

Planning Update

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge

Issue 2, July 2008



Mark Ely/USFWS

Sweetwater Arm unit at Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge, Wyoming.

This planning update describes the progress the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has made in development of a comprehensive conservation plan for Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge. The update includes information about how to comment on the draft plan.

The Refuge

Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge lies approximately 47 miles southwest of the city of Casper, located in central Wyoming in a high plains basin near the headwaters of the Platte-Kansas ecosystem.

Construction on Pathfinder Dam was completed in 1909, creating the first reservoir on the North Platte River. At the same time, Pathfinder Wildlife Refuge (later renamed Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge) was established as an “overlay” refuge on Bureau of Reclamation lands on the reservoir.



Dave Menke/USFWS

Northern pintail.

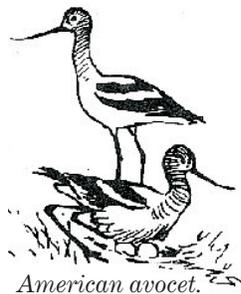
Comprehensive Conservation Plan

The plan will guide management for all refuge programs. This is a “living” document that will be updated every 15 years. An environmental assessment, required by the National Environmental Policy Act, accompanies the draft plan. The assessment describes three management alternatives considered for the refuge and their effects on the environment.

Draft Plan Available for Public Review

The Service has completed a draft plan for public review. The draft plan has a draft vision statement and five supporting goals. To achieve the vision and goals, the Service considered three alternatives and the environmental consequences of each.

The Service selected a proposed action (alternative C) for which objectives and strategies were written—these represent the draft plan. The draft plan may be viewed online (www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/planning/states/wyoming/wyoming.htm).



American avocet.

Draft Vision Statement

Pathfinder Reservoir and surrounding public lands supply life-cycle needs for a multitude of wildlife adapted to this semiarid region of central Wyoming.

The wetland complexes, upland sagebrush habitats, and open waters of the Pathfinder Reservoir provide feeding, breeding, staging, resting, and nesting areas for migratory birds and resident wildlife.

Management decisions will be directed toward maintaining or improving wildlife habitat values.

Appropriate public use opportunities will be identified and provided where possible.

Draft Goals

The Service developed the following goals to achieve the vision for the refuge.

Natural Resources Goal

Conserve the ecological diversity of uplands and wetlands to support healthy populations of native wildlife, with an emphasis on migratory birds.

Visitor Services Goal

Provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives.

Partnerships Goal

Work with partners to support healthy populations of native wildlife and to increase understanding of wildlife needs as well as the benefits of wildlife to local communities.

Cultural Resources Goal

Identify and evaluate the cultural resources on the refuge and protect those that are determined to be significant.

Administrative Goal

Obtain administrative capabilities that will result in efficient strategies to manage the landscape to achieve habitat and public management goals.



Hooded merganser.
Glen Smart/
USFWS

Lesser scaup.
Dave Menke/USFWS

Alternatives Considered

Alternatives A, B, and C present different ways to achieve the draft vision and goals for the refuge.

Alternative A (No Action)

Funding, staff levels, and management activities at the refuge would not change under alternative A.

The Service would continue to manage refuge habitats on an opportunistic schedule. There would be limited data collection and monitoring of habitats and wildlife species. Outreach and partnerships would continue at present levels.

Existing uses of the refuge would be evaluated under the National Wildlife Refuge System's appropriate uses and compatibility policies, which may result in the modification or elimination of some refuge uses.

Alternative B

Management activities under alternative B would increase. The Service would evaluate and manage upland habitats for the benefit of migratory bird species. Monitoring and management of invasive species at the refuge would increase.

With additional staff, the Service would collect baseline biological information for wildlife and habitats. The Service would increase the operations and maintenance of natural resources at the refuge and maintain and develop partnerships that promote wildlife and habitat research and management.

The Service would provide and enhance wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities where compatible with refuge purposes. The Service would not permit non-wildlife-dependent uses at the refuge.

Alternative C (Proposed Action)

Alternative C is the Service's proposed action and basis for the draft comprehensive conservation plan.

Under alternative C, the refuge boundary would be modified to remove Service interests from areas that provide minimal opportunity to improve wildlife habitat and are difficult to manage. The Service would manage the remaining refuge areas similar to those actions described in alternative B. Modification of the refuge's boundary would enable the Service to focus efforts on habitat improvement for the benefit of migratory bird species and efficiently direct refuge resources toward accomplishing the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Service would provide and enhance wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities where compatible with refuge purposes. The Service would not permit non-wildlife-dependent uses at the refuge. Recreational uses that occur outside the refuge boundary would not be subject to Refuge System policies.

Final Steps in the Planning Process

1. The 30-day public review of the draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment includes a public meeting.
2. The Service revises the draft plan as needed based on public comments, and the regional director selects the preferred alternative, which guides development of the final plan.
3. A "notice of availability" published in the *Federal Register* lets the public know that the Service has completed and approved the final comprehensive conservation plan. The Service makes copies of the final plan available.
4. The Service begins implementation of the approved, final plan.

How to Provide Comments

We invite you to share your comments about the draft plan (proposed action). We will accept letters, faxes, and emails. To be considered, all written comments must be emailed or postmarked by August 26, 2008.

Email: toni_griffin@fws.gov

Postal Mail:

Toni Griffin, Planning Team Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
134 Union Blvd., Suite 300
Lakewood, CO 80228

Fax: 303/236 4792, Attn: Toni Griffin

Public Meeting

You may also wish to participate in our public meeting. There will be a short presentation about the draft plan, and then we will record any comments you would like to provide. For directions, please call 307/473 3400.

August 18, 2008; 4 p.m.–7 p.m.
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Pronghorn Room
3030 Energy Lane
Casper, Wyoming

Contact Information

You may reach refuge staff by telephone at 970/723 8202.



