



News Release

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Meeting to Gather Input on Management of Two Oklahoma Wildlife Refuges

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold an open-house forum on Friday, October 26 from 3 to 7 p.m. in Butler to discuss its draft management plan for Washita and Optima National Wildlife Refuges. The meeting will be at the Butler Community Center, located at the intersection of State Highways 33 and 34.

The Service released a draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment in September for the public to review. The documents outline the goals and objectives that will drive management of Washita National Wildlife Refuge, on the northern end of Foss Lake in Custer County, and Optima National Wildlife Refuge in Texas County, Oklahoma, for the next 15 years. The deadline for comments is November 1.

To request copies of the two documents, contact Washita National Wildlife Refuge headquarters, at 20834 E. 940 Rd., Butler, OK 73625-5001 or call 580-664-2205. The documents may also be viewed and downloaded from the Service's Southwest Region Division of Planning website at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/Plan/completedplans.html>.

The Service will accept written comments submitted by mail, fax, or email until November 1, 2007. Comments should be sent to: Joanne Pena, Program Assistant, Division of Planning, Southwest Region National Wildlife Refuge System U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 1306 Albuquerque, NM 87120; Email: Joanne_Pena@fws.gov or fax: 505-248-6874.

The refuges were set aside to provide wintering and resting habitat for migratory birds. Specific goals for the refuge management include restoring native grasslands on both refuges, growing food crops for migratory birds at both refuges and managing created wetlands at Washita to provide habitat and food for migratory birds. Additional goals address outreach to local and regional schools and groups, and enhanced visitor facilities, primarily at Washita. More than 270 species of birds, 60 species of reptiles and amphibians, 53 species of mammals, and 28 species of fish use habitats on the refuge complex for part or all of the year.

The refuges are part of the Service's National Wildlife Refuge System. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires that all units of the Refuge System be managed in accordance with an approved management plan. When implemented, the Washita and Optima

National Wildlife Refuges final plan will achieve the legislative purposes of the refuges; help fulfill the Refuge System mission; and, maintain and restore ecological integrity at each refuge.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 547 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 fish, wildlife management offices, and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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