

2 The Planning Process

The Improvement Act directs the Service to manage refuges in accordance with an approved CCP.

This section describes the planning process and issues specific to Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge.

THE PROCESS

The Service is following the planning steps below to determine the future management of the refuge, in a thorough manner that meets requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Service policy.

The CCP process consists of a series of steps that are displayed sequentially; however, CCP planning, with NEPA analysis and documentation, occur simultaneously. Although public involvement is listed as part of two steps, the Service will take public input at any point in the planning process.

- Preplanning (form a planning team, review available data, organize efforts)
- Initiate public involvement and scoping (public input gathered on issues)
- Develop draft vision and goal statements
- Develop and analyze draft alternatives, including a proposed action (includes developing draft objectives)
- Prepare documentation of the NEPA analysis, including the draft plan (proposed action alternative)
- Conduct internal review (Service, state, and tribal partners) and gather public input on draft document
- Analyze and respond to public comments
- Select one of the alternatives, which becomes the CCP
- Make revisions as necessary and prepare the final CCP
- Approve and carry out the CCP
- Monitor and evaluate actions and results

The planning team (described in appendix C) for the CCP is carrying out the process, and has prepared this draft CCP and EA.

Coordination with the public, local groups, and other agencies has been essential in developing a realistic, meaningful plan. A summary of this consultation and coordination is in appendix D.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

Based on the analysis documented in this EA, the following decisions will be made by the Service's regional director for region 6 (Mountain–Prairie Region), headquartered in Lakewood, Colorado.

The type and extent of management and public access that will occur on the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge.

Whether or not the management and public access on the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge would have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment.

DOCUMENTATION

As part of the Service's decision-making process, this EA has been developed in accordance with the NEPA. Four alternatives provide options for addressing management concerns and for resolving public issues. The draft CCP for the refuge is described in alternative A (the Service's proposed action).

This document displays the results of planning to date to develop the CCP. It includes a description of the existing environment on the refuge, alternatives for management, and an assessment of the effects of carrying out the alternatives.

STEP-DOWN PLANS

Step-down management plans describe how specific strategies in the approved CCP will be carried out—and include schedules for management subjects (e.g., habitat, public use, fire, and safety) or groups of related subjects—to meet CCP goals and objectives.

One step-down management plan has already been completed—the hunt plan, which was completed to open the refuge to hunting starting the fall 2002 season (see details about the environmental analysis in appendix A).



John Steinhilber/USFWS

White-tailed Deer

After the CCP is completed, six additional step-down plans will need to be developed or modified:

- Occupational safety and health—*required*
- Inventory and monitoring of populations—*required*
- Habitat management practices—*required*
- Fire management—*required*
- Invasive species management
- Public use
- Habitat management plan

PLAN REVISION

Plans are dynamic—management strategies need to be reviewed and updated periodically. The CCP will be reviewed at least annually to determine if it requires any revisions.

Monitoring and evaluation will determine whether management activities are achieving the refuge purposes, vision, and goals. When significant new information becomes available, ecological conditions change, major refuge expansion occurs, or other needs are identified, the CCP can be revised.

Revision should occur, at a minimum, every 15 years. If the plan requires a major revision, the CCP process starts anew. Plan revisions require NEPA compliance. The public will continue to be informed of and involved with any revision to the CCP.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The NEPA process is being used by the Service to engage the public in refuge planning, while determining whether the proposed action for management of the refuge would have significant effects.

Scoping is the term for requesting input from the public, in this case, regarding management of a refuge. The primary thrust for the planning process is to provide a forum for ideas and issues to be shared, reviewed, and evaluated among agency staff and the public.

Comments are reviewed to identify issues—public concerns about or advocacies for future management of the refuge. These issues are addressed in the CCP, other plans, and decision documents.

Public scoping was initiated in January 1998, when issue workbooks were mailed and open houses were held for public input on management for all the refuges of the National Bison Range complex. An open house was held in March 2001 to request public comment on hunting at the refuge. Appendix D further describes the public involvement process.

ISSUES

This section describes issues regarding the refuge that were identified during public scoping.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Water rights and loss of water downstream due to refuge restoration projects are of concern.

- The public wants the Service to explain hydrology restoration, the purpose, and its impacts.
- Rumors of filling or draining Dahl Lake were questioned.

The CCP will describe the purposes for water management and its impacts.

Strong support and concern exists for the control or eradication of invasive plants.

- Individuals do not want the Service to change land management practices on the refuge so that the distribution of invasive plants increases.
- Concerns were expressed about native plant restoration and control or reduction of reed canarygrass. Reed canarygrass is present on the refuge, yet has been kept down by grazing.
- There were many disagreements about the most acceptable and efficient control methods.

The CCP will outline objectives and strategies for management of invasive plants, as well as for native grass restoration.

Grazing practices and intensity are generally issues.

- A local comment suggested grazing opportunities be continued, but in a compatible manner. Comments regarding the loss of a working ranch seem to center partially on the loss of possible grazing lands.

The CCP will review grazing as a land management tool.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

The public advocates strongly for giving wildlife and their habitat foremost consideration.

- Wildlife-dependent uses must be given a high priority for consideration due to the requirement of the Improvement Act, yet the public had a concern for wildlife to come first.
- The refuge needs to be managed in accordance with the establishing purposes and provide for the conservation and enhancement of fish and wildlife.
- Some individuals suggested the refuge had the most biological potential for deer, elk, and upland birds rather than waterfowl, and could be an important wildlife habitat corridor.

- The refuge has a history of gray wolves occupying the area and conflicts with neighboring ranchers. As a national wildlife refuge, consideration must be given for wolf presence, yet it must be managed in response to depredation problems in compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and wolf recovery plan. It is also possible that grizzly bears use the area to some degree; bears would have to be managed for conservation of the species and to minimize conflict with humans.
- Questions were raised regarding the biological potential for reintroduction of species such as the trumpeter swan and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.
- For a range of management activities, the public wanted to understand how the management techniques were decided and what effects could be expected. For example, how are population targets derived, why have or not have fences, and what impacts could be caused from water manipulation and hunting.

The CCP will contain management direction that addresses the establishing purposes for the refuge.

TRADITIONAL USE

The CSKT are concerned that refuge management activities not harm cultural sites.

- The tribes want a cultural resource survey conducted to define the extent of Native American use and identify sites. The refuge is part of the aboriginal homelands of the CSKT.
- The tribes voiced an interest in subsistence hunting on the refuge.
- The Service may accommodate Native American traditional use, while maintaining the integrity of the refuge.
- Public comments against Native American use generally stem from not understanding the legal requirements and criteria for administering these types of uses.

The CCP will explain traditional uses and provide for a quality public experience for all.

Social concerns for the loss of a working ranch surrounded the acquisition of the ranch.

Ranching is the cultural history of Pleasant Valley, and cattle grazing will be reviewed for opportunities as a land management tool.

PUBLIC USE

Public use was considered highly desirable, yet many wanted it managed in a way that did not degrade wildlife habitat.

- Many desire hunting as a recreational use and want access across the refuge for hunting opportunities on neighboring lands.
- A few commenters requested trapping access on the refuge, yet the majority of opinions were that trapping should not be allowed.
- Photography, nature trails, and fishing are popular requests, along with a few requesting horseback riding, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing.
- Some individuals would like to see no recreational uses allowed.
- Some commenters were concerned about impacts to habitats that timber company crews have during access to the refuge.

The CCP will contain management direction for public use determined compatible with refuge purposes.

ADMINISTRATION

The public was concerned about facilities, refuge expansion outside of designated boundaries, and adequate refuge staffing.

- Facilities were of concern. Many buildings exist on the refuge. It needs to be determined which facilities to use for administrative purposes, along with where to place new structures (e.g., parking lots and signs) for minimal impact to wildlife.
- There were concerns about collaboration with the MPC on issues of access to refuge easements.
- There were concerns about whether the Service would be committed to the time and money required to maximize the potential for use of additional property.

The CCP will display the staff and funding required to effectively administer uses and manage for fish and wildlife.

