



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 1, May 2008



Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge is in the initial stage of developing a comprehensive conservation plan. Many issues will be examined during the planning process including options for improving habitat for pronghorn antelope and other native species.
USFWS

Greetings

Over the next few years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will be seeking input from the public, Tribes, and organizations regarding your interests, concerns, and viewpoints about refuge management issues.

The information we receive from you will be helpful during development of a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge).

This is the first in a series of planning updates we will provide to keep you informed and invite your participation in the planning process.

Help Us Plan for the Future

As we begin this planning process, we are provided the opportunity to look at our habitat management and public use programs from fresh perspectives.

Refuge purposes will remain the same for the Sheldon Refuge's CCP. The way we manage and implement actions, however, may change as a result of analyzing current management programs and practices, along with potential new alternatives to meet Refuge purposes, and the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and goals.

We view the CCP process as an opportunity to examine our public

programs, such as fishing, hunting, and environmental education; the location of our facilities such as trails, campgrounds, and signs; and our management of habitats, such as canyons, riparian areas, and sage-steppe uplands.

Public input and feedback is an important part of our CCP process and results in a better plan for the future of the Refuge.

Please provide your ideas, questions, and comments on the issues we should cover in the CCP, by June 30, 2008. More opportunities to provide comments will occur during the CCP planning process. See the CCP planning schedule on page 6.

Please share your ideas with us at the upcoming public open house meetings—see page 7 for details, or by submitting written comments—see back page for contact information.



Maintaining high quality sagebrush-steppe habitat on the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge is important to the survival of the Greater sage grouse and other species.
USFWS

Refuge Overview

The Refuge was established in 1931 for the following purposes.

- To provide habitat for pronghorn antelope, the primary species, and populations of native secondary species (e.g., mule deer, sage-grouse, and song birds) in numbers necessary to maintain a balanced wildlife population.

- To conserve listed endangered or threatened fish, wildlife, and plants.
- For use as an inviolate migratory bird sanctuary.

The Refuge boundary encompasses 572,876 acres of high desert sagebrush-steppe ecosystem in Washoe and Humboldt Counties, Nevada, and Lake County, Oregon (see map). It currently represents

one of the largest, last, and reasonably intact examples of a high desert ecosystem in the Great Basin.

The Refuge provides a variety of vitally important habitats for a host of species found in the high desert including pronghorn antelope, mule deer, greater sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit, migratory birds, desert fishes, desert reptiles, and a range of rare plants and invertebrates.

Preliminary Goals

We have developed preliminary Refuge goals and would like your input on them. Goals are broad statements intended to provide direction on future Refuge management. The following goals are based on the Refuge purposes, and the mission and policies of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Goal 1: Protect and maintain upland habitats characteristic of the Great Basin ecosystem, that support pronghorn antelope, greater sagegrouse, pygmy rabbit, prairie falcon, and other upland species. These habitats include sagebrush-steppe and other shrublands; western juniper woodlands; mountain mahogany woodlands; semidesert grasslands; and cliffs, canyons, and barren lands.

Goal 2: Manage feral horse and burro populations to benefit a diverse assemblage of native plant and wildlife species, habitats, and naturally functioning systems characteristic of the Great Basin ecosystem.

Goal 3: Restore and maintain wetland habitats characteristic of the Great Basin ecosystem that support sandhill crane, western snowy plover, Alvord chub, Lahontan cutthroat trout, yellow-breasted chat and other wetland species. These habitats include wet meadows, springs, streams, intensively-managed marshes, wetland complexes, reservoirs, playas, and riparian and aspen woodlands.

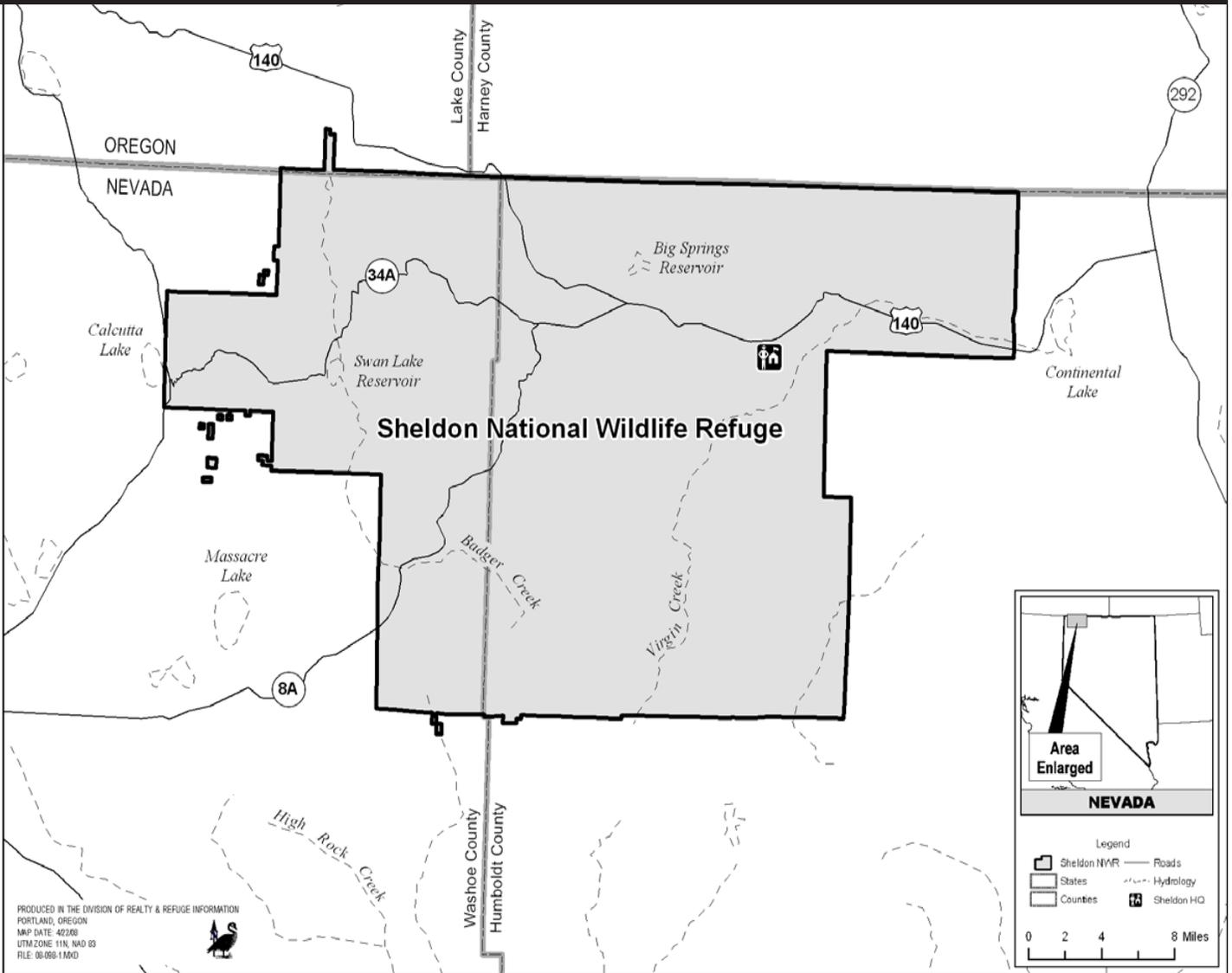
Goal 4: Protect and manage the Refuge's paleontological, prehistoric, and historic resources

to ensure present and future generations have opportunities to recognize the cultural significance of the area's past.

Goal 5: Provide visitors of all interests and abilities opportunities to experience a variety of high quality wildlife-dependent recreational and educational activities in a vast, rugged and remote high desert landscape.

Goal 6: Protect and manage the Refuge's Wilderness Study Areas to maintain wilderness character and values.

Goal 7: Collect scientific information (i.e., inventories, monitoring, research, assessments) necessary to support adaptive management decisions on the Refuge in support of Goals 1-6.



Prairie falcons (below) and other species use the Refuge's narrow canyon habitat and cliffs (left) for hunting and nesting.
USFWS





Scientists have documented 650 plants and 300 vertebrate species occurring on Refuge lands and in Refuge waters including the Lahontan cutthroat trout pictured above. USFWS



The Refuge's vast sagebrush steppe ecosystem pictured above is one of the last, best places for wildlife of the high desert, such as the pygmy rabbit also pictured above. USFWS

<p>Preliminary Issues to be Considered in the Refuge's CCP</p> <p>During the CCP planning process a range of possible management alternatives will be explored and evaluated, including current management practices. The planning team has identified some potential issues to be considered during CCP development. We would like to hear your comments on the following issues, and any other topics of concern, at a series of public meetings we intend to hold in communities near the Refuge (see page 7 for details). If you aren't able to attend one of our public meetings, please submit written comments to the Refuge (see page 8 for contact information).</p>		<p>Camping</p> <p>Currently, there are 12 semi-primitive campgrounds and one highly developed campground available to Refuge visitors. The majority of the semi-primitive campgrounds are located at or near springs and riparian areas, and are primarily used during the hunting season. The close proximity of these campgrounds to water could potentially contaminate water sources, and disturb and displace wildlife from critical habitats. The Virgin Valley Campground is the only highly developed campground on the Refuge. During peak seasons, there is the potential for overcrowding, user conflicts, and overflow camping expanding into undeveloped uplands surrounding the campground. As part of the planning process, we will review the Service's campground policy and develop a strategy that complements public use, Refuge purposes, and biological goals and objectives.</p>
<p>Wildlife and Habitat Management</p> <p>The Refuge is actively managing habitat for pronghorn antelope and other native species which contribute to the biodiversity of the Great Basin ecosystem. Key issues include: (1) invasive species causing deterioration of natural habitats; and (2) degraded riparian habitats caused by past livestock grazing and current grazing by feral horses and burros. We will examine current management practices in the CCP and potential new actions for meeting the Refuge's purposes and trust resource responsibilities, and maintaining and/or restoring biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health.</p>		<p>Wilderness Management</p> <p>In the early 1970s the Service determined that 341,500 acres within the Refuge met the minimum criteria for proposing the areas for wilderness designations. These Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) are to be managed in a manner that avoids adversely affecting their wilderness character until completion of a wilderness proposal review, and if appropriate, designation as wilderness by Congress. In the CCP we will: (1) examine whether the WSAs proposed for wilderness designations remain suitable today; (2) examine whether lands outside the WSAs but within the Refuge boundary meet the minimum criteria for a wilderness designation proposal; and (3) identify management programs and associated tools necessary for maintaining the WSAs' wilderness character and achieving Refuge purposes.</p>
<p>Feral Horses and Burros</p> <p>The current feral horse and burro populations are negatively affecting water and plant resources on the Refuge, especially in riparian habitats near springs, playa lakes, and streams. These impacts are directly affecting the capacity of the Refuge to support native plants and wildlife, and to restore the native ecosystem. Horses and burros also pose health and safety risks to motorists on Highway 140, with 5 to 15 collisions per year involving feral horses or burros. A feral horse and burro management plan will be developed as part of the CCP.</p>		<p>Public Access, Roads, and Transportation</p> <p>The road network on the Refuge provides access to most major habitat types and recreational points of interest. Concerns include adverse impacts to wildlife, habitats, cultural and historical resources, the back-country visitor experience, and Wilderness Study Areas. Administrative issues include: confusing road access designations; all terrain vehicle (ATV) use on and off roads; lack of classification of road type (e.g., 4-wheel drive vs. 2-wheel drive); seasonality of road conditions; and opportunities for conversion of closed roads to nonmotorized recreational trails. A transportation plan will be developed as part of the CCP.</p>
<p>Fish Stocking</p> <p>Fishing is a popular activity and a priority public use on the Refuge. There are ponds and reservoirs on the Refuge that are stocked with native and non-native fish. The current practice of stocking non-native fish is in conflict with Service policy. In coordination with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, we will continue to provide fishing, and examine fish stocking options in the CCP.</p>		

About CCP Planning

When Congress amended the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (Act) in 1997, it incorporated an underlying philosophy that “wildlife comes first” on refuges.

The Act provided the Service with guidance for managing refuges to ensure the long-term conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. It also established six priority public uses on National Wildlife Refuges—wildlife

observation and photography, hunting, fishing, interpretation, and environmental education.

The Act also strengthened the compatibility determination process for assuring that priority uses and other activities do not conflict with refuge management purposes.

The Act requires all lands within the Refuge System to be managed in accordance with a CCP. A CCP ensures that the management of each refuge reflects the purposes of that

refuge and the mission, policies, and goals of the Refuge System. The Service views the planning process as an opportunity to strengthen current partnerships and forge new ones.

The CCP for Sheldon Refuge will outline refuge goals, objectives, and management strategies to achieve over 15 years, following CCP completion. An environmental impact statement (EIS) will be developed with the CCP to analyze the effects of proposed alternatives.

Tentative Planning Schedule for the Refuge

Planning Step:	Target Date:
Planning Update 1 issued.....	May 2008
Public Meetings.....	May 14 and 22, and June 4 and 11, 2008
Planning Update 2 scheduled.....	August 2008
Planning Update 3 scheduled.....	January 2009
Public review of Draft CCP and EIS.....	March 2010
Distribution of final CCP.....	September 2010

We will keep you informed if dates change.

Numerous historic and prehistoric sites are present on the Refuge. In the 1930s, an area known as the “Last Chance Ranch” (pictured), was one of the first properties we purchased during Refuge establishment.
USFWS



You are Invited to the first Public Open House Meetings

The first public open house meetings are opportunities for you to help us identify the issues to be addressed in the CCP and to have your questions answered about the Refuge. Four open house style public meetings are scheduled at different locations for your convenience.

Lakeview	Date: May 14, 2008 Time: 6:00-9:00 p.m.	Location: Daly Middle School Gym 220 South H Street Lakeview, Oregon 97630
Winnemucca	Date: May 22, 2008 Time: 6:00-9:00 p.m.	Location: West Hall Convention and Visitors Authority 50 West Winnemucca Boulevard Winnemucca, Nevada 89445
Alturas	Date: June 4, 2008 Time: 6:00-9:00 p.m.	Location: Christian Life Assembly 225 West B Street Alturas, California 96101
Reno	Date: June 11, 2008 Time: 6:00-9:00 p.m.	Location: Pantera/Tartuca Rooms Siena Hotel and Casino One South Lake Street Reno, Nevada 89501



Mule deer (pictured) pronghorn antelope, prairie falcons and hundreds of other bird species, desert wildflowers, rugged cliffs, and expansive sagebrush communities can be observed by the public at the Refuge.
USFWS

Your Comments are Important

Your comments help shape the future of the Refuge.

Mail comments to:

Paul Steblein, Project Leader
Sheldon-Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex
P.O. Box 111
Lakeview, OR 97630

Fax comments to:

(541) 947-4414

Email comments to:

SheldonCCP@fws.gov

To learn more about the Refuge visit our website: <http://www.fws.gov/sheldonthartmtn/Sheldon/index.html>

Please provide comments by June 30, 2008.

Additional information concerning CCP development is available on our website: <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/>



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Planning and Visitor Services
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232

Change of address requested.

In this issue:

Your comments
on the Sheldon
National
Wildlife Refuge
are requested.
What natural
resource issues
are important
to you?