



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Peaks to Prairies: *Mountain-Prairie Regional Newsletter*

Vol 1 Issue 2 SUMMER 2013

Send Your Comments

Any comments or suggestions can be emailed to kate_miyamoto@fws.gov.

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The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service What's Inside

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Welcome

Celebrating the 40th Year Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act



Black-footed ferret kit

We are making our way through summer at a rapid clip, and I hope you are finding time to enjoy the incredible wild places and wildlife that make this part of the country so dear to so many of us.

This issue of our regional newsletter highlights some of our partnerships that deal with threatened, endangered, or otherwise imperiled species – because this year we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Signed into law in 1973, it was the first environmental law to put emphasis on protecting imperiled species and recognized the principle that all of us on the planet are interconnected.

I recently had the good fortune to spend some time out in the field. In June, I visited Baggs, Wyoming with the group Partners for Conservation (PFC) for their annual Private Lands Partners Day. This group grew out of the successful partnership in the Blackfoot Valley of Montana and has expanded to include others from across the country who share an interest in community-based conservation. Focusing on “conservation through conversation,” PFC is interested in collaborative conservation partnerships in working landscapes. At this year’s gathering, they showcased local partnerships in the Little Snake River Valley. A great day in the field was followed with discussions – sharing experiences about successes that keep working landscapes working and native species healthy. One thing I learned from this group is how much we can get done together when we focus on those goals we have in common!



Regional Director’s Corner

In July, I was fortunate to spend a day in Gunnison County, Colorado visiting with folks who are working on conservation of the Gunnison sage-grouse, a species that has been proposed for listing under the ESA. The Gunnison County Commissioners and Colorado Parks and Wildlife arranged for Service representatives, including Director Ashe, to visit with several property owners in the Gunnison basin who host Gunnison sage-grouse.

This opportunity to visit with landowners was important, and it was clear to me that these folks operate from a stewardship perspective on these working landscapes and that we have much in common. We also met with the Gunnison Basin Strategic Committee, a group that has led much of the effort to safeguard this largest population of the species. We finished up the day with a meeting that included representatives from the 11 counties across the range of the bird. Kudos to the Gunnison County Commissioners and partners for bringing together the other counties around a memorandum of understanding. They are beginning additional efforts to address threats to the species in the outlying populations. I don’t know where we will end up in regards to the ESA, but I look forward to continuing to work with these good folks in a way that protects the species and meets local goals.

-Noreen Walsh, Regional Director



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Updates

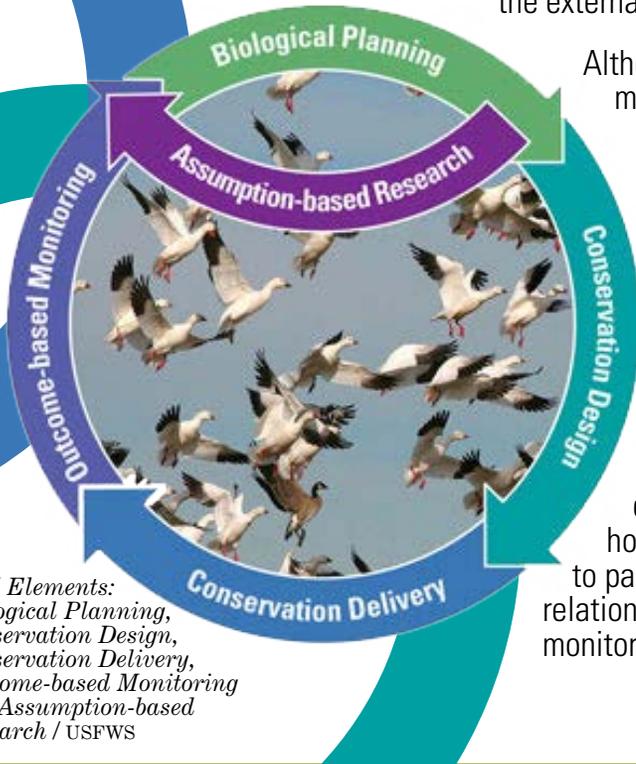
Strategic Habitat Conservation and Surrogate Species

The Service is continuing its development of a “Surrogate Species Approach” to landscape conservation. When fully implemented, the surrogate approach is intended to improve how the Service defines biological objectives and targets conservation efforts using the Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) framework, resulting in more cost effective management decisions and conservation investments.

The National Surrogate Species Team has been reviewing comments on the draft guidance from the Service, state partners and other commenters. The team is considering all comments and is re-drafting the guidance accordingly. The team also developed a calendar for the external peer review of the revised guidance and that peer review will occur late this fall.

Although the guidance is not yet final, the Director and the Directorate have a strong desire to begin to move ahead in an iterative, adaptive manner. Director Dan Ashe has asked the SHC Executive Oversight Team to describe what “Version 1.0” of our surrogate species approach should look like, so a first iteration could be in place by the end of 2013. We expect Version 1.0 to be a starting point, to help us begin building this approach, and to help us learn as we take steps forward.

This first version (Version 1.0) will consist of a preliminary list of surrogate species within at least one defined geography per region; a geography which may be smaller than a Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC). It will also include associated population objectives, and preliminary operation plans and will begin to articulate how the Service will use surrogate species to define, deliver, and assess the conservation work needed to achieve desired biological outcomes. Each region’s Version 1.0 will be developed in concordance with a joint framework that outlines how the Service and the States who choose to participate will operate in a peer-to-peer relationship to select species, objectives, and monitoring protocols. *(continued)*



SHC Elements:
Biological Planning,
Conservation Design,
Conservation Delivery,
Outcome-based Monitoring
and Assumption-based
Research / USFWS



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Strategic Habitat Conservation and Surrogate Species

In our region, we will be working to develop our strategy with states, beginning with the identification of one geography, where together we will develop a surrogate species approach.

A final agreement was reached with the states on the framework this past spring. The framework describes how we can work together on landscape conservation with a surrogate approach. Key points in the joint framework include:

1. The Service and States will work together to decide the initial pool of species to be represented and the initial pool of surrogates

2. The Service will not select State trust species as surrogates without concurrence from the State(s) involved

3. The initial scale for selection of surrogate species could be within the boundaries of LCCs. The scale may be smaller than an LCC or it may transcend multiple LCC geographies

4. The Service and the States will jointly decide the monitoring, data management, and reporting protocols necessary for surrogate species; subject to approval of such protocols, for state trust species, to the states involved

5. The Service and the states will work together to determine the population objectives for the chosen surrogate. If a state agrees on using a State trust species as a possible surrogate, the surrogate population objective will be identical to the State population objective or combined State objectives



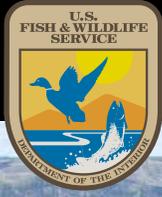
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WORKING TOGETHER to Save the Last Wild Reaches of the Missouri River



Lewis and Clark would not recognize many portions of the mighty Missouri River today. Over the last 200 years, generations of settlers have spent considerable energy

trying to manage the river and carve out a safe and prosperous place to live. These changes brought many benefits including dependable hydropower and flood control. Unfortunately, harnessing the Missouri River came at a cost to many fish and wildlife species that once thrived in a free-flowing river.

*Missouri River
Inset: Least tern*

Recently, the Service and the National Park Service (NPS) embarked on an effort to preserve and conserve the few remaining “wild” portions of the Missouri River in northeast Nebraska and southeast South Dakota – the proposed Niobrara Confluence and Ponca Bluffs Conservation Areas. The community is and will be an integral part of the process – in both the planning and the execution. In creating these areas, we will work with interested private landowners, local communities, and other conservation entities to conserve important wildlife habitats, increase quality recreational opportunities, preserve sensitive cultural sites, and maintain sustainable farming and ranching operations in the region.

The proposed Niobrara Confluence Conservation Area, which is currently open for public comment, lies between Fort Randall Dam and Lewis and Clark Lake and includes reaches of the Missouri and Niobrara Rivers. This area contains one of the last segments of the middle Missouri River that remains unchannelized, undeveloped, and relatively free-flowing. The surrounding old, wide river valley contains important habitat for at least 60 native and 26 sport fishes. In addition, the area’s riparian woodlands and island complexes are important for approximately 25 resident bird species and 115 migratory bird species including piping plovers, least terns, and bald eagles. *(continued)*



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Updates

Niobrara Confluence and Ponca Bluffs Conservation Areas

The proposed Ponca Bluffs Conservation Area, also currently open for public comment, lies between Gavins Point Dam and Sioux City. This area is a diverse, relatively unaltered, riverine-floodplain ecosystem characterized by a main channel, braided channels, wooded riparian corridors, pools, chutes, sloughs, islands, sandbars, backwater areas, wet-lands, natural floodplain and upland forest communities, pastureland, and croplands. The area also supports a wide variety of wildlife and fisheries resources.

These two proposed conservation areas are remarkable in that they still exhibit pre-dam conditions and function much as they did under historical conditions. To preserve these areas, the Service and the NPS have developed a draft Environmental Impact Statement and Land Protection Plan to provide alternatives and identify impacts of the proposed conservation efforts. The documents will aide in outlining strategic habitat conservation initiatives, all undertaken with interested landowners to preserve land through either fee-title acquisition or conservation easements.

Conservation easements are remarkable tools that allow the preservation of habitat along with working

landscapes like farmlands and rangelands—an approach that can be both cost effective and more socially and politically acceptable. Furthermore, conservation easements allow lands to remain privately owned and on local tax rolls while still providing lifelong conservation value to the public. Landowners would be compensated for perpetually conserving the biological, ecological, and cultural values on their properties by promoting the growth of native grasses, shrubs, and trees; eliminating or reducing invasive species; and protecting culturally significant sites. In return, these landowners would be compensated for their contribution to regional conservation goals, and the money eventually enters the local economy.

We have invited the public to participate through scoping and planning meetings and providing an opportunity to comment on the land

protection plan and draft environmental statement through September 30, 2013.

Collaboration is key to this undertaking. By partnering with interested landowners, communities, tribes, and other entities, we can often achieve a level of conservation that helps not only fish and wildlife but also the surrounding human communities.

For more information visit our [website](#).



Piping plover



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Updates

Greater Sage-Grouse

Greater Sage-grouse

The Service is making available a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and a draft umbrella conservation agreement to augment ongoing efforts to enhance the abundance and distribution of the greater sage-grouse throughout its historical range in Wyoming.

In March 2010, the Service determined that protection of the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was warranted. However, listing the greater sage-grouse at that time was precluded by the need to address other listings of higher priority. Consequently, the greater sage-grouse was added to the list of candidate species under the ESA.

The purpose of the umbrella conservation agreement, known as a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA), is to encourage landowners to voluntarily implement conservation measures to conserve, restore, or enhance habitat for the greater sage-grouse on non-Federal lands in Wyoming. In return, participating landowners and land managers would receive regulatory assurances concerning land use restrictions that might otherwise apply to them should the greater sage-grouse become protected under the ESA.

The Umbrella CCAA addresses potential conservation measures pertaining to ranch management that may be implemented on voluntarily enrolled non-Federal lands in Wyoming. Livestock grazing is the dominant land use within the range of the greater sage-grouse in Wyoming. Consequently, implementation of conservation measures from the Umbrella CCAA would benefit the greater sage-grouse. The EA considers the biological, environmental, and socioeconomic effects of the Umbrella CCAA. *(continued)*

Greater sage-grouse



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Greater Sage-grouse

The Umbrella Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances was prepared by the Service in cooperation with the Wyoming Governor's Office, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Department of Agriculture, Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts, Wyoming Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service. Under the Umbrella CCAA, each participating landowner, with assistance from participating State and Federal agencies, would develop an individual CCAA, selecting appropriate conservation measures described in the Umbrella CCAA. Individual CCAAs would be linked to the Umbrella CCAA.



The Service will issue an enhancement-of-survival permit to each enrolled landowner following approval of the individual CCAA. In the event the greater sage-grouse is listed under the ESA, the permit authorizes incidental take of the species that may result from general farming and ranching operations and recreation. The Service also will not impose commitments or restrictions of land, water, resources, or finances on the enrolled landowner beyond those agreed to in the individual CCAA. The Umbrella CCAA will be in effect for 40 years following its approval. Individual CCAAs and enhancement-of-survival permits will have a duration of 20 years.

Copies of the Umbrella CCAA and EA are available online [here](#).

Greater sage-grouse in Red Desert, Wyoming



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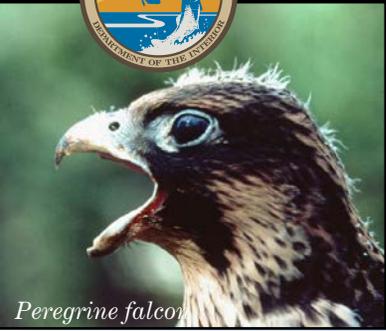
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FEATURE: **ENDANGERED SPECIES**

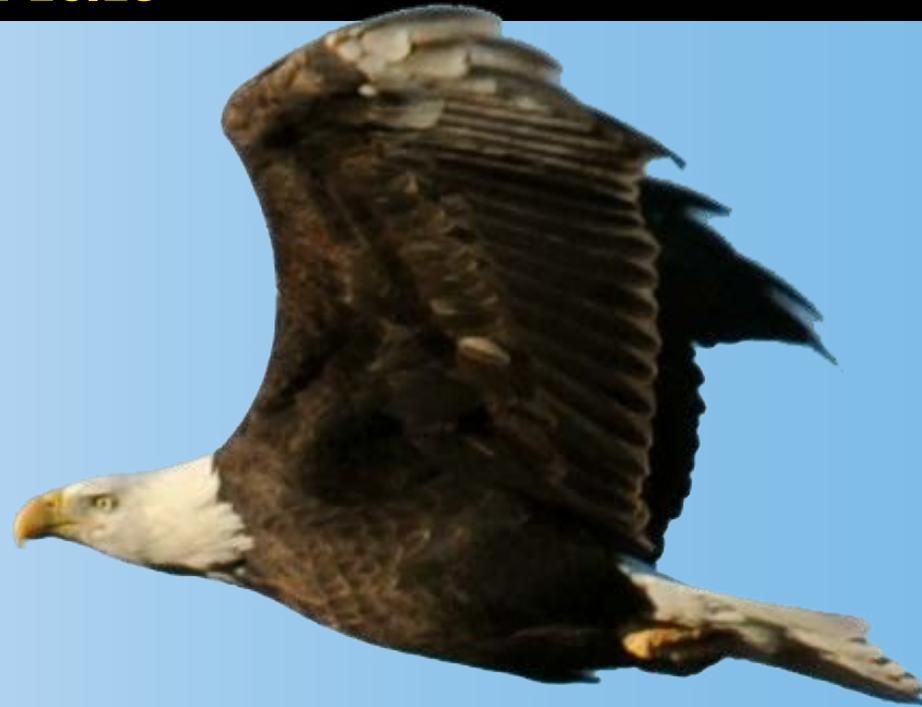
40th Anniversary



Peregrine falcon



American alligator



Celebrating
40 YEARS

of the
**ENDANGERED
Species
Act**

As we enter the 40th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, the Service honors the accomplishments in preventing species extinction and steadily improving the habitats and conservation prospects for many others.

A dedicated website spotlights the stories of conservation success in every state across the country, provides information on the milestones of this historic law, share images and videos and offers opportunities for families to participate in free, educational activities together. www.fws.gov/endangered/ESA40/index.html

The cornerstone of imperiled wildlife and plant conservation in the U.S., the ESA has brought about some incredible comebacks. The bald eagle, peregrine falcon and American alligator have recovered to the point where ESA protection is no longer necessary for their survival.

Bald eagle



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FEATURE: ENDANGERED SPECIES

Gray Wolf

The recovery of the gray wolf in the Northern Rockies continues to be one of the great success stories of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Having exceeded its recovery goals for the last 11 years, the entire Northern Rocky Mountain (NRM) population (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, eastern one-third of Washington and Oregon, and a small part of north central Utah) was declared recovered and removed from ESA protections in 2012. Management was then turned over to state authority.

As part of our commitment to monitor the wolf population to ensure that it continues to thrive under state management, we publish an annual status report in collaboration with other federal, state and tribal agencies.

The recently released 2012 Annual Report states that as of December 31, 2012, there were at least 321 confirmed packs and 1,674 wolves within the NRM area. The 2011 report showed 287 confirmed packs and 1,796 wolves.

In comparison to the 2011 study of the NRM, the report shows a nearly 12 percent increase in the number of wolf packs. The report also shows a nearly 7 percent decrease in the overall population, which is in line with our expectation for the year. The number of breeding pairs also

decreased by 6 percent, from 109 pairs in 2011 to 103 pairs in 2012. Overall, the wolf population remains well above the recovery levels identified by Service and partner biologists in the recovery plan.

Wolf packs, especially breeding pairs, remain within the three core recovery areas in northwestern Montana/Idaho Panhandle, central Idaho, and the Greater Yellowstone Area, and again were confirmed in eastern Washington and Oregon. No packs were documented in Utah.



Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Population Remains Healthy Under State Management

Wolf damage can be significant in some livestock producing areas where wolves are present, but confirmed depredations are a comparatively small proportion of all livestock losses in the NRM Distinct Population Segment. In 2012, 231 “problem” wolves were lethally removed by agency control, which includes legal take in defense of property by private citizens. *(continued)*

Gray wolf



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FEATURE: ENDANGERED SPECIES

Gray Wolf

In 2012, Montana removed 108 wolves by agency control and harvested 175 wolves in their hunting season; Idaho removed 73 wolves by agency control and harvested 329 wolves by public hunting; and in Wyoming, 43 wolves were removed by agency control and 66 harvested through regulated hunting. Washington removed seven wolves. In Oregon, no wolves were removed by agency control. No wolves were harvested in Washington or Oregon.

While the state wolf hunts have been controversial, wildlife managers have used hunting for decades to manage and sustain dozens of game populations in North America. It remains an accepted and successful wildlife management tool that helps to reduce conflicts with humans, maintain stable populations and generate public support. We're encouraged by the results of the trophy game hunts in each state.

Hundreds of people have assisted with wolf recovery efforts over the years. This report supports the effective and appropriate management approach taken by the states, demonstrating that the implementation of their management plans continues to maintain a healthy wolf population at or above established recovery goals. We will continue to monitor the delisted wolf populations in the NRM states for a minimum of five years to ensure that they continue to sustain their recovery. The report is posted online [here](#).

The report is a cooperative effort by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Wyoming Fish and Game, the Nez Perce Tribe, National Park Service, Blackfeet Nation, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Wind River Tribes, Colville Tribe, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Utah Department of Natural Resources, and USDA Wildlife Services.



Wolf pack / Douglas Smith, NPS



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FEATURE: **ENDANGERED SPECIES**

Pallid Sturgeon



Working to **CONSERVE** and **PROTECT** the Endangered Pallid Sturgeon

A draft recovery plan aimed at recovering the federally endangered pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*), a bottom-feeding fish considered to be a relic of the dinosaur era, was made available for public review and comment from March 15 to April 15, 2013.

Pallid sturgeon are an important indicator of the health of several of America's largest rivers, and represent a unique piece of America's natural history, with fossil ancestors dating back over 70 million years.

The draft revised plan summarized and updated the available information on the species life history needs, reevaluates the threats to the species, and identifies recovery efforts.

The Service originally drafted the recovery plan in 1993 as an outline of the steps necessary to recover the imperiled fish. Revisions to the recovery plan will allow the Service and its conservation partners to better address threats such as habitat destruction.

In order to keep pace with the rapidly changing and heavily used rivers the pallid sturgeon calls home, we are updating its recovery plan to better meet the conservation challenges. The goal is to conserve and protect this 'living dinosaur' from extinction for future generations of Americans."

A number of threats to the pallid sturgeon's habitat have complicated the recovery of this freshwater fish. *(continued)*

Pallid sturgeon on ruler



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FEATURE: ENDANGERED SPECIES

Pallid Sturgeon

Human modification of its river habitat such as river channelization, impoundment, and altered flow regimes are in part responsible. Degraded water quality and disease are other factors.

Historically, its distribution included the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers in Montana downstream to the Missouri-Mississippi confluence and the Mississippi River possibly from near Keokuk, Iowa downstream to New Orleans, Louisiana. Pallid sturgeon were also found in the lower reaches of some of the larger tributaries to the Missouri, Mississippi, and Yellowstone rivers including the Tongue, Milk, Niobrara, Platte, Kansas, Big Sioux, St. Francis, and Grand rivers. The total length of the pallid sturgeon range historically was about 3,515 River miles.

The Service and its partners have been working diligently to recover the pallid sturgeon by artificially propagating and stocking sturgeon, population monitoring and researching the life history and needs of the pallid sturgeon for natural reproduction. In addition, the Service and partners are working to create fish passages at Intake Dam on the Yellowstone River in Montana.

Today, wild pallid sturgeon persist in the un-impounded reaches of the Missouri River, Mississippi River and some of their larger tributaries. Pallid sturgeon observations and records have increased with sampling effort in the middle and lower Mississippi River. Additionally, in 1991 the species was identified in the Atchafalaya River of Louisiana, and in 2011 pallid sturgeon were documented entering the lower reaches of the Arkansas River.

An electronic copy of the draft recovery plan is available [here](#).

“The goal is to conserve and protect this ‘living dinosaur’ from extinction for future generations of Americans.”



Juvenile pallid sturgeons



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FEATURE: **ENDANGERED SPECIES**

Conservation Success in the Piceance and Uinta Basin

by Jared Martin, External Affairs Intern

In northwestern Colorado and northeastern Utah, several threatened and endangered plant species are benefiting from concerted efforts by the Service, non-profit organizations, state agencies, federal land managers, and oil and gas companies. Rapid energy development within Utah's Uinta Basin and Colorado's greater Piceance (pronounced pee-awnz) Basin poses new conservation challenges. Oil and gas projects in the region have implications for several endangered or threatened plant species, their habitats, and their pollinators. Plants on private land are especially susceptible to these threats, since the Endangered Species Act provides no legal protection for them.

In Rio Blanco County, Colorado, the Dudley Bluffs bladderpod (*Physaria congesta*), a small cushion plant with bright yellow flowers, and the Dudley Bluffs twinpod (*Physaria obcordata*), a low-growing perennial herb, occur in an area of accelerated natural gas development. The two species are limited to sparse white shale outcrops on one of the largest accessible natural gas deposits in the nation. The bladderpod consists of eight populations and approximately 546,000 individuals, while the twinpod occurs in 11 populations and approximately 25,000 individuals.

"Ninety-five percent of the development near these rare plant populations has occurred in the last 10 years," says Gina Glenne, a botanist in the Service's Ecological Services Field Office. "Rio Blanco County has over 2,600 natural gas wells, but predictions estimate 19,000 wells will exist within 15 years. These wells and their associated infrastructure are impacting populations and habitat for both species."

To limit the long-term impacts of oil and gas development to these species, and other listed plant species, the Service is working with energy project developers to create guidelines that ensure projects move forward in a way that minimizes disturbance to plants, their habitats, and their pollinators. The Service recently established a mitigation fund through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation—the first ever to be established solely for plant conservation. *(continued)*

**Endangered
Species Act
Success Story:
Conservation Success
in the Piceance and
Uinta Basin**



Dudley Bluffs
bladderpod



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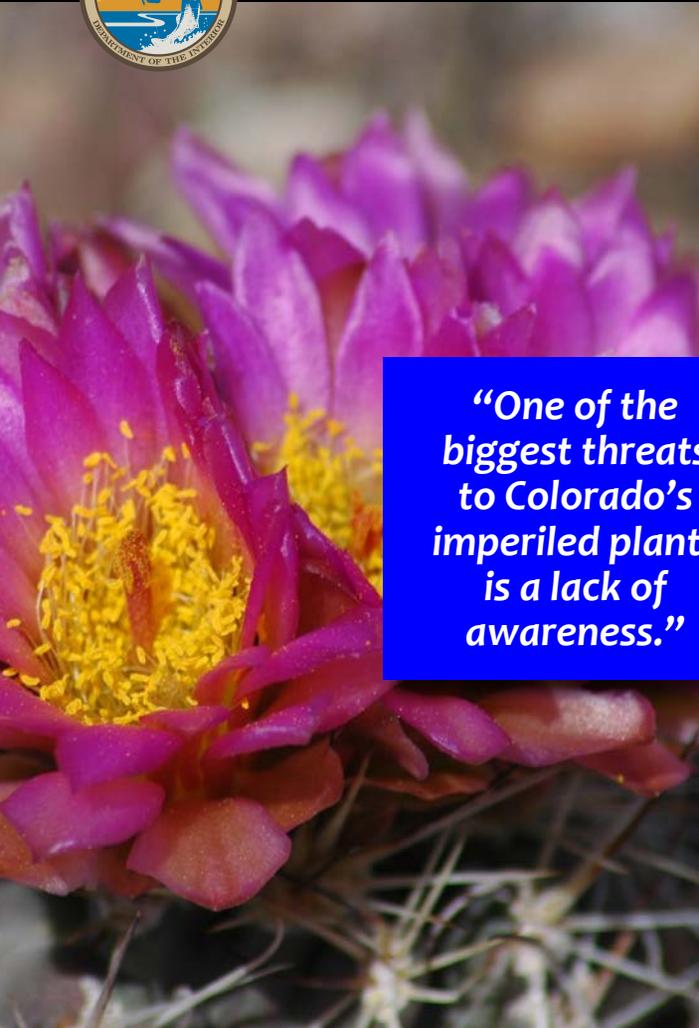
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FEATURE: ENDANGERED SPECIES

Conservation Success in the Piceance and Uinta Basin



“One of the biggest threats to Colorado’s imperiled plants is a lack of awareness.”

Oil and gas companies operating in Uinta Basin hookless cactus (*Sclerocactus wetlandicus*) and Pariette cactus (*Sclerocactus brevispinus*) habitat contribute to the fund, which supports various research and mitigation projects, including a project examining ways to reclaim oil and gas wellpads so these small, barrel shaped cactus species can return.

A number of concerned conservation groups are also contributing to the conservation of these imperiled plant species by conducting surveys, funding research, and strategizing on the most effective means for mitigating impacts of oil and gas development and achieving recovery.

The Rare Plant Conservation Initiative – with representatives from over 22 entities, including state and federal agencies, academia, botanical gardens, non-profit organizations, botanical artists, and private industry – is devoted to ensuring plant diversity in Colorado. The group is working closely with industry to implement management practices for oil and gas development in areas where listed plants occur.

“One of the biggest threats to Colorado’s imperiled plants is a lack of awareness,” says Susan Spackman Panjabi, a botanist for the Colorado Natural Heritage Program of Colorado State University. “By working with oil and gas companies and other partners we can proactively protect high quality habitats and prevent loss of important botanical biodiversity.”

A similar group with equally diverse membership, the Uinta Basin Rare Plant Forum, is working to set priorities for research and conservation for nine plant species that are unique to the stark, cold desert of northeastern Utah. One of the efforts undertaken by the forum is an annual botany blitz, where volunteers gather each spring or early summer in the Uinta Basin and visit new field sites to count individuals of rare or listed plant species. In 2010, forum volunteers counted more than 14,000 Uinta Basin hookless cacti at one site—effectively increasing the known population size by 50 percent. The forum also identifies research needs, including further study on the impacts associated with energy development, life history, and breeding biology for plants in the region.

Uinta Basin hookless cactus in bloom



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Get Your Goose On!

Education and Outreach Campaign

GET YOUR GOOSE ON!

at a National Wildlife Refuge



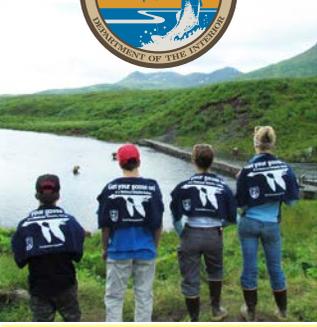
The blue goose has long been the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System. It was first drawn more than 80 years ago by Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist and noted conservationist, J.N. "Ding" Darling. The first recorded use of Darling's goose on an official U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sign was at North Dakota's Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge, circa 1934. Today, the blue goose icon is featured prominently at national wildlife refuges across the country.

Prominent though its placement may be, the blue goose still does not enjoy the same celebrity as, say, Smokey Bear. And that is something employees of the Service's Mountain-Prairie Region set out to help change in 2012 when they developed the "Get Your Goose On!" (GYGO) education and outreach campaign. To get this campaign started, they design and printed GYGO rally towels, shipped them off to refuges across the country, and encouraged folks to take pictures and videos with the towels. External Affairs staff then catalogued and shared the hundreds of photos and videos taken over the summer.

So, what does it mean to get one's goose on? For some, it may be marveling at North America's largest colony of white-faced ibis at Utah's Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. For others, it may be feeling the ground tremble as American bison thunder across the prairie at Colorado's Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. That is why Get Your Goose On! is such a fun concept – it is a completely unique experience that visitors can customize for themselves.

Whatever activity tickles your outdoor fancy, starting this summer select book stores at National Wildlife Refuges across the country will carry towels, allowing visitors to capture their favorite Get Your Goose On! memories and upload those photos and videos to our soon-to-be-launched Get Your Goose On! social media accounts.

Photos (left to right): Kodiak NWR in Alaska, Cannon Beach, Oregon, Bowdoin NWR in Montana, Hule'ia NWR in Hawaii, National Elk Refuge in Wyoming, Kayaking at Rappahannock NWR in Virginia



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Tribal Updates

Tribal Wildlife Grants

Funding Announcement for 2014 Tribal Wildlife Grants

The request for proposals for the FY 2014 Tribal Wildlife Grant grant cycle opened May 1, 2013 and will close September 3, 2013. Proposals must be submitted to the appropriate Regional Office with a postmark of no later than September 3, 2013. All proposals should align with the [Mountain-Prairie Regional Priorities \(PDF 6.4 MB\)](#).

- [Application Kit](#) (includes information and guidance for preparing and submitting a project proposal)

Funding Awards for 2013 Tribal Wildlife Grants

Tribes awarded grants in the Mountain-Prairie Region are:

- *NORTH DAKOTA*: Standing Rock (\$191,286) Small Mammal Diversity and Abundance
- *SOUTH DAKOTA*: Cheyenne River Sioux (\$200,000) Black-footed Ferret Recovery Project

The Service announced Tribal Wildlife Grants awards to Native American tribes in 14 states to fund a wide range of conservation projects. "The mindful stewardship of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats is a value that tribal nations share with the Service," said Service Director Dan Ashe. "Tribal Wildlife Grants create opportunities for us to work together in a variety of ways, including species restoration, fish passage, protection of migratory birds, and coping with long-term effects of a changing climate."

More than \$60 million has gone to Native American tribes through the Tribal Wildlife Grants program since 2003, providing support for more than 360

conservation projects administered by participating federally recognized tribes. These grants provide technical and financial assistance for development and implementation of projects that benefit fish and wildlife resources and their habitats, including non-game species. The grants have enabled tribes to develop increased management capacity, improve and enhance relationships with partners (including state agencies), address cultural and environmental priorities, and heighten tribal students' interest in fisheries, wildlife and related fields of study. Some grants have been awarded to support recovery efforts for threatened and endangered species.

[Learn More](#)

Grizzly bear in Yellowstone National Park



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Landscape Conservation Cooperatives

Southern Rockies LCC Update



LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION
COOPERATIVES

SOUTHERN Rockies LCC

Activities and Accomplishments



Recently the Southern Rockies Landscape Conservation Cooperative (SRLCC) released their fiscal year 2012 activities and accomplishments annual report. The SRLCC is a voluntary network of partners working together to address conservation goals at landscape-scales. In order to achieve shared goals, SRLCC partners share data, science and capacity. They work across boundaries and jurisdictions to identify common efforts, build consensus, and enact a strategic approach to enhancing their individual and collective landscape-scale conservation efforts. Through effective analysis and decision support, SRLCC partners work efficiently to reduce the challenges of conservation in complex ecological systems. View the full report online [here](#).



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OPERATION Rolling Thunder

United States Attorney Michael W. Cotter of the District of Montana, and U.S. Attorney Brendan V. Johnson of the District of South Dakota announced the results of Operation Rolling Thunder, a two-year covert investigation focusing on unlawful trafficking in federally-protected migratory birds, primarily bald and golden eagles. The operation was conducted by Service agents from March 2008 through February 2011 in Montana and South Dakota. The investigation documented 43 transactions of protected migratory birds, primarily bald and golden eagles, in violation of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Lacey Act. The unlawful transactions include the purchase of multiple whole carcass bald and

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golden eagles in interstate commerce using the U.S. Postal Service and wire transfers of funds to further the transactions. In total, the operation was able to purchase feathers, other bird parts, and complete migratory birds, which involved a minimum of 80 eagles and 30 hawks.

In response to the successful prosecutions, U.S. Attorney Michael W. Cotter said, “I have to commend the investigators with the U.S. Fish Wildlife Service and Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark Smith for his excellent work in this case. Investigations and prosecutions, like Operation Rolling Thunder, of those that kill our protected species for their own gain are vital to ensuring the sustainability of the majestic raptors of our country.”

“This investigation documented the unlawful killing and commercialization of eagles and hawks, an unlawful practice that in certain areas of our country is a significant threat to species that are a vital part of our natural heritage,” said Ed Grace, Deputy Chief for the Service. “We hope the penalties in these cases serve as a deterrent to those engaged in this practice, and urge the public to help us put an end to it.” *(continued)*

Bald eagle



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OPERATION Rolling Thunder

On October 12, 2012, the Department of Justice announced a policy addressing the ability of members of federally recognized Indian tribes to possess or use eagle feathers, an issue of great cultural significance to many tribes and their members. The Attorney General's memorandum is the first formal policy statement adopted by the Justice Department on this issue. It clarifies and expands on longstanding Department practice, consistent with the Department of the Interior's 35-year old Morton Policy, of not prosecuting tribal members for possessing or using eagle feathers and other protected bird parts. Federal wildlife laws such as the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act criminalize the killing of eagles and other migratory birds and the possession or commercialization of the feathers and other parts of such birds. These laws are enforced by the Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior and help ensure that eagle and other bird populations remain healthy and sustainable.

Many Indian tribes and tribal members have historically used, and continue to use federally protected birds, bird feathers or other bird parts for their tribal cultural and religious expression. Federal wildlife laws recognize the importance of accommodating tribal spiritual needs by allowing exceptions for the religious purposes of Indian tribes. Eagle feathers are made available to tribal members every year from the Service's [National Eagle Repository](#).

- Read the [Department's Eagle Feathers Policy](#)



Immature bald eagle



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service In Memoriam



Dr. Robert Klumb



Maegan Spindler

Dr. Robert Klumb, Project Leader at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Great Plains Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, and **Maegan Spindler**, a Service biological technician, were struck and killed by a vehicle on July 8, 2013. The cause of the incident is being investigated by the SD Highway Patrol. Rob and Maegan and the rest of the crew had completed a day of field work and were in the parking lot of their hotel in Pickstown, South Dakota, when Rob and Maegan lost their lives.

Rob started his academic career at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where he earned two B.S. degrees, one in Biology and the other in Conservation of Natural Resources. He earned his M.S. (Natural Resources) at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Rob then earned his PhD in 2002 at Cornell University where he studied the role of Lake Ontario nearshore habitats as nursery areas for larval and juvenile alewives. Rob started his 10-year career as a fisheries biologist in the Great Plains Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office in 2002. He demonstrated exceptional skills as a biologist and a mentor and was promoted to a Project Leader position in 2009. Rob played many important roles in the Service's multi-partner effort to recover the endangered pallid sturgeon and to restore the Missouri River. Rob is remembered by his colleagues as a brilliant biologist and as an exceptional mentor for his staff and students at South Dakota State University (where he served as an adjunct professor).

Maegan began her first position with the Service this spring and had already stood out as a dedicated and passionate fisheries biologist. She was most recently from Cazenovia, NY, and earned a B.S. degree in Wildlife Science from the State University of New York at Syracuse. Afterwards she earned a fisheries diploma from Vancouver Island University in British Columbia. Prior to working for the Service, Maegan worked two years for Wyoming's Department of Game and Fish as a fisheries technician. According to her friends and colleagues, her passion for enjoying the gifts of nature and working with fish and wildlife shone brightly.

Both Rob and Maegan will be greatly missed by their families, the Service and the world of conservation.

In Memoriam



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