1 Introduction

USFWS

Sunset over Upper Red Rock Lake.

This document presents an environmental assessment (EA) that evaluates alternatives for, and expected consequences of, managing Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Alternative B is the proposed action of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and is presented in chapter 6 as the draft comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for the refuge. This chapter provides an introduction to the CCP process and describes the involvement of the Service, the state of Montana, the public, and others, as well as conservation issues and plans that affect the refuge. The remaining chapters provide more specific information on the refuge and planning issues (chapter 2), its resources (chapter 4), and the alternatives (chapter 3) and related consequences (chapter 5) considered for this plan. Chapter 6 provides objectives and strategies for the proposed action.

The Service has developed this draft CCP to provide a foundation for the management and use of Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. This refuge is one of the most remote in the continental United States. It is located in the Centennial Valley in southwestern Montana in Beaverhead County, 47 miles west of West Yellowstone and 38 miles east of the town of Lima. (Figure 1. Location of Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Montana). When finalized, the CCP will serve as a working guide for management programs and actions over the next 15 years.

This draft CCP was developed in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) and Part 602 (National Wildlife Refuge System Planning) of "The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual." The actions described in this draft CCP and EA meet the requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality regulations that implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). This project also complies with NEPA public involvement requirements.

The final CCP will specify the necessary actions to achieve the vision and purposes of the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. Wildlife is the first priority in refuge management, and visitor services (wildlife-dependent recreation) are allowed and encouraged as long as they are compatible with the refuge's purposes.

The draft CCP and EA have been prepared by a planning team composed of representatives from various U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service programs. The planning team also incorporated public input—public involvement and the planning process are described in section 1.6, "The Planning Process."

After reviewing a wide range of public comments and management needs, the planning team developed alternatives for managing the refuge. The team recommended one alternative to be the Service's proposed action, which addresses all substantive issues and best achieves the purposes of the refuge.

Figure 1. Location of Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Montana.

The proposed action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's recommended course of action for managing the refuge. The proposed action is summarized in chapter 3, "Alternatives," with its predicted effects described in chapter 5, "Environmental Consequences." The details of the proposed action compose the draft CCP (chapter 6).

1.1 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PLAN

The purpose of this draft CCP is to identify the role that the refuge will play in support of the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) and to provide long-term guidance for managing refuge programs and activities. The CCP is needed to

- communicate with the public and other partners in efforts to carry out the mission of the Refuge System;
- provide a clear statement of direction for managing the refuge;
- provide neighbors, visitors, and government officials with an understanding of the Service's management actions on and around the refuge;
- ensure that the Service's management actions are consistent with the mandates of the Improvement Act;
- ensure that management of the refuge is consistent with federal, state, and county plans;
- provide a basis for development of budget requests for the refuge's operation, maintenance, and capital improvement needs.

Sustaining the nation's fish and wildlife resources is a task that can be accomplished only through the combined efforts of governments, businesses, and private citizens.

1.2 THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AND THE REFUGE SYSTEM

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for fish, wildlife, and plant conservation. The Refuge System is one of the Service's major programs.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, working with others, is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

Over a century ago, America's fish and wildlife resources were declining at an alarming rate. Concerned citizens, scientists, and hunting and angling groups joined together to restore and sustain America's national wildlife heritage. This was the genesis of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Today, the Service enforces federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores vital wildlife habitat, protects and recovers endangered species, and helps other governments with conservation efforts. In addition, the Service administers a federal aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars to states for fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, and related programs across America.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Activities in Montana (2006)

Service activities in Montana contribute to the state's economy, ecosystems, and education programs. The following list highlights the Service's presence and activities:

- employed 142 people in Montana
- 407 volunteers donated more than 21,131 hours to Service projects on refuge lands
- managed two national fish hatcheries, one fish and wildlife management assistance office, one fish health center, four ecological services offices, and one fish technology center
- managed 23 national wildlife refuges encompassing 1,195,828 acres (1.27% of the state)
- managed 5 wetland management districts
  - managed 47,884 acres of fee waterfowl production areas
  - managed 135,320 acres under various leases or easements
- hosted more than 629,950 annual visitors to Service-managed lands
  - 112,835 hunting visits
  - 71,665 fishing visits
  - 419,062 wildlife observation visits
  - 9,905 students (8,944 in on-site programs) participated in environmental education programs
- provided $6.9 million to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) for sport fish restoration and $6.3 million for wildlife restoration and hunter education
- since 1988, the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has helped private landowners restore more than 27,402 wetland acres on 2,141 sites; 320,124 upland acres on 298 sites; and 1,138 miles of river habitat
- paid Montana counties $315,271 under the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act (money used for schools and roads)

National Wildlife Refuge System

In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt designated the 5.5-acre Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first wildlife refuge for the protection of brown pelicans and other native nesting birds. This was the first time the federal government set aside land for wildlife. This small but significant designation was the beginning of the Refuge System.

One hundred years later, the Refuge System has become the largest collection of lands in the world specifically managed for wildlife, encompassing over 96 million acres within 547 refuges and over 3,000 small areas for waterfowl breeding and nesting. Today, there is at least one refuge in every state, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Improvement Act of 1997 established a clear mission for the Refuge System.

> *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.*

The Improvement Act states that each national wildlife refuge (that is, each unit of the Refuge System, which includes wetland management districts) shall be managed to

- fulfill the mission of the Refuge System;
- fulfill the individual purposes of each refuge and district;
- consider the needs of fish and wildlife first;
- fulfill the requirement of developing a CCP for each unit of the Refuge System and fully involve the public in preparation of these plans;
- maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System;
- recognize that wildlife-dependent recreation activities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, are legitimate and priority visitor services;
- retain the authority of refuge managers to determine compatible visitor services.

In addition to the mission for the Refuge System, the wildlife and habitat vision for each unit of the Refuge System maintains the following principles:

- Wildlife comes first.
- Ecosystems, biodiversity, and wilderness are vital concepts in refuge and district management.
- Habitats must be healthy.
- Growth of refuges and districts must be strategic.
- The Refuge System serves as a model for habitat management with broad participation from others.

Following passage of the Improvement Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service immediately began to carry out the direction of the new legislation, including preparation of CCPs for all national wildlife refuges and wetland management districts (WMDs). Consistent with the Improvement Act, the Service prepares all CCPs in conjunction with public involvement. Each refuge and each district is required to complete its CCP within the 15-year schedule (by 2012).

People and the Refuge System

The nation's fish and wildlife heritage contributes to the quality of American lives and is an integral part of the country's greatness. Wildlife and wild places have always given people special opportunities to have fun, relax, and appreciate the natural world.

Whether through bird watching, fishing, hunting, photography, or other wildlife pursuits, wildlife recreation contributes millions of dollars to local economies. Approximately 37 million people visited the Refuge System in 2004, mostly to observe wildlife in their natural habitats. Visitors are most often accommodated through nature trails, auto tours, interpretive programs, and hunting and fishing opportunities. Significant economic benefits are being generated to the local communities that surround refuges and wetland management districts. Economists report that Refuge System visitors contribute more than $1.4 billion annually to local economies.

1.3 NATIONAL AND REGIONAL MANDATES

Refuge System units are managed to achieve the mission and goals of the Refuge System, along with the designated purpose of the refuges and districts (as described in establishing legislation, executive orders, or other establishing documents). The key concepts and guidance of the Refuge System are contained in the Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (Administration Act), Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), "The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual," and the Improvement Act.

The Improvement Act amends the Administration Act by providing a unifying mission for the Refuge System, a new process for determining compatible visitor services on refuges and districts, and a requirement that each refuge and district be managed under a CCP. The Improvement Act

states that wildlife conservation is the priority of Refuge System lands and that the Secretary of the Interior will ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of refuge lands are maintained. Each refuge and district must be managed to fulfill the Refuge System's mission and the specific purposes for which it was established. The Improvement Act requires the Service to monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge and district.

A detailed description of these and other laws and executive orders that may affect the CCP or the Service's implementation of the CCP is found in Appendix A. Service policies on planning and day-to-day management of refuges and districts are in the "Refuge System Manual" and "The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual."

1.4 REFUGE CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PLANS

The Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge contributes to the conservation efforts described here.

Fulfilling the Promise

A 1999 report, "Fulfilling the Promise, The National Wildlife Refuge System" (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1999), is the culmination of a yearlong process by teams of Service employees to evaluate the Refuge System nationwide. This report was the focus of the first national Refuge System conference (in 1998)—attended by refuge managers, other Service employees, and representatives from leading conservation organizations.

The report contains 42 recommendations packaged with three vision statements dealing with wildlife and habitat, people, and leadership. This CCP deals with all three of these major topics. The planning team looked to the recommendations in the document for guidance during CCP planning.

Partners in Flight

The "Partners in Flight" program began in 1990 with the recognition of declining population levels of many migratory bird species. The challenge is, according to the program, maintaining functional natural ecosystems in the face of human population growth. To meet this challenge, Partners in Flight worked to identify priority land bird species and habitat types. Partners in Flight activity has resulted in 52 bird conservation plans covering the continental United States.

The primary goal of Partners in Flight is to provide for the long-term health of bird life of this continent. The first priority is to prevent the rarest species from going extinct. The second priority is to prevent uncommon species from descending into threatened status. The third priority is to "keep common birds common."

There are 58 physiographic areas, defined by similar physical geographic features, wholly or partially contained within the contiguous United States and several others wholly or partially in Alaska. The Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge lies within the physiographic area known as the Central Rocky Mountains (see figure 2). It is a huge physiographic area, extending from northwest Wyoming over all of western Montana, the northern two-thirds of Idaho, large areas of eastern Oregon and Washington, much of southeast British Columbia, and a sliver of west Alberta. It is an area of high mountains, with elevations exceeding 10,000 feet. Glaciation has left broad flat valleys between mountain ranges. Elevation determines the dominant vegetation. The highest areas are alpine tundra. The subalpine zone is dominated by Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir, with ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir in the montane zone below that. Stand-replacing fire can change forests in either of those zones to lodgepole pine or aspen. Grass and sagebrush occur under open pine forests that grade downslope into grasslands, wetlands, woodlands, or shrub-steppe.

Approximately 28 species of birds have a larger population in the Central Rocky Mountains than in any other physiographic area. This is the largest such number of any physiographic area in the lower 48 states, and it seems to represent the huge size of the area and the vast amount of quality bird habitat that still exists. The habitat characteristics, however, are not unique to just this area but represent the heart of the mountainous West and the center of distribution for many birds, particularly those of coniferous forests, which range more widely.

Fire in higher elevation coniferous forests of the central Rocky Mountains tends to be of high intensity and low frequency. After such stand-replacing fires, either aspen or lodgepole pine occupy a site until a century or more of succession results in redominance of the site-specific hemlock, spruce, or fir species. Many birds track this process—both black-backed and three-toed woodpeckers specialize in foraging on charred post-fire trees. Dusky grouse and Williamson's sapsucker are among those species most abundant in aspen.

A huge percentage of the central Rockies in the United States are in public ownership, mostly managed by the Forest Service. Maintenance or restoration of healthy forest ecosystems on public and private industrial lands will be the most important factor in keeping the central Rocky Mountains a healthy ecosystem for so many forest birds.

The priority bird species and habitats of the central Rocky Mountains found on the refuge include the following:

Shrub-steppe
- greater sage-grouse

Wetland
- American white pelican
- trumpeter swan
- Barrow's goldeneye
- Franklin's gull

Riparian
- calliope hummingbird

Coniferous forest
- Dusky grouse
- black-backed woodpecker

Aspen
- Williamson's sapsucker
- red-naped sapsucker

North American Waterfowl Management Plan

Written in 1986, the "North American Waterfowl Management Plan" envisioned a 15-year effort to achieve landscape conditions that could sustain waterfowl populations. Specific plan objectives are to increase and restore duck populations to the average levels of the 1970s—62 million breeding ducks and a fall flight of 100 million birds.

By 1985 waterfowl populations had plummeted to record lows. Habitat that waterfowl depend on was disappearing at a rate of 60 acres per hour. Recognizing the importance of waterfowl and wetlands to North Americans and the need for international cooperation to help in the recovery of a shared resource, the United States and Canadian governments developed a strategy to restore waterfowl populations through habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement. Mexico became a signatory to the plan in 1994.

The plan is innovative because of its international scope and its implementation at the regional level. Its success depends on the strength of partnerships called "joint ventures," involving federal, state, provincial, tribal, and local governments; businesses; conservation organizations; and individual citizens.

Joint ventures are regional self-directed partnerships that carry out science-based conservation through a wide array of community participation. Joint ventures develop implementation plans that focus on areas of concern identified in the plan. Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge lies within the Intermountain West Joint Venture.

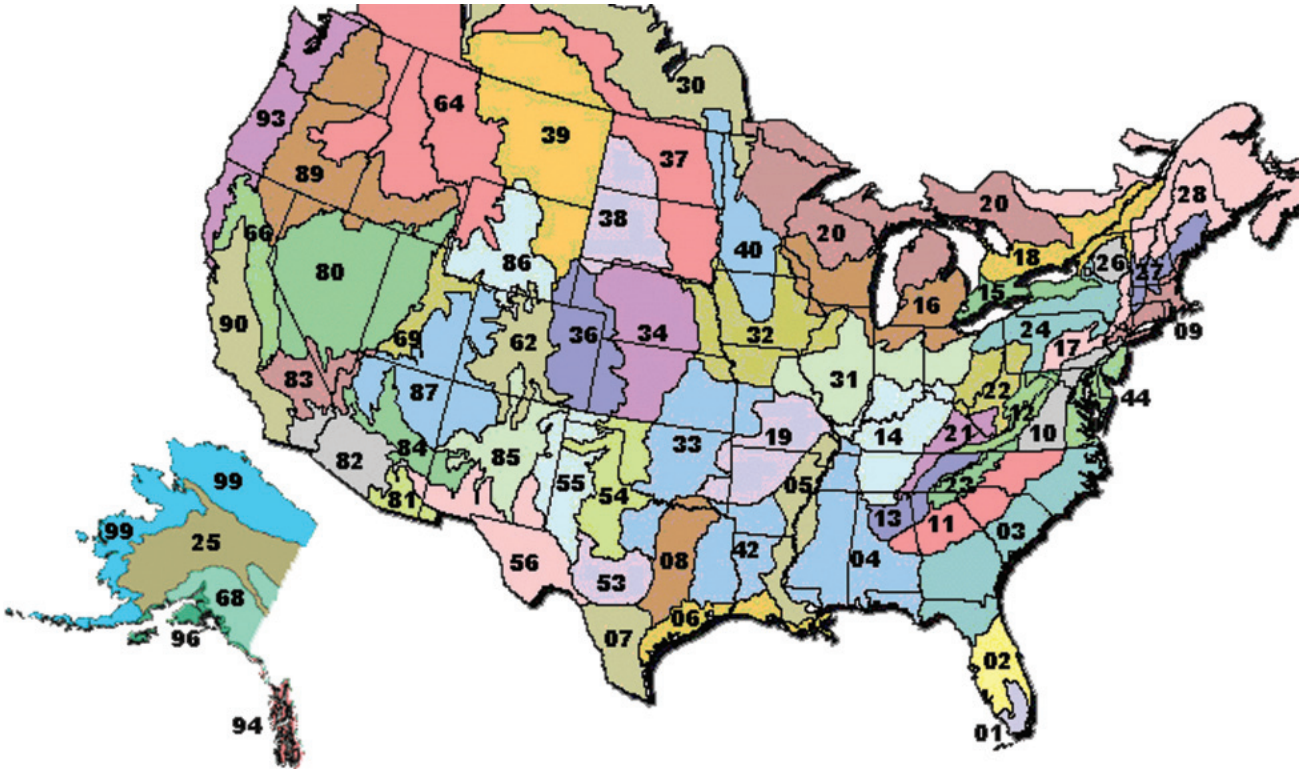

Figure 2. Physiographic area map of the United States.
(Source: Partners in Flight)

Laura King/USFWS

Glossy ibis.

Intermountain West Regional Shorebird Plan

The Intermountain West Regional Shorebird Plan was released in 2000. The plan notes that perhaps 1 million shorebirds breed in the Intermountain West region and that millions more migrate through the area each year. The plan recognizes that finding ample high-quality fresh water will be the greatest challenge faced by shorebirds in the Intermountain West region. The shorebird plan articulates seven goals, plus associated objectives and strategies related to habitat management, monitoring and assessment, research, outreach, and planning. The planning goal includes objectives to coordinate shorebird planning and projects with other migratory bird initiatives and specifically with the Intermountain West Joint Venture. The shorebird plan identifies 11 species of shorebirds that regularly breed in the region, as well as 23 additional species that are annual migrants. Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is recognized in the plan as one of the 79 managed shorebird sites.

State Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy

Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy includes all vertebrate species known to exist in Montana, including both game and nongame species, as well as some invertebrate species, such as freshwater mussels and crayfish. From the early years of fish and wildlife management, the focus has been placed on game animals and their related habitats because most of the agency's funding has been provided by hunters and anglers.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks does not intend to reduce its focus on important game species and maintains that conserving particular types of habitats will benefit a variety of game and nongame species. With this new funding mechanism and conservation strategy in place, the MFWP believes that managing fish and wildlife more comprehensively is a natural progression in the effective conservation of Montana's remarkable fish and wildlife resources (MFWP 2005). Although game species are included in MFWP's conservation strategy, the priority is species and their related habitats "in greatest conservation need." This means focus areas, community types, and species that are significantly degraded or declining, federally listed, or where important distribution and occurrence information used to assess the status of individuals and groups of species are lacking. Because management of game species has been largely successful over the last 100 years, most species have populations that are stable or increasing, and fewer are identified as "in greatest conservation need" (49 nongame, 11 game). MFWP's conservation strategy uses five ecotypes to describe the broad areas of Montana's landscape that have similar characteristics. Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is located in the intermountain/foothill grassland ecotype, a mosaic of private and public land that extends from the glaciated Flathead River Valley to the north, south to the Centennial Valley, and east to the Little Belt Foothills. This western Montana ecotype harbors more wildlife communities than any other in Montana.

Within each of the ecotypes, Tier 1 (greatest need of conservation) geographic focus areas were identified for all terrestrial and aquatic areas of the state. Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is located within the Southwest Montana Intermontane Basin and Valley focus area. The Tier 1 priority species for this area include the western toad, common loon, trumpeter swan, bald eagle, greater sage-grouse, long-billed curlew, flammulated owl, Townsend's big-

eared bat, pygmy rabbit, great basin pocket mouse, gray wolf, grizzly bear, and Canada lynx.

The"Montana Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy" (MFWP 2005) outlines five conservation concerns and strategies for the Southwest Montana Intermontane Basin and Valley Focus Area. The key concerns are:

- Habitat fragmentation and loss of connectivity as a result of human population growth/ development
- Invasive or exotic plant species
- Altered fire system
- Range or forest management practices
- Streamside residential development

Fisheries Program, Vision for the Future

The Fisheries Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has played a vital role in conserving and managing fish and other aquatic resources since 1871. Today, the Fisheries Program is a critical partner with states, tribes, other governments, other Service programs, private organizations, public institutions, and interested citizens in a larger effort to conserve these important resources. The nation's fish and other aquatic resources are among the richest and most diverse in the world. These resources have helped support the nation's growth by providing enormous ecological, social, and economic benefits. Despite efforts by the Service and others to conserve aquatic resources, a growing number are declining at alarming rates. Loss of habitat and invasive species are the two most significant threats to the diversity of aquatic systems. One-third of the nation's freshwater fish species are threatened or endangered, 72% of freshwater mussels are imperiled, and the number of threatened and endangered species has tripled in the last 20 years. Clearly, there is increasing urgency to identify and carry out actions that will reverse these alarming trends before it is too late (USFWS 2002a).

In order to better conserve and manage fish and other aquatic resources in the face of increasing threats, the Service worked with partners to refocus its Fisheries Program and develop a vision outlined in the document, "Fisheries Program, Vision for the Future" (USFWS 2002b). The vision of the Service and its Fisheries Program is working with partners to restore and maintain fish and other aquatic resources at self-sustaining levels and to support federal mitigation programs for the benefit of the American public. To achieve this vision, the Fisheries Program will work with its partners to

- protect the health of aquatic habitats;
- restore fish and other aquatic resources;
- provide opportunities to enjoy the benefits of healthy aquatic resources.

One of the objectives in this document states:

> *Objective 2.2: Restore declining fish and other aquatic resource populations before they require listing under the Endangered Species Act. The Fisheries Program will increase its support and assistance in stopping and reversing declines of native fish and other aquatic resources, including restoring fish passage and rebuilding populations.*

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge has one of the only native lacustrine/adfluvial (live in the lake and breed in the river) populations of Arctic grayling in the lower 48 states, along with a native population of Westslope cutthroat trout. Both of these populations are imperiled due to a significant loss of habitat, disease, sedimentation, and impacts from other nonnative fish species. In order to achieve this objective of restoring declining fish populations, the refuge will need to take management actions to enhance these species and their habitats, while ensuring that the purposes of the refuge are being met.

1.5 ECOSYSTEM DESCRIPTION AND THREATS

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is located within the Upper Missouri, Yellowstone, and Upper Columbia rivers ecosystem. This ecosystem lies within the Rocky Mountain and Great Plains physiographic provinces and includes a large part of Montana, northern Wyoming, and a small section of western North Dakota (see figure 3). Some of the wildest and most unpopulated country in the lower 48 states occurs within this 185,000 square mile area, including such significant protected areas as Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and the Upper Missouri River. Wildlife in these areas is abundant and diverse.

Threatened and endangered species are actively protected and managed within various areas of this ecosystem; those species include grizzly bear, gray wolf, black-footed ferret, bull trout, pallid sturgeon, piping plover, least tern, and water howellia. Some of these species, such as the grizzly bear, are only listed in certain areas. Of these species, only the gray wolf has been observed visiting the refuge. Sitting astride the Continental Divide, the ecosystem gives rise to the Columbia and Missouri rivers. Three main habitat groups are predominant throughout the ecosystem: mountain habitat, river habitat, and prairie habitat. Mountain habitat groups contain a number of habitat types. Arid lands in the valleys have mixed wheatgrass and fescue grasslands along with considerable acreages of sagebrush stands. Surrounding mountains are of moderate elevation and are cloaked with conifer forests. The

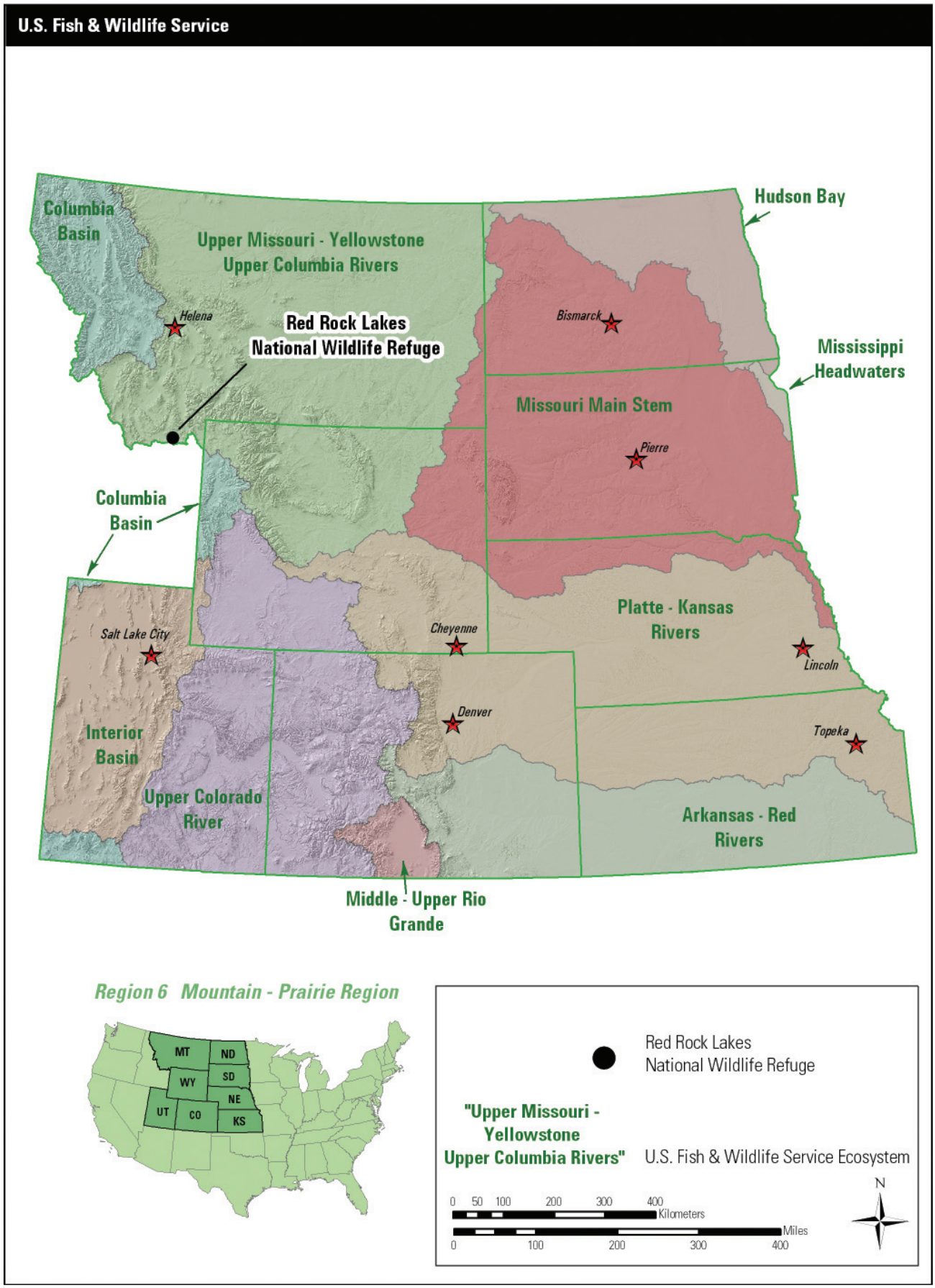

Figure 3. Upper Missouri, Yellowstone, and Upper Columbia rivers ecosystem map.

highest elevations have Douglas-fir or spruce-fir forests or alpine vegetation. Gray wolves, grizzly bears, wolverines, and different species of trout occur in these habitat groups. River habitat groups are comprised of a mix of native prairie grass and sagebrush-steppe, along with the riparian zone of larger rivers and their tributaries. Cottonwood- and shrub-dominated communities are also common. Many of the same animals that are present in the mountain habitat are present in the river habitat as well. Prairie habitat groups include woodlands and grass- or sage-dominated areas where adequate moisture for a forest canopy is not available. Higher elevation is home to subalpine communities and rock outcrops. Prairie grasslands or shrub-steppe dominates at lower elevations, with riparian areas along watercourses. Black-tailed prairie dogs, bald eagles, ferruginous hawks, and a diverse group of fish can be found in this habitat.

Key threats to the ecosystem include invasive plant species, conversion of native prairie to agriculture, and habitat fragmentation from development and population growth. Priorities for the Upper Missouri, Yellowstone, and Upper Columbia rivers ecosystem include ensuring natural and healthy ecological processes for the area, and making sure that economic development complements environmental protection.

1.6 PLANNING PROCESS

This draft CCP and EA for the refuge are intended to follow the Improvement Act and NEPA and the implementing regulations of both acts. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued its Refuge System planning policy in 2000. This policy established requirements and guidance for refuge and district plans—including CCPs and step-down management plans—to ensure that planning efforts follow the Improvement Act. The planning policy identified several steps of the CCP and environmental analysis process (see figure 4).

Table 1 lists the specific steps in the planning process, to date, for the preparation of this draft CCP and EA. The Service began the pre-planning process in August 2005 with the establishment of a planning team. The planning team is comprised primarily of Service personnel from the refuge and representatives from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Some other contributors included other Service divisions, U.S. Geological Service, Montana State University, Bureau of Land Management, and The Nature Conservancy (see "Appendix B: List of Preparers, Consultation, and Coordination"). During pre-planning, the team developed a mailing list, internal issues, and a special qualities list. The planning team identified and reviewed current refuge programs, compiled and analyzed relevant data, and determined the purpose of the refuge.

A notice of intent (NOI) to prepare the draft CCP and EA was published in the Federal Register on June 12, 2006. Public scoping began with publication of the notice, and information was distributed through news releases, issuance of the first planning update, and holding two public scoping meetings in August 2006. Public scoping concluded on September 15, 2006, when the comment period closed.

Over the course of pre-planning and public scoping, the planning team collected available information about the resources of the refuge and the surrounding areas. This information is summarized in "Chapter 4. Affected Environment."

Coordination with the Public

A mailing list of more than 250 names, including private citizens; local, regional, and state government representatives and legislators; other federal agencies; and interested organizations was prepared during pre-planning (see "Appendix C: Public Involvement").

The first planning update issue was sent in July 2006 to everyone on the mailing list. Information was provided on the history of the refuge and the CCP process, along with an invitation to a public scoping meeting.

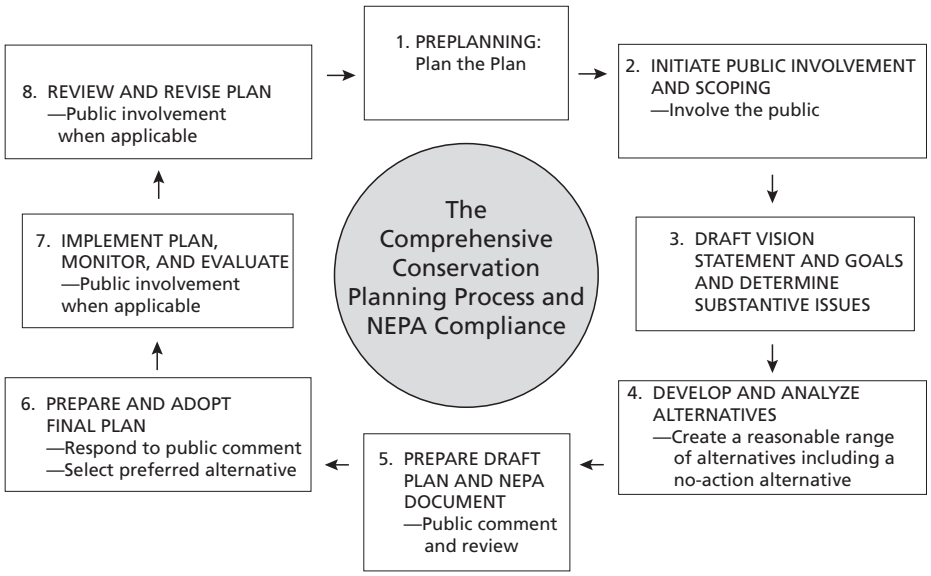

Figure 4. CCP and environmental analysis process steps.

Table 1. Planning process summary and timeline for Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

Date	*Event*	*Outcome*
August 16, 2005	Kickoff meeting	CCP overview developed, planning team list developed, purposes identified, initial issues and qualities list developed, development of mailing list initiated.
September 20, 2005	Visitor services review	Visitor services programs and facilities evaluated by education and visitor services staff.
February 21, 2006	Biological review	Gathered information from a team of researchers and biologists on the natural processes that formed and continue to influence Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.
May 17, 2006	Biological review	Worked with contracted U.S. Geological Survey researcher to evaluate current biological programs and needs.
June 12, 2006	Notice of intent	Published notice of intent in *Federal Register* to initiate public scoping.
August 1, 2006	Planning update	First planning update sent to mailing list describing planning process and announcing upcoming public scoping meetings.
August 15, 2006	Public scoping meeting	Offered public opportunity to learn about the CCP and provide comments.
August 16, 2006	Public scoping meeting	Offered public opportunity to learn about the CCP and provide comments.
August 15, 2006	Vision and goals workshop	Developed draft vision and goals statements.
September 9, 2006	Public scoping meeting	Offered public opportunity to learn about the CCP and provide comments.
September 11, 2006	Biological review	Panel of biologists and researchers gathered to review and evaluate biological program and issues.
January 5, 2007	Focus group meeting (realty issues)	Staff and realty specialists discussed boundary and conservation easement program issues.
January 10, 2007	Alternatives netmeeting workshop	Developed alternatives table.
February 12, 2007	Objectives and strategies workshop	Finalized alternatives table, selected proposed action, and began writing objectives/strategies.
April 2007	Draft CCP	Began writing draft CCP/EA.
July 11-25, 2008	Internal review of draft CCP	Draft CCP is reviewed by Service, state, and other federal partners.

Each planning update included a comment form and postage-paid envelope to give the public an opportunity to provide written comments. Emails were also accepted at the refuge's email address: redrocks@fws.gov.

Three public scoping meetings were held within 2 hours of the refuge office. There were 33 attendees, primarily local citizens, including surrounding ranchers. Following a presentation about the refuge and an overview of the CCP and NEPA processes, attendees were encouraged to ask questions and offer comments. Verbal comments were recorded, and each attendee was given a comment form to submit additional thoughts or questions in writing.

All written comments were due September 15, 2006. A total of 55 additional written comments were received throughout the scoping process. All comments were shared with the planning team and considered throughout the planning process.

State Coordination

At the start of the planning process, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's region 6 director sent a letter to MFWP, inviting them to participate in the planning process. Numerous state biologists have since been involved in the planning process and have also participated in biological reviews of the refuge's management program. At the start of the process, the offices of each of the three state members of Congress (then Senator Conrad Burns, Senator Max Baucus, and Representative Dennis Rehburg) were sent letters notifying them of the planning process and inviting them to comment on the plan. Four other Montana State senators and representatives and Governor Brian Schweitzer were sent similar letters. To date, the state has been supportive of the planning process.

Tribal Coordination

Early in the planning process, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's region 6 director sent a letter to tribes identified as possibly having some interest in participating in the planning efforts at Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. Those contacted were the Northern Cheyenne, Crow, Eastern Shoshone, and Arapaho tribal councils. The tribal councils did not submit responses to the region 6 letter; nevertheless, the councils were provided planning updates and opportunities to comment.

Results of Scoping

Comments collected from scoping meetings and correspondence were used in the development of a final list of issues to be addressed in this draft CCP and EA.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined which alternatives could best address these issues.

The planning process ensures that issues with the greatest effect on the refuge are resolved or given priority over the life of the final CCP. Identified issues, along with a discussion of effects on resources, are summarized in chapter 2.

In addition, the Service considered suggested changes to current refuge management presented by the public and other groups.

Selecting an Alternative

The Service's region 6 director will consider the environmental effects of each alternative and select an alternative to implement—this alternative will then become the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge CCP. The regional director's decision will be disclosed in a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) included in the final CCP. Implementation of the CCP will begin following the regional director's signature and publication of the final CCP. The final CCP will provide long-term guidance for management decisions; support achievement of the goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes; and identify the Service's best estimate of future needs. This draft CCP details program planning levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, thus, are primarily for Service strategic planning purposes. This CCP does not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operation and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisitions.