

Planning Update

Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Issue 1, August 2008

The National Wildlife Refuge System

The Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

The Refuge System began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first bird sanctuary and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his presidency.

This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand and became the National Wildlife Refuge System—the largest system of lands in the world dedicated for the conservation of wildlife.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), an agency within the Department of the Interior, administers the Refuge System.



Sharp-tailed grouse.

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Black-necked stilt.

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Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex

The Benton Lake NWR Complex (complex) is approximately 127,000 acres in size and consists of the following seven units:

- Benton Lake NWR
- Lost Trail NWR
- Swan River NWR
- Benton Lake Wetland Management District (WMD)
- Blackfoot Valley Wildlife Management Area
- Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area
- Northwest Montana Flathead County WMD

Spanning both sides of the Continental Divide, the complex is a collection of diverse landscapes, from wetlands and short-grass prairie in the east to forests in the west. Likewise, animal species that inhabit the complex lands are diverse and reflective of a variety of habitats. Large numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds inhabit wetlands in the east, while large predators such as grizzly bears make their home in the mountains and forests to the west.

What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Improvement Act). This legislation provides clear guidance for management of the Refuge System including this new mission statement.

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.



Northern harrier.

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The Improvement Act directs the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to the conservation of wildlife and maintenance of the biological integrity of ecosystems.

To support and fulfill this mission, the Improvement Act also requires that, by 2012, the Service will have developed a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for each national wildlife refuge in the Refuge System at the time of the act. To meet this requirement, the Service has started work on a CCP for the Benton Lake NWR Complex. This 15-year plan will provide long-range guidance and management direction for all of the complex's programs. The plan will outline a vision statement and supporting goals, objectives, and strategies. It will be a "living" document that is updated every 15 years.

The CCP and the accompanying environmental assessment or environmental impact statement (as required by the National Environmental Policy Act) will describe management alternatives considered and their effects on the environment.

In summary, the comprehensive conservation plan will do the following:

1. Outline a vision.
2. Guide management decisions.
3. Outline goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve the complex's vision and purposes.
4. Provide other agencies and the public with an understanding of the management strategies to be carried out at the complex.

Project Timeline

SPRING 2008	✓	Preplanning
SUMMER 2008	✓	Draft Vision Statement
SEPTEMBER 2008	○	Public Involvement & Scoping
2009	○	Develop & Analyze
2010	○	Release the Draft CCP/EA
2011	○	Final CCP/EA
	○	Begin Plan Implementation

Draft Vision Statement

In May 2008 Service personnel met to develop a draft vision statement for the complex. This statement will help guide the CCP process for the complex.

The spirit of the American West resonates on both sides of the Continental Divide in the prairies, mountains, rivers, and wetlands of the Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Here, migratory birds fill the sky, bull trout thrive, and grizzlies and wolves still roam. Visitors experience many of the same landscapes that Lewis and Clark explored on their journey through the "Crown of the Continent." Conservation efforts in the complex protect intact landscapes, manage productive habitats, and offer people opportunities to connect with wildlife in solitude under Montana's big sky. These efforts rely upon innovative public and private partnerships, are supported by the region's people, and harmonize with its historic rural economy.



Service personnel met in May 2008 to develop a draft vision statement for the complex.



Wetlands at Benton Lake NWR.

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Public Involvement and Scoping

Four public scoping meetings are scheduled to occur during the first week of September 2008. These meetings are essential to developing a list of issues that the CCP will address. The meetings will follow an informal "open house" format. You are invited to drop by anytime from 4pm to 7pm to meet personally with Service personnel, learn more about the CCP process, and provide input.

Meeting Schedule

September 2, 2008:

- Great Falls, MT
La Quinta Inn, 600 River Drive S.

September 3, 2008:

- Choteau, MT
Stage Stop Inn, 1005 N. Main Ave.
- Ovando, MT
Ovando School, 108 Birch St.

September 4, 2008:

- Kalispell, MT
Red Lion Hotel, 20 North Main St.

Why Did You Receive This Update?

This planning update is being widely distributed to generate interest in the planning process and collect ideas and thoughts from the public, state and local governments, organizations, and other partners.

You are receiving this update because you were identified as someone who may want to be kept informed or share ideas about the future management of the Benton Lake NWR Complex.

Since this mailing list is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, your permission is needed to place your name on the permanent mailing list. If you do not request to be on the mailing list, the Service will assume

that you do not wish to receive further information on the planning process.

If you would like to continue receiving planning updates, please complete the enclosed "mailing list consent" form and return it to the address listed below. You may also phone, fax, or email Toni Griffin (planning team leader) and request that your name be placed on the mailing list. Her contact information is given below.

Contact Information

Service staff are available to provide additional information about the complex's history, goals, and accomplishments; and to answer questions about the planning process.

Public comments relating to the scoping portion of the planning process will be accepted by written letter or email through September 15, 2008, and can be sent to the following postal or electronic addresses or by fax:

Toni Griffin, Planning Team Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Refuge Planning
P.O. Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225-0486

Email: toni_griffin@fws.gov

Fax: 303/236 4792

Phone: 303/236 4378

For information about the complex:
www.fws.gov/bentonlake

Phone: 406/727 7400

For information about the planning process:

www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/planning/ccp.htm



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