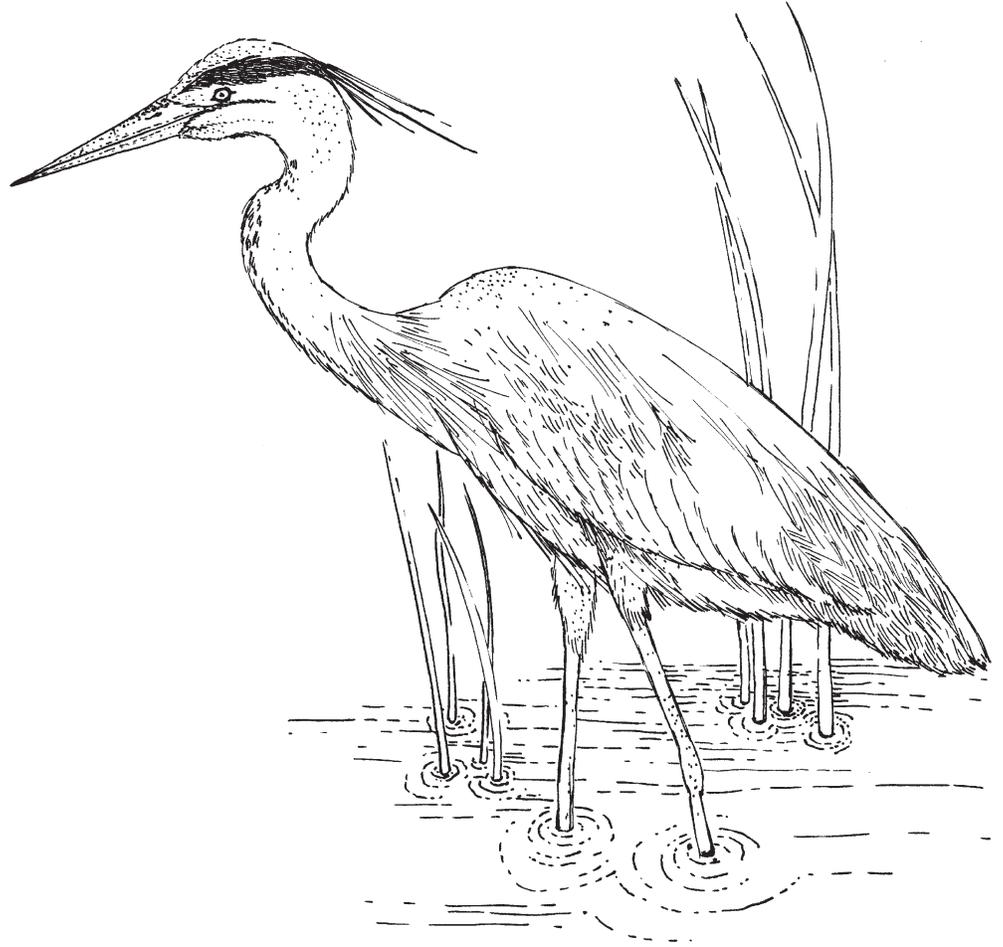


# 1 Introduction





# 1 Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has developed this draft CCP to provide a foundation for the management and use of the Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which includes not only the refuge but also the wetland management district (WMD). The plan is intended to serve as a working guide for management programs and actions over the next 15 years.

The plan was developed in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 and Part 602 (National Wildlife Refuge System Planning) of the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual. The actions described within this plan also meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Compliance with NEPA is being achieved through the involvement of the public and the inclusion of an integrated environmental assessment (EA).

When fully implemented, this plan will strive to achieve the program vision and the purposes of the refuge. Fish and wildlife and their habitats are the first priority in refuge management, and public use (wildlife-dependent recreation) is allowed and encouraged as long as permission is granted by the manager and it is compatible with, or does not detract from, a refuge's purpose(s).

The plan has been prepared by a planning team composed of representatives from various Service programs, including the refuge staff and the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department (SDGFP).

After reviewing a wide range of public comments and management needs, the planning team developed a proposed alternative. This alternative will attempt to address all significant issues while determining how best to achieve the intent and purposes of the refuge and WMD. The proposed alternative is the Service's recommended course of action for the future management of these refuges, and is embodied in this draft.

## 1.1 Purpose and Need for Plan

The purpose of this CCP is to identify the role that Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge Complex will play in support of the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), and to provide long-term guidance to management programs and activities. The plan is needed:

- To provide a clear statement of direction for the future management of the program;
- To provide landowners, neighbors, visitors, and government officials with an understanding of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's management actions on and around these refuges;
- To ensure that the Service's management actions are consistent with the mandates of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997;



*Canada geese taking flight*

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- To ensure that the management of these refuges is consistent with federal, state, and county plans; and
- To provide a basis for the development of budget requests for the program's operational, maintenance, and capital improvement needs.

Perhaps the greatest need of the Service is to build relationships with landowners and communicate with the general public and other partners in efforts to carry out the mission of the Refuge System. Sustaining our nation's fish and wildlife resources is a task that can be accomplished only through the combined efforts of governments, businesses, and private citizens.

## 1.2 The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System

### ***The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service***

*“The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, working with others, is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.”*

Over 100 years ago, America's fish and wildlife resources were declining at an alarming rate. Concerned citizens, scientists, and hunting and angling groups joined together to restore and sustain our national wildlife heritage. This was the genesis of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Today, the Service enforces federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores vital wildlife habitat, protects and recovers endangered species, and helps other governments with conservation efforts. It also administers a federal aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars to states for fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, and related programs across America.

The Service manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, thousands of waterfowl production areas (WPA), and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations.

### **Service Activities in South Dakota**

Service activities in South Dakota contribute to the state's economy, ecosystems, and education programs. Lacreek NWR contributes to the economic benefits of hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and wildlife photography in South

Dakota. A report titled, *Banking on Nature 2004: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation*, evaluated the impacts of refuges to local economies. Based on figures from 2004, Lacreek NWR is estimated to have generated \$84,500 in local economic effects from refuge recreation visits. The majority of effects were associated with expenditures by non-resident visitors. The refuge budget also contributes a stimulus to the local economy with a significant portion of payroll, maintenance, and operation expenditures spent locally.

The refuge employs 7 full time equivalent (FTE) employees, with a current budget of \$741,700 and has an annual visitation of 16,400. This includes funds for the fire program and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. In addition, 150 volunteer hours are contributed to the refuge operations.

In general, the South Dakota Federal Aid – Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration program is a source of federal excise taxes paid by hunters, anglers, and boaters on fishing and hunting equipment. The monies generated from this tax have economic benefits to South Dakota. In 1998, the economic impact of angler expenditures was \$206 million and hunters contributed \$176 million to the overall economy (Source: [http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/reference/briefing\\_book\\_nd\\_2000.pdf](http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/reference/briefing_book_nd_2000.pdf)).

### ***The National Wildlife Refuge System***

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt designated the 5.5-acre Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first wildlife refuge for the protection of brown pelicans and other native nesting birds. This was the first time the federal government set aside land for the sake of wildlife. This small but significant designation was the beginning of the System. One hundred years later, this System has become the largest collection of lands in the world specifically managed for wildlife, encompassing over 96 million acres within 544 refuges and over 3,000 small areas for waterfowl breeding and nesting. Today, there is at least one refuge in every state in the nation including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In 1997, a clear mission was established for the System through the passage of the Improvement Act. That mission 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.”*

The Improvement Act further states that each refuge shall be managed:

- To fulfill the mission of the System;
- To fulfill the individual purposes of each refuge;
- To consider the needs of fish and wildlife first;
- To fulfill the requirement of developing a CCP for each unit of the System, and fully involve the public in the preparation of these plans;
- To maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the System;
- To recognize that wildlife-dependent recreational activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation, are legitimate and priority public uses; and
- To retain the authority of refuge managers to determine compatible public uses.

In addition to the overall mission for the System, the wildlife and habitat vision for each national wildlife refuge stresses the following principles:

- Wildlife comes first.
- Ecosystems, biodiversity, and wilderness are vital concepts in refuge management.
- Refuges must be healthy.
- Growth of refuges must be strategic.
- The System serves as a model for habitat management with broad participation from others.

Following passage of the Improvement Act, the Service immediately began efforts to carry out



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*Waterfowl viewed from the auto tour loop*

the direction of the new legislation, including the preparation of CCPs for all refuges. The development of these plans is now ongoing nationally. Consistent with the Improvement Act, all refuge CCPs are being prepared in conjunction with public involvement, and each refuge is required to complete its own CCP within the 15-year schedule (by 2012).

## People and the National Wildlife Refuge System

Our fish and wildlife heritage contributes to the quality of our lives and is an integral part of our nation's greatness. Wildlife and wild places have always given people special opportunities to have fun, relax, and appreciate our natural world.

Whether through bird watching, fishing, hunting, wildlife photography, or other wildlife pursuits, wildlife recreation also contributes millions of dollars to local economies. In 2002, approximately 35.5 million people visited a national wildlife refuge, mostly to observe wildlife in their natural habitats. Visitors are most often accommodated through nature trails, auto tours, interpretive programs, and hunting and fishing opportunities. Significant economic benefits are being generated to the local communities that surround the refuges. Economists have reported that national wildlife refuge visitors contribute more than \$792 million annually to local economies.

## 1.3 Ecosystem Descriptions and Threats

### *Central Flyway*

Lacreek NWR is located in the Central Flyway, which is one of four administrative flyways in North America (see figure 1, USFWS ecosystem map). The states and provinces included are: Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. The Central Flyway Council is made up of federal, state, and provincial representatives from the United States and Canada who meet regularly to coordinate population surveys, regulate and set hunting seasons, and plan for management of the migratory bird resource. Lacreek NWR designates a staff member to represent region 6 on the swan subcommittee of the Central Flyway Council.

In 1986, Canada, the United States, and Mexico united to form the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), designed to restore diminishing continental waterfowl populations to the levels of the 1970s.

The NAWMP brought together federal and state agencies, private conservation organizations, business and private landowners, national corporations and individuals of the three countries into “Joint Ventures.” Joint Ventures are regionally based, self-directed partnerships that carry out science-based conservation through a wide array of community participation. Joint Ventures strive:

- To build partnerships for conservation where participation is voluntary and programs are non-regulatory;
- To work on public and private lands to protect, restore and enhance critical habitats for waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, and land birds; and
- To build a scientific foundation through improvement of databases, scientific technologies and monitoring that help partners target conservation efforts to where they will do the most good and make the best use of resources.

## Northern Great Plains Joint Venture

Lacreek NWR is found in the newest Joint Venture, the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture. It is bounded on the north and east by the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture and on the west by the Intermountain West Joint Venture.

The Northern Great Plains Joint Venture area is arid to semi-arid and mostly unglaciated. Relatively few natural wetlands exist. Land use in the area is primarily livestock production and numerous man-made wetlands have been created for livestock and wildlife. This area of short- and mixed-grass prairie has been dramatically altered in the last 100 years, due primarily to human intervention. Once common native grasslands are seriously threatened and many bird species are declining. Maintaining and protecting existing wetlands and grasslands, as well as creation and enhancement of wetlands, will be a major focus



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Lacreek NWR headquarters

for the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture. Lacreek NWR contributes to and participates in the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture through its active Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, management of the WMDs easements, and management and restoration of the refuges resources.

## Missouri River Main Stem Ecosystem Plan

The Service has adopted watersheds as the basic building blocks for implementing ecosystem conservation. Lacreek NWR is found in the Missouri River Main Stem Ecosystem. This vast area covers all of North and South Dakota and small portions of Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana. The major threats identified for this ecosystem include conversion of prairie to cropland, overgrazing, invasive species, and aggressive prairie dog control. Lacreek NWR contributes to the accomplishment of goals and objectives for this ecosystem through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the partnerships that exist at the refuge and throughout the WMD.

Key legislation and policies can be found in appendix B.

## 1.4 National and Regional Mandates

The administration of the Refuge System is guided by a variety of international treaties, federal laws, and Presidential Executive Orders. Management options under each refuge’s establishing authority and the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (the legal and policy guidance for the operation of national wildlife refuges) are contained in the documents and acts listed in appendix B.

The Improvement Act amends the Refuge System Administration Act by providing a unifying mission for the System, a new process for determining compatible public uses on refuges, and a requirement that each refuge will be managed under a CCP. The Improvement Act states that wildlife conservation is the priority of System lands and that the Secretary of the Interior will ensure that the biological integrity, diversity and environmental health of refuge lands are maintained. Each refuge must be managed to fulfill the System’s mission and the specific purposes for which it was established. The Improvement Act requires the Service to monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge. A list of other laws and executive orders that may affect the CCP or the Service’s implementation of the CCP is provided in appendix B. Service policies providing guidance on planning and the day-to-day management of a refuge are contained within the Refuge System Manual and the Service Manual.



# U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge

Bennett County, South Dakota

USFWS Ecosystem

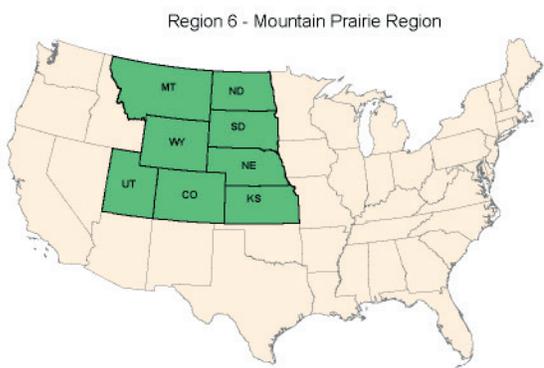
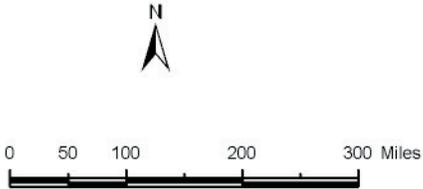
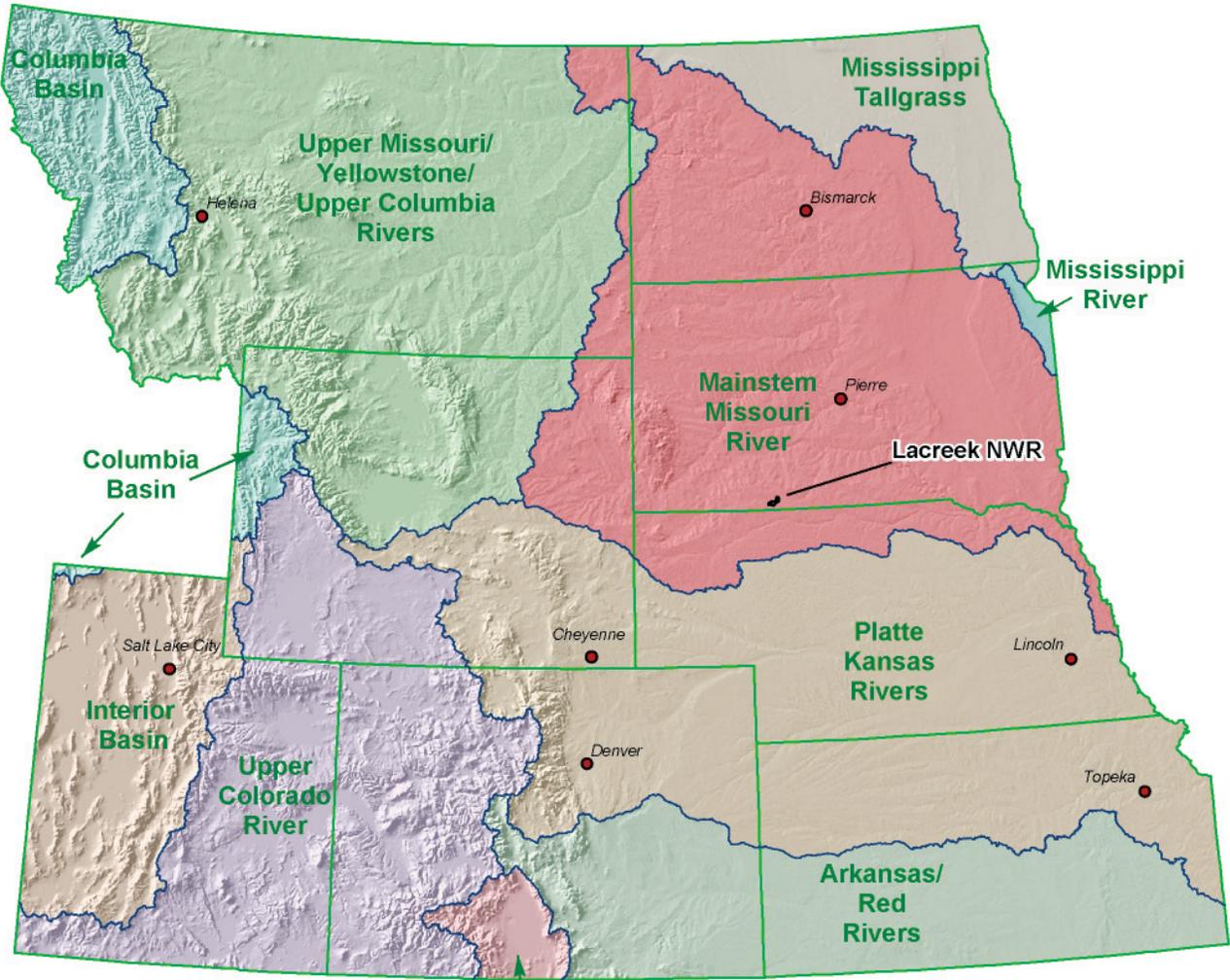


Figure 1. USFWS ecosystem map

## 1.5 The Planning Process

This Draft CCP and EA for Lacreek NWR and WMD are intended to comply with the Improvement Act and NEPA and their implementing regulations. The Service issued a final refuge planning policy in 2000 that established requirements and guidance for Refuge System planning, including CCPs and step-down management plans, ensuring that planning efforts comply with the provisions of the Improvement Act. The planning policy identified several steps of the CCP and EA process (see figure 2):

- Form a planning team and conduct pre-planning;
- Initiate public involvement and scoping;
- Draft Vision Statement and Goals;

- Develop and analyze alternatives, including Proposed Action;
- Prepare Draft CCP and EA;
- Prepare and adopt final CCP and EA and issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or determine if an Environmental Impact Statement is needed;
- Implement plan, monitor and evaluate; and
- Review (every 5 years) and revise (every 15 years) plan.

The Service began the pre-planning process in September 2004 (see appendix C). A planning team comprised of Service personnel from the refuge and the SDGFD (appendix D), was developed shortly after the initial kickoff meeting. Draft issues and qualities lists were developed.

A notice of intent was published in the Federal Register on November 30, 2004. Notification of a

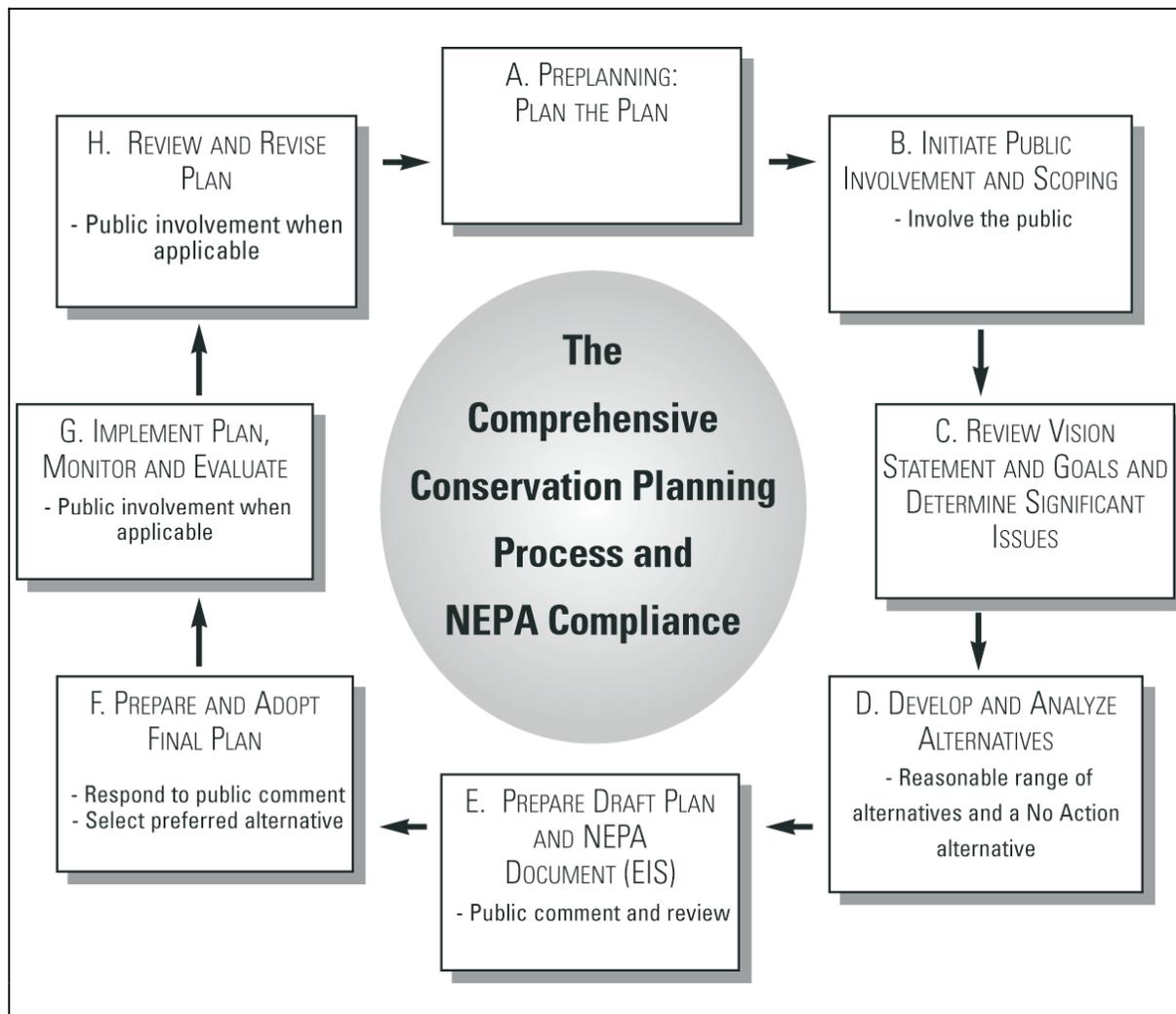


Figure 2. The steps in the CCP process

public open house was distributed through media press releases.

Over the course of pre-planning and scoping, the planning team collected available information about the resources of the refuge and the surrounding areas. This information is summarized under chapter 4. Affected Environment.

This CCP provides long-term guidance for management decisions; sets forth goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes; and identifies the Service's best estimate of future needs. This CCP details program planning levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning and program prioritization purposes. This CCP does not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.

The Service has made draft compatibility determinations for Lacreek NWR (appendix A).

