

5. PLANNING PROCESS

This section summarizes the process of developing the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. The purpose of this section is to explain the procedures that were followed for each step of the process. The specific outcomes of the various steps described here are given earlier in this document.

The process included four major steps. First, an inventory and an analysis of relevant data, including maps, were carried out. Second, a program—an overall package of activities and functions—was developed for the Refuge. Third, the program was applied to the site and five alternative plans were created. Fourth, the selected alternative plan was thoroughly documented so that the intent of the plan could be communicated to the public. The process itself was not as linear as this list of steps might suggest. In many cases it was important to revisit earlier decisions as more or better information became available.

Part of the process of creating the final plan included evaluating its environmental impacts. A draft environmental impact statement was created and presented to the public during the development of alternative plans. The final environmental impact statement was carried out during the final phase of the project.

Table 5.1 The Refuge planning process was characterized by four broad phases.

- 1. Inventory and analysis*
- 2. Program development*
- 3. Alternatives plan development*
- 4. Preferred plan selection and development*





wildlife management, public programs, and facilities that seemed appropriate at this early stage of the planning process. The workshop helped the planning team frame questions to the public.

A particularly significant concept developed at the workshop was the recognition that the 27-square mile Arsenal has several very different landscape types: a northern zone characterized by grasslands and prairie dog colonies, a southern zone with extensive introduced vegetation and water bodies, and a corridor along First Creek. These zones, along with one that was added later in the project to include gateway lands just off the Refuge, reflect ecological conditions that are quite different across the Refuge. This “zones concept” was used in developing management objectives that respond to these ecological differences.

Organize and conduct focus groups

Eight focus groups were created with the following principal memberships: neighbors, civic and business leaders, environmental education, environmental organizations, recreation, public agencies, tourism, and the scientific community.

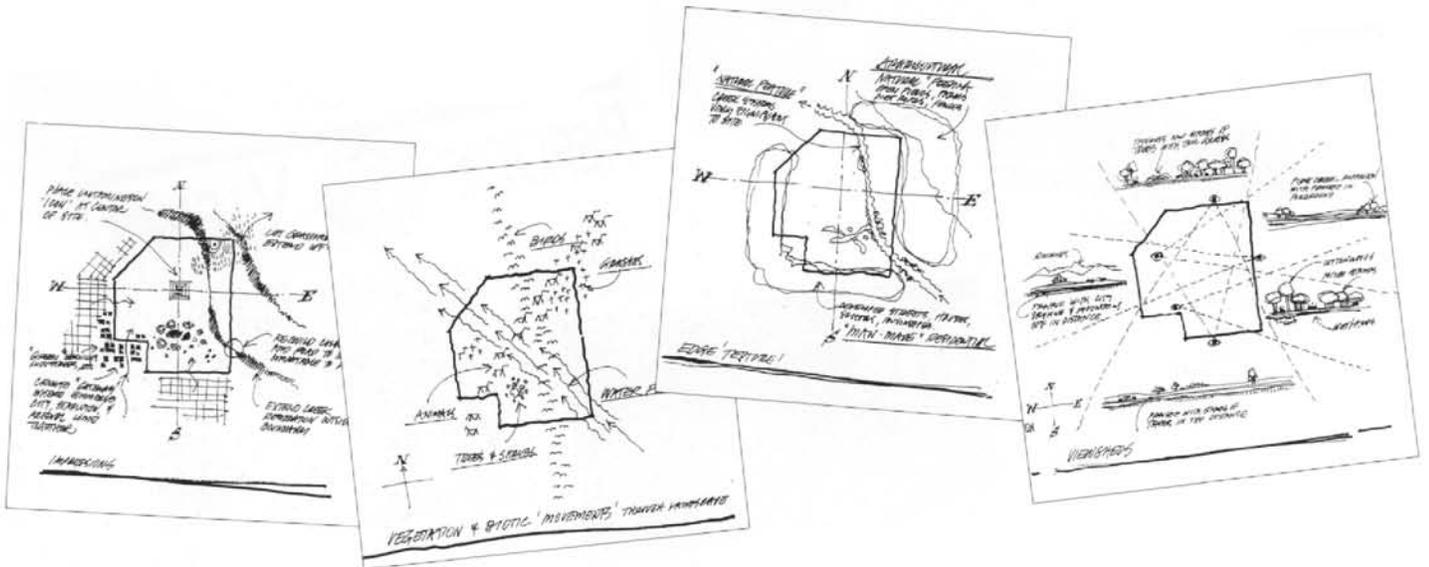
These groups met twice during the project to provide input into the process, particularly as it related to the topic of specific concern to each

group. Meetings were timed so that they came before major public presentations as a way of getting timely feedback in anticipation of those larger meetings.

The first meetings were held in June 1994 to identify important issues and concerns that would have to be addressed in creating the comprehensive management plan. From these meetings—and continuing on throughout the project—the planning team detected no great controversy about the development of the Refuge. The focus group participants helped identify issues needing to be dealt with and helped the planning team understand better how to interact with the surrounding neighborhoods and the larger community.

A second round of meetings was held in January and February 1995 to review the alternative plans that had, by then, been developed. Insightful questions and comments at these meetings helped the planning team revise its presentation strategy before the public presentation of the alternative plans.

The focus groups were very helpful in the development of the final plan. Because each group was made up of people with similar interests, discussions at meetings were often more in-depth than at the public meetings.



Compile issues and concerns

From discussions with the general public, focus groups, and personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies, the planning team compiled a list of issues and concerns that helped in developing goals and objectives for the Refuge.

These issues and concerns included the following questions:

- What should be the balance of uses at the Refuge?
- What should be the level of access available to people?
- How much wildlife movement should be allowed beyond the site?
- Which species, if any, should be reintroduced?
- What is the nature of the western zone and what kinds of activities should be encouraged there?
- To what degree can existing infrastructure be reused?
- How do you tell the whole history of the site, including contamination?

Develop preliminary goals and objectives

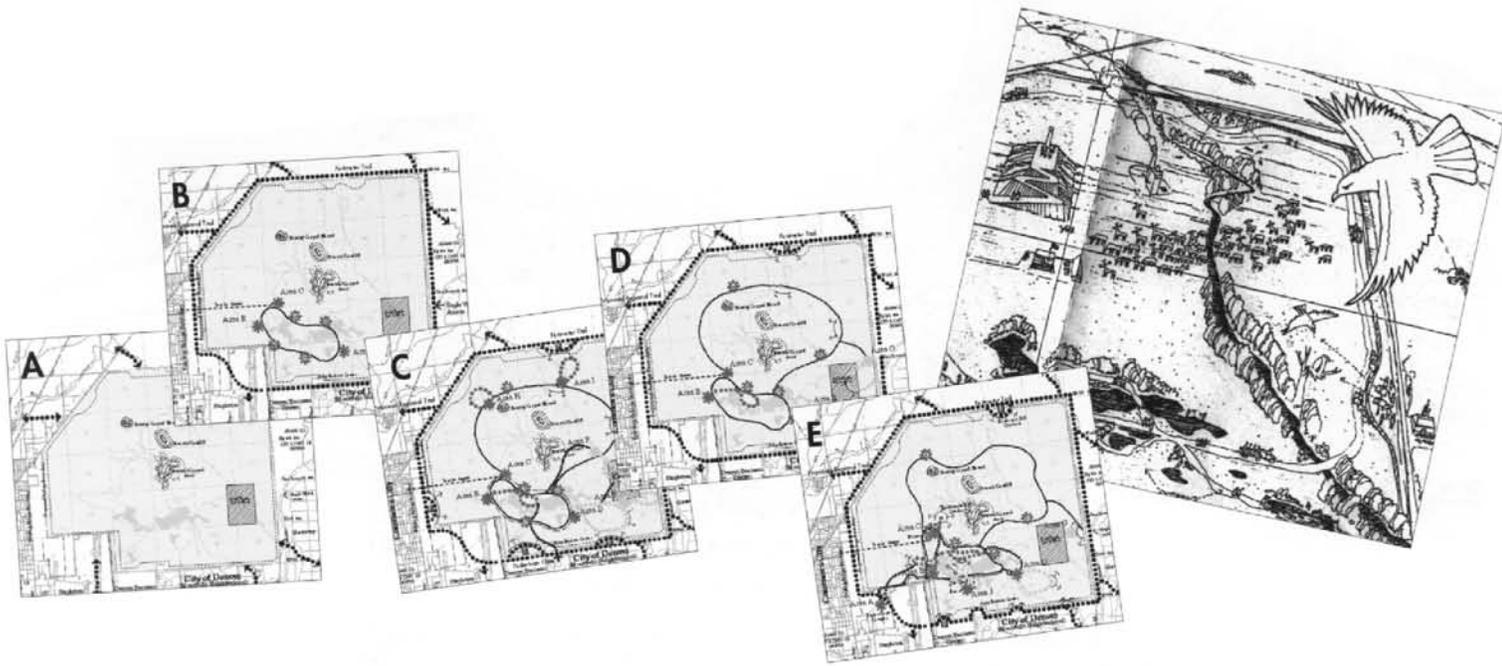
Goals and objectives were developed based on the issues and concerns identified earlier and on the mandates set out by the legislation estab-

lishing the Refuge. These were presented to the public for comment and later revised.

Conduct public meetings

Public scoping meetings held in September 1995 gave the community the opportunity to comment on the direction of the development of the Refuge's plan. These meetings were held in three different communities to make it more convenient for the public to attend. A notice of the meeting appeared in the Federal Register. Invitations were sent to approximately 25,000 people, including each postal address in the surrounding communities of Commerce City and Denver's Montbello neighborhood. Advertisements announcing the meetings appeared in the local newspapers and the two dailies. Flyers were distributed to key locations.

A video tape developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service specifically for these meetings was used to introduce the public to the Refuge and its planning process. A preliminary vision of the Refuge was presented as was a three- landscape-zone way of looking at the site. Attendees were then divided into smaller discussion groups and asked to respond to three main questions: What should be the primary mission of the Refuge? What kinds of activities should be



allowed or not allowed at the Refuge? What advice would you like to give the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in creating the Refuge plan?

Each group then made a brief report back to the full meeting. An opportunity was provided for formal comment and then the meeting was adjourned.

Comments from the meetings and those that were received through the mail (a public comment period ran for an additional 30 days after the meetings) were used to revise the preliminary vision and help develop alternative plans for the Refuge. Comments were summarized in a scoping report.

Public review of alternative plans

Preliminary alternative Refuge plans were presented to the public in a second series of public meetings in February 1995 at Adams City High School in Commerce City, Montbello High School in Denver, and at the Denver Botanic Gardens. These meetings were not a requirement of the process stipulated in the National Environmental Policy Act. They were added to the process to provide greater public involvement in planning the Refuge.

Once again the meetings were held in three different locations as a convenience to the public.

Approximately 10,000 copies of a newsletter were sent out as an invitation to the meetings. Advertisements announcing the meetings appeared in the local newspapers and the two dailies. Flyers were distributed to key locations.

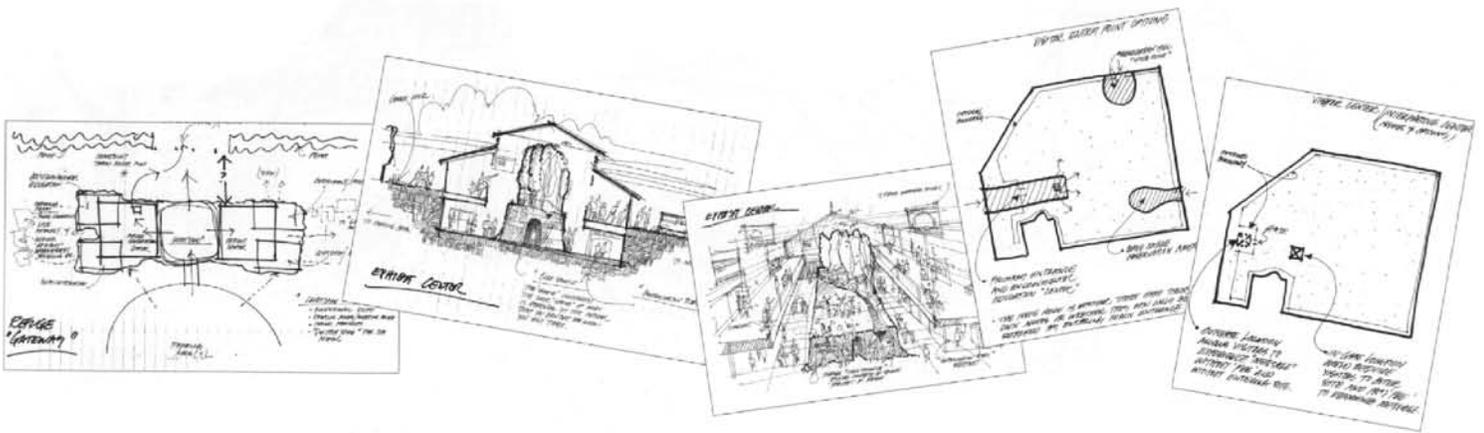
After a brief introduction from the Project Leader, a video was shown which presented the activities to date and explained several important aspects of the planning process. An overview was given of the preliminary alternative plans, then those in attendance were divided into smaller discussion groups so they could ask further questions and make comments on the preliminary plans. Each group reported back to the larger group.

Comments from these meetings, those sent in, and those from the focus groups helped the planning team revise the alternative plans and develop a preferred alternative.

Public review of the draft environmental impact statement

The draft environmental impact statement, which analyzes the environmental effects of the alternative plans, was presented to the public at a meeting in Denver on June 27, 1995.

(Advertisements alerting the public to the meeting were placed in local newspapers and flyers were



circulated. Forty thousand copies of a newsletter were sent out with information about the meeting.)

Particular detail was given on the Service's preferred alternative. A formal comment period came at the close of the meeting and written comments were taken through August 15. With a few minor exceptions, comments strongly favored the preferred alternative.

Conduct Agency meetings

Two special meetings were held with representatives from federal, state, and local agencies interested in the creation of the Refuge. These meetings provided opportunities for the representatives to voice concerns from their agencies as well as ask questions about the project.

2. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Identify public needs (uses, market demand)

The kinds of uses that the public would likely want to see at the Refuge—from the more obvious such as nature watching to the less traditional, like bicycling—were drawn from a range of sources, including a survey conducted by the Service. Each use had to meet the legislated purposes of the Refuge to be allowed within the Refuge.

A number of uses not typically allowed on refuges, such as inline skating and jogging, will be allowed in the Refuge greenbelt, which is along the perimeter of the entire Refuge, but not within the fence enclosing the majority of the Refuge.

Identify biological needs

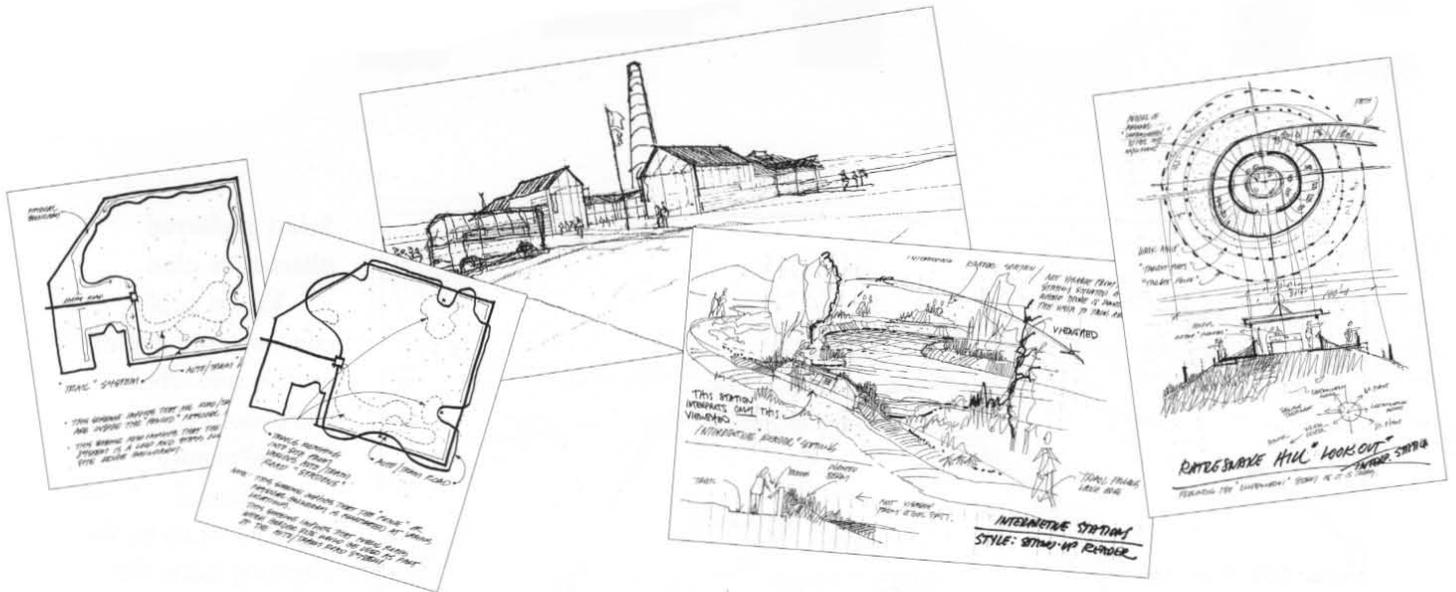
A workshop was held with Service personnel to identify and record the biological communities of the Refuge and their needs. These biological needs were considered with the public needs to identify a program of uses and facilities for the Refuge.

Analyze compatibility of uses with Refuge purposes

Each of the public uses of the Refuge was evaluated preliminarily for its compatibility with the purposes for which the Refuge was established. Some uses were found to be compatible because they would be separated in time or space from a purpose they might otherwise disrupt. For example, bicycling is allowed only on the southern tram route and only when the bald eagles are not in residence at the Refuge.

A more formal compatibility analysis is currently underway.

As part of this process, a suitability mapping exercise was conducted that looked at the suitability



ity of the land for three land uses: buildings, roads, and trails.

Assess impacts (preliminary)

A preliminary assessment of impacts was carried out for the uses proposed for the Refuge. This was an early way to identify potential conflicts between the Refuge's resources and the uses being considered.

Develop preliminary and final program

The planning team developed a draft preliminary program for the uses that were being considered for the Refuge. This was based on the facility requirements for similar uses at other refuges. A workshop was then held with Service personnel to review and revise that document and create a preliminary program, which showed, among other things, approximate requirements for each element (both biological, as well as public use) of the plan.

The preliminary program was revised as the final plan was selected and its uses and facilities refined. A detailed analysis of each major facility was carried out as part of the process of creating a budget and a phasing plan for the final plan. These are described in project worksheets.

Send newsletters

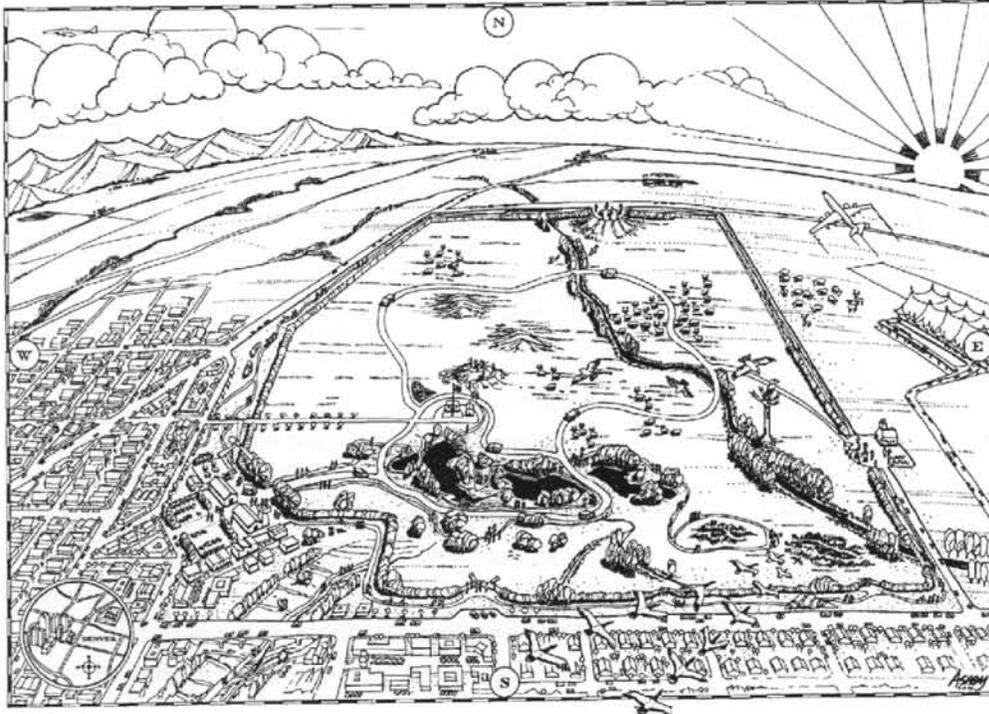
Newsletters were used to communicate project progress to the public and to invite them to upcoming public meetings. The first newsletter was an invitation to attend the scoping meetings in September 1994. The second newsletter (Winter 1995) reported the results of the public scoping meetings, outlined the preliminary alternative plans, and invited the public to workshops to review the alternatives. The third newsletter (Spring 1995) discussed the results of the previous public meeting, described the alternative preferred by the Service, and invited the public to a presentation of the draft environmental impact statement and the preferred alternative.

A poster was also created at the end of the project to communicate the major characteristics of the final plan.

3. ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

Develop alternative plans

A range of comments was heard at each of the early public meetings about the levels of access that the public should have on the Refuge. Some people spoke in favor of high levels of pub-



lic access, allowing people to use most of the Refuge. Others favored heavy restrictions on what people would be allowed to do and where they would be allowed to go. Still others felt some intermediate level of access was appropriate. Because of the range of opinion, the planning team felt the level of public access would be a good characteristic to vary among the alternatives.

Three major alternative plans were created with high, moderate, and low public access. A fourth alternative plan—no action—was considered as a requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Refine alternatives

The alternatives were revised based on comments made at the public workshops and those sent to the Project Leader.

Select preferred alternative plan

Taking public comment into consideration and other evaluations (such as the preliminary assessment of impacts) made by the planning team, the Service selected as the preferred alternative the plan with moderate public access.

Prepare draft environmental impact statement

The Service and the planning team prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to document the possible environmental effects of the alternative management plans on the natural, social and economic environment. The EIS is intended to comply with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Service's policy on new Refuge development. The analysis of environmental impacts associated with implementation of the management plan is addressed at the conceptual planning level. (See the Draft and Final EIS for details of the processes that lead to those documents.)

Draft preliminary Comprehensive Management Plan

Worksheets

Project worksheets were completed for each

project to be undertaken as part of the comprehensive management plan. These sheets include a preliminary cost estimate to carry out the project and describe the characteristics of each project.

Refine budget

The cost estimates from the project worksheets were combined to create an overall budget for the project. The budget was refined by making adjustments to the project worksheets.

Phasing

A phasing scheme was developed for the comprehensive management plan because the plan will be realized over a period of years. Each phase has associated with it specific projects and project costs.

4. PREFERRED PLAN SELECTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Finalize goals and objectives

The process of finalizing the comprehensive management plan and creating the final documents that describe it included revisiting the preliminary goals and objectives. They were revised and finalized based on comments that had been offered by the public and in an effort to make the objectives more measurable.

Prepare public use plan

Concurrent with the development of the comprehensive management plan, a companion document was created outlining public use for the Refuge. This public use plan, which describes the Refuge's range of environmental education and interpretation and wildlife-oriented recreation, was developed from the earlier assessment of anticipated user needs and market demand for such services.

Prepare final environmental impact statement

After reviewing comments received from the public and from other agencies on the draft EIS, the final EIS was prepared.

Draft record of decision

On December 8, 1995 the Acting Regional Director for Region 6 issued a record of decision designating the Service's preferred plan as the final plan for the Refuge.

Issue comprehensive management plan and summary poster

This comprehensive management plan was published along with a summary poster to notify the public that the Refuge's management plan had been completed.

