

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## 1. What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP)?

A comprehensive conservation plan is a document that described the desired future conditions of the refuge, district, conservation area, or other unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System that provides long-range guidance and management direction for the manager to accomplish the purposes of the unit, contribute to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and meet other relevant mandates (“Draft Fish and Wildlife Service Manual” 602 FW 1.5).

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires a CCP be completed for every unit of the Refuge System by 2012, and that each unit will be managed in accordance with the CCP.

## 2. What is an Environmental Assessment (EA)?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 sets up procedural requirements for all Federal Government agencies to analyze the environmental impacts of a Federal action. NEPA’s procedural requirements apply to all Federal agencies in the executive branch.

An EA is a concise public document, prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, that briefly discusses the purpose and need for an action and alternatives to such action and that provides sufficient evidence and analysis of effects to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or finding of no significant impact (40 CFR 1508.9).

## 3. What does the CCP include?

The CCP describes future management for all programs in the refuge complex. The 163,304-acre refuge complex is located in northwest and north-central Montana. Spanning both sides of the Continental Divide, it is a collection of diverse landscapes, from wetlands and mixed-grass prairie in the east to forests, intermountain grasslands, rivers, and lakes in the west. The refuge complex oversees management of 2 refuges, 1 wetland management district containing 22 waterfowl production areas, and 3 conservation areas, and administers 216 easements within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

- Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1929 and consists of 12,383 fee-title acres and 76.88 acres of right-of-way easement. It is located on the northern Great Plains, 50 miles east of the Rocky Mountains and 12 miles north of Great Falls, Montana.
- Benton Lake Wetland Management District was established in 1975. This is the largest such district in the National Wildlife Refuge System. It includes 10 counties (Cascade, Chouteau, Glacier, Hill, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, Pondera, Powell, Teton, Toole), 22 waterfowl production areas, and 4 distinct easement programs.
- Blackfoot Valley Conservation Area (CA) was established in 1995 and expanded in 2011. This conservation easement program has the potential to protect up to 103,500 acres in the Blackfoot Valley by buying conservation easements on private land within the 824,024-acre project area.
- Rocky Mountain Front CA was established in 2005 and expanded in 2011. This conservation easement program has the potential to protect up to 295,000 acres in the Rocky Mountain Front by buying conservation easements on private land within the 918,000-acre project area.
- Swan River National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1973 and consists of 1,568.81 acres. It is

located in the Swan Valley, 38 miles southeast of Creston, Montana.

- Swan Valley CA was authorized in 2011. This conservation area has the potential to protect up to 10,000 acres in the Swan Valley by buying conservation easements on private land, and up to 1,000 acres in fee-title land next to the Swan River Refuge within the 187,400-acre project area.

#### **4. How is this plan related to the Secretary's America's Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative?**

The refuge complex includes three conservation areas (Blackfoot Valley, Rocky Mountain Front, Swan Valley) that are collectively referred to as the Service's Crown of the Continent projects. The Crown of the Continent is a general term that refers to a large geographic area along the continental divide in Montana and Canada. A number of agencies, NGOs, and organizations are currently working within the Crown of the Continent Focus Area to provide conservation delivery under the Secretary's AGO initiative. Management for the Service's Crown of the Continent Conservation Areas is described in this CCP.

#### **5. What types of impacts were studied in the EA?**

The EA examined a number of environmental, social and cultural impacts. Including the following:

- Physical Environment including climate change, preservation of intact landscapes, and landscape threats and conflicts.
- Biological Resources including vegetative habitat types and the associated birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fishes, and insects.
- Visitor Services including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, interpretation, environmental education, and other uses
- Administration Effects including staff and funding, facilities and real property assets, and visitor and employee safety and resource protection
- Cultural Resources
- Socioeconomic Conditions
- Environmental Justice
- Cumulative Impacts

#### **6. Who prepared the CCP and EA?**

An interdisciplinary planning team composed of Service personnel from various offices and divisions prepared the draft CCP and EA and the final CCP.