

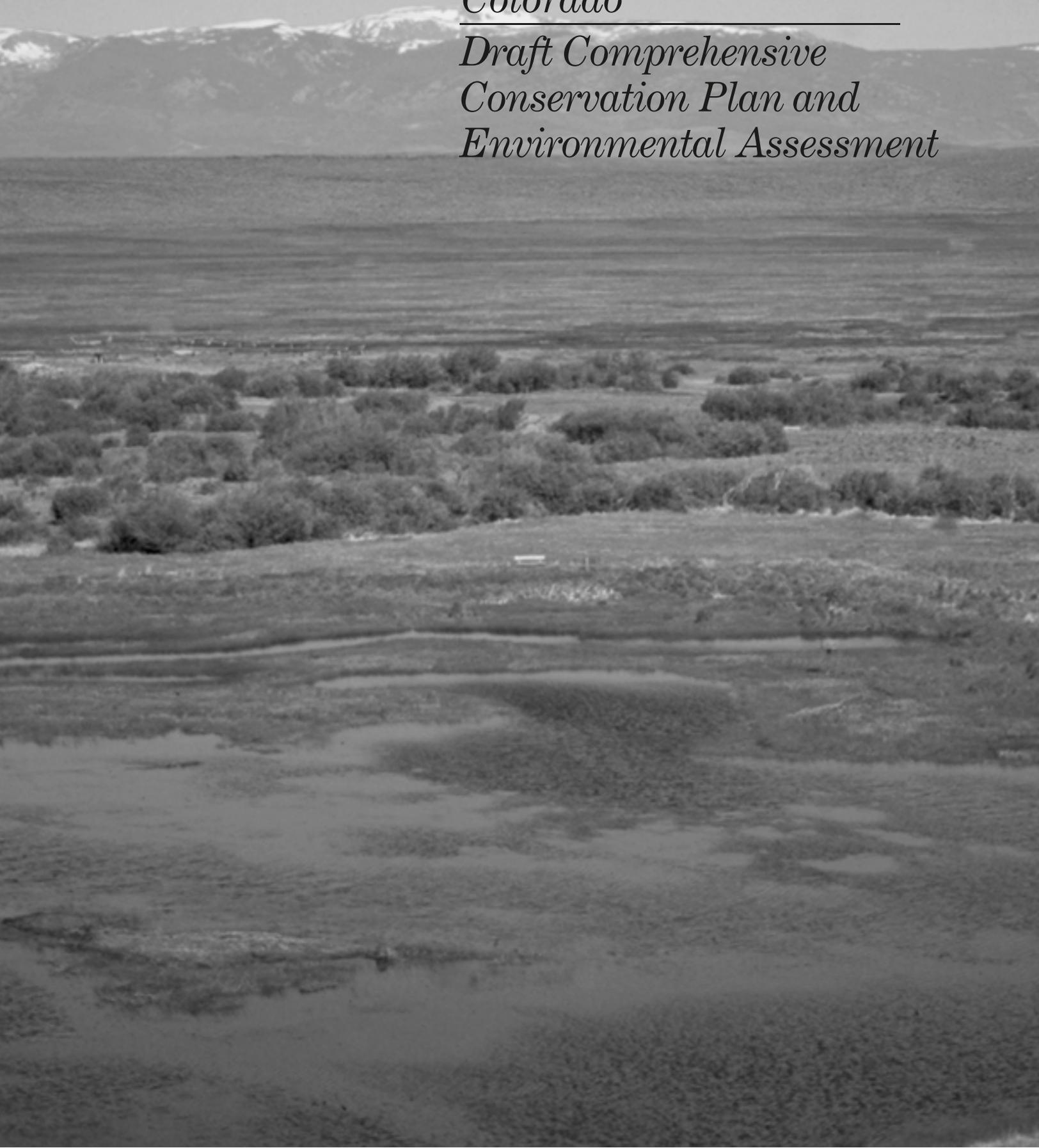
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Arapaho

National Wildlife Refuge

Colorado

*Draft Comprehensive
Conservation Plan and
Environmental Assessment*



CCPs provide long-term guidance for management decisions and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes and identify the Service's best estimate of future needs. These plans detail program planning levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning and program prioritization purposes. The plans do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.

ARAPAHO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Draft
*Comprehensive Conservation Plan
and Environmental Assessment*

July 2003

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*Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge
Comprehensive Conservation Plan Approval
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 6*

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Summary

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) is the principal Federal agency with the responsibility for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System (System) which encompasses more than 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices, and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

National wildlife refuges are established for a particular purpose. Formal establishment is generally based upon a statute or executive order that specifies a purpose for that Refuge. However, refuges can also be established by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service using the authorization found within laws such as the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Conservation Act, and the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956. Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge was established on September 26, 1967, for the following purposes:

“ . . . for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.”
16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)

“ . . . for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources” 16 U.S.C. § 742f (a)(4) “ . . . for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude” (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

These two broad statements provide the “side-boards” to guide future management of Arapaho NWR.

To accomplish these purposes, the Refuge has utilized the existing ditch irrigation system to irrigate hay meadows for waterfowl, shorebird, and songbird nesting habitat. Additionally, 78 wetlands were created or enhanced to provide waterfowl brood-rearing habitat. The result is that Arapaho NWR contains abundant wildlife resources, produces 6,000 to 8,000 ducks annually, and supports a diverse wildlife community that is common to high mountain valleys in the central Southern Rocky Mountains. In April of 1997, Arapaho NWR experienced an office fire that completely destroyed the headquarters building. Unfortunately, much of the historic wildlife resource data was lost to this fire. Implementation of this plan will require some collection of baseline wildlife and plant resource information to regain what was lost to fire.

The Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge Complex includes the following four satellite refuges in Wyoming: Bamforth NWR, Hutton Lake NWR, Mortenson Lake NWR, and Pathfinder NWR. The Arapaho NWR staff administers all five refuges from Walden, Colorado with a combined total of 44,960 acres.

Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP) were mandated by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. This Act requires that the CCP must identify and describe:

- 1) purposes of the Refuge;
- 2) fish, wildlife, and plant populations and their habitats;
- 3) archaeological and cultural values;
- 4) significant fish, wildlife, and plant problems; and
- 5) the actions necessary to correct them.

The CCP should also identify and describe compatible wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities and administrative and visitor facilities required to implement the Plan. This CCP only addresses the management of Arapaho NWR near Walden, Colorado. Management of the remaining four Wyoming satellite Refuges will be addressed in a separate planning effort.

Benefits of the CCP are several: better long-term continuity in Refuge management; better understanding of Refuge management actions for Refuge staff members and visitors; a clear description of future development and funding needs; and the assurance that Refuge management will fulfill the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the specific purposes for which the Refuge was established.

The Arapaho CCP will be used to prepare step-down management plans and revise existing management plans. It also will be used to prepare budgets which describe specific actions to be taken by the Refuge over the next 15 years. Given that new information, guidance, and technology frequently change and become available, the CCP will be updated as necessary throughout the 15-year period.

The Environmental Assessment considered four management alternatives for management of the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge. Each of these alternatives were evaluated for environmental consequences in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The CCP is the preferred alternative for Refuge management.

Refuge Vision

Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge is managed to benefit the diversity of plants and wildlife found in this high mountain valley of the southern Rocky Mountains. The Refuge and its resources are also managed for the benefit of the citizens of the United States.

The Refuge includes wetland, meadow, sagebrush uplands, and riparian communities that provide habitat for large mammals, neotropical migratory birds, nesting waterfowl, fishes, and species of concern from national and regional conservation plans. In particular, efforts by Refuge staff to restore the Illinois River channel hydrology, areas of sagebrush uplands, and to effectively manage wetlands and meadows, contribute to the ecological integrity of the Refuge, North Park, and the overall North Platte River system.

Through wildlife-dependent recreation and education, people have opportunities to learn of the wonder and significance of North Park's fauna and flora. Firsthand experiences with the Refuge encourage people to participate as stewards, not only of the Refuge, but also of the natural resources in their own communities.

Working in collaboration with the local community and other agencies and organizations helps the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service manage the Refuge as a contributing ecological, cultural, and economic component of the unique mountain valley within which it sits.

Refuge Goals

Arapaho NWR lands will be managed using the following goals within four primary habitat types (riparian, wetlands, meadows, and uplands). Compatible public uses, cultural resources, research opportunities, and partnerships will be used to facilitate Refuge management, and enhance public understanding of natural resource values within North Park. Refuge staff recognize that many landscapes have been altered and may never be restored. Arapaho NWR goals include:

- **Riparian Habitats** - *Provide a riparian community representative of historic flora and fauna in a high valley of the southern Rocky Mountains to provide habitat for migratory birds, mammals, and river-dependent species.*
- **Wetland Habitats** - *Provide and manage natural and man-made permanent and semipermanent wetlands (in three wetland complexes) to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and associated wetland-dependent wildlife.*
- **Meadow Habitats** - *Provide and manage irrigated, grass-dominated meadows historically developed for hay production, to support sage grouse broods, waterfowl nesting, and meadow-dependent migratory birds.*
- **Upland Habitats** - *Provide an upland community representative of the historic flora and fauna in a high valley of the southern Rocky Mountains to provide habitat for sage grouse, large mammals, and other shrub-associated species.*
- **Public Use** - *Through wildlife-dependent recreation and education, people of a range of abilities and interests are able to learn of, and appreciate, the natural resources of this unique high mountain park. Thereby, citizens become better stewards of nature in their own communities and stronger supporters of the Refuge specifically and the National Wildlife Refuge System generally.*
- **Cultural Resources** - *The cultural resources of the Refuge are preserved, protected, and interpreted for the benefit of present and future generations.*
- **Research** - *The Refuge is a learning platform for compatible research that assists management and science of high mountain park sage-steppe communities.*
- **Partnerships** - *A wide range of partners join with the Fish and Wildlife Service in promoting and implementing the Refuge vision.*

The vision and goals presented here will be implemented over the next 15 years using the measurable objectives and strategies identified within this CCP. Working with partners, the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge will conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.



Sunset Over Arapaho NWR © Everett & Nancy Collin



House Wren © Everett & Nancy Collin



Gadwall with Brood ©Virginia Heitman

Butterfly © William H. Miller



Sage Grouse Hen with Young © Everett & Nancy Collin



Prairie Dog © USFWS





Cottontail © Everett & Nancy Collins



American Avocet © William H. Miller



North Park Middle School Science Class



Eared Grebe © William H. Miller

Cow Moose with Twins © William H. Miller



Prairie Lupine © Everett & Nancy Collins

