

II. Planning Process

Description

The project leader for the Crescent Lake/North Platte National Wildlife Refuge Complex and the manager of the Crescent Lake Refuge were assigned primary responsibility for planning in May 1998. An open house/scoping session was held in Oshkosh on July 16, 1998, to inform the public of the planning process and to seek ideas on Refuge programs and issues.

About 150 invitations were mailed to local and national stakeholders (educators, permittees, neighbors, other agencies and non-profit organizations). The general public was also invited through widely published/broadcast news releases. Information could also be obtained by contacting the Refuge Manager and comments could be submitted in writing.

Refuge staff also met personally with the Alliance Office of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC), Wildcat Audubon Society, the North Platte Valley Sportsmans Association, the Alliance Rotary Club and the Scottsbluff Lions Club to discuss the CCP process.

In November 1998, the Project Leader formed an interdisciplinary team to provide input and critical review (Appendix K).

The final CCP will guide management of the Crescent Lake Refuge for the next 15 years. It will be used to prepare and revise step-down management plans, performance plans, and budget requests. The Plan will be reviewed during routine Refuge inspections and programmatic evaluations. When changes are needed, the level of public involvement and associated NEPA documentation will be determined by the Project Leader. The entire plan will be formally reviewed and revised at least every 15 years.

Planning Assumptions / Limitations

Proposed Wilderness Area

The 24,502-acre proposed Wilderness Area, until accepted or rejected by Congress, must be managed as if it was wilderness; only "minimum tools" can be used (see Section IV and Appendix G).

Research Natural Areas

The two officially designated RNAs (1,076 acres) are to remain free of human disturbance, including habitat management and public use.

Planning Issues

The following issues were identified during the public scoping process and/or discussions with review team members. Some additional information is available in the Environmental Assessment (published with the Draft CCP).

Wilderness Proposal and Research Natural Areas

(see previous page)

Endangered Species

The Refuge is within the range of the blowout penstemon, a federally-listed endangered plant, and plays an important role in its survival.

Public Access

The Refuge is accessible only by relatively narrow, rough roads; most interior roads are passable only with four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Hunting and Fishing

The Refuge is open to deer and upland bird hunting but not waterfowl.

Invasive Species

Canada thistle exists in varying densities throughout the Refuge, including the Proposed Wilderness Area and Research Natural Areas. Phragmites is an aggressive wetland invader.

Bison Reintroduction

Bison were once part of the Sandhills Prairie ecosystem and should be considered for reintroduction into the Proposed Wilderness Area.

Lands of Interest

Several adjacent areas are potentially important for the endangered blowout penstemon, wetland values, and migratory birds and are candidates for additional protection.

Staffing and Funding

Several people expressed concern that funds would never be available to staff the Refuges and implement the Plan.

