

Summary



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THE ROCKY FLATS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

This document is a Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge (Rocky Flats NWR). The CCP will guide management of Refuge operations, habitat restoration and visitor services for the next 15 years.

The Rocky Flats site is a 6,240-acre former nuclear defense facility operated by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). All weapons manufacturing was performed in a 600-acre area in the middle of the site known as the Industrial Area. In 1992, the mission of the Rocky Flats site changed from weapons production to environmental cleanup and closure. The DOE is completing the cleanup in accordance with the Rocky Flats Cleanup Agreement (RFCA) under oversight by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE).

Under the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Act of 2001 (Refuge Act), the 6,240-acre Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site will become the Rocky Flats NWR following certification from the EPA that cleanup and closure have been completed. At that time, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) will assume management responsibility for most of the site.

Five sequential steps must be completed before Rocky Flats becomes a Refuge. These steps are:

1. Service completes final CCP/EIS and issues a Record of Decision



The Refuge provides habitat for elk.

2. DOE completes site cleanup except for operations and maintenance (O&M) of cleanup and long-term monitoring facilities
3. EPA certifies completion of the cleanup
4. DOE transfers land to Department of the Interior
5. Department of the Interior establishes the Refuge and Service begins management and implementation of the CCP

The Service understands that some members of the public remain apprehensive about potential public use at Rocky Flats NWR due to the site's history. This CCP outlines how the Service will brief visitors about the site's



Big Bluestem in the xeric tallgrass prairie.

transformation from a nuclear weapons production facility to a National Wildlife Refuge. The Service will address public concerns about the safety of the Refuge by providing clear information that educates visitors about access restrictions and public use opportunities. This information will be available at all trailheads. The Service also will work with the DOE to develop signage and fencing or another means of boundary demarcation to clearly identify all areas that will be retained by DOE and are closed to public access.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that evaluates and compares the CCP and three other alternatives with respect to managing wildlife, habitats and human use of the proposed Refuge was developed in concurrence with this CCP and published as a separate document. Together with this planning document, the EIS discloses

effects of restoration and visitor use on important physical, biological, social and cultural resources.

REFUGE SIGNIFICANCE

In the Refuge Act, Congress identified the following significant qualities about the Rocky Flats site:

- The majority of the site has generally remained undisturbed since its acquisition by the government.
- The site preserves valuable open space and striking vistas of the Front Range mountain backdrop.
- The site provides habitat for many wildlife species, including a number of threatened and endangered species, and is marked by the presence of rare xeric tallgrass prairie plant communities.

REFUGE PURPOSE

The Refuge Act identified four purposes of the Rocky Flats NWR:

- Restoring and preserving native ecosystems.
- Providing habitat for, and population management of native plants and migratory and resident wildlife.
- Conserving threatened and endangered species.
- Providing opportunities for compatible scientific research.

The Refuge Act also provided some direction for managing the Refuge. The Service is to manage the Refuge to ensure that wildlife-dependent public uses and environmental education and interpretation are the priority public uses of the Refuge.

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The Service will conserve the diversity of native fauna.

VISION

During the initial planning process, the Service developed the following vision statement to describe what will be different in the future as a result of the CCP and to capture the essence of what the Service is trying to accomplish at the Refuge:

Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge is a healthy expanse of grasslands, shrublands and wetlands, including rare xeric tallgrass prairie, where natural processes support a broad range of native wildlife. The Refuge provides striking mountain and prairie views and opportunities to appreciate the Refuge resources in an urbanized area through compatible wildlife-dependent public uses and education. Working with others, the Refuge conserves the unique biotic communities and sustains wildlife populations at the interface of mountains and prairies on Colorado's Front Range.

GOALS

The Service also developed a set of goals to guide the planning effort and Refuge management:

Wildlife and Habitat Management

Conserve, restore and sustain the biological diversity of the native flora and fauna of the mountain/prairie interface with particular consideration given to threatened and endangered species.

Public Use, Education and Interpretation

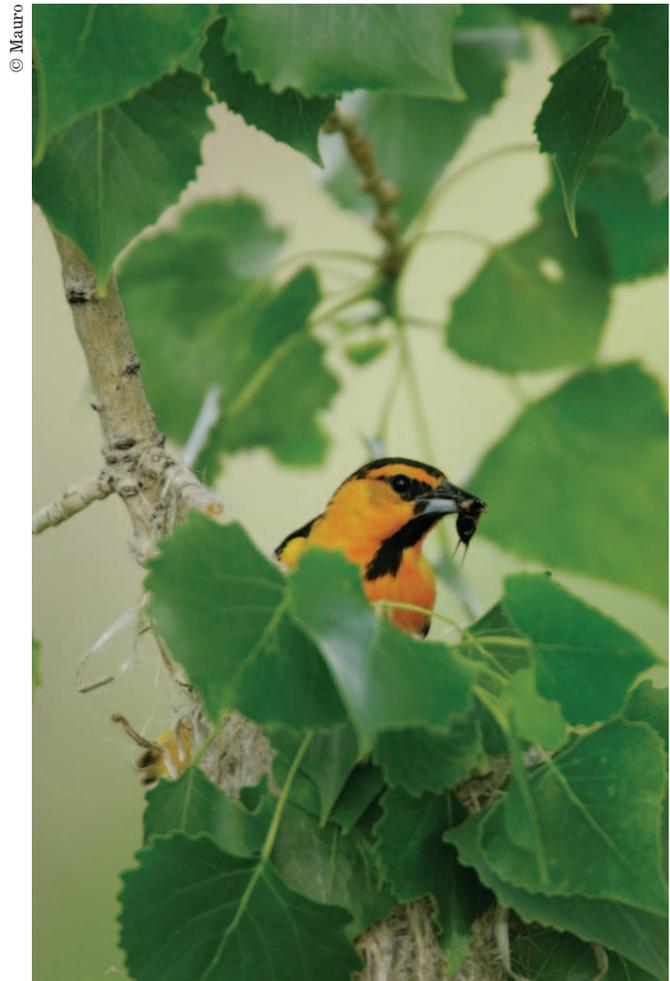
Provide visitors and students high quality recreational, educational and interpretive opportunities and foster an understanding and appreciation of: the Refuge's xeric tallgrass prairie; upland shrub and wetland habitats; native wildlife; the history of the site; and the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS).

Safety

Conduct operations and manage public access in accordance with the final Rocky Flats' cleanup decision documents to ensure the safety of the Refuge visitors, staff and neighbors.

Effective and Open Communication

Conduct a variety of communication outreach efforts to raise public awareness about the Refuge programs, management decisions, and the mission of the Service and the NWRS.



Quality wildlife viewing opportunities will foster appreciation of the Refuge's diverse habitats.

Working with Others

Foster beneficial partnerships with individuals, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and others to promote resource conservation, compatible wildlife-related research, public use, site history, and infrastructure.

Refuge Operations

Based on available funds, provide facilities and staff to fulfill the Refuge vision and purpose.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Throughout the planning process, the Service has solicited input from the public. Public involvement in the planning process ensured that interested and affected individuals, organizations, agencies and governmental entities were consulted and provided opportunities to participate. Public involvement has:

- Informed the public about Rocky Flats NWR (planning updates, website, public meetings, presentations).
- Provided public input on key issues.
- Provided help in determining management direction of Rocky Flats NWR.

THE REFUGE'S RESOURCES

The Rocky Flats site is located at the interface of the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. The western half of the site is characterized by the relatively level Rocky Flats pediment, which gives way to several finger-like drainages that slope down to the rolling plains in the eastern portion of the site.

A diverse mosaic of vegetation communities is found at Rocky Flats. Two of these vegetation communities, the



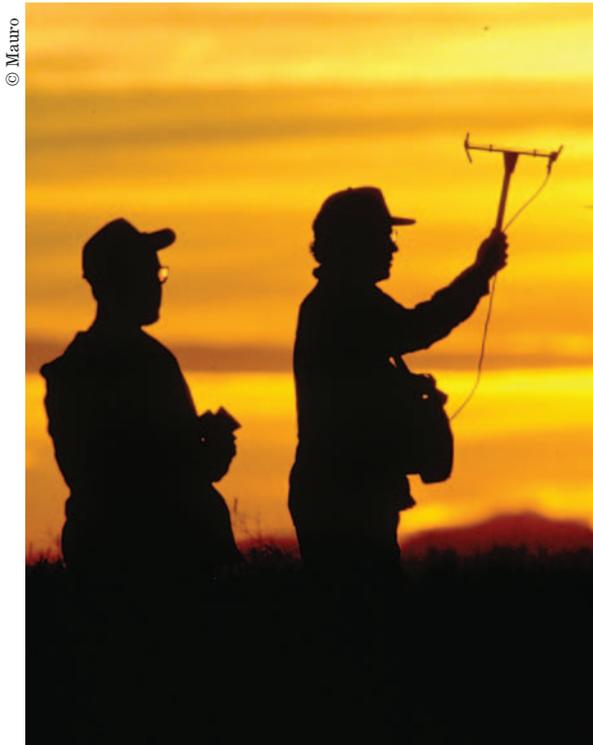
A field of wildflowers.

xeric tallgrass prairie and the tall upland shrubland, are considered to be rare in the region. Other vegetation communities include riparian woodland, riparian shrubland, wetlands, mesic mixed grassland, xeric needle and thread grassland, reclaimed mixed grassland, and ponderosa pine woodland.

Many areas of the Rocky Flats site have remained relatively undisturbed for the last 30 to 50 years, allowing them to retain diverse habitat and associated wildlife. These wildlife communities are supported by the regional network of protected open space that surrounds Rocky Flats on three sides and buffers wildlife habitat from urban development. Preble's meadow jumping mouse (Preble's), a threatened species, occurs in every major drainage on the Refuge, as well as wetlands and shrubland communities adjacent to the Rock Creek and Woman Creek drainages. A resident herd of about 160 deer inhabit the site and elk are occasionally present.

Cultural resource surveys have identified and recorded 45 cultural sites or isolated artifacts at Rocky Flats. None of the identified cultural resources are recommended as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, the Lindsay Ranch within the Rock Creek drainage provides opportunities to interpret the early history of settlement and ranching on the prairie.

The Rocky Flats site is located at the intersection of Jefferson, Boulder and Broomfield counties. The site is surrounded by open space to the north, east and west, and urban development to the northeast and southeast. Other nearby land uses include mining operations, wind energy research, and water collection and storage facilities.



Working with others on wildlife-related research is a Refuge goal.

ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE CCP AND EIS

The legislation establishing Rocky Flats NWR requires that the Department of Energy (DOE) retain jurisdiction, authority and control over portions of the Rocky Flats site necessary for cleanup response actions. DOE anticipates that it will need to retain land in and around the current Industrial Area in order to maintain institutional controls and protect cleanup and monitoring systems.

Management alternatives for the DOE-retained lands were not considered in the EIS because the lands will not be part of the Refuge and the Service will not have authority to decide how those lands should be managed. The Service is recommending a fence that allows wildlife movement be built around the retained area to distinguish Refuge lands from DOE jurisdiction. The DOE does not anticipate transferring any lands that would require additional safety requirements for either the Refuge worker or the visitor.

OVERVIEW OF THE CCP

Four alternatives were developed following the public scoping process and a workshop involving the planning team and Service staff. The EIS analyzed the environmental consequences of each alternative. Alternative “B,” entitled “Wildlife, Habitat, and Public Use,” was selected as the preferred alternative and adopted by the Service as the final Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

The CCP emphasizes both wildlife and habitat conservation along with a moderate level of wildlife-dependent public use. Refuge-wide habitat conservation will include management of native plant communities, removal and revegetation of unused roads and stream crossings, management of deer and elk populations, and protection of Preble’s meadow jumping mouse habitat. Restoration will strive to replicate pre-settlement conditions.

Visitor use facilities will include about 16 miles of trails, a seasonally staffed visitor contact station, trailheads with parking, and developed overlooks. One trail down to the Lindsay Ranch will be open soon after Refuge establishment, while the remainder of the public use facilities will open after 5 years, when restoration is well underway. Most of the trails will use existing roads. Public access will be by foot, bicycle, horse, or car. A limited public hunting program will be developed in collaboration with Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW).

On- and off-site environmental education programs will focus on the prairie ecosystem and will primarily target high school and college students.

The Service will provide compatible scientific research opportunities that focus on wildlife habitat and interactions between wildlife and human use. Partnerships will be sought from federal, state and municipal agencies and private entities to help achieve Refuge goals and to conserve contiguous lands.

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The Lindsay Ranch barn will become an interpretive site.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The Service has developed objectives and strategies for the CCP. An objective is a general statement about what the Service wants to achieve on the Refuge, while a strategy is a specific action, tool, technique or combination of the above used to meet objectives. Chapter 4 describes the objectives and strategies in detail. The key objective topics are listed below.

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT

- Preble's habitat management
- Xeric tallgrass management
- Mixed grassland prairie management
- Road restoration and revegetation
- Weed management
- Deer and elk management
- Prairie dog management
- Species reintroduction

PUBLIC USE, EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

- Public access
- Visitor experience

- Interpretation
- Environmental education
- Hunting
- Recreation facilities

SAFETY

- Staff safety
- Visitor safety

OPEN AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Outreach efforts

WORKING WITH OTHERS

- Emergency response partnerships
- Conservation partnerships
- Research partnerships
- Volunteer partnerships

REFUGE OPERATIONS

- Staffing
- Operations and management facilities
- Cultural resource management



Mule deer are frequently sighted at the Refuge.

© USFWS



Sharp-tailed grouse is a likely candidate for reintroduction.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The Comprehensive Conservation Plan will pose a variety of benefits and impacts to resources at Rocky Flats. Some of the greatest benefits will come from road removal and revegetation, weed management, and Preble's habitat management activities. The greatest impacts to Refuge resources will be the result of increased visitor use. The environmental consequences are summarized below and described in detail in the EIS.

Preble's Habitat Management. Preble's habitat will be protected and maintained. This will result in moderate, long-term benefits to Preble's and other species that depend on riparian habitat.

Grassland Management. Tallgrass and mixed grassland management strategies, along with weed and fire management and road removal and revegetation, will benefit grassland communities on the Refuge.

The planned restoration of non-native grasses in the hay meadow and other areas to native prairie will benefit the overall quality and diversity of mixed grassland habitat on the Refuge.

Road Restoration and Revegetation. The removal and revegetation of unused roads and stream crossings will provide a major long-term benefit to a variety of vegetation communities and related wildlife species.

Weed Management. Implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices will benefit a variety of wildlife habitat types on the Refuge.

Deer and Elk Management. The establishment and achievement of population targets for deer and elk will benefit both those species and the habitat on which they depend.

Trail Development and Use. While the impacts of new trail construction will be negligible, public use of some trails could result in moderate long-term adverse impacts to wildlife species due to an increased human presence that may alter wildlife movement and foraging patterns. Some trail impacts will be reduced by the enforcement of seasonal trail closures.

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Lupine is one of many wildflowers found on the Refuge in the spring.

ROCKY FLATS ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN

This plan was developed as a presentation tool for illustrating how the Refuge will be developed and experienced by visitors once it is transferred to the Service and opened to the public. The plan offers insight into the visitor experience, revealing the look and feel of the Refuge's habitat and wildlife, trails and other other facilities.



Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge

A Prairie Refuge At The Foot Of The Rockies

SHAPINS
ASSOCIATES
ERO

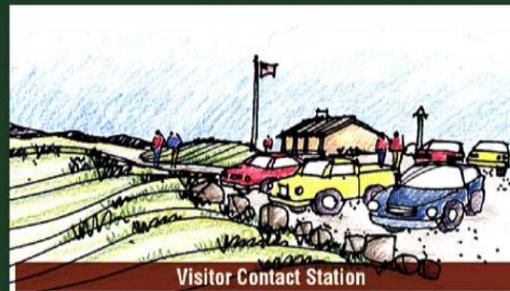
Visitors park and start their experience at the Visitor Contact Station.

Signs along the trails inform and educate.

Overlooks provide views of historic sites, prairie landscape and a city panorama.

Viewing blinds offer shade for enjoying the refuge's wildlife.

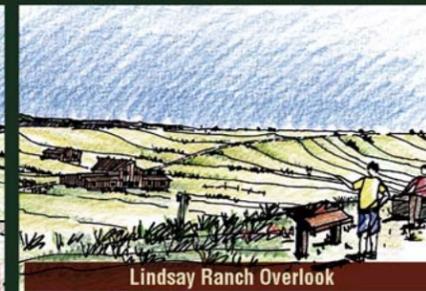
The trails are suitable for various forms of recreation.



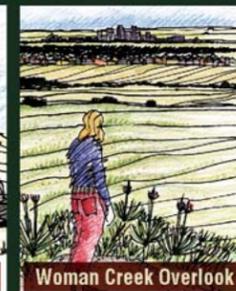
Visitor Contact Station



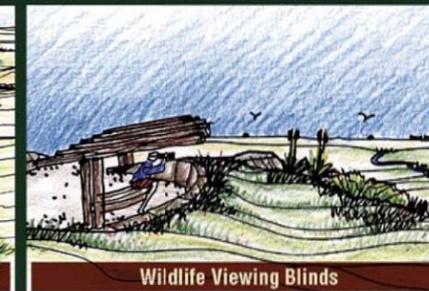
Interpretive Trail Signs



Lindsay Ranch Overlook



Woman Creek Overlook



Wildlife Viewing Blinds



Multi-Use Trail