



Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Winter 2007 – Planning Update No. 3

Progress Report and Visitor Center Announcement

Greetings!

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) is providing this update to keep you informed about the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) preparation process for the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex). The CCP will guide the management of the four refuges that make up the Desert Complex for the next 15 years. As part of this process, we have been seeking input from the interested public, Native American tribes, other conservation organizations, and local, state and federal governmental agencies.

This third *Planning Update* has four purposes:

- 1) Report on the progress of the development of the CCP/EIS for the Desert Complex.
- 2) Provide information on the proposed visitor center at the Desert National Wildlife Range.
- 3) Highlight volunteer activities throughout the Desert Complex.
- 4) Encourage you to continue to provide input during the development of the CCP/EIS.



Pahrnanagat National Wildlife Refuge offers spectacular scenic views and excellent wildlife viewing opportunities.

Thanks for Sharing

We would like to express our thanks to everyone who continues to be a part of the CCP/EIS planning process. In the last Update, we presented the results of the public scoping process and summarized the comments that were received from the public, groups and agencies. We also published the Draft Refuge Vision Statements and asked for your comments on these "visions" for the future management of your refuges.

Incorporating the issues raised during scoping, Refuge staff have developed draft management alternatives for each of the four refuges. The alternatives include management actions to meet the wildlife, habitat and visitor services goals established for each of the refuges.

Now, we are in the process of analyzing the impacts of these potential actions on the environment (natural and

man-made). You will have an opportunity to comment on both the management alternatives and the impact assessment during the Draft EIS review.

This *Planning Update* also highlights volunteer activities and announces our decision to prepare a separate environmental assessment covering the proposed new visitor center and administrative office at Desert National Wildlife Refuge. We want you to continue to participate in the management of your National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS).

Linda L. Miller
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CCP/EIS Update

Since the last planning update, significant progress has been made on the CCP/EIS for the Desert Complex. The Service planning team reviewed a preliminary administrative draft of the document in winter 2005-2006. Each of the chapters is being revised to incorporate comments and recommendations from the planning team and is being updated to incorporate new references for the refuges and related planning documents. Examples of new documents include the Ash Meadows NWR Geomorphic and Biological Assessment and the State of Nevada Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The revised document will be reviewed by the

Service and Cooperating Agencies and additional changes will be made, as needed, to produce a public draft CCP/EIS. The public draft document is expected to be published in the spring of 2007. The public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft CCP/EIS document as well as participate in public workshops in the Las Vegas area. Notice of the dates, times, and locations for these meetings will be provided in a subsequent planning update and public notices in local newspapers. Public participation during this period will be key to the development of the CCP.

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT

Interagency Volunteer Program

This past spring the Interagency Volunteer Program (IVP) offered over 22 training classes such as in-depth Interagency Orientation, Hydrology, Desert Ecology, Wildlife, First Aid and much more. The program exceeded volunteer recruitment goals established for five scheduled conservation initiatives over a 12-month period. There were over 12 events and the IVP recruited over 678 volunteers who contributed a total of 3,010 hours. The current number of interagency volunteers in the database stands at 1,350, with a combined hour total of 141,753. An Interagency Volunteer Orientation Manual and training evaluation processes were completed. The IVP is finishing writing a Standard Operating Procedure for our volunteer program that will guide managers on all aspects from recruitment procedures, safety information, agency policy to much more.

Information on upcoming events can be found at www.getoutdoorsnevada.org.

Take Pride in America

The four federal land management agencies in southern Nevada (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service) received the national Take Pride in America Federal Volunteer Program award for the second year on September 14. At the awards ceremony, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne honored volunteers and volunteer programs in the nation for their outstanding contributions towards stewardship of public lands.

Tremendous Volunteer Efforts

Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex volunteers donated over 5,500 hours valued at over \$100,000 to conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the benefit of the American people. This is almost equal to increasing the Complex's existing full-time staff by 20%. Volunteers participated in a variety of projects, including:

- Over 800 hours for Ash Meadows NWR habitat restoration workdays in an effort to recreate historically suitable habitat for the endangered Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish and other species found here and nowhere else in the world, saving the Service more than \$14,000.
- Clearing invasive cattails out of over 2,500 feet of stream channels to restore habitat for the endangered Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish and other T&E Species.
- 60 volunteers and an Eagle Scout donated over 300 hours valued over \$5,400 to cleanup the boundary between the Desert NWR and the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas. 60 cubic yards of waste were removed from this event – this equates to the height of an 18-story building if each cubic yard of waste was piled on top of another.
- 1,000 hours at Pahrnagat NWR managing wildlife and improving habitat.
- 2,000 hours supporting wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities at Pahrnagat NWR.
- Over 750 hours maintaining facilities, roads and structures at Pahrnagat NWR.

For current information, contact the Refuge Managers or the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex at (702) 515-5450.

Proposed Visitor Center at the Desert National Wildlife Refuge

What do you do when you face the possibility of hosting up to one million visitors to a refuge each year? Imagine you are located directly adjacent to the City of Las Vegas, which continues to rank as one of the fastest growing cities in the nation, as well as host to approximately 39 million tourists each year. How about if the refuge is the 1.5 million-acre Desert NWR, the largest refuge in the lower 48 states, and approximately half of that is inaccessible to the public because it is managed as the Nevada Test and Training Range by the U.S. Air Force?

Now consider that the remaining portions of the Refuge are vast and remote, ranging from 2,500 to 10,000 feet in elevation, with temperatures ranging from below freezing in the winter to over 110 degrees in the summer, and having less than 200 miles of road, many of which are barely passable to all but high-clearance, 4-wheel-drive vehicles.

Lastly, the majority of the wildlife are reclusive, hard to spot over such immense areas, and/or nocturnal — as a result, most of the public is unable to experience Desert NWR's fantastic resources!

Potential visitors to Desert NWR could come from Las Vegas as well as tourists comprising millions of visitors from every state in our nation and many other countries. This presents a rare outreach opportunity for the National Wildlife Refuge System. At the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, which, like Desert NWR, is also located at the Las Vegas urban interface and offers a comparable experience, visitation was about 1.2 million last year, with about 350,000 using their visitor center.

Population growth, coupled with increased tourism, brings more demand for the natural desert experience. In the decade of the 1990s, Las Vegas grew by 85 percent! The City of North Las Vegas, which also shares a common boundary with the Desert NWR, grew at a phenomenal rate of nearly 43 percent in the period from April 2000 to July 2004.

As a result, the Clark County School District is now the 5th largest in the nation, with 12 new schools opening in

can take advantage of Las Vegas's highly sophisticated tourism network and well-established service structure to ensure that tourists are well informed about this facility.

While visitors to a refuge are traditionally encouraged to connect with the resources out in nature, due to the extremes in size, location and climate of Desert NWR, a Visitor Center could be the focus of the visitor experience. This would provide interpretation and environmental education exhibits that bring visitors close to unique resources they would rarely see up close and personal in the wild.

Refuge staff have explored opportunities for visitors to connect with Desert NWR's natural and cultural resources in new and exciting ways. A new Visitor Center and associated outdoor facilities are a means to achieve this goal.

Initially, the Visitor Center and associated facilities were going to be evaluated as part of the CCP/EIS process. In order to expedite the review process, the Service has decided to prepare a separate Environmental

Assessment (EA) to comply with NEPA. The EA will evaluate the impacts of developing a visitor center/administrative office and associated interpretive facilities at Corn Creek Field Station.

The Draft Visitor Center EA will be made available to the public for review and comment. It is expected to be available in early 2007. If you wish to be on the mailing list for the document, please contact the Desert NWR Complex office at (702) 515-5450.



Federal lands in southern Nevada host more than 16 million visitors each year. With a population growth of almost 7,000 new residents moving into Clark County each month, planning for the management of increased visitation is important to lessen the impact on the natural resources.

the 2005–2006 school year and 88 new schools projected over the next 10 years. This translates into a real need for outdoor classroom experiences for students to learn about the desert environment.

Fortunately, Desert NWR is already part of a strong visitor information structure. Working with other federal land management agencies and the Outside Las Vegas Foundation, Desert NWR has an opportunity to provide unique education and recreational experiences in southern Nevada. Once the Visitor Center is built, Desert NWR



Please feel free to contact us!

We are available to provide additional information about the refuges' resources, visitor services, and accomplishments to date, and to answer any question about the planning process. Feel free to call, write, e-mail, or come to see us.

If you did not receive this Planning Update through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, please contact us. If you would like to be removed from the list or are receiving multiple copies of these notices, please let us know.



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Or check out the following sites on the Web:

<http://www.fws.gov/desertcomplex>

<http://www.fws.gov/cno/refuges/planning.html>

Please pass this *Planning Update* along to anyone you think might be interested in the planning process. Thank you!