

[From Fall 1994]

Moist Soil Management

Since its establishment in 1943, the refuge has provided habitat for migratory bird species. As part of providing habitat, the refuge has managed various water impoundments (moist soil management units) for the benefit of many species of water birds. This year, the refuge has begun the long awaited process of cleaning out the borrow ditches that run along side the roads and dikes of the impoundments. Over the years, the ditches have become filled with silt and other materials. As a result, the draw-down process, which is so vital during early spring, has become significantly impeded in many impoundments.

Water levels in the impoundments are lowered during early spring, to allow various plants to grow and to provide shorebird habitat. The plants then provide the food that waterfowl rely upon during the winter months. The draw-down also serves to expose moist soil areas within the impoundments. These areas are important because they provide key feeding areas for the many species of shorebirds that use the refuge during the summer months.

In addition, alternate smaller ditches have been placed in Black Duck Marsh and North Wash Flats. Black Duck Marsh, which is the first impoundment visitors encounter on the left side of Beach Road as they drive toward the beach, characteristically drains slowly. Subsequently, four other impoundments which are interconnected to Black Duck Marsh also drain slowly. The added ditching will not only facilitate draw-downs but also will provide for better flooding.

North Wash Flats is one of the three critical piping plover nesting areas. However, the area is highly subject to flooding. The extensive ditching within North Wash Flats should substantially reduce the incidence of flooding. Therefore, the number of piping plover nests which are lost to flooding within this area should be reduced as well.

These efforts are another example of our commitment to maintaining and improving habitat for wildlife so that citizens can enjoy the wildlife and wild areas on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge for many generations to come.

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