

Planning Update

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment Laramie Plains National Wildlife Refuges

Issue 1, September 2006

The National Wildlife Refuge System

The Laramie Plains national wildlife refuges in Wyoming are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

The Refuge System began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first bird sanctuary and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife.

This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand and became the National Wildlife Refuge System—the largest system of lands in the world dedicated for the conservation of wildlife.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) administers the Refuge System.



Tim McCabe/USFWS

Nesting Western Grebe

Laramie Plains National Wildlife Refuges

The Laramie Plains national wildlife refuges include Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge, Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

- Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge is about 1,166 acres, and is located approximately 6 miles northwest of Laramie, Wyoming. The purpose of the refuge is to provide "a refuge and breeding ground for birds and wild animals." The refuge is made up of three parts arranged in a roughly "L-shaped" pattern, the segments being one-half mile apart.

- Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge is about 1,928 acres, and is located approximately 10 miles southwest of Laramie, Wyoming. The purpose of the refuge is to provide "a refuge and breeding ground for birds and wild animals."

Physical features include Hutton Lake, Rush Lake, Creighton Lake, and Lake George. Bird species that use the refuge during fall and spring migrations include mallard, redhead, teal, northern pintail, great blue heron, night-herons, phalaropes, western grebe, small grebes, bitterns, and black tern.

- Mortensen Lake National Wildlife Refuge is about 1,968 acres, and is located 15 miles southwest of Laramie, Wyoming. The purpose of the refuge is "to conserve fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species."

The refuge supports the only known population of Wyoming toads in existence. The toad was listed as an endangered species in 1984. The toad population at Mortensen Lake was found in 1987.

Physical features include Gibbs Pond and Mortensen, Soda, and Gerber lakes. The Last Chance, Osterman, and South ditches cross the refuge.



USFWS

Red-necked Phalarope

Habitat types include open water, wetland, wet meadow, grassland, sagebrush, and greasewood communities; irrigated pasture; and irrigated cropland.

What is a comprehensive conservation plan?

In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Improvement Act). This legislation provides clear guidance for management of the Refuge System including this new mission statement.

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

The Improvement Act directs the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to the conservation of wildlife and maintenance of the biological integrity of ecosystems.

To support and fulfill this mission, the Improvement Act also requires that, by 2012, the Service will have developed a comprehensive conservation plan for each national wildlife refuge in the Refuge System at the time of the Act.



Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

Mallard Hen

To meet this requirement, the Service has started work on a comprehensive conservation plan for the Laramie Plains national wildlife refuges. This 15-year plan will provide long-range guidance and management direction for all of the refuges' programs. The plan will outline a vision statement and supporting goals, objectives, and strategies. It will be a "living" document that is updated every 15 years.

The accompanying environmental assessment or environmental impact statement (as required by the National Environmental Policy Act) will describe management alternatives considered and their effects on the environment.

In summary, the comprehensive conservation plan will do the following:

1. Outline a vision
2. Guide management decisions
3. Outline goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve the refuges' vision and purposes
4. Provide other agencies and the public with an understanding of the management strategies to be carried out at Laramie Plains national wildlife refuges

What are the steps and completion dates for this planning process?

1. Preplanning, January–March 2006
2. Public involvement, May–October 2006
3. Develop and analyze alternatives for addressing issues and achieving goals, September–December 2006
4. Prepare the draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental document, January–March 2007
5. Review the draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental document, April–August 2007
6. Develop the final comprehensive conservation plan, September–December 2007

How can you participate in this process and provide comments?

The enclosed comment form and return envelope is for you to share your ideas with the planning team. In addition, emails and other written formats will be accepted. All written comments must be postmarked by October 31, 2006 to be considered.

Why did you receive this update?

This planning update is being widely distributed to generate interest in the planning process and collect ideas and thoughts from the public, state and local governments, organizations, and other partners.

You are receiving this update because you were identified as someone who may want to be kept informed or share ideas about the future management of the Laramie Plains national wildlife refuges.

Will you be getting future planning updates?

If you would like to continue to receive planning updates, please complete the enclosed "mailing list consent" form and return it in the envelope provided.

Since this mailing list is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, your permission is needed to place your name on the permanent mailing list. If you do not return this form, the Service will assume that you do not wish to receive any further updates.

Contact Information

Service staff are available to provide additional information about the refuges' history, goals, and accomplishments; and to answer questions about the planning process.

Public comments will be accepted by written letter or email through October 31, 2006 and can be sent to the following postal or electronic addresses or by fax:

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