

Chapter 1—Introduction



Tom Koerner / FWS

Marsh Wren

We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), have developed this comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) to provide a foundation for the management and use of Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (Cokeville Meadows Refuge or refuge) in Wyoming for at least the next 15 years.

This chapter introduces the CCP with descriptions of the steps in the CCP planning process; our involvement and that of the State of Wyoming, the tribes, the public, and others; and other plans that may be affected or supported by the future management of the refuge.

Cokeville Meadows Refuge is located in southwestern Wyoming within Lincoln County near where Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming meet (figure 1). It lies directly south of the town of Cokeville, and both were named for coal located in the vicinity. The refuge now consists of 9,259 acres within a 26,657-acre acquisition boundary and lies in the Bear River Basin, which has a drainage area of about 4.8 million acres and includes parts of Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming.

This CCP was developed in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) and Part 602 (National Wildlife Refuge System Planning) of “The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.” The actions described herein meet the needs of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). It was prepared by a planning team made up of representatives from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), Cokeville Meadows Refuge staff, various Service programs, the town of Cokeville, the Lincoln County Planning Department, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and other cooperating agencies. The planning team also incorporated public input in compliance with NEPA (see section 1.6).

After reviewing a wide range of public comments, issues, and management needs, our planning team developed a range of alternatives to manage the refuge. After assessing the environmental consequences of implementing each of these, we chose alternative D (landscape-level management) as our proposed action, which addresses all substantive issues raised

while also showing how best to achieve the purposes of the refuge. The details of the proposed action can be found in “Chapter 4—Management Direction.”

This CCP will serve as a working guide for programs and actions on the refuge over the next 15 years.

1.1 Purpose and Need for the Plan

This CCP provides long-term guidance for managing refuge programs and activities. It will help Cokeville Meadows Refuge fulfill its purposes and define how the refuge will support the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

See section 2.2 for more about the refuge’s purposes and its enabling legislation. For information on other relevant legislation and policies, see appendix E.

The CCP is needed to:

- communicate to the public and other partners the refuge’s efforts to carry out the mission of the Refuge System;
- provide a clear statement of direction for managing the refuge;
- provide neighbors, visitors, and government officials an understanding of our management actions on and around the refuge;
- assure that the refuge’s management actions are consistent with the mandates of the Improvement Act;

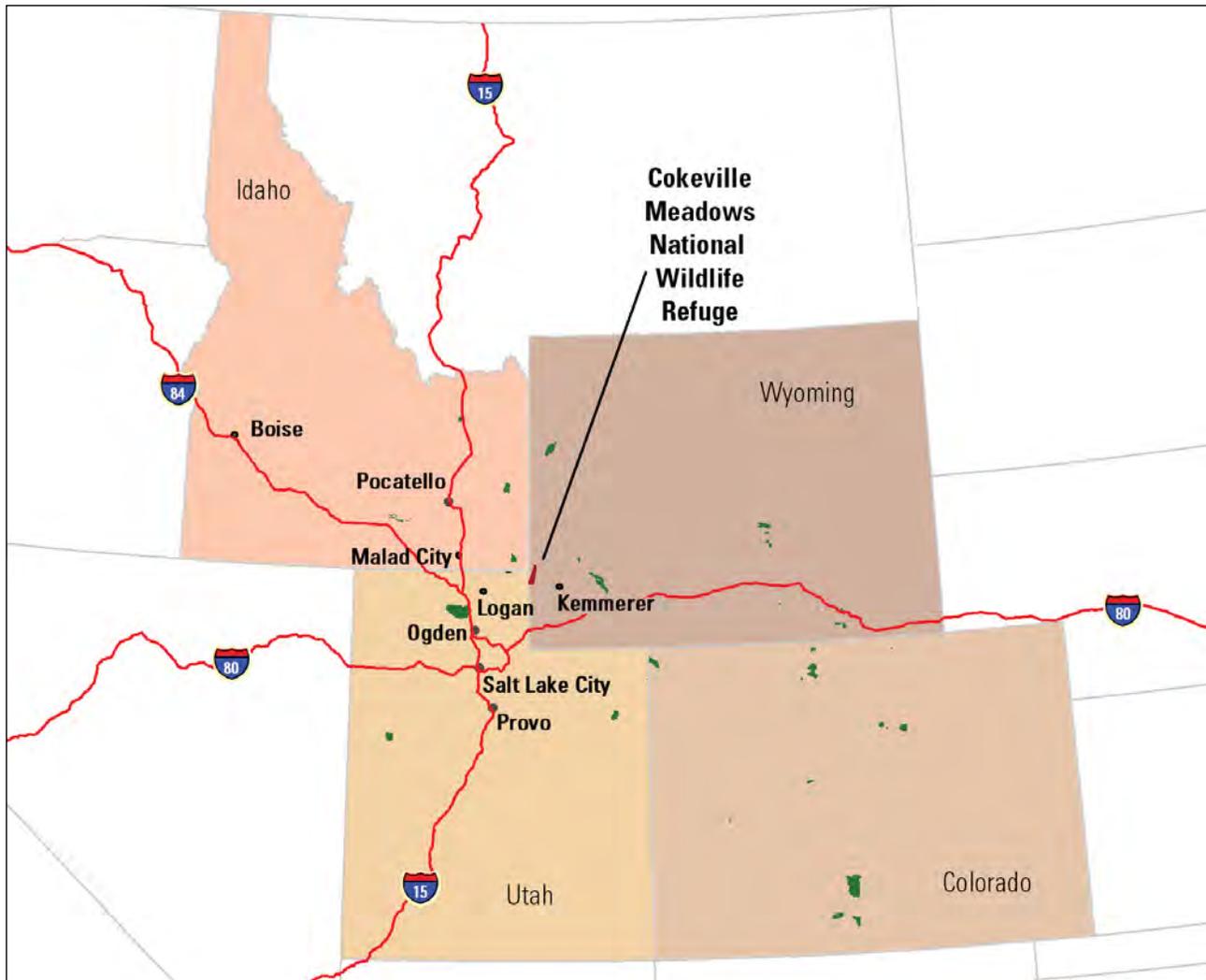


Figure 1. Vicinity map of Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Wyoming, and its proximity to other national wildlife refuges (in green).

- assure that management of the refuge is consistent with Federal, State, and county plans;
- provide a basis for developing budget requests for the refuge's operation, maintenance, and capital improvement needs.

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



We are the principal Federal agency responsible for fish, wildlife, and plant conservation. The Refuge System is one of our major programs.

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.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, America's fish and wildlife resources were declining at an alarming rate, largely because of unrestricted market hunting. Concerned citizens, scientists, and hunting and angling groups joined together and generated the political will for the Federal Government to enact its first significant conservation measures. These actions included the establishment of the Bureau of Fisheries in the 1870s and, in 1900, the passage of the first Federal wildlife law—the Lacey Act—which prohibited interstate transportation of wildlife taken in violation of State laws. Beginning in 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established more than 50 wildlife refuges across the Nation.

Over the next three decades, the United States ratified the Migratory Bird Treaty with Great Britain, and Congress passed laws to protect migratory birds, establish new refuges, and create a money

source for refuge land acquisition. In 1940, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service was created within the U.S. Department of the Interior, and existing Federal wildlife functions, including law enforcement, fish management, animal damage control, and wildlife refuge management, were combined into a single organization for the first time.

Today, we administer the Refuge System, enforce Federal wildlife laws, manage migratory bird populations, restore nationally significant fisheries, conserve and restore vital wildlife habitat, protect and recover endangered species, and help other governments with conservation efforts. We also administer a Federal aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars to the States for fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, and related programs.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Activities in Wyoming

Our activities in Wyoming contribute to the State's economy, ecosystems, and education programs. The following describe our presence and recent activities in the State:

- As of May 2013, we have 55 employees.
- More than 12,586 hours were donated by 675 volunteers to help complete projects on refuge lands.
- We manage 2 fish hatcheries totaling 121 acres and 6 coordination areas totaling 16,291 acres (FWS 2013b), 1 ecological services field office, and 1 management assistance office.
- We manage 7 national wildlife refuges totaling 86,427 acres (figure 2) (FWS 2013b).
- On average, more than 857,000 people visit our lands every year:
 - More than 2,000 of these engage in hunting.
 - More than 5,300 of these take part in fishing.
 - More than 583,700 of these take part in wildlife observation.

- Nearly 1,000 (576 in onsite programs) students take part in environmental education programs.
- We provided \$4.5 million to WGF D for sport fish restoration and \$4.2 million for wildlife restoration and hunter education.
- We paid Wyoming counties \$744,583 under the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act, and \$362,318 of that went to schools and roads (FWS 2012).
- Between 1987 and 2011, our Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program helped private landowners to enhance or restore 5,427 acres of wetlands, 294 miles of riparian and instream habitats, and 282,568 acres of upland habitats (FWS 2013c).

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.

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 native nesting birds. This was the first time the Federal Government set aside land for wildlife. This small but significant designation was the beginning of the Refuge System.

One hundred years later, the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) has become the largest collection of lands in the world specifically managed for wildlife, encompassing more than 150 million acres within 553 refuges and more than 3,000 waterfowl production areas providing breeding and nesting habitat for migratory birds. Today, there is at least one refuge in every State as well as in Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and the other Pacific Territories.

Individual units of the Refuge System were established under a wide variety of statutes and executive orders. Before 1966, each refuge was managed to meet its individual establishment purpose, but there was no law requiring the refuges to be managed as a cohesive system of lands. Passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (Administration Act) changed that and created the Refuge System. In 1997, Congress significantly amended the Administration Act with the Improvement Act, which is the organic legislation of, and has a clear mission statement for, the Refuge System.

The Improvement Act states that each unit of the Refuge System, including wetland management districts, must:

- fulfill the mission of the Refuge System;
- fulfill the individual purposes of each refuge and district;
- consider the needs of fish and wildlife first;
- develop a CCP and fully involve the public in its preparation;
- support the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System;
- allow refuge managers to decide on compatible public uses;
- recognize that wildlife-dependent recreation activities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation, are legitimate and priority public uses.

The following principles guide the vision for wildlife and habitat of each unit of the Refuge System:

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

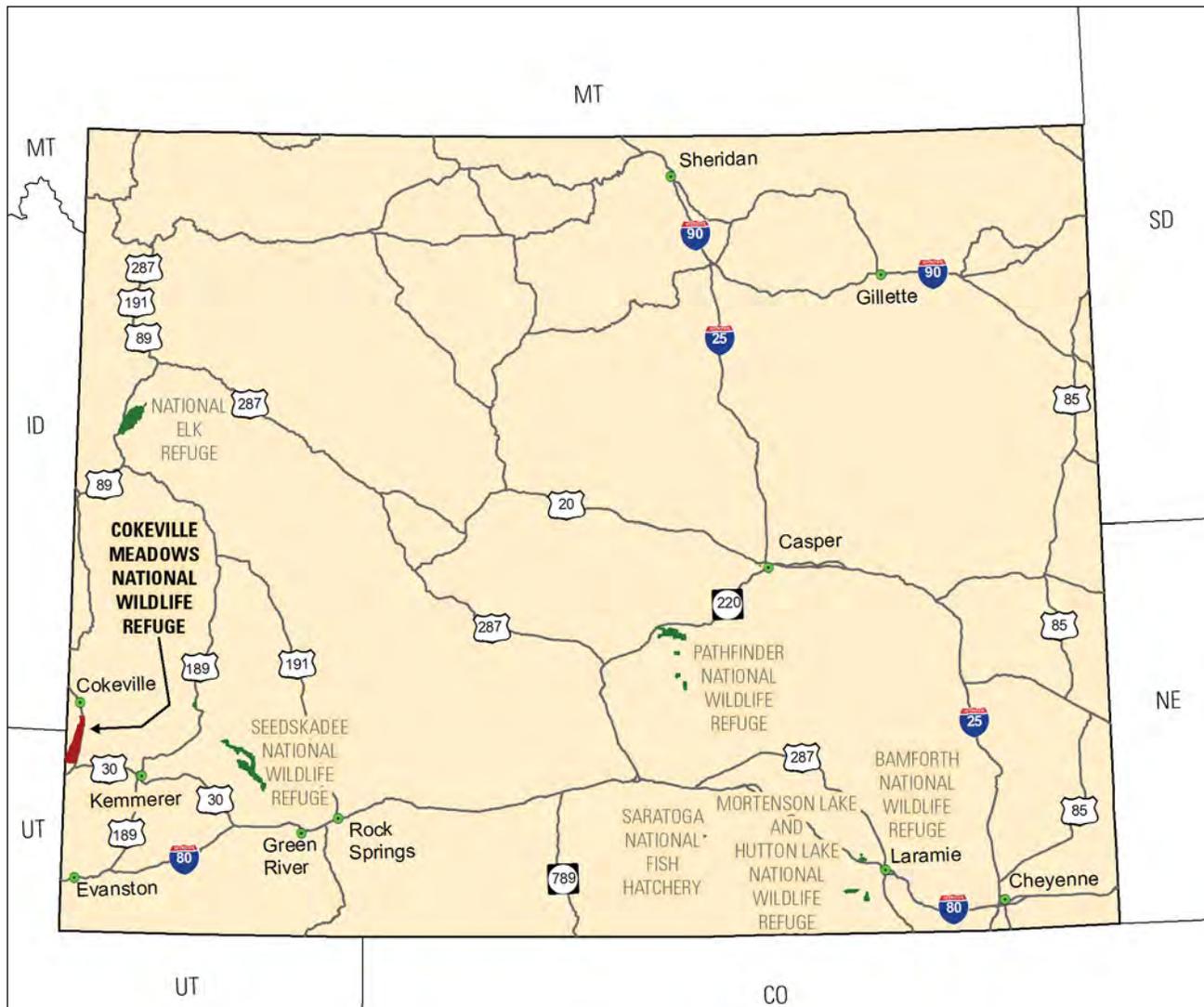


Figure 2. Location of Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and other national wildlife refuges in Wyoming.

The following goals of the Refuge System (601 FW 1) help guide the development of CCPs and the administration, management, and growth of the Refuge System:

- Conserve a variety of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats, including species that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
- Develop and support a network of habitats for migratory birds, anadromous and inter-jurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations that is strategically distributed and carefully managed to meet important life history needs of these species across their ranges.
- Conserve those ecosystems, plant communities, wetlands of national or international significance, and landscapes and seascapes that are unique, rare, declining, or under-represented in existing protection efforts.
- Provide and enhance opportunities to take part in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation).
- Foster understanding and instill appreciation of the diversity and interconnectedness of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.

Under the Improvement Act, we began to prepare CCPs for all national wildlife refuges and wetland management districts using public involvement.



Refuge System units are managed to achieve their designated purposes, as described in establishing legislation, Executive orders, or other establishing documents, and the mission and goals of the Refuge System. Key guidance for the Refuge System is found in the Administration Act, as amended, Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), “The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.”

Descriptions of the laws and Executive Orders that may affect this CCP and the management of Cokeville Meadows Refuge can be found in appendix E. Policies on planning and the management of refuges are found in the “Refuge System Manual” and “The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual” as well as in various Director’s orders, Regional Director’s orders, and Service handbooks.



The Cokeville Meadows Refuge also contributes to the conservation efforts described below.

Conserving the Future

Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation lays out 24 recommendations that 9 implementation teams are charged with fulfilling. The implementation of these recommendations are currently underway and can be followed online (FWS 2011).

Conserving the Future will deliver on three outcomes: articulate the important work and future of the Refuge System in a vision document, raise the awareness of conservation on refuges, and foster new leaders for us and the Refuge System as well as for the conservation community.

Bird Conservation

As interest in bird and habitat conservation has grown over the past few decades, partnership-based bird conservation initiatives have produced international, national, and regional conservation plans. “All-bird” conservation planning in North America has come from the North American Bird Conservation Initiative. Formed in 1999, it is a coalition of government agencies, private organizations, and bird initiatives in the United States that works to advance integrated bird conservation based on sound science and cost-effective management to help all birds in all habitats.

The conservation of all birds is being accomplished under four planning initiatives: the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, the North American Landbird Conservation Plan by Partners in Flight, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan

Partners from Federal and State agencies and nongovernment organizations from across the country pooled their resources and expertise to develop a conservation strategy for migratory shorebirds and the habitats on which they depend. The resulting document, completed in 2000, provides a scientific framework to find species, sites, and habitats that most urgently need conservation action.

The main goals of the plan are to make sure that adequate quantities and qualities of shorebird habitat are supported locally and to support or restore shorebird populations at the continental and hemispheric levels. Separate technical reports were developed for conservation assessment, comprehensive monitoring strategy, research needs, and education and outreach. These national assessments were used to step down goals and objectives into 11 regional conservation plans.

Although some outreach, education, research, monitoring, and habitat conservation programs are being carried out, the accomplishment of conservation objectives for all shorebird species will require a continued, coordinated effort among existing and new partners.

North American Landbird Conservation Plan by Partners in Flight

This plan, developed by Partners in Flight beginning in 1990, recognizes that the population levels of many migratory bird species are declining. The chal-



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Rough-legged Hawk

lenge, according to the program, is to manage human population growth while supporting functional natural ecosystems.

Partners in Flight is a cooperative that includes partnerships among Federal, State, and local government agencies, philanthropic foundations, professional organizations, conservation groups, industries, the academic community, and private individuals. The goals for Partners In Flight (Rich et al, 2004) are:

- Define an active, scientifically based conservation design process that identifies and

develops solutions to threats and risks to landbird populations.

- Create a coordinated network of conservation partners to carry out the objectives of landbird conservation plans at multiple scales.
- Secure the commitment and resources to support the vigorous implementation of landbird conservation objectives.

The main goal of Partners in Flight is to provide for the long-term health of landbirds on this continent. The first priority is to prevent the rarest species from going extinct. The second priority is to prevent uncommon species from descending into threatened status. The third priority is to “keep common birds common.”

Partners in Flight named priority landbird species and habitat types and developed 52 bird conservation plans covering the continental United States. For planning purposes, they split North America into seven groups of birds by ecological area—avifaunal biomes—and 37 bird conservation regions (figure 3). The Cokeville Meadows Refuge lies within Bird Conservation Region 10, the Northern Rockies Region. This region includes the Northern Rocky Mountains and outlying ranges in both the United States and Canada and the intermontane Wyoming Basin and Fraser Basin.

More specifically, the refuge sits within the physiographic area known as the Wyoming Basin (figure 4). This area is primarily in Wyoming but also extends into northern Colorado, southern Montana, and small parts of northeast Utah and southeast Idaho. The area consists of broad intermountain basins interrupted by isolated hills and low mountains that merge to the south into a dissected plateau. The Wyoming Basin is primarily shrub-steppe habitat, dominated by sagebrush and shadscale and interspersed with areas of shortgrass prairie. Higher elevations have mountain shrub vegetation, and the highest areas have coniferous forest. Partners in Flight priority bird populations and habitats of the Wyoming Basin are listed in table 1.

Table 1. Priority bird populations by habitat at Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Wyoming.

<i>Shrub-steppe</i>	<i>Sagebrush grasslands</i>	<i>Wetlands</i>
greater sage-grouse	short-eared owl	American bittern
ferruginous hawk	Swainson's hawk	Wilson's phalarope
sage thrasher	mountain plover	white-faced ibis
sage sparrow		American avocet
Brewer's sparrow		American white pelican

Source: FWS 2013a.



Figure 3. Map of the bird conservation regions of North America

North American Waterbird Conservation Plan

This plan is carried out by a partnership consisting of Federal, State, and Provincial wildlife agencies; individuals; and nonprofit conservation organizations covering 28 countries from Canada to Panama as well as islands and near-shore areas of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Gulf of Mexico,

and the Caribbean Sea. It provides a contiguous framework for conserving and managing colonial-nesting waterbirds, including 209 species of seabirds, coastal waterbirds (gulls, terns, and pelicans), wadingbirds (herons and ibises), and marshbirds (certain grebes and bitterns).

Its overall goal is to make sure that the following are sustained or restored throughout the waterbirds' ranges in North America: (1) the distribution, diver-

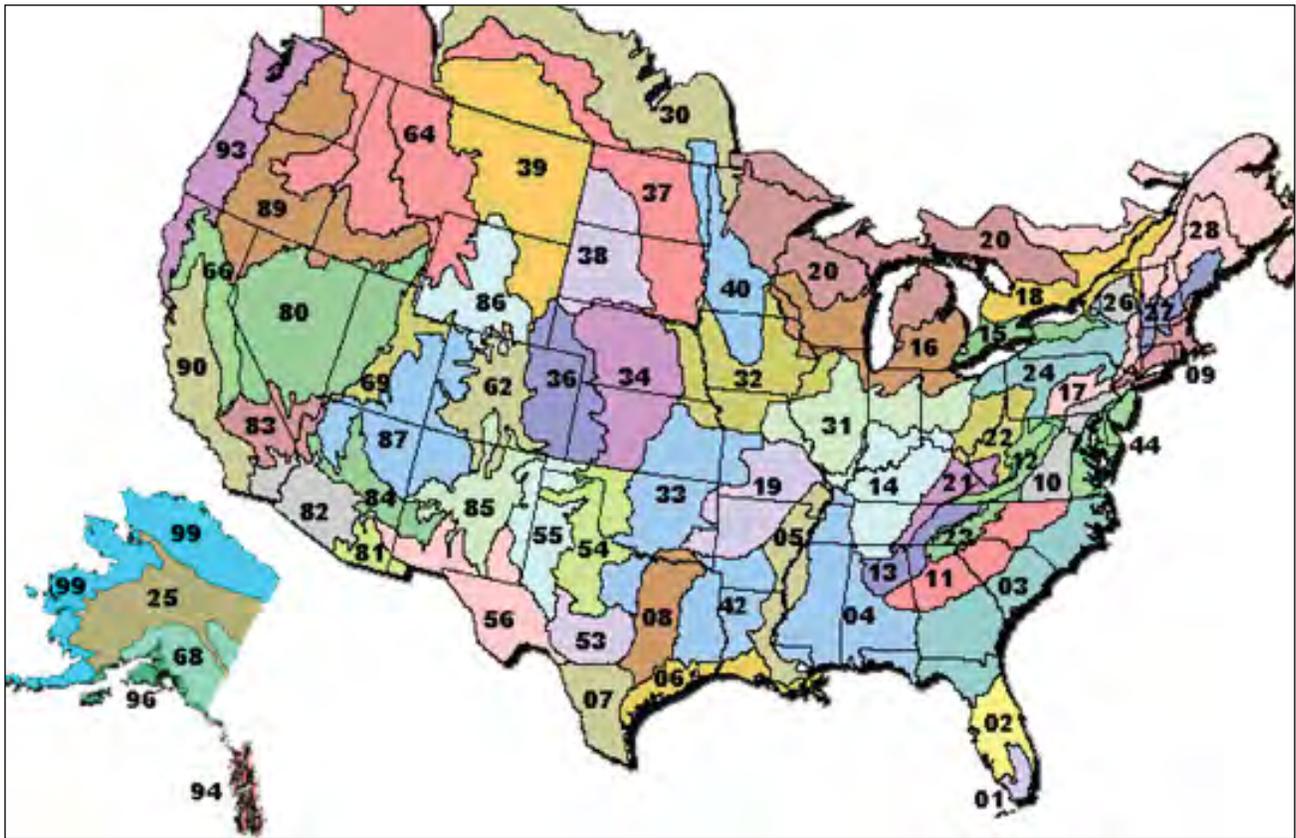


Figure 4. Map of physiographic areas of the United States, including area 86, the Wyoming Basin, which contains Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Wyoming.

sity, and abundance of waterbird populations; (2) habitats for breeding, migratory, and nonbreeding waterbirds; and (3) important sites for waterbirds.

Political considerations and ecological factors influenced the drafting of waterbird planning region boundaries. Sixteen planning regions are identified in the Western Hemisphere, and Cokeville Meadows Refuge is located within the Intermountain West Waterbird Conservation Region. This Region's dispersed high-mountain lakes; large, terminal, hypersaline lakes; marshes; playas; rivers; streams; riparian zones; and fresh and brackish wetlands host about 40 waterbird species, including many, or most, of the world's California gulls, eared grebes, white-faced ibises, and American white pelicans.

Eleven waterbirds are identified as species of high concern in this waterbird conservation region: yellow rail, Franklin's gull, black tern, eared grebe, western grebe, Clark's grebe, snowy egret, American white pelican, common loon, American bittern, and certain managed populations of the greater and lesser sandhill crane. Cokeville Meadows Refuge provides habitat for several of these species, including American bittern, black tern, western grebe, bittern, and sandhill crane.

The waterbirds that use this region are highly adaptable to constantly changing wetland conditions

and depend on a region of wetlands to meet habitat and forage needs during the stages of their annual life cycle. The competing demands for water from agriculture, development, and recreation pose the greatest threats to regional waterbird populations. Contaminants such as mercury and dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) and its breakdown products also threaten the region's waterbirds. Because of the West's feast-or-famine water regime, this plan stresses conserving a network of quality wetland habitats with secure water sources to provide choices for waterbirds during drought and flood cycles (Kushlan et al. 2002).

North American Waterfowl Management Plan

Written in 1986, this plan envisioned a 15-year effort to achieve landscape conditions that could sustain waterfowl populations. Specific objectives are to increase and restore duck populations to the average levels of the 1970s—62 million breeding ducks and a fall flight of 100 million birds.

In the mid-1980s, waterfowl populations had plummeted to record lows. Duck nesting habitat was disappearing at a rate of 60 acres per hour. Recogniz-

ing the importance of waterfowl and wetlands to North Americans and the need for international cooperation to help in the recovery of a shared resource, the United States and Canadian Governments developed a strategy to restore waterfowl populations through habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement. Mexico joined the plan in 1994.

The plan is innovative because of its international scope and its implementation at the regional level. Its success depends on the strength of partnerships, called “joint ventures,” involving Federal, State, Provincial, tribal, and local governments; businesses; conservation organizations; and individual citizens. Joint ventures are regional in scope and self-directed. They drive science-based conservation through diverse community participation and develop implementation measures for areas of concern contained in the plan.

Intermountain West Joint Venture

Established in June 1994, this joint venture and implements the plan in the Intermountain West (Intermountain West Joint Venture 2005). It conserves wetlands and associated habitats and is comprised of many partnerships among public and private organizations that share common interests in supporting and managing key ecosystems in the region. Lands under its jurisdiction stretch from the Sierra Nevada and Cascades in the west to just east of the Rocky Mountains and from the Mexican border in the south to the Canadian border in the north. This extensive geographic region encompasses portions of eleven western States and includes an enormous variety of avian habitat.

Intermountain West Regional Shorebird Plan

This plan covers six bird conservation regions in the Intermountain West and includes an array of habitats from saline sinks to alpine streams (Oring et al. 2010). The Cokeville Meadows Refuge offers important breeding habitat for several shorebird species and is of modest importance to many species of migratory birds.

Recovery Plans for Federally Listed, Threatened, or Endangered Species

No federally listed species have been documented at Cokeville Meadows Refuge. One candidate species, greater sage-grouse, does occur on the refuge. If, during the life of this CCP, listed species are discovered on the refuge or new species are listed, we will make sure that the refuge takes part in any approved

recovery plans. We will also conduct an Intra-Service Section 7 Consultation on refuge management activities that might affect the listed or candidate species.

To make sure that the conservation of candidate species is adequately considered in this document, we conducted a biological evaluation of its actions per section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (see appendix C).

State Wildlife Action Plan

Congress created the State Wildlife Grants Program and the Tribal Wildlife Grants Program in 2001. These provide States, territories, and tribes with Federal dollars to support conservation aimed at preventing wildlife from needing protection under the ESA. To take part in the State Wildlife Grants program, each State completed a State Wildlife Action Plan by October 1, 2005.

These plans define integrated approaches to the stewardship of all wildlife species, with added emphasis on species of concern and habitats at risk. The goal is to shift focus from single-species management and highly specialized individual efforts to a geographically based, landscape-oriented, fish and wildlife conservation effort. We approve State Wildlife Action Plans and Tribal Wildlife Grants Programs and administer these programs' monies.

We reviewed the WGF D State Wildlife Action Plan and used information in it during the development of this CCP. The State Wildlife Action Plan contains information from the Tribal Wildlife Grants Programs developed by the Wyoming Wind River Indian Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation. Carrying out the habitat goals and objectives of this CCP will support those of the WGF D State Wildlife Action Plan.

Responding to Accelerating Climate Change

We believe that a rapid acceleration in climate change could affect the Nation's fish, wildlife, and plant resources in profound and unforeseen ways. While many species would continue to thrive, some may decline or go extinct. Others may survive in the wild only through direct and continued intervention.

In 2010, we drafted a strategic plan to address climate change for the next 50 years entitled “Rising to the Challenge—Strategic Plan for Responding to Accelerating Climate Change” (FWS 2010). The plan employs three key strategies: adaptation, mitigation,

and engagement. In addition, the plan acknowledges that no single organization or agency can address climate change without allying itself with others across the Nation and around the world (FWS 2010). This plan is an integral part of the U.S. Department of the Interior's strategy for addressing climate change as expressed in Secretarial Order 3289 (September 14, 2009).

We will use the following guiding principles from the plan (FWS 2010) in responding to climate change:

- **Priorities setting**—Continually evaluate priorities and approaches, make difficult choices, take calculated risks, and adapt to climate change.
- **Partnership**—Commit to a new spirit of coordination, collaboration, and interdependence with others.
- **Best science**—Reflect scientific excellence, professionalism, and integrity in all of our work.
- **Landscape conservation**—Emphasize the conservation of habitats within sustainable

landscapes, applying our strategic habitat conservation framework.

- **Technical capacity**—Assemble and use state-of-the-art technical capacity to meet the climate change challenge.
- **Global approach**—Be a leader in national and international efforts to meet the climate change challenge.

Scientific observations and data suggest that the great northern geographic area in which Cokeville Meadows is located—as defined by Service and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) experts, see section 1.5 below—may already be undergoing environmental and ecological changes because of climate change trends. Clear patterns in climate change could affect high-mountain ecotypes and lower-elevation, snow melt-dependent watersheds more acutely than they some other geographic areas.

To address the effects of possible climactic change, any proposed management strategies must continue to adapt to a dynamic environment. When considering possible climatic changes and resulting potential ecological changes, we look for effects on the following 12 focal species of the great northern



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Coyote

geographic area: bull trout, pacific lamprey, salmon, steelhead, greater sage-grouse, Lewis’s woodpecker, trumpeter swans, willow flycatcher, Columbia spotted frog, cutthroat trout subspecies, Arctic grayling, and wolverine.



In the face of escalating challenges such as land use conversion, invasive species, water scarcity, and complex issues that could be amplified by possible climatic changes, we have broadened our vision from an ecosystem approach to conservation across a broader, landscape scale.

Strategic Habitat Conservation

In the early 21st century, we undertook a cooperative effort with the USGS that culminated in a report by the National Ecological Assessment Team (USGS 2006). The report outlines a unifying adaptive resource management approach—integrating planning, design, delivery and evaluation—for conservation on a landscape scale. This is strategic habitat conservation—a structured, science-driven approach for making efficient, transparent decisions about where and how to expend our resources to conserve species, or groups of species, that are limited by the amount or quality of habitat (figure 5).

Since 2006, we have taken significant steps to turn this vision into reality. Our and USGS experts have defined a framework of 21 geographic areas using an aggregation of bird conservation regions. Cokeville Meadows Refuge lies in geographic area six—the great northern. This geographic area is unique in social values, natural resources, and managerial challenges.

The great northern geographic area six includes one of the largest surface areas of all the geographic areas in North America, spanning more than 447,000 square miles in the United States (57 percent) and Canada (43 percent). Ecologically, this area represents one of the most relatively intact and functional ecosystems in the United States with diverse groups of species and important conservation and restoration opportunities. Habitats support plant and animal species with cultural significance to multiple Native American tribes and of important societal and conservation value to the United States, Canada, and the world. Cultural traditions are tied closely to the

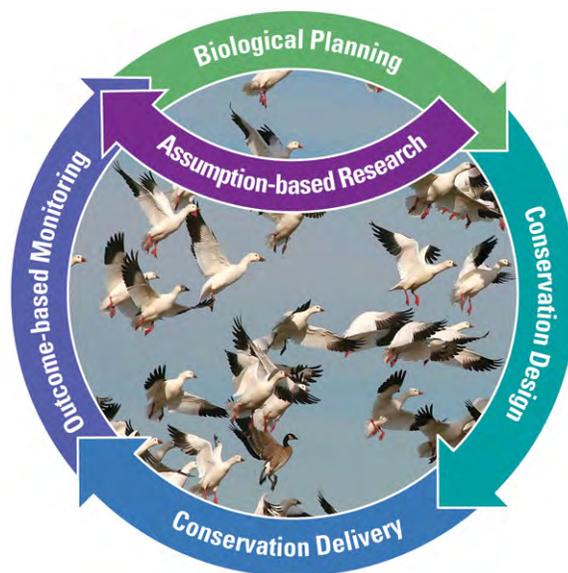


Figure 5. Basic strategic habitat conservation process.

land’s natural resources, as are contemporary ways of life, such as ranching, logging, and recreational and subsistence hunting and fishing. The Nation’s largest communities of free-roaming bison, elk, deer, and other ungulates; wolves; and bears as well as diverse salmon and trout populations are hallmarks of this geographic area

Landscape Conservation Cooperatives

Protecting natural and cultural resources is essential to sustaining our health and quality of life. Humans, along with fish and wildlife, rely on clean water and the benefits of healthy rivers, streams, wetlands, forests, grasslands, and coastal areas in order to thrive. Managing the landscapes that provide our natural and cultural resources has become more challenging. With the signing of Secretarial Order No. 3289, the Department of the Interior launched landscape conservation cooperatives to better integrate science and management to address climate change and other landscape-scale issues. By forming a network that is holistic, collaborative, adaptive, and grounded in science, landscape conservation cooperatives work to sustain our economy and our land, water, wildlife, and cultural resources (Department of the Interior 2010).

The continent’s 22 landscape conservation cooperatives include resource managers and scientists who share a common need for scientific information and an interest in conservation. Each landscape con-

servation cooperative brings together Federal, State, and local governments along with tribes and first nations, nongovernmental organizations, universities, and interested public and private organizations. Our partners work collaboratively to identify best practices, connect efforts, identify science gaps, and avoid duplicating work through conservation planning and design.

Cokeville Meadows Refuge is in the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative, which covers the great northern geographic area six (figure 6).

The Vision of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives

Support landscapes that are capable of sustaining natural and cultural resources for current and future generations.

The Mission of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives

Landscape conservation cooperatives:

- develop and provide integrated science-based information about the implications of climate change and other stressors to sustain natural and cultural resources;
- develop shared, landscape-level, conservation objectives and strategies based on scientific understanding and the implications of current and future environmental stressors;
- facilitate the exchange of applied science when implementing conservation strategies and products that they and their partners develop;



Figure 6. Location of the Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge within geographic area six, the great northern, as administered by the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative.

- monitor and evaluate strategy effectiveness in meeting shared objectives;
- develop effective linkages among each other.



We prepared this CCP in compliance with the Improvement Act and Part 602 (National Wildlife Refuge System Planning) of “The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.” The actions described herein meet the needs of the Council on Environmental Quality regulations that carry out NEPA. The Refuge System’s planning policy, issued in 2000, also offers guidance for refuge and wetland management district plans, including CCPs and stepdown management plans, to help them follow the Improvement Act. We adhered to the steps of the CCP and EA process that are outlined in this planning policy (figure 7).

We began the preplanning process in August 2009 by establishing a planning team made up primarily of staff from the refuge and the Mountain-Prairie Region 6 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Region 6) division of refuge planning. Other team-

members included staff from other Service divisions, including education and visitor services (EVS), law enforcement, realty, geographic information system (GIS), water rights, fire, fisheries, and from WGFD and BLM staff. Later on, the town of Cokeville and Lincoln County, represented by the Lincoln County Planning Department, formally requested to join the planning team and were included through a memorandum of understanding between us and these local governments.

During preplanning, the team developed a mailing list, identified internal issues, and identified the unique qualities of the refuge (see section 2.5).

During planning, the team identified and reviewed current programs, compiled and analyzed relevant data, and reviewed establishing authorities to define the purposes of the refuge. We also prepared a hydrogeomorphic method (HGM) analysis report. The HGM report took almost 2 years to research and complete and resulted in many sound recommendations for the restoration and management of the refuge.

Afterwards, a notice of intent to prepare the draft CCP and environmental assessment (EA) was published in the “Federal Register” on October 30, 2009. Public scoping—the process of obtaining public input to inform the planning process—began soon after in



Figure 7. Process steps for comprehensive planning and associated environmental analysis.

November 2009 and included the mailing of invitation letters, the posting of flyers and press releases and the holding of public scoping meetings. The draft plan was printed and released for 45 days of public review in September 2013. We analyzed all of the comments we received during the public review and made appropriate changes to this CCP.

Table 2 lists the specific steps we took to prepare the Cokeville Meadows Refuge CCP.

Coordination with the Public

We compiled a mailing list of more than 83 names during the planning process. It includes private citizens; local, regional, and State government representatives and legislators; other Federal agencies; and interested organizations, as described in appendix D.

In November 2009, we held two public scoping meetings near Cokeville Meadows Refuge. The first was in Cokeville, Wyoming, and the second was in

Table 2. Planning process summary for Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Wyoming.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Outcome or purpose</i>
August 13, 2009	Cokeville Meadows Refuge CCP meeting for public officials	Overview of the planning and public participation processes, identification of issues, answer questions from officials, and discussion of economic development
September 25, 2009	Initial meeting with the proposed planning team	CCP overview developed; planning team completed; purposes identified; initial issues and qualities list developed; development of mailing list started
November 16–18, 2009	Kickoff meeting, vision, and goals development.	Issues and qualities list updated; biological and mapping needs identified; public scoping planned
October 30, 2009	Public scoping planning	Scoping meeting schedules and formats completed
November 17, 2009	Public scoping meeting, Cokeville, WY	Public opportunity offered (to learn about the CCP and provide comments)
November 18, 2009	Public scoping meeting, Kemmerer, WY	Public opportunity offered (to learn about the CCP and provide comments)
April 20–21, 2010	Alternatives workshop	Vision statement and goals reviewed; alternatives developed.
February 23–25, 2011	Assessment of environmental impacts	Reviewed range of alternatives and decided on environmental consequences.
April 26–28, 2011	Non-biological objectives and strategies workshop	Objectives and strategies for the proposed action drafted
June 21–23, 2011	Biological objectives and strategies workshop	Objectives and strategies for the proposed action drafted
July–December, 2011	First draft CCP and EA preparation	First draft of the CCP and EA prepared
March–April 2012	Planning team review of the first draft CCP and EA	First draft of the CCP and EA reviewed and commented on by planning team
May 2012–May 2013	Internal Service review of and editing of the first draft CCP and EA	Draft CCP and EA reviewed and commented on by our regional office staff, planning team, and others
May 2013	Planning team review of the second draft CCP and EA	Second draft of the CCP and EA reviewed and commented on by planning team
June–August 2013	Preparation of public review draft CCP and EA	
September 2013	Draft CCP and EA distributed	Draft CCP and EA mailed out to the public and posted on the Division of Planning Web site
September 2013	Public comment meeting in Cokeville, Wyoming	Draft CCP and EA presented to the public; public comments collected
November 2013	Public comments collected and analyzed	Modification of Draft CCP to incorporate relevant and substantive public comments
December 2013	Briefed Assistant Regional Director of Refuge System	Summary of public comments reviewed and addressed by our Region 6 Assistant Regional Director of the Refuge System
February 2014	Briefed Regional Director	Summary of public comments reviewed and addressed by our Regional Director and Deputy Regional Director and CCP signed
March 2014	Production and distribution of final CCP. Begin implementation.	Final CCP sent to the printer and then distributed to the public. Staff begins implementing the CCP

Kemmerer, Wyoming. Fifty-two people attended the two meetings. They were primarily local citizens, including ranchers, sportsmen and women, other recreational users, and wildlife management professionals. Following a presentation about the refuge and an overview of the CCP and NEPA processes, we encouraged attendees to ask questions and offer comments. We recorded verbal comments and gave attendees a comment form by which to submit more thoughts or questions in writing.

In addition to verbal comments received during scoping meetings and others that we held with Congressional representatives and stakeholders, we received a total of 12 written letters during the initial scoping period ending December 31, 2009. We reviewed and considered all substantive comments and public input throughout the planning process.

State Coordination

In November 2009, our Region 6 Director mailed a letter to the director of WGFD inviting the agency to take part in our CCP planning process. As a result, six representatives from WGFD are part of the CCP planning team, which complements the excellent, ongoing working relationships we had already established with local WGFD biologists.

WGFD is charged with providing “an adequate and flexible system for the control, management, protection, and regulation of all Wyoming wildlife.” WGFD supports 36 wildlife habitat management areas and 96 public access areas, encompassing 410,000 acres of managed lands for wildlife habitat and public recreation. These lands contain 121 miles of stream easements and about 21,014 surface acres of lakes and reservoirs for public access.

Tribal Coordination

In November 2009, our Region 6 Director mailed letters to 12 Native American tribal governments informing them about the CCP development process and inviting them to take part. Letters went to the Northern Arapaho, Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, Lower Brule Sioux, Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, Cheyenne River Sioux, Oglala Sioux, Standing Rock Sioux, Santee Sioux, Rosebud Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, Eastern Shoshone, and Northwest Band of Shoshone Nation of Utah Tribe.

Although none of the tribal governments chose to take part in our planning process, they remain on the CCP mailing list and continue to receive CCP-related correspondence.

Results of Scoping

We used all the comments we collected during scoping and public comment meetings and from correspondence, including refuge management recommendations, to develop the list of issues that are addressed in this CCP in this chapter and in chapter 2. Our planning team also developed alternatives to address these issues and chose one alternative to be our proposed action.

The Draft Plan

We considered all input in developing the draft CCP and EA, including suggestions from the public, partners, and other groups, about changes to the refuge’s current management. The planning process makes sure that issues with the greatest effects on the refuge are given priority or are resolved. After scoping and a detailed analysis of the results, we created four management alternatives that best addressed the issues that had been identified. We chose alternative D (landscape-level management) to be our proposed action. In September 2013, we published a notice of availability announcing that the draft CCP and EA was available for a 30-day public review period. In appendix D of this CCP we provide a summary of written comments that we gathered during the review period along with our responses.

The Final Plan

After reviewing public comments on the draft CCP and EA, our Region 6 Director selected alternative D as the preferred alternative. Subsequently, we produced this final CCP, which is based on the draft CCP but includes substantive changes. The biological evaluation for the final CCP determined that there would likely be no adverse effect on threatened or endangered species or on critical habitats as a result of the actions of the CCP (appendix C). The Regional Director approved the final CCP in February 2014 after finding that it would cause no significant impact to the human environment (appendix A).

Chapter 4 outlines the long-term guidance for management decisions that arose from the preferred alternative, sets forth objectives and strategies to accomplish refuge purposes and goals, and identifies our best estimate of future needs. The CCP details program levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations yet serve to assist in our strategic planning.

