

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain-Prairie Region

134 Union Boulevard

Lakewood, Colorado 80228

May 7, 2012

Contact: Laurie Shannon 303-236-4317

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE RELEASES THE FINAL COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR CHARLES M. RUSSELL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced its publication of the final Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge.

“This conservation plan will guide the long-term management for what we consider one of the crown jewels of the National Wildlife Refuge System,” said Steve Guertin, Director of the Service’s Mountain-Prairie Region. “Our goal is to preserve the integrity and beauty of the refuge which is home to the native prairies, the high cliffs of the Missouri Breaks, and the colorful badlands captured by the famous Montana cowboy artist Charlie Russell for whom the refuge was named.”

In preparing the final CCP and EIS, the Service developed three action alternatives including a preferred alternative and a no-action alternative, based on the Service’s mission and the purposes of the refuge and in consideration of public input throughout the planning process. The action alternatives evaluate a range of options for managing habitat, wildlife, and public use on the refuges.

Under Alternative D’s ecological processes emphasis and the Service’s preferred alternative, the Service would work with partners to use natural, dynamic, and ecological processes along with active management practices such as prescribed fire and grazing and weed control in a balanced, responsible manner to restore degraded habitats and maintain biological diversity, biological integrity, and environmental health of the refuges. Once natural processes are restored, more passive approaches would be favored. The Service would provide for quality wildlife-dependent public uses and experiences and would limit economic uses when they were injurious to ecological processes. The priority public uses would be hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation environmental education. Economic uses are uses where there is an economic benefit involved such as livestock grazing, commercial guiding and outfitting, and photography. Since the implementation of a 1986 resource management plan, the health of many habitats on Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge have improved;

however, a number of degraded areas remain largely as a result of too many ungulates (both cattle and elk), invasive species, and several poorly functioning riparian areas.

Under Alternative B's wildlife population emphasis, the Service would manage the landscape in cooperation with partners to emphasize abundant wildlife populations using natural processes and active agricultural practices. Wildlife-dependent public uses would be encouraged, but economic uses would be limited when they compete for habitat resources.

Under Alternative C's public use and economic use emphasis, the Service would manage the landscape in cooperation with partners to promote maximum levels of compatible, wildlife-dependent public uses and economic uses. Wildlife population and habitats would be protected using various management tools that would minimize damaging effects to wildlife and habitat while enhancing and diversifying public and economic opportunities.

The Service published its draft CCP and EIS in September 2010 which generated thousands of comments on a number of topics. As a result of public comment, the Service incorporated several changes in its approach to wildlife and habitat management, wilderness, public access, and other topics. For more information about the final plan and EIS, visit www.fws.gov/cmrr/planning.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/>. Connect with our Facebook page, follow our Twitter feed, watch our YouTube channel and view our Flickr photo stream.

-FWS-

