

I. Introduction/Background

1.1 Refuge Overview: History of Establishment, Acquisition and Management

1.1.1 Seedskadee NWR Overview

This Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is being developed specifically for Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge (Seedskadee NWR or Refuge). Seedskadee NWR is located in southwestern Wyoming, 37 miles northwest of the City of Green River. The Refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) as a component of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System). The entire Refuge is within Sweetwater County, Wyoming and within the Green River Basin. Geographically, the Refuge is long and narrow, and bisected throughout its length by the Green River. The north boundary of the Refuge is seven miles downstream from Fontenelle Dam. From here, the Refuge extends 37 miles downstream and ranges in width from one to two miles. Total relief within the Refuge is 300 feet. The highest elevation is 6,490 feet near the north end of the Refuge at McCullen Bluff. The lowest elevation is 6,190 feet at the south end of the Refuge, below Big Island. (See Map 1)

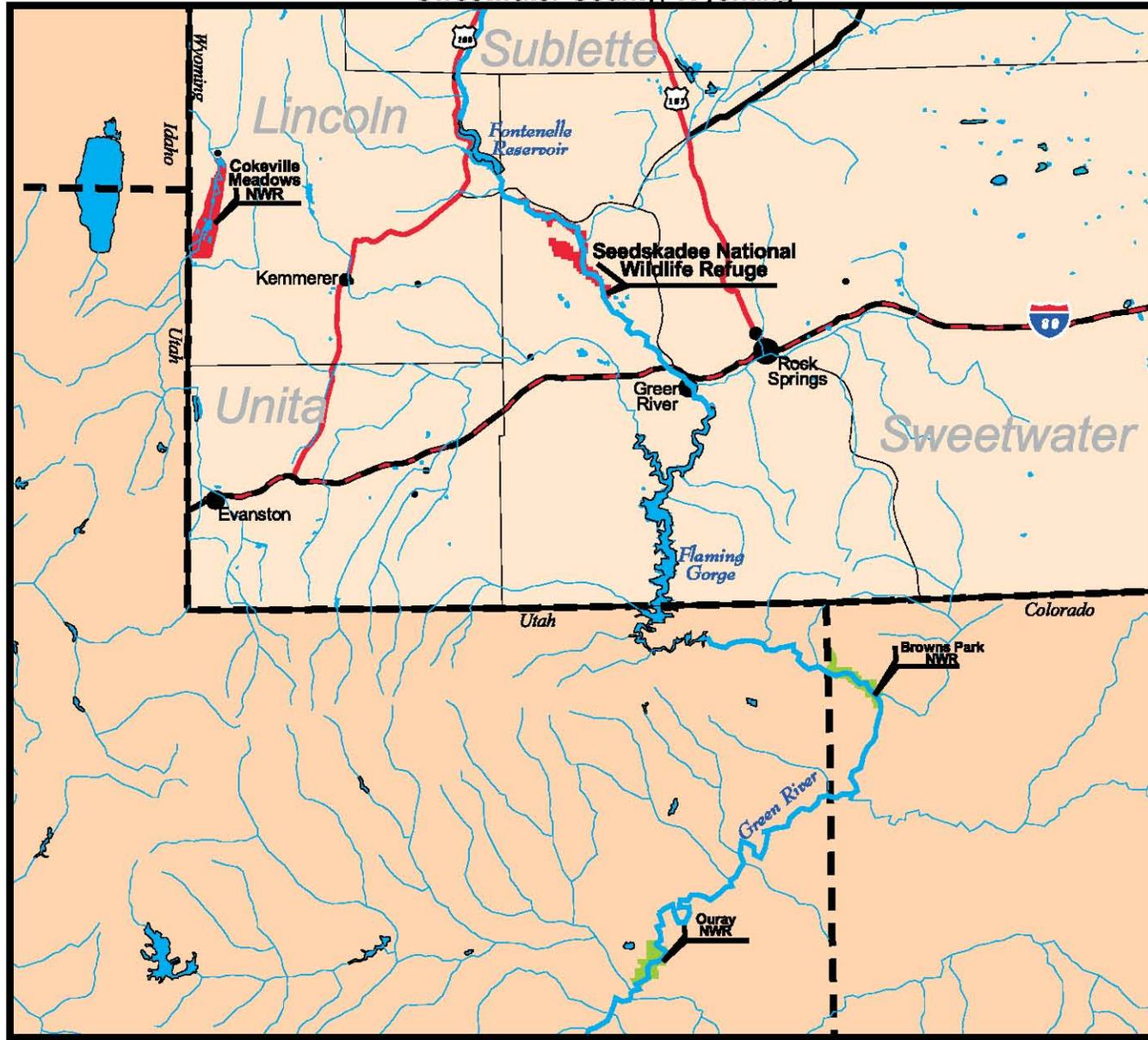
1.1.2 History of Seedskadee NWR Establishment, Acquisition, and Management

Seedskadee NWR was authorized by the Colorado River Storage Project Act of 1956 (CRSP). The CRSP authorized and funded construction of Bureau of Reclamation Colorado River storage facilities and related projects including Fontenelle Dam and the Seedskadee Irrigation Project. Section 8 of the CRSP provides for the establishment of wildlife habitat development areas to offset the loss of wildlife habitat resulting from reservoir construction in the Colorado River drainage. The Seedskadee Reclamation Act of 1958 specifically authorized acquisition of lands for Seedskadee NWR. Seedskadee NWR was established on November 30, 1965, through a Memorandum of Understanding between U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the Service.

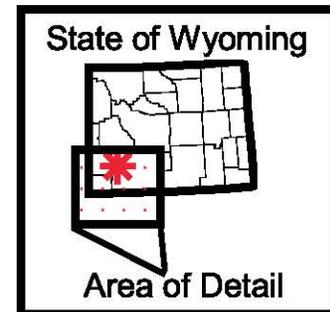
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may acquire lands consistent with legislation, other congressional guidelines or Executive Orders for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their associated habitat and to provide wildlife-dependent public use for education and recreation purposes. Service policy is to acquire lands only when other means of achieving program goals and objectives are not appropriate, available, or effective (USFWS, 341 FW1). In compliance with Section 8 of the Colorado River Storage Project Act, Reclamation is responsible for funding land acquisitions within the Refuge and funding Refuge developments to offset the loss of wildlife habitat resulting from reservoir construction. Since 1958, the Service and Reclamation have worked cooperatively to mitigate the habitat losses. Thus far over 4.5 million dollars have been made available by Reclamation for land acquisition and project development at Seedskadee NWR.

Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge

Sweetwater County, Wyoming



Draft



Map #1 Vicinity Map

The original Refuge acquisition boundary was designated in Public Land Order 4834 (Federal Register, Vol. 35 - Wyoming 14982) on May 25, 1970, and encompassed 22,112 acres for the mitigation of habitat lost due to the construction of Fontenelle Dam and Reservoir. In the 1990s, the Refuge boundary area increased with the purchase of additional acreage of “uneconomic remnants” and in 1998 when additional acres were acquired from Reclamation withdrawn lands to “roundout” boundary irregularities and improve management opportunities. Today’s 1999 boundary includes 26,382.23 acres. All lands are fee title and located within Sweetwater County, Wyoming. Two 2.5-acre privately-owned parcels remain within the boundary of the Refuge. Lands acquired for Seedskafee NWR were all acquired under Section 8 of the 1956 Colorado River Storage Act. No lands have been acquired for the Refuge under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act or Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act.

Table 1.1 Total Acreage			
Tract No	Acquired Date	Tract Name	Acres
1-5	11/06/61	Union Pacific Resources Company	3,483.70
1	5/20/70	USA	7,940.76
1	9/10/92	USA	440.77
10	1/28/74	Thoman et al	1,036.05
11	11/30/65	Hawley	916.48
12, a-k	11/26/96	Rock Springs Grazing Assn.	3,366.67
13, a	12/13/95	Crosson Ranches (Pal Tract)	395.84
16	11/26/96	Taliaferro	294.28
17, a-h	4/23/93	UP Land Resources Corp.	3,552.15
2-5	7/30/62	State of Wyoming	719.29
5	6/13/81	Riverside Livestock	160.00
2,aec	8/25/93	State of Wyoming	1,959.24
	1998	USA Roundout (Reclamation to USFWS)	2,117.00
3	9/30/89	Meandered Acres (881.54 acres included in the USA Roundout)	
Total Acres			26,382.23

Initial mitigation strategies on the Refuge were intended to follow preliminary mitigation concept. This included creation of ponds, other open waters, and wetlands primarily for waterfowl use. However, it proved too costly to install and operate pumps for pond filling, return flows from irrigation use would not have been available, and construction of new diversions, water systems, and dikes would have required extensive planning and budget commitment. Instead, actual development in the 1960s focused on use of pre-refuge diversions and irrigation ditches to develop wetlands. During the next decade, minor dike improvements were made to increase wetland size, but no extensive wetland development or management occurred.

Substantial wetland development did not occur until the 1980s with creation of the Hamp, Hawley, Lower Hawley, and Dunkle water management units. Development of these areas included gravity flow diversions from the Green River and a series of ditches and dikes to create impoundments, marshes, and irrigated wet meadows. These units totaled about 1,700 acres. The Refuge's objectives as stated in a 1987 management plan were:

1. To develop and maintain wetland habitat (primarily as nesting and brood-rearing habitat for Canada geese and other waterfowl).
2. To preserve habitat conditions for the benefit of native wildlife species thus ensuring wildlife diversity in the area, as well as providing habitat for rare and endangered species which frequent the area.
3. To provide opportunities for interpretation and recreation to the visiting public.

About 4,338 acres of riparian area parallel the Green River through the Refuge; however, there has been little management of this resource to date. Upland habitat management has historically centered on habitat protection through fencing and prescribed burning. Fencing of the entire Refuge has been completed. Acreages of existing habitat and locations are described and mapped in the Vegetation and Wildlife Habitat Section.

While the management emphasis at Seedskadee NWR was initially on waterfowl habitat, in recent years there is a growing awareness that the habitat of other migratory and native species dependent on the Green River have been impacted by construction and operation of the Fontenelle Dam. Artificial manipulation of the natural flows of the Green River have reduced sedimentation in River flows and increased down-cutting (incision) of the river channel. This has created negative effects on the health of the riparian forest downstream from Fontenelle Dam. Because these effects were not immediate nor fully anticipated, the extent and implications of the riparian habitat changes were not identified as mitigation targets in initial Seedskadee Project planning. Even now these impacts are not easily quantifiable nor are their implications fully understood for wildlife that are dependent on the riparian river corridor. There is a consensus that Reclamation mitigation actions should continue post Seedskadee Project construction to maintain, enhance, and/or restore riparian habitat downstream of Fontenelle Dam (Auble and Scott, 1998; Bitterroot Consultants, 1996; Berk, 1998).

The Service's management approach to Seedskadee NWR has a broader focus today than anticipated in the 1958 Fish and Wildlife Service Report. Managers today and into the foreseeable future are focused on maintaining quality habitat for migratory and native species which use the Refuge. In addition, when compatible with the Refuge's wildlife and habitat management goals, the Refuge also seeks to provide compatible wildlife-dependent public use opportunities, interpretation and protection of cultural resources, and in interpretive and educational information on the Refuge's habitat, wildlife, and cultural resources.

1.2 Purpose of and Need for Comprehensive Conservation Plan

The Service has recognized the need for strategic planning for all the components of the Refuge System. The System is currently comprised of more than 530 refuges and 3,000 waterfowl production areas, totaling approximately 93,604,644 acres (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1999). Seedskadee NWR, located in southwestern Wyoming, is a unique and ecologically important component of this System.

In September 1996, Executive Order 12996 was enacted which gave the System guidance on issues of compatibility and public uses of its land. Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act in October 1997. This “organic act,” for the first time in the System’s history, established the core mission of the Refuge system. Refuge’s were to be managed as a system of units dedicated to wildlife and wildlife habitat. As part of this, each Refuge was to prepare a CCP within 15 years.

The CCP planning effort helped the Refuge system address the changing needs of wildlife species and the public. CCP planning efforts provide the opportunity to meet with Refuge neighbors, elected representatives, user groups, and customers, and other agencies to ensure that CCP’s are relevant and truly address natural resource issues and public interests. This CCP also explains the planning process, a Refuge’s characteristics and purposes, and the direction management will take during the next 15 years to attain the stated purpose of the Refuge.

The purpose for developing this CCP for Seedskadee NWR is to provide the Refuge and the public with a 15-year management plan for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their related habitats found on the Refuge; while providing opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses. The CCP, when completed, will guide the Refuge in meeting its management objectives and contribute to the mission of the Refuge system while meeting all legal mandates.

The Service’s goals for the Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process are:

1. To provide a clear and comprehensive statement of desired future conditions(vision)for each refuge or planning unit.
2. To provide a forum for the public to comment on the type, extent, and compatibility of uses on refuges.
3. To ensure that the refuge is managed to fulfill the mission of the System as well as the specific purposes for which it was established.
4. To ensure public involvement in refuge management decisions by providing a process for effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with affected parties, including Federal agencies, State conservation agencies, Tribal governments, local governments, conservation organizations, adjacent landowners, and interested members of the public.
5. To encourage that we conduct refuge planning in concert with an ecosystem approach.
6. To demonstrate support for management decisions and their rationale by sound professional judgment, biological initiative, and public involvement.
7. To provide a uniform basis for budget requests for operational, maintenance, and capital improvement programs.

1.3 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mission

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the National Wildlife Refuge System which is comprised of Federal lands that are acquired and managed for the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats. The Service's origins date back to 1871, when Congress established the U.S. Fish Commission to study the decrease of the nation's food fishes and recommend ways to reverse the decline. The Fish Commission eventually evolved into the "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service" and was located within the Department of the Interior in 1956. The Service's scope of responsibilities broadened throughout the years to include migratory birds, endangered species, certain marine mammals, freshwater and anadromous fish, law enforcement, and national wildlife refuges.

Our mission is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Service carries out these responsibilities through several functional entities. The National Wildlife Refuge System is one of those entities.

1.4 National Wildlife Refuge System Mission, Goals, and Guiding Principles

The National Wildlife Refuge System (System) is the world's largest collection of lands set aside specifically for the protection of fish, wildlife and plant populations and their habitats. The first unit of the System was created in 1903, when President Theodore Roosevelt designated 3-acre Pelican Island, a pelican and heron rookery in Florida, as a bird sanctuary.

In 1966, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act that assembled the refuges into a unified "System" and codified their administration. This System has grown from 300 refuges totaling 28 million acres in 1966 to today's 530+ refuges in all 50 States and a number of U.S. Territories, and Waterfowl Production Areas in 10 States, totaling over 93 million acres.

However, the Refuge Administration Act did not establish a mission for the System or contain any planning requirements.

On March 25, 1996, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12996, on management and public use of the System. The Executive Order served as the foundation for the permanent statutory changes made by the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997. The Executive Order modified the management direction of Refuges by including provisions for opportunities for six wildlife-dependent recreational uses. The Executive Order recognized "compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation as priority public uses of the System." These six wildlife-dependent recreational uses are recognized as priority public uses of System lands. These, and other uses, are allowed on refuges only after finding that they are compatible with the purpose of the refuge and the Refuge System. Uses are allowed through a special regulation process, individual special use permits, or sometimes through State fishing and hunting regulations.

Enactment of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 provided the System with a true “organic” act, furnishing a mission for the System, policy direction, and management standards for all Refuge System units.

However, the System’s importance goes far beyond these services. It contributes directly and indirectly to human welfare through a number of ecosystem services and functions. Chapter 4 contains a detailed discussion of ecosystem services. For the entire biosphere, the estimated annual economic value of all the world’s ecosystem services and functions is about \$33 trillion (Constanza, *et al.* 1997).

The following broad goals, aimed at fulfilling the System’s mission, describe the level of responsibility and concern for wildlife resources as a result of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997:

- a. *To fulfill our statutory duty to achieve refuge purpose(s) and further the System mission;*
- b. *Conserve, restore where appropriate, and enhance all species of fish, wildlife, and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered;*
- c. *Perpetuate migratory bird, interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations;*
- d. *Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants;*
- e. *Conserve and restore, where appropriate, representative ecosystems of the United States, including the ecological processes characteristic of those ecosystems;*
- f. *To foster understanding and instill appreciation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their conservation, by providing the public with safe, high-quality, and compatible wildlife-dependent public use. Such use includes hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.*

In addition, individual national wildlife refuges are acquired under a variety of legislative acts and administrative orders and authorities. These orders and authorities usually have one or more purposes for which land can be transferred or acquired. These System units provide important habitat for many native mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, invertebrates, and plants. The System also plays a vital role in preserving endangered and threatened species and offers a wide variety of wildlife-dependent public uses. Annually, national wildlife refuges receive 34 million visitors.

Individual refuges provide specific requirements for the preservation of trust resources such as migratory birds. For example, waterfowl breeding refuges in South and North Dakota provide important wetland and grassland habitat to support breeding populations of waterfowl as required by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Seedskadee NWR also supports breeding populations as well as providing migration habitat during spring and fall periods. Other refuges in Louisiana and Texas provide wintering habitat for these populations. The network of lands is critical to these birds survival. A deficiency in one location can affect the species and the entire network’s ability to maintain adequate populations.

Other refuges may provide habitat for threatened and endangered plants or animals. Refuges in these situations ensure that populations are protected and habitat is suitable for their use. Refuges, by providing a broad network of lands throughout the United States, help prevent species from being listed as threatened or endangered by providing secure habitat for their use and providing recovery habitats in portions or all of a species range.

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. (National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105-

1.5 Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge Purpose(s)

Each refuge in the Refuge system is managed to fulfill the mission of the Refuge System as well as the specific purposes for which the refuge was established. Seedskadee NWR's purpose is defined by two pieces of enabling Federal legislation. The principal purpose of Seedskadee NWR is to provide for the conservation, maintenance, and management of wildlife resources and habitat including the development and improvement of such wildlife resources. Additionally, the Refuge is charged to protect the scenery, cultural resources, and other natural resources and provide for public use and enjoyment of compatible wildlife-dependent activities.

The two pieces of enabling legislation are:

1. Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act: “. . . shall be administered by him (Secretary of the Interior) directly or in accordance with cooperative agreements . . . and in accordance with such rules and regulations for the conservation, maintenance and management of wildlife, resources thereof, and its habitat thereon, . . .” 16 U.S.C. 664
2. Colorado River Storage Act: “. . . Secretary is authorized and directed to investigate, plan, construct, operate, and maintain . . . (1) public recreational facilities on lands withdrawn or acquired . . .” for the Colorado River project in order to “. . . conserve the scenery, the natural, historic, and archaeological objects, and the wildlife on said lands, and to provide for public use and enjoyment of the same and of the water areas created by these projects . . . and (2) facilities to mitigate losses of and improve conditions for, the propagation of fish and wildlife.” The Secretary may “. . . dispose of . . .” the facilities “. . . to Federal . . . agencies . . . upon such terms and conditions as will best promote their development and operation in the public interest.” 43 U.S.C 620g

Besides these two pieces of enabling legislation, the thirty-fifth legislature of the State of Wyoming passed enrolled Act No. 54 in 1959 “providing consent of the State of Wyoming to the acquisition by the United States where approved by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission and the State Land Board, of lands for the establishment of migratory bird refuges.” In it, the State of Wyoming is consenting to the acquisition of up to 20,000 acres of land in Wyoming for the establishment and maintenance of migratory bird refuges in accordance with and for the purposes of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act and the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. Thus, if ever any of these authorities, and associated funds, were invoked for the acquisition of new lands for Seedskadee NWR, these lands would be managed for “use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds” (16 U.S.C. 715d) in accordance with the Migratory Bird Conservation Act. To date, all lands acquired have been through Section 8 of the 1956 Colorado River Project Storage Act.

1.6 Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge Vision Statement

Seedskadee NWR will strive to preserve, restore, and enhance the ecological integrity of the Green River riparian corridor and associated uplands as habitat for migratory birds and other indigenous wildlife for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge will manage for a variety of native plants and wildlife, with emphasis on migratory birds and threatened and endangered species. Natural habitats of the Green River will be preserved or restored. The Refuge will provide interpretation of the natural and human history of the area and provide for wildlife-dependent recreation that is compatible with Refuge purposes. To meet this vision, the Service will seek partnerships with other agencies, interest groups, landowners, and local communities.

1.7 Legal and Policy Guidance

National wildlife refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (System), the designated purpose(s) of the Refuge unit as described in the establishing legislation and/or executive orders, Service laws and policy, and international treaties (for a complete list see Appendix E).

Key concepts included in laws, regulations, and policies that guide management of the System include primary versus multiple-use public lands, compatibility, and priority wildlife-dependent recreational activities. Examples of relevant guidance include the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, the Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (50 CFR), Executive Order 12996 (Management and General Public Use of the National Wildlife Refuge System), and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended, provided guidelines and directives for administration and management of all areas in the System, including wildlife refuges, areas for the protection and conservation of fish and wildlife threatened with extinction, wildlife ranges, game ranges, wildlife management areas, and waterfowl production areas. Use of any area within the System was permitted, provided that such uses were compatible with the major purposes for which such areas were established.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 amends the Refuge System Administration Act by including a unifying mission for the System, a new formal process for determining compatible uses on refuges, and a requirement that each refuge will be managed under a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP or Plan). This Act states that wildlife conservation is the priority of the System lands and that the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) shall ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of refuge lands are maintained. Each refuge must be managed to fulfill the mission of the System and the specific purposes for which it was established. Additionally, this Act identifies and establishes the legitimacy and appropriateness of the six wildlife-dependent recreational uses. These are hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. As priority public uses of the System, these uses will receive enhanced consideration over other uses in planning and management. Furthermore, this Act requires that a CCP be in place for each refuge by the year 2012 and that the public have an opportunity for active involvement in plan development and revision. It is Service policy that CCPs are developed in an open public process and that the agency is committed to securing public input throughout the process. This Act amended portions of the Refuge Recreation Act and National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966.

Lands within the System are different from other, multiple-use public lands in that they are closed to all public uses unless specifically and legally opened. Unlike other Federal lands that are managed under a multiple-use mandate (i.e., national forests administered by the U.S. Forest Service and public lands administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management), the Refuge System is managed specifically for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats. Compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System.

Compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are priority public uses of the System. These uses must receive enhanced consideration over other public uses in refuge planning and management.

Before any uses, including wildlife-dependent recreational activities, are allowed on national wildlife refuges, Federal law requires that they be formally determined to be "compatible."

A compatible use is defined as a use that, in the sound professional judgement of the refuge manager, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the Refuge. Sound professional judgement is further defined as a finding, determination, or decision that is consistent with the principles of sound fish and wildlife management and administration, available science, and resources (funding, personnel, facilities, and other infrastructure), and adherence with applicable laws. If financial resources are not available to design, operate, and maintain an activity, the refuge manager will take reasonable steps to obtain outside assistance from the State and other conservation interests. No refuge use may be allowed unless it is determined to be compatible.

The Service has completed compatibility determinations for Seedskadee NWR (see Appendix D).

The Refuge Recreation Act, as amended, authorized the Secretary to administer refuges, hatcheries, and other conservation areas for recreational use when such uses did not interfere with the area's primary purpose.

Executive Order 12996 (March 23, 1996) identified a new mission statement for the System; established six priority public uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation); emphasized conservation and enhancement of the quality and diversity of fish and wildlife habitat; stressed the importance of partnerships with Federal and State agencies, Tribes, organizations, industry, and the general public; mandated public involvement in decisions on the acquisition and management of refuges; and required identification, prior to acquisition of new refuge lands, of existing compatible wildlife-dependent uses that would be permitted to continue on an interim basis pending completion of comprehensive planning.

1.8 Existing Partnerships

Legal, administrative, policy, and planning guidelines provide the framework within which management activities are proposed, developed, and implemented. This framework also provides the basis for a continued and improved partnership between the Service, Reclamation, and other natural resource agencies.

In compliance with Section 8 of the Colorado River Storage Project Act of 1956, Reclamation is responsible for funding land acquisitions within the Refuge and funding Refuge developments to offset the loss of wildlife habitat resulting from reservoir construction. Since 1958, the Service and Reclamation have worked cooperatively to mitigate the habitat losses. The Service and Reclamation will continue to cooperate in close partnership for the benefit of the natural resources involved. The CCP is a means of assuring those benefits are achieved.

See Chapter 3 for further information on Bureau of Reclamation/Fish and Wildlife Service partnership history on the Seedskadee Project and development of Seedskadee NWR.

The Refuge also works with a variety of other organizations and individuals on natural resource projects including:

- local law enforcement agencies (general enforcement)
- Wyoming Game and Fish (wildlife and fish surveys, habitat management, enforcement, public outreach, public use)
- Sweetwater County weed and pest (invasive species control)
- Trout Unlimited (stream and river restoration, Take A Kid Fishing Day)
- Rural fire protection districts (wildfire suppression)
- Private landowners (partners for wildlife program)
- Universities (research on wildlife, vegetation, public use)
- Wyoming Partners in Flight (bird monitoring)
- Trumpeter Swan Society (swan management)
- Local school districts (environmental education)
- Scout organizations (community and refuge projects)
- Sweetwater County Chamber of Commerce (eco-tourism, special events)
- Big Sandy Working Group (river and riparian restoration)
- Bureau of Land Management (grazing, historical interpretation and restoration, public use)
- Intermountain Joint Venture (coalition partners)
- Rock Springs Grazing Association (livestock grazing management via a contractual agreement)
- Green River Green Belt Committee (wetland restoration)
- Highland Desert Flies (Take a Kid Fishing Day)
- Volunteers (local community folks, Good Sams Club, Student interns)
- USGS (riparian research)

1.9 Potential for Refuge Expansion

After the release of the first draft CCP and EA for Seedska-dee NWR, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) announced to the Service its intention to dispose of most of the lands acquired under the “Seedska-dee Project” - which, among other things, resulted in the creation of the Refuge in 1965. Remaining Seedska-dee Project lands owned by Reclamation are to be transferred to another Federal agency for management. A portion of the lands available from Reclamation surround the Big Sandy River and adjoin the Refuge.

In this draft CCP, we identify interest in amending the Refuge boundary if additional tracts of land become available which would contribute to the Refuge’s mission. Included for consideration are lands surrounding the Big Sandy River, a significant tributary that joins the Green River inside the Refuge boundary (see section B3.1 #16, and the EA). As stated in this draft document: “Other lands would be considered for acquisition on a willing seller basis if information indicated that additional acres were necessary for management of selected species or for mitigation purposes. Such areas may include . . . lands surrounding the Big Sandy River. Any additional land acquisition . . . would go through a public involvement process and be on a willing seller basis only.”

Careful consideration was given to including an analysis in this draft CCP of amending the Refuge boundary to include lands associated with the Big Sandy River. However, the decision was made to not include the Big Sandy analysis in this CCP process for two primary reasons: 1) the CCP is too far along in the review process; and 2) a separate review process, independent of this CCP, would provide a more thorough analysis of any possible land acquisition, including better public scoping and participation in the process.

Currently, the Refuge is beginning an internal review to evaluate the feasibility of amending the Refuge boundary to include lands along the Big Sandy River. The land surrounding the Big Sandy River, which is proposed for disposal by Reclamation, is considered a “study area.” Prior to any formal action, the Refuge will complete an internal analysis of these lands and make a recommendation to the Regional Director to pursue, or not to pursue, the transfer of these lands to the Refuge. If a decision is made to pursue a land transfer, a full public process will ensue complete with public involvement consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

