

CHAPTER 1—Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has developed this volume 2 of the final comprehensive conservation plan and environmental impact statement (FEIS) for the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and the UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge. This companion document for the FEIS includes the following components:

- copies of comment letters from Federal, State, and local government agencies and organizations with Service responses
- comments from individuals with Service responses
- summaries of form letters received
- copies of the transcripts from seven public hearings

The draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental impact statement (DEIS) was released to the public for review and comment on September 7, 2010. A 60-day comment period for the document closed on November 16, 2010, and was extended through December 10, 2010. In addition, the Service held seven public hearings in fall 2010.

Throughout the comment period, the Service received more than 1,700 comments from 919 individuals (primarily emails, letters, and oral comments during public meetings), 53 letters from Federal, State, and local government agencies and organizations, and 19,627 form letters.

The purpose of this volume is to address the substantive comments received on the draft CCP and EIS. As defined by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance guidelines, comments are considered substantive if they:

- question, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of the information in the document;

- question, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of the environmental analysis;
- present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the environmental impact statement;
- cause changes or revisions in the proposal.

This volume contains the Service's responses to substantive comments on the DEIS. Comments, with responses, are divided into two chapters. Chapter 2 has copies of the comments made by Federal, State, and local government agencies and organizations that qualify as tax-exempt, nonprofit entities. Chapter 3 summarizes the comments made by the public or other entities.

In compliance with the spirit of the Privacy Act of 1974, it is the policy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mountain–Prairie Region, to not publish the names, addresses, or other personal information of individuals (agencies, business, and organizations are excluded). Rather than print every letter from individuals and redact (black out) all personal information, and because many of the comments are similar in nature, the Service has summarized the general nature of the comments received and tracked the number of individuals that expressed each general comment. This is also consistent with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

The Service responded to each substantive comment. Where appropriate, the text of the FEIS has been revised to address comments. Some of the comments do not meet the definition of “substantive” (as defined previously), and those are shown as “comment noted.” In some instances, the Service has opted to respond to specific nonsubstantive comments where the public displayed a strong interest.

