7 minutes
Total number of firms (2002)	5,931	7,048	4,413	135,410
Private nonfarm employment change 2000-06	3.6%	3.3%	1.1%	3.3% (US 5.1%)
Manufacturers' shipments (02)	\$105,443,000	\$218,905,000	147,162,000	\$13,851,915,000
Retail sales (02)	\$396,690,000	\$490,405,000	\$263,451,000	\$16,053,515,000
Accommodation and foodservice sales (2002)	\$ 62,140,000	\$ 82,034,000	\$ 33,319,000	\$2,045,841,000

Archaeological and Historical Resources

As is generally the case in coastal settings, the study area is especially rich in archaeological resources, though few have been reported on the current refuge lands. The majority of prehistoric archaeological sites in the area date from the Ceramic Period (ca. 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1600). This probably reflects population density to some extent, but is also a reflection of the instability of coastal environments during preceding periods. Pottery appears in this period (the origin of its name), and life-ways appear to have consisted of a mix of hunting and gathering of upland, estuarine, and marine resources, especially soft shell clam (*Mya arenaria*). Unlike most of the eastern United States pre-Contact agriculture was only significant in southwestern Maine, because of the short growing season. A similar pattern of occupation followed European contact, with the addition of fur trapping for the European market. Extensive permanent settlement of mid-coast Maine by Euro-Americans was hindered by repeated wars until the mid-18th century. Many towns were established in the latter part of that century, with population and economic activity generally concentrated around major estuaries and an economy based primarily on farming, maritime trades, and (from the 19th century) tourism.

THE ENVIRONMENT OF ALTERNATIVE SITES

Alternative A. No Action

Staff will remain in existing leased space until the current lease expires in 2012. At that time the Service would renew the lease or seek a similar, alternate building to lease. Since it is not known exactly where a new leased office would be, the specific environment cannot be described. However, it would likely be in an existing commercial building.

Physical Environment

The existing site is in the Rockport Park Centre industrial park, just off Route 1 in Rockport. The office is served by its own septic system and well.

Biological Environment

The office has other similar offices in the vicinity and has mixed hardwood forest behind it and on one side. Urban/suburban wildlife is present, including mallard ducks, woodchucks, porcupine, chipmunks, and squirrels.

Socioeconomic Environment

This site is in Knox County, adjacent to Rockland. Knox County is the most densely populated of the three counties. Its median household income is below Maine's average and slightly below Lincoln County's, but higher than Waldo County's. The median housing value is higher than Maine's average but between the two counties. It has more manufacturing, retail and accommodation and foodservice sales than either of the other two counties.

Archaeological and Historical Environment

No significant historical or archaeological resources are known at this site, and are also unknown for a currently unknown possible future lease site. Since no Service construction is contemplated in this alternative, no archaeological studies would be needed for this alternative.

Alternative B. Round Top Farm, Damariscotta

Physical Environment

This site is an old farm surrounded by rolling hayfields along a brackish river. Soils are irrelevant, as the buildings are served by a sewer system.

Maps found on the Federal Emergency Management Agency website show this parcel has a small area along the river inside of the Special Flood Hazard Zone (100 year probability flood), but the buildings are located well clear of this zone.

Biological Environment

Urban/suburban wildlife species are present, such as skunks, foxes, raccoons, squirrels, and deer. Because of the river, ospreys, herons, ducks and an occasional bald eagle may be seen. Bobolinks and perhaps other grassland birds nest in the hayfields, which are not cut until after July 15.

Socioeconomic Environment

Damariscotta is in Lincoln County. Although its median income is very similar to the state average, Lincoln County shows a lower poverty rate, a higher median home value, and a greater increase in employment between 2000 and 2006.

Archaeological and Historical Resources

Necessary renovations would not disturb soils at the site, so no impacts on archaeological resources are anticipated. The farm structures were built in the 1800s but have not been evaluated for potential listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The owners and community wish to preserve the historic look of the buildings, which can be accommodated regardless of their National Register status.

Alternative C. Old County Road, Rockport

Physical Environment

The site contains a fair amount of ledge. This parcel contains Tunbridge-Lyman fine sandy loams with a 3-8% slope in the front of the lot and Lyman-Rock outcrop Tunbridge complex 8-45% slopes in the back; these soils are rated "severe: depth to rock" for septic tank absorption fields (SCS, 1983).

Old County Road is elevated well above the coast and this whole parcel is not near any Special Flood Hazard Zone (100 year probability flood).

Biological Environment

This site has a mix of hardwood forest, old field, garden and lawn. Urban/suburban wildlife species are present, such as skunks, foxes, raccoons, squirrels, and deer.

Socioeconomic Environment

This site is in Knox County, adjacent to Rockland. Knox County is the most densely populated of the three counties. Its median household income is below Maine's average and slightly below Lincoln County's, but higher than Waldo County's. The median housing value is higher than Maine's average but between the two counties. It has more manufacturing, retail and accommodation and foodservice sales than either of the other two counties.

Archaeological and Historical Resources

This property's woodland was cleared in the 1930s or 1940s and a home, garden and orchard were developed on it. No significant historical or archaeological resources are known at this site. However, unrecorded archaeological resources may be present and archaeological studies may be needed for facilities proposed here under Alternative C and also in other alternatives.

Alternative D. Commercial Building, Rockland (Service's Preferred Alternative)

Physical Environment

This building exists on .6 acres in a residential/commercial mixed zone in Rockland. Soils are irrelevant, as the buildings are served by a sewer system. Maps found on the Federal Emergency Management Agency website show this building located near but outside of the Special Flood Hazard Zone (100 year probability flood).

Biological Environment

The building is surrounded by parking lots, with small amounts of grass and horticultural specimens. Only limited numbers of suburban wildlife would visit this site.

Socioeconomic Environment

Rockland is in Knox County. Knox County is the most densely populated of the three counties. Its median household income is below Maine's average and slightly below Lincoln County's, but higher than Waldo County's. The median housing value is higher than Maine's average but between the two counties. It has more manufacturing, retail and accommodation and foodservice sales than either of the other two counties.

Archaeological and Historical Resources

Two structures that have been incorporated into this building were probably built in the late 1800s, and retain a historic look on the exterior, but the insides have been completely renovated and modernized and the exteriors connected by a modern building in antique style. They are not on the National Register of Historic Places and have not been evaluated for listing. It is uncertain whether any archaeological resources exist on this site, though some damage presumably would have occurred to such sites during successive episodes of construction. The only anticipated renovation with any potential to affect archaeological resources at this location is the expansion of parking space.

Alternative E. Commercial Building, Lincolnville Beach

Physical Environment

This existing building has an existing private well and septic system on site. This parcel is quite elevated and not in the Special Flood Hazard Zone (100 year probability flood).

Biological Environment

The building is on a three-acre parcel, with Route 1 in front and residential housing behind it accessed by a different street. The parcel is mostly wooded, but due to its location, only limited numbers of suburban wildlife would visit this site.

Socioeconomic Environment

Lincolnville is in Waldo County. Waldo is the poorest county of the three, with a poverty level more than 2% higher than the state average and roughly 4% higher than the other two counties. It has also had a lower job growth rate than other areas in Maine.

Archaeological and Historical Resources

One building on this site was built in the 1920s and the other is recent construction. Any archaeological resources that may have existed on this site would likely have been destroyed during the newer building's construction. The 1920s building has been heavily modernized and does not appear eligible for National Register of Historic places listing.

Alternative F. Purchase Land and Build On Route 1 in Searsport

Physical Environment

Maps found on the Federal Emergency Management Agency website show these parcels have a small area along the coast inside of the Special Flood Hazard Zone (100 year probability flood), but there is plenty of room to site buildings clear of this zone.

Biological Environment

These are large wooded parcels, bounded on the west by Route 1, the east by Penobscot Bay, and similar large lots with residences to the north and south. Inventories have not been completed, but wildlife and birds typical of mixed hardwood forests, similar to those found on Sears Island described in slightly more detail below, are likely present.

Socioeconomic Environment

Searsport and Northport are both in Waldo County. Waldo is the poorest county of the three, with a poverty level more than 2% higher than the state average and roughly 4% higher than the other two counties. It has also had a lower job growth rate than other areas in Maine.

Archaeological and Historical Resources

It is unknown whether any historic or cultural resources are likely to occur on this site; an archaeological and historic inventory would have to be completed prior to choosing where on the property to site the building.

Alternative G. Sears Island, Searsport

Physical Environment

Sears Island has glacial till over bedrock. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service's website, the soils in the northeast quadrant are Peru-Marlow-Brayton Association. These soils are rated "severe" for the creation of dwellings with basements and septic systems due to wetness and slow percolation rates.

Maps found on the Federal Emergency Management Agency website show this parcel has a small area along the coast inside of the Special Flood Hazard Zone (100 year probability flood), but there is plenty of room to site buildings clear of this zone.

Biological Environment

Sears Island hosted European settlers before 1775 and a farm was operated there from 1797 to 1922, with 740 of its 940 acres in fields and pastures in 1880. Farming was abandoned in 1922 and reverted to second-growth forests. There are ordinary hardwood (red maple, paper birch, red oak, and white ash), softwood (red spruce, balsam fir, tamarack and white pine) and mixed stands. There are also shrubby fields, fern meadows and grassy meadows. There are also some limited dune grasslands. There are forested seepage wetlands perched on hardpan scattered throughout the forests; 73 wetlands, ranging from 0.05 acre to about 23 acres total about 223 acres (St. Hilaire, 2007).

The 1987 Penobscot Bay Conservation Plan drafted by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, designated the area including northeast Sears Island and the east side of the causeway to be rated Class A (statewide significance) due to its significant waterfowl use during multiple seasons, shorebird use during migration, and post-dispersal use by terns and osprey. Recommended guidelines for Class A areas are that existing habitat not be degraded through alteration or development and that the level and intensity of existing uses not increase (St. Hilaire, 2007).

Five species of amphibians, four species of reptiles, 22 probable resident mammals, and 142 species of birds have been recorded from the island. There is a bald eagle nest on the island, and the ribbon snake, a Maine Special Concern species, was recorded in 1974 (St. Hilaire, 2007).

Socioeconomic Environment

Searsport is in Waldo County. Waldo is the poorest county of the three, with a poverty level more than 2% higher than the state average and roughly 4% higher than the other two counties. It has also had a lower job growth rate than other areas in Maine.

Archaeological and Historical Resources

Several archaeological sites are recorded on the island, but in locations where there would be no construction impacts from the proposed project. The State Historic Preservation Officer has not designated any of the sites eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. However, studies in search of unrecorded archaeological sites might still be needed within the specific footprint area of the headquarters and education center.

CHAPTER 4. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter discusses the positive and negative consequences of each alternative. The following analysis will compare each alternative's:

- Fit to basic site criteria, including cost and construction impacts
- Effectiveness - which site/bldg best meets our needs/objectives?
- Environmental Impact –what are the positive and negative impacts to the host community?

For ease of comparison, a ranking system has been devised and the summary of the analysis is presented in Table 2 below.

Fit to Basic Site Criteria

As previously discussed, basic site criteria were outlined in the CCP. Since sites were selected to meet those criteria, all of the alternatives reasonably fit the criteria. The criteria that all alternatives fit equally well were:

- no changes in zoning are required, or changes would not result in protracted conflict;
- is consistent with the neighborhood, e.g. would have limited impact on neighbors;
- has good accessibility to utilities that do not require costly upgrades (cost of building septic system included in costs of developing site);
- has good access to emergency services;
- has minimal to no hazardous materials or contaminants;
- has safe ingress and egress, or development of such is reasonable;
- can accommodate a handicapped-accessible building for Service staff, Friends Group and partners, as well as educational and interpretive facility (costs of adding accessibility added into costs of developing site);
- can accommodate anticipated visitation with minimal adverse impact; and
- can support construction of a facility modeled on the principles of sustainable design, (or can be retrofitted to accommodate) such things as active and passive solar, and a state-of-the-art septic system and well.

There was variation in how well the alternatives fit the remaining basic site criteria; each alternative's fit to the remaining criteria is numerically rated in items 1-7 in Table 2 below. Criteria 1-5 are self-explanatory except to note that the proximity to water mentioned in the CCP as "on the waterfront" was clarified to be proximity to the ocean in item 2.

Development impacts, which CCP criteria mention should be minimal, are rated in item 6. When a new building is built, ground-disturbing activities are required to clear the site, excavate the foundation, create a septic field, and create parking. Despite careful attention to Best Management Practices during this disturbance, some erosion and sedimentation can occur when rain washes over the disturbed soil. Native vegetation is lost temporarily over the entire construction site and lost forever in the footprint of the building. Invasive plant species may be introduced, either from seeds on construction equipment or in fill, or simply due to soil disturbance.

Alternatives A, B and E would involve the least construction impacts, since they involve very little construction (existing buildings with existing sewage treatment and parking). Alternative D would involve some slight impacts to soils during construction of additional parking spaces on a flat, small lot across the street (part of the acquired property). The vegetation on this lot is lawn and horticultural shrubs, so no native habitat would be impacted.

Alternative C, F and G would require extensive soil disturbance to clear the site, excavate a foundation, create a septic field (which might be challenging on these sites due to soil constraints) and create parking. In addition, Alternative C might involve some necessary blasting of the rock ledge. In these alternatives, native vegetation would be cleared temporarily over a two to three acre area, and permanently lost under an acre or two of access road, building and parking lots. The threat of introducing invasives is relatively greater to the more intact forests of F and G; C already has many invasive species on the property.

No wetlands would be impacted by Alternatives A, B, D, or E, since no construction would occur and these parcels have no wetlands near the existing buildings. Alternative C has a pond, but this could be easily avoided.

Sears Island (G) is known to have a great number of wetlands that would need to be avoided during the siting and construction of the building. The properties of F have not yet been surveyed for vernal pools or other wetlands, but this would be done prior to siting the building and beginning construction, to avoid and minimize impacts.

Wildlife would generally be impacted proportionally to the loss of native vegetation, and the amount of non-native invasive plants introduced, although certain species could be driven away by fragmentation of the woods and the increased human activity at the site. Since these sites are so close to busy Route 1, and are generally in fairly developed areas, this is felt to be a minor impact. Alternatives F and G would have the largest impact on wildlife habitat and wildlife.

There are no known federally-listed species on any of these sites.

No archaeological resources would be impacted by A, B, or E, since no construction would occur in areas not already impacted by previous construction. Alternatives C, D, F, and G may require survey for undiscovered archaeological resources, but survey for D would likely be far less extensive than for C, F, or G. Only B and D have structures with any potential for National Register of Historic Places listing, but if they proved eligible it is expected that renovations could be designed to be compatible with their historic character.

Cost estimates were discussed in Chapter 2 and ranked in item 7 in Table 2 below.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness is the measure of how well a particular alternative could help us meet the goals and objectives set forth in our CCP. Goal 6 is to “Provide enjoyment and promote stewardship of coastal Maine wildlife and their habitats by providing priority wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities.” Objectives relevant to a coastal education center include:

providing 25% of school children within 15 miles of each office one environmental education program each year; and ensuring that 90% of refuge visitors will be able to name the Service as the agency managing the Refuge and identify at least one important Refuge habitat type and relate its significance to migratory birds and other native wildlife.

The first objective is relatively straight forward; the alternative that is located closest to the highest school populations would be the most effective in reaching that objective. The indicator that can be used is school populations within 15 miles of the site. This indicator is rated in item 8 in Table 2 below.

The second objective is more difficult. At most refuges, visitors are attracted to the refuge itself, and stop in to a visitors center on site to be oriented to the visit they are about to make to the refuge land. Maine Coastal Islands is very different. Half the Refuge's acreage is on offshore islands, inaccessible to most visitors except a few islands that are accessed by tour boats or kayaks. In addition, all islands with colonial nesting seabirds are closed April through August and islands with nesting eagles are closed from mid-February to mid-May. The challenge here is not to simply orient the visitor, but to somehow simulate a visit to a place that most refuge "visitors" may not ever actually visit. The coastal education center must be a destination in and of itself, and visitors to the center must be given an experience that simulates a visit to the islands, in order to introduce these globally significant habitats to them. Therefore, the education center visitor is a refuge visitor, and the challenge is to attract as many visitors as possible to the center. Indicators that can be used to measure the number of visitors that might be attracted to a site include: number of residents within 10 miles of the center, number of people currently passing the site in cars, and the number of people attending events in the town. The number of residents is directly proportional to the number of students, and the number of people attending events is not a predictably correlated with center visitation. The selected indicator, the traffic count on the nearest main road, is rated in item 9 in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2. RANKING OF ALTERNATIVES

		Alternatives						
Pts	Criteria to be Ranked	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
		No Action	Damariscotta	Old County Road, Rockport	Rockland	Lincolnville	Searsport	Sears Island
	1. Proximity to Route 1	n/a						
5	On Route 1					5	5	
3	Visible or within .5 miles of Route 1				3			
1	Within 1.5 miles of Route 1		1	1				1
	2. Proximity to the ocean	n/a						
5	Ocean front and access						5	5
3	Near ocean				3			
1	Distant ocean view		0	1		1		
	3. Central location for management of mid-coast operations							
5	Within 5 miles of Rockland boat ramp	5		5	5			
3	Within 15 miles of Rockland boat ramp					3		
1	Within 30 miles of Rockland boat ramp		1				0	0
	4. Readily available outdoor environment for programming	n/a						
5	Plentiful, trails and access already exist		5					
3	Plentiful, access improvements needed			3			3	3
1	Limited, but sites nearby				1	0		
	5. Service-owned, or willing seller							
5	Available as a bargain sale			5	5			
3	Available at fair market value					3	3	
1	Favorable long-term lease	0	1					1

Pts	Criteria to be Ranked	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
		No Action	Damariscotta	Old County Road, Rockport	Rockland	Lincolnville	Searsport	Sears Island
	6. Development Impacts							
5	Building(s) exist	5	5		5	5		
3	New building on impacted site			3				
1	New building in natural area						1	1
	7. Cost	n/a						
5	Less than \$2.5 million		5		5	5		
3	\$2.5- 5.5 million			3				3
1	Greater than \$5.5 million						1	
	8. Number of school children within 15 miles ¹	n/a						
5	More than 6,500				5			
3	5,500-6,500		3	3		3	3	
1	Less than 5,500							1
	9. Average daily # cars ²	n/a						
5	Greater than 12,500						5	5
3	7,000-12,500				3	3		
1	Less than 7,000		1	1				
45	Total Points	10	22	25	35	28	26	20

¹ Data obtained from the Maine Department of Education, Maine Educational Data Management System, database query of 2005 enrollment data.

² From Maine Department of Transportation website, 2007 Maine Transportation Count Book

Discussion of Ranking Results

Alternative D. Commercial Building, Rockland (Service's Preferred Alternative)

The Rockland Commercial Building scores the highest number of points (35 out of 45). It is located in a highly visible area, with many cars passing nearby and within walking distance of a busy downtown area that holds many large events; many tourists stay in downtown Rockland for several days to go to the events or visit the several museums in the area. The building has a nice view of the ocean and is close to a walking trail along the waterfront. The location is close to the Rockland boat launch and the Rockport parcel that can accommodate boat storage, and is centrally located to many partners in the mid-coast; this works well to support all the operations of the refuge's mid-coast office. By allowing the staff to spend most of their time in the same building, it also helps to integrate the refuge's various programs.

Rockland has the greatest population of residents and school children nearby. Although the site has no room for outdoor activities, an oceanfront boardwalk trail is nearby and programs can be held at the nearby Rockport parcel. The building is otherwise ideal for environmental education programs as it has exhibit space and 2 classrooms. The building is for sale (therefore can be owned in fee by the Service) and the price is very reasonable, especially considering the large square footage, excellent condition, and fact that the building is already universally accessible, and has sprinkler and security systems in place. The Friends of Maine Seabird Islands are willing to assist the Service in purchasing the building and holding it until the Service has the funds to purchase it from the Friends. Although not the least expensive alternative, it is the least expensive fee ownership option. The use of an existing building avoids almost all of the construction impacts and habitat disturbance, fragmentation and destruction involved in building on a natural area.

Alternative E. Commercial Building, Lincolnville Beach

This site received 28 out of 45 points. Although in a very good highly visible location on Route 1, the building is in a lower traffic area than Rockland or Searsport. It is very reasonable in cost, but the building itself is somewhat small. While it has adequate office and exhibit space, it lacks the classroom space available at Damariscotta and Rockland. The site also has extremely limited access to the outdoors. Using existing buildings here again avoids almost all of the construction impacts and habitat disturbance, fragmentation and destruction involved in building on a natural area.

Alternative F. Purchase Land and Build On Route 1 in Searsport

This alternative scores 26 out of 45 points. The ability to build in a good location allows an ideal building and outdoor access. The biggest drawbacks are the expense (this is the most expensive alternative due to the extra \$1million for the cost of the land), and the development impacts inherent in developing a driveway, parking area, large building and trails in an undeveloped parcel.

Alternative C. Old County Road, Rockport

This alternative scored 25 out of 45 points. Its strengths are that it could be Service-owned, (since the Friends of Maine Coastal Islands would donate it to the Service) and it would provide enough room for a building and trails with a view in the centrally-located Rockland area. Its

weakness is the out-of-the-way location. A weakness that did not greatly affect the ranking, but could be presently underestimated in the estimated construction costs and impacts, is the amount of ledge on the property, which could make providing an adequate foundation and septic system very difficult and costly.

Alternative B. Round Top Farm, Damariscotta

This alternative ranked 22 out of 45. Although the price, partnership, and outdoor environment are attractive, this alternative is not ideally located on Route 1, near the Rockland boat ramp, nor on the ocean. The existing buildings could be adapted to be suitable and do allow construction impacts to be minimized. The Service cannot own the buildings or site.

Alternative G. Sears Island, Searsport

This alternative scored 20 out of 45. Although Searsport has the highest amount of traffic passing on nearby Route 1, this is offset by the lower number of residents and school children in the area. The strengths of the site are the opportunity to build an ideal building on a site with ocean access for programming; the weaknesses are the location away from the Rockland boat ramp, and significant construction impacts to this natural site. It would be very difficult to build a federal building on land the Service does not own.

Alternative A. No Action

This alternative does not satisfy the intent of the project, either to move staff into a Service-owned building or to provide a platform for the refuge's environmental education and outreach projects. It cannot even be scored in many categories, as no visitors would be served by this alternative. It received the lowest number of points (10 out of 45).

Other Impacts

Recreation

The creation of trails at Old County Road in all alternatives and on Sears Island in Alternative G would provide new opportunities for outdoor recreation. Other alternatives would make use of existing facilities and recreational amenities.

Environmental education and interpretation programs

The creation of a center for the refuge would provide a platform for the refuge to launch an environmental education program and also offer interpretive programs. If the refuge's objective of providing 25% of school children within 15 miles of the office one environmental education program each year is realized, between 1,145 and 1,680 children will benefit from these programs each year. In addition, hundreds of residents and thousands of tourists will be introduced to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuges, and come to understand more about the wildlife and habitats of the Maine coast, especially seabirds.

Alternative A. No Action, would not provide these benefits; all of the other alternatives would provide the benefits of environmental education and outreach programming to school children, residents and tourists.

Economic Impacts: Tax Revenue

Refuge Revenue Sharing Program

Some National Wildlife Refuges generate revenue from pre-existing mineral leases, timber harvests or permit fees. These funds are pooled nationally and then distributed to communities to help make up for the loss of tax revenues that occurs when the Service buys land and that land becomes tax-exempt. Payments are at the rate of $\frac{3}{4}$ of 1% of the appraised market value of the property (not necessarily the same as the assessed value in the tax rolls); properties are re-appraised by the Service approximately every 5 years. Congress may appropriate funds to make up any shortfall in the revenue sharing fund, but the fund has not been fully funded for a number of years. In 2008, payments were 41.66% of what the full amounts would have been. For more details, see <http://www.fws.gov/realty/RRS.html>.

Alternative A. No Action

The Service would lease this site, so no refuge revenue sharing would be paid to the hosting municipality, although taxes would be paid by the building owner.

Alternative B. Round Top Farm, Damariscotta

The Service would not own this site, so no refuge revenue sharing would be paid to the Town of Damariscotta. Since the Damariscotta River Association is a non-profit organization, there are no taxes currently paid on this property.

Alternative C. Old County Road, Rockport

Since this property would become part of the refuge under all alternatives to accommodate the boats if not the center, the Town of Rockport will receive refuge revenue sharing payments in the future. In 2008, the property and buildings were assessed at \$252,000, and the taxes paid were \$2,628.24 (mill rate 11.28%). If the assessed value is close to the market value appraisal, and Congress fully funded the Refuge Revenue Sharing Program, the payment would be about \$1,890, but if funding remains near the 2008 level (only 41.66% of full funding) payments would be \$787. Payment levels vary somewhat from year to year. The Service does not pay Revenue Sharing for the value of government improvements placed on the property after purchase, so the value of a new boat garage or headquarters and coastal education center would not be appraised nor increase the payments.

Alternative D. Commercial Building, Rockland (Service's Preferred Alternative)

The commercial building in Rockland is assessed at \$1,638,700 and 2008 taxes were \$29,005 (mill rate 17.7%). If the assessed value is close to the market value appraisal, and if Congress fully funded the program, the Refuge Revenue Sharing payment would be about \$12,290, but the program was only funded at 41.66% in 2008. A comparable year's payment would be \$5,120. If the market value appraisal is closer to the asking price, the payment would be approximately \$2,171. Payment levels vary somewhat from year to year, and could go up in future as market values increase, or down if the shortfall in the program increases.

Alternative E. Commercial Building, Lincolnville Beach

Taxes on this building were \$8,202.87 in 2008-2009. The assessed value is \$701,000. If the appraised market value is close to this assessed figure and Congress fully funded the program, the Refuge Revenue Sharing payment would be \$5,257.50, but the program was only funded at 41.66% in 2008. A comparable year's payment would be \$2,190.27. Payment levels vary somewhat from year to year. Payment levels vary somewhat from year to year, and could go up in future as market values increase, or down if the shortfall in the program increases.

Alternative F. Searsport Taxes on this parcel were approximately \$5,000 in 2008-2009. The appraised value of the parcel is unknown, but the Refuge Revenue Sharing payment is likely to be in the range of \$2,000. Payment levels vary somewhat from year to year, and could go up in future if the market value of the land increases, or down if the shortfall in the program increases. The Service does not pay Revenue Sharing for the value of government improvements placed on the property after purchase, so the value of a new boat garage or headquarters and coastal education center would not be appraised nor increase the payments.

Alternative G. Sears Island, Searsport

Since this area is owned by the State of Maine and managed by the Maine Department of Transportation, no taxes are currently being paid to the Town of Searsport. Since this property would not be sold to the Service, no Refuge Revenue Sharing payments would be made.

Economic Impacts: Benefits to host community

Benefits to the host community include increased visitation and/or longer stays in the immediate area, with the attendant likelihood of additional spending in the local area.

Alternative A. No Action

No additional visits would be generated under this alternative, so no economic benefit to the community is expected to occur.

Alternatives B-G.

An economic analysis was prepared by Charles Lawton of Planning Decisions, Incorporated in the report "Sears Island: Options for the Future." The methodology derived visitation estimates based on visitation at nearby state parks, and based spending outside the center by local citizens, existing tourists, and entirely new tourists (who come specifically to see the center or extend their stays due to the center) on the Longwoods Report (Longwood International Travel and Tourism in Maine, 2005). This report estimated that 22,000 visitors per year would visit the center and that the total annual "sales impact" (includes direct spending on retail, food, transportation, recreation, accommodations, a multiplier and an indirect sales impact) of \$1.7 million dollars. In addition, the report said that creation of new jobs to service the facility might inject approximately \$200,000 into the local economy.

Although it would probably vary slightly from community to community, an estimated economic benefit of this magnitude would likely be felt in any of the community that would host the

center; since so many assumptions are involved, it is difficult to fine-tune it to the specifics of each community.

Economic Impacts: Conclusion

Generally, towns would either lose tax income that would not be fully offset by the Refuge Revenue Sharing Program (Alternatives C, D, E, and F) or there would be change in their tax situation, as they do not now collect taxes on the parcels (Alternatives B, G). However, in every case, the magnitude of the estimated benefit to the local economy from visitors is large, so this would offset the loss in tax income.

Cumulative Impacts

The development of the preferred alternative, as well as Alternatives B and E, would incur little in the way of cumulative impacts, as the buildings already have been built and no new services will be required; construction impacts due to the addition of the boat storage building on the Old County Road would be the only impacts that would add to other development occurring regardless of this project in Knox County. Alternatives C, F and G would have greater development impacts that would add to other development already occurring in their areas. As development increases in general, additional traffic is probably the most immediately noticeable effect. Additional demands for services would also increase. This project, by siting near an artery road and not adding children that require significant services like schools, should not present significant cumulative impacts.

CHAPTER 5. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION WITH OTHERS

From March 2000 to September 2004 there were numerous meetings, including 4 public hearings in different locations around the state, discussing the Comprehensive Conservation Plan that laid out the concept of a mid-coast headquarters and coastal education center, included the criteria used in this assessment, and mentioned the need for this assessment.

In early March, 2008, Refuge Manager Charles Blair (who had left to accept another position), incoming Refuge Manager Beth Goettel, and several members of the Damariscotta River Association met to tour their buildings and grounds, and to talk about this alternative.

On June 22, 2008, Refuge Manager Beth Goettel made a presentation about the Refuge at the Damariscotta River Association's annual meeting; the possibility of a visitor center in Damariscotta was briefly discussed.

On June 24, 2008, Walt Quist, Chief of Realty for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Northeast Region, Bill Porter, also from Realty, and Kevin Ortyl, a Refuge Division engineer, toured the Damariscotta buildings and also visited Sears Island.

On February 10, 2009, the Friends of Maine Seabird Islands discussed how to assist Refuge staff in finding alternative locations to be considered for a headquarters and coastal education center. A subcommittee was formed.

On March 10, 2009 the Friends of Maine Seabird Islands subcommittee had reviewed all commercially available sites and recommended that the Service consider the Rockland site.

On March 16, 2009, Refuge Manager Beth Goettel met with members of the Maine Department of Transportation, the Maine Department of Conservation, the Governor's office, and the Town of Searsport. The possibility of locating the headquarters and coastal education center on Sears Island was discussed.

On April 15, Refuge Manager Beth Goettel, Refuge Supervisor Janet Kennedy, and Chief of Refuges for the Northeast Region Tony Leger met with members of the Damariscotta River Association in Hadley, Massachusetts to discuss the Damariscotta site.

On April 23, 2008, Refuge Manager Beth Goettel met with members of the Friends of Sears Island in Searsport to discuss Sears Island.

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APPENDIX A. RELEVANT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FROM APRIL 2005 MAINE COASTAL ISLANDS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE FINAL COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN

Goal 6

Provide enjoyment and promote stewardship of coastal Maine wildlife and their habitats by providing priority wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities

Objective 6.1

Environmental Education

25% of school children within 15 miles of each office participate in one environmental education program each year and identify an action to undertake in their own community to support wildlife conservation

Objective 6.2

Environmental Interpretation

90% of refuge visitors will be able to name the Service as the agency managing the Refuge and identify at least one important Refuge habitat type and relate its significance to migratory birds and other native wildlife

Objective 6.3

Environmental Interpretation – Commercial Tours

90% of 27,000 visitors that take commercial seabird boat tours from Bar Harbor (to Petit Manan Island) and out of Jonesport and Cutler (to Machias Seal Island) will understand the value of Maine's coastal islands for nesting seabirds and be able to identify the Refuge's role in seabird conservation at the conclusion of their trip

Goal 8

Communicate and collaborate with local communities, Federal, State, local and Tribal representatives, and other organizations throughout coastal Maine to further the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Objective 8.3

Community Outreach

65% of adults contacted who reside within 10 miles of refuge lands will know the refuge exists, that it is part of a national system of refuges, and can identify its management priorities for migratory bird conservation and seabirds.

APPENDIX B. INTRA-SERVICE SECTION 7 BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION FORM

Originating Person: Beth Goettel
Telephone Number: 207-236-6970 ext. 12
Date: July 20, 2009

I. Region: 5 (Northeast Region)

II. Service Activity (Program): Refuges

III. Pertinent Species and Habitat

- A. Listed Species and/or their critical habitat within the action area: None
- B. Proposed species and/or proposed critical habitat within the action area: None
- C. Candidate species within the action area: None
- D. Include species/habitat occurrences on a map. N/A

IV. Geographic area or station name and action: Maine Coastal Islands NWR, establish headquarters and coastal education center.

V. Location (attach map): Service preferred alternative is existing building in City of Rockland. *Alternative D on larger map of coast. Detailed location on 2nd map*

- A. Ecoregion Number and Name:
- B. County and State: Knox County, Maine
- C. Latitude and Longitude: 44 06' 00"
69 06' 25"
- D. Distance to nearest town: 0.1 mile to the downtown commercial district
- E. Species/habitat occurrence: No federally listed or candidate species are known to occur on the preferred or any of the alternative sites.

VI. Description of proposed action:

Proposed purchase, parking lot construction on suburban lot, and interior modifications to commercial building in Rockland, Knox County, Maine to create headquarters and coastal education center for Maine Coastal Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

VII. Determination of effects:

No federally listed or candidate species occur at the proposed or alternative sites and so will not be affected by construction.

VIII. Effect determination and response requested: N/A (*concurrency optional)

A. Listed species/designated critical habitat:

Determination: Response requested
 no effect/no adverse modification MM*Concurrence
 may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect Concurrence
 species/adversely modify critical habitat
 may affect and is likely to affect species/adversely Formal Consultation
 modify critical habitat

B. Proposed species/proposed critical habitat:

Determination: Response requested
 no effect/no adverse modification *Concurrence
 is likely to jeopardize proposed species/adversely Conference
 modify proposed critical habitat

C. Candidate species

Determination: Response requested
 no effect *Concurrence
 is likely to jeopardize candidate species Conference

Beth Spetzel
 Project biologist (Requestor)

7/21/09
 Date

IX. Reviewing ESFO Evaluation:

A. Concurrence X Nonconcurrency _____
 B. Formal consultation required _____
 C. Conference required _____
 D. Informal conference required _____
 E. Remarks: _____

Mae McCallough
 Endangered Species Biologist
 Maine Field Office

7/30/09
 Date

Luuk-Nordt
 Supervisor
 Maine Field Office

7/30/09
 Date