

Want to Get Involved?

Participation by you and other interested groups and individuals is critical to the success of this planning process. Only then can we develop effective management taking your comments into consideration. In addition to public open houses, periodic planning updates will be sent to individuals on our mailing list. If you would like to be on our mailing list, we must have your written permission. Please complete the enclosed consent form and return to either of the contacts listed below.

Contact Information

We are available to provide additional information about refuge history, goals, and accomplishments to date, and to answer any questions about the planning process. Public comments will be accepted by written letter or e-mail through August 31, 2003, at the following addresses:

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The Next Steps

The next phases of the CCP process will focus on data gathering, research, and the development of alternative management strategies. After analyzing comments gathered during the public scoping phase, members of the Service staff, partnering agencies and the core production team will focus their efforts on gathering data and conducting research. In January 2004, the core team will reconvene to begin developing several planning alternatives for the Refuge. Alternatives will address conservation techniques and Refuge management actions as well as compatible wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities.

When draft management alternatives have been produced, the core team will again turn to the public for their input. During an Alternatives Workshop, the Service will present the alternatives to the public and solicit feedback and ideas for further refinement of the various strategies.

As the planning process unfolds over the next two to three years, the Service will return to the draft vision statement outlined in this document. While the statement today seems like a fair expression of what the Refuge will be like in the future and what it will offer visitors and wildlife, the vision of the Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge may continue to evolve over time. Public comments, innovative ideas and new partnerships will continue to shape the refinement of the vision statement and, in turn, guide the development of the CCP.

The Planning Schedule

Planning Stage	Dates
1. Preplanning	Oct 2002 - Jan 2002
2. Draft Vision Statement and Goals	Feb 2003 - Feb 2003
3. Public Involvement and Scoping	May 2003 - Aug 2003
4. Data Gathering and Research	May 2003 - Dec 2003
5. Develop and Analyze Alternatives	Jan 2004 - Jun 2004
6. Public Input	Jun 2004 - Jul 2004
7. Prepare Draft CCP and NEPA Document	Aug 2004 - Oct 2004
8. Public Review of Draft CCP and NEPA Document	Nov 2004 - Jan 2005
9. Develop Final CCP and NEPA Document	Feb 2005 - May 2005

Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge . . .

“Where prairie and wing touch the Kansas sky”



The National Wildlife Refuge System

In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt protected an island with nesting pelicans, herons, ibis, and roseate spoonbills in Florida's Indian River from feather collectors decimating their colonies. He established Pelican Island as the nation's first bird sanctuary and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his tenure. This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand, later becoming the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Today, 100 years later, the Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 540 National Wildlife Refuges nationwide. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the largest system of lands in the world dedicated primarily for the conservation of wildlife.

In 1997 Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, legislation which provides clear guidance for the management of the Refuge System. The act included a new statutory mission statement and directed the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to conserving wildlife and maintaining biological integrity of ecosystems.

This law requires the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to develop a comprehensive conservation plan for each refuge. It also stated that certain wildlife-dependent recreational uses are priority public uses on refuges and strengthened the compatibility determination process for assuring that these and other activities do not conflict with refuge management purposes and goals.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Kirwin

National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update

Volume One, May 2003

“The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System 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.”

Let Your Voice Be Heard!

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is starting work on a *Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP)* for the Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge. A CCP is a 15-year plan that will provide long-range guidance and management direction for the Refuge.

This planning update has been widely distributed to generate interest in the planning process. If you would like to continue to receive periodic planning updates regarding the Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, please complete the enclosed mailing list consent form and return in the envelope provided.

This planning project provides a unique opportunity for the Service to involve individuals and local communities in the long-term management of the refuge. You can play a significant role in the development of a far reaching plan!

The Service is committed to keeping you informed about the development of the CCP, and invites the public to engage in the planning process and share ideas about the Refuge's future.

Public Scoping Meetings

- **Kirwin**
May 20, 2003
5:00 - 8:00 pm
Kirwin City Library
1st and Main
- **Hays**
May 21, 2003
5:00 - 8:00 pm
Sternberg Museum of Natural History
Fort Hays University
3000 Sternberg Drive
- **Phillipsburg**
May 22, 2003
5:00 - 8:00 pm
Huck Boyd Center
860 Park Street

If you have special needs and plan to attend one of the public scoping meetings, please call 303/236 4378 so arrangements can be made.

The Planning Process

Glossary of Terms

Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP): A 15-year plan that will provide long range guidance and management direction for the Refuge. The plan will outline the Refuge vision and desired future conditions and explain the goals, objectives and strategies necessary to achieve the vision and purpose of the Refuge.

Compatible Wildlife-dependent Recreation: Recreational activities that are directly tied to wildlife. A recreational use is considered "compatible" if it does not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System or the purposes of the Refuge. The six wildlife-dependent recreation activities identified by Congress as the System's priority public uses include: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation.

Vision Statement: A vision statement is a compelling, future-oriented expression of what the Refuge will be, or what the Service hopes to do, based primarily upon the Refuge System's mission and Refuge purpose.

Goals: Goals are descriptive, open-ended, and often broad statements that direct work toward achieving the vision and purpose of the Refuge.

What is a CCP?

Congress passed the National Wildlife System Improvement Act of 1997, which provides the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service with guidance for managing refuges. Important principles of the act are to maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge, and facilitate compatible wildlife-dependent recreation.

Every refuge is required to have a Comprehensive Conservation Plan completed by 2012. The plan will outline refuge goals, objectives, and management strategies. It is a flexible "living" document that will be updated every 15 years.

The accompanying environmental document, environmental assessment or environmental impact statement (EA or EIS), required by the National Environmental Policy Act, will describe management alternatives considered and their effects on the environment.

In summary, the CCP will:

- Outline a vision for the Refuge
- Guide management decisions
- Outline goals, objectives and strategies to achieve the Refuge's vision and purpose(s)
- Provide other agencies and the public with an understanding of the management strategies to be implemented on the Refuge
- Describe the desired future conditions of the Refuge

Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge

Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge is located in the rolling hills and narrow valleys of the North Fork of the Solomon River and Bow Creek in north-central Kansas. The Refuge lies in an area where the tall-grass prairies of the east meet the short-grass plains of the west. As a result of this merging of prairies and plains, grasses and wildlife common to both habitats are found on the Refuge.

Kirwin NWR, the first national wildlife in Kansas, was established in 1954 as an overlay project on a Bureau of Reclamation irrigation and flood control reservoir. The Bureau owns the land and controls reservoir water levels. Refuge staff manage all other activities on the land and water. The reservoir is fed by the North Fork of the Solomon River and Bow Creek. Both are intermittent streams, drying up in periods of low precipitation. Reservoir water levels fluctuate tremendously from year to year, depending upon rain and snow runoff.

Consisting of 10,778 acres, the Refuge supports diverse wildlife habitat including grasslands, wooded riparian areas (found along the banks of the river and reservoir), open water and wetlands. It is one of a system of over 540 refuges administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.



Bluebird © Cindie Brunner

Working Toward A Refuge Vision and Goals

Qualities and Issues

At the public open houses, participants will be asked to comment upon what they feel are important qualities and features of the Refuge and to identify issues of concern related to the Refuge.

Qualities are the characteristics and features of the Refuge which make it special and worthy of refuge status. Qualities build upon the Refuge's purpose. The purpose of Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge is for the "... conservation, maintenance, and management of wildlife, resources thereof, and its habitat thereon, ..." 16 U.S.C. 715d (Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act).

Issues are defined as management concerns that need to be addressed during the refuge planning process. Here are some examples that we have identified:

Qualities

- Kirwin NWR lies within the heart of the Central Flyway, and as such, plays an important role as nesting and feeding grounds for migratory birds
- The presence of a permanent water body (Kirwin Reservoir) in a semiarid environment attracts a large diversity of wildlife

Issues

- The spread of invasive species and woody vegetation is a problem that threatens the integrity of native plant communities on the Refuge and adjacent lands
- Tremendous fluctuation in the water levels of the reservoir create numerous management challenges including, providing access to the shoreline and management of the dry reservoir basin (current data indicates Kirwin Reservoir is entering a period of low water levels due to the natural drought cycle for the next 20 to 40 years)

A Draft Vision

During a Vision and Goals workshop in February 2003, Service staff and representatives from the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation developed the following draft vision statement and goals for Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge.

At public open houses, the public will be asked to review the vision statement and goals and offer suggestions for refinements.

Draft Vision Statement

Along the seam where the tall and short grasses of the rolling prairie embrace and dance in the Kansas wind, two valleys join and beckon wildlife and visitors alike. Visitors to the Refuge will find themselves charmed by the melody of the meadowlark, captivated by the expansive vistas from limestone outcrops and delighted by the bountiful resources of its land and waters. Wildlife-dependent recreation amid the solitude of the Refuge will provide present and future generations with an experience to remember for a lifetime.

The Draft Goals

1. Ecology - Restore the native mixed grass prairie ecosystem (i.e. grasslands, wooded draws, limestone outcrops) and riparian areas above flood levels to emulate natural processes. When water levels are low, diversify wildlife habitats within the dry reservoir basin.

2. Water Resources - Strive to maintain greater water level management and storage specifically for the benefit of fish and wildlife and wildlife-dependent recreation.

3. Research & Science - A scientific approach utilizing the best available information will guide the restoration, protection, and enhancement of the Refuge's water resources and fish and wildlife habitat for the prosperity of native flora and fauna.

4. Cultural Resources - The Refuge will protect significant prehistoric, Native American, and other cultural resources.

5. Refuge Operations - The Refuge will prioritize for "wildlife first" and emphasize the protection of trust resources in the utilization of staff, funding, partnerships and volunteer programs.

6. Public Use - All public uses will be compatible with the purpose of Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The following wildlife-dependent public uses; hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation, will be prioritized. In association with compatible uses, the Refuge will strive to provide a diversity of outreach, research and education and interpretation.

**The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 declares that compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are legitimate and appropriate, priority general public uses of the Refuge System. These six uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation) are to receive enhanced consideration, in planning and management, over all other general public uses of the Refuge System.*

7. Partnership - The Refuge will work to compliment habitat on the Refuge and surrounding landscape by developing partnerships regarding land and water habitat restoration, environmental education, wildlife-dependent public use, research and infrastructure.



Coneflower © Cindie Brunner

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