

Chapter 1. Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has developed this draft comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) to provide a foundation for the management and use of the Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex (complex), which includes Long Lake NWR, Slade NWR, Florence Lake NWR, and the Long Lake Wetland Management District (WMD or district). The plan is intended to serve as a working guide for management programs and actions over the next 15 years.

The CCP was developed in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) and Part 602 (National Wildlife Refuge System Planning) of the Service Manual. The actions described within this plan also meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Compliance with NEPA is being achieved through the involvement of the public and the inclusion of an integrated environmental assessment (EA).

When fully implemented, this CCP will strive to achieve the program vision and the purposes of the complex. Fish and wildlife and their habitats are the first priority in management of Service lands, and public use (wildlife-dependent recreation) is allowed and encouraged as long as the activity has been determined to be compatible with the biological objectives outlined in this CCP.

A planning team comprised of representatives from various Service programs, including complex staff and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF), prepared this CCP.

After reviewing a wide range of public comments and management needs, the planning team developed a proposed alternative. This alternative will attempt to address all significant issues while determining how best to achieve the intent and purposes of the complex. The proposed alternative is the Service's recommended course of action for the future management of these refuges and the district, and is embodied in this draft.

Purpose and Need for Plan

The purpose of this CCP is to identify the role that the complex will play in support of the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), and to provide long-term guidance to management programs and activities. The CCP is needed to:

- provide a clear statement of direction for the future management of the program;
- provide landowners, neighbors, visitors, and government officials with an understanding of the Service's management actions on and around these refuges and waterfowl production areas (WPAs);
- ensure that the Service's management actions are consistent with the mandates of the Improvement Act;
- ensure that the management of these refuges and WPAs is consistent with federal, state, and county plans, and;
- provide an outline for the development of budget requests for the programs operational, maintenance, and capital improvement needs.

Perhaps the greatest need of the Service is to build relationships with landowners and communicate with the public and other partners in efforts to carry out the mission of the Refuge System. Sustaining our nation's fish and wildlife resources is a task that can be accomplished only through the combined efforts of governments, businesses, and private citizens.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

"The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, working with others, is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

Over 100 years ago, America's fish and wildlife resources were declining at an alarming rate. Concerned citizens, scientists, and hunting and angling groups joined together to restore and sustain our national wildlife heritage. This was the genesis of the Service.

Today, the Service enforces federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores vital wildlife habitat, protects and recovers endangered species, and helps other governments with conservation efforts. It also administers a federal aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars to states for fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, and related programs across America.

The Service manages the program along with the rest of Refuge System, thousands of WPAs, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations.

Service Activities in North Dakota

Service activities in North Dakota (State) contribute to the State's economy, ecosystems, and education programs. The Service employs approximately 160 people and provides economic benefits that are a result of the fishing, hunting, and wildlife observation and photography activities in the complex. Although a figure has not been determined, most visitors from outside Burleigh, Kidder, and Emmons counties frequent motels, restaurants, and other businesses in Bismarck, Steele, Linton, and other surrounding communities, while visiting the complex.

The complex employs eight full-time equivalent employees, with a current budget of \$741,700. Long Lake NWR has 10,000 visitors annually, while approximately 60,000 visitors utilize WPAs for recreation annually. The budget includes funds for the fire program and management of one wildlife development area (WDA). WDAs are transfer lands acquired by the Bureau of Reclamation and then transferred to the Service. Their purpose is to mitigate project impacts associated with development of the Garrison Diversion Project. In addition, 997 volunteer hours are annually contributed to complex operations.

The North Dakota Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration program is a source of federal excise taxes paid by hunters, anglers, and boaters on fishing and hunting equipment. The monies generated from this tax have economic benefits to the State. In 1998 the economic impact of angler expenditures was \$206 million and hunters contributed \$176 million to the overall economy of the State.

The Service's Partners for Wildlife program contributes significantly to the rural economy of the State. Along with several partners, the Service has helped 3,318 landowners enhance wildlife habitat on 191,225 acres of private wetlands and uplands and 48 miles of riparian habitat since 1987. Over 233,354 acres of wetlands and associated uplands have been restored, enhanced, or protected in the State through funds from the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA). Substantial portions of the districts are part of the Chase Lake Prairie Project area which targets protection and development of migratory bird habitat on private lands.

The Service's Ecological Services Program augments the Refuge System by assuming a primary role in endangered species consultation, tracking, recovery, and listing activities as well as monitoring development projects, which are federally funded for compliance with environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

The State contains two national fish hatcheries and one Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Office. These programs augment and assist fishery programs on refuges and WPAs in the State.

The district continues to pursue an active acquisition program through funding provided by the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program (SWAP). Most activity focuses on protecting wetland and grassland habitat through the purchase of perpetual easements.

Substantial private organization funding augments the Service's habitat protection and development efforts. Ducks Unlimited, Inc., Delta Waterfowl Foundation (Delta), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the NDGF, along with others, are primary partners.

The National Wildlife Refuge System

In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt designated the 5.5-acre Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first wildlife refuge for the protection of brown pelicans and other native, nesting birds. This was the first time the federal government set aside land for the sake of wildlife. This small but significant designation was the beginning of the Refuge System. One hundred years later, this system has become the largest collection of lands in the world specifically managed for wildlife, encompassing over 96 million acres within 544 refuges and over 3,000 small areas for waterfowl breeding and

nesting. Today, there is at least one refuge in every state in the nation, as well as in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In 1997 a clear mission was established for the Refuge System through the passage of the Improvement Act. That mission 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."

The Improvement Act further states that each refuge shall be managed to:

- fulfill the mission of the Refuge System;
- fulfill the individual purposes of each refuge;
- consider the needs of fish and wildlife first;
- develop a CCP for each unit of the Refuge System, and fully involve the public in the preparation of these plans;
- maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System;
- recognize that wildlife-dependent recreation activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, are legitimate and priority public uses, and;
- retain the authority of refuge managers to determine compatible public uses.

In addition to the overall mission for the Refuge System, the wildlife and habitat vision for each refuge stresses the following principles:

- Fish and wildlife come first.
- Ecosystems, biodiversity, and wilderness are vital concepts in refuge management.
- Refuges must be healthy.
- Growth of refuges must be strategic.
- The Refuge System serves as a model for habitat management with broad participation from others.

Following passage of the Improvement Act, the Service immediately began efforts to carry out the direction of the new legislation, including the preparation of CCPs for all refuges. The development of these plans is now ongoing nationally. Consistent with the Improvement Act, all refuge CCPs are being prepared in conjunction with public involvement, and each refuge is

required to complete its own CCP within the 15-year schedule (by 2012).

People and the National Wildlife Refuge System
America's fish and wildlife heritage contributes to the quality of our lives and is an integral part of our Nation's greatness. Wildlife and wild places have always given people special opportunities to have fun, relax, and appreciate our natural world.

Whether through bird watching, fishing, hunting, photography, or other wildlife pursuits, wildlife recreation also contributes millions of dollars to local economies. In 2002 approximately 35.5 million people visited a refuge, mostly to observe wildlife in their natural habitats. Visitors are most often accommodated through nature trails, auto tours, interpretive programs and hunting and fishing opportunities. Significant economic benefits are being generated to the local communities that surround the refuges. Economists have reported that refuge visitors contribute more than \$792 million annually to local economies.

The Service has made draft compatibility determinations for the complex (appendix A).

Ecosystem Descriptions and Threats

Central Flyway

The complex is located in the Central Flyway, which is one of four administrative flyways in North America (see figure 2, regional context map). The states and Canadian provinces included are: Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Wyoming, Alberta and Saskatchewan. The Central Flyway Council is made up of federal, state, and provincial representatives, who meet regularly to coordinate population surveys, regulate and set hunting seasons, and plan for management of the migratory bird resource.

In 1986 Canada, the United States, and Mexico united to form the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), designed to restore diminishing continental waterfowl populations to the levels of the 1970s.

The NAWMP brought together federal, state/provincial agencies, private conservation organizations, private landowners, and business leaders from the three countries into "Joint Ventures." Joint Ventures are regionally based, self-directed partnerships that carry out science-

based conservation through a wide array of community participation. Joint Ventures strive to:

- build partnerships for conservation where participation is voluntary and programs are nonregulatory;
- work on public and private lands to protect, restore and enhance critical habitats for waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, and land birds, and;
- build a scientific foundation through improvement of databases, scientific technologies, and monitoring that help partners target conservation efforts to where they will do the most good and make the best use of resources.

Prairie Pothole Joint Venture

The complex lies within the boundaries of the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV). The PPJV was established in 1987, 1 year after the establishment of the NAWMP, and was one of the original six priority joint ventures under the plan. It serves to protect, restore, and enhance priority wetland and grassland habitats throughout one-third (100,000 square miles) of North America's prairie pothole region (PPR) The remaining two-thirds of the PPR is located in prairie Canada. The PPJV includes portions of North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, and Iowa.

Habitats within the PPJV consist of some of the most productive wetland systems in the world. Millions of glacially derived depressional wetlands, commonly referred to as "prairie potholes", and their associated grasslands are tremendously productive and support a diversity of wildlife, especially migratory waterfowl. Although the PPR makes up only 10 percent of North America's total waterfowl breeding area, this region can produce greater than 50 percent of the continental duck population during wet years (Batt et al. 1989).

The PPJV is a dynamic partnership, involving state and federal agencies, private conservation organizations, landowners, universities, and others. It has been an unqualified success since its inception, due in large part to the fact that the above entities have realized that they can achieve more through collaboration than they can accomplish by acting alone.

Missouri River Mainstem Ecosystem Plan

The Service has adopted watersheds as the basic building blocks for implementing ecosystem conservation. The complex is found in the Missouri

River Mainstem Ecosystem. This vast area covers all of North Dakota and South Dakota and small portions of Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana. The major threats identified for this ecosystem include conversion of prairie to cropland and invasive species. The complex contributes to the accomplishment of goals and objectives for this ecosystem through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the partnerships that exist throughout the complex.

Key legislation and policies can be found in appendix D.

National and Regional Mandates

The administration of the Refuge System is guided by a variety of international treaties, federal laws, and presidential Executive Orders (EOs). Management options under each refuge and district's establishing authority and Improvement Act (the legal and policy guidance for the operation of refuges) are contained in the documents and acts listed in appendix D.

The Improvement Act amends the Refuge System Administration Act by providing a unifying mission for the Refuge System, a new process for determining compatible public uses on refuges, and a requirement that each refuge will be managed under a CCP. The Improvement Act states that wildlife conservation is the priority of Refuge System lands and that the Secretary of the Interior will ensure that the biological integrity, diversity and environmental health of refuge lands are maintained. Each refuge must be managed to fulfill the Refuge System's mission and the specific purposes for which it was established. The Improvement Act requires the Service to monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge. A list of other laws and EOs that may affect the CCP or the Service's implementation of the CCP is provided in appendix D. Service policies providing guidance on planning and the day-to-day management of a refuge are contained within the Refuge System Manual and the Service Manual.

The Planning Process

This draft CCP and EA for the complex are intended to comply with the Improvement Act and NEPA and their implementing regulations. The Service issued a final refuge planning policy in 2000 that established requirements and guidance for Refuge System planning, including CCPs and step-down management plans, ensuring that planning efforts comply with the provisions of the

Improvement Act. The planning policy identified several steps of the CCP and EA process (see figure 1):

- Form a planning team and conduct pre-planning;
- Initiate public involvement and scoping;
- Draft vision statement and goals;
- Develop and analyze alternatives, including proposed action;
- Prepare draft CCP and EA;
- Prepare and adopt final CCP and EA and issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or determine if an environmental impact statement is needed;
- Implement plan, monitor and evaluate, and;
- Review plan (every 5 years) and revise (every 15 years).

The Service began the pre-planning process in November 2003 (see appendix E). A planning team comprised of Service personnel from the complex and the regional office, as well as from the NDGF (appendix C), was developed during the kickoff meeting in February 2004.

A notice of intent was published in the *Federal Register* on May 21, 2004. Notification of a public open house was distributed through press releases.

Draft issues and qualities lists were developed during a workshop held at the Service's Bismarck office in late September 2004. Over the course of pre-planning and scoping, the planning team collected available information about the resources of the complex and the surrounding areas. This information is summarized in chapter 4: Affected Environment.

This CCP provides long-term guidance for management decisions; sets forth goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes; and identifies the Service's best estimate of future needs. This CCP details program planning levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning and program prioritization purposes. This CCP does not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.

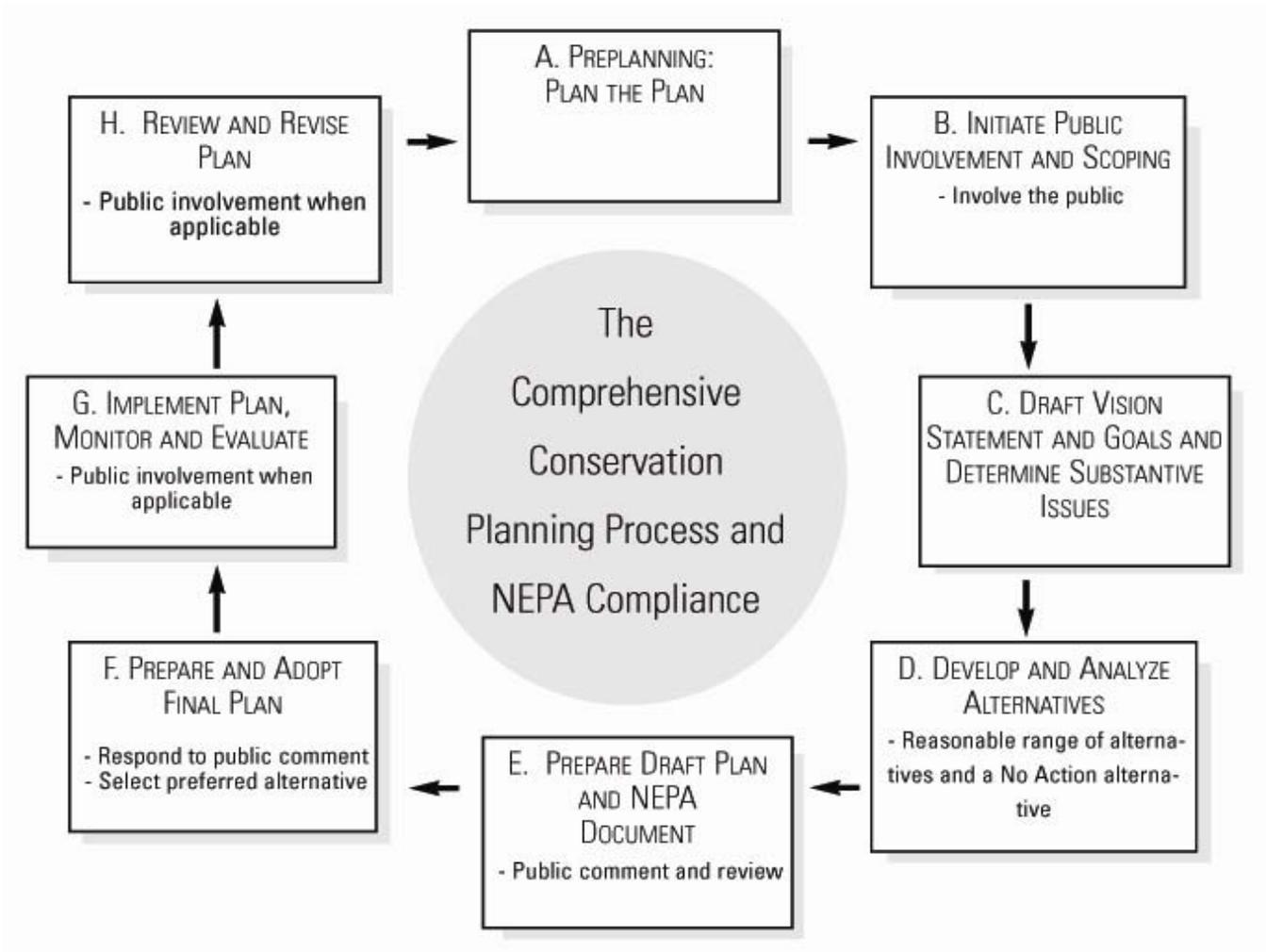


Figure 1. The steps in the CCP process

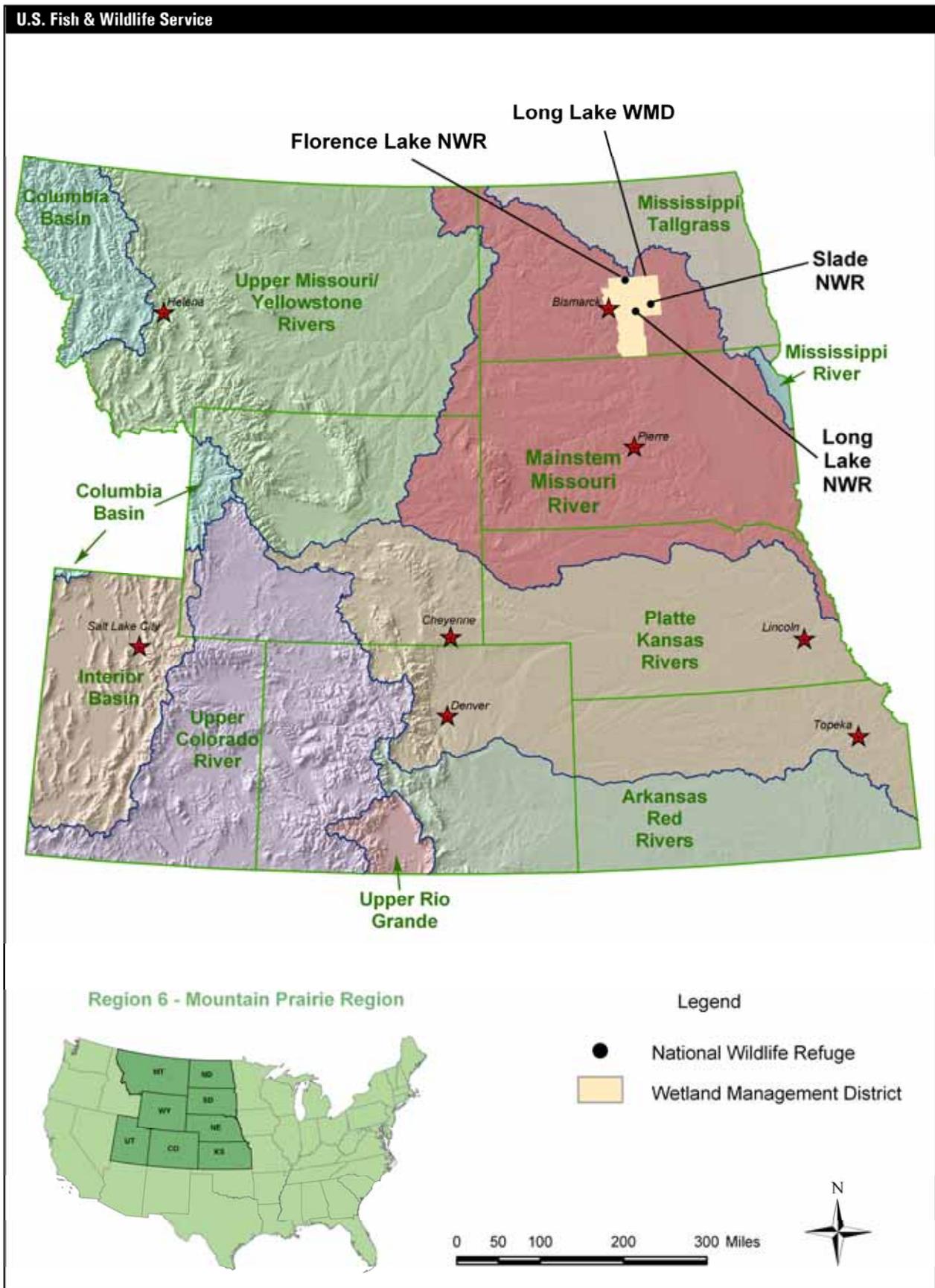


Figure 2: Regional context map

