

Planning Update

*Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge*

Issue 2, May 2008



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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service held six meetings across Montana to gather input on the planning process.

Public Scoping Concludes

Many people braved subzero temperatures in January and February to attend the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) public meetings and voice their thoughts about the future of Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) including UL Bend NWR (a refuge within a refuge). We would like to summarize what we heard and the outcome of our scoping process, and identify the next steps in the comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) process.

For a comprehensive report of the comments gathered during public scoping, please refer to the "Scoping Report" that is available for download at www.fws.gov/cmr/planning. We thank everyone who participated and look forward to the next round of discussions.

Barron Crawford
Barron Crawford
Project Leader

A Sample of Public Comments

"The refuge has great economic impact on the local community."

"Seems to be the right number of roads to provide access to most areas yet, at the same time, a short hike from any road can provide the feeling of solitude from civilization and technology that only wildness can offer."

"Charles M. Russell NWR is a treasure locally and nationally."

"We have a low population. We are an aging population. We really need to protect the viability of our communities and our county."

"The refuge has great historic value to the local community and landowners. It is also our unique little piece of the world. The geological formations, archaeology, paleontology, unique terrain, and bareness of the area are something that is treasured and should remain for the next generation to experience."

"The hunting, fishing, and scenic beauty is unsurpassed anywhere in the lower 48 states."

"Weeds, particularly saltcedar, is the single biggest issue."

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Public Scoping Summary

What Is Scoping?

As defined by the National Environmental Policy Act, scoping is “an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues.”

The scoping process provides a forum for recognizing public and agency concerns that help guide development of alternative approaches to refuge management.

In an effort to recruit public involvement in the CCP and EIS planning process, the Service published “Planning Update, Issue 1” that provided information about the public involvement process. The Service circulated information through press releases and advertisements.

Public Comments

Numerous people shared their comments, questions, and concerns about the planning process from December 4, 2007, through February 29, 2008. Several hundred people attended the meetings, and the planning team answered questions and recorded comments from participants at the meetings. The Service received 23,867 written responses in the form of letters, emails, and from the handout sheet provided at the meetings. While many comments echoed similar concerns, it should be noted that the objective of compiling comments



A concerned citizen speaks out in Jordan.

does not represent a voting process. Instead, the purpose was to identify the issues to be addressed, so each comment was equally important. All the questions and comments were organized by topic into a spreadsheet. Every effort was made to capture all the comments whether general in nature or about specific concerns. A summary of the comments can be found in the full scoping report at www.fws.gov/cmrr/planning.

Comment Topics

The table to the right depicts the general comment topics and subtopics received and the percentages of each.

“You need to consider access for senior citizens and others who can’t get into areas of the refuge. Better access is needed.”

“After attending a meeting where many comments were anti-wilderness and pro-motorized, I want to remind the decision makers that many people favor wilderness designation as a way to protect and preserve wild places.”

Topics by Percentage*

Public Uses and Access	16%
EIS Document and Analysis	12%
Habitat and Wildlife	12%
Partners and Adjacent Lands	8%
Wilderness	7%
Livestock Grazing	7%
Hunting and Predators	5%
Reintroductions	5%
General CCP	5%
Air, Soils, Climate, and Water	5%
Socioeconomics	4%
Invasive Species	4%
Fire	3%
Refuge Qualities	3%
Refuge Operations	2%

*Due to rounding, does not total 100%



The immense, rugged landscape at the refuge offers outstanding opportunities to engage in priority public uses. However, this presents challenges for public access, which the public offered diverse opinions about.

Significant Issues

Several key issues were identified following the analysis of all comments collected through the various public scoping activities and a review of the requirements of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 and other laws, regulations, and policies. These key issues that will be considered during the formulation of alternatives for future refuge management are summarized below.

Habitat and Wildlife

- The use and role of fire management, livestock grazing, hunting, fencing, or other management tools in the preservation and restoration of habitat conditions on the refuge.
- Wildlife and habitat management in the context of the larger landscape that includes adjacent private, state, tribal, and federal lands.
- Species reintroductions or management of species that move onto the refuge, specifically—bison, wolves, and bighorn sheep.
- Invasive species and noxious weed management including the management tools used.
- Special consideration of threatened, endangered, and species of concern.
- Predator management.

Public Uses and Access

- Public access including motorized and nonmotorized types of access and law enforcement operations.

- Roads including number, location, and types of roads, maintenance, ownership, and rights-of-way.
- Priority public uses—hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and interpretation and environmental education.
- Nonpriority uses such as camping and bicycling.
- Facilities, programs, and infrastructure to support public uses and access.

Wilderness

- Existing wilderness study areas—consolidation, expansion, or contraction.
- Identification of potential for any new wilderness designations.
- Access, infrastructure, and use of management tools in wilderness.

Socioeconomics

- Benefits of the refuge and promotion of refuge values.
- Impacts of refuge activities on the local economy and community.

Water Resources

- Water quality and quantity.
- Water development (stock ponds, wells, and infrastructure).
- Missouri River riparian ecosystem.
- Water rights issues and how they relate to refuge management.



Brett Billings/USFWS

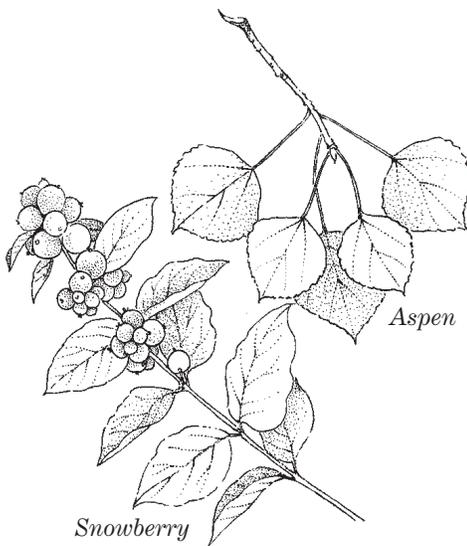
Fishing is one of six priority public uses at a national wildlife refuge.

Adjacent Lands and Partnerships

- Adjacent land management issues.
- Consultation and coordination with federal, state, and local partners.
- Minerals, climate change, oil, gas, and energy development; recommendations and strategies on reducing resource impacts.
- Priority recommendations for future land acquisitions.

Cultural Values, Traditions, and Resources

- Refuge values and qualities.
- Traditions and lifestyles.
- Cultural and paleontological resources.



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The Service will address habitat and wildlife management at the refuge. Species such as pronghorn migrate across several jurisdictional boundaries.

Issues Outside the CCP Process

Several issues identified during public scoping are outside of the scope of the analysis. Those issues and the rationale for not including them are described below.

Enhancement Act of 2000

The actions outlined in the Enhancement Act of 2000 (cabin legislation), including the time limits imposed in the act will not be addressed because they are outside the scope of this planning process.

Fort Peck Lake Levels

The Fort Peck Project was authorized for flood control, navigation, hydropower, wildlife, recreation, and municipal and industrial water supply, and irrigation. The determination of water levels through the refuge is outside the scope of this planning process.

Grazing Fees, Transfer of Grazing Permits, and Animal Unit Months

Guidance on livestock grazing is provided in "6 RM 9" of the "Fish and Wildlife Service Manual." For region 6

of the Service, grazing fee rates are based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Statistics Board publication for "Grazing Fee Rates for Cattle by Selected States and Regions for 2008."

There are no conditions described in the "Fish and Wildlife Service Manual" that allow for transfer of existing grazing permits, and this issue will not be addressed in the CCP and EIS.

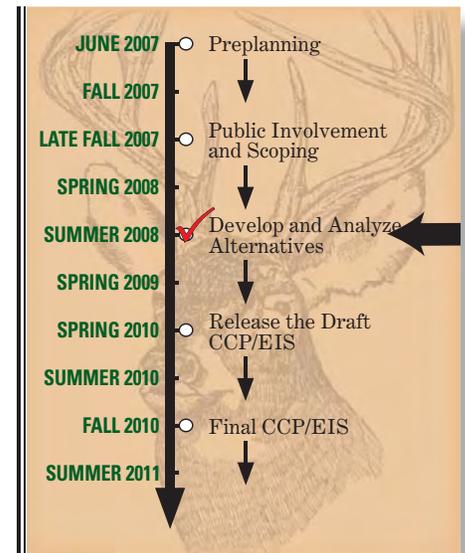
The Service will not readdress the decision made in the 1986 "Record of Decision" that reduced grazing at the refuge to 33 percent of available "animal unit months." Instead, the CCP and EIS will address how livestock grazing is used as a management tool to meet specific habitat goals, objectives, and strategies for managing habitat and wildlife.

Private Property Rights

The right of a private property owner to extract minerals on state or private lands within or adjacent to the refuge is outside the scope of this process.

Next Steps

Project Timeline



As part of the next phase of the planning process, a range of alternatives is being considered. We encourage you to stay involved in the planning process and to provide input on the alternatives when they are presented at public workshops in fall 2008. We will provide more information in the next update.

Contact Information

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To get on the project mailing list:
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The black-footed ferret is an endangered species found at the refuge.

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