



Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update

The National Wildlife Refuge System

“The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Recent Accomplishments

As discussed in the previous update, migratory grassland birds such as meadowlarks, dickcissels and burrowing owls need conservation help more than any other group of birds in North America.

Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge is used during migration by many grassland birds to feed, rest and replenish energy reserves for the next leg of their journeys. Many of these birds winter in the southern U.S., but some, such as bobolinks, winter in South America. In addition to being a haven during migrations, the refuge also provides nesting habitat for many migratory grassland birds.

Over the past 12 months, the refuge has been addressing the needs of grassland birds locally by working on several projects.

Approximately 1,000 acres have been seeded to native grasses to provide additional habitat for migratory grassland birds. In an effort to enhance existing grasslands on the refuge some trees have been removed, prescribed burns have been

implemented, and the refuge has begun to aggressively attack Canada and musk thistle. Nesting resident birds such as the ring-necked pheasant, bob-white quail, and the greater prairie chicken also benefit greatly from these efforts.

Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) Progress

Preplanning, draft vision statement and goals, public scoping, and data gathering and research for the CCP have been completed.

The planning team is currently developing and analyzing a range of management alternatives for the refuge. Alternatives will address conservation techniques and management actions as well as recreation opportunities. When complete, the range of management alternatives will identify specific objectives and strategies for accomplishing each alternative.

The Next Steps

When draft management alternatives have been produced, the planning team will again turn to the public for their input. During a public open house in November or December 2004, the Service will present the alternatives to the public and solicit feedback and ideas for further refinement of the alternatives.

Biological data, research and public comments will be taken into consideration to select a proposed action in January 2005. Preparation of the draft CCP and environmental assessment (EA) will follow. The draft CCP/EA will be distributed for public review May 2005.

Tree Invasion

“It’s time to change the way we look at trees on the prairies. While trees provide habitat for some wildlife, they pose a serious threat to grassland-dependent species.”

*Randy Rodgers
Wildlife Biologist
Hays, KS*

Trees in grasslands provide perches for non-native avian predators, such as red-tailed hawks and great horned owls, to sit in and look for other birds to eat. In addition, black-billed magpies nest in scattered trees and search for eggs and chicks in the surrounding grasslands to feed to their own young.

Trees also provide perches for brown-headed cowbirds. From its perch, the cowbird looks for nesting hens and flies down and lays cowbird eggs in the other birds nest for the other hen to raise. Usually the cowbird destroys the host bird’s eggs by pecking holes in them or rolling them out of the nest. Some grassland birds, like greater prairie chickens, will not nest close to trees and will usually leave a patch of grassland if trees are allowed to invade. The trees also attract mammalian predators, such as raccoons and skunks, into grasslands when they would not have otherwise been there. Consequently, the refuge grasslands have been greatly improved through the removal of trees.

As the planning process continues to unfold over the next year, the Service will return to the draft vision statement and goals outlined in Planning Update Volume One. Public comments, innovative ideas and new partnerships will continue to shape the refinement of the vision statement and goals and, in turn, guide the development of the CCP.

Want to Get Involved?

Participation by you and other interested groups and individuals is critical to the success of this planning process! We are available to provide additional information about refuge history, goals, and accomplishments to date, and to answer any questions about the planning process.

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The Planning Schedule

Planning Stage	Dates
1. Preplanning	October 2002 - January 2002
2. Draft Vision Statement and Goals	February 2003 - February 2003
3. Public Involvement and Scoping	May 2003 - August 2003
4. Data Gathering and Research	May 2003 - December 2003
5. Develop and Analyze Alternatives	May 2004 - October 2004
6. Public Input	November - December 2004
7. Selection of Proposed Action	January 2005
8. Prepare Draft CCP and NEPA Document	February 2005 - April 2005
9. Public Review of Draft CCP/EA Document	May 2005 - June 2005
10. Develop Final CCP and NEPA Document	July 2005 - August 2005

**Our schedule has changed. Please note the dates above for the current schedule of important planning dates. Public involvement opportunities are highlighted in bold.*

Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge . . .
“Where prairie and wing touch the Kansas sky”