

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

Sullys Hill National Game Preserve

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Prepared by

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Abbreviations

Administration Act	National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act
AMSL	above mean sea level
CCP	comprehensive conservation plan
CO₂	carbon dioxide
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CWCS	comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy
CWD	chronic wasting disease
DNC	dense nesting cover
EA	environmental assessment
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
F	Fahrenheit
FMP	fire management plan
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
GIS	Geographic Information System
Improvement Act	National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997
IPM	integrated pest management
NAWMP	North American Waterfowl Management Plan
ND	North Dakota
NDGF	North Dakota Game and Fish Department
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NOA	notice of availability
NOI	notice of intent
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA)
ORP	outdoor recreation planner
pers. comm.	personal communication
PL	public law
PPR	Prairie Pothole Region
refuge	Sullys Hill National Game Preserve
Refuge System	National Wildlife Refuge System
Service	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
spp.	species
SWG	state wildlife grant
UND	University of North Dakota
USC	United States Code
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
VOR	visual obstruction reading
WG	wage grade pay schedule (civil service employees)
WMA	waterfowl management area
WMD	wetland management district
WPA	wetlands production area
WUI	wildland-urban interface
YCC	Youth Conservation Corps

Summary

The following summary provides an overview of this draft comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental assessment for Sullys Hill National Game Preserve, including (1) a general description; (2) purposes of the refuge; (3) vision and goals; (4) alternatives considered, including the proposed action; and (5) the decision to be made regarding the proposed comprehensive conservation plan.

SULLYS HILL NATIONAL GAME PRESERVE LOCATION AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Sullys Hill National Game Preserve is a 1,675-acre national wildlife refuge sitting on the south shores of Devils Lake, about ten miles south of the city of Devils Lake, North Dakota. This refuge supports a unique community of habitats such as an oak, ash, basswood, and aspen woodland; mixed-grass prairie; and natural wetlands; along with beaver ponds and created wetlands. These diverse habitats create a large ecotone that provides “edge” habitat for over 250 species of migratory birds, plains bison, Rocky Mountain elk, white-tailed deer, turkeys, and prairie dogs.

The refuge is one of only 19 designated natural areas in North Dakota, of which only four are national wildlife refuges. It is also one of only four refuges established for national bison conservation.



Entrance sign for Sullys Hill National Game Preserve

Sullys Hill National Game Preserve has a long history of visitation with over 60,000 annual visitors, making it the most visited refuge in North Dakota. The refuge is becoming a progressive regional conservation learning center, promoting the conservation role of the National Wildlife Refuge System while educating visitors about the functions and benefits of prairie wetlands and grasslands. The refuge uses both indoor and outdoor education with a focus on the sciences, biodiversity, and human dimensions in the environment, providing area educators an environment that makes learning more exciting and interesting.

SULLYS HILL NATIONAL GAME PRESERVE ESTABLISHMENT

The refuge was first established on April 27, 1904, through Public Law 179, that authorized President Theodore Roosevelt to set aside a portion of unallotted lands as a public park in the Devils Lake Indian Reservation, including the unallotted tract of land known as the Fort Totten Military Reservation. The final Proclamation No. 32, establishing Sullys Hill Park, was signed on June 2, 1904, by President Roosevelt and assigned management to the National Park Service. On June 30, 1914, appropriations were made for the creation of a big game preserve within the park.

On December 22, 1921, President Warren Harding, by Executive Order 3596, ordered that all lands in the boundaries of Sullys Hill National Park Game Preserve be reserved and set apart as a refuge and breeding grounds for birds.

In the Act of March 3, 1931, President Herbert Hoover transferred the preserve to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). It was renamed Sullys Hill National Game Preserve and administered as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System as a big game preserve, refuge, and breeding ground for wild animals and birds.

LEGISLATIVE PURPOSES

Every refuge has a purpose for which it was established. This purpose is the foundation upon

which to build all refuge programs, from biology and public use, to maintenance and facilities. No action that the Service or public takes may conflict with this purpose. The refuge purposes are found in legislative acts or administrative orders, which provide the authorities to transfer or acquire a piece of land for a refuge. Over time, an individual refuge may contain lands that have been acquired under a variety of transfer and acquisition authorities, giving a refuge more than one purpose. The goals, objectives, and strategies identified in the draft CCP are intended to support the individual purposes for which the refuge was established.

The purposes for Sullys Hill National Game Preserve are described in the following legislation and public land orders:

- “All the lands that are now reserved or may hereafter be included within the boundaries of the . . . Sullys Hill National Park Game Preserve . . . are hereby further reserved and set apart for the use . . . as refuges and breeding grounds for birds.” (Executive Order 3596, December 21, 1921)
- “As a big game preserve, refuge, and breeding grounds for wild animals and birds . . . provided, that the said game preserve is to be made available to the public for recreational purposes in so far as consistent with the use of this area as a game preserve . . . provided further, that hunting shall not be permitted on said game preserve.” (46 Stat. 1509, act of March 3, 1931)



REFUGE VISION

The vision for Sullys Hill National Game Preserve is based on the establishing purposes of the refuge, resource conditions and potential, and the issues.

Overlooking North Dakota’s largest natural lake and riding the tops of a glacial thrust block formation, Sullys Hill National Game Preserve is dressed in undulating native woodlands and prairie. Teddy Roosevelt’s vision and broad community support are largely responsible for the successful conservation of these habitats ensuring the preservation of the refuge’s plains bison and Rocky Mountain elk while supporting migrating waves of warblers and other native bird species.

Sullys Hill National Game Preserve is renowned as a regional conservation learning center—greeting families, students, and outdoor enthusiasts of all abilities. Children are able to learn about their natural world using all their senses, which fosters their own environmental ethics. Each visitor’s experience not only enriches their personal lives, but instills a unique understanding and appreciation for preserving native prairie and wetland habitats, the natural resources of the Devils Lake Basin, and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System to preserve America’s wildlife heritage.

REFUGE GOALS

The goals described below reflect the vision for Sullys Hill National Game Preserve.

Goal 1. Prairie Habitat: Maintain prairie plant communities representative of the historical mixed-grass prairies to support healthy populations of grassland-dependent migratory birds in balance with bison, elk, and other indigenous wildlife.

Goal 2. Woodland Habitat: Manage for healthy native woodlands of various age classes and

structure to provide habitat for migratory birds, in balance with bison, elk, and other indigenous wildlife.

Goal 3. Wildlife Population Management: Carry out management practices that ensure healthy populations of Rocky Mountain elk, plains bison, and other indigenous wildlife species that exemplify the genetic integrity of historic prairie wildlife.

Goal 4. Environmental Education and Outreach: Deliver quality, interactive environmental education programming to regional schools, communities, organizations, and local governments to garner support and appreciation for Sullys Hill National Game Preserve, North Dakota's wetland and grassland resources, and the conservation role of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Goal 5. Visitor Services and Interpretation: Provide captivating visitor services facilities and activities for visitors of all abilities, as well as community groups, youth groups, and members of Spirit Lake Nation that result in a greater understanding and support for the preservation of native habitats and landscapes of North Dakota's Prairie Pothole Region and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Goal 6. Protection and Maintenance: Provide for the safety of staff, volunteers, and the visiting public while ensuring the protection and maintenance of refuge facilities, lands, and cultural resources.

THE DRAFT PLAN

After reviewing a wide range of public comments and management needs, the Service developed three alternatives for management of the refuge. Alternative C is the proposed action of the Service and is presented in chapter 6 as the draft comprehensive conservation plan.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

ALTERNATIVE A—CURRENT MANAGEMENT (NO ACTION)

Alternative A, the no-action alternative, reflects the current habitat management of the refuge. It provides the baseline against which to compare other alternatives. It is also a requirement of the National Environmental Protection Act that a no-action alternative be addressed in the planning process.

ALTERNATIVE B

Habitat management under alternative B would begin to address reduced forest regeneration by managing the uncontrolled browsing of captive bison, Rocky Mountain elk, and white-tailed deer within the big game forest, which has resulted in reduced habitat for forest interior birds. The environmental education program would be expanded to provide additional opportunities and improve quality, while providing a consistent message of protecting wetland and grassland habitats. Visitor safety and facility security would improve as a result of cooperative agreements with local law enforcement agencies, regular maintenance, and installing fire and security systems.

ALTERNATIVE C—PROPOSED ACTION

Habitat management under alternative C would address reduced forest regeneration caused by browsing of captive bison, Rocky Mountain elk, and white-tailed deer, as well as deterioration of native prairie as a result of season-long grazing and lack of fire. The environmental education program would be expanded to include additional on-site and off-site opportunities. Visitor safety and facility security would improve as a result of improved staffing, cooperative agreements with local law enforcement agencies, regular maintenance, and installing fire and security systems.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The environmental assessment describes three alternatives for achieving the above goals. Based on the analysis described in the environmental assessment, a decision will be made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's regional director for region 6 (Mountain-Prairie Region) on which alternative will be selected to manage the refuge for the next 15 years.

