

# Planning Update

## *Comprehensive Conservation Plan Quivira National Wildlife Refuge*

Issue 2, April 2013



Rachel Laubhan/USFWS

*Egrets and Ibis on Quivira National Wildlife Refuge*

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## The Refuge

Quivira National Wildlife Refuge is located in the Great Plains. Its purposes are to provide migration, nesting, resting, and feeding habitat for migratory birds and to develop, advance, manage, conserve, and protect fish and wildlife resources.

The refuge also provides opportunities for the public to enjoy compatible wildlife-dependent public use activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation.

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## The Planning Process

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires us to develop a comprehensive conser-

vation plan for each national wildlife refuge. The final plan for the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge is scheduled for completion in 2013 and will guide the management of the refuge for the next 15 years.

The planning process for a comprehensive conservation plan is a series of steps including environmental analysis. We encourage and value public involvement throughout the process. Our planning team compiled a list of issues to consider and analyzed management alternatives for the comprehensive conservation plan that would not only address these issues but also meet the purposes, vision, and goals of the refuge.

There are three alternatives analyzed within the draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment for the refuge that are

summarized under the “Alternatives” section of this summary.

After the planning team prepares the final comprehensive conservation plan for publication, a notice of availability will be published in the Federal Register, and copies of the final comprehensive conservation plan or accompanying summary will be sent to those on our mailing list.

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## Issues

Based on an analysis of comments collected from the public and our staff and on a review of the needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, we identified several key issues for Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. These were used to create alternatives

for future management and are summarized below.

### *Tree Management*

There are differences of opinion about tree management on Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Prairie restoration, with a reduction in current tree coverage, is generally understood and supported. Yet, some would prefer that we keep tree coverage at a higher level for a variety of reasons.

### *Whooping Crane Closures*

When whooping cranes, which are federally listed as endangered, are present, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge closes to hunting to avoid disturbing them and to prevent accidental shooting. Whooping crane arrivals and departures are unpredictable, which makes it difficult for hunters to plan ahead. Public lands for hunting in Kansas are also limited, which exacerbates their frustration. And yet, while disappointing hunters, whooping cranes do attract birders.

We at the refuge have received many requests to reconsider our refuge-wide closures. At the nearby Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism has successfully protected whooping cranes by using par-

tial area closures. This may prove to be effective for us as well.

### *Prohibiting the Collection of Shed Antlers*

Deer population density on Quivira National Wildlife Refuge is relatively high, and those who have an interest in shed antler collection do not support our decision to prohibit this activity on all refuges in Kansas. However, collecting or taking of any plant, wildlife, or parts thereof from a national wildlife refuge without a permit is specifically prohibited under Title 50 Code of Federal Regulations Part 27.61.

### *Deer and Turkey Hunting*

Deer and turkey hunting have never been approved as a public use activity or management strategy on Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, but there is interest in allowing these hunting activities in the future. Populations of these species continue to increase, and research suggests that effective population management may require a control of some sort both on and off refuge lands.

### *Water Quantity and Quality*

Agriculture and oil production in the area help set water resource and land use trends that raise concerns about the current and future charac-

teristics of water quality. Future water availability and quality may not be assured, yet adequate water quantity and chemistry are important factors of refuge saltmarsh and wetland communities. Substantial declines in the water table would also likely affect grassland and meadow habitats.

### *Increasing Public Use and Wildlife Compatibility*

We are aware of potential benefits and harm to natural resource conservation brought on by an increasing interest in birding and ecotourism. Whooping cranes and rare birds quickly attract many birders and photographers when they appear on the refuge. According to the National Wildlife Refuge System Compatibility Policy, these wildlife-dependent recreational use activities are welcome as long as they are found not to interfere with, or detract from, the fulfillment of the Refuge System mission or the purposes of the refuge.

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## Goals

Our goals for Quivira National Wildlife Refuge are based on the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, the refuge's



*Whooping Cranes*



Woodhouse's Toad

purposes, and the information we gathered during planning.

#### *Landscape Conservation Goal*

Actively protect, preserve, manage, and restore the functionality of the diverse ecosystems of the Rattlesnake Creek watershed.

#### *Native Ecological Community Conservation Goal*

Actively conserve and improve environmental conditions within refuge boundaries to promote sustainable, native ecological communities and support species of concern associated with this region of the Great Plains.

#### *Visitor Services Goal*

See that visitors enjoy quality, wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities.

#### *Public Outreach Goal*

Help visitors of all abilities understand, appreciate, and support our mission, the refuge's unique habitats, and the refuge's importance to migratory birds and other wildlife and plant species.

#### *Cultural Resources Goal*

Name, value, and preserve the cultural resources and cultural history of the refuge and connect staff, visitors, and the community to the area's past.

#### *Visitor and Employee Safety and Resource Protection Goal*

Provide for the safety, security, and protection of visitors, employees, natural and cultural resources, and facilities of the refuge and the Great Plains Nature Center.

#### *Administration Goal*

Provide and support facilities, strategically fill approved positions and allocate staff, increase volunteer opportunities and partnerships, and effectively raise and use money to keep the long-term integrity of infrastructure, habitats, and wildlife resources at the refuge and at the Great Plains Nature Center.

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## Alternatives

Staff developed three alternatives to assist the planning process.

#### *Alternative A (Current Management—No Action)*

This represents the current management. This alternative provides the baseline against which to compare the other alternatives. It also fulfills a need of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Under alternative A, our management activity would continue unchanged. We 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. Habitat management would remain focused primarily on benefiting migratory birds. Our staff would keep monitoring, inventory, and research activities at current levels. Budget and staff levels would remain the same with little change in overall trends. Programs would follow current direction, emphasis, and intensity.

#### *Alternative B (Proposed action)*

We would focus on restoring native communities and promoting the potential natural range of conditions on Quivira National Wildlife Refuge that help focal resources, or focal species and their respective habitats and on increasing public use opportunities for hunting. We would increase our attention and understanding of the connectedness of habitats and the effectiveness of our management. To achieve this alternative, relatively minor changes in our operations; inventory, monitoring programs, and research; and infrastructure would likely be required.

#### *Alternative C*

To the extent possible, we would promote self-sustaining natural processes with less regard to the effects on focal species relative to alternative B, though we understand that complete ecological restoration is impossible. Our key values for restoring natural ecological processes include achieving the long-term sustainability of native communities and lowering maintenance costs. We find that it is widely accepted that native plant communities tend to be more resilient to climate change and other environmental stressors than nonnative and highly managed ecosystems. Native wildlife species, including our trust resources, are also able to adapt to such changes. Our efforts, such as prescribed fire, grazing, and invasive species control, would be focused on keeping native plant community composition and diversity, and we would presume that native wildlife would benefit from these activities. Relative to our other alternatives, habitat conditions would be allowed to fluctuate more with climatically driven wet and dry cycles.

## Next Steps and How to Get Involved

### *Attend a Public Meeting*

We will hold three public meetings to discuss this plan:

- Monday, April 29, 2013  
5 p.m. to 7 p.m.  
Stafford Senior Center  
130 South Main  
Stafford, Kansas
- Tuesday April 30, 2013  
5 p.m. to 7 p.m.  
Great Plains Nature Center  
6232 East 29th Street North  
Wichita, Kansas
- Wednesday, May 1, 2013  
5 p.m. to 7 p.m.  
Front Door Community Center, meeting room  
1615 Tenth Street  
Great Bend, Kansas

At these meetings, attendees will be given the opportunity to submit comments. You can also submit comments online or by email or mail.

### *Submit Comments Online*

- [www.fws.gov/refuge/quivira](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/quivira)

### *Submit Comments by Email*

- [quivira@fws.gov](mailto:quivira@fws.gov)

### *Submit Comments by Mail*

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Attention: Toni Griffin  
Division of Refuge Planning  
134 Union Blvd., Suite 300  
Lakewood, CO 80228

The deadline for submitting comments is May 20, 2013. All comments from the public and interested groups will be placed in the administrative record and will be made available for public viewing.

## Contact Information

To learn more about the refuge, or if you have questions about the planning process, please visit our Web site:

**[www.fws.gov/refuge/quivira](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/quivira)**

You may also reach staff by telephone at **620 /486 2393** or by email at **[quivira@fws.gov](mailto:quivira@fws.gov)**.



*Snowy Plover*  
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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

