

Planning Update

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

Issue 3, August 2008

Alternatives Workshops Scheduled

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has developed four draft management alternatives as part of the comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) process. The draft alternatives are based on the refuge purposes, significance, goals, legal mandates, and comments gathered during the public scoping period in the winter of 2008.

The Service is pleased to present the draft alternatives in this update and during the upcoming public workshops to be held September 2–4 and September 15–17, 2008. The workshops will involve a brief presentation of the alternatives and small group discussions.

Each of the draft alternatives presents a different approach for future refuge

management, with varied focus on wildlife and habitat management scenarios and public uses. No decisions concerning refuge management have been made.

We appreciate your continued involvement in the CCP process and look forward to receiving your input on the preliminary management alternatives. The deadline for comments about these alternatives is October 31, 2008. Public comments will be accepted by letter or email, or in person. Refer to the contact information on the last page of this update.



Brett Billings/USFWS



Brett Billings/USFWS

These youngsters and ferruginous hawk check out the view from down low. No matter what your views are about the refuge's draft alternatives, come share your thoughts with us.

2008 Alternatives Workshops

- Lewistown, Montana
September 2, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Yogo Inn, Sapphire Room
211 East Main Street
- Glasgow, Montana
September 3, 1:00–3:00 p.m.
Cottonwood Inn
Highway 2 East
- Malta, Montana
September 3, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Malta High School Cafeteria
South 9th Street West
- Jordan, Montana
September 4, 2:00–4:00 p.m.
VFW Post
11 South Main Street
- Billings, Montana
September 15, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Montana State University
Student Union
Lewis and Clark Room
3803 Central Avenue
- Bozeman, Montana
September 16, 4:30–6:30 p.m.
Best Western Gran Tree Inn
1325 North 7th Avenue
- Great Falls, Montana
September 17, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Mansfield Center for
Performing Arts
2 Park Drive South

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Development of Alternative Management Plans

Process for Developing Alternatives

The Service's planning process requires examining a range of reasonable alternatives for managing Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and UL Bend NWR (a refuge within a refuge). By gathering public input on the draft alternatives before the draft CCP and environmental impact statement (EIS) is written, the Service ensures that impacts, trade-offs, ideas, and concerns voiced by the public, stakeholders, and tribes are considered prior to writing the draft CCP and EIS. Once the draft CCP and EIS is published (spring 2010), there will be another opportunity to provide input prior to the selection of a preferred alternative in the final CCP and EIS (spring 2011).

Alternatives as Concepts

Three action alternatives and the no-action alternative are described in this planning update. All of the project documents that led to the development of the alternatives can be found on the project website at www.fws.gov/cmr/planning including the draft vision and goals (Planning Update 1), which outline the overall direction of the plan.

For each alternative, there is a concept statement or "theme" that describes the approach used to achieve the vision. The no-action alternative is based on



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Each alternative has a different emphasis for habitat management.

how the refuge is managed currently and serves as a baseline for comparing the resource conditions and public uses prescribed by the other three alternatives.

Under each alternative concept, the actions for different categories are described. These actions generally focus on what future conditions and uses should occur. At this stage, there are fewer specific details of how they should be achieved. As an example, an alternative may describe using a management tool such as prescribed fire or grazing but would not describe how many acres would be burned or grazed annually. Those details will be outlined in the next stage of the planning process when objectives and strategies are written or in future step-down plans. The categories under each alternative are linked to the issues identified during public and internal scoping.

Draft Proposed Action

The Service's planning policy requires that one of the alternatives be identified as the draft proposed action. The proposed action is the alternative that the Service believes best fulfills the refuge purposes and the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Despite having identified the proposed action, the Service has not made any final decisions concerning alternatives and is soliciting input from the public on what approaches are most appropriate for the future of the refuge.

Illustrations of Alternatives

The descriptions and illustrations on the following pages summarize what future conditions would look like under each of the alternatives. Seven categories were used: habitat and wildlife, wilderness, water resources, public uses, cultural/paleontological resources, refuge operations, and partnerships. A more detailed chart can be found on the project website.



Brett Billings/USFWS

Father and son scout for deer during archery season. The refuge is renowned for its hunting opportunities. The proposed alternatives address different approaches to wildlife management and public uses.

Summary of Draft Alternatives

Alternative A—No Action

Maintain existing wildlife population goals, wildlife habitat management, wildlife-dependent public uses, and economic uses.

Alternative B—Wildlife and Habitat Emphasis

Manage the landscape, in cooperation with our partners, to emphasize the abundance and diversity of wildlife populations using both balanced natural ecological processes such as fire and wild ungulate herbivory and responsible active management such as farming practices or tree planting. Encourage wildlife-dependent public uses and limit economic uses when they compete with wildlife for habitat resources.

Alternative C—Public Use and Economic Emphasis

In cooperation with our partners, manage the landscape to emphasize and promote maximum compatible wildlife-dependent public uses and economic uses while protecting wildlife populations and habitats to the extent possible. Minimize damaging impacts to wildlife habitats while using a variety of management tools to enhance and diversify public and economic opportunities.

Alternative D—Ecological Processes Emphasis (Draft Proposed Action)

In cooperation with our partners, use natural dynamic ecological processes and active management in a balanced responsible manner to restore and or maintain the biological diversity, biological integrity, and environmental health. Once natural processes are restored, a passive management approach is adopted. Provide for quality wildlife-dependent public uses and experiences. Manage (or limit) economic uses when they are injurious to ecological processes.



Hungry vesper sparrows. Wildlife conservation is the Service's primary mission.

© Diane Hargreaves

Some Common Definitions

Several terms used in the CCP planning process define how national wildlife refuges should be managed under the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System). More information about these terms can be found at www.fws.gov/policy/manuals (600 Land Use and Management Series).

Wildlife-dependent Recreational Uses

Six forms of recreational activities have been identified by Congress as the priority public uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. Camping, bicycling, horseback riding, and other uses are not priority uses but can facilitate wildlife-dependent recreation provided they are found to be appropriate and compatible.

Compatible Uses

All wildlife-dependent recreational uses, or any other use of a national wildlife refuge, must not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the Refuge System mission or the purposes of the national wildlife refuge.

Appropriate Uses

Proposed or existing uses that meet at least one of the following: is a wildlife-dependent recreational use; contributes to fulfilling refuge purposes, the Refuge System mission, or goals and objectives outlined in a CCP; and the refuge manager has evaluated the use and found it to be appropriate.

Biological Integrity, Diversity and Environmental Health

In managing the Refuge System, the Service is to ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health is maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.



Brett Billings/USFWS

Elk graze during the fall along cottonwood riparian areas near the Missouri River. The management alternatives contrast different ways of balancing habitat and wildlife management, public uses, and economic uses at the refuge.

Illustrations of Alternatives

The following collection of photographs and sketches illustrates some of the differences between alternatives. Alternative A would continue existing management practices, alternative B would emphasize enhancement of wildlife and habitat resources, alternative C would expand and improve public and economic uses, and alternative D would restore dynamic ecological processes. A more detailed comparison chart of the four alternatives follows these illustrations.

Habitat and Wildlife

ALTERNATIVE A
No Action

ALTERNATIVE B
Wildlife and Habitat

ALTERNATIVE C
Public and Economic Uses

ALTERNATIVE D
Ecological Processes

LANDSCAPE SCALE

Lack of Naturally Occurring Ecosystem Process

Ponderosa pines dominate the landscape.



Landscape Management Emphasizes Wildlife

Habitat improved with resources allocated toward wildlife.



Landscape Management Emphasizes Public and Economic Uses

Fewer ponderosa pines dominate the landscape, grasslands have expanded, and public and economic use opportunities are created.



Resources Allocated Toward Restoring Ecosystem Processes

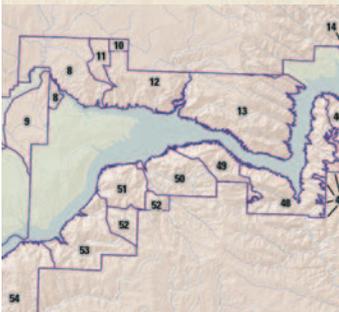
Grasslands and shrubs dominate the landscape with pockets of ponderosa pines.



TYPE OF HABITAT

Maintain Population Levels

Continue habitat units per the 1986 EIS.



Increase Wildlife Populations

Balance game and nongame wildlife.



Increase Game Populations

Balance game and nongame wildlife and improve habitat.



Increase Diversity of Wildlife Populations

Restore balanced ecological processes. More diversity than alternative B.



All photos are courtesy of USFWS except as noted. Above: long-billed curlew, pronghorn, prairie scenes, vesper sparrows, and shining penstemons © Diane Hargreaves.

Habitat and Wildlife

ALTERNATIVE A

No Action

ALTERNATIVE B

Wildlife and Habitat

ALTERNATIVE C

Public and Economic Uses

ALTERNATIVE D

Ecological Processes

RIPARIAN

Maintain Riparian Areas Where Possible

Reduce weeds and fence out livestock. No restoration.



Restore Riparian Areas and Aggressively Reduce Weeds



Maintain Current Riparian Areas

Protect riparian areas as resources become available.



Fully Functioning Ecosystem

Restore natural processes. Manage for diversity. Aggressively reduce weeds.



GRAZING

Maintain Current Grazing Level

Retire grazing permits as they become available. Move gradually to prescriptive grazing.



Actively Reduce Grazing

Only use prescriptive grazing to achieve specific objectives when other tools are not feasible.



Passive Management Approach

If sentinel plants decline, balance reductions of livestock permits with wild ungulate numbers.



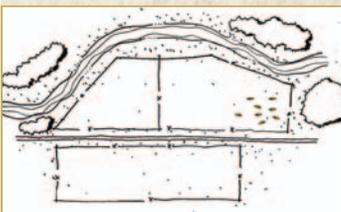
Active Management Approach

Use prescriptive grazing to enhance habitat. Monitor sentinel plants, and adjust management as needed.

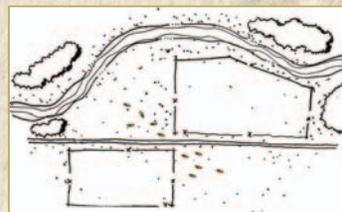


FENCES

Maintain Fencing



Remove Some Interior Fencing



Maintain Fencing

Same as alternative A.

Remove More Interior Fencing

To facilitate patch burning and long-distance wildlife movement.



Illustrations of Alternatives

Habitat and Wildlife/Wilderness

ALTERNATIVE A
No Action

ALTERNATIVE B
Wildlife and Habitat

ALTERNATIVE C
Public and Economic Uses

ALTERNATIVE D
Ecological Processes

FIRE

Limited Use of Prescribed Fire

Increased Use of Prescribed Fire

Increased Use of Prescribed Fire

Use Patch Prescribed Fire

To enhance habitat.

Balance enhanced wildlife habitat and improved forage for livestock.

Establishment of a naturally occurring fire cycle with small patch burns.



REINTRODUCTIONS*

Maintain Ferret Reintroduction Program

Reintroduce Additional Species

Expand Bighorn Sheep Population

Restore Biological Diversity

Improve environmental health.



*Reintroductions rely on partnerships with the State and others. Above: black-footed ferret release © Diane Hargreaves

WILDERNESS AND ROADS

Maintain Existing Wilderness

Roads and inholdings fragment the wilderness.

Evaluate Wilderness Boundaries

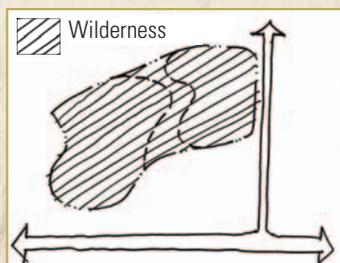
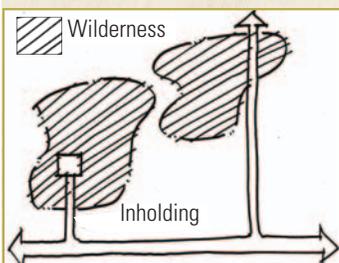
Modify boundaries to avoid fragmentation and consolidate wilderness areas.

Maintain Existing Wilderness

Same as alternative A, plus consider modifying wilderness boundaries to accommodate more public use.

Evaluate Wilderness Boundaries

Same as alternative B, plus consider expanding wilderness boundaries and consolidating wilderness areas.



Public Use

ALTERNATIVE A
No Action

ALTERNATIVE B
Wildlife and Habitat

ALTERNATIVE C
Public and Economic Uses

ALTERNATIVE D
Ecological Processes

RECREATION

Maintain Existing Public Use Opportunities

Improve Quality of Public Use Opportunities

Maximize Quality Public Use Opportunities

Maintain Biological Integrity Through Public Use

Promote understanding of ecological processes.



ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

Maintain Current Accessible Facilities

Meet Needs of All Users

Improve Access for All Users

Meet Needs of All Users

Same as alternative B.



ROAD ACCESS

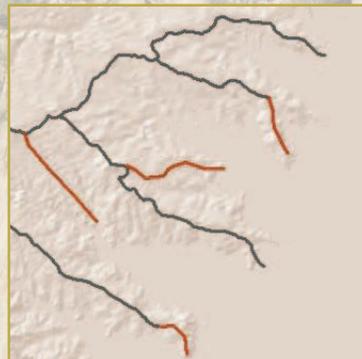
Maintain Current Road Access

Reduce Road Stems

Reduce Road Stems and Improve Access

Reduce Road Stems

Same as alternative B.



Comparison of Alternatives

ISSUE CATEGORY	ALTERNATIVE A—No Action <i>Note: Most alternatives rely on partnerships</i>	ALTERNATIVE B—Wildlife and Habitat Emphasis
Wildlife and Habitat Management	<p>Habitat—Maintain current habitat objectives through fire suppression, big game emphasis, livestock grazing, fences, water development, and control of noxious weeds with some restoration and fencing out of livestock from riparian habitats.</p> <p>Wildlife—Strive to achieve the 1986 EIS target levels for game and nongame species.</p> <p>Migratory Birds—Continue to passively manage.</p> <p>Prairie Dogs—Manage disease where possible.</p> <p>Endangered Species—Continue to monitor and implement existing recovery plans.</p> <p>Reintroductions—Work with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) and other partners on ferrets, prairie dogs, and bighorn sheep.</p> <p>Predators—Allow coyote hunt from start of antelope season to March 1. No hunting or trapping.</p> <p>Wolf Management—No wolves; no plan in place.</p> <p>Grazing—Manage according to 1986 EIS target levels.</p> <p>Weeds—Use weed strike team, update mapping, require certified weed-free hay, use some biocontrols, do active bottomland restoration, have free car washes.</p> <p>Fire—Wildland fire suppression through appropriate management response; little prescribed fire.</p> <p>Fish—Continue work with partners to inventory and manage fish populations.</p>	<p>Habitat—Use intensive management practices (i.e., plantings) or natural processes (i.e., fire, wild ungulate herbivory) to produce highly productive food and cover. Increase fencing to exclude livestock from river bottoms except for water gaps.</p> <p>Wildlife—Maximize populations of game and nongame species. Intensively manage habitat. For select units, maximize game populations within available habitat. Establish new bighorn sheep populations.</p> <p>Migratory Birds—Identify species of concern and manage associated habitat to promote populations. Increase monitoring of key habitats.</p> <p>Prairie Dogs—Restore/expand populations through disease management and population augmentation.</p> <p>Endangered Species—<i>Same as A</i>, plus actively manipulate habitats to promote recovery.</p> <p>Reintroductions—<i>Same as A</i>, plus swift fox, pallid sturgeon, and bighorn sheep, and consider bison.</p> <p>Predators—Increase predator populations and eliminate active predator management.</p> <p>Wolf Management—Develop a wolf management plan in accordance with federal and state regulations.</p> <p>Grazing—Actively reduce permits and use prescriptive grazing to achieve objectives. Remove interior fencing as appropriate.</p> <p>Weeds—<i>Same as A</i>, plus aggressively reduce weeds and restore native plants.</p> <p>Fire—<i>Same as A</i>, plus use approved plan to improve wildlife habitat during a wildfire. Increase use of prescribed fire to enhance habitat and reduce fuels. Monitor effects. Partner with others to address wildland-urban interface areas.</p> <p>Fish—<i>Same as A</i>, plus increase and restore native populations in the Missouri River and tributaries and increase new impoundments for fish.</p>
Wilderness	Manage wilderness and proposed wilderness as if it is designated per Service policy.	<i>Same as A</i> , plus evaluate all proposed wilderness to determine if still meets criteria. Recommend modifications. Consider reductions to enhance habitat manipulation.
Water Resources	<p>Water Development—Continue to cap artesian wells to prevent depletion of groundwater. Maintain and rehabilitate select stock ponds.</p> <p>Quality/Riparian—Continue to restore riparian habitat and adhere to standard watershed management practices. Partner with others on water quality issues.</p> <p>Water Rights—Adjudicate, define, and quantify water rights.</p>	<p>Water Development—Cap wells plus encourage natural water development within streams such as improved flows to benefit wildlife.</p> <p>Quality/Riparian—Address erosion from overgrazing, roads, etc. Retain ground cover to increase flows into streams and protect riparian corridors.</p> <p>Water Rights—<i>Same as A</i>, plus acquire water rights associated with inholdings as they become available and obtain senior upstream water rights if available.</p>

ALTERNATIVE C—Public Use and Economic Emphasis	ALTERNATIVE D—Ecological Process Draft Proposed Action
<p>Habitat—<i>Same as A</i>, plus manage for diverse wildlife-dependent recreation. Manage plant communities with compromise between wildlife food and cover and livestock forage needs. Use fences to prevent further degradation to riparian areas.</p> <p>Wildlife—Strive to maintain balance between big game numbers and livestock numbers to sustain big game and sharp-tailed grouse habitat and populations. Establish new bighorn sheep population.</p> <p>Migratory Birds—Strike balance between migratory birds, public and economic uses.</p> <p>Prairie Dogs—<i>Same as wildlife above.</i></p> <p>Endangered Species—<i>Same as B</i>, but less intensive manipulation.</p> <p>Reintroductions—Work with FWP and other partners to expand bighorn sheep populations only.</p> <p>Predators—Increase predator management through expanded hunting program.</p> <p>Wolf Management—<i>Same as B.</i></p> <p>Grazing—Passively move to prescriptive grazing program as current grazing permits become available.</p> <p>Weeds—<i>Same as B</i>, plus emphasize visitor education and law enforcement.</p> <p>Fire—Use aggressive initial attack to minimize economic loss from wildfire. Increase utilization of prescriptive grazing to minimize fuel loads. Use prescribed fire <i>same as A</i>, except to create balance between enhanced wildlife habitat and improved forage for livestock.</p> <p>Fish—<i>Same as B</i>, except impoundments would serve livestock too.</p>	<p>Habitat—Mimic and restore natural processes and manage for a diversity of species. Initially use active management practices, but evolve toward passive approaches that use natural processes like fire and wild ungulate herbivory. Sustain sentinel species. Exclude livestock from all river bottoms except in designated water gaps.</p> <p>Wildlife—Strive to restore and maintain the diversity of all species by restoring balanced ecological processes and reducing livestock numbers if needed. Establish new bighorn sheep population.</p> <p>Migratory Birds— <i>Same as habitat and wildlife above.</i></p> <p>Prairie Dogs—<i>Same as wildlife above.</i></p> <p>Endangered Species—<i>Same as B and habitat and wildlife above.</i></p> <p>Reintroductions—Partner to restore extirpated species when habitat available and accepted by most of the public.</p> <p>Predators—Function as part of natural processes. Eliminate active predator management.</p> <p>Wolf Management—<i>Same as B.</i></p> <p>Grazing—Actively move toward prescriptive grazing to enhance habitat for wildlife.</p> <p>Weeds—<i>Same as B.</i></p> <p>Fire—Where possible, allow wildfire to perform its natural function by using an active patch burn approach. Use prescribed fire to restore diversity, preserve fire refugial sites and associated plant species, enhance habitat for wildlife, and improve environmental health. Monitor fire effects.</p> <p>Fish— <i>Same as A</i> but improve the health and diversity of all fish populations by restoring streams and riparian areas.</p>
<p><i>Same as B</i>, but potentially modify boundaries to accommodate more public use access.</p>	<p><i>Same as B</i>, but as private inholdings are acquired, look to expand the boundaries of existing wilderness and proposed wilderness. Look to consolidate wilderness and proposed wilderness.</p>
<p>Water Development—Cap wells plus encourage natural and constructed water sources for livestock and public uses.</p> <p>Quality/Riparian—<i>Same as B</i>, except balance water quality restoration with public use and economic needs.</p> <p>Water Rights—<i>Same as B.</i></p>	<p>Water Development—Cap wells plus encourage natural water development within streams to restore natural processes.</p> <p>Quality/Riparian—<i>Same as B.</i></p> <p>Water Rights—<i>Same as B.</i></p>

Comparison of Alternatives

ISSUE CATEGORY	ALTERNATIVE A—No Action <i>Note: Most alternatives rely on partnerships</i>	ALTERNATIVE B - Wildlife and Habitat Emphasis
Public Uses	<p>Hunting—Maintain current programs for ungulates, upland birds, waterfowl, and coyote (limited). No hunting for nongame. No trapping.</p> <p>Fishing—Continue to follow state regulations and cooperate with FWP on paddlefishing.</p> <p>Environmental Education/Interpretation—Maintain limited programs (bus tour, school visits, fair booth) and facilities (interpretive center, kiosks, etc.).</p> <p>Wildlife Observation/Photography—Maintain elk viewing area, trail, auto tour route, and other facilities. Part of regional birding trail.</p> <p>Access—Maintain existing roads (+/-700). Keep roads closed in the 13 proposed wildernesses. Continue seasonal closures. Maintain hunting blind for persons with disabilities. Allow licensed all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) on roads.</p> <p>Other Uses—Allow horse use, ATVs, and bikes on roads. Permit planes to land on water/ice per USACE’s plan. Permit camping within 100 yards of roads; leashed dogs (off-leash okay when hunting).</p> <p>Commercial Recreation—Continue to offer 10 outfitting permits for hunting. Allow nonregulated commercial and guided fishing at the refuge.</p>	<p>Hunting—Provide quality hunting opportunities that sustain populations of big game and habitat for nongame.</p> <p>Fishing—<i>Same as A</i>, plus strive to provide quality opportunities that maintain sustainable population of game and nongame fish.</p> <p>Environmental Education/Interpretation—Create programs that emphasize wildlife biology. Work with partners to expand programs. Update signage, website, and other media and facilities.</p> <p>Wildlife Observation/Photography—Strive to provide opportunities to see many species—birds, big game, prairie dogs, etc.</p> <p>Access—Manage access to benefit wildlife populations. Where necessary increase harvest. Restrict access seasonally to sensitive areas (river and roads). Work with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and others to limit certain types of boats or vehicles, and manage access to certain areas (i.e., harden ramps). Improve accessibility for all visitors.</p> <p>Other Uses—<i>Same as A</i>, with adaptive management as uses increase. Manage camping to fit use. No new uses unless they facilitate wildlife-dependent uses.</p> <p>Commercial Recreation—Permit when it benefits wildlife. Begin to regulate commercial fishing including tournaments. Allow more outfitting when it accomplishes wildlife and habitat objectives.</p>
Cultural and Paleontology Resources	<p>Cultural—Protect according to all laws. Some protection of homesteads, but others turning to ruin. Protect known gravesites.</p> <p>Paleontology—Issue permits to institutions; no recreational digging.</p>	<p>Cultural—<i>Same as A</i>, except increase law enforcement.</p> <p>Paleontology—<i>Same as A</i>, except decrease education permits for colleges for paleontology. Increase law enforcement.</p>
Refuge Operations	<p>Operations—Mineral withdrawal until 2012. Work to renew. Adhere to existing rights-of-way. Maintain current staff levels, facilities, and equipment.</p> <p>Climate Change—Maintain current efforts to reduce carbon footprint through recycling and efficiency. Consider what conditions may exist in the future—drought, more fires, loss of species, etc.</p>	<p>Operations—<i>Same as A</i>, except increase staff and expand facilities at Jordan and Sand Creek. Acquire inholdings from willing sellers.</p> <p>Climate Change—<i>Same as A</i>, plus proactively identify species that are likely to decline and modify management where possible.</p>
Partnerships	<p>Maintain existing partnerships with federal, state, and local entities, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners. Work with partners to promote the refuge as a tourism destination.</p>	<p><i>Same as A</i>, plus improve partnerships. Work with USACE on jurisdiction issues. Pursue opportunities for joint management of fire suppression, prescribed fire, and habitat manipulation. Explore land exchange opportunities where possible. Develop road plan with federal, state, and local partners. Pursue partners and money to increase weed control. Develop refuge friends group.</p>

ALTERNATIVE C - Public Use and Economic Emphasis	ALTERNATIVE D - Ecological Process <i>Draft Proposed Action</i>
<p>Hunting—Maximize opportunities: expand to include new species and weaponry (primitive weapons). Increase youth hunts. Expand mule deer and predator programs. Allow trapping.</p> <p>Fishing—<i>Same as A</i>, plus increase access to lake areas. Consider winter shoreline access to ice fishing. Increase youth opportunities and other events.</p> <p>Environmental Education/Interpretation—Create programs that emphasize diverse uses including more youths. Educate visitors on invasive aquatic plants. Increase interpretation of paleontological resources. Update signage, website, and other facilities.</p> <p>Wildlife Observation/Photography—Emphasize opportunities that highlight wildlife and habitat. Identify new areas for viewing. Increase ecotourism to see many species.</p> <p>Access—Expand access in some areas and close other areas seasonally to protect habitat. Provide for diverse experiences and accessibility. Improve access to boat ramps. Promote nonmotorized access, but consider allowing for game retrieval in closed areas outside wilderness. Work with counties to manage access and roads. Work within existing policies to improve access for livestock permittees.</p> <p>Other Uses—<i>Same as A</i>, with adaptive management as uses increase. Establish new campsites and campgrounds. Look to create designated horse camps. Evaluate need for designated sites along lake. Consider new compatible uses.</p> <p>Commercial Recreation—Permit when it benefits the public or economic use. Increase opportunities for ecotourism and other economic uses. Work with USACE and FWP to regulate commercial fishing including tournaments.</p>	<p>Hunting—Provide opportunities that maintain wildlife at levels that restore ecological processes. Work with FWP to manage for desired sex and age ratios of big game. Allow limited predator hunting and trapping where appropriate.</p> <p>Fishing—<i>Same as A</i>, but provide opportunities that maintain game species at levels that restore ecological processes on perennial streams for native prairie fish.</p> <p>Environmental Education/Interpretation—Create programs that emphasize importance of ecological processes. Update signage, website, and other media and facilities.</p> <p>Wildlife Observation/Photography—Strive to provide more opportunities, programs, and facilities that highlight diversity of healthy habitats and importance of ecological processes.</p> <p>Access—Manage access to benefit natural processes. Evaluate roads and implement seasonal road closures or openings as needed to encourage free movement of wildlife. Manage ATV use. Work with USACE to limit certain types of boats and manage access to certain areas (harden ramps). Work with counties to determine access and management of petitioned roads. Upgrade and improve existing facilities to current standards for accessibility.</p> <p>Other Uses—<i>Same as A</i>, with adaptive management as uses increase. Evaluate and address camping needs as use changes on the refuge. Harden sites if needed. Limit camping to within 100 feet of numbered routes.</p> <p>Commercial Recreation—Only permit when it benefits natural ecological processes or habitats.</p>
<p>Cultural—<i>Same as A</i>, except increase education opportunities and permits. Promote documentaries and classes. Consider purchase of inholdings for protection.</p> <p>Paleontology—<i>Same as A</i>, except increase education opportunities and permits. Promote documentaries and classes. Consider purchase of inholdings for protection.</p>	<p>Cultural—<i>Same as A</i>, except limit or manage special use permits to protect habitat.</p> <p>Paleontology—<i>Same as A</i>, except limit or manage special use permits to protect habitat.</p>
<p>Operations—<i>Same as B</i>.</p> <p>Climate Change—<i>Same as B</i>.</p>	<p>Operations—<i>Same as B</i>.</p> <p>Climate Change—<i>Same as B</i>.</p>
<p><i>Same as B</i>, plus emphasize and adapt partnerships to increase tourism. Work with nonprofit organizations interested in developing ecotourism opportunities. Develop partnerships with sporting organizations. Establish detailed agreements with fire districts. Expand volunteer groups.</p>	<p><i>Similar to B</i>.</p>

Cooperating Agencies

Under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, lead agencies are encouraged to consult, coordinate, and cooperate with relevant federal, state, local, and tribal governments concerning the environmental effects of their actions. Generally, agencies that have jurisdiction, or offer special expertise and knowledge needed for the completion the EIS, or provide other benefits to the lead agencies can be invited to be cooperating agencies for a plan.

In accordance with the Service's planning policy (www.fws.gov/policy/602fw1.html), the Service began the planning process with formal notification to Native American tribes and other federal and state agencies with a land management interest by inviting them to participate as cooperating agencies.

The Service received formal requests from the six counties and conservation districts adjacent to the refuge requesting cooperating agency status.

After careful review of departmental and bureau policies, recommendations to the heads of agencies by the Council on Environmental Quality, and

Executive Order 13352 on Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation (2004), the Service granted cooperating agency status to the following agencies:

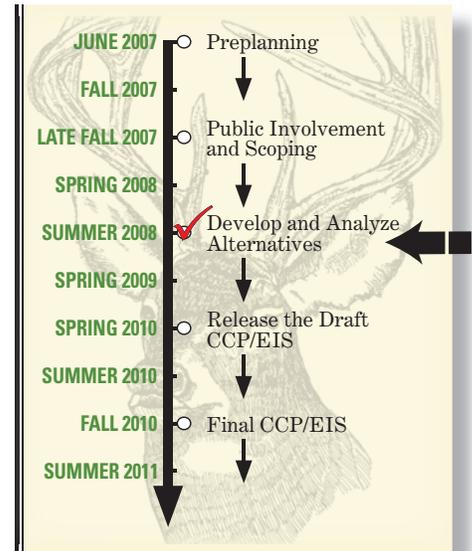
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Bureau of Land Management
- Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
- Montana Department of Natural Resources
- The six counties adjacent to the refuge
- The six conservation districts adjacent to the refuge

There are many benefits of having agencies participate as cooperating agencies; however, the Service is the final decision maker for the plan. Being a cooperating agency does not enlarge the power of one stakeholder group over another. The Service is committed to listening to all stakeholders, citizens, and tribes who participate in the comprehensive conservation planning process.

When finalized, a copy of the memorandum of understanding with the cooperating agencies will be posted to the project website.

Next Steps

Project Timeline



Following the public workshops on the draft alternatives presented in September, we will post an update of what we heard during the meetings. After this, the alternatives will be analyzed and the draft plan written. We anticipate having a draft plan available for review by spring 2010.

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Grassland birds like the long-billed curlew are decreasing across the Great Plains.

