

6 Comprehensive Conservation Plan



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The future direction for Bear Butte NWR was developed for this final CCP based on careful analysis of information; involvement of federal, tribal, state, and local government contacts, conservation organizations, landowners, and other interested parties; and determining the best course of action for Bear Butte NWR and the community, at large. Alternative A—current management (no action) was selected as the preferred alternative, the final CCP.

Under this alternative, the limited-interest easements will continue to be managed through the 1967 cooperative agreement with the state of South Dakota, with periodic reviews between the Service and state.

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Bear Butte NWR is an atypical refuge compared to most refuges in the Refuge System. As stated throughout this document, the area was established primarily as a recreation area with some wildlife benefits. At the time, establishment of a limited-interest easement refuge was the only avenue available to secure assistance from the Civilian Conservation Corps to construct a dam and recreational facilities. It would have been a much better administrative fit to have placed management of the easements with another land management entity with a mission more aligned with recreational use.



Tom Koerner / USFWS

Bear Butte Lake

This unique situation has existed throughout the history of Bear Butte NWR. Indeed, a number of attempts have been made to divest the limited-interest easement refuge, and a solution was sought when the state of South Dakota purchased much of the lands in fee title. Historically, divestiture of any refuge is not easily accomplished, nor is it welcomed by a large segment of the public. Even divestiture of a limited-interest easement refuge that is owned in fee title by other state and federal land-management agencies is frequently not supported.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

After a review of all the public comments received and consideration of tribal concerns raised during the public comment period, it was decided to table attempts at divestiture using the CCP/EA process. According to refuge planning policy (May 25, 2000), the CCP should be revised when significant new information becomes available. This should occur every 15 years or sooner, if necessary. It is important to note that if conditions change, the Service could reconsider actions approved in the CCP. If revisions were considered, full disclosure through extensive public involvement using NEPA and other compliance procedures would be closely followed.

Therefore, the Service will continue to manage the refuge within the parameters of the 1967 cooperative agreement with the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Department (SDGFP). Existing recreational uses, public programs, and habitat within the limited-interest easement refuge will continue to be managed by the SDGFP. Current habitat and wildlife practices will continue to be carried out by state park personnel, and levels of public use will remain the same. The state park facilities and activities that are provided on the southeast side of Bear Butte Lake—hiking, picnicking, designated camping, fishing, and a horse camp—will continue to be offered. Refuge staff will support partnerships between the SDGFP and the tribes for the ongoing protection of cultural resources. The Service will continue passive management and maintenance of facilities. No refuge staff will be assigned to the limited-interest easement refuge, as is currently the case.

The Service has limited authority outside the scope of this limited-interest easement refuge and the 1967 cooperative agreement to prevent or shape the future development and activities conducted on private lands adjacent to and near Bear Butte. Development around the butte is highly controversial. Many local residents and tribal members wish to preserve the site's special values. The Service will continue to encourage pursuit of other avenues for protection of the site's cultural integrity.

