

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

*Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge
Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuge*

September 2007

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Abbreviations

Administration Act	National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966
ABC	American Bird Conservancy
BBS	breeding bird survey
BCR	Bird Conservation Regions
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
CCP	comprehensive conservation plan
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
cfs	cubic feet per second
CRP	conservation reserve program
CWCS	comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy
DNC	dense nesting cover
DU	Ducks Unlimited
EA	environmental assessment
EO	executive order
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FMP	fire management plan
FONSI	finding of no significant impact
FTE	full-time equivalent
GIS	geographic information system
GPS	global positioning system
GS	general schedule (employment)
HAPET	Habitat and Population Evaluation Team
HMP	habitat management plan
IMPROVE	interagency monitoring of protected visual environments
Improvement Act	National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
LPP	land protection plan
NABCI	North American Bird Conservation Initiative
NAWCA	North American Wetlands Conservation Act
NAWMP	North American Waterfowl Management Plan
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NOI	notice of intent

NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NWI	national wetland inventory
NWR	national wildlife refuge
NWRS	National Wildlife Refuge System
PFW	Partners for Fish and Wildlife
PL	public law
PPJV	Prairie Pothole Joint Venture
PPR	prairie pothole region
Refuge System	National Wildlife Refuge System
region 6	Mountain–Prairie Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
RONs	Refuge Operating Needs System
SAMMS	Service Asset Maintenance Management System
Service	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
SUP	special use permit
SWG	state wildlife grant
TMDL	total maximum daily load
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UGHEP	upland gamebird habitat enhancement program
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WG	wage grade (employment)
WHIP	wildlife habitat incentive program
WPA	waterfowl production area
WMD	wetland management district
WUI	wildland–urban interface

Summary

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has developed this comprehensive conservation plan as the foundation for management and use of the three Laramie Plains refuges (Bamforth, Hutton Lake, and Mortenson Lake) located in Albany County, Wyoming. This plan, approved in 2007, will guide management of the refuges for the next 15 years.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) requires the Service to develop a comprehensive conservation plan by 2012 for each national wildlife refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

This brief summary describes the refuges, comprehensive conservation plan, and planning process.

THE LARAMIE PLAINS REFUGES

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

The Laramie Basin is home to three national wildlife refuges known collectively as the “Laramie Plains refuges.” Located within 15 miles of Laramie, the three refuges are managed by Service staff headquartered at the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) near Walden, Colorado, which lies approximately 65 miles southwest of Laramie.

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. Bamforth NWR and Hutton Lake NWR were established by executive orders in 1932, within one day of each other.

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

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

Mortenson Lake NWR was established in 1993 to protect the Wyoming toad’s last known population. The Wyoming toad was listed as an endangered species in 1984. Physical features of 1,968-acre refuge include Mortenson Lake, Soda Lake, and Gibbs Pond. Habitat types include open water, wetlands, wet meadow, grassland, sagebrush, and greasewood communities. No public use is currently allowed on the refuge to prevent potential adverse impact on the Wyoming toad.



Refuge habitats include wet meadows and grasslands.

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THE PLANNING PROCESS

Through the environmental analysis process, the Service has selected as the preferred alternative (final comprehensive conservation plan) for the Laramie Plains refuges alternative B from the draft conservation plan and environmental assessment published in August 2007.

In 2006, a planning team of refuge and other Service staff gathered and began to analyze resource information. The planning process included designing a vision for the three refuges, along with goals to reach the vision. After identifying key issues related to achieving the vision, the team developed management alternatives.

The team invited the public to participate in the planning process and public scoping. A mailing list of about 165 names was created and included private citizens; local, regional, and state government representatives and legislators; other federal agencies; tribal governments; and nonprofit organizations.

Key issues (habitat, wildlife, water quality, public outreach, public use, and refuge operations) were identified during analysis of concerns raised by

refuge staff, along with analysis of public comments collected during scoping. These issues were addressed throughout the planning process and in the final comprehensive conservation plan.

COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN

This plan includes detailed objectives and strategies to carry out the vision and goals for the Laramie Plains refuges.

The below vision describes what the refuges will be and what the Service hopes to do, and is based primarily on the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and specific purposes of the refuges.

Vision

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

The refuges will be evaluated to direct management decisions to provide natural and enhanced habitat,



Bulrushes.

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.

Goals

The following goals will direct work toward achieving the vision for the Laramie Plains refuges.

Research and Science Goal

Conduct natural resource management using sound science and applied research to advance the understanding of refuge resources and natural resource function.

(Applies to all three Laramie Plains refuges.)

Partnerships Goal

Work with partners to determine the wildlife and habitat resources on the refuges, to maximize wildlife habitat protection, and to increase understanding of wildlife needs, as well as the benefits wildlife offer to individuals and communities, on and off the refuges.

(Applies to all three Laramie Plains refuges.)

Cultural Resources Goal

Identify and evaluate the cultural resources on the refuges and protect those that are determined to be significant.

(Applies to all three Laramie Plains refuges.)

Refuge Operations Goal

Secure and demonstrate the effective use of funding, staffing, and partnerships for the benefit of all resources in support of the refuges and the Refuge System.

(Applies to all three Laramie Plains refuges.)

Natural Resources Goal

Conduct baseline surveys to identify refuge resources and the role these resources serve in the Laramie Basin ecosystem and the Refuge System.

(Applies only to Bamforth NWR.)

Wetlands Goal

Manage refuge impoundments and other wetlands to create diverse habitat for wetland-dependent wildlife.

(Applies only to Hutton Lake NWR and Mortenson Lake NWR.)

Uplands Goal

Evaluate and manage shrub- and grass-dominated uplands for benefits to migratory birds (willet, horned lark), white-tailed prairie dogs, pronghorn, and other wildlife.

(Applies only to Hutton Lake NWR and Mortenson Lake NWR.)

Visitor Services Goal

Provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives.

(Applies only to Hutton Lake NWR.)

Wyoming Toad Goal

In conjunction with the Wyoming Toad Recovery Team, manage refuge lands around Mortenson Lake and other areas on the refuge as necessary to protect, create, and manage habitat suitable for Wyoming toad recovery from endangered status.

(Applies only to Mortenson Lake NWR.)

