

Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

September 2002

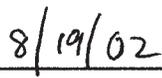
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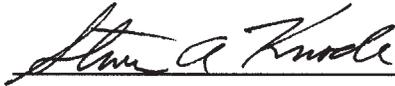
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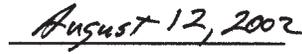

Date

**Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Comprehensive Conservation Plan Approval
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6**

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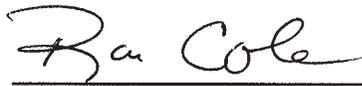


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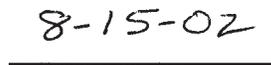


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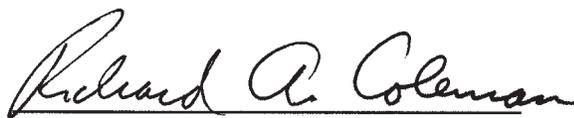
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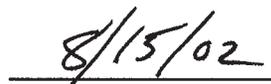
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Summary

Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge is located in Garden County on the eastern edge of the Nebraska Panhandle. It lies on the southwestern edge of the 19,300 square mile Nebraska Sandhills, the largest sand dune area in the Western Hemisphere and one of the largest grass-stabilized regions in the world. The Sandhills are characterized by rolling, vegetated hills and interdunal valleys which are oriented in a northwest to southeast direction. Many shallow lakes and marshes are interspersed in the lower valleys. Native grasses predominate. Wildlife diversity, except large ungulates and their predators, is relatively unchanged since early settlement.

There are 21 wetland complexes on the Refuge totaling approximately 8,251 acres or about 18 percent of the total area. These wetlands are a mixture of shallow lakes, marshes, seasonal wetlands, wet meadows and a small stream resulting from Refuge management activities.

The Sandhills are within a wide transitional zone called the Mixed Grass Prairie which lies between Tallgrass Prairie to the east and Short Grass Prairie to the west. Although precipitation is typical of the semi-arid Mixed Grass Prairie, the Sandhills are characterized by post-climax, tallgrass species typical of a greater moisture regime (Oosting 1948; Keeler, et al 1980).

The Nebraska Sandhills are one of the few large native prairie areas in the United States that have not been substantially converted to farmland or otherwise modified. Thus, most of the plant and animal species present when settlement began are still present today.

This is a 15-year Plan, but only the goals will remain static. Objectives and strategies are based on present knowledge and reflect known needs. They may change, as may specific management actions, as knowledge and needs change. Public involvement will be sought for any significant amendments.

It is also important to understand that individual objectives cannot be taken out of context. It is the mixture of objectives that will produce the desired results. Generally speaking, on Crescent Lake Refuge, where the legal mandate is to serve as a "refuge and breeding ground for birds and other wild animals," habitat is managed to support or produce birds and other wildlife. However, because it is the habitat over which wildlife managers have most control, a clear understanding must also occur of the kinds and amounts of habitat needed to support that wildlife. Public use and environmental education are also important functions of the Refuge. Thus, it is important to know what kinds and how much public use can be allowed and remain compatible with the wildlife purposes and objectives.

The main goals of the CCP are:

Endangered, Threatened, and Candidate Species

- **Goal:** *Contribute to the preservation and restoration of endangered flora and fauna that are or were endemic to the Crescent Lake Refuge area.*

Upland Habitat

- **Goal:** *Preserve, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity of indigenous flora and fauna of the physiographic region described as the Sandhills Prairie.*

Wilderness

- **Goal:** *Preserve, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity of indigenous flora and fauna of the physiographic region described as the Sandhills Prairie, while maintaining and enhancing the wilderness quality.*

Wetland Habitat

- **Goal:** *Maintain natural and artificially managed permanent and semipermanent wetlands to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and associated wetland-dependent species.*

Fish and Wildlife

- **Goal:** *Preserve, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity and abundance of migratory birds and other indigenous fish and wildlife with emphasis on grassland-dependent species.*

Interpretation and Recreation

- **Goal:** *Provide visitors an opportunity to enjoy, learn about and utilize fish and wildlife in a setting that emphasizes an undisturbed natural environment and minimum human interaction.*

Community Involvement / Support Systems

- **Goal:** *Interact with communities and organizations to create mutually beneficial partnerships.*



Meadowlark © Cindie Brunner

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Purpose and Vision

Legal Purpose

Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge was established on March 16, 1931, by Executive Order 5597 which defined the legal purpose as an area “. . . reserved and set apart . . . as a refuge and breeding ground for birds and wild animals.”

It is important to understand this legal purpose, particularly because it includes all wild animals, not just migratory birds. It is the hub around which planning, management actions, and compatibility determinations revolve.

Vision

“I am the grass; I cover all . . .
“I am the grass
Let me work”
- Carl Sandberg (Grass)

A sea of grass in a sea of grass, Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge was established primarily for the concentration of native prairie and associated wetlands which, together, attract a wide variety of wildlife, particularly migratory birds. But, like all national wildlife refuges, Crescent Lake Refuge is not an island, independent of what goes on around it. It is part of larger and dynamic social, economic and biological communities, communities that also affect wildlife that use the Refuge. Unlike many Refuges, however, surrounding land use, principally cattle grazing, is relatively stable, public use is relatively low, and there are few threats from the outside.

Thus, we envision a Refuge about the same size it is now, the purpose of which is to maintain in perpetuity a representative sample of the native prairie and wildlife associated with this part of the Nebraska Sandhills. We see habitat in excellent condition, fewer exotic plants, and a healthy and growing population of blowout penstemon, an endangered plant. We see a visiting public which values the solitude and for which relatively few but high quality learning and recreational facilities are available. We see about half of the Refuge as a National wilderness area which supports bison, a species not present in the area in a wild state for over 100 years. We see the Refuge doing its part to support migratory birds enjoyed by people in States up and down the Central Flyway. We see active partnerships with surrounding landowners to help them maintain habitat on private lands while engaged in sustained, profitable agriculture. We see the Refuge as a contributing part of the Nebraska Sandhills.

