

Planning Update

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge

Issue 1, September 2009

The National Wildlife Refuge System

The Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge in Montana is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

The Refuge System began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first bird sanctuary and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife. This small network of sanctuaries expanded and became the National Wildlife Refuge System—the largest system of lands in the world dedicated for the conservation of wildlife.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) administers the Refuge System.

What is a comprehensive conservation plan?

In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Improvement Act). This legislation provides clear guidance for management of the Refuge System including a new mission statement.

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.

To support and fulfill this mission, the Improvement Act requires that, by 2012, the Service will have developed a comprehensive conservation plan for each land unit in the Refuge System at the time of the act.

To meet this requirement, the Service has started work on a comprehensive conservation plan for Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge. This 15-year plan will provide long-range guidance and management direction for all refuge programs. The plan will outline a vision statement and supporting goals, objectives, and strategies. It is a “living” document that will be updated every 15 years.



Yellow-headed blackbird, a refuge resident.

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

In summary, the comprehensive conservation plan will do the following:

- Outline a vision.
- Guide management decisions.
- Outline goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve the refuge's vision and purposes.
- Provide other agencies and the public with an understanding of the management strategies to be carried out at the refuge.



Facts About the Refuge

- Established December 1963
- Comprises 2,800 acres
- Located 25 miles south of Missoula, Montana, in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley
- Renamed for Senator Lee Metcalf, a local native Montanan and well-known conservation leader
- Habitats include riverine, ponderosa pine forest, cottonwoods, grasslands, and emergent vegetation
- Bordered by the world-famous Bitterroot River
- Public uses include wildlife observation and photography, hunting, fishing, interpretation, and education
- 120,000 visits annually



Pileated woodpecker

Purposes for Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge

- “For use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” (*Migratory Bird Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 715d*)
- “Suitable for (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species” (*16 U.S.C. 460k-1*); “The Secretary ... may accept and use ... real ... property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors” (*16 U.S.C. 460k-2*). (*Refuge Recreation Act, 16 U.S.C. 460k, as amended*)

Draft Vision Statement

Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge is a jewel of wildlife habitat and discovery nestled in between the towering Bitterroot and Sapphire mountain ranges and bordered by the Bitterroot River.

This valley refuge, fed by mountain snow, is a diverse mosaic of protected grasslands and riparian habitats for migrating songbirds, waterbirds, and other native wildlife, including porcupine and river otters.

The refuge, in partnership with its friends, neighbors, and the community, is a conservation leader ensuring that the remaining biological integrity of this wondrous refuge and valley remains intact or, where appropriate, is restored.

Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge is a place of discovery for visitors to experience wildlife first hand and the area’s unique culture. Children can step out of their urban jungles and experience nature with all their senses. Visitors to the refuge will appreciate the beauty of the land and experience a sense of wonder and pride to be part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

What are the steps and estimated completion dates for this planning process?

1. Preplanning, throughout 2009
2. Public scoping, fall 2009
3. Development of the vision statement and goals, winter 2009
4. Development and analysis of alternatives for addressing issues and achieving goals, through spring 2010
5. Preparation of the draft comprehensive conservation plan and NEPA document, through fall 2010
6. Internal review of the draft comprehensive conservation plan and NEPA document, winter 2010
7. Public review of the draft comprehensive conservation plan and NEPA document, spring 2011
8. Development of the final comprehensive conservation plan, fall 2011

Why did the Service send you this update?

The Service is widely distributing this planning update to generate interest in the planning process and collect ideas and thoughts from the public, state and local governments, organizations, and other partners.

You are receiving this update because you were identified as someone who may want to be kept informed or share ideas about the future management of the refuge.

Will you be getting future planning updates?

If you would like to continue to receive periodic planning updates, please complete the enclosed "mailing list consent" form and return it to the mailing address provided.

Since this mailing list is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, the Service needs your permission to place your name on the permanent mailing list. If you do not return this form, you will not receive any further updates.

How can you participate in this process and provide comments?

There is an enclosed a comment form for you to share your ideas with the planning team. The Service will also accept emails and other written formats. All written comments must be postmarked by October 15, 2009, to be considered.

You may also wish to participate in the upcoming public meetings to be held from 7–9 p.m. at the following locations:

- September 29, 2009
Lee Metcalf National Wildlife
Refuge Visitor Center
4567 Wildfowl Lane
Stevensville, MT
- October 1, 2009
Missoula Public Library
301 East Main
Missoula, MT

There will be a short presentation on the planning process and planning team members will record your issues and ideas related to the refuge.

For directions to the meeting places, please contact the refuge office at 406/777 5552.

Additional Information and Contacts

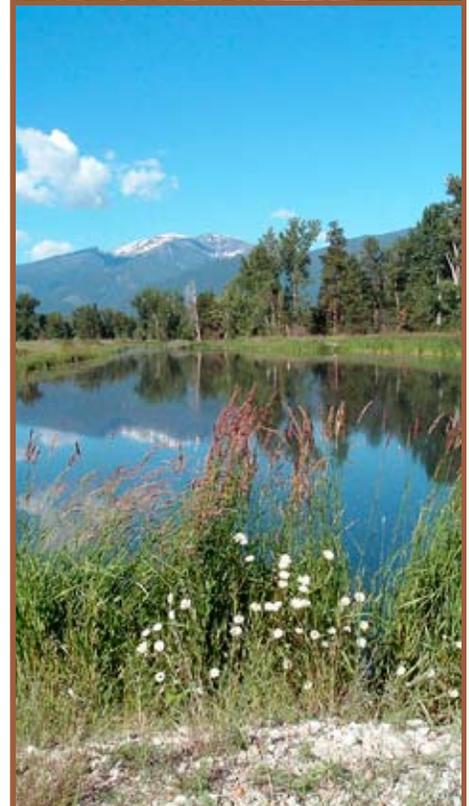
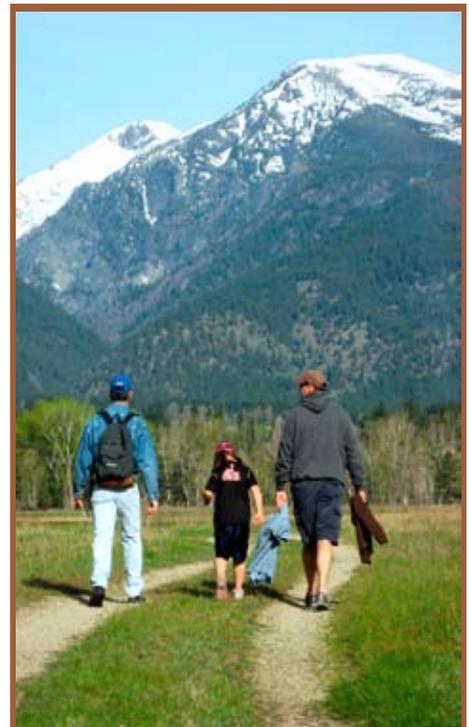
To learn more about the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, please visit the Web at www.fws.gov/leemetcalf.

For questions or to provide comments by email, please contact the refuge at 406/777 5552 or leemetcalf@fws.gov.

You may fax or mail your written comments by October 15, 2009, to:

Laura King, Planning Team Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
58355 Bison Range Road
Moiese, MT 59824
Fax 406/644 2661

To see copies of this and other planning updates online, visit the Web at www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/planning/states/montana/montana.htm.



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Comprehensive Conservation Plan
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4567 Wildfowl Lane
Stevensville, MT 59870**

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