Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District

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Prepared by:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge
29746 Bird Road
Martin, SD 57551

and

Division of Refuge Planning, Region 6
PO Box 25486 DFC
Lakewood, CO 80225

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Acronymns and Abbreviations Used in this CCP

BMPs	best management practices
CCP	comprehensive conservation plan
CD	compatibility determination
Corps	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
EA	environmental assessment
EO	executive order
FMP	fire management plans
FONSI	finding of no significant impact
FTE	full time equivalent
FQA	Floristic Quality Assessment
FQI	Floristic Quality Index
Improvement Act	National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
LWRRA	Little White River Recreation Area
NAWMP	North American Waterfowl Management Plan
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
Non-wildlife-dependent recreational uses	Personal watercraft, camping, swimming, horseback riding, volleyball, basketball, tournament fishing, power and speed boating
NWR	national wildlife refuge
Refuge System	national wildlife refuge system
SAV	submergent aquatic vegetation
SDGFP	South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department
Service	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
SWAP	Small Wetlands Acquisition Program
Wildlife-dependent recreational uses	Hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation
WMA	wildlife management area
WMD	wetland management district
WPA	waterfowl production area

Summary

The Refuge and its Purpose(s)

Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1935 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt through Executive Order No. 7160 "… as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife." The refuge lies in the Lake Creek Valley on the northern edge of the Nebraska Sandhills and includes 16,410 acres of native sandhills, sub-irrigated meadows, impounded fresh water marshes, and tall- and mixed-grass prairie uplands.

The refuge serves as an important staging area for many species of waterfowl, sandhill cranes, shorebirds, and neotropical migrants. Spring flows entering the refuge help to provide critical wintering habitat for the high plains trumpeter swan flock. These open waters during the winter also attract large concentrations of Canada geese and mallards. The refuge's grasslands support long-billed curlews, marbled godwits, grasshopper sparrows, bobolinks, and other grassland bird species of concern. Bald eagles, a threatened species, are commonly observed on the refuge, and the endangered whooping crane has been documented using refuge wetlands during migration.

Unique habitats are provided in black-tailed prairie dog towns, which support high numbers of burrowing owls and host other species of concern, such as ferruginous hawks. The refuge provides a variety of habitats for resident wildlife and supports local concentrations of white-tailed and mule deer, sharp-tailed grouse, and ring-necked pheasants during the fall and winter.

The wetland management district (Lacreek Wetland Management District) was started as part of the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program in the 1950's to save wetlands from various threats, particularly draining. The passage of Public Law 85-585 in August of 1958 amended the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act (Duck Stamp Act) of 1934, allowing for the acquisition of Waterfowl Production Areas and Easements for Waterfowl Management Rights (easements).

Refuge Vision and Goals

The vision for the refuge is based on the establishing purposes of the refuge, resource conditions and potential, and the issues. The goals help the refuge staff achieve the vision.

USFWS, Tom Koerner

Sunset View From the Refuge

Refuge Vision

"Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge's wetland resources create a sanctuary within the semi-arid Great Plains landscape. The refuge provides a great diversity of uses for wildlife and humans alike. Refuge stewards manage hydrology to reflect natural conditions and restore native plant communities of the Lake Creek Valley and the adjacent sandhills for migratory birds and other native wildlife. Visitors learn about grasslands, wetlands, and sandhill ecosystems and enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation. Ongoing cooperation with partners and the public fosters appreciation and builds support for the refuge's biological and cultural assets."

Refuge Goals

Goal 1. Wildlife and Habitat Management:
Conserve, restore, and enhance the native biological diversity of the Lake Creek Valley and Nebraska Sandhills for migratory birds and other wetland and grassland-dependent species.

Goal 2. Research and Science:
Use sound science, monitoring, and applied research to advance the understanding of natural resources and management within the Lake Creek Valley, Nebraska Sandhills, and surrounding grasslands.

Goal 3. Public Use:
Provide opportunities for quality wildlife-dependent recreation and promote awareness of Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge's resources and the mission of the Refuge System.

Goal 4. Cultural Resources:
Identify, value, and preserve the cultural resources and history of Lacreek NWR to connect refuge staff, visitors, and the community to the area's past.

Goal 5. Refuge Operations:
Secure and demonstrate effective use of funding, staffing, and partnerships for the benefit of all resources in support of the Refuge System mission.

Goal 6. Partnerships:
Engage a wide range of partners, including non-governmental organizations and federal, state, tribal, and local entities, to join with Lacreek NWR Complex to support research and management, promote awareness, and foster appreciation for the Lake Creek Valley, Nebraska Sandhills, and surrounding grasslands.

Decisions to be Made

Based on the analysis document in the environmental assessment, a decision will be made by the Service's regional director for region 6 (Mountain-Prairie Region) on which alternative will be selected to manage Lacreek NWR for the next 15 years. The environmental assessment describes three alternatives for achieving the above goals.

Alternative A—Current Management (No Action):
Under this alternative, management activity being conducted by the Service would remain the same. The service would not develop any new management, restoration, or education programs at the refuge. Current habitat and wildlife practices benefiting migratory species and other wildlife would not be expanded or changed. The staff would perform limited, issue-driven research and only monitor long-term vegetation change. No new funding or staff levels would occur and programs would follow the same direction, emphasis, and intensity as they do at present. The staff would continue to manage the WMD through monitoring and enforcing easements.

Alternative B—Integrated Restoration (Proposed Action):
This alternative is the proposed action for Lacreek NWR and WMD CCP. Through an integrated restoration approach, the refuge would strive to restore ecological processes and achieve habitat conditions that require reduced management over time while recognizing the place of the refuge in the overall landscape and community. An emphasis on monitoring the effects of habitat management practices and use of the research results to direct ongoing restoration would be a priority. Current levels of priority public uses and activity would increase. The staff would continue to manage the WMD through monitoring and enforcement of easements.

Alternative C—Comprehensive Grassland Restoration:
Under this alternative, the refuge staff would focus management on restoration of grassland habitat and its associated species. Current levels of priority wildlife-dependent public uses would increase with educational priorities placed on habitat restoration. Research activities would focus on management practices on targeted grassland species. The staff would continue to manage the wetland management district through monitoring and enforcement of easements.

USFWS, Tom Koerner

Members of the planning team touring the Refuge.