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Field Work for GIS Pilot Yields New Findings

Chincoteague NWR has embarked on a pilot Geographic Information System (GIS) project in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy, the National Park Service, and the National Biological Service. The Nature Conservancy has developed a system in which to classify vegetation called the Terrestrial Community Alliances System (TCAS). In conjunction with field work, a vegetative-cover type map can be generated using the alliance system and a computer-based GIS.

With support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Washington office, Chincoteague NWR was chosen to be the first refuge mapped in this pilot project. The field work for the project was completed in October and resulted in many new findings. During the field work, at least eight occurrences of communities considered significant or rare by the Division of Natural Heritage were noted. In addition, one plant species new to Virginia and populations of 11 species monitored as rare in the state, by the Heritage Program, were documented.

The mapping of the refuge will make it easier for staff biologists and managers to develop management plans and to conduct research. The rare communities and plant species will become a part of the priority list of protected areas on the refuge.

*Stephanie Brady,
Refuge Operations Specialist - CNWR*