

Scoping Report

*San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex:
Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Baca
National Wildlife Refuges*

Colorado

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Scoping

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is developing a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) to provide a foundation for the management and use of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (complex). The complex is made up of three refuges located in south central Colorado: Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge, and Baca National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) (figure 1). Additionally, the Service is looking at the potential for protecting other lands within the watershed through the development of a land protection plan (LPP) figure 2). This would be achieved largely through strategic acquisition of conservation easements although some limited fee-title acquisition could occur.

Both the CCP and LPP are being developed in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 and Part 602 of the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual on compatibility (FWS 2000a), refuge planning (FWS 2000b), and other policy and guidance documents. The actions described in the CCP and LPP also meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Compliance with NEPA is being achieved throughout the process by involving the public and preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

This scoping report summarizes the outreach activities and the comments received during the initial scoping phase of the project. While the Service welcomes and accepts public comments until the comment period closes on the draft documents, comments derived from the scoping process assist the Service in determining what the significant issues are that need to be addressed during the planning

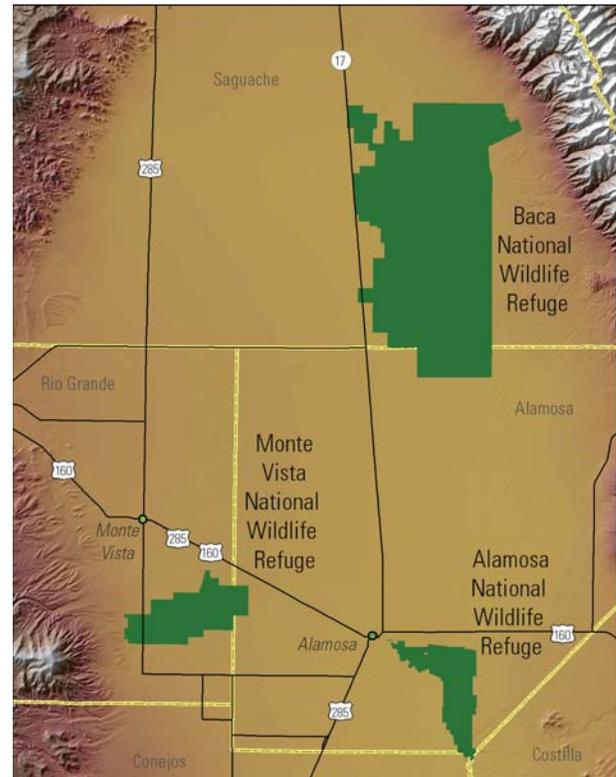


Figure 1. Location of refuge complex in Colorado.

process. Table 1 shows the schedule for the planning project. The project is anticipated to take four years to complete. There is a potential that the LPP will move ahead at a different schedule than the CCP process, primarily due to different complexities of the projects. If this occurs, a separate environmental assessment will be prepared for the LPP. Either way, at the end of the process, each will have its own stand-alone plan.

Table 1. Planning Phases and Schedule for CCP Process

<i>Planning Phase</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Public Involvement and Activity</i>
Preplanning	Fall 2010	Discussions with potential cooperating agencies.
Scoping	March 2011	Public meetings and comment
Alternatives Development	Fall 2011-Winter 2012	Public meetings and comment
Develop draft CCP/LPP* and EIS	2012-2013	Public meetings and comment on draft document
Final CCP/LPP and EIS	2014	
Record of Decision	2014	

*The development of the LPP may move ahead at a different timeframe. If this occurs, a separate environmental assessment will be incorporated into the document.

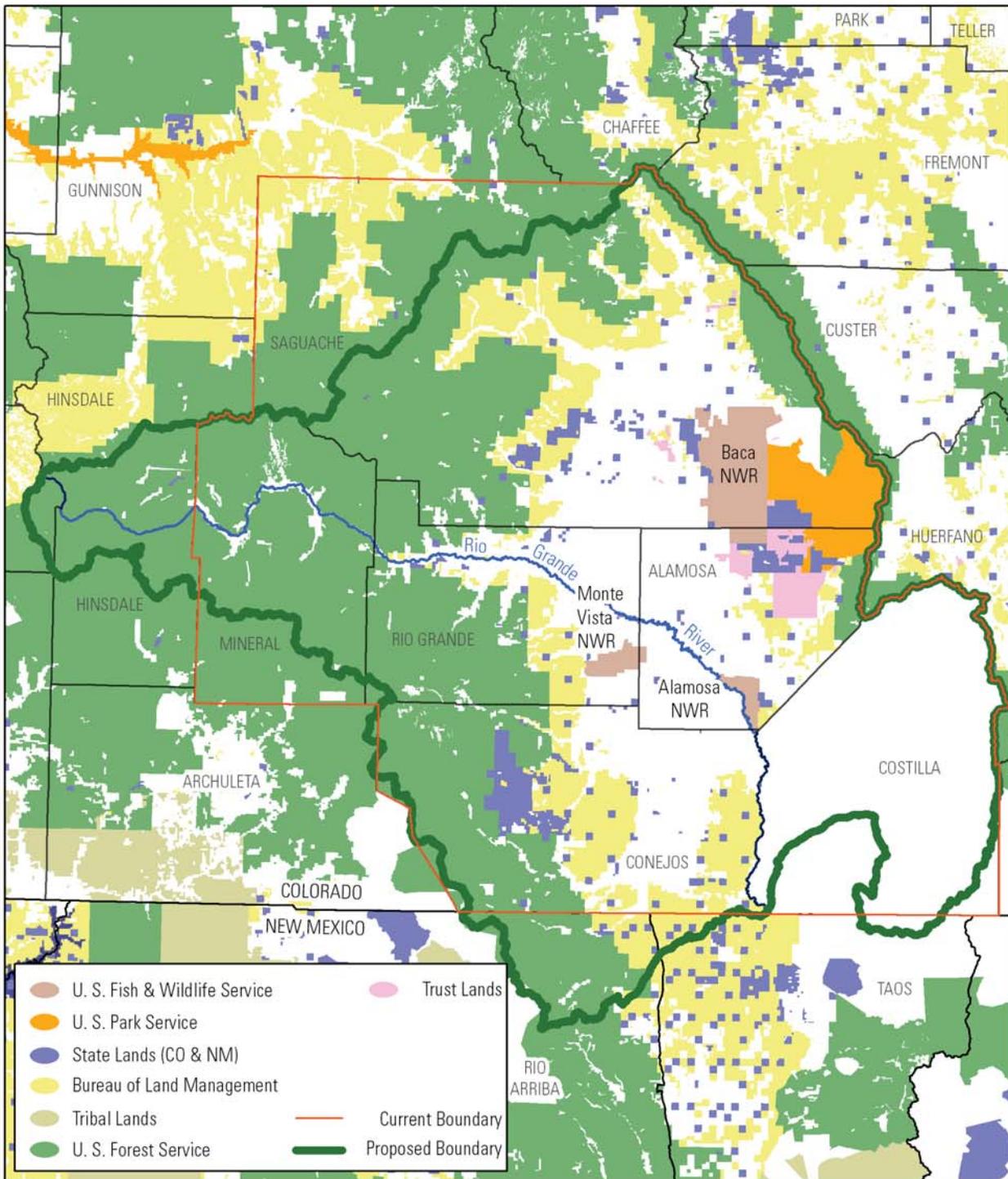


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

San Luis Valley Conservation Area (Proposed)

Colorado, New Mexico

Preliminary Project Proposal Land Status



PRODUCED IN THE DIVISION OF REFUGE PLANNING
 DENVER, COLORADO
 LAND STATUS CURRENT TO: 01/02/11
 MAP DATE: 01/02/11
 BASEMAP: DRG 24K
 MERIDIAN: NAD



Figure 2. Map of proposed San Luis Valley Conservation Area.

When fully implemented, the CCP will strive to achieve the vision, goals, and purposes of the three refuges. Refer to appendix A for the draft project vision and goals. Fish and wildlife are the first priority in refuge management, and wildlife-dependent recreational uses are encouraged as long as the use is appropriate and compatible with a refuge's purpose and the mission of the Refuge System. The priority public uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation and environmental education) are given first consideration. The LPP will achieve landscape-level habitat conservation goals within the Southern Rockies Landscape Conservation Cooperative which is designed to protect wildlife and wetland habitat in southern Colorado (FWS 2011).

The CCP and LPP are being prepared by a planning team composed of representatives from various Service programs together with several cooperating agencies that include the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and Colorado Division of Water Resources.

SCOPING PERIOD

The public scoping process is an important component of the project. During this phase, the Service sought input from citizens and interested organizations; Federal, State, and local agencies; and tribal governments to help inform the planning process. This helped identify specific opportunities, issues, concerns, and ideas related to the management of the refuge.

The formal scoping period for the general public began on March 15, 2011, with the publication of a notice of intent in the Federal Register (FR Doc. 2011-5924). The notice of intent (appendix B) notified the public of the Service's intent to begin the CCP/LPP and EIS process and solicited public comments. The scoping period ended on April 29, 2011. Comments that were received after this date were not considered for this scoping report, but they will still be considered during the process. Public input is welcomed throughout the process and can be made any time until the formal comment period closes on the draft CCP/LPP and EIS.

Public scoping meetings were held on March 29, 2011 in Alamosa, Colorado; March 30, 2011 in Monte Vista, Colorado; and March 31, 2011 in Moffat, Colorado.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Early in the preplanning phase, the Service identified a process that would be inclusive of many interests and would involve a range of activities for

keeping the public informed and ensure meaningful public input (see appendix C). To date, the Service used various methods to solicit guidance and feedback from interested citizens, organizations, tribes, and government agencies. These methods have included outreach materials, public scoping meetings, agency meetings, briefings and presentations, as well as letters, e-mail and telephone calls.

Planning Updates

A planning update was mailed to about 300 persons and businesses during the period leading up to the public meetings, and most updates were mailed in mid-March 2011 (appendix C). The planning update and an earlier piece titled "Public Involvement Summary" (appendix C), outlined the planning process, the draft vision and goals for the refuge, and the dates, times and locations of the public scoping meetings. Information contained in the planning update was announced at local agency meetings. The planning update distribution list consisted of individuals, agencies, and organizations who previously expressed an interest in refuge activities.

Press Release

A press release announcing the planning process and notifying the public of the schedule and location of the public meetings (appendix D) was sent to nearly 857 media organizations throughout Colorado including congressional offices, other federal and state agency offices, and tribal agencies. A number of news articles about the planning process appeared in a number of newspapers, radio, television, and online publications prior to the meetings. Additionally, the project leader gave a taped radio interview with KSLV in Monte Vista, CO that aired on April 16, 2011 and another live interview with KRZA which aired twice on April 19, 2011.

Project Website

The project's planning website <<http://www.fws.gov/alamosa/planning>> was established in early March 2011. The site provides information about the public scoping meetings, as well as downloadable versions of all of the available public scoping documents. An example of the web site is included in appendix D. All interested citizens can sign up to be on the project mailing list or can provide public comment through the planning website.

Public Scoping Meetings

The three public scoping meetings (March 29-31, 2011) were a major component of the public scoping process. The purpose of these meetings was to solicit public concerns and planning ideas that will be considered in the CCP/LPP and EIS. Meetings

were held at three locations—Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Moffat.

Following a brief welcome and introduction, Service staff made a presentation that outlined the following points:

- Description of the Service and the purpose of the Refuge System
- CCP and EIS process
- Project schedule
- Draft vision and goals
- Proposed San Luis Valley Conservation Area and LPP

Following the presentation, the remainder of the meeting was broken up into two components—questions and answers and public comments. During the question and answer session, the facilitator took all the audience’s questions. In turn, Service staff answered all questions. Most of the meeting time was spent in the question and answer session. After all the questions were answered, the Service took comments from those who wanted to offer them. This format enabled participants to have their questions and concerns answered about the planning process and also identified many of the important issues. Refer to appendix E for a complete summary of the comments heard at the meetings.

Other Briefings

The Service has briefed a number of entities including county commissioners from the affected governments, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, and others.

As part of President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoor initiative, the Service has met with a wide array of local ranchers and stakeholders, county commissioners, State representatives, and other Federal agencies to talk about landscape conservation and other values in the San Luis Valley.

AGENCY AND TRIBAL COORDINATION

In accordance with the Service’s planning policy, the preplanning and scoping process began with formal notification to Native American tribes and other federal and state agencies with a land management interest and inviting them to participate as cooperating agencies and members of the planning team.

Native American Tribes

The Service sent letters of notification about the planning process including an invitation to participate on the planning team to the following tribes: Cochiti Pueblo, Pueblo of Santa Clara, Pueblo of Laguna, Pueblo of Zuni, Pueblo of Picuris, Pueblo

of San Ildefonso, Pueblo of Acoma, Pueblo of Santa Ana, Pueblo of Taos, Pueblo of Jemez, Uintah and Ouray Ute Indian Tribe, Southern Ute Tribe, Ute Mountain Tribe, Jicarilla Apache Nation, Ohkay Owingeh, and Navajo Nation. The Service is continuing to work with interested tribes who are interested in the planning process.

Federal, State, and Local Agencies

The Service sent letters of notification about the planning process including an invitation to participate on the planning team to the following agencies: National Park Service; Bureau of Reclamation; San Luis Valley Public Lands Center—Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service; Natural Resources Conservation Service; Colorado Division of Wildlife; and the Colorado Division of Water Resources. To date, the Service met with the counties located within the refuge boundaries about the planning process including Alamosa, Rio Grande, and Saguache counties. Additionally, the Service has met with or notified several of the adjacent counties.

SCOPING RESULTS

The following discussion summarizes the methods for comment collection and analysis, the number and source of comments received and a summary of the comments. The planning team collected comments, questions and concerns about the future of the refuge through public meetings, letters, e-mail, and other methods as described in the Public Scoping Activities section above.

Methods for Comment Collection and Analysis

The objective of the scoping process is to gather the full range of comments, questions and concerns that the public has about management of the refuge or the planning process. All comments, questions, or issues, whether from written submissions or recorded at the public meetings were organized by topic into a spreadsheet and coded for organizational purposes. Every effort was made to document all issues, questions, and concerns. Regardless of whether comments and questions were general in nature or about specific points of concern, they were added to the spreadsheet one time.

The Service provided optional questions to the public that included the following:

- What suggestions do you have for managing migratory birds on the refuges in the face of climate change and declining precipitation?
- What ideas do you have regarding visitor services and wildlife-dependent public uses on the refuges, particularly Baca National Wildlife Refuge which is currently closed to any public use?

- What changes, if any, would you like to see in the management of the Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges?
- What concerns do you have regarding the additional protection of wildlife and wetland habitat in the San Luis Valley? Can the use of conservation easements protect important wildlife resources in the valley?
- What concerns do you have regarding ungulate management on the refuges or the reintroduction of species such as the American bison?

All comments received from individuals on Service NEPA documents become part of the official public record. Requests for information contained in comments are handled in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, NEPA and other Department of Interior and Service policies and procedures. In compliance with the policies of the Service regarding disclosure of personal information, any names, addresses, or other personal information of individuals (does not apply to agencies or organizations) who commented will not be published in any document unless that information was spoken in a public meeting.

The Service emphasizes that public scoping is not a voting process, and each comment is considered on the substance and relevancy to the planning process. A summary list of all the comments received by topic during the scoping process is found in appendix D.

COMMENT SUMMARY

The Service received input on a wide array of topics and subtopics. Comments were submitted in writing and/or offered at the public meetings held in March 2011 in Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Moffat, Colorado. Figure 3 shows the interest level in various topics. For a complete summary of the notes from the public meetings refer to appendix E.

Approximately 52 people attended the three public meetings with the largest audience at the meeting in Moffat where about 33 people attended (10 at Alamosa and 9 at Monte Vista). Additionally, about 14 organizations and citizens provided written comments. Agency or organizations included the Environmental Protection Agency, Defenders of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, Lexam, and their legal firm.

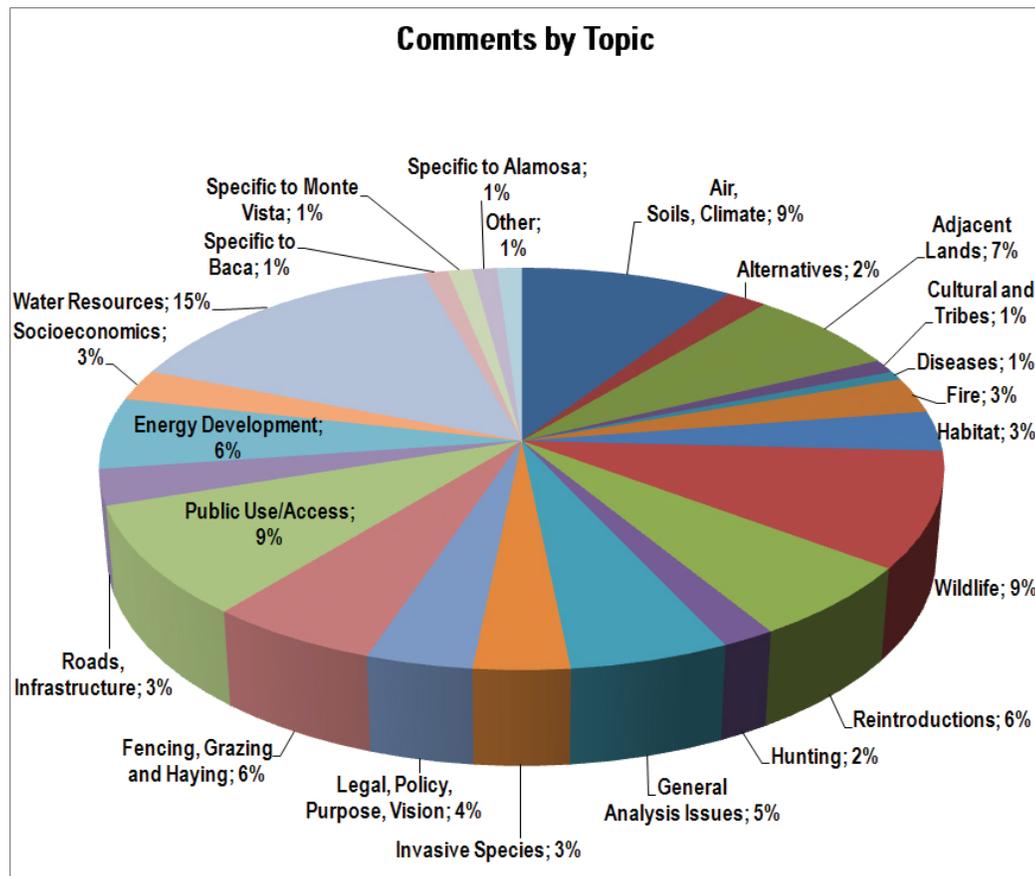


Figure 3. Percentage of comments by topic.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN CCP AND EIS PROCESS

Based on the qualities, issues, and recommendations identified in the scoping comments, as well as guidance from the Improvement Act, NEPA, and the Service's planning policy, the Service organized all the comments into seven significant topics and a number of subtopics that will be addressed in the CCP and EIS:

- Habitat and Wildlife Management
 - Protection and management of migratory birds
 - Elk management within the complex
 - Reintroduction of species including American bison
 - Protection of threatened, endangered, and species of concern
 - Protection or restoration of unique or important vegetation communities
 - Livestock grazing, farming practices, use of fencing, and other management tools
 - Management of invasive and noxious weeds
 - Fire management on the landscape
 - Issues related to biological diversity, integrity, and environmental health
- Water Resources
 - Management and development of water
 - Water amount and quality
 - Water rights and pumping of wells
 - Protection of wetlands, including playas, riparian areas, and river corridor
 - Irrigation and diversion practices
- Landscape Conservation and Protection
 - San Luis Valley Conservation Area and future land protection priorities
 - Development of partnerships for adjacent land protection
 - Wilderness review
 - Wildland and urban fire interface on the refuges
- Visitor services
 - Hunting
 - Visitor access
 - Environmental education, interpretation, photography, and wildlife observation opportunities on the refuges
 - Non-priority uses
 - Management of visitor services with energy development
- Partnerships and Operations
 - Refuge management and the impacts to adjacent lands
 - Funding and infrastructure needs for management and operations
 - Management of third party mineral rights and their potential impacts
 - Management of existing infrastructure and boundary areas
- Cultural Resources and Tribal Coordination
 - Need for comprehensive inventories and maintaining legal obligations to protect resources
- Research, Science and Protection of the Physical Environment
 - Climate change and its effect on refuge management
 - Energy development
 - Protection of air, soils, and natural sounds and visibility

Habitat and Wildlife Management

A wide variety of habitats are found across the three refuges, including wet meadows, playa wetlands, riparian areas within the flood plain of the Rio Grande, desert shrublands and grasslands, and croplands. Totalling about 106,000 acres, the refuges are an important stopover for numerous migratory birds including nesting, migrating, and wintering birds. The federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, a small neotropical bird species is found fairly frequently in the willow-cottonwood corridor along the Rio Grande in Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge. Several other Federal and State species of concern including the Rio Grande sucker, Rio Grande chub, the northern leopard frog are found within or adjacent to the refuge. Many species of mammals use the refuge including elk, deer, coyote, porcupine, and other small mammals.

The Service provides artificial and created habitats on the refuges to support an abundance of migratory birds, including populations of sandhill crane that may not be sustainable long-term with continued management. One of the manipulations is the growth of barley, a non-native crop which provides a high carbohydrate food source in a small area, but removes that area from the promotion of native vegetation. There are questions about the long-term sustainability of this strategy. Spring food is not as available in their migration path, and not providing a food source could impact the health and vigor of the cranes. These issues and questions about whether it may be possible to increase the use of native vegetation without unacceptable trade-offs to the sandhill crane populations will be examined in the CCP and EIS. Additionally, the plan will address the role



Black-necked stilts fly over a wetland.

that the refuges should play in the management of other migratory birds and endangered, threatened, or species of concern found on the refuges. Particularly, the Service will address whether continued artificial manipulation of habitat and replacement of native habitat meets the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and purposes of the refuges.

The CCP and EIS will address the management of increasing elk populations across all of the refuges and in particular on Baca National Wildlife Refuge where elk are having a significant impact on riparian areas. They are inhibiting the ability of willows to grow which is detrimental to the habitat suitability for species such as the southwestern willow flycatcher. The National Park Service is developing an ungulate management plan for Great Sand Dunes National Park, and the Service is committed to sharing information and coordinating the two planning processes where possible. Adjacent landowners have expressed concerns over the impact the burgeoning population is having on these lands.

There has been interest expressed in the reintroduction of the American bison on Baca National Wildlife Refuge. Whether the refuge could support free-roaming bison without negatively affecting other species or habitat is a topic of concern.

Other issues of interest to be addressed including the use of prescribed fire, livestock grazing, haying, farming, control of invasive species, wildland fire suppression, and management of diseases (e.g. mosquito control for West Nile or brucellosis if bison were introduced). These are all important topics to address in the planning process.

Water Resources

All of the refuges were set aside largely for the protection of migratory birds, although the purposes for Baca National Wildlife Refuge are broader than Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges. The topic of water is one of the biggest concerns for residents in the San Luis valley. In recent years, pre-

cipitation has declined in the valley. Many residents have questions about the Service's use of water on the refuge even though the Service has senior water rights. Water management is an important tool in providing food and cover for birds. For the CCP process, the Service is undertaking a hydrogeomorphic study to look at historic water flows on the refuges. This information will help inform alternatives development in the planning process.

The management and development of water includes a number of subtopics about water rights; water quality; amount and timing of water use; the pumping of wells and the use of irrigation across the refuge; and the protection of wetlands including playas, riparian areas, and the river corridor. These are all important concerns to be discussed during the CCP process.

Landscape Conservation and Protection

Many individuals, organizations, and agencies have been involved for a number of years in protecting wetlands and other areas in the San Luis valley. The role the refuges play in this conservation effort is important. As part of President Obama's America's Great Outdoors Initiative, the Secretary of Interior announced that the San Luis Valley would be one of three focus areas in the State of Colorado (DOI 2011). The Department of Interior and other federal agencies will work with the State, local stakeholders, private landowners and other partners to help conserve healthy lands and waters and promote tourism in the San Luis Valley and the Rio Grande River Corridor. The Service has proposed the San Luis Valley Conservation Area to be considered as part of the planning process. Primarily the Service would protect wetlands and other important resources through conservation easements, although some limited fee-title acquisition could occur. How the proposed conservation area contributes to other conservation efforts or the President's initiative is important to consider.

As part of the CCP process, the Service is required to conduct a wilderness review and incorporate a summary of the review in the CCP. Specifically, the CCP will look at whether any areas on Baca National Wildlife Refuge would meet the values expressed in the Wilderness Act and the Service's Wilderness Stewardship Plan (FWS 2008).

Visitor Services

Hunting, including harvest of elk on all of the refuges is a key topic of interest in the planning process. There is both support for and opposition expressed for the use of hunting as a management tool and as a wildlife-dependent recreational activity. There is



Many commenters expressed their desire to see more environmental education programs.

also a desire by many for the Service to invest more in environmental education and interpretation in order to educate visitors about the importance of the refuges and to convey a sense of the history of the place and human presence in the valley. A central part of this would be developing a future step-down plan for visitor services that would identify central themes or messages and tie them together. The plan should address accessibility among other components of the overall visitor experience. Currently public use is not allowed on Baca National Wildlife Refuge. The type of visitor services and access; the socioeconomic impacts; and how energy development could affect visitor aesthetics or uses on Baca National Wildlife Refuge are important considerations to address. These activities also impact staffing and infrastructure needs.

Partnerships and Refuge Operations

Many agencies, organizations, and landowners are currently working in partnership to accomplish a number of common goals, and the CCP and LPP will provide for additional opportunities to engage with others to address issues. Wildlife populations are greatly affected by outside influences as well as conditions found within the refuges. Invasive species are a threat not only for the refuges, but for other Federal, State, and local governments and private landowners. Privately-owned mineral rights, energy development lands, fire management, and other rights of ways issues influence future conditions on the refuges. The Service does not own the mineral rights on Baca National Wildlife Refuge and needs better strategies on how to handle the third party minerals rights and their potential impacts. Surface use agreements that come with the mineral rights limit how the refuge can manage these impacts. There is significant interest in having the

Service think beyond the boundaries of each refuge and crafting plans at the landscape scale whenever possible.

Additionally, all of the refuges have significant operational and infrastructure requirements and needs. The Baca National Wildlife Refuge boundary has not been completely surveyed, posted, or fenced. The lack of boundary delineation could result in trespass and ownership conflicts. When the Baca refuge was acquired, it came without additional resources or funding for operations, creating challenges for management without staff support. For all of the refuges, there is a need to continually re-evaluate the allocation of staff as current staffing levels are not adequate to meet operational needs. The Service had to cut nearly all of its environmental education efforts due to lack of staffing. The cost and the amount of energy used to pump needed water for the refuges raises the question of whether these costs are sustainable in the long-term, particularly in light of the need to reduce energy use. A comprehensive condition assessment of infrastructure for water delivery and measurement is needed. A plan does not exist for the upkeep of historic buildings on the refuges. There is a need for detailed mapping and condition assessment of existing infrastructure.

Cultural Resources and Tribal Coordination

About 12,000 years of history and prehistory has been documented on the refuges. In general, there has been outstanding cooperation between federal agencies, tribes, and collectors to preserve and document the history of the region.

Only about 5 percent of the areas found on the refuges have been comprehensively inventoried. Concern exists that the lack of information could lead to destruction of important sites. Lack of research, concerns about destruction and vandalism, lack of staffing to maintain legal obligations for compliance, the ability to maintain ongoing relationships with tribes, collectors, and other agencies are all important issues to be addressed in the CCP and EIS.

Research, Science, and Protection of the Physical Environment

The refuge complex exists in a unique area containing large contiguous tracts of generally protected environments—Federal, State, and private lands. This is coupled with multiple agencies who work well together; a dynamic scientific community; and many interested and knowledgeable citizens. All share a common interest in protecting the values and attributes of the San Luis Valley. As a result many opportunities exist for applied research and in sharing that information between entities.

Baca National Wildlife Refuge is adjacent to a designated wilderness area and a National Park; and therefore, a class I air quality area. Other physical attributes include the immense dark night sky and quiet soundscapes. These were identified as important qualities by many residents.

Climate change is one of the biggest issues affecting plants and wildlife today across Service lands (FWS 2010). In the San Luis Valley, current data suggests that climate change could be affecting the valley, as there have been longer patterns of increased temperatures and lower precipitation. On adjacent lands, there have been dramatic changes in forest vegetation due to large areas of diseased trees which could affect changes in water flow. Longer periods of drought may become more common in the future. These changes could threaten numerous species in the valley and on the refuges, particularly those dependent on water habitats. Even if the refuges provide habitat through water manipulation, sandhill cranes, waterfowl and other migratory birds may suffer due to conditions in other parts of the valley. Strategies for protecting the important physical attributes as well as managing the refuges in light of climate change, a declining aquifer, energy development, wildlife diseases, and invasive species are important issues to address in the planning process.

RATIONALE FOR SELECTING SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The planning team considered every comment received during the public scoping process. These comments were grouped for consideration into relevant topics and subtopics, as described in the section above and appendix E. Based on guidance from NEPA and Service planning policy, the planning team determined which topics would constitute significant issues, and which were outside the scope of the planning process. Issues that are deemed significant are typically those issues that are within the Service's jurisdiction, suggest different actions or alternatives, and will influence the Service's decision. Many of the significant issues are interrelated. Issues identified in the scoping process that were not considered to be significant issues are described under the Issues Outside the Scope of the CCP and EIS section.

ISSUES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF CCP AND EIS

Several issues that were identified during the scoping process were not selected for detailed

analysis in the CCP and EIS. In accordance with NEPA requirements, the Service identified and eliminated from detailed study the topics and issues that are not significant, discussing those issues only briefly. These issues and the rationale for not selecting them as significant issues are described below.

Development of Mineral Rights

The Service does not own the mineral rights within Baca National Wildlife Refuge. The draft CCP and EIS will not address the rights of private property owners to exercise their rights to extract any locatable minerals or oil and gas within or adjacent to the refuge. Any exploration wells or activities supporting the testing, development, or production of gas, oil, and other minerals will be analyzed through an additional and separate NEPA process. The CCP and EIS will not analyze a future mineral development alternative, but it will look at how habitat and wildlife and visitor services should be managed if mineral development occurs in the future.

Baca Oil and Gas Environmental Assessment

Lexam Explorations (U.S.A.) Inc., an owner of a mineral interest below portions of the surface estate of the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, has proposed drilling two wells to explore for oil and gas beneath the surface estate of the refuge. Following the development of an environmental assessment in January 2011, to address the impacts on the surface estate of Baca National Wildlife Refuge, the Service issued a Finding of No Significant Impact for the proposal by Lexam. The CCP and EIS will not readdress the decision made on April 1, 2011 for two test wells. Any additional exploration wells or activities supporting the production of natural gas or oil on the refuge will be analyzed through an additional and separate NEPA process.

Closed Basin Project

The Bureau of Reclamation operates the closed basin project in south central Colorado which has a surface area of 2,940 square miles. The San Juan Mountains on the west and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains on the east merge to form the northern boundary of the basin. Portions of it are within Alamosa and Baca National Wildlife Refuges. The purpose of the closed basin project is to salvage ground water in the closed basin that would otherwise be lost to evapotranspiration (BOR 2011). The CCP and EIS will not address any jurisdictional, operational, or infrastructure issues related to this project.

Refuge Revenue Sharing Payments

Since 1935, the Service has made revenue-sharing payments for refuge land under its administration to

counties under the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act of 1935 (16 U.S.C. 715s) which has been subsequently amended. These payments are not the same as other Federal revenue-sharing payments measures such as Payments in Lieu of Taxes which applies to lands administered by other agencies including those within the Department of the Interior. When there is not enough money to cover the payments, Congress is authorized to appropriate money to make up the deficit; however, payments to a county are reduced when Congress fails to appropriate the money. While these can be issues of concern in times of declining revenues, the Service has no control over these payments. Addressing the issue of declining payments is outside the scope of the draft CCP and EIS.

Military Overflights

The United States Air Force is preparing an environmental assessment to evaluate the potential environmental consequences of establishing a Low Altitude Tactical Navigation (LATN) area in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado (USAF 2010). The LATN would provide airspace to operate C-130 and CV-22 aircraft for training purposes. The Federal Aviation Administration has the responsibility to plan, manage, and control the structure and use of all airspace over the United States. Day-to-day airspace designation, design, and management is delegated through the Federal Aviation Administration to the military. Furthermore, the Improvement Act specifically exempted overflights above a refuge from compatibility requirements (FWS 2000a). Addressing military overflights would be outside the scope of the analysis except for any cumulative impact that could result from a Service action.

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Appendix A

Draft Vision and Goals



Vision Statement

The San Luis Valley Refuge Complex, set in a high expansive desert valley, is cradled between the snowcapped peaks of the San Juan and Sangre De Cristo Ranges. Mountain snowmelt feeds the Rio Grande, numerous streams, and a dynamic groundwater system creating a diverse mix of playas, wet meadows, willow and cottonwood riparian corridors that are in stark contrast with the surrounding arid landscape. As reflected by 12,000 years of human history in the valley, the refuge complex attracts many people. Visitors experience the ancient song of the sandhill crane, witness evening flights of thousands of waterfowl, and listen to bugling elk. The refuges support and foster a collaborative spirit between its neighbors and partners to conserve the valley's treasured resources.

Goal Statements

Habitat and Wildlife Goal

Conserve, restore and enhance the ecological diversity and function of the San Luis Valley ecosystem to support healthy populations of native fish and wildlife, with an emphasis on migratory birds.

Water Goal

Protect, acquire and manage surface and groundwater resources to maintain and support management objectives.

Visitor Services Goal

Provide safe, accessible and quality wildlife-dependent recreation and perform outreach to visitors and local communities to nurture an appreciation and understanding of the unique natural and cultural resources of the San Luis Valley.

Cultural Resources Goal

Protect significant cultural resources within the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Research and Science Goal

Use sound science, applied research, monitoring, and evaluation to advance the understanding of natural resource functions and management of the habitats within the San Luis Valley ecosystem.

Operation and Management Goal

Secure and effectively use funding, staffing, and partnerships for the benefit of all resources in support of the Refuge Complex purposes and the mission of the Refuge System.

Land Conservation and Partnership Goal

Actively pursue and continue to foster partnerships with other agencies, organizations, the water community and private landowners to conserve, manage, and provide long-term sustainability of the working landscapes within the San Luis Valley ecosystem.

Appendix B

Notice of Intent

Comments may refer to both broad areas or may refer to particular blocks.

6. Information from Call

Information submitted in response to this Call will be used for several purposes, including identifying and prioritizing areas with potential for oil and gas development as well as determining possible environmental effects and potential conflicts in the Call area. The areas nominated in the proposed sales, their respective rankings, and comments will be analyzed to make a preliminary determination of the potential advantages and disadvantages of oil and gas exploration and development to the region and the Nation. Comments collected will be used to develop proposed actions and alternatives in the EIS scoping process, to develop lease terms and conditions to ensure safe offshore operations, and to assess

potential conflicts between offshore gas and oil activities and a State CMP.

7. Existing Information

BOEMRE routinely assesses the status of information acquisition efforts and the quality of the information base for potential decisions on tentatively scheduled lease sales. As a result of this continually ongoing assessment, it has been determined that the status of the existing and extensive data available for planning, analysis, and decision making is adequate.

An extensive environmental studies program has been underway in the GOM since 1973. The emphasis, including continuing studies, has been on environmental characterization of biologically sensitive habitats, physical oceanography, ocean-circulation modeling, and ecological effects of oil and gas activities.

A complete listing of available study reports, and information for ordering

copies, can be obtained from the Public Information Office referenced above. The reports may also be ordered, for a fee, from the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, 5301 Shawnee Road, Springfield, Virginia 22312, or telephone (703) 605-6000 or (800) 553-6847. In addition, a program status report for continuing studies in this area can be obtained from the Chief, Environmental Sciences Section (MS 5430), Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394, or telephone (504) 736-2752, or via the BOEMRE Web site at: <http://www.gomr.boemre.gov/homepg/regulate/environ/studiesprogram.html>.

8. Tentative Schedule

MILESTONES FOR MULTISALE EIS FOR PROPOSED 2012-2017 CENTRAL AND WESTERN GOM PLANNING AREA SALES

Notice of Intent (NOI) to Prepare a Multisale EIS	February 2011.
Call for Information and Nominations	March 2011.
Comments received on NOI	March/April 2011.
Comments received on Call	April 2011.
Area Identification Decision	May/June 2011.
Draft EIS published	Summer 2011.
Public Hearings on Draft EIS	Fall 2011.
Final EIS	Spring 2012.

9. Sale Milestones

The following is a list of tentative milestone dates applicable to lease sales covered by this Call:

SALE-SPECIFIC MILESTONES FOR PROPOSED 2012-2017 CENTRAL AND WESTERN GOM PLANNING AREA SALES

Request for Information to Begin Lease Sale Specific Process	12 months before each lease sale.
Environmental Review Completed	5 to 7 months before each lease sale.
Proposed Notice and CZM Consistency Determination	5 months before each lease sale.
Final Notice of Sale	1 month before each lease sale.

Finally, the tentative months for GOM lease sales during 2012-2017 are:

Central GOM Sales: March of each year.

Western GOM Sales: November 2012. August of each year thereafter.

Dated: February 28, 2011.

Michael R. Bromwich,

Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy, Management, Regulation and Enforcement.

[FR Doc. 2011-5953 Filed 3-14-11; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-MR-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R6-R-2011-N014]; 60138-1265-6CCP-S3]

San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Alamosa, CO; Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent; request for comments.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), intend to

prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex) in Alamosa, Colorado. The Complex comprises Baca, Monte Vista, and Alamosa National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs). We provide this notice in compliance with our CCP policy to advise other Federal and State agencies, Tribes, and the public of our intentions, and to obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to consider in the planning process.

DATES: To ensure consideration, please send your written comments by April 29, 2011. Submit comments by one of the methods under ADDRESSES. We will

announce opportunities for public input in local news media throughout the CCP process.

ADDRESSES: Send your comments or requests for more information by any of the following methods.

E-mail: SLVrefuges@fws.gov. Include "San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex CCP" in the subject line of the message.

Fax: Attn: Laurie Shannon, Planning Team Leader, 303/236-4792.

U.S. Mail: Laurie Shannon, Planning Team Leader, Division of Refuge Planning, P.O. Box 25486, Denver, CO 80225-0486.

In-Person Drop-off: You may drop off comments during regular business hours at the above address, or at the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex administrative office located at 8249 Emperius Road, Alamosa, CO 81101.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Laurie Shannon, 303/236-4317 (phone) or laurie_shannon@fws.gov (e-mail); or David C. Lucas, Chief, Division of Planning, 303/236-4366 (phone), P.O. Box 25486, Denver Federal Center, Denver, CO 80225-0486.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

With this notice, we initiate our process for developing a CCP for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Alamosa, CO. This notice complies with our CCP policy to (1) advise other Federal and State agencies, Tribes, and the public of our intention to conduct detailed planning on this refuge and (2) to obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to consider in the environmental document and during development of the CCP.

Background

The CCP Process

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee) (Administration Act) by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, requires us to develop a CCP for each national wildlife refuge. The purpose for developing a CCP is to provide refuge managers with a 15-year plan for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife management, conservation, legal mandates, and our policies. In addition to outlining broad management direction on conserving wildlife and their habitats, CCPs identify wildlife-

dependent recreational opportunities available to the public, including, where appropriate, opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. We will review and update the CCP at least every 15 years in accordance with the Administration Act.

Each unit of the NWRS was established for specific purposes. We use these purposes as the foundation for developing and prioritizing the management goals and objectives for each refuge within the NWRS and to determine how the public can use each refuge. The planning process is a way for us and the public to evaluate management goals and objectives that will ensure the best possible approach to wildlife, plant, and habitat conservation, while providing for wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities that are compatible with each refuge's establishing purposes and the mission of the NWRS.

Our CCP process provides participation opportunities for Tribal, State, and local governments; agencies; organizations; and the public. At this time we encourage input in the form of issues, concerns, ideas, and suggestions for the future management of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

We will conduct the environmental review of this project and develop an EIS in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*); NEPA regulations (40 CFR parts 1500-1508 and 43 CFR part 46); other appropriate Federal laws and regulations; and our policies and procedures for compliance with those laws and regulations.

San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex

The San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex is composed of three national wildlife refuges (NWRs): Monte Vista, Alamosa, and Baca. These NWRs are located in the San Luis Valley, a high mountain basin located in Rio Grande, Alamosa, and Saguache Counties, Colorado. Monte Vista NWR, authorized in 1952, and Alamosa NWR, authorized in 1962, were set aside under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 715D) for "use as inviolate sanctuaries, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." Baca NWR was authorized in 2000 with passage of Public Law 106-530, also known as the "Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000." In 2008, Congress amended the act and established the purposes of the

Baca NWR to "restore, enhance, and maintain wetland, upland, riparian, and other habitats for native wildlife, plant, and fish species in the San Luis Valley." In administering the Baca NWR, the Service is required to the maximum extent practicable to emphasize migratory bird conservation; take into consideration the role of the refuge in broader landscape conservation efforts; and, subject to any other agreement or the purposes of the refuge, use decreed water rights on the refuge in approximately the same manner that the water rights have been used historically.

A wide variety of habitats are found across the three refuges, including wet meadows, playa wetlands, riparian areas within the flood plain of the Rio Grande, desert shrublands and grasslands, and croplands. Totalling about 106,000 acres, the refuges are an important stopover for numerous migratory birds. The refuges support many groups of nesting, migrating, and wintering birds, including grebes, herons, ibis, ducks, geese, hawks, eagles, falcons, shorebirds, owls, songbirds, and others. Nearly 20,000 sandhill cranes spend several weeks in the San Luis Valley during the spring and fall migrations, feeding and resting to replace critical fat reserves. Among the cranes that make a stopover are about 95 percent of the Rocky Mountain population of greater sandhill cranes and a portion of the midcontinent population of sandhill cranes. The Federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, a small neo-tropical bird species, is found fairly frequently in the willow-cottonwood corridor along the Rio Grande on Alamosa NWR. Additionally, there are several other Federal and State species of concern, including the Rio Grande sucker, Rio Grande chub, the Northern leopard frog, and other species that are found within or adjacent to the refuges. Many species of mammals also use the refuges, including elk, deer, coyote, porcupine, and other small mammals.

Scoping: Preliminary Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

There are a number of issues, concerns, and opportunities for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex. A few of these are briefly described.

Although Congress significantly expanded the Service's acquisition authority and subsequent management responsibilities in the San Luis Valley, to date, funding for operation of the Baca NWR has been limited. This has posed a number of challenges for the refuge staff in the management of refuge operations across the complex. The

Service will identify ways to increase management efficiencies, prioritize, and look for creative solutions during the planning process.

Since the late 1980s, increasing numbers of elk have been using Monte Vista and Alamosa NWRs during the fall and winter months. Similarly, elk numbers on the Baca NWR and adjacent Federal and private lands have been an ongoing concern in the valley. The Colorado Division of Wildlife estimates the elk population in game management unit 82 to be about 5,000 elk. Generally this population travels between Baca NWR, neighboring National Park Service lands, and The Nature Conservancy lands, both inside and outside the authorized boundary of Baca NWR, along with other surrounding private lands and Federal lands. Although it is unclear to what extent biological carrying capacities are being reached or exceeded, there has been substantial impact occurring on riparian areas along with crop depredation on private lands. Many stakeholders agree that a coordinated approach is needed for elk management.

There has also been interest in the reintroduction of bison on Baca NWR. Whether the refuge could support free-roaming bison without negatively affecting other species will need to be evaluated and determined during the CCP process.

All the refuges were set aside largely for the protection of migratory birds; therefore water management has been an important tool in providing food and cover for birds. Climate change data is showing a pattern of decreasing precipitation and increasing temperatures in the San Luis Valley. This pattern may shift habitats, requiring greater flexibility in future land management of the refuges. Water management, including quantity, quality, and movement of water, is a complex issue that needs to be addressed.

The Service is also proposing to study the potential for a landscape-level strategic habitat conservation initiative within the Southern Rockies Landscape Conservation Cooperative, a network of partnerships working in unison to ensure the sustainability of America's land, water, wildlife and cultural resources. The study would analyze the potential protection of about 430,000 acres primarily through conservation easements and limited fee-title acquisition in the San Luis Valley.

We request input on these issues and other concerns affecting refuge management or public use during the planning process. We are especially

interested in receiving public input in the following areas:

(a) What suggestions do you have for managing migratory birds on the refuges in the face of climate change and declining precipitation?

(b) What ideas do you have regarding visitor services and wildlife-dependent public uses on the refuges, particularly Baca NWR, which is currently closed to any public use?

(c) What changes, if any, would you like to see in the management of Alamosa and Monte Vista NWRs?

(d) What concerns do you have regarding the additional protection of wildlife and wetland habitat in the San Luis Valley? Can the use of conservation easements protect important wildlife resources in the valley?

(e) What concerns do you have regarding ungulate management on the refuges or the reintroduction of species such as bison?

We provide the above questions for your optional use. We have no requirement that you provide information; however, any comments the planning team receives will be used as part of the planning process.

Public Meetings

We will give the public an opportunity to provide input at a public meeting. You can obtain the schedule from the planning team leader (*see ADDRESSES*). We will announce opportunities for public input in local news media throughout the CCP process. You may also send comments anytime during the planning process by U.S. mail, e-mail, or fax (*see ADDRESSES*). There will be additional opportunities to provide public input once we have prepared a draft CCP.

Public Availability of Comments

Any comments we receive will become part of the administrative record and may be available to the public. Before submitting comments that include your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you may ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Dated: February 15, 2011.

Noreen E. Walsh,

Deputy Regional Director, Mountain-Prairie Region, Denver, CO.

[FR Doc. 2011-5924 Filed 3-14-11; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R8-FHC-2011-N044; 81331-1334-8TWG-W4]

Trinity Adaptive Management Working Group

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Trinity Adaptive Management Working Group (TAMWG) affords stakeholders the opportunity to give policy, management, and technical input concerning Trinity River (California) restoration efforts to the Trinity Management Council (TMC). The TMC interprets and recommends policy, coordinates and reviews management actions, and provides organizational budget oversight. This notice announces a TAMWG meeting, which is open to the public.

DATES: TAMWG will meet from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, April 12, 2011.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Trinity County Library, 351 Main Street, Weaverville, CA 96093.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
Meeting Information: Randy A. Brown, TAMWG Designated Federal Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1655 Heindon Road, Arcata, CA 95521; telephone: (707) 822-7201. *Trinity River Restoration Program (TRRP) Information:* Jennifer Faler, Acting Executive Director, Trinity River Restoration Program, P.O. Box 1300, 1313 South Main Street, Weaverville, CA 96093; telephone: (530) 623-1800; e-mail: jfaler@usbr.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Under section 10(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.), this notice announces a meeting of the TAMWG. The meeting will include discussion of the following topics:

- Annual flow release schedule,
- New TAMWG charter,
- Acting Executive Director's Report,
- Channel rehabilitation policies,
- TRRP performance measures,
- Membership update,
- Election of TAMWG chair and vice-chair for 2011, and
- TAMWG bylaws.

Completion of the agenda is dependent on the amount of time each item takes. The meeting could end early if the agenda has been completed.

Appendix C

Public Outreach

Public Involvement Plan

Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge

Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge

Baca National Wildlife Refuge

11/16/2010

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Introduction

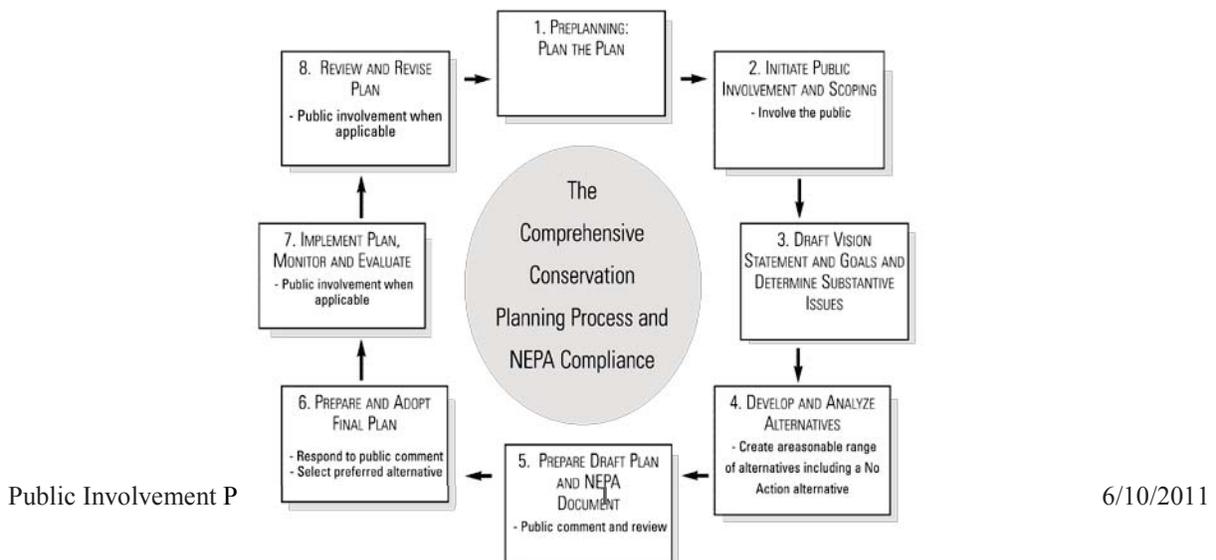
The public involvement process for the development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex is inclusive of numerous interests and will involve a range of activities for keeping the public informed about the process and ensuring meaningful public input. These activities include holding public meetings and workshops, updating the public and stakeholders on plan developments, briefing the congressional delegation and other county/community leaders or stakeholder groups, and providing the public with many opportunities for comment. This document describes in detail when, where, and how the public can learn about and become involved in the upcoming planning process.

The overarching goal of public involvement for this planning process is to reach a final decision, in part, through the exchange of ideas between the public and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Throughout the development of the CCP and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex which includes, Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge, and Baca National Wildlife Refuge, the Service will establish a relationship with the public and initiate an exchange of ideas that will inform the conservation planning effort for the refuge.

Planning Process

In accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) (16 USC 668dd et seq.), the Service’s CCP planning policy (available online at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/602fw1.html>) requires substantial and significant public involvement throughout the process. The planning policy draws from the public involvement requirements outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) guidelines and other pertinent laws, executive orders, regulations, policies and guidelines. This paper supplements the specific CCP planning policy guidelines by describing how public involvement will be incorporated into the CCP/EIS process for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The Service’s planning policies require that CCP’s be revised every 15 years or earlier if monitoring and evaluation determine changes are necessary to achieve the site’s purpose(s), vision, goals, or objectives. Figure 1 shows the planning steps from beginning to end. It is iterative by nature (meaning it can move back and forth) and should not be viewed as a linear or sequential process. For example, at the end of step 3, the draft vision and goals statement which is started in preplanning (step 1) will inform the development of alternatives (step 4), but these are draft statements that are not finalized until the final plan is completed, and revisions can and do occur throughout the process.

Figure 1: Planning Process



Public involvement in the planning process ensures that interested and affected individuals, organizations, agencies and governmental entities are consulted and provided with opportunities to participate. Public involvement in the San Luis Valley NWR Complex project serves three functions:

- Inform the public about the San Luis Valley NWR Complex
- Gather public input on key issues and concerns
- Assist in determining the future management direction of the San Luis Valley NWR Complex. Public input involves both idea generation and idea review. Establishing a dialogue between the Service and interested individuals and groups will be essential to address the challenges and opportunities involved in the development of the CCP/EIS.

The following objectives summarize the purpose and direction of the San Luis Valley NWR Complex CCP/EIS public involvement process:

- Clearly disseminate information to the public and ensure that opportunities for public participation are inclusive and visible.
- Keep the public informed about San Luis Valley NWR Complex in order to generate educated planning suggestions and critiques.
- Gather input from the diverse groups and interested individuals outside the core team and identify issues of concern and to formulate and evaluate alternative plans.
- Develop relationships with the public in order to ensure the public's long-term support of the refuge and the successful implementation of the CCP.

Description of Publics

The CCP/EIS public involvement process will involve local community members, tribes, federal, state and local government agencies, organizations (often called stakeholder groups), neighboring landowners, businesses, and the general public. All of the agencies, organizations, and citizens will interact in different ways throughout the process.

Federal and State Agencies

- Federal agencies – There are several federal agencies that will have specific interests in this planning process. Agencies such as the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) have an integral connection to San Luis Valley NWR Complex and likely will be cooperating agencies and part of the planning team. A primary purpose of having cooperating agencies under National Environmental Policy Act is to emphasize coordination and cooperation throughout the process. Cooperating agencies are afforded opportunities to express their planning concerns and provide input on conservation and management matters.
- State agencies - The Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) and Office of the Governor will be notified of the progression of plan development. Further, the Regional Director (Region 6) will formally invite a representative from the CDOW and the San Luis Valley Water Conservation District to serve on the planning team (see planning team and roles below).
- Congressional delegation – Representatives from federal and state congressional offices will be notified and briefed on the progression of plan development.

Native American Tribes

• Tribal governments – The Regional Director (Region 6) will formally invite Native American organizations that express interest in San Luis Valley NWR Complex to be a part of the planning team. Tribes closest to the refuge include:

- Jicarilla Apache Nation
- Pueblo of Jemez
- Pueblo of Picuris
- Pueblo of San Ildefonso
- Pueblo of Santa Clara
- Pueblo of Taos
- Pueblo of Zuni
- Pueblo of Cochiti
- Pueblo of Santa Ana
- Pueblo of Laguna
- Pueblo of Acoma
- Southern Ute Tribe
- Uintah and Ouray Ute Indian Tribe
- Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
- Navajo Nation

County and local governments

• County and local governments directly represent the local communities and will be kept apprised of the significant issues and concerns raised in the planning process. These may be immediately adjacent to the refuge while others are further away.

- County governments-Rio Grande, Alamosa, and Saguache
- Local Communities – Alamosa, Monte Vista, Crestone, Mosca, Hooper, Moffat, and Saguache

Communities, Organizations & Interest Groups

• Stakeholder Groups – Organized citizen groups such as The Nature Conservancy, County Conservation Districts, grazing associations, livestock associations, Friends Group, Ecosystem Council, and local ranching groups are some of the groups likely to participate in the planning of the refuge.

• Community and adjacent landowners – Businesses, neighborhood associations and other nongovernmental often have substantial interest in socioeconomic, wildlife and habitat, and recreational issues.

Public at large

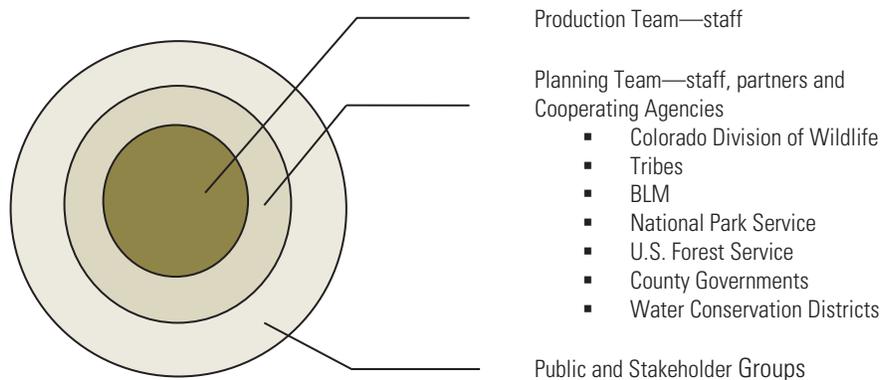
• General public – All citizens who are interested in the planning process, and/or the National Wildlife Refuge System, whether local, reside within Colorado, or live out of state will have an opportunity to participate in the process.

The Planning Team and Role of Stakeholders

The Service has assembled planners, managers, environmental specialists, facilitators and Service staff (of different professional disciplines and levels of involvement) to assist in the planning effort. The process is lead by a planning team leader who works in close coordination with the Project Leader from the refuge. Figure 2 shows where and how different agencies and stakeholders fit into the planning process. At the center, a production team is responsible for developing and facilitating the public involvement program and the entire CCP/EIS. The production team is responsible for day-to-day tasks in developing and producing the plan. Next, state partners, cooperating agencies, tribes, county governments, or others that have a direct land management relationship are invited to participate as members of the planning team. Participation by the state and tribal conservation agencies is not subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (USFWS 2000). The level of involvement by planning team members is usually at the level desired by that agency. Planning team members may provide subject matter expertise, represent agency views or concerns, or they may prefer to keep informed on the plan's progress. Next, the Service keeps local and county governments regularly briefed on the issues raised in the planning process. Finally, the outer ring is comprised of many stakeholder groups and citizens including nonprofit organizations, businesses, and citizens at large. Stakeholder groups and citizens can

be actively involved in public meetings, workshops or choose to be kept informed on the process through updates, the website, or news releases.

Figure 2: Stakeholder involvement in the planning process.



Public Notification and Involvement

A number of measures have been developed to notify and inform all planning team members, federal, state, and local officials, stakeholder groups and the public on the CCP/EIS process and solicit input. These measures can range from workshops, educational and technical briefings, to posting information on the planning website. The overall objective of all the outreach activities is to ensure that the CCP/EIS addresses the input the Service receives. Below is a description of notification outlets and public involvement procedures that will be incorporated throughout the planning process:

- Federal Register Notices—a Notification of Intent (NOI) will be published in the Federal Register to initiate the public scoping process. Notifications of Availability (NOA) will be published in the Federal Register to announce the release of the draft and final CCP/EIS and the Record of Decision (ROD).
- Media Coverage—the media will be utilized to disseminate information about the CCP process and to alert the public of opportunities to participate in the process. Press releases and notices will be generated at key stages of public involvement process and sent to newspaper, television and radio media outlets. Newspaper advertisements will be procured to announce public meetings. In order to recruit news coverage, representatives of the media will be informed about the progress of the plan and members of the core team may discuss the process individually with reporters. The Regional Office External Affairs will be integral to ensuring that information is disseminated throughout the planning process.
- Planning team meetings and workshops—members of the core production team and refuge or Service staff will convene at key steps or as necessary in the process to provide the planning team partners and cooperating agencies with information and discuss concerns. Planning team workshops or briefings will be conducted as necessary but would including scoping, alternatives, the draft CCP/EIS, and the final CCP/EIS. The planning team members are integral to the entire planning process.

- Presentations and briefings—in order to keep the public posted on the CCP/EIS process, presentations may be conducted during the public scoping period upon request and could range from county commissioner meetings, local community meetings, briefings to stakeholder groups, etc. The focus of the presentations will be information dissemination, though time will be allotted for answering questions and gathering public comments. These presentations and briefings will provide opportunities for the core team to maintain dialogue with the public and clarify issues that arise throughout the process. These briefings must adhere to federal laws and are open to all people.
- Public workshops, meetings, and hearings—the public will be encouraged to participate in a series of meetings held at strategic phases of the plan development including public scoping, alternative plan development, and review of the draft CCP/EIS. The format for public meetings (i.e. open house versus public hearing) will vary depending on the stage of the planning process, but all will provide an opportunity for the public to learn about refuge issues and the CCP process, and will enable the public to provide input. Public comments from the public meetings will be recorded and analyzed by the core team.
- Planning updates—at least five or six planning updates will be published and distributed to the public. The updates will report on the CCP/EIS process, document workshop results and announce all opportunities for public involvement. The planning updates will be presented in a newsletter format and information will be disseminated in a clear and simple manner. The planning updates will be mailed to the general mailing list, distributed at presentations and workshops, made available online and at various repositories in the planning region.
- Mailing database— mailing lists of all key stakeholder groups will be compiled in order to develop a comprehensive mailing database. Meeting attendees and any individuals or groups that express interest in the project will be added to the database on an ongoing basis. Postcards to gauge the public’s interest and to alert them to opportunities for involvement will be mailed out at regular intervals throughout the process.
- Document repositories—the public will be able to access hard copies of planning documentation (draft CCP/EIS, planning updates, etc.) at the main branch libraries of the communities listed above in addition to being available online and available for viewing at the refuge headquarters in Alamosa, Colorado.
- Website—either a project website or the existing NWR planning website will serve as a resource for updating the public on the planning process and as an electronic repository for planning documents (planning updates, news releases, draft CCP/EIS, and all documents produced). In addition there will be a project email where the public can ask for information or make a comment.
- Phone—information can also be requested by phone to the planning team leader, and contact information will be made available on the website, in planning updates, and other ways.
- Hard copies of documents—limited copies of the draft and final CCP/EIS will be available to appropriate elected officials, Federal, State and local agencies, tribal governments, organizations, libraries, adjacent landowners and individuals requesting publications.

Public Involvement Process and Schedule

The CCP process will span three-four years and involve five stages (Figure 3). Throughout this period, the production team and planning team will focus on:

- Informing the public
- Gathering public input
- Identifying public concerns
- Responding to and incorporating the public’s feedback in the formulation of alternatives.

A general description of each planning phase and date is shown in Figure 3. The schedule will be updated throughout the process.

Figure 3: Five planning stages in CCP/EIS process for San Luis Valley NWR Complex

Planning Phase	Date
Preplanning	October 2010-November 2010
Public Involvement and Scoping	November 2010-April 2011
Develop and Analyze Alternatives	Summer 2011-Late Summer 2011
Development of the Draft CCP/EIS	Early Winter 2012-Summer 2013
Final CCP/EIS	Late Fall 2013-Winter 2015

Preplanning

During the preplanning phase, the production team is formed and responsibilities are assigned. The team develops a work plan and schedule for the CCP/EIS process. Legislation governing the refuge, including establishment legislation, the Improvement Act, NEPA and the Service’s planning policy are reviewed, and other planning and compliance requirements are considered. The planning area is delineated on a map and its ecological context is identified including its relationship to its watershed and any outlying refuges or other important fish and wildlife habitats. This phase involves comprehensive ecological and cultural data collection and review required to assess the refuge’s planning needs. The production team will identify preliminary refuge management issues and potential strategies to resolve them. By the completion of the preplanning stage, the production team will have developed a CCP/EIS work plan, published the public involvement process (including other agency coordination) and schedule. The production team begins the development of the administrative record.

Internal scoping

As a diverse organization made up of many disciplines, the Service kicks off the planning effort with an internal workshop to develop a preliminary vision statement and draft set of goals in a workshop setting. This enables refuge and Region 6 personnel with an opportunity to understand the refuge’s purpose, identify staff and management concerns and potential opportunities for resolving them, as well as identifying impacts that may need to be addressed in the CCP and EIS analysis. Goals for wildlife and habitat management, as well as compatible wildlife-dependent recreation will also be addressed in the workshop. As a result, when the official scoping phase begins, the Service can engage and communicate with other agencies, organizations, and the public in a cohesive manner and solicit the best input throughout the process.

Initiate public involvement and scoping

Public scoping begins when the Service publishes NOI in the Federal Register. This is the official notification that the planning process has begun, and it identifies when comments must be submitted. In addition, the Service will put out a press release and advertise public meetings in local newspapers. During this phase of the project, the Service will solicit ideas and ask the public to comment on the refuge’s preliminary draft vision and goals statements. The public will also be encouraged to identify concerns and provide input on planning issues and to generate potential management solutions to resolve them. All public comments will be recorded and analyzed.

Planning Team Briefing/Workshop

The production team will meet with the planning team partners and cooperating agencies to brief everyone on the project and discuss roles and responsibilities and refine the preliminary qualities, issues, vision and goals identified by Service personnel.

Public Involvement

- Briefings—these will be provided to county commissioners, local communities, tribes, or other stakeholder groups throughout the public scoping period as needed. The presentations will focus on the progression of planning efforts and provide opportunities for answering questions and gathering feedback on the preliminary vision and goals.
- Planning Update—the first update will be mailed to the mailing database and posted online and will provide background information on the San Luis Valley NWR Complex, introduce the CCP/EIS process, announce upcoming public workshops and invite public to participate.
- Public meetings—it is anticipated that advertised public scoping meetings will be held in Alamosa, Moffat, and Monte Vista, but this could be revised based on need. While the exact format is yet to be determined, the purpose of these meetings is to provide the public with information about the planning process and listen to the public's concerns and ideas about planning effort.
- Comments--the public is invited to provide their ideas and concerns at meetings, in letters, emails, in person or by phone. While comments may be provided throughout the process, in order to be considered in the scoping phase, a comment deadline will be set in the Federal Register notice.

After reviewing the public's comments, the production team will once again revise and refine the preliminary vision and goals statements and identify significant issues and concerns that will guide the development of alternative plans. The rationale for selecting significant issues, or not selecting a particular issue to address, will be documented in a scoping report document. As shown in Figure 1, step 3, Develop Draft Vision and Goals, this is an important outcome of the scoping phase.

Develop and analyze alternatives

Once the significant issues are determined as a result of the scoping, the core production team and planning team will begin to identify different approaches for managing fish, wildlife, habitats, and public uses on San Luis Valley NWR Complex. All alternative approaches incorporate concepts in achieving the draft vision and goals. One alternative approach will be the “no-action alternative” which describes ongoing refuge management activities. This alternative might not meet all the CCP goals, but it is provided as a basis of comparison with all the action alternatives.

Similar to the steps outlined under scoping above, there will be a progression of planning team discussions/ workshops as well as public presentations/workshops on the draft alternatives. The public will be invited to comment and provide feedback on the draft alternative plans (generally there are at least three or four alternatives including the no-action alternative and a proposed action alternative).

Prepare Draft CCP/EIS

During this stage, the public's comments once again will be analyzed; the alternative plans will be refined including the proposed action. Members of the production team will begin writing the draft CCP/EIS. This stage is often the longest stage as detailed analysis of the impacts of the various alternatives takes considerable time. Members of the production team will write draft compatibility determinations for wildlife-dependent recreational uses or any other uses of the refuge and these are published in draft CCP/EIS.

Objectives and Strategies

Detailed objectives and strategies identify in greater detail how the proposed action alternative will be implemented. They must meet specific criteria identified in Service policy. In essence, these are the heart of the document, and they must be specific, measurable, action oriented, results oriented, and time specific. These detailed objectives and strategies are based on the alternative concepts.

Release of Public Draft CCP and EIS

The Service will publish a NOA in the Federal Register, announcing the release of the draft CCP/EIS to the public and the deadline for submitting comments. Public meetings at this stage of the process are usually held as a public hearing using an official recorder. This will be the public's first opportunity to view the entire document. Many of the steps for public involvement leading up to the release of the Draft CCP/EIS are similar to the steps identified under scoping—ranging from planning team meetings;

presenting briefings to the congressional delegation, county commissioners, and local governments; mailing a planning update; posting information on the website; and advertising the meetings.

Final CCP/EIS

After the comment period has closed for the public review of the draft, the production team will analyze public comments, respond to the substantive comments, and modify the CCP/EIS where appropriate. The substantive public comments will be summarized and responses generated. Substantive comments are those that raise an issue regarding law or regulation, agency procedure or performance, compliance with stated objectives, validity of impact analyses, or other matters of practical or procedural importance. Nonsubstantive comments are those that offer opinions or provide information not directly related to issues or impact analyses. Though nonsubstantive comments will be acknowledged and considered, they do not require a response. The comment documentation in the final EIS will include a summary of the topics and viewpoints represented, as well as written responses to each comment.

The Service will publish an NOA in the Federal Register-announcing that the Final CCP/EIS is available. Additionally, the Service will brief the planning team, congressional delegation, county commissioners, and local communities; put out a press release; and make the document available online and at main branch libraries.

No sooner than 30 days following the publication of the Final CCP/EIS, the Regional Director for the Mountain-Prairie Region, Lakewood, Colorado will issue a Record of Decision (ROD) on the final plan. The Service will publish a NOA in the Federal Register, announcing that the ROD is available. The Regional Director will select the final preferred alternative for managing the San Luis Valley NWR Complex. Implementation of the plan will begin after the ROD is issued. The production team will produce a final stand-alone plan and a summary brochure detailing the final decision, and will prepare and distribute a final planning update.

Contact Information

Contact information for the project is listed below. Further information can be found on the website at www.fws.gov/alamosa/planning

Laurie Shannon, Planning Team Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
P.O. Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225-0486
(303) 236-4317 (phone)
(303) 236-4792 (fax)

Mike Blenden
Project Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Alamosa, CO
(719) 589-4021 x 1001 (phone)

Citations

U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2000. 602 FW1: Refuge Planning Overview. 2000. In *Fish and Wildlife Service Policy Manual*. Washington, D.C.

Public Involvement Summary

San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex: Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Baca National Wildlife Refuges

January 2011

Beginning the Plan

Over the next 4 years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will be developing a combined comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (refuge complex), which includes Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge, Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, and Baca National Wildlife Refuge. The CCP is a 15-year plan that will provide long-range guidance and management direction for all refuge complex programs, including habitat conservation and wildlife-dependent recreation, such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education. As part of the planning process, we are looking to study the potential for a landscape-level, strategic habitat initiative that would provide guidance for acquiring additional conservation easements in the San Luis Valley.

This Public Involvement Summary outlines the public involvement process for the proposed CCP and EIS. It specifies when and how you can provide input on these documents. Our overall goal is to reach a final decision on the selection of a preferred management alternative to implement under the CCP based on the analysis in the EIS; an exchange of ideas between the public and the Service is an important part of achieving this goal.

The San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex is a unique and ecologically important component of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Alamosa and Monte Vista refuges were established primarily to support the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The purpose of Baca National Wildlife Refuge is to restore, enhance, and maintain wetland, upland, riparian, and other habitats for native wildlife, plants, and fish in the San Luis Valley.

We look forward to your input on how the refuge complex can ensure that habitat is conserved and restored while also serving visitors and the neighboring communities. We will be providing planning updates and hosting public meetings throughout the planning process. Additionally, we will accept comments shared with us through face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations, email, mail, and fax transmissions.

Please join us at upcoming meetings in spring 2011 or feel free to visit us at any of the refuges.

Sincerely,



Mike Blenden
Project Leader



USFWS

Options for managing the increasing populations of elk in the valley will be discussed during the planning process.

Informing the Public

The public involvement process for the CCP and EIS for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex will take into account numerous interests. It will involve a range of activities for keeping the public informed about the status of the CCP and EIS to ensure meaningful public input. These activities include (1) holding public meetings and workshops, (2) updating the public and stakeholders on CCP and EIS development, (3) briefing the congressional delegation and other county and community leaders and stakeholder groups, and (4) providing the public with many opportunities to comment.

The Service will use the following outreach methods to stay in touch with the public:

- *Planning Updates and Announcements*
Throughout the CCP development process, planning updates will be published and distributed to the public. The updates will report on CCP and EIS development, announce all opportunities for public

involvement, and document workshop results. The updates will be mailed to names and organizations on the project mailing list; distributed at presentations and workshops; and made accessible through community information networks, main branch libraries, and online.

- *Media Coverage*
Announcements and reports presented in local newspapers and on television and radio stations will notify the public about opportunities for involvement and our progress in developing the CCP and EIS.
- *Website*
The public may visit the project website at www.fws.gov/alamosa to obtain information about the planning process and to download planning documents as they become available.

Gathering Public Input

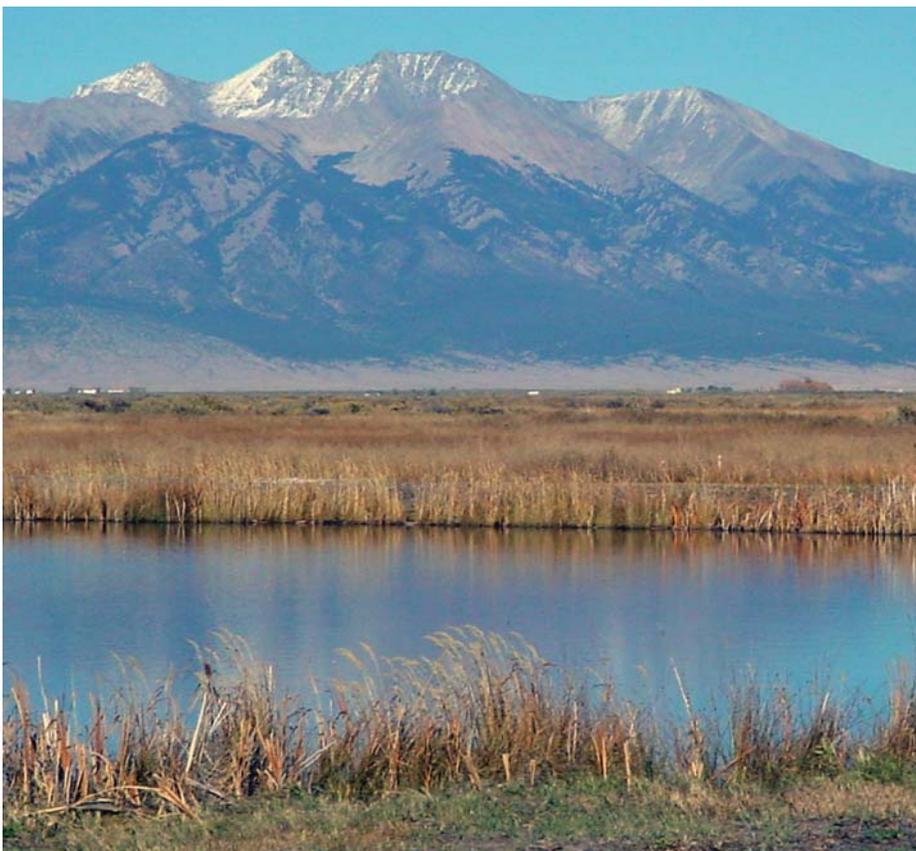
Public involvement will include both idea generation and consideration of those ideas during the development of the CCP and EIS.

- *Public Meetings and Workshops*
The public will be encouraged to participate in a series of meetings or workshops held at strategic phases of CCP development, including public scoping, alternatives development, and draft plan review. The focus of these forums will be to generate ideas the Service could consider when developing the CCP, educate the public on refuge issues and the planning process, and gather public input. It is anticipated that meetings will be held in the communities of Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Crestone, but these locations could change if necessary. The exact format of the forums has not been determined but will be announced prior to the meetings or workshops.
- *Presentations and Briefings*
In order to keep the public and stakeholder groups informed about the CCP process, presentations and briefings will be conducted throughout the planning process.

Analyzing Public Input

The Service will review and consider all comments made at workshops and other public meetings as well as comments received by telephone, email, fax, and the U.S. mail. Comments on the draft CCP and EIS (anticipated to be published in summer 2013) should be specific and should address the adequacy of the CCP, the merits of the alternatives, and the analysis of impacts in the EIS. The final decision concerning selection of the preferred alternative and implementation of the CCP will be made by the Service's regional director for the Mountain-Prairie Region (Lakewood, Colorado).

Please be aware that all comments, including personal identifying information, will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act. This means that your entire comment and personal identifying information, including your address, phone number, and email address, could be publicly available at any time. Although you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.



Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge is one of three refuges found in the San Luis Valley. 14,345-foot Mt. Blanca serves as a backdrop for the refuge.

Public Involvement Process and Schedule

The CCP process will span 4 years and involve five stages: (1) preplanning; (2) public involvement and scoping; (3) development and analysis of alternatives; (4) development of the draft CCP and EIS; and (5) production of the final CCP and EIS and the Record of Decision. Many opportunities will be available for public involvement. Throughout the CCP process, the planning team will focus on the following:

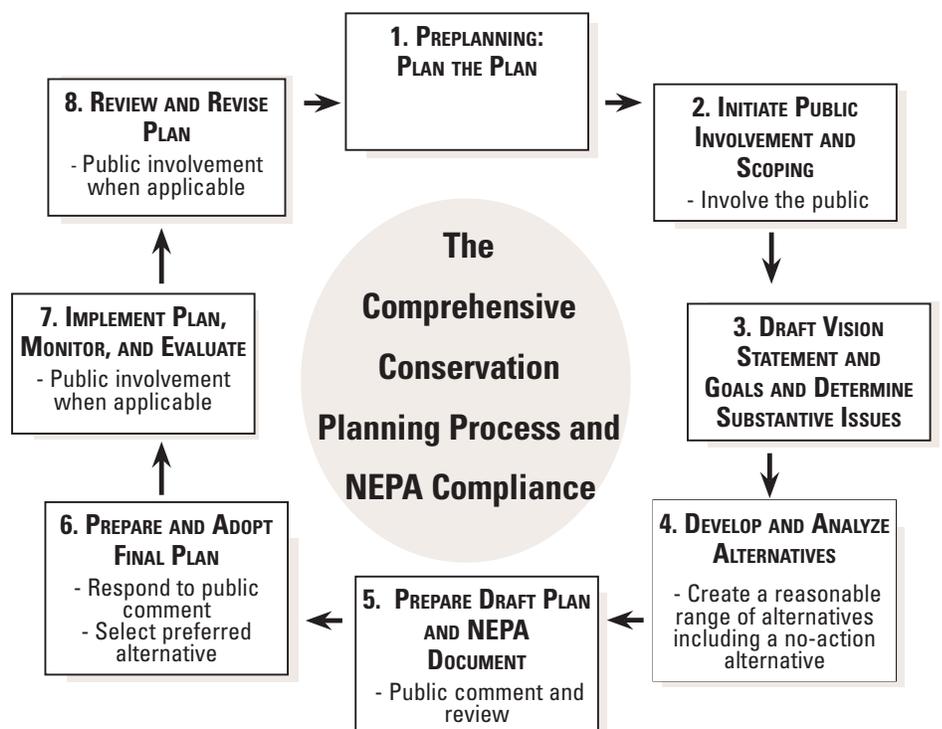
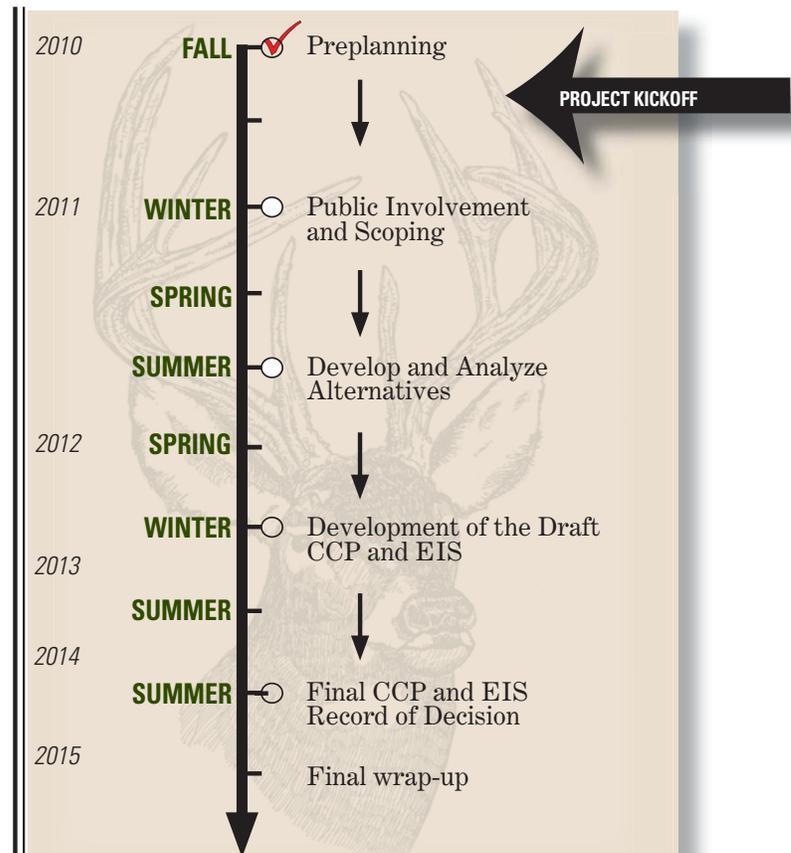
- informing the public
- gathering public input
- identifying public concerns
- responding to and incorporating the public's feedback in the formulation of alternatives and analysis of issues

Stakeholders

The stakeholder groups that have expressed an interest in the CCP process include the following:

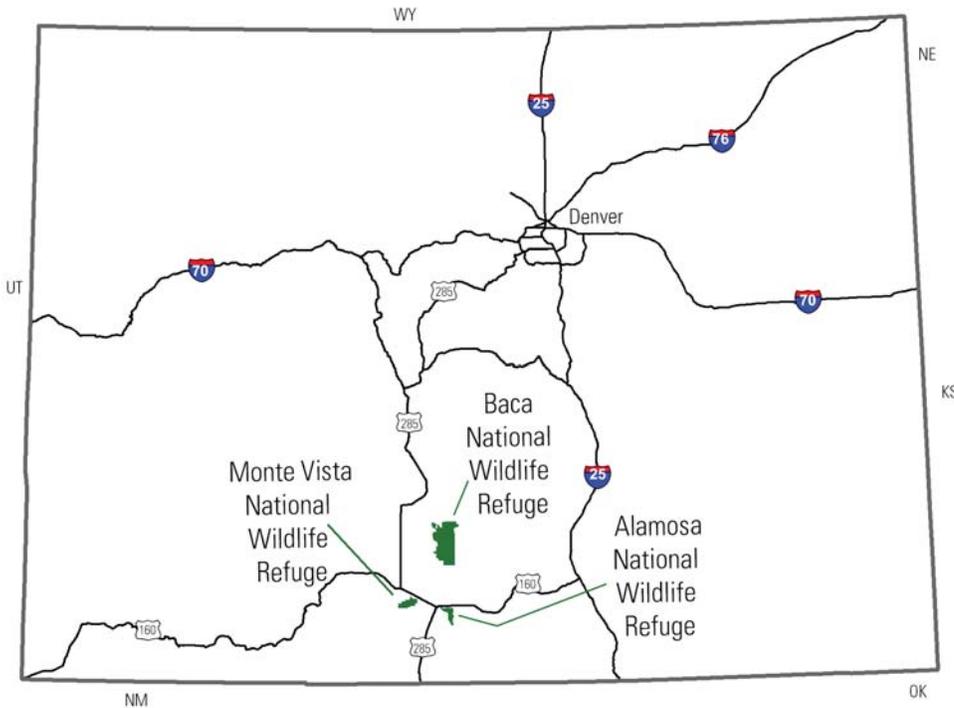
- *State and Federal Agencies*
State agencies, congressional representatives, and federal agencies
- *Communities, Organizations, and Interest Groups*
Environmental and conservation groups, community and neighborhood groups, and neighboring landowners
- *Native American Tribes*
- *Public at Large*
Anyone who wishes to be involved
- *County and Local Governments*
County and local governments directly represent the local communities and will be kept apprised of the significant issues and concerns raised during the planning process. Counties adjacent to the refuges as well as more distant counties may be involved.
 - County Governments*
Alamosa, Costilla, Conejos, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache
 - Local Communities*
Alamosa, Crestone, Monte Vista, Mosca, and Saguache.

PROJECT TIMELINE



The Service is guided in developing CCPs by policy established in 2000, which can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/602fw1.html>.
NEPA=National Environmental Policy Act of 1976

**San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Colorado**



Contact Information

San Luis Valley
National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Attn: Laurie Shannon
Planning Team Leader
P.O. Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225-0486
Tel: 303/236 4792
Fax: 303/236 4317

For project information, to get on the mailing list, or to send us an email:
www.fws.gov/alamosa/planning

For information about the refuges:
www.fws.gov/Alamosa
Tel: 719/589 4021



The American avocet is one of many birds that breed on the refuges in the San Luis Valley.



January 2011

**San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex
P.O. Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225-0486**

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Planning Update

San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex: Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Baca National Wildlife Refuges

Issue 1, March 2011



Dave Menke/USFWS

Sandhill cranes can often be heard during their spring migration through the San Luis Valley.

The sandhill cranes are echoing the call!

As winter slowly lets go of its grip on the San Luis Valley, thousands of greater and lesser sandhill cranes are descending on the valley to refuel as they continue their annual trek north. Joining these valley visitors are abundant waterfowl, shorebirds, and birds of prey. The San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (refuge complex) plays host to this majestic event every spring and fall.

Like the birds, many of us are anxious to be on the move, whether it is to work in the fields or to celebrate warmer weather. We would like to invite our stakeholders, whether you are a government official, a member of an organization, a member of a Native American tribe, or an interested citizen, to take a little time away from your busy schedules to voice your ideas about the future of three remarkable

places: Baca National Wildlife Refuge, Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge, and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge.

The public involvement phase of the comprehensive planning process for the refuge complex has begun. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has formed a planning team consisting of Service staff along with representatives from state, federal, and tribal agencies to begin work on a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement. At the same time, we will be studying the potential for a landscape-level strategic habitat conservation initiative consisting primarily of conservation easements in the San Luis Valley. When completed, this plan will provide guidance on the direction of the three refuges for 15 years. Whether you decide to send us comments by letter or fax or you choose to join us at an upcoming public meeting, we look forward to hearing your views about the important qualities

of these refuges and what issues you think should be addressed during the planning process.

Mike Blenden
Project Leader

Inside This Update

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A Vision for the Future	3
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Scoping the Issues

One of the early phases in the planning process is to determine the significant issues that need to be addressed in the CCP. Over the next few months, we will gather information about the concerns of our stakeholders. One way we learn about stakeholders' ideas and concerns is by holding public meetings. In late March, we will be hosting three public meetings in the San Luis Valley, in Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Moffat, Colorado. The locations and times for each meeting can be found in the box to the right.

The format for the public meetings will include a short presentation followed by an opportunity for meeting attendees to ask questions. Those who wish to offer comments publicly will be allowed to make brief remarks after all the questions have been answered. We will allow time in the meetings for one-on-one conversations, and we encourage you to engage with the refuge staff as that is the best way to learn about the planning process. An optional questionnaire about refuge issues will be available at the meetings or can be found on our website at <http://www.fws.gov/alamosa/planning>. We will also accept comments by letter, email, phone, or one-on-one conversations.

The following questions may assist you in providing input.

1. What do you value most about the refuge complex?
2. What problems or issues do you want to see addressed in the CCP?
3. What changes, if any, would you like to see in the management of the three refuges?

More information about our public involvement process, including scoping, can be found in the Public Involvement Summary, January 2011, which is available on our website.

Comment Deadline

Scoping comments are due by April 29, 2011. See the back page of this update for more information about submitting your ideas and concerns.

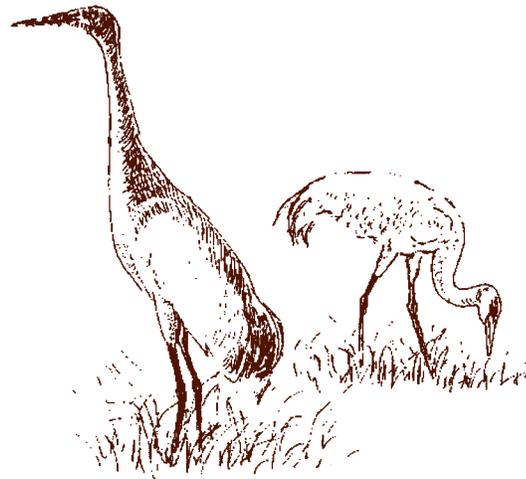


The annual crane festival is a great way to learn about the refuges.

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2011 Public Scoping Meetings

- Alamosa, Colorado
March 29, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Alamosa County Building
8900 Independence Way,
Room 108
719/589 4848
- Monte Vista, Colorado
March 30, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Monte Vista COOP
Community Room
1901 E. Hwy 160
719/852 5181
- Moffat, Colorado
March 31, 2:00–4:00 p.m.
Moffat School District
School Cafeteria
501 Garfield Avenue
719/256 4710



The upcoming public meetings will be held March 29, 30, and 31, 2011.

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A Vision for the Future

During December 2010, refuge staff began thinking about the important qualities of the refuge complex and how the three refuges that make up the complex should look in the future. The refuge staff developed a draft vision, which is a compelling, future-oriented expression of what the refuges should be or what

the Service hopes to do, based primarily on the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) and the legislative purposes of each refuge. Goals are descriptive, open-ended, and often broad statements that provide direction on how best to achieve the vision. During the public meetings and scoping process, the public will be asked to review the statements and offer suggestions for refinement.

Draft Vision

The San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex, set in a high expansive desert valley, is cradled between the snowcapped peaks of the San Juan and Sangre De Cristo ranges. Mountain snowmelt feeds the Rio Grande, numerous streams, and a dynamic groundwater system, creating a mix of playas, wet meadows, and willow and cottonwood riparian corridors, which are in stark contrast with the surrounding arid landscape. This valley and its wildlife have attracted many peoples, as reflected by 12,000 years of human history. Visitors experience the ancient song of the sandhill crane, witness evening flights of thousands of waterfowl, and listen to bugling elk. The refuges support and foster a collaborative spirit between their neighbors and partners to conserve the valley's treasured resources.

"The San Luis Valley, including the refuges, encompasses large, unfragmented expanses of wet meadows and riparian areas that provide habitat for the life cycle needs of a high diversity of wildlife and plant species."

-Refuge employee at the draft vision and goals workshop



Willow Creek meadow, San Luis Valley, Colorado

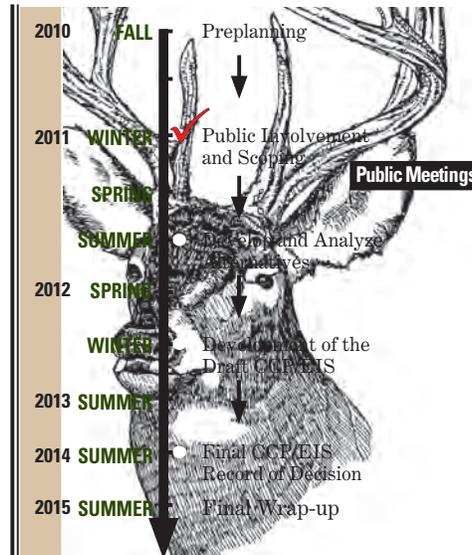
Draft Goals

- **Habitat and Wildlife:** Conserve, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity and function of the San Luis Valley ecosystem to support healthy populations of native fish and wildlife, with an emphasis on migratory birds.
- **Water:** Protect, acquire, and manage surface and groundwater resources to maintain and support management objectives.
- **Visitor Services:** Provide safe, accessible, and high-quality wildlife-dependent recreation and perform outreach to visitors and local communities to nurture an appreciation and understanding of the unique natural and cultural resources of the San Luis Valley.
- **Cultural:** Protect significant cultural resources within the refuge complex.
- **Research/Science:** Use sound science, applied research, monitoring, and evaluation to advance the understanding of natural resource functions and management of the habitats within the San Luis Valley ecosystem.
- **Operation and Management:** Secure and effectively use funding, staffing, and partnerships for the benefit of all resources in support of the refuge complex purposes and the mission of the Refuge System.
- **Land Conservation/Partnership:** Actively pursue and continue to foster partnerships with other agencies, organizations, the water community, and private landowners to conserve, manage, and provide long-term sustainability of the working landscapes within the San Luis Valley ecosystem.

Refuge Facts

The refuge complex is a unique and ecologically important component of the Refuge System. Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges were established primarily to support the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Baca National Wildlife Refuge focuses not only on protecting the region's hydrology, which the unique sand dunes ecosystem depends on, but also on protecting the exceptional ecological, cultural, and wildlife resources of the area. Congress authorized acquisition of land within Baca National Wildlife Refuge with passage of the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000. This legislation received widespread support and, in 2008, Congress amended the act to establish the purposes of the refuge. This act specifies that, among other requirements, the Service is to "restore, enhance, and maintain wetland, upland, riparian, and other habitats for native wildlife, plant, and fish species in the San Luis Valley."

Project Timeline



Contact Information

San Luis Valley
National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Attn: Laurie Shannon
Planning Team Leader
P.O. Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225-0486
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Fax: 303/236 4317

For project information, to get on the mailing list, or to send us an email:
www.fws.gov/alamosa/planning

For information about the refuges:
www.fws.gov/alamosa
Tel: 719/589 4021



Black-necked stilts



March 2011

San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex
P.O. Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225-0486

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Appendix D

Press Release and Website

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
MOUNTAIN-PRAIRIE REGION
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM
SAN LUIS VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX
9383 El Rancho Lane
Alamosa, Colorado 81101**

March 18, 2011

For Immediate Release

Contact: Mike Blenden (719) 589-4021
Laurie Shannon (303) 236-4317

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to Prepare Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the
San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

Open Houses Will Be Held In March to Gather Public Input

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold a series of public open houses at various locations in Colorado to solicit public input for the development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The Refuge Complex includes Baca National Wildlife Refuge, Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, and Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge. The Service encourages everyone with an interest in these significant public resources to participate in this process and help create the vision for future management of the refuges.

Meeting dates, times, and locations are:

- March 29, 2011, 6:30-8:30p.m., Alamosa County Building, 8900 Independence Way, Room 108, Alamosa, Colorado
- March 30, 2011, 6:30-8:30p.m., Monte Vista COOP Community Room, 1901 E. Highway 160, Monte Vista, Colorado
- March 31, 2011, 6:30-8:30p.m., Moffat School District Cafeteria 501 Garfield Avenue, Moffat, Colorado

The Service prepares comprehensive conservation plans (CCP) for national wildlife refuges to help fulfill the mission of the Refuge System and manage for the purposes of each refuge. These plans address conservation of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats, and describe opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation that are compatible with refuge purposes. In addition, each plan has detailed objectives and strategies that the Service will carry out to achieve the goals.

The San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex is composed of three national wildlife refuges: Monte Vista, Alamosa, and Baca. These refuges are located in the San Luis Valley, a high mountain basin located in Rio Grande, Alamosa, and Saguache Counties, Colorado.

Totaling about 106,000 acres, a wide variety of habitats are found across the three refuges, including wet meadows, playa wetlands, riparian areas within the flood plain of the Rio Grande, desert shrublands and grasslands, and croplands.

The refuges are an important stopover for numerous migratory birds. The refuges provide important habitat for nesting, migrating, and wintering birds, including grebes, herons, ibis, ducks, geese, hawks, eagles, falcons, shorebirds, owls, songbirds, and others. Nearly 20,000 sandhill cranes spend several weeks in the San Luis Valley during the spring and fall migrations, feeding and resting to replace critical fat reserves. Additionally many species of mammals also use the refuges, including elk, deer, coyote, porcupine, and other small mammals.

The National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) Improvement Act of 1997 requires that all refuges be managed in accordance with an approved CCP which, when implemented, will achieve refuge purposes; help fulfill the Refuge System mission; maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; help achieve the goals of the Wilderness Preservation System; and meet other mandates. The CCP will guide management decisions and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies to accomplish these tasks. The Service hopes to finalize the plan by 2014.

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. The Service is both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for its scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on the Service's work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

-FWS-



Alamosa/Monte Vista/Baca National Wildlife Refuge Complex Mountain-Prairie Region

Planning



Comprehensive Conservation Planning

The staff at the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex) is embarking on an important multi-year process to develop a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) for the refuge including Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Baca National Wildlife Refuges. A CCP (as it is commonly called) provides long-range guidance and management direction for the Complex. Your ideas and comments are an important part of the process, and we invite you to participate. Throughout the process, we will provide information on this website about upcoming public meetings or workshops and we will post project documents as they become available. Additionally, you can be placed on the project mailing list or submit comments by following the links below.

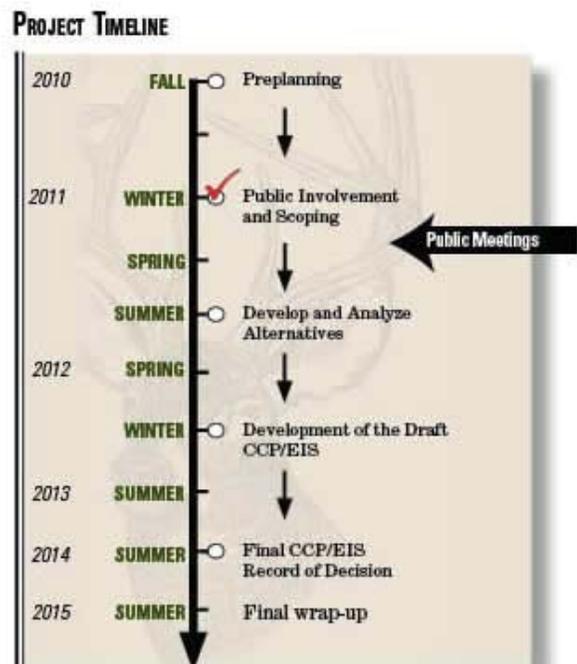
Click on the link to the planning involvement summary (1.9 MB PDF) to learn more about the CCP process and how you can be involved.

Planning Updates

Planning Update - March 2011 (5 MB PDF)

Federal Register Notice: San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Alamosa, CO; Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

[Sign up on our Mailing List](#)



Send your comments to SLVrefugesplanning@fws.gov

Comments will be accepted in writing at Laurie Shannon, Planning Team Leader, Division of Refuge Planning, P.O. Box 25486, Denver, CO 80225

Mike Blenden
Project Leader
San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex



Last updated: March 15, 2011

Appendix E

Comment Codes by Topic and
Summary of Public Meeting Discussions

Public Scoping Comments by Topic
San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
10		AIR, SOILS, GEOLOGY, AND CLIMATE CHANGE
11	Air Quality	General comments about protection of Air Quality
11.01	Air Quality	Adjacent to Class I air quality area. CCP needs to address the effects of the actions on Class 1 area
11.02	Air Quality	Should include a summary of available air quality data to describe existing conditions. Data is readily available from CDPHE or EPA air explorer site.
11.03	Air Quality	Need to summarize direct impacts from prescribed fire as well as possible indirect impacts. Example-soil instability and resulting dust due to reduce vegetative cover after a burn. If emissions are significant or in close proximity to smoke sensitive receptors, then the EIS should include an air impact analysis presenting direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of these activities on smoke sensitive receptors. Consult with CDPHE for modeling, mitigation or other measures under Clean Air Act.
11.04	Air Quality	Discuss appropriate smoke monitoring techniques and mitigation including meteorological conditions favorable for mitigating prescribed fire smoke and alternatives including mechanical fuel reduction methods. Consider requirements for the incorporation of interagency prescribed fire planning and implementation procedures
11.05	Air Quality	Refer to national inter-agency MOU regarding air quality analysis and mitigation for federal oil and gas decisions
11.06	Air Quality	Current air quality conditions in the area should be presented. The amount of stationary, mobile and non-road source emission activities should be quantified and disclosed. The EIS should include an emissions inventory and if appropriate, screening-level air quality analysis including recreation, surface authorization for energy development, prescribed fire, and road dust. Particulate emissions from related construction activities should be addressed. Any significant concentrations of hazardous air pollutants should be evaluated including those that may be emitted during the drilling, completion and production of the oil and gas wells (formaldehyde, benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, xylene, n-hexane, and formaldehyde.
11.07	Air Quality	The analysis should address and discuss and disclose the potential affect on the national ambient air quality standards, prevention of significant deterioration increments across the planning area. Effects on Class 1 areas.
11.08	Air Quality	Design criteria, monitoring and mitigation suggestions
12	Soils	General comments and concerns about soils
12.01	Soils	Need to address impacts on soils from roads, other management activities
13	Climate Change	Comments and concerns about climate change
13.01	Climate Change	Need to identify major potential threats to the refuge from climate change
13.02	Climate Change	The CCP must consider and analyze the impact of climate change.
13.03	Climate Change	Climate change is among the most significant problems affecting plants and animals today.
13.04	Climate Change	Vision statement needs to incorporate climate change.
13.05	Climate Change	Must include Secretarial 3289 as a relevant policy
13.06	Climate Change	Climate change is expected to place enormous pressure on ecosystems and should be considered as a planning issue in the CCP. Consider species range shifts, phenological changes, decoupling of species assemblages, hydrological changes, and changes in disturbance-planning decision should be considered in light of this
13.07	Climate Change	Need to include current and historic temps, precipitation, observed trends and projected future conditions
13.08	Climate Change	Need to develop a comprehensive research and monitoring program to function as early warning system.
13.09	Climate Change	CCP should address ongoing environmental threats in which climate change is putting additional pressure on--synergistic effect.
13.10	Climate Change	CCP should outline a strategy for improving habitat connectivity in the face of climate change and the need to maximize ecosystem resiliency and facilitate transition of wildlife to more suitable locations.
13.11	Climate Change	Concerned about climate change and status of aquifer
13.12	Climate Change	Climate change and gas emissions-methane gas is 23 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.
13.13	Climate Change	Disclose expected annual and total lifetime cumulative BHG emissions in CO-2 equivalent terms and translate the emissions into equivalencies that are easily understood from the public standpoint--x number of motor vehicles-see www.epa.gov/RDEE/energy-resources/calculator.html
13.14	Climate Change	There is a lot of climatic variation from year to year. Current research should shed some light on the historical range of variation. This could help form a long-term and science based plan for water use.

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Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
20		AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT
21	Affected Environment	EPA guidance on existing conditions within the analysis area
30		ALTERNATIVES
31	General	Comments, concerns, questions about alternative development and methodology
31.01	General	Oil and gas exploration should be addressed as an alternative and analyzed
31.02	General	Summarize the criteria and process used to develop range of alternatives including criteria used to identify and/or screen potential alternatives. Identify criteria used to eliminate criteria
31.03	General	Special attention should be given to development of environmental baselines as opposed to no-action alternative. Current environmental conditions need to be described in the document as a baseline so future changes can be measured for all alternatives.
31.04	General	Mitigation-need to identify appropriate mitigation where impacts are expected. Include designation of entity responsible for implementing mitigation, funding source, and specific temporal milestones to meet rehabilitation standards.
40		ADJACENT LANDS (Jurisdictions)-FEDERAL AND STATE, COUNTIES
41	General	General comments, questions, concerns about adjacent federal and state land
41.01	General	NPS is conducting ungulate management study. Need to coordinate efforts to the extent possible. Ungulates are a cross boundary issue.
41.02	General	Important to share data between agencies--groundwater, vegetation, etc. and other coordination
41.03	General	Important for playa wetlands to get flooded
41.04	General	State engineer in process of developing new rules and regulations for wells. All wells will be shut off if they don't have an augmentation plan or participate in a subdistrict with a plan-could affect Monte Vista and Alamosa.
41.05	General	There have been dramatic changes in forest vegetation (i.e. large areas of dead spruce and fir). Forest Service is concerned about how these changes could change water flow. Could be a concern on the refuges.
41.06	General	Need to reduce erosion in the valley. NRCS is looking at soil conservation and how cropland has altered biology. Working on a resource management plan between Colorado and New Mexico.
41.07	General	Should bison be reintroduced on the Baca Ranch lands and to what degree. There is a national bison initiative and the Nature Conservancy is interested. NPS is preparing a white paper. Some believe SLV is a place for bison to be successful and environmentally appropriate.
41.07	General	Need to understand effects of any bison reintroduction on migratory birds. There are many management issues and human dimension issues as well.
41.08	General	Geothermal may become an issue in mineral rights. Although there is not development now on BLM lands, it could be an issue in the future. The State considers the heat from geothermal to be a mineral right but the water is a water right. CCP needs to know where mineral development will occur.
41.09	General	Opportunity to manage habitat with prescribed fire through partnerships. The internal argument is the completion for resources for fire management.
41.10	General	Public use-NPS access for Great Sand Dunes from the north and how or if that should be a consideration for the refuge.
41.11	General	Need to paint a credible and believable hydro-geomorphic picture of the valley historically and as it currently exists to inform the public and bring them along with the decision and the science. Whenever you model, the people who are affected have a tendency not to believe the model.
41.12	General	If Service gets rid of all the artificial structures does it restore anything? Really important to get a handle on what the refuges looked like prior to valley irrigation.
41.13	General	The Nature Conservancy hired a geologist to map geologic hydrogeomorphic processes in the valley. The Smithsonian has also mapped the middens which can show changes. Should include this.
41.14	General	The field of human dimensions is growing and is becoming more important for NPS planning processes
41.15	General	Habitat restoration-There may be an opportunity to move ungulates more onto National Forest land and keep them there a little longer
50		ADJACENT LANDS-PRIVATE
51	Adjacent Lands	Need to address the impacts of elk on adjacent lands
60		BIOLOGICAL OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES
		none
70		COMMERCIAL USES
		none
80		COMPATIBILITY
		none
90		CONSULTATION, CONTRACTORS, AND COORDINATION
		none

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Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
100		
CULTURAL RESOURCES		
100.01	General	Project does not appear to affect the Old Spanish National Historic Trail--1 miles east of the northeastern point of the Baca NWR. There could be concerns if oil and gas exploration or other energy-related project were to be planned in the area.
100.02	General	Document areas of potential effect. Consult State Historic preservation officer.
200		
DISEASE		
200.01	General	Analyze Brucellosis if bison are reintroduced.
200.02	General	West Nile and the management of mosquitos
300		
FIRE MANAGEMENT		
310	Policy	General comment about fire management policy and management
320	Management	Specific comments fire management
320.01	Management	Oppose fire suppression or use of prescribed burning
320.02	Management	What should the FWS role be in terms of fire management? There should be one fire management plan for all the agencies. Need more preplanning to know when it is necessary to send the firefighters out to fight a fire. You should at least say that it is necessary.
330	Impact analysis	General concerns and comments about the impacts from fires
340	Interagency cooperation	General support for agency cooperation on fire fighting and agreements
350	Prescribed fire	Support for use of prescribed fire to allow fire to play its natural role
360	Wildland Fire	Support for natural wildland fire policy as much as reasonably possible
400		
GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT SPECIFIC REFUGES NOT ADDRESSED ELSEWHERE		
410	General-Baca	Other Comments made about Baca NWR
410.01	General-Baca	Attributes-size, ecological uniqueness, potential of key ecological processes, different statement of purpose
410.02	General-Baca	Need to allow for access on Baca now so public can have information to see what happens there and the public can support the refuge and CCP
410.03	General-Baca	Support as little management as possible-let nature take its course on Baca NWR
410.04	General-Baca	Service has been mismanaging Baca
420	General-Monte Vista	Comments made about Monte Vista Refuge
420.01	General-Monte Vista	The perennial springs were part of the reasons that Monte Vista was established. The hydrology of the springs has changed. Now there is wind erosion and the soils are not conducive to vegetation development. Needs to be looked at carefully.
420.02	General-Monte Vista	Really supports hands on management that is going on at Monte Vista. It seems that the path is to continue the trend. Monte Vista is the easies to manipulate and manage because of its access and logistics
430	General-Alamosa	Comments made about Alamosa
430.01	General-Alamosa	Work with city of Alamosa to create additional access from the land that abuts the city
430.02	General-Alamosa	Reopen the visitor center. It could become the center piece for environmental education in the valley
440	General-LPP	Specific Comments about LPP or Conservation Area
440.01	General-LPP	Are you addressing Obama's America's Great Outdoors initiative?
500		
HABITAT, WILDLIFE, AND ECOSYSTEMS		
501	Habitat-General	General comments in support of protecting habitat and wildlife resources and values
501.01	Habitat-General	connect discontinuous areas of terrestrial and aquatic habitat and establish protections for likely movement corridors along both latitudinal and altitudinal gradients.
501.02	Habitat-General	Restore lost or degraded elements of ecosystem composition, structure, and function.
501.03	Habitat-General	CCP needs to address effects on vegetation, wildlife, and its habitats, and recreational hunting, etc.
520	Habitat-specific	Specific comments about habitat management
520.01	Habitat-specific	Oppose irrigation of hay fields

Public Scoping Comments by Topic
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Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
530	Landscape	Need to look at larger landscape in analysis; general comments about larger landscape not related to LPP
530.01	Landscape	Encourage the Service to think well beyond the boundaries of each refuge to craft plans at landscape scale whenever possible.
530.02	Landscape	Particular emphasis should be placed on restoring the system to full, natural functionality by wise water management, weed control, science-based wildlife management, and range management, and restoration of the American bison.
540	Wildlife-General	General comments, questions, and concerns about wildlife species
550	Wildlife-Specific	Specific comments about wildlife species
550.1	Wildlife-Specific	The Service should manage wildlife populations to restore biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health
550.2	Wildlife-Specific	There are a number of species that have been potentially impacted by mismanagement on Baca NWR (at least a dozen species listed)
560	Wildlife-Ungulates-Elk	Specific comments about ungulates or ungulate management
560.01	Elk Management	Elk are an important, conspicuous and valued species
560.02	Elk Management	Elk can have negative effect on vegetation communities and other species dependent upon those communities
560.03	Elk Management	Recommend interagency planning to deal with elk management
560.04	Elk Management	Oppose any management of ungulates.
560.05	Elk Management	Need to determine if current population increase is outside the range of natural variation and whether this is a direct and primary cause of habitat degradation.
560.06	Elk Management	If there are up to 3,000 elk what is the management strategy for these animals. In 20 years there could be many more so there needs to be some kind of management.
560.07	Elk Management	It seems the agencies should have learned from other areas about how to manage the elk and what kind of numbers should be on the land.
560.08	Elk Management	Opening up the Baca to public access should disperse elk (prefers no vehicle access).
560.09	Elk Management	Support for elk harvest. Problem can't be solved without management.
560.1	Elk Management	Elk are easier to manage with habitat manipulation as compared to bison. Bison go wherever they want.
560.12	Elk Management	What are the numbers of elk? Why can't you be more specific about the numbers? What riparian areas are being affected.
560.13	Elk Management	Do we know what population of elk can be on the Baca without damage?
560.14	Elk Management	Need to consider shooting elk. Elk move onto private land and impact lands
560.15	Elk Management	Are you going to take action or wait until long studies are done?
560.16	Elk Management	Would elk be less likely to be in riparian areas if they could be in other areas?
560.17	Elk Management	Do elk seem to respond to habitat saturation by not having a lot of young?
560.18	Elk Management	Please keep elk off my ranch
560.19	Elk Management	Elk are inhibiting the ability of the willows to grow which is detrimental to the habitat suitability for the willow flycatcher. Need to document whether this is occurring on all the refuges.
580	Wildlife-Birds	Specific comments about birds species
580.01	Wildlife-Birds	Need to formulate landscape scale crane management and enhancement strategy for SLV to increase quality of habitat on other conservation lands. Important particularly in light of impending water regulations.
580.02	Wildlife-Birds	Seems like there has been a precipitous decline in waterfowl over the past 11 years. If you lose a nesting season how long does it take to get that back. Populations are going down. No winter water is causing the birds to fly by. The State needs to listen more.
580.03	Wildlife-Birds	The refuges are managed primarily for migratory birds but the elk come onto the refuges to seek refuge from hunters and other negative pressures. This can impact habitat for migratory birds.

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Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
590	Fences	General concerns, comments and questions about fencing and other infrastructure as barriers for wildlife
590.01	Fences	Remove all barbed wire fencing from the interior and perimeter of the refuge.
600		HUNTING (PRIORITY PUBLIC USE)
601	General	Regulations, Methodologies, and Assumptions about Hunting
610	Support-hunting	General support for hunting and fishing opportunities
610.01	Support-hunting	Need to have hunting on Baca NWR
620	Oppose-hunting	Comments or concerns in opposition to hunting or types of weaponry
620.1	Oppose-hunting	opposition to hunting or trapping on Baca NWR
630	Management	General comments and concerns about hunting management
700		IMPACT/EFFECT ANALYSIS (not otherwise described)
701	Analysis	General Methodologies for Establishing Impact/Effects Analysis
701	Analysis	EPA reviews EIS's in accordance with its responsibilities under NEPA and Clean Air Act. EPA reviews and comments in writing on impact of any major federal action. Comments include a rating of both the environmental impact of the proposed action and the adequacy of the NEPA document. Summary of rating system is enclosed
710	Analysis	Specific text about impact/effect analysis
710.01	Analysis	Analysis should show all impacts to refuge resources from roads including wildlife, habitat, cultural resources, threatened and endangered species.
710.02	Analysis	Impact analysis must address climate change and how it will affect fire management, livestock grazing, and wildlife habitat.
710.03	Analysis	Analyze and disclose all fauna, fish, or flora management and conservation plans in CCP including any "enhancement" activities that may be planned for refuge.
730	Mitigation	General comments or concerns on Mitigation analysis
730.01	Mitigation	Energy development, recreational use, prescribed fire treatment, grazing and related activities are amount the planning activities requiring management, mitigation, and monitoring. Details should be identified and who is responsible.
800		INVASIVE SPECIES
801	General	Comments and concerns about the spread of invasive species
801.01	General	Success in weed management could be increased substantially by developing a system-wide, multi-partner effort with feds, state, local, and private partners within Great Sand Dunes complex.
801.02	General	Supports the goal of preventing the introduction and spread of invasive plants and noxious weeds. Support prioritization of management techniques that focus on non-chemical treatments first. Reliance on herbicides should be a last resort. Early recognition and control of new infestations is essential. Use prevention measures such as reseeding disturbed areas immediately and cleaning equipment and tires.
801.03	General	State of Colorado maintains list of noxious plants and invasive species. Should list the noxious weeds and exotic plants that occur in the planning area.
820	Control	Support for more aggressive management of noxious weeds on adjacent lands
821	Chemicals	General comments and concerns about use of chemicals to control invasive species
821.01	Chemicals	Oppose use of herbicides or chemicals
830	Monitoring	Comments and concerns about monitoring of invasive species
840	Livestock	Role that livestock grazing has in invasive species
900		LAWS AND REGULATIONS
921.3	Executive Orders	Executive Order 11990 requires all Federal Agencies protect wetlands.
921.4	Executive Orders	EPA guidance on Executive Order 12898 requires federal agencies to address Environmental Justice
930	Improvement Act	Comments and concerns about the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act
940	NEPA	General comments and questions about adhering to NEPA

Public Scoping Comments by Topic
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Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
1000		LIVESTOCK GRAZING AND AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES
1001	General	Regulations, Methodologies, Literature and Assumptions about Livestock Grazing
1001.01	General	What is occurring now in terms of private leases for grazing and haying and are there hay fields that elk are not allowed?
1001.02	General	Need to include a quantitative discussion of existing grazing allotments in the planning area and how the CCP will address future grazing. Support efforts to reduce grazing impacts through the use of best management practices and adaptive management/monitoring strategies to protect sensitive soils, wetlands, riparian areas, etc. Recommend protection of riparian corridors through use of a minimum 100 foot buffer. Reduced stocking rates or grazing season may be necessary. Specify both positive and negative impacts of adaptive management strategy.
1040	Grazing-support	Comments in general support of livestock grazing on refuge
1040.01	Grazing-support	Need to manage the refuges. Cannot just let things go. Graze some but just a certain portion
1040.02	Grazing-support	Well-managed grazing is a key tool that needs to be used on all three refuges in a planned and consistent manner for maintaining healthy and diverse vegetation for habitat
1040.03	Grazing-support	You need to remember how Baca is historically tied to this valley. Health of the Baca lands is due to the management of the land before it was acquired. The way it has been managed has shown that the area has thrived under it. The refuge can be part of a sustainable food chain. You can use animals to manage that land and maintain its health--you can use and control cattle in terms of what the grass needs at any given time--can control where they are--take advantage of historic management and not radically change it.
1040.04	Grazing-support	Baca has been maintained as a hunting, grazing, and haying ranch for over 100 years and we need to be slow in implementing new changes.
1050	Grazing-oppose	Comments in general opposition or concerns about livestock grazing and haying
1050.01	Grazing-oppose	No cattle or hay cutting on Baca NWR
1050.02	Grazing-oppose	If you allow grazing on Baca NWR, change name to Baca National Cow Refuge.
1050.03	Grazing-oppose	In-kind agreements for cattle and hay operations are questionable and their management should be investigated.
1060	Agricultural Practices	Comments, concerns and questions about agricultural practices
1060.01	Agricultural Practices	Need to include a quantitative discussion of existing agricultural cooperative permitting arrangements with local farmers/ranchers and the haying practices and feed cropping activities occurring in the planning area. Include discussion of how future hay production and feed cropping in planning area will be address. Impacts should be detailed about these practices.
1080	Water	Comments and concerns about water development for livestock grazing
1080.01	Water	Need to consider impacts of cattle on riparian areas
1100		MONITORING
1101	General	Regulations, Methodologies, Literature and Assumptions about Monitoring
1101.1	General	EPA guidance on monitoring
1110	Habitat/Wildlife	General comments about habitat and wildlife monitoring
1110.01	Habitat/Wildlife	questions about elk collaring and hydro-geomorphic analysis
1120	Public Use	Comments and concern about monitoring public use impacts
1200		OTHER ISSUES NOT OTHERWISE ADDRESSED
1400		PARTNERSHIPS
1401	General	General comments in support for partnerships and better communications with communities
1500		PLANNING PROCESS
1501	Process	Comments, concerns, and questions about planning process
1600		PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT--CCP PROCESS
1601.01	Process	Need to have more opportunities for public involvement on the CCP for Baca. Consider FACA
1700		PUBLIC USE AND ACCESS (Not already described)
1701	Access	General comments, concerns, and questions about access for public uses
1701.01	Access	Oppose public access or vehicles or tour route on Baca NWR.
1701.02	Access	Allow for all lands on Baca NWR to be open for foot travel

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Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
1701.03	Access	Create better maps for the refuges. Currently maps show the boundaries and roads in them but none of the adjoining roads. The map for Alamosa refuge does not show the roads to the east even though they exist. It makes it difficult to get there without getting lost.
1701.04	Access	Allow for bicycles and pedestrians on any roads open to the public for driving
1701.05	Access	Oppose all visitor use or services
1701.06	Access	There is no public access to Baca so it is difficult to make comments. How do you comment when you don't have any idea of what the area looks like or feels like
1701.07	Access	Why are hunters allowed on refuges but people who want to take a walk or look at birds can't?
1701.08	Access	Is it possible to have a tour of Baca?
1710	Accessibility	Comments specific to accessibility issues for persons of all abilities
1720	Access-motorized	Comments and concerns specific to motorized access
1720.01	Access-motorized	Support for a refuge loop road within Baca. Good roads already exist and could use them
1740	Other Priority Public Uses	General comments and concerns about wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, education
1740.01	Other Priority Public Uses	Could have tours of historic buildings on Baca Ranch. Staff from Crestone Historical Museum would be able to lead these.
1740.02	Other Priority Public Uses	Could have naturalist series of events using staff, professors from Adams State or other local naturalists
1740.03	Other Priority Public Uses	Support for education programs tied to Moffat RE-2 school district standards
1740.04	Other Priority Public Uses	Support for artist-in residence or other similar program-primarily have tie to Crestone area
1740.05	Other Priority Public Uses	EE programs should address climate change.
1740.06	Other Priority Public Uses	EE and community involvement-it is vital to continue to involve community members in various aspects of the refuges from youth programs to adult engagement. The summer youth programs can build into future biologist and FWS personnel and programs such as Friends of the Refuge provide ways for others to more actively participate.
1740.07	Other Priority Public Uses	Would love to see more education. Area has great potential, particularly with ability to partner with NPS and considering the socio-economic situation. This area provides great opportunities for local school to access EE that because of the low income, the local student might not get elsewhere.
1740.08	Other Priority Public Uses	It would not be wise to make EE a focal part of plan because it would not get funded.
1740.09	Other Priority Public Uses	Interested in what types of community education and research could be developed with and on the refuge. Could we look at what you have been doing so we can see what opportunities might exist?
1750	Non-Priority Public Uses	Comments about non-priority/non-traditional public uses
1750.01	Non-Priority Public Uses	Support for annual elk fest or something similar to Elk Refuge with antler auction
1750.02	Non-Priority Public Uses	Support for sleigh ride that could be done by concessionaire-Baca Grande Stables or other Ranch
1800		PURPOSE AND NEED AND DECISION AREAS
1801	Policy	Purpose and Need-Planning Process and Policy
1801.1	Policy	EPA guidance on purpose and need statements-describe has conservation management has evolved since previous plans.
1810	Purposes	General comments about Refuge purposes
1810.01	Purposes	Baca NWR is being mismanaged because its goals do not meet legislated purpose--using cattle grazing and haying for invasive species. Hunting and motor vehicle us are also damaging to the refuge and not part of legislated use. A refuge is a place where wildlife and plants are to be protected.
		FORSEEABLE ACTIVITIES AND CUMULATIVE IMPACTS
1900	General	General comments about cumulative impact analysis
1901.1	General	EPA guidance on cumulative effects and mitigation, see http://cequ.eh.doe.gov/nepa/ccenepa/ccenepa.htm . Assess any impacts to airsheds in Class I areas. Organize according to areas-airsheds and watersheds versus political boundaries.
1901.2	General	examine cumulative impacts of development. It is appropriate to examine anticipated activity trends in the study area, not just approve on the ground projects.

Public Scoping Comments by Topic
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Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
1910	Energy Development	Specific comments about cumulative impact analysis-minerals extraction
1910.01	Energy Development	EPA is concerned with impacts associated with potential increase of energy development in the planning area as well as cumulative impacts that may be occurring as a result of increased energy development in the planning area.
1910.02	Energy Development	Need to discuss unique situation on Baca related to privately-held mineral rights, the surface access agreement and implications for energy exploration
1910.03	Energy Development	whether additional surface authorization and likely development associated with such access can proceed without impacting aquatic and air resources
1910.04	Energy Development	appropriate rate of surface development
1910.05	Energy Development	where access roads should be located for least impact
1910.06	Energy Development	appropriate access stipulations
1910.07	Energy Development	necessary mitigation measures
1910.08	Energy Development	refer to EPA letter on Baca proposed oil and gas
1910.09	Energy Development	Interested in what will happen when Lexam comes in. It will be radical change for Baca and we have been talking about slow change
1910.10	Energy Development	Possibility of discovery of oil and gas should be in this planning process. It does not need to be incompatible. If oil and gas is on the refuge, taxes will go down
1910.11	Energy Development	What is Lexam asking for mineral rights? What is CCP costing?
1910.12	Energy Development	cumulative effects analysis should take into account the effects of reasonably foreseeable growth in the energy development in the area and its effects on the air and aquatic resources. Indirect effects should also be analyzed.
1910.13	Energy Development	Look at what other forms of energy development are going on in the valley.
1910.14	Energy Development	Oppose all drilling for oil or natural gas
1910.14	Energy Development	Request that oil and gas exploration and production be addressed and included in the CCP process as a potential use of the Baca NWR.
1920	Adjacent land uses	Discuss land uses adjacent to the refuge
1920.01	Adjacent land uses	Need to consider vegetation and species that are upland from the Baca refuge (this is really a water issue)
2000		REFERENCES AND STUDIES
2001	Research	Questions about hydrogeomorphic study
2100		REFUGE OPERATIONS AND BUDGET
2110	Budget	General concerns about lack of adequate funding to implement CCP
2120	Law Enforcement	Specific comments and concerns about law enforcement on refuge
2200		REINTRODUCTION OF WILDLIFE SPECIES
2201	General	General comments and concerns about species reintroductions
2201.01	General	Need to consider other extirpated native species where doing so would restore vital ecosystem functions and contribute to coordinated management with other land managers and partners in the region.
2201.02	General	Is it within the purview of the USFWS to reintroduce pheasants?
2201.03	General	Can make the case that sandhill cranes are not native either. Historical evidence shows the population was down to 41 individuals.
2210	Wolves	
2201.01	Wolves	Wolves may ecologically make sense but realizes it is a politically hot issue.
2220	Bison	Bison-General comments and concerns about potential reintroduction of bison
2220.01	Bison-General	Is the Zapata Ranch running bison? There is a study being done on the refuge that is looking at elk, bison, and the landscape. Study should be available by the end of the year.
2220.02	Bison-General	Discuss impacts of farming and ranching from reintroduction of bison, including adequacy of sustainable forage to maintain a bison herd. Any impacts related to planned corrals or handling facilities should be described.

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Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
2220.03	Bison-General	Even if the bison herd was brucellosis-free need to discuss minor or perceived effect that could create economic impacts to the community. Safety awareness signs should be located anywhere where the public could come into contact
2220.04	General	Should bison be reintroduced on the Baca Ranch lands and to what degree? There is a national bison initiative and the Nature Conservancy is interested. NPS is preparing a white paper. Some believe SLV is a place for bison to be successful and environmentally appropriate.
2220.05	General	Need to understand effects of any bison reintroduction on migratory birds. Many management issues and human dimension issues as well
2221	Bison-Support	Support bison reintroductions
2221.01	Bison-Support	Bison would increase tourist and local interest in wildlife values
2221.02	Bison-Support	Although it is not known the extent of bison populations pre-settlement, the same can be said for other ungulates like elk
2221.03	Bison-Support	Recognize the bison restoration poses challenges but these can be dealt with such that negative impacts on minimized while the positive impacts of bison restoration would be dramatic and of nation and international importance.
2221.04	Bison-Support	Bison are a keystone species recognized for its role in promoting diversity and functioning of natural systems. Their absence has had a substantial negative effect on diversity and ecosystem function given the observations and studies of the effects of their removal and restoration of bison ecology in SLV.
2221.05	Bison-Support	Bison issue needs to be fleshed out fully by looking at overall population of bison nationally. It is hard to make a local decision about bison without understanding more about the bison situation across the U.S.
2300 ROADS (All comments that mention roads)		
2301	General	General comments and concerns about roads
2301.01	General	Remove all roads and restore and revegetate these areas on Baca NWR
2301.02	General	Utilize the maintenance roads along the canals on the refuges to create additional areas of access for public (Alamosa). Opportunities exist for this at all three refuges. Using existing infrastructure would decrease costs, etc. These roads already disturb wildlife.
2301.03	General	Travel management analysis should include a structured, systematic road inventory, including identification of the road/trail network needed for management objectives and what can be done to address water quality, fish and wildlife concerns. Concerns should be paid to density, road stream crossing, road drainage and surface erosion, culvert sizing, and potential for washout, fish migration, etc. Should give preference to routes that do not have sensitive resources.
2301.04	General	EPA supports transition from unmanaged motorized recreation to restricted travel. Need to address effects of unmanaged OHV use.
2301.05	General	Need to address law enforcement and signage for managing road systems
2301.06	General	Need to address dust suppression from unpaved roads and disturbed areas.
2340 Maintenance Comments and concerns about maintenance issues		
2341	Maintenance	Concerns whether the refuge will have funding for operations and maintenance
2400 SOCIOECONOMICS		
2401	General	General questions and concerns about socioeconomic analysis, methodologies, and assumptions
2401.01	General	Need to look more at value added products of what might be found on a piece of ground. Need to explore every opportunities
2410	Benefits	General comments or concerns about positive economic impacts of refuge
2420	Impacts	Comments or concerns about impacts of refuge activities on local area
2430	Refuge payments	Questions and concerns about Revenue Sharing
2440	Environmental Justice	General Comments and Concerns
2440.01	Environmental Justice	Executive Order 12898. Disclose and evaluate any environmental justice concerns associated to rural low-income communities from the conservation management activities and potential build-out for the reasonably foreseeable development analysis. Close coordination with tribes is encouraged. If no environmental justice consideration, then that should be disclosed.
2500 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES AND RARE SPECIES		
2501	T&E Species	General concerns and questions about Threatened and Endangered or rare species management
2501.01	T&E Species	Area contains numerous special status species which need to be addressed in the CCP. The EIS should address discussion of any expected benefits associated with enhancement of the Upper Rio Grande/San Luis Valley ecosystem resulting from CCP activities
2600 TRIBAL ISSUES		

Public Scoping Comments by Topic
San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
2601	Tribes	Need to look for more ways to involve the tribes in the process
2700		VEGETATION HABITAT (not otherwise described)
2800		VISION AND GOALS
2801	Vision and Goals	Support for Service's draft vision and goals as being comprehensive
	Vision and Goals	Vision needs to include climate change
2900		WATER RESOURCES (AMOUNT AND QUALITY, Aquatic Resources)
6001	General	General comments and concerns about water resources
6001.01	General	Need a water management plan included for Baca NWR
6001.02	General	Need an assessment of water resources in accordance with CCP checklist
6001.03	General	Water management plan needs to include restoration of natural stream flows and riparian areas with Baca Grand POA and town of Crestone
6001.04	General	Need to restore Cottonwood Creek, Spanish Creek, Willow Creek, South Crestone, North Crestone Creek
6001.05	General	Instead of restoration of viable riparian areas in upper recharge areas they are being destroyed
6001.06	General	destruction of riparian habitat in Baca Grande subdivision-some flows impeded completely
6001.07	General	The subdivision creeks particularly Cottonwood and Spanish Creek have become ditches for cattle.
6001.08	General	Water management on Baca is different due to so much water being diverted historically. Encourage Service to expand the studies to determine the effects of haying, grazing, and various water prescriptions on bird species, particularly in cooperation with private landowners to conservation wise decisions can be made in future.
6001.09	General	How much water to you use to irrigate the hay meadows on Baca?
6001.09	General	Where are you going to put the water management plan into the planning concept and how will that affect Crestone? Streams go through the subdivision. These areas are no longer getting their historic flows that they got before refuge establishment. Areas are high in diversity and we are suffering from degradation because of lack of water. In Crestone we are losing wells and springs
6002	General	Regulations, Methodologies and Assumptions about Water Resources
6010	Water rights	General comments and concerns about water rights and water supply
6010.01	Water rights	Protect natural integrity of Monte Vista and Alamosa by securing water rights sufficient to maintain high-quality systems
6010.02	Water rights	Clarify Baca NWR water rights
6010.03	Water rights	Concern about diversion gate into public trust water at Cottonwood Creeks historic fork
6010.04	Water rights	The Refuge's water rights concerning Cottonwood Creek is based on an obsolete 1880s decree of 95 cubic foot per second. There average flow is 40 cubic foot per second (cfs). How is this data determined. We believe average is less than 10cfs.
6010.05	Water rights	proposed gate at Cottonwood Creek would be a major disturbance to a natural stream and an area protected by the covenants green belt and area has high biodiversity rating
6010.06	Water rights	Have to compete for deep water. Can't sit by and let it go to highest bidder. Need to go after more water rights
6010.07	Water rights	If deep wells are of interest, you should encourage deep wells for oil and gas exploration and then use the holes when they are no longer of use. Hard to overlook surface disturbance but there would be long-term benefit in terms of water availability
6010.08	Water rights	Dave Mathias kept a daily diary of water issues. Also check historical society
6010.09	Water rights	Look at differences between managed water supply versus what was historic. Lowered groundwater has created situation where without management, historical wetlands may not be able to continue to exist.
6010.1	Water rights	Baca land trust has a strong tradition of trying to engage ranchers and other to work together on the management of water. The refuge owns water rights which are inclusive, but if they only think about the refuge they risk thinking of only their needs to the exclusion of the surrounding lands. Would not be good for the basin as a whole. The refuge needs to think about how their water needs fit into the larger community.
6020	Impacts	Comments specific to impacts or erosion
6020.01	Impacts	Need to address how alternatives will impact soil erosion
6030	Analysis	Comments about analysis of water resources
6030.01	Analysis	The diversion of water to increase hay pastures on Baca has had unknown effects on the natural diversity and functioning of the natural system. Severely restricting the occasion flooding of playas on the west margin of the refuge may have had a negative effect on resident and migratory birds.
6030.02	Analysis	What are the issues with establishing native hydrology? Will you being doing pros and cons?

Public Scoping Comments by Topic
San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Code	Sub-Category	TOPIC
6040	Wetlands	Comments specific to wetlands
6041	Wetlands	Identify wetlands potentially affected by refuge management and identify any mitigation measures needed
6042	Wetlands	Executive Order 11990-Protection of Wetlands by Federal Agencies
6041.1	Wetlands	EPA considers the protection, improvement, and restoration of wetlands to be of high priority
6041.2	Wetlands	Need to discuss exclusion or reduction of energy development, grazing, bison reintroduction, agricultural practices, recreation, etc. where wetlands would be affected
6041.3	Wetlands	Restore all historical natural wetlands on Baca NWR
6041.04	Wetlands	Aquatic resources that are considered difficult to replace under the law should be avoided
6041.05	Wetlands	Detailed analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to all wetlands in the system.
6050	Water development	General support for more water development
6051.01	Water development	Put all water back into the historical natural creek beds on Baca NWR.
6051.02	Water development	It is vital to secure the current and perhaps additional water for the refuges as the region faces numerous water challenges and pressures increase on wetlands across the valley. This makes the role of the refuges even more vital to provide necessary habitat into the future.
6070	Quality	Comments specific to water quality
6070.1	Quality	include water quality data for streams, lakes, and watersheds of planning area to provide baseline for future monitoring of impacts
6070.2	Quality	Recommend using CNHP/CDOW wetland and riparian mapping and basin-wide wetland assessments for Upper Rio Grande/San Luis Basin that are available
6070.3	Quality	Need to include discussion of Clean Water Act impaired or threatened water body segments within planning area. If there aren't any, note this. Contact CDPHE. Proposed activities should not cause further degradation of water quality and should be consistent with State's TMDL developed for water body
6070.4	Quality	Water source protection could be key issue for energy development. Analyze potential energy development impacts to surface water, groundwater, existing, and potential drinking water, and irrigation. Impacts include water quality, quantity, and current adverse changes on any stream
6070.5	Quality	Water source protection is very important for oil and gas development on split estates. Need to identify all reasonable monitoring and mitigation measures to protect these water sources even if they are outside Service jurisdiction. If water supply wells would be utilized, EPA recommends additional monitoring and mitigation measures.
6070.6	Quality	EIS should describe site-specific current soil conditions. Address soil loss, the relative amount of increased surface storm flow, and changes in water temps. Associated with erosion of soils and stream banks, etc. Resulting from prescribed burning, vegetation treatments, grazing, road construction, bison reintroduction, etc. Analyze impacts to aquatic resources associated with each alternative. Monitor hydrophobic soils for five years post prescribed burn.
6070.7	Quality	Impact of roads on water quality from existing road network. Identify any new road constructions. Limit new road construction. Locate roads away from streams and riparian areas, steep slopes, erosive soils. Minimize stream crossings. Provide adequate drainage and control of erosions. Follow other best management practices
3000		WILDERNESS
3001	General	General comments, questions and concerns about wilderness and future designations
3001.01	General	Concerns about impacts of refuge activities on wilderness
3001.02	General	Need to conduct wilderness review as part of planning process
3100		OTHER CCP ISSUES
3100.01	General	Support as little management as possible-let nature take its course on Baca NWR

San Luis Valley Scoping Meetings

Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP)

Land Protection Plan (LPP)

Alamosa Meeting - March 29th 2011

Forest Service vegetation map – make sure to include.

Elk management Discussion – Coordination with National Park Service (NPS)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will be addressing elk in the plan. On Baca National Wildlife Refuge there are thousands of elk and they are impacting browsing areas. The National Park Service (NP) is starting an ungulate management plan for the areas that they manage. The NPS and Service are coordinating efforts to ensure efficiency and appropriate management strategies that support each other's efforts.

The NPS finished their management plan in 2004 for the national park and preserve. The NPS has slightly different laws and guidance than Service but they are close sister agencies. The NPS does have some options in the park for managing populations of wildlife. It is important for the agencies and public to realize that the animals don't know the difference between lands across the landscape. They go where they want to go so management on each are affects each other.

The Nature Conservancy has two bison herds on their lands within portions of the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. At some point, they may be interested in selling the lands to NPS or Service and a decision may have to be made as to whether bison are appropriate.

The NPS public process for the ungulate management plan will start next month. The NPS wants the public to know that these planning processes are being done in concert. Sangre de Cristo's are still a big area of unfragmented habitat.

Question: Is the Zapata Ranch is running bison?

Answer: Yes, on the Medano. The Conservancy owns the ranch and land but the land is under the management of the NPS and Service. The agencies are working with Nature Conservancy to acquire the land. Land will be valued by fair appraisal value.

There is a study being completed on the ranch that is looking at three components including elk, bison and the landscape. Elk are everywhere, but there are only a few places that have bison and elk. This study will help guide where each species is and how they interact. This study should be available for the public to review by the end of this calendar year.

Usually there are between 1,000 and 3,000 elk on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge.

Comment: Access to Baca National Wildlife Refuge

There is no public access to the Baca National Wildlife Refuge so it is difficult to make comments. How do you comment when you don't have any idea of what that area looks like, what it feels like?

Answer: There is an access issue: The 1997 law which required all refuges to have management plans stipulated that all public access needs to conform to being compatible to the purposes of the refuge. Baca

National Wildlife Refuge does not have a plan. Questions about access—how to provide it, where to allow it etc. will be a part of the planning process for this management plan.

Access is available during guided tours, which will be occurring through the spring and summer. One of the questions of this plan is “What kind of opportunities would the public like to have on these areas?”

Question and Comment: If there are 1,000 to 3,000 elk, what is the management strategy for these animals? In 20 years, there may be many more, there needs to be some kind of management.

Answer: Through the ungulate study and other studies, the agencies are trying to examine impacts and different ways to manage the elk. There is a shared concern between agencies that elk populations could become, and probably already are, a problem. The agencies involved are developing management strategies and looking at sustainable populations.

Comment: It seems that the agencies should have learned from other areas how to manage the elk and what kind of numbers should be on the land.

Answer: The Service needs to do this on a site-specific basis, specific to the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, and do this as wisely as possible. Also, need to comply with the law. There are some general rules that can be applied everywhere but there are many variables that need to be considered that are site specific. Also a general number doesn't really mean much if the elk are in the wrong place or congregating in high densities. The Baca National Wildlife Refuge is relatively new to the Service so there is a lot to learn.

Comment: Although the Baca National Wildlife Refuge should be totally off use to motorized vehicles, there needs to be access for the public. By opening up the Baca National Wildlife Refuge to the public for use, the elk will naturally become more dispersed.

Comment: The agency has to manage something in terms of the grazing. Cannot just let things go. Graze some but just a certain portion. This reflects a thoughtful and careful management strategy.

Question: Will you be addressing Obama's America's Great Outdoors initiative?

Answer: Yes. The Service is looking at developing a “conservation area” as part of this planning process. This would be defined by the hydrologic boundaries of the valley and would incorporate a land conservation program that seeks to protect highly valued areas.

A larger land protection plan, which at this point is just an idea on a map, may compliment the larger national goal. What this may do is begin the large process of acquiring conservation easements within this larger framework or defined landscape boundaries. If the idea survives, this complex would have the ability to work with partners, landowners, agencies to complete strategic land acquisitions. The process we are in now would provide the planning as part of the LPP so the agency does not have to go through NEPA again for each small parcel.

The Service is interested in conservation easements in part to provide a buffer zone around the refuges from development. Also conservation easements can be useful to preserve specific habitats.

Question: Does the Federal government reimburse counties for land lost to development for public lands?

Answer: Yes. There are various formulas for figuring the loss and the Service picks the highest number. Congress also supplements these funds. It becomes highly dependent on the specific refuge. Right now – it is probably high comparable to what taxes would generate. In areas with higher land values, this may not be true.

Monte Vista Meeting - March 30th 2011

Elk management

The Service knows that one of the issues is how to manage the elk on the refuges including what tools will be used and what is appropriate for the refuges in terms of populations and control. We will be addressing elk in the plan. On Baca National Wildlife Refuge there are multiple thousands and are impacting browsing areas. The NPS is starting an ungulate management plan.

Animals don't know the difference between lands across the landscape. Many of the old ranches that no longer have the herd or are no longer operational provide grasses for ungulates. The Nature Conservancy has two bison herds on their lands within the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. At some point, they may be interested in selling the lands to NPS or Service and a decision will have to be made as to whether bison are appropriate.

The agencies want to avoid unintended consequences from elk. If they are pushed to encourage them to go elsewhere than the park or refuges they may end up somewhere else where they are not helpful.

NPS public process will start next month. Want public to know that these planning processes are being done in concert. Sangre de Cristo's are still a big area of unfragmented habitat.

Comment: It is odd that the park service has ended up where it is in terms of hunting. It wasn't that way in "Teddy's" day. When many of the refuges and parks were established, management was encouraged. The agency also needs to be mindful of bighorn sheep and whether elk have usurped some of their habitats.

Comment: Couple of years ago, was astounded at the number of elk when taken out on a tour. There is no real alternative but to start harvesting elk given the exploding populations. Populations have increased rapidly and they will soon be, if not already, out of control. The problem cannot be solved without drastic measures. Last summer there were some herds where there were too many to count.

Answer: The Service generally agrees with these comments. On the Baca National Wildlife Refuge there is probably the forage to support current populations but whether or not that fits into the goals of the refuge and its purpose is a question that needs to be looked at during the LPP process.

It becomes more complicated if you consider the possible use of bison on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge and their ecological benefits.

Comment: Elk are somewhat easier to manage with habitat manipulation than bison. Bison are more difficult because they are more likely to go wherever they want without regard to habitat preference.

Comment: Appreciates the idea of a fenceless management strategy (goal of Service and NPS) but worries it is not realistic given the herds. Thinks other options may have to be considered.

Comment: Have to compete for a piece of the deep water (confined aquifer). Can't sit by and let it go to the highest bidder. Can acquire the rights and then lease it back to farmers in the present but will have it for future use.

Comment: If deep wells are of interest, then you should encourage deep wells for oil and gas exploration and then use the holes when they are no longer of use and abandoned. Hard to overlook the surface impacts but there would be great long-term benefits in terms of water availability. Concern about contamination of groundwater is overblown. I would like to see the Service acquire more water rights.

Comment: Dave Mathias kept a daily diary of water issues in the water. Also the Monte Vista historical society may have records.

Comment: The Service needs to be looking at differences between managed water supply and what was historic. Lowered groundwater has created a situation that, without management, historical wetlands may not be able to continue to exist. Anecdotal evidence points to wetlands drying up due to lowering groundwater. In favor of managing water in order to keep the wetlands wet also in favor of acquiring additional lands to help maintain hydrologic connections and provide more options for conservation of lands critical for birds. Use strategic and wise selection of lands for acquisition.

Question: Is it within the purview of the Service to reintroduce pheasants?

Answer: They are not native so it is not feasible to reintroduce pheasants on the refuge.

Comment: Can make the case that sandhill cranes are also not native. There were no sandhills here when I was a child.

There is some historical evidence that the sandhill crane populations earlier in the century went through a decline. There was a time when the population was down to 41 individuals.

Comment: I would love to see more education.

Answer: The Service does have an education program within the region. The Service believes that this area has great potential for environmental education. This is true especially given the ability to tag on to the Great Sand Dunes National Park in the area and considering the socio-economic situation. A case could be made that this area provides great opportunities for local schools to access environmental education that, because of the low socio-economics, the local students may not get elsewhere.

The Kid's Crane Festival occurs in October and has been highly successful. This is a good example of things that can happen on a national wildlife refuge.

Comment: It would not be wise to make conservation education a focal part of plan because it will not get funded.

Comment: In the 11 years that the commenter has been here, has noticed a precipitous decline in waterfowl. If you lose a nesting season – how long does it take to get that back? It just seems that the populations are going down and down. Concerned that lack of early winter water and no winter water is causing the birds to fly by. The State needs to listen more. The resource is being compromised to satisfy irrigation needs. Get into adjudication of water rights. When a wetland has been there long enough that it is almost native – it should have priority. Questions how much we should spend on historic hydrogeological studies. Does it really matter? The refuges were established to manage wetlands for wildlife. That is what should be a priority. The ducks don't care what the long term historic area looked like. Feels steamrolled sometimes as to what happens in the valley. If it is put to the voters in Colorado – they would vote for sandhill cranes over cheaper potatoes.

Comment: There are many common interests. Need to look more at value-added products of what might be found on a piece of ground. Need to explore every opportunity.

Question: Are there any sage grouse?

Answer: Maybe a few but there really isn't very good habitat.

Question: Do elk seem to respond to habitat saturation by not having a lot of young?

We have seen this for a few years now. It appears that the peak has passed and the trend is down. It would be important to find out what all the contributing factors are. There may be other factors.

Comment: Wolves may ecologically make sense but realizes that politically it is a big hot issue.

Comment: There is a big issue of dust storms in an area where historic perennial springs have dried up.

The perennial springs were part of the reasons that Monte Vista was established. However, the hydrology in the area of those springs has changed. Now there is wind erosion and the soils there are not very conducive to vegetation development. This needs to be looked at carefully in the plan.

Comment: I really support hands on management that is going on at Monte Vista.

It seems that the path that we are on is to continue this trend. However, it is important to understand that Monte Vista is the easiest to manipulate and manage because of access and logistics.

Question: What are the issues with establishing native hydrology? Will you be doing pros and cons?

Answer: In some areas we don't have a lot of latitude. On the Baca National Wildlife Refuge it is pretty clear that maintaining historical playas etc. is the directive. However, part of the problem is that the historical flows from the west and north are no longer getting to the playas. The ground is such a sponge and very little gets there now. This will require efficient use of augmentation.

There are anecdotal stories about how the playas used to be wetter to the point of being able to canoe a good distance. Something has obviously happened. It would be great to find a way to find a way to achieve the hydrology which existed not too long ago, but it may not be possible. The hydro-geomorphic analysis/research may be very useful on proving to larger audiences including legislatures that what is trying to be achieved is historical and we need to work back that way.

Question: What should the Service role be in terms of fire management?

Answer: We think there should be one fire management plan for all the agencies. Need more preplanning to know when it is necessary to send the firefighters out to fight a fire or not. In this plan we should at least say that this is necessary.

Moffat Meeting - March 31st 2011

Comment: Representative from the Nature Conservancy: Conversation about bison needs to be fleshed out fully by looking at the overall population of bison nationally. It is hard to make a local decision about bison without understanding more about the bison situation across the United States.

Question: Would really like to know why hunters are allowed to hunt during all times of year on the wildlife refuges and yet those just wanting to take a walk or look at birds don't have access.

Answer: The situation is a little different than it was just stated. Hunters do not have unrestricted access. On Monte Vista, hunters can go out to a designated area at restricted times and hunt. Alamosa is the same. Both have a couple of short walking trails that are available to all the public. On the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, there are no hunting or public uses. Because Baca does not have a management plan, development of public use has not yet been proposed or approved. That is why this planning process and why a CCP/LPP is necessary. There are opportunities for guided tours of the Baca. We are here tonight to hear what other opportunities can be provided.

Question: What is occurring now in terms of private leases for grazing and haying and are there hay fields that the elk are not allowed access to?

Answer: In 2005, the Service wrote a conceptual management plan, following principals learned from experience with Alamosa and Monte Vista. We did not want to rock the ecological system by radically changing management practices without really first knowing what the consequences would be. When we first got access to the Baca, it was noted that the large wet meadows were more free of invasive species than any other area of the valley. Based on that observation, the decision was made that the Service would not change the existing strategies until the ecological system, as it currently functions, was better understood. Only then can we tweak or change the management to see if we can be more productive with

wildlife and still manage to maintain the ecological health of the land. This will help us determine where we will go on the CCP.

In terms of leases, we only give annual permits to do something specific and prescribed to achieve a management objective. There is currently grazing on about 7,000 acres, and haying on about 3,000-4,000 acres. Approximately, 10,000 to 12,000 acres are irrigated. This is all on a tract of land that is about 92,000 acres.

Comment: We were perusing the notes of the meetings that have been held in Monte Vista and Alamosa. One thing we read was that the elk population was estimated at between 1,500 to 3,000 years ago. This seems like a big range and tells me that not much is known about the population, which is a concern. I have also heard tonight that perhaps some of the willow areas are in danger. What specific drainages?

What was said about elk populations was that at any given time there are between 1,500 and 3,000 elk on refuge lands. They come and go and wander. At times there are around 1,500 on the refuge and then some more wander in to access grasses etc.

The riparian areas of all drainages are affected. Out of thousands of seedlings, there is not a single one that has not been browsed by elk. They are often browsed to the base and so have to start regrowth every single year.

Question: Do we know what population of elk can be on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge without damage?

Answer: The Service is trying to figure this out. It is not a strict numbers issue. It depends highly on distribution and timing. It is complex. In some areas there is so much damage that we just don't know. We need to get some heavily damaged areas to a certain stage in order for them to be able to be able to sustain any elk presence at all. Some of these areas have been fenced off, or are being fenced off, to be allowed to recover.

Comment: When the elk run out of things to eat on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge they will get pushed onto private lands, which will cause problems with private landowners. A tool that is not used, and is often skirted, is shooting the elk.

Comment and Question: We have been coming to these meetings for several years and there have been continuous concerns expressed about the elk populations and yet it seems that the damage continues and crops are eaten. Are you going to take action or wait until long studies are done?

Answer: We consider this to be a very important issue. We have been experimenting with the Colorado Department of Wildlife to see if we can move elk out of the riparian areas but have to do it on a very small scale to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We have to do a hunt management plan in order to open the areas up to hunting. We are trying to do this well and thoughtfully. We are in the process of a NEPA process currently to see if we can redistribute and find a way to address the problem before this plan is done. Within the next months we will have another scoping meeting to discuss this plan.

Question and Comment: Where are you going to put the water management plan into the planning concept and how will that affect Crestone? I think that the Baca National Wildlife Refuge is unique because the streams that go into the Baca National Wildlife Refuge go through the subdivision at Crestone. These areas are no longer getting their historic flows that they got before the Baca National Wildlife Refuge was put into place. These areas are high in diversity and are suffering from degradation because of lack of water. In Crestone we are losing wells and losing springs.

We are also concerned about climate change and the status of the aquifer. There seems to be a lot less water. We have heard from a lot of people that we are having a hard time getting water out to the refuges so is this type of planning a waste of time?

Answer: The water management plan will be part of this process. We are protecting our water rights as part of our mission. The water that goes through Crestone is a part of the water rights of the refuge. We protect that right by using the water.

In this plan we will talk about water in quite a bit of detail. But there is not necessarily a separate plan.

Comment: Need to put into this conceptual plan for the area that considers vegetation and species that are upland from the refuge. Those needs, and that biodiversity, should not be ignored. It is part of the same system – just because it is upland does not mean it isn't important.

Question: How much water do you use to irrigate the meadows?

Answer: We are putting in gauges at boundaries at first diversions to see if we can figure that out.

Comment: The scope of the problem that the previous commenter is talking about is outside the scope of this management. What is affecting Crestone is happening throughout the valley and is not because of Baca National Wildlife Refuge. There are changes in water availability everywhere.

Comment: Permittee for grazing. You need to remember how the Baca National Wildlife Refuge is historically tied to this valley and people. The health of the Baca lands is due to the management of the land before it was acquired. The way it has been managed has shown that the area has thrived under it. This refuge can be part of a sustainable food chain. You can also use animals to manage that land and maintain its health. You can use and control cattle in terms of what the grass needs at any given time. You can make sure that the animals (cattle) are where they need to be, for as long as they need to be. We need to take advantage of this historic management and not radically change what has been so good for the land.

Comment: The Baca land trust has had a strong tradition of trying to engage ranchers and others to work together on the management of water. The conservation roundtable put on a discussion of the closed basin project. The main point is that the wildlife refuge owns water rights which are inclusive, but if they only think about the needs of the refuge they risk thinking of only their needs to the exclusion of surrounding lands. This thinking would not be good for the basin as a whole. The Closed Basin Project is thinking more globally. The refuge needs to think about how their water needs fit into the larger and whole community.

Comment: The Baca National Wildlife Refuge has been maintained as a hunting, grazing, and haying ranch for over 100 years and we need to be very slow in implementing any new changes because we could lose this important resource.

Question: Would elk be less likely to be in riparian areas if they could be in other areas?

Answer: In terms of grazing capacity for elk, there is plenty of area to graze. There is not a lack of grazing areas. The problem is that the animals are keying in on some of the most sensitive areas. There is a lot of food out there but especially Willow and Cottonwood Creeks are like candy or ice cream to elk. They key in on this first. Even though there is an abundance of other food out there.

Question: Is it possible to have a tour of the Baca National Wildlife Refuge?

Answer: Absolutely. We will be offering management tours and will be putting out a number of dates. It is first come first serve but if they fill up can add more.

Question: Interested in what types of community education and research could be developed with and on the refuge. Could we look at what you have maybe been doing so that we could see what opportunities may exist?

Answer: These are the kind of comments we need. There is huge potential for this kind of cooperation and any ideas would be welcome.

Comment: Interested in change on the refuge and what will happen when Lexam comes in. If Lexam comes on it will be a radical change Baca National Wildlife Refuge and we have been talking about slow change.

If Lexam comes in and has permits they will have a max of one or two wells. The big question is what will happen if they find oil and gas and go into production mode. If that happens we will have to work with them and coordinate how the refuge will be managed. However, if that were to happen, a whole new NEPA process would begin. At this time, should it be approved they will only be approved for 2 wells; anything new would require new NEPA.

Comment: The possibility of discovery of oil and gas should be in this planning process and we could work together on this. It does not have to be incompatible. We can work with this. If oil and gas is on the refuge. Taxes will go down.

Question: What about existing research? Are you starting from scratch?

Answer: Short discussion on existing research especially mentioning hydro-geomorphic analysis and elk collaring.

Question: What is Lexam asking for the mineral rights? What is this CCP/LLP costing?

Answer: About 8 million dollars for the mineral rights. Not sure what the CCP/LLP costs but it is a lot less. It would also have to be done whether we had the mineral rights or not. They are separate issues.

