



*Visioning for a refuge  
where the mountains  
meet the prairie.*

Vision & Issues Workshop  
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Prepared for the United States Fish & Wildlife Service  
by Shapins Associates

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## Coming Soon: Colorado's Newest Refuge

The future Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge will attract humans and wildlife alike. Situated at the base of the foothills of the Rocky Mountain, the Refuge will provide prime grassland habitat and scenic open space. As development encroaches on the remaining Front Range habitat, wildlife will migrate to the preserved Rocky Flats parcel. Similarly, people in search of a serene natural setting in the increasingly urbanized Denver region will retreat to the Refuge.

Spared from conversion to agricultural use and development for many decades, the Rocky Flats site harbors a diversity of plant communities and wildlife species native to the landscape where the mountains meet the prairie. The vegetation at Rocky Flats is predominantly a mixed prairie ecosystem, with riparian and wetland communities occurring along some drainages, ponds, and seeps. The upland surfaces and gentle hillsides support a mixture of native grasses, forbs and shrubs. Over 590 species of plants

have been identified in the terrestrial communities at and near Rocky Flats. The Refuge is most noted for its xeric tallgrass prairie and upland shrub habitat.

The presence of a federally listed, threatened species, the Preble's meadow jumping mouse, further distinguishes the Refuge's natural resources. Other small mammal populations at the Refuge include the Meadow Vole, White-Tailed Jackrabbit and Black-Tailed Prairie Dog. Large mammals and small predators on site include Mule and White Tail Deer, coyote and raccoon. The Painted Turtle, Prairie Rattlesnake and various frog and toad species represent herpetile populations. At certain times of the year, Elk and occasionally bears travel along adjacent wildlife corridors and use the future refuge site for foraging.

The grasslands on site also provide important habitat for numerous bird species such as the Red-Tailed and Northern Harrier Hawks and the Peregrine Falcon. Numerous common bird populations are found at the Refuge including the Western Meadowlark, Killdeer, Barn Swallow and the Yellow Warbler.



The future Refuge's Rocky Mountain backdrop

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## ***An Open Space Link***

For the future visitor to Rocky Flats, the Refuge location is remarkable because it offers striking views of both the Rocky Mountains and the Denver skyline. With nearly 50,000 acres of publicly owned land surrounding Rocky Flats, the Refuge is also a key component of the Metropolitan region's open space network. The substantial mass of contiguous land encompassing the Refuge will provide wildlife with a habitat corridor that extends from the Continental Divide to the prairie.

over the years resulting in the preservation of native flora and fauna throughout the site.

With the end of the Cold War in 1992, weapons production at Rocky Flats was terminated and the Department of Energy (DOE) began focusing on the clean up and closure of the Site. Sometime after 2006, it is anticipated that all nuclear materials and wastes will have been removed from the Site, all buildings demolished, and any remaining contamination will have been remediated and will comply with the appropriate health and safety standards. The Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Act of 2001 stipulates that upon completion of the clean up and closure tasks, most of the Rocky Flats site will be transferred from the DOE to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) and will become a national wildlife refuge. DOE will retain primary jurisdiction over portions of the site and will continue to have stewardship responsibility of all land in their control.



Lindsay Ranch barn and homestead in Rock Creek

There is more to the history of Rocky Flats than the Cold War. For example, the settlement of the western frontier represents an early chapter in the history of Rocky Flats. The area known as Lindsay Ranch in the Rock Creek drainage of the Rocky Flats site was homesteaded by the Scott family in 1868. Within 50 years of its original settlement, the Scott property transferred hands and, through consolidation, was enlarged to over 640 acres. In 1941, G. Lindsay purchased the ranch and surrounding lands. Ten years later, in 1951, the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission purchased the 1280-acre ranch from Lindsay. An old ranch house, a barn, stock pond and fences remain on the Rocky Flats site today. Despite their dilapidated conditions, these structures are charming and present

## ***Rocky Flats History***

From 1952 to 1992, the Department of Energy used the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (Site) to house facilities for the production of nuclear weapons components. Manufacturing at the Rocky Flats Site was conducted in the 400-acre Industrial Area. An approximate 6,000-acre expanse of grasslands called the Buffer Zone surrounds the Industrial Area. The Buffer Zone has been left largely undisturbed

opportunities for interpreting the site's ranching history.

Today, clean up activity is ongoing on the site and the Service is working with DOE to ensure that the CCP development and the clean up and closure process are well coordinated. The Service provides technical assistance to DOE in order to ensure that clean up and closure activities in keeping with the purpose of the Refuge. In May of 2001, the Service published the Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for Rock Creek Reserve area of the Rocky Flats site. In accordance with the plan, the Service has begun restoring riparian habitat in the Rock Creek drainage. The Service is also implementing programs to control the spread of noxious weeds on the site.

## Planning for a Refuge

The National Wildlife Refuge System's mission and management priorities as well as the legislated purpose of Rocky Flats will provide the basis for developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Rocky Flats. Before developing a vision and management strategies for the Refuge, it is important to understand how national wildlife refuges in general, and Rocky Flats NWR in particular, are intended to conserve fish and wildlife and provide wildlife-recreation opportunities for the American public.

### **National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:**

*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.*

### **National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:**

1. To achieve refuge purpose(s) and further the System's mission
2. Conserve, restore, and enhance threatened and endangered species in their natural ecosystems
3. Perpetuate the migratory bird, interjurisdictional fish and marine mammal populations
4. Preserve a natural diversity and abundance of refuge flora and fauna
5. Conserve and restore, where appropriate, representative ecosystems of the United States, including ecological processes characteristic of those ecosystems.
6. Foster an understanding and appreciation of fish, wildlife and plant ecology and their conservation by providing the public with safe, high-quality, and compatible wildlife-dependent public use.



Coyotes are among the small predators on the Refuge

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**Rocky Flats NWR'S Legislated Purpose:**

1. Restoring and preserving native ecosystems
2. Providing habitat for, and population management of, native plants and migratory and resident wildlife
3. Conserving threatened and endangered species [including species that are candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.)]
4. Providing for opportunities for compatible scientific research.

**Congressional Findings for Rocky Flats NWR:**

1. The majority of the Rocky Flats site has generally remained undisturbed since its acquisition in 1951 by the Federal government.
2. Increasing growth and development within Denver's metropolitan region reduces the amount of open space and, thereby, diminishing Front Range mountain vistas for many metropolitan Denver communities.
3. The Rocky Flats site provides habitat for many wildlife species, including a number of threatened and endangered species, and is marked by the presence of rare xeric tallgrass prairie plant communities.

**Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) & Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)**

A Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is a 15-year plan that will provide long-range guidance and management direction for the Rocky Flats NWR.

In summary, the Rocky Flats' CCP will:

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

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a complementary document to the CCP.

Required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to examine a range of federal actions and their potential effects on the environment, the Rocky Flats EIS requires a comprehensive inventory and analysis of the Refuge's resources. *Qualities* build upon the Congressional findings. They are the characteristics and features of Rocky Flats that make it special and worthy of refuge status. *Issues* are defined as management concerns that need to be addressed during the refuge planning process. Issue identification requires consideration of management challenges both within the Refuge and in relation to adjacent communities and the public.



Prairie Dog

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## ***Focusing on Planning***

Cleanup issues will not be addressed as part of the CCP/EIS development process. The CCP and EIS will focus on the management of the Refuge after the cleanup and closure tasks are finalized. While the Service plans for the Refuge, the Department of Energy (DOE) will manage the remediation and contaminant removal tasks at the former nuclear weapons production site. The Service and DOE will work together to make certain that the planning and cleaning processes are well coordinated. Rocky Flats will not be transferred to the Service until DOE's clean up and closure efforts are complete and the site has met the appropriate health and safety standards.



Participants at the Vision & Issues Workshop

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## **Developing a Refuge Vision & Goal Statements**

In July of 2002, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service staff, representatives from the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), and members of the consultant team responsible for producing the CCP/EIS convened for a Vision & Issues Workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to initiate the internal scoping process for the development of the CCP and EIS for the Refuge. The workshop provided a forum for Service staff and CDOW representatives to share information

about the future Refuge and to exchange ideas about management strategies. Workshop participants initially focused on identifying the qualities and attributes of the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology site and recording issues and topics pertinent to refuge planning. The qualities and issues discussions then led to the collective drafting of preliminary vision and goal statements for the Refuge.

### ***Qualities & Issues***

Qualities build upon the Congressional findings. They are the characteristics and features of Rocky Flats that make it special and worthy of refuge status. Issues are defined as management concerns that need to be addressed during the refuge planning process. Issue identification requires consideration of management challenges both within the Refuge and in relation to adjacent communities and the public.

### ***Vision***

A vision is a future-oriented expression of what the Rocky Flats site will be, or what the Service hopes to do, based primarily upon the Refuge System's mission and the Rocky Flats' purpose. A vision statement explains the intentions of the Service's planning efforts. To be compelling, the Refuge vision must specifically highlight the unique characteristics of the Rocky Flats site.

### ***Goals***

Goals are descriptive, open-ended, and often broad statements of desired future conditions that convey a purpose but do not define measurable units. A well-written goal directs work toward achieving the vision and purpose of the Rocky Flats NWR. The goals drafted at the workshop refer specifically to Rocky Flats NWR. They outline approaches for managing the Refuge's resources and articulate what visitor experiences will be like in the future.

## ***A Unique Refuge [QUALITIES]***

The following were identified as important qualities of the Rocky Flats NWR:

### ***Natural Resource Qualities***

- Healthy upland shrubland communities in Rock Creek and Woman Creek drainages
- Preble's meadow jumping mouse (a federally listed threatened species) habitat
- Intact native plant communities
- Soils that support a xeric tallgrass prairie in an area where rainfall is usually not sufficient to sustain such plant communities
- Mesic mixed grassland
- Year-round deer habitat

### ***Site Qualities***

- An adjacent wildlife corridor extending from the prairie to the Continental Divide
- Nearly 50,000 acres of open space surrounding the site
- Mountain and prairie ecotone
- Proximity to many people in surrounding urban areas
- Unobstructed views of both downtown Denver and the Rocky Mountains
- Proximity to two major universities that can use the site for scientific research
- Preserved habitat and scenic open space on the edge of Denver's rapidly expanded Metropolitan region

### ***Management Qualities***

- A high level of public interest in the Rocky Flats project
- Many potential partners
- A collection of resource and planning experts at the nearby Arsenal NWR that can be called upon to lend assistance

### ***Public Use Qualities***

- Striking views of the surrounding landscape that are likely to attract visitors
- Wildlife diversity for environmental education and interpretation programs
- A scenic open space enjoyed by visitors and passerby's

### ***Cultural Resource Qualities***

- Lindsay Ranch historic structures
- Cold War history
- An Apple orchard and old stagecoach site



Burning helps maintain the ecological health of the prairie

© Fred Krampetz, USFWS

## ***Planning Challenges [ISSUES]***

The following were selected as important issues to be reviewed during the drafting of the vision and goal statements and the subsequent planning of the Refuge:

### ***Natural Resources Issues***

- Surface mining and its potential devastation of existing prairie plant communities
- The spread of invasive weeds and controversial control techniques
- Conservation of Preble's meadow jumping mouse habitat
- The potential spread of wildlife diseases
- Culling and predator control
- Conservation of wildlife movement corridors
- Reintroduction of extirpated species
- Habitat restoration practices

### ***Management Issues***

- Lands retained by DOE are subject to institutional controls
- Prescribed burning as a management tool
- Wildfire suppression
- Grazing and livestock
- Shifting hydrology dynamics upon site closure
- Access control and boundary delineation
- Easement and wildlife corridor maintenance
- Fence design & location
- Infrastructure & facilities/staff/resources needed to operate the Refuge
- Funding sources and availability
- Refuge expansion to include Section 16
- Development along the southern boundary
- Demands for urban infrastructure improvements such as road widening

### ***Public Outreach Issues***

- Resources needed to promote a positive public perception of the Service and the Refuge



Issue identification at the workshop

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- Continued education about the Service's role at the Refuge
- Negative public perception of prescribed burning and hunting
- Human consumption of animals hunted on the Refuge
- Ensuring the site is safe for public access
- Making sure all voices are heard

### ***Public Use Issues***

- Public's anticipation of unrestricted use
- Suggestions to prohibit public access
- Construction of a visitor education center
- Trail types and trail uses
- Bike routes
- Hunting programs

### ***Partnerships Issues***

- Provision for public uses that are complementary with surrounding open space properties

### ***Safety Issue***

- The history of the site as a Superfund project
- Management of wildlife dependent recreation in light of contamination
- Health risks of prescribed burning and consumption of animals hunted on site

### ***Cultural Resource issues***

- The role of the Cold War Museum and Cold War history interpretation
- Interpretation and/or treatment of the Lindsay Ranch structures

## Looking 20 years into the future....

### The DRAFT Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Vision

Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge is a healthy expanse of grasslands, shrublands and wetlands including rare xeric tallgrass prairie where natural processes support a broad range of native wildlife. The Refuge provides striking mountain and prairie views and opportunities to appreciate refuge resources in an urbanized area through compatible wildlife-dependent recreation and education. Working with others, the Refuge conserves the unique biotic communities and sustains wildlife populations at the interface of mountains and prairies on Colorado's Front Range.

## DRAFT Refuge Goals

# 1

### ***Wildlife and Habitat Management Goal:***

The Refuge will conserve, restore and sustain the biological diversity of the native flora and fauna of the mountain/prairie interface with particular consideration given to threatened and endangered species.

This goal expresses a commitment to restoring wildlife and plant species that are native to the landscape where the Rocky Mountain foothills meet the prairie while conserving and sustaining existing populations on the Refuge. Given the presence of the federally listed Preble's meadow jumping mouse at the Refuge, heightened attention will be given to managing habitat for the threatened species.

# 2

### ***Public Use, Education & Interpretation Goal:***

The Service will provide compatible wildlife-dependent recreational, educational and interpretive opportunities for people to learn about and appreciate the National Wildlife Refuge System; the Refuge's xeric tallgrass prairie, upland shrub and wetland habitats; native wildlife; and the history of the site.

This goal highlights the wide variety of public use opportunities the Refuge presents. Given the Refuge's urban context, educational programs and public outreach efforts are likely to target a large population base. Environmental education and interpretive programs will take advantage of the Refuge's natural and cultural resources. Before a public use program is adopted it must be deemed "compatible" in that it does not interfere with or detract from the purpose of Rocky Flats NWR.



The Rock Creek Drainage

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## DRAFT Refuge Goals (cont.)

3

***Safety Goal:***

The Service will conduct Refuge operations and manage public access safely and in accordance with the final Rocky Flats' cleanup decision documents.

In response to concerns about the cleanup and closure of the Refuge, the safety goal demonstrates the Service's commitment to providing a safe visitor experience. The Service will comply with the Department of Energy's cleanup decision documents and abide by all institutional controls.

4

***Effective and Open Communication:***

The Service will proactively communicate with the public and stakeholders about Refuge programs and management decisions as well as the mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Public outreach will be an important component of Refuge management. The Service intends to keep the public informed about Refuge news and plans to educate Refuge visitors and surrounding communities about the Service and the NWR System.



Refuge wildflowers

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## DRAFT Refuge Goals (cont.)

# 5

### *Working with Others:*

The Service will work with others on issues of mutual concern including resource conservation, compatible wildlife related research, public use, site history, and infrastructure.

The Service is committed to building positive relationships with surrounding landowners and communities. Likewise, surrounding communities have expressed an intense interest in the Refuge's development and future management. The Service is eager to join in partnership with these neighbors and other agencies in order to better serve wildlife and the public at large. This goal will guide the cooperative management of wildlife corridors across adjacent properties and the resolution of boundary and access issues.

# 6

### *Refuge Operations:*

Based on available funds, the Service will provide resources to fulfill the Refuge vision and purposes.

This goal reiterates the Service's intent to adhere to management strategies that respond to the Refuge's vision and purpose despite the likelihood of financial restraints. The Service will work within its means to conserve fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities for compatible wildlife recreation at the Refuge.



Environmental Education in the prairie

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## The Next Steps

### Engaging the public...

With a draft vision statement and a preliminary list of goals in hand, the CCP/EIS core production team will turn to the public for their input. The core team will conduct public scoping meetings in which they will educate the public about the CCP/EIS process and the Refuge's resources. The meetings will also provide a forum for the public to provide feedback on the draft vision and goals.

The Service maintains interest about the public's concerns and will encourage meeting participants and all other interested parties to expand on the issues and qualities lists. The public will be asked to share their ideas about what make's the Refuge an asset for their community and how they think its should be managed in the future to serve both wildlife and people.

### Planning for the future...

The next phase of the CCP/EIS process will focus on 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 reconvene in order to develop several planning alternatives for the Refuge. Alternatives will address conservation techniques and Refuge management actions as well as compatible wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities.

Once 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 alterna-

tives to the public and will solicit their feedback and ideas for the further refinement of the various strategies.

As the planning process unfolds over the next 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 Rocky Flats NWR 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.

Planning Stage	Schedule Dates
<b>1 Preplanning</b> Public Involvement Framework • Public Agency Coordination Plan • Project Workplan • Draft Vision & Goals	May 2002 ■ July 2002
<b>2 Public Involvement &amp; Scoping</b> Draft Issues & Concerns • Inventory & Analysis Mapping • Public Workshops (Scoping) • Vision, Goals, & Issues Refinement •	August 2002 ■ October 2002
<b>3 Develop &amp; Analyze Alternatives</b> Alternative Plans • Environmental Consequences Assessment • Public Workshops (Alternative Plans)	November 2002 ■ May 2003
<b>4 Prepare Draft CCP • EIS (for public review)</b> Objectives • Programming • Compatibility Determinations • Alternative Plan Refinement • Environmental Consequences Assessment • Public Workshops (Review Draft CCP/EIS)	June 2003 ■ June 2004
<b>5 Final CCP • EIS &amp; Record of Decision</b> Public Comment Response • Proposed Action • Public Workshops (Public Review Final CCP/EIS) • Record of Decision • Public Celebration of Project	July 2004 ■ December 2004

**ROCKY FLATS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**  
 COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN • ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The three-year CCP/EIS schedule