

Planning Update

Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge

Issue 1, January 2008



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This seven-point bull elk sounds off during the fall rut at Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. Now is the time for stakeholders to speak out about their ideas for the future of this magnificent refuge.

Got Voice? Wanna Bugle?

The glorious fall rut is over in the rugged Missouri Breaks in north-central Montana. Winter has taken hold in the forested coulees, river bottoms, and badlands country around the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) including UL Bend NWR (a refuge within a refuge). Elk and other resident wildlife species in this 1.1 million acre refuge that many people refer to simply as “CMR” are now spending the long winter months searching for food and shelter in a constant bid for survival. Although some of us would prefer to hunker down for the winter, the time has come for stakeholder groups, communities, tribes, and interested citizens to voice their ideas about the future of this remarkable place.

The public involvement phase of the comprehensive planning process has begun. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has formed a planning team consisting of Service staff along with representatives from Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks,

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Bureau of Land Management to begin work on the comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) for the refuge. The CCP is a 15-year plan that will provide long-range guidance and management direction for all of the refuge’s programs including habitat conservation and recreational uses such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation.

Whether you decide to stay warm inside and send us a note by letter or fax, or you choose to brave the winter chill to join us at an upcoming public meeting, we look forward to hearing your views about the important qualities of this refuge and what issues you think should be addressed the planning process.

Barron Crawford

Barron Crawford
Project Leader

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Scoping the Issues

Public Input

One of the early phases in the planning process is to determine what significant issues need to be addressed in the CCP. On December 4, 2007, we (the Service) announced in the *Federal Register* (FR 68174) our intent to initiate the planning process for developing a CCP and EIS. Over the next few months, we will gather information about what concerns stakeholders the most. One way we learn about the issues is by having public meetings. It is not the only option for voicing one's ideas and concerns, as we accept comments by letter, email, phone or one-on-one conversations. We will be hosting a number of meetings throughout Montana during January 28–30 and February 4–6, 2008. The locations for the meetings can be found in the box to the right.

The format for the public meetings will include a short presentation followed by an opportunity for meeting attendees to ask questions. Those who wish to offer comments publicly will be allowed to provide brief remarks after all the questions are answered. We will allow time in the meetings for one-on-one conversations, and we encourage you to engage the refuge staff. An optional questionnaire about refuge issues will be available at the meetings or can be found on our website at <http://www.fws.gov/cmnr/planning>.

The following optional questions may assist you in providing input.

1. What do you value most about the refuge?
2. What problems or issues do you want to see addressed in the CCP?
3. What changes, if any, would you like to see in the management of the refuge?

Additional Information

More information about our public involvement process can be found in the *Public Involvement Summary*, October 2007, which is available on our website.



These youngsters show off a northern pike caught on Fort Peck reservoir. Public uses like fishing are often important public issues.

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Comment Deadline

We have extended the scoping comment deadline from February 4, as announced in the *Federal Register*, to February 29, 2008. Although we invite input throughout the planning process until the close of the comment period on the draft CCP and EIS (sometime in 2010), for your comments to be considered in this phase of the planning process, comments must be received by the deadline.

2008 Public Scoping Meetings

- Bozeman, Montana
January 28, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Best Western Gran Tree Inn
Aspen Room
1325 North 7th Avenue
- Great Falls, Montana
January 29, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Mansfield Center for Performing Arts
2 Park Drive South
- Ft. Peck, Montana
January 30, 2:00–4:00 p.m.
Ft. Peck Interpretive Center
Multi-purpose room
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Malta, Montana
January 30, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Great Northern Hotel
Basement
2 South 1st Street
- Lewistown, Montana
February 4, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Yogo Inn
Sapphire Room
211 East Main Street
- Jordan, Montana
February 5, 2:00–4:00 p.m.
VFW Post
11 South Main Street
- Billings, Montana
February 6, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Billings Hotel and Convention Center
1223 Mullowney Lane



These youths practice their sharpshooter skills. The refuge offers opportunities for young people to get involved in hunting.

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A Vision for the Future

During October 2007, in the *Draft Vision and Goals Workshop*, refuge staff began thinking about the important qualities of Charles M. Russell NWR and how the refuge should look in the future. A vision is a compelling, future-oriented expression of what the site should be, or what the Service hopes to do, based primarily on the mission of the National

Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) and the legislative purposes of the refuge. Goals are descriptive, open-ended, and often broad statements that direct work toward achieving the vision. During the public meetings and scoping process, the public will be asked to review the statements and offer suggestions for refinement.

Draft Vision

Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge's expansive badlands, cottonwood river bottoms, old-growth forested coulees, sagebrush steppe, and mixed-grass prairies appear out of the sea that is the northern Great Plains.

Encompassing more than a million acres, the refuge affords visitors solitude, serenity, and unique opportunities to experience natural settings and wildlife similar to what Native Americans and later Lewis and Clark observed.

The diversity of plant and animal communities found on the refuge stretch from the high prairie through the rugged breaks, to the Missouri River and Fort Peck Reservoir.

The refuge is an outstanding example of a functioning component of an intact landscape in an ever-changing West.

Working with our neighbors and partners, the Service employs adaptive management rooted in science to protect biological integrity and improve wildlife populations and habitat for a diversity of species.

"One of the things I like best about CMR is the distance between the refuge and the nearest Wal-Mart. The remoteness and potential for solitude is outstanding."

—Refuge employee at the vision and goals workshop



Sharp-tailed grouse in courtship display. The refuge was initially established for the protection of sharp-tailed grouse and pronghorn.

Draft Goals

■ *Habitat and Wildlife*—Conserve, restore, and improve the biological integrity and ecological diversity of plant and animal communities of the Missouri River Breaks and surrounding prairies to support healthy populations of native plants and wildlife.

■ *Endangered Species*—Contribute to the identification, preservation and recovery of endangered, threatened, and species of concern that occur or have historically occurred in the Northern Great Plains.

■ *Research and Science*—Advance the understanding of natural resources, ecological processes, and the effectiveness of management actions in the northern Great Plains through compatible investigations, monitoring, and applied research.

■ *Wilderness*—Conserve, improve, and promote the wilderness quality and associated natural processes of designated and proposed wilderness areas within the refuge for all generations.

■ *Fire Management*—Promote fire's natural role in shaping and managing the landscape where possible, using the appropriate management response.

■ *Public Use and Education*—Provide all visitors with quality education, recreation, and outreach opportunities that are appropriate and compatible with the purpose and goals of the refuge and the mission of the Refuge System while maintaining the remote and primitive experience unique to the refuge.

■ *Cultural/Paleontological Resources*—Identify, value, and preserve the paleontological and cultural resources of the refuge, and connect refuge staff, visitors, and the community to the area's prehistoric and historic past.

■ *Refuge Operations and Partnerships*—Through effective communication and application of innovative technology, the refuge uses funding, staffing, partnerships, and volunteer programs for the benefit of the natural resources.

Refuge Facts



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Forested coulees and other unique formations on the eastern refuge boundary.

■ Charles M. Russell NWR was established in 1936 as the Fort Peck Game Range for the purpose of sustaining large numbers of sharp-tailed grouse, pronghorn, and other wildlife. In 1963 it was designated as the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Range, and in 1976 the “Range” became a “Refuge” with the Service having full authority for management.

■ UL Bend NWR, which lies within CMR, was established in 1969. Much of it is designated wilderness. About 176,000 acres on CMR are proposed for wilderness designation.

■ The refuge is the largest national wildlife refuge in Montana, covering 1.1 million acres and is the second largest refuge in the lower 48 states.

Charles M. Russell NWR CCP
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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P.O. Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225-0486

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



■ Over 233,081 visitors were reported in the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2006 survey of national wildlife refuges, ranking eighth of the ten most visited refuges. Visitors can see bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, pronghorn, prairie dogs, and over 236 species of birds.

Submit Comments

Public comments will be accepted by written letter or email at the following address until February 29, 2008.

Charles M. Russell NWR
 Comprehensive Conservation Plan
 Attn: Laurie Shannon,
 Planning Team Leader
 P.O. Box 25486
 Denver, CO 80225-0486
 Tel: 303/236 4792 Fax: 303/236 4317

To get on the project mailing list:

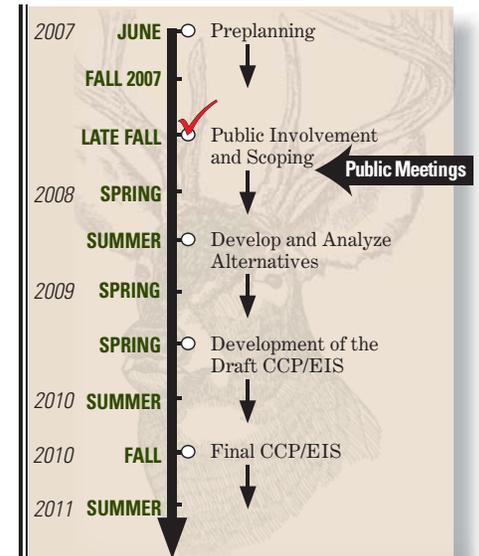
Email: Laurie_Shannon@fws.gov
 Website: www.fws.gov/cmnr/planning

For information about the refuge:

Website: www.fws.gov/cmnr
 Tel: 406/538 8706

CCP Schedule

PROJECT TIMELINE



The CCP process will span 4 years and involve five stages: (1) preplanning; (2) public involvement and scoping; (3) development and analysis of alternatives; (4) development of the draft CCP/EIS; and (5) production of the final CCP/EIS. All stages will include opportunities for public



