

Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update

Volume Seven, Summer 2005

Letter from the Refuge Manager

I am happy to announce that we have completed the comprehensive conservation planning effort for the future Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge. The final Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) has been approved and is anticipated to be printed and released in June 2005. Over the course of the last three years, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) has made a concerted effort to engage the public in the planning process. I would like to thank all of you who came to our public meetings, reviewed the draft planning documents and submitted comments. By bringing your issues and ideas to the table, you helped us develop a strong plan.

While the planning process has come to an end, the clean up of Rocky Flats is ongoing and the site will not be transferred to the Service until the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) certifies that cleanup and closure at Rocky Flats have been completed by the Department of Energy (DOE). Following transfer from DOE, the Service will begin implementing the CCP.

We are very pleased with the CCP that resulted from our public planning process. Implementation of the CCP, however, is contingent on the amount of resources and funding available to the Service. Currently, the federal budget is very constrained and it is clear that funding will not be available to begin implementation of the CCP when the Refuge is established. This means that the Refuge will remain closed to public use and the proactive wildlife and habitat conservation plans outlined in the CCP will be delayed for the foreseeable future. We will do our best to provide minimum management to protect the Refuge and comply with weed laws and endangered species requirements.

In the meantime, we look forward to the day when resources and funding will allow us to realize the Refuge's vision of conserving and restoring grassland habitat while providing opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation.



Dean Rundle
Rocky Flats NWR Manager

Final CCP Completed!

If you would like to receive a summary brochure of the final Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan or a copy of the plan, please contact the Service at rockyflats@fws.gov or call 303.289.0980.

You can also download the CCP and other planning documents at <http://rockyflats.fws.gov>



Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Record of Decision

A Record of Decision (ROD) for the Final Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge CCP was published in the Federal Register on April 18, 2005. The ROD is the decision made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) on the proposed management of the future Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge. The ROD confirms that the CCP has been prepared along with an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and Service planning policies. The ROD also verifies that the CCP addresses the issues identified during the public process, and is consistent with Service policies, the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Act of 2001 (Refuge Act), and sound wildlife and habitat management principles.

The Selection of Alternative B

The Service carefully considered environmental and other relevant concerns presented by agencies, organizations and individuals on the proposed alternatives to develop and implement a CCP for the Rocky Flats NWR. Alternative B - *Wildlife, Habitat, and Public Use* was selected because it achieves a reasonable balance between wildlife and habitat conservation and compatible wildlife-dependent public use. The Service believes that Alternative B is most consistent with the intent of the Refuge Act, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1977, and Service planning policies, and is the best way to achieve the vision and goals for the Refuge. Although Alternative A - *No Action*, is the least expensive to implement, this management scenario does not allow for wildlife-dependent recreation and includes very limited habitat restoration. While Alternative C - *Ecological Restoration* provides a higher level of habitat restoration and monitoring and Alternative D - *Public Use* provides more extensive public use facilities and programs, Alternative B best balances habitat protection and public use while limiting implementation costs.



Brown-eyed susan (*Gaillardia aristata*)

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Below: Trail development along existing road corridors will minimize impacts to habitat and wildlife.



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Outcome of the Plan

Habitat and Wildlife Management

When funding becomes available, the Service will employ a variety of tools, including prescribed fire, grazing, and mowing to stimulate and maintain the Refuge's native grassland communities. To improve habitat conditions for a variety of wildlife species, including the wetland and riparian Preble's meadow jumping mouse habitat areas, the Service will remove 28 miles of unused road and 13 stream crossings. Additional management efforts will include:

Noxious Weeds and Restoration: The CCP includes a full suite of weed management and restoration tools to ensure that the most effective and efficient methods can be used to control weeds and restore degraded habitat.

Deer and Elk Management: The Service will work cooperatively with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) to establish population targets and use public hunting, culling, or other means to achieve those targets. Population management will reduce the potential for impacts to sensitive habitat areas from over-browsing or overgrazing and assist in ensuring the health and well being of ungulate populations.

Species Reintroduction: The Service and CDOW will work together to evaluate the suitability of reintroducing the extirpated sharp-tailed grouse to the Refuge, and will continue to monitor native fish that have recently been introduced to Rock Creek.

Monitoring: The Service will routinely monitor sensitive habitats including the xeric tallgrass prairie, tall upland shrubland, and riparian habitat.

Public Use

Visitor use facilities will eventually include 12.8 multi-use trails, 3.8 miles of hiking-only trails, a visitor contact station, interpretive overlooks, viewing blinds, and associated access and parking facilities. Public use programs will include environmental education programs for high school and college students, a limited hunting program (two weekends per year) for youth and disabled, and interpretive programs. Visitor facilities and uses will be carefully planned to minimize impact to habitat and wildlife. The majority of the facilities will be located on previously disturbed sites. Seventy-two percent of the trails will be constructed by narrowing the width of existing gravel or dirt roads on the site. All of the trails in the Rock Creek drainage will be restricted to hiking only, and will be subject to seasonal closures.

Safety and Communication

The Service will address concerns about the safety of the Refuge for public access through outreach and clear signage that articulates access restrictions and public use opportunities. The Service will also work with DOE to develop signage and fencing or another means of boundary demarcation to identify all areas that will be retained by DOE and remain closed to public access.

Research and Partnerships

The Service will provide compatible scientific research opportunities that focus on wildlife habitat and interactions between wildlife and human use. The Service will work with other nearby jurisdictions and natural resource management agencies to coordinate resource management activities and to protect wildlife movement corridors surrounding the Refuge.

Below: The CCP reasonably balances habitat and wildlife conservation with wildlife-dependent recreation.





Contact Information

For more information on the CCP/EIS project please contact:

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

Transfer to USFWS

In accordance with the Refuge Act of 2001, the site will become the Rocky Flats NWR when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) certifies that cleanup and closure at Rocky Flats have been completed and that all response actions are operating properly and successfully. "Response actions" are cleanup activities currently being undertaken or monitoring and maintenance activities following cleanup by DOE at the Rocky Flats site. After EPA certification, the majority of the site will transfer to the Department of Interior and will be managed by the Service as a National Wildlife Refuge. The transfer is not anticipated to occur until after 2006.

Early Refuge Years

During the early years of the CCP implementation, the Service will focus limited staff and funding resources that may become available on habitat restoration including revegetating unnecessary roads, weed management, and restoring stream crossings. This approach will allow the Service to reduce the severity of noxious weed infestations and gain a foothold on road restoration before public trail use introduces new disturbances. As funding becomes available, the Service will build a welcome kiosk and a Lindsay Ranch trail and overlook. The unstaffed welcome kiosk positioned near the Lindsay Ranch trailhead will inform visitors about current access opportunities and future public use facility development.

Below: Collecting native seed and other restoration activities will be a management priority during the early years of refuge establishment.



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