

Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update

Volume Five, Winter 2004

Draft CCP/EIS is Ready for Review

After nearly two years of work, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) is excited to announce that the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (CCP/EIS) for the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge is complete and ready for review.

Public involvement has been an integral part of the planning process with the Service turning to interested individuals and organizations for help in identifying key issues of concern. The Service modified the alternatives based on comments voiced at the last round of public meetings in May 2003.

Once again, the Service invites the public to engage in the planning process and comment on the draft CCP/EIS. The Service will mail copies of the CCP/EIS to agencies and individuals who have been

actively involved in the planning process. The copies should be received by February 20th. Others can request a copy from the Service or view the document online. Public meetings in March will provide an additional opportunity for the public to review the draft and share their comments with the Service.

The draft CCP/EIS outlines the management direction and strategies for refuge operations, habitat restoration and visitor services for the next 15 years. The document evaluates and compares four alternatives to managing wildlife, habitats and public uses of the future Refuge. The draft CCP/EIS also analyzes the impacts of restoration and visitor use on the Refuge's important physical, biological, social and cultural resources. This planning update provides an overview of the contents of the CCP/EIS.

Upcoming Public Meetings

- *Westminster*
Wednesday, March 10, 2004
6:30 - 8:30 pm
College Hill Library
Front Range Community College
Library Room L-211
3645 W. 112th Avenue
Westminster, CO 80031
- *Boulder*
Thursday, March 11, 2004
6:30 - 8:30 pm
East Recreation Center
Mountain View & Flatirons Rooms
5660 Sioux Drive
Boulder, CO 80303
- *Arvada*
Wednesday, March 17, 2004
6:30 - 8:30 pm
Arvada Center
6901 Wadsworth Boulevard
Arvada, CO 80003
- *Broomfield*
Thursday, March 18, 2004
6:30 - 8:30 pm
Broomfield Recreation Center
Lakeshore Room 3
280 Lamar Street
Broomfield, CO 80020

Meetings will include a brief presentation on the draft CCP/EIS followed by a hearing. Individuals will be given 3 minutes to comment. Meetings will begin promptly according to the listed schedule.



Left: Management of deer and elk populations is addressed in the wildlife and habitat management objectives of the CCP/EIS.

Management Alternatives

Objectives & Strategies

The draft CCP/EIS outlines objectives and strategies for the management of the Refuge. An objective is a general statement about what the Service wants to achieve on the Refuge, while a strategy is a specific action, tool or technique used to meet an objective. Given each alternative's unique emphasis, the objectives and strategies vary by alternative.

Key Objective Topics

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

A Range of Alternatives

Four alternatives are outlined and analyzed within the draft CCP/EIS. The alternatives represent a wide range of viable management directions for the future Refuge. The CCP/EIS details how the Refuge's natural resources will be conserved and restored and summarizes what the visitor experience will be like in each alternative. All four alternatives would involve habitat conservation and restoration and Alternatives B and D would provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent public use.

Alternative A - No Action

Retain the current resource management regime. Restoration efforts would focus on the Rock Creek drainage.

Alternative B - Wildlife, Habitat and Public Use*

Emphasize the conservation of wildlife and their habitats while allowing a moderate level of public use.

Alternative C - Ecological Restoration

Emphasize habitat conservation with a focus on restoring the Refuge to presettlement conditions.

Alternative D - Public Use

Provide the highest level of wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities for refuge visitors.

*The Service identified Alternative B, *Wildlife, Habitat and Public Use*, as the Proposed Action. Alternative B addresses the major issues identified during public scoping and is consistent with sound fish and wildlife management.

Alternative Revisions

The Service analyzed the comments collected from the alternative review in the winter and spring of 2003 and modified the alternatives where appropriate. The following list outlines changes to the alternatives that resulted from both public comment and internal Service reviews.

Public Use

Alternative B was modified to allow equestrian use on the southern multi-use trails and to phase in public use. The trail to Lindsay Ranch would open within 6 months of Refuge establishment and the remaining trails would open after 5 years.

Restoration

Road and stream crossing restoration areas were adjusted to better fit the goals of each alternative.

Staffing

Fire management staff was added to all alternatives, recognizing the need for rapid response to and suppression of unplanned ignitions, and to manage prescribed fire in Alternatives A, B and C.

Wildlife Habitat

Prairie dog habitat was better defined and population targets adjusted to minimize impacts to adjacent habitats. Preble's habitat was also better defined using detailed habitat models.

Hunting

After 2 years, the Service would consider providing hunting opportunities to additional user groups, based on population management needs and initial hunt participation rates.

Below: The Lindsay Ranch barn would be retained under Alternatives A, B and D.



Environmental Impact Analysis

Environmental Consequences

The proposed management alternatives would result in a variety of benefits and impacts to resources at Rocky Flats. Some of the greatest benefits would come from road removal and revegetation, weed management and Preble's habitat management activities. Potential impacts were identified for each alternative based on a review of relevant scientific literature, previously prepared environmental documents for Rocky Flats and the best professional judgement of Service staff and other resource specialists.

The CCP/EIS describes each alternative's potential effects on the following resources:

- Geology and Soils
- Water Resources
- Vegetation Communities
- Wildlife Resources
- Threatened, Endangered and Candidate Species
- Cultural Resources
- Open Space, Recreation and Trails
- Visual Resources
- Noise
- Transportation
- Air Quality



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Above: In Alternatives B and D, Rocky Flats would provide excellent opportunities for visitors to view wildlife. Deer and elk populations would be controlled in all alternatives to minimize impacts on habitat quality due to overbrowsing or overgrazing.

Below: The sharp-tailed grouse may be reintroduced to Rocky Flats under all alternatives.



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Outside the Scope

Management alternatives for the Department of Energy's (DOE) retained lands are not considered in the CCP/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. DOE anticipates that it will retain land in and around the current Industrial Area to maintain institutional controls and protect cleanup and monitoring systems. However, the Service and the DOE will work together, to the extent possible, to minimize visible differences between the Refuge and DOE's retained lands.



Contact Information

Please direct comments on the draft CCP/EIS to:

Rocky Flats NWR
Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Laurie Shannon, Planning Team Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Rocky Mountain Arsenal - Building 121
Commerce City, CO 80022

Phone 303/289 0980
Fax 303/289 0579
Email rockyflats@fws.gov
Website <http://rockyflats.fws.gov>

Information regarding cleanup at Rocky Flats can be found at <http://www.rfets.gov>

Comments Welcome

We encourage you to stay involved in the planning process and to take the time to review the document and attend one of the public workshops.

The deadline for comment submission is April 12, 2004. As you are reviewing the document, please keep in mind that comments on the Draft CCP/EIS should be specific and should address the adequacy of the plan, the impact statement, and the merits of the alternatives discussed.

Below: Tallgrass and mixed grassland management coupled with weed management and road removal would benefit grassland communities on the Refuge.

In the Final CCP/EIS, the Service will respond to all *substantive* comments. Comments are considered substantive if they:

- Question, with reasonable basis, accuracy of information in the document.
- Question, with reasonable basis adequacy of the environmental analysis.
- Present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the EIS.
- Cause changes/revisions to the CCP.
- Provide additional information relevant to the analysis.

At the close of the comment period, the Service will analyze the comments. New information relevant to the analysis and other substantive comments will be used to revise the draft document and begin preparation of the final CCP and EIS. The Service anticipates publishing the final document in December 2004.

All comments must be submitted by April 12, 2004

Please visit <http://rockyflats.fws.gov> to download the CCP/EIS and to learn more about the alternatives and the environmental impacts.



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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge
Rocky Mountain Arsenal - Building 121
Commerce City, CO 80022

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