

II. Planning Process

2.1 Description of the Planning Process

The development of this CCP was guided, in the beginning, by the Refuge Planning Chapter of the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual (Part 602 FW2.1, November 1996) and later also by the Service's Final Comprehensive Conservation Planning Policy. Key steps include:

1. Planning;
2. Identifying issues and developing a vision;
3. Gathering information;
4. Analyzing resource relationships;
5. Developing alternatives and assessing their environmental effects;
6. Developing management goals, objectives, and strategies;
7. Identifying a preferred alternative;
8. Publishing the Draft Plan and soliciting public comments on the Draft Plan;
9. Review of comments and effecting necessary and appropriate changes to the Draft CCP; and,
10. Preparation of the final CCP for approval by the Region 6 Regional Director, and finally
11. Implementation of the CCP.

During the course of this CCP planning effort, several formal and informal meetings were held to determine the issues relative to Seedskaadee NWR. Meetings with Federal agencies, State agencies, and members of the public assisted the Service and Reclamation in identifying most of the natural resource and public use issues.

Issues, concerns, and opportunities were developed early through a scoping process which began on May 31, 1996 and closed October 15, 1996.

On May 31, 1996, invitations and announcements of two open houses, an explanation of Seedskaadee NWR directive and purpose, and a request for comments were mailed out to known interested parties. On June 6, 1996, press releases announcing the open houses were mailed to the appropriate media outlets such as KMER Radio, KRKK Radio, KUGR Radio, KSIT Radio, KUWR Radio, Sweetwater County TV, the Green River Star, the Casper Star Tribune, Rocket Miner, Kemmerer Gazette, and the Pinedale Roundup newspapers.

On June 8, 1996, an open house scoping meeting was held at the Seedskaadee NWR headquarters; questionnaires and comment sheets were handed out and verbal comments were taken. The open house was held concurrently with the Refuge's "Take a Kid Fishing" day. Thirty-three people attended. On June 10, 1996, the second open house scoping meeting was held from noon to 8:00 p.m. at the Sweetwater County Library in Green River, Wyoming. Eight people attended.

On June 25, 1996, the questionnaire and comment sheet were mailed out to the CCP mailing list. A complete list of all those who were sent information on the Plan can be found in the project file. On July 1, 1996, signs were posted for the Farson Open House. The open house was held on July 17, 1996 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Farson Community Hall. Four people attended.

On July 17, 1996, the Refuge Manager met with the Sweetwater County Commissioners at the Courthouse. On September 3 and 4, 1996, the Green River Refuges staff met to develop draft mission/goals/objectives for Green River Refuges. On September 16, 1996, a press release announcing the final two open houses was mailed to the appropriate media outlets.

On September 25, 1996, an open house in Rock Springs at the White Mountain Library was held from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.; six people attended.

On October 1, 1996, a meeting was held with the Lincoln County Commissioners followed by an open house from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Lincoln County Courthouse. One person (county planner), in addition to the three commissioners, attended. On November 11, 1996, Seedskaadee NWR staff completed a set of "draft management goals and objectives;" these have been submitted to the Service's regional office for review and concurrence.

"Focus Group" meetings at Sweetwater County Library in Green River were held on January 9, 1997, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. to discuss commercial recreation use and public access. Twenty-one people attended including five permitted fishing guides, recreational fishermen, parties interested in public access, and other agency representatives.

On April 29, 1997, a workshop was conducted at the Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge head quarters to identify potential alternative components for consideration in preparation of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Refuge. On April 30, 1997, a follow-up meeting was held with Service and Consulting Team personnel.

Invitations to participate in the workshop were sent to selected resource specialists with Federal and State agencies involved or interested in resource management within or adjacent to the Refuge. The list included personnel from Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Those who accepted the invitation to participate were provided a notebook prior to the meeting containing the meeting's purpose, a meeting agenda, background on the planning process including the Fish and Wildlife Service's planning context, and issues identified during scoping.

The purpose of the meeting was to understand identified planning and NEPA issues, discuss draft CCP goals developed by the Refuge, and explore various alternative components that could achieve the goals and address identified issues.

Based on discussions in the workshop and subsequent discussion with Seedskaadee NWR staff, the issues considered significant for the EA were identified by Refuge staff for analysis. Based on the issues, the Seedskaadee NWR staff developed alternatives to address the issues and the goals. The issues, as they were identified during the scoping process, are described in Chapter 2.

Planning Participants

All individuals that provided comments, oral or written, are listed below. Column 2 identifies the forum in which the commentors participated or submitted comments. The forum in which the commentors participated are identified in column 2 in the following manner:

1. Project Initiation Meeting (SNWR1)
2. Planning Group Meeting (SNWR2)
3. Alternatives Development Workshop (ALT)
4. Commercial Use/Access Meeting (CU)
5. Comment Form (C)

| Name | Comment Reference ¹ |
|---|--------------------------------|
| ■ Rob Keith, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Bennie C. Johnson, Green River, WY | CU, C |
| ■ Dennis Watts, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Les Skinner, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Van Beacham, Kemmerer, WY | CU, C |
| ■ Ken Reed, Rock Springs, WY | CU |
| ■ Patrick Nichols, Rock Springs, WY | CU |
| ■ George Stonebreaker | CU |
| ■ Katie Legerski, Rock Springs, WY | CU |
| ■ Patti Smith, Rock Springs, WY | CU |
| ■ Duane Kerr, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Scott Talbott, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Jim Pasboy, Superior, WY | CU |
| ■ Jim Williams, Manilla, UT | CU |
| ■ Terry Dockter, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Carl Williams, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Beverly Williams, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Ron Remmick, Regional Fishery Supervisor, Game and Fish Department Green River, WY | CU, ALT |
| ■ Tom Brannan, Rock Springs, WY | CU |
| ■ Glen Sadler, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Patricia Sadler, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Bill Birmingham, Green River, WY | CU |
| ■ Bureau of Land Management, Rock Springs, WY | C |
| ■ Thoman Ranch, Kemmerer, WY | C |
| ■ M.K. Tucker, Rock Springs, WY | C |
| ■ Bruce Woodward, Rock Springs, WY | C |
| ■ John Roberts, Kemmerer, WY | C |
| ■ Lucy Diggins, Green River, WY | C, ALT |
| ■ Tim Habenbenger, Wyoming Outfitters & Guides Assoc., Alpine, WY | C |
| ■ Mitch Nielson, Green River W | C |
| ■ Dave Vesterby, BLM, Pinedale WY | C, ALT |
| ■ Howard Hart, Green River, WY | C |
| ■ Matt and Liz David, Pinedale, WY | C |
| ■ Darrell Welch, Reclamation, Denver, CO | SNWR1, ALT, C, SNWR2 |
| ■ William Long, Jackson, WY | C |
| ■ Gary Harvey, Evanston, WY | C |
| ■ Ken Reed, City of Rock Springs, Family Recreation Center Rock Springs, WY | C |
| ■ Barry Floyd, Casper, WY | C |
| ■ Marci Fagnant, Kemmerer, WY | C |
| ■ Barney Shrank, Lakewood CO | C |
| ■ illegible | C |
| ■ Carl T. Williams, Green River WY | C |
| ■ Greg Auble, USGS Biological Resources Division, Midcontinent Ecological Science Ctr | ALT |

- Ty Berry, Refuge Supervisor, MT/WY, USFWS . ALT
- Renee Dana, BLM, Rock Springs District ALT
- Jaymee Fojtik, USFWS ALT
- Mark Hatchel, BLM, Kemmerer Resource Area . . ALT
- Sally Haverly, BLM, Green River Resource Area . ALT
- John Henderson, BLM, Rock Springs District ALT
- Patricia Hamilton, BLM, Green River Res. Area . . ALT
- Robb Keith, Wyoming Game and Fish Dept ALT
- Duane Kerr, Wyoming Game and Fish Dept ALT
- Rhoda Lewis, Regional Archaeologist, USFWS . . . ALT
- Mike Mischeledey, BLM ALT
- Mike L. Scott, Midcontinent Ecological Science Ctr, USGS ALT
- Al Simpson, Provo Area Office, Reclamation ALT
- Dave Skates, Project Leader, USFWS ALT
- Kevin Spence, Wyoming Game and Fish Dept ALT
- Andy Tenney, ORP, BLM, Rock Springs District . ALT
- Anne Marie LaRosa, Seedskaadee NWR Former Manager SNWR1, ALT, SNWR2
- Tom Koerner, Seedskaadee NWR Former Deputy Manager . SNWR1, ALT, SNWR2
- Adam Halverson, Seedskaadee NWR SNWR1, ALT, SNWR2
- Suzanne Beauchaine, Seedskaadee NWR SNWR1, ALT, SNWR2
- Carol Taylor, USFWS SNWR1, ALT, SNWR2
- Shannon Heath, USFWS SNWR1, ALT, SNWR2
- Dennis Earhart, Bear West . . . SNWR1, ALT, SNWR2
- Emilie Charles, Bear West SNWR1, ALT, SNWR2
- Jan Striefel, Landmark Design SNWR1

¹ Project Initiation meeting 2/19-20/97(SNWR1)
 Planning Group Meeting, 9/18-19/97 (SNWR2)
 Alternatives Development Workshop 4/29/97 (ALT)
 SNWR1 Commercial Use/Access Meeting 1/9/97 (CU)
 Comment Form (C)

The following list of planning and environmental assessment issues was derived from the comments generated during the public process, from interested jurisdictions, and from the Seedskadee NWR staff.

2.2 Planning Issues

Issues, concerns, and opportunities were identified through discussions with planning team members and key contacts and through the public scoping process. Comments were received orally at the meetings, via e-mail, and in writing, both before and during the scoping process. The following issues, concerns, and comments are a compilation and summary of those expressed by the public, other Federal and State agencies, local and county governments, private organizations and individuals, and environmental groups.

2.2.1 Wildlife and Habitat Management Issues

2.2.1.1 Threatened and Endangered Wildlife and Plants

What measures are taken to protect threatened, endangered, and candidate species and species of management concern?

There are concerns regarding conflicts between human use, wildlife use, and sensitive vegetation at the Refuge. Minimizing disturbance of wildlife, especially during nesting, wintering, or other sensitive seasons, is an issue.

2.2.1.2 Riparian Habitats

How will riparian habitat losses be mitigated to support migratory birds and native wildlife species?

The hydrology and morphology of the Green River through Seedskadee NWR have been altered by the construction and operation of Fontenelle Dam. Changes in channel morphology, such as downcutting, have occurred and overbank flooding is rare to nonexistent. Water temperatures have decreased and river flows have been significantly altered from their historical levels and patterns. Cottonwood gallery forests are not regenerating under the current water management regime. Riparian forest communities are losing their structural diversity and becoming single storied. Existing stands of cottonwoods and willows show evidence of severe drought stress and are heavily browsed by native ungulates and some trespass livestock. Existing stands of trees are also susceptible to wildlife, particularly in drought years. A major loss of these forests could occur on the Refuge in 20 to 50 years if nothing is done. Cottonwood forests provide very important habitat for migratory birds.

2.2.1.3 Wetlands

How will wetland losses be mitigated to support migratory birds and native wildlife species? How will wetlands be managed to support migratory birds and native wildlife species?

The Refuge was established as a means to mitigate for loss of wildlife habitat from dam and reservoir construction within the upper Colorado River System. The Fish and Wildlife Service is concerned about impacts to wetland habitat because of their importance to migratory birds and native wildlife species. The extent to which wetland creation or enhancement ought to occur to achieve mitigation, and the types and management of wetlands that should be pursued to support the mix of migratory birds and native wildlife species are issues.

2.2.1.4 Upland Habitats

How would upland shrub and grassland habitat be managed to support native wildlife species and migrating birds?

Upland areas within the Refuge, including the Dry Creek Unit, have not been managed with the intensity of the River corridor. A mosaic of successional stages is desirable from a wildlife habitat standpoint. Opportunities may exist to use a variety of management tools to alter the successional state of upland shrub habitats and provide more habitat diversity.

2.2.1.5 Riverine Habitats

How are fisheries managed on the Refuge?

The public is concerned about future management of the fishery. One concern is that the Refuge installed water diversions and other structures in the River, and their potential affect on fish and resources.

2.2.1.6 Weeds

To what extent are weeds (invasive, nonnative plants) controlled?

Noxious weeds, such as pepperweed, salt cedar, Canada thistle, Russian knapweed, cheatgrass, and musk thistle are invading most Refuge habitats and dominating the vegetation in some areas. Control methods for some weed species are unknown or not completely effective. Former land management practices and current active management activities have created many opportunities for weeds to become established. How to manage the Refuge to control the spread of weeds and reclaim weed-dominated habitats are issues.

2.2.1.7 Predators and Nuisance Species

How are predators and nuisance species controlled?

Controlled trapping of nest predators occurs during the waterfowl nesting season. Beaver are removed when significant tree losses occur. There is concern about how, and to what extent, predators and nuisance species should be controlled.

2.2.1.8 Fire Management

How is fire managed on the Refuge?

Wildfires are contained and extinguished on the Refuge. Using controlled fires in certain habitats as a management tool is a concern. How much prescribed burning is required to manage certain habitats is also a concern.

2.2.2 Public Use and Recreation Issues

2.2.2.1 Access Management

How is access/travel managed on the Refuge?

The Refuge needs to seek a balance of access for wildlife-dependent recreation while providing adequate protection for wildlife. Off-road vehicle use is prohibited within the boundary of the Refuge; however, unauthorized off-road vehicle use persists. New two-track roads are being created continuously. Significant habitat degradation and wildlife disturbance is occurring throughout the Refuge. In addition, other designated Refuge roads create high levels of wildlife disturbance, particularly during sensitive seasons, such as nesting and wintering. Determining how travel should be managed on the Refuge is an issue. Additionally, the public is interested in the development of walking trails. Some mountain bike use is occurring. Improved access on designated roads, trail development, location, management, and use are concerns.

2.2.2.2 Universal Access

To what extent is universal access to public use facilities and activities provided?

There is a desire to provide special activities/facilities for people with disabilities.

2.2.2.3 Wildlife Viewing and Photography

To what extent are opportunities provided for wildlife viewing and photography?

Wildlife observation and photography are priority wildlife-dependent recreational activities. There is interest in developing or enhancing opportunities for visitors to better view wildlife and wildlife habitats. Proposals include photography and viewing overlooks/sites; auto tour routes; and walking/hiking trails.

2.2.2.4 Hunting

What types of hunting opportunities are provided on the Refuge?

Hunting is a priority wildlife-dependent public use on refuges. There are different points of view on whether or not hunting should be allowed on the Refuge. How will areas “closed to hunting” be managed to provide adequate sanctuary for wildlife species? There are concerns about what species should be hunted and what are the Refuge’s goals and objectives with respect to management of game species. There is some interest in the Refuge providing duck hunting blinds.

2.2.2.5 Recreational Trapping

What types of recreational trapping are allowed on the Refuge?

A question arose about whether trapping should be used for predator control and if this could be accomplished through recreational trapping.

2.2.2.6 River Access

How is River access managed?

Where and how should public River access, parking, and boat launch ramps and associated public use facilities be provided are issues.

2.2.2.7 Sport Fishing

What types of sport fishing opportunities are provided on the Refuge?

The Refuge's fishery is popular for bank and float fishing including both commercially guided and recreational fishing. There are conflicting points of view among anglers and fishing guides about how fishing is regulated.

2.2.2.8 Commercial Guide Fishing

Is commercially guided fishing allowed and how is it managed?

There are concerns about what level of commercial and recreational fishing on the Green River is appropriate in order to avoid negative affects on wildlife. If Seedska-dee NWR staff continues to allow commercial guide fishing, issuance of Special Use Permits should be based upon the desirable level of River use.

2.2.2.9 Camping

Is camping allowed and, if so, where and how are sites developed and the use managed?

Camping is not considered wildlife-dependent recreation. However, at Seedska-dee NWR, there is demand for camping opportunities, especially from people floating the 35 miles of River through the Refuge. Campgrounds are located upstream from the Refuge at Fontenelle and primitive upland camping occurs downstream from the Refuge on Rock Springs Grazing Association lands and on adjacent BLM land. There are questions about whether or not camping is a compatible use and should be permitted.

2.2.2.10 Boating

What types of boating are allowed on the Green River through the Refuge?

There are concerns that use of motorized watercraft on the Green River may impact wildlife and the area's solitude.

2.2.2.11 Visitor Use Level

What is the appropriate visitor use level of the Refuge?

How are visitor use levels determined within the Refuge? There is question about the extent of impact from public use, including recreation and interpretive programs. Any determinations of visitor use levels are complicated by the need to minimize wildlife disturbance, to avoid encroachment on solitude, and by the nature and capacity of visitor facilities, parking, and amenities.

2.2.2.12 Environmental Education

What type of environmental education programming is provided to the public?

The Refuge staff provides educational opportunities on an "as needed" basis. There are opportunities to partner with other agencies to provide an environmental education program and facilities that promote an awareness of the basic ecological foundation for the interrelationship between human activities and the natural system.

2.2.2.13 Environmental Interpretation

To what extent are opportunities pursued to interpret natural resources, especially wildlife and their habitat for the visiting public?

Interpretive signs at the Refuge are limited to the kiosks and the auto tour. Those that exist on the Refuge are outdated. Determining opportunities and locations for interpretation for wildlife, habitat, and cultural resources are issues.

2.2.2.14 Public Information

How is information on the Refuge, its resources, and regulations provided to the public and what are the effects of public use, including recreation and interpretive programs, on Refuge resources?

There are general concerns about better communication with the public, neighbors, local jurisdictions, and other agencies on the purpose and mission of the Refuge—why it and its management policies are important, both locally and to the broader ecosystem.

2.2.2.15 Cultural Resources

How are cultural resources protected? To what extent are opportunities pursued to interpret cultural resources for the visiting public?

Potential impacts to cultural resources from facilities development, habitat manipulation, visitor use, and Refuge operations and maintenance are concerns. There is also an interest in developing more interpretive opportunities of cultural resources such as locating interpretive displays at sites/cabins and public points of interest.

2.2.2.16 Partnerships

To what extent are partnership opportunities pursued with volunteers, local service groups, organizations, individuals, schools, and other governmental agencies?

Determining opportunities for Refuge management to “partner” with local groups, organizations, individuals, schools, local and State governments, and other agencies to achieve the Refuge’s mission and goals and to conserve and enhance wildlife in the Green River ecosystem is an issue. Likewise, finding opportunities to encourage and utilize volunteers is an interest.

2.2.3 Administrative Management Issues

2.2.3.1 Land Acquisition

Is further land acquisition or land disposal planned?

Land acquisition within the Refuge boundary is essentially complete. Two 2.5-acre parcels remain to be acquired should there be willing sellers. A proposal was set forth several years ago to transfer land along the Big Sandy River from Reclamation to the Service to be managed as part of the Seedskaadee NWR. There are questions about whether there is an interest in exchanging, acquiring, or disposing of lands within or adjacent to the Refuge boundary.

2.2.3.2 Minerals

How will privately-owned minerals be developed?

Development of minerals on or immediately adjacent to the Refuge may impact wildlife, wildlife habitats, and the quality of the visitor experience. There is a question about whether seismic activity should be allowed and, if so, under what circumstances. Protecting the wildlife resources from unacceptable impacts is a concern.

2.2.3.3 Right-of-Way

What is the Service's policy toward requests for grants of right-of-way across the Refuge?

There is a question about how Refuge staff responds to right-of-way requests.

2.2.3.4 Livestock Access

How is access to water for livestock provided?

The Refuge has traditionally provided access to the River for watering livestock from adjacent private/public land allotments. Water access lanes to the River are difficult to secure; for example, preventing trespass from livestock. How can the Refuge provide livestock access to water while maintaining the integrity of the Refuge boundary and preventing trespass?

2.2.3.5 Grazing

Is grazing allowed on the Refuge? What is Refuge management doing to prevent livestock trespass?

The Refuge has been fenced to prevent livestock from entering, thus improving and protecting habitat for wildlife. Grazing may be an appropriate tool to manage some of the Refuge's habitats. Construction of new fences, maintenance of existing or new fences, and the removal of old fence and wire are concerns.

