

# Planning Update

## *Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment Laramie Plains National Wildlife Refuges*

Issue 2, August 2007

The Service has prepared a draft comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental assessment for management of the Laramie Plains national wildlife refuges.

### The Refuges

The Laramie Plains national wildlife refuges include Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Hutton Lake NWR, and Mortenson Lake NWR. Staff of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (headquartered at the Arapaho NWR near Walden, Colorado) manages the refuges. All three refuges are located within 15 miles of Laramie, Wyoming.

Laramie is in a high plains ecosystem known as the Laramie Basin. The shallow depressions of the basin, within the relatively flat topography of the region, support wetland complexes unique to the area. These wetland complexes provide resting, nesting, and breeding areas for migratory birds in the semiarid environment.

In the early 1930s, J. Clark Salyer III was charged with identifying areas to

protect as national wildlife refuges for migratory birds. He surveyed the area around Laramie and selected two locations as national wildlife refuges for migratory birds. Executive orders in 1932 established Bamforth NWR and Hutton Lake NWR.

*Bamforth NWR* comprises three separate parcels with private or state lands in between them. The 1,166-acre refuge contains Bamforth Lake, but most of the lake falls outside the refuge boundary. There is no public use allowed at Bamforth NWR.

*Hutton Lake NWR* is 1,928 acres and supports approximately 2,000 public visits over the course of a year, mostly from March through October. Wildlife viewing opportunities are limited from November through February due to frozen ponds and cold, snowy weather.

*Mortensen Lake NWR* was established in 1993 to protect the Wyoming toad's last known population, which was listed as an endangered species in 1984. Physical features of the 1,968-acre refuge include Mortensen Lake, Soda

Lake, and Gibbs Pond. Habitat types include open water, wetlands, wet meadow, grassland, sagebrush, and greasewood communities. There is no public use allowed at the refuge to prevent potential adverse effects on the Wyoming toad.

### Planning

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act requires that a CCP be developed for each national wildlife refuge in the nation. These plans are to guide the management of each refuge for 15 years.

The CCP process is a series of steps including environmental analysis. Public and partner involvement are encouraged and valued throughout the process. Management alternatives were developed to meet the purposes, vision, and goals of the refuges.

The CCP will be carried out and monitored throughout its 15-year effective period.



*Gadwall with duckling.*

## Vision

*The wetland complexes and uplands of the Laramie Plains national wildlife refuges are important resource components of this semiarid region that provide key habitat for the Wyoming toad and other endangered species, migratory birds, and resident wildlife.*

*The refuges will be evaluated to direct management decisions to provide natural and enhanced habitat, thereby maximizing the unique potential of each refuge.*

*Wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities will be evaluated for each refuge to determine potential, appropriate, public use opportunities.*

## Please Provide Your Comments

The Service invites you to review the draft CCP and environmental assessment and tell us what you think. Your comments on the plan will help the Service write a final plan that is both visionary and practical.

You may attend an upcoming open house to comment personally on the draft CCP and environmental assessment. The Service will hold the open house in August at the Albany County Public Library in Laramie, Wyoming. The specific date and time will be announced in the local media.

In addition, the Service will accept public comments in written format sent to the address below. The Service needs your comments by September 1, 2007, in order to consider them during the development of the final CCP.

*Please send your comments to*

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## Planning Steps Completed

- *Pre-planning*: researched refuge history and gathered information.
- *Public scoping*: distributed planning update 1 and a news release; held an open house; and collected public comments.
- *Vision and goals*: drafted the vision and goals.
- *Alternatives*: developed a range of management alternatives.
- *Draft CCP and environmental assessment*: prepared the document for public review.

## Planning Steps Remaining

- *Public review*: distribute the draft CCP and environmental assessment to people and groups on the mailing list, August–September 2007.
- *Final CCP*: prepare the final CCP and decision document for approval by the Service's regional director, September–December 2007.



August 2007

## Future of the Refuges

If the proposed action is selected, the Service will carry out the objectives described in *Alternative B, Enhanced Refuge Management*. Under this alternative, there would be an increase in management activities.

Actions include the following:

- The Service would evaluate and manage upland habitats for the benefit of migratory bird species.
- Refuge staff would research the availability of additional water rights for the refuges.
- Monitoring and management of invasive species on the refuges would increase.
- Refuge staff and partners would collect in-depth baseline data for wildlife and habitats.
- There would be increased efforts in the operations and maintenance of natural resources on the refuges.
- The Service would pursue partnerships that promote wildlife and habitat research and management.



