



# Mountain-Prairie Region



# Year in Review 2011



Welcome to the Mountain-Prairie Region and our look back at 2011. We had a full and productive year achieving significant milestones in our mission to conserve the nation's fish and wildlife resources. The Service and our many partners brought our collective efforts to bear across large landscapes. Together, we protected some of the last intact habitat for native species such as grizzly bears, greater prairie chickens and, of course, the millions of migratory birds who journey through and breed in our region every year.



Stephen Guertin / USFWS

I am particularly pleased to highlight the tremendous strides we achieved in fulfilling Interior Secretary Ken Salazar's vision for America's Great Outdoors (AGO). This effort for conservation seeks to focus the resources of the Service and other federal conservation agencies on grassroots initiatives to deliver fish and wildlife conservation, promote outdoor recreation opportunities, and support healthy communities across the country. Through AGO, the Service and our partners advanced numerous large landscape conservation efforts, including the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area

in Kansas, the Dakota Grassland Conservation Area in North and South Dakota, and the Crown of the Continent Conservation Area in Montana. These projects, which represent decades of hard work and collaboration by Service field staff, private landowners, state agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other conservation champions, will permanently protect millions of acres through the use of perpetual conservation easements acquired from willing sellers. In addition to enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, these conservation areas will help ensure traditional rural economies thrive

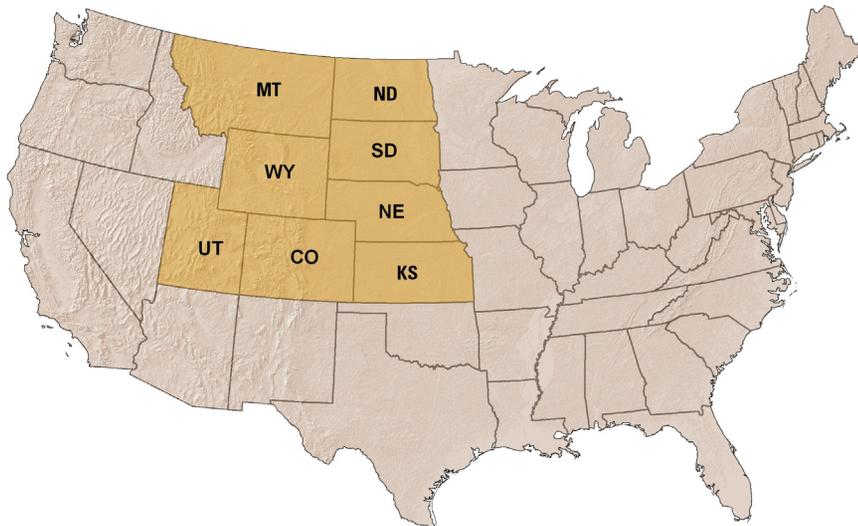
in the future, thus preserving the working landscape communities that are the heart and soul of this great region.

The road ahead will be a challenge as we deal with an uncertain federal budget, the onset of climate change and our ability to get people to enjoy the great outdoors. Despite these and other challenges, I am filled with optimism and energy when I consider all we have accomplished together over this past year. I look forward to the year ahead and the many conservation successes still to come.

- Steve Guertin, Regional Director

## From the Regional Director...

### The Mountain-Prairie Region



Cover: Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge / USFWS  
Leadplant in the Dakota Grasslands Conservation Area in South Dakota / USFWS



**America's  
Great  
Outdoors**



**Cutthroat Trout**



**Landscape  
Conservation  
Cooperatives**



**Endangered  
Species  
Recovery**



**Energy**



**Tribal Partners**



**Sage Steppe**

**CONTENTS**



# AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS

Conserving America's Wild Landscapes

*The Service established the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area and the Dakota Grassland Conservation Area to protect habitat through voluntary, perpetual conservation easements.*

## Dakota Grasslands Conservation Area - North and South Dakota

The Dakota Grasslands Conservation Area (DGCA) will allow the Service to better work with private landowners to accelerate the conservation of native prairie (both wetland and grassland habitats) within the Prairie Pothole Region in the eastern parts of North Dakota and South Dakota. This new conservation area also benefits the local ranching culture and will preserve, at a landscape scale, the ecological integrity of the area's mixed-grass prairie, tallgrass prairie, prairie pothole wetlands, and riparian woodlands. Partners include the South Dakota Grassland Trust, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, and Partners for Conservation.



Spiderwort / USFWS

## Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area - Kansas

The Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area (FHLCA) will help maintain the integrity in the last intact piece of tallgrass prairie wildlife habitat in North America, stream water quality, and the rich agricultural heritage of the Flint Hills. These conservation easements will protect habitat for more than 100 species of grassland birds and 500 plant species. Partners include the State of Kansas, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ranchland Trust of Kansas, (an affiliate of the Kansas Livestock Association), and Kansas Land Trust.



Greater prairie chicken / USFWS

Top left: *Missouri Coteau, DGCA* / USFWS  
Top right: *Tallgrass prairie and wildflowers, FHLCA* / USFWS



### Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative

Managing our natural and cultural resources and landscapes has become increasingly complex. Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) are public-private partnerships that recognize these challenges transcend political and jurisdictional boundaries and require a network approach to conservation.

LCCs seek to identify best practices, connect efforts, identify gaps, and avoid duplication through improved conservation planning and design.

The Great Northern LCC encompasses the Columbia River Basin, the

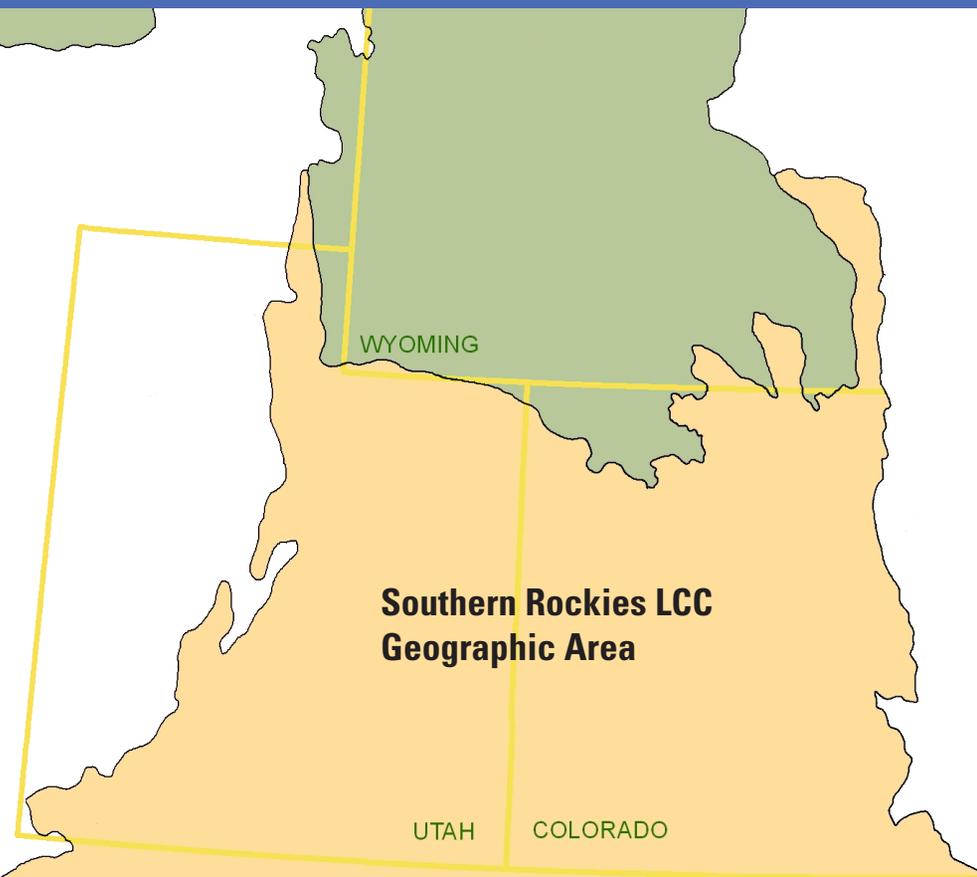
Northern Rocky Mountains, and the Sage Steppe of the Interior West. The Province of British Columbia has also joined the Great Northern LCC leadership.

The Great Northern LCC supports the development and delivery of conservation solutions through data, science and tools, decisions and partner support, and coordinated action. To support the on-the-ground landscape conservation, the Great Northern LCC has committed over \$2.4 million in 2011 and 2010 to a range of partners and landscape partnerships for ecological research,

information management and outreach projects. In 2011, the Great Northern LCC funded 12 projects, with 5 projects from 2010 receiving second year funding.

The Great Northern LCC partners are developing a collective landscape vision that reflects our shared conservation values including restoration and protection of ecosystems and habitats, native and sport fish and wildlife, aquatic systems, lands important to tribal and western heritages, and traditional land uses such as ranching, agriculture, and timber.

# LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION COOPERATIVES



WYOMING

### Southern Rockies LCC Geographic Area

UTAH

COLORADO

### Southern Rockies Landscape Conservation Cooperative

The Southern Rockies Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) encompasses large portions of Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico, as well as smaller parts of Wyoming, Idaho, and Nevada. The area is geographically complex, including wide elevation and topographic variation, from 14,000-foot peaks, to the Grand Canyon and cold desert basins.

Southern Rockies LCC projects include:

- Development and demonstration of building resilience to climate change in Colorado's Gunnison Basin
- Monitoring impacts of forest restoration treatments on ponderosa pine ecosystems in Colorado



*Rocky Mountain Front / USFWS*

- Connectivity and enhancement of adaptive management capacity on Navajo Nation lands
- Modeling low stream flows and assessing the ecological impacts of potential stream drying under climate change in the Upper Colorado River Basin
- Assessing soil vulnerability to future climate change in the Southern Rockies LCC, with implications for vegetation change and water cycle



*Westslope cutthroat trout / USFWS*

### **Native Trout Conservation**

The regional Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) continued its work to conserve native trout and habitat. A highlight of the year was the implementation of the Small Project Funding Program. Its purpose is to provide a source of funding to organizations seeking to get involved in conservation – protection, restoration or enhancement – of western native trout at the local level. It specifically supports collaborative approaches and partnerships involved in local efforts or community-

based programs that provide for habitat, educational, or public recreational angling programs that contribute to Initiative’s efforts to conserve western native trout. Two small projects in Montana received funding this year: the Rattlesnake Creek Community Stewardship Program and Chicago Creek Western Cutthroat Trout Reintroduction Project. In addition, the Service’s National Fish Habitat Action Plan funded three projects this year: the Bear Creek Greenback Cutthroat habitat in Colorado, Chalk Creek fish habitat and fish passage in Utah, and Jocko River habitat improvements in Montana.

# CUTTHROAT TROUT

# SAGE STEPPE

### **Conserving Sage Steppe Ecosystem**

The Service is active in the conservation of the sagebrush steppe ecosystem which is essential habitat for the Greater and Gunnison sage-grouse and many at-risk migratory bird species. Several research projects, funded through Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, examine a broad range of climate change impacts on sagebrush ecosystems, in an effort to

understand the impact of wind energy development on Greater sage-grouse. The results of this research will greatly improve our understanding of how to properly manage this complex ecosystem for the conservation of species at risk while considering the wide variety of multiple use demands in these areas.

The Mountain-Prairie Region’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife (private lands) program is working with private landowners within Gunnison sage-grouse and Greater sage-grouse core areas to restore and enhance sage steppe habitat. These landscape-scale projects have restored and enhanced 45,000 acres.

Additionally, we have partnered with the USDA National Resource Conservation Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land

Management and the U.S. Forest Service to deliver on-the-ground conservation through a variety of programs.



*Greater sage-grouse / USFWS*



*Sagebrush enhancement project / USFWS*



*Sage-grouse habitat on private ranch / USFWS*



Whooping cranes in flight / ©Bob Gress

### Office of Law Enforcement - Working with Industry to Achieve Compliance

The Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) special agents partner with state and federal counterparts and industry to provide outreach to ensure implementation of best practices designed to protect migratory birds and other wildlife from industrial hazards. When necessary, the Service works with prosecutors to gain compliance and hold companies and individuals accountable, for impacts to the nation's wildlife resources.



Whooping crane / USFWS

# ENERGY

### Habitat Conservation Plan

The Mountain-Prairie and Southwest Regions are working closely with 19 wind energy companies to develop a landscape-scale Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) to conserve species protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and species in decline while supporting responsible renewable energy development. HCPs are planning documents required as part of an

application for an incidental take permit under the ESA. They describe the anticipated effects of the proposed action; how those impacts will be minimized, or mitigated; and, how the HCP is to be funded.

The Great Plains Wind Energy HCP would cover 11 states across the whooping crane migration corridor and the lesser prairie chicken range. Public and agency comments received during the recent scoping period will be addressed during HCP development. The Service intends to have a draft Environmental Impact Statement available for public review in early 2013.



Wind turbines / USFWS



Waterfowl discarded along a road in South Dakota during sport hunting season / USFWS

### Habitat and Population Evaluation Team - Wind Farm Effects on Waterfowl Study

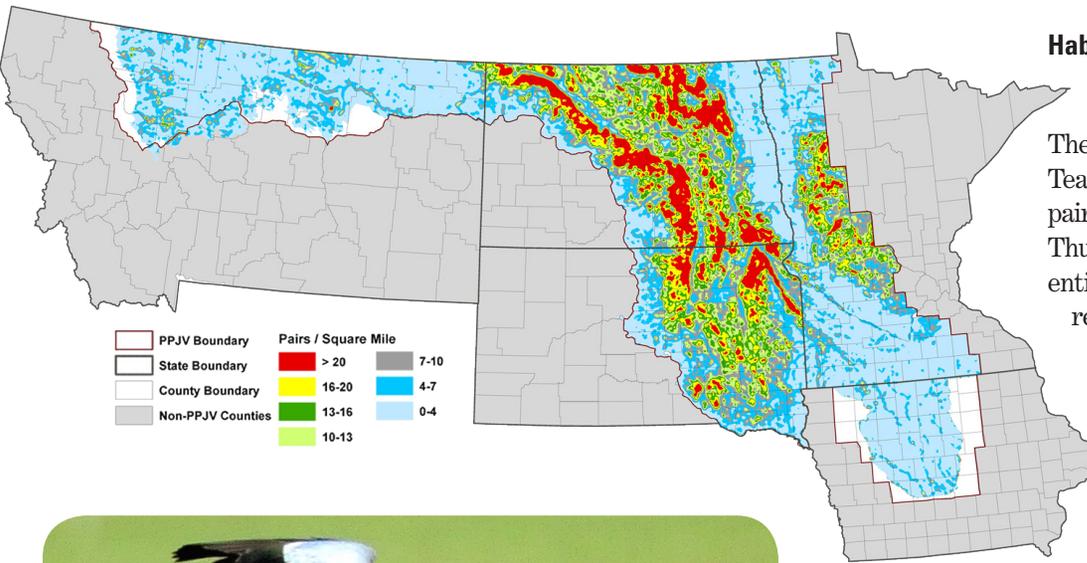
The Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) office recently completed a three-year cooperative study with Ducks Unlimited on Kulm Wetland Management District to assess the effects of wind power development on numbers of breeding waterfowl in the vicinity of wind farms. Results of this research will be used to guide acquisition of conservation easements and ensure that conservation benefits of Migratory Bird Conservation Fund dollars are spent effectively.

Left: Wind farm in Montana / USFWS

## Habitat and Population Evaluation Team - Thunderstorm Map Complete

The Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) completed the breeding pair density and distribution map (see Thunderstorm Map) for mallards over the entire Prairie Pothole Joint Venture region. The map is a result of the long-term, adaptive conservation process for mid-continental breeding waterfowl, and was the model for the national Strategic Habitat Conservation concept.

This decision support tool provides a spatially-explicit, scientific foundation for targeting millions of conservation dollars annually by the Service and partners for easement acquisition, Partners for Fish and Wildlife private land projects, and other conservation actions for breeding waterfowl.



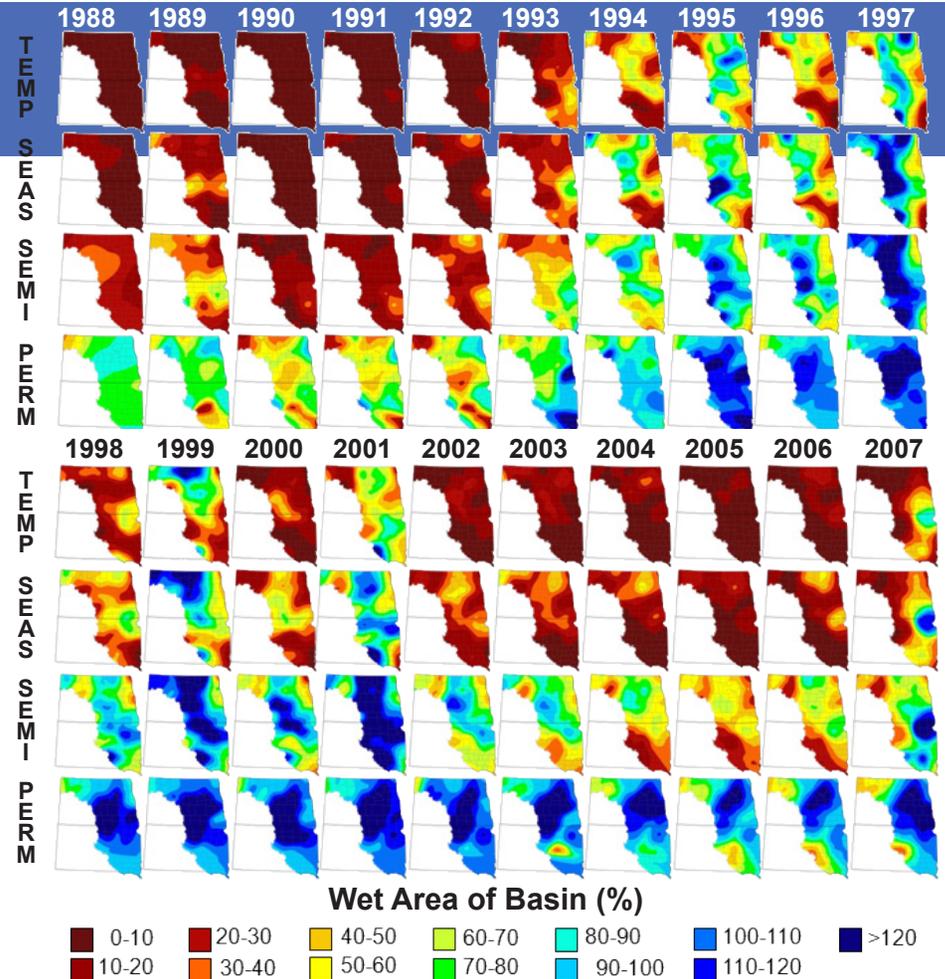
*Blue-winged teal / USFWS*

## Habitat and Population Evaluation Team - 25th Year of Four-Square Mile Survey

Originally developed to assess waterfowl use of Service lands, data from this survey are used to target easement acquisition, assess effects of conservation programs, inform Farm Bill programs, monitor landscape change, assess wetland dynamics, and provide baseline data used in the development of spatially explicit models for waterfowl and non-game birds.

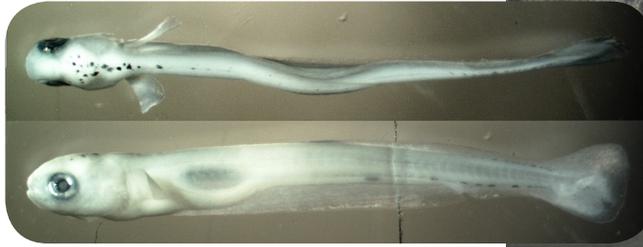
A major benefit provided by the Four-Square Mile Survey is the Habitat and Population Evaluation Team's (HAPET)

extensive records of annual water conditions for more than 50,000 wetlands, which include the second driest drought of the 20th century and the wettest period in the past 130 (possibly 500) years. These data are being incorporated into a variety of projects related to climate change in the Mountain-Prairie Region, including determination of mechanisms influencing wetland water levels, improvement of wetland monitoring programs, and modeling of response to climate change by wetland-dependent birds.



## Endangered Razorback Sucker Spawn for First Time in Utah's White River

Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program researchers discovered endangered razorback sucker larvae for the first time this year in the White River in eastern Utah. The White River is the second largest tributary to the Green River, which plays a significant role in the life cycle of the razorback sucker and three other species of endangered Colorado River Basin fishes: Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub and bonytail.



*Razorback sucker larvae* / Colorado State University

Right: *Biologist Amadeus Guy sets light trap in the White River* / USFWS



*John Hogg (center), responsible for taking the first Meeteetse ferret away from his dog Shep in 1981, poses with Service staff Kimberly Tamkun, Stephen Torbit, Michael Thabault and Robyn Bortner during festivities marking the 30th anniversary of the black-footed ferret's rediscovery* / USFWS

# ENDANGERED



*Black-footed ferret* / USFWS

## Black-footed Ferret Recovery Efforts Continue

Conservationists celebrated the 30th anniversary of the endangered black-footed ferret's rediscovery in 1981. These celebrations served to strengthen the resolve of those working to recover one of North America's most imperiled terrestrial species. The Service and its partners continue working toward

comprehensive recovery: delisting via secure populations in the wild. To this end, partners are working to address the species' primary need of adequate prairie dog populations as prey to support ferret populations in the wild and, thereby, achieve recovery. In 2011, progress was made toward creating incentives for landowners to conserve ferret and prairie dog populations, and developing an effective plague vaccination to better manage prairie dogs for cyclical outbreaks of sylvatic plague. The Service and its partners are developing a programmatic safe harbor program, which would minimize regulatory considerations for landowners. Given the present momentum, the Service is optimistic that with the help of its many conservation partners, recovery of the species is achievable in the foreseeable future.



Radiocollared wolf / © Steve Matthies

# SPECIES RECOVERY

## Wolf Recovery

This past year was a monumental year for wolf recovery in the Northern Rocky Mountains. Having exceeded recovery levels for more than a decade and based on our previous science-based delisting determination, Congress reinstated that wolves in Idaho and Montana be removed from the list of Federally-protected species. Recovery in these states has been an overwhelming success. Implementation of Service approved post-delisting management plans will ensure maintenance of a large and healthy gray wolf population into perpetuity. Wolves in Montana and Idaho can now be managed in a manner similar to black bears and mountain lions. Post-delisting monitoring requirements remain in effect for at least five years.

As the final piece of the wolf recovery puzzle, this summer we announced an agreement with Wyoming to guide future wolf management in the state. If implemented, this agreement would promote the management of a stable, sustainable population of wolves, and pave the way for the Service to return wolf management to the appropriate state or tribal wildlife agencies in Wyoming. On the basis of this agreement, we recently proposed to delist wolves in Wyoming. Finalizing this proposal to delist will be dependent on changes to Wyoming statutes and regulations necessary to conform to and implement the wolf management plan. Until a final decision on this proposal is published, wolves in Wyoming will remain fully protected under the Endangered Species Act.

## Grizzly Bear Recovery

Of the approximately 1,700 grizzly bears living in the lower 48 states, 95 percent are in healthy and expanding populations. Grizzly population augmentation continues in the Cabinet/Yaak population. We just completed a Wildlife Monograph on the genetics and relatedness of all grizzly populations from Yellowstone to Alaska. Finally, we continue to work with partner agencies to connect all the large blocks of public land in the Northern Rockies to enhance resilience of these ecosystems to climate change.



Resting grizzly bear / USFWS

## Maguire Daisy

After a 25-year conservation effort involving numerous Federal land management partners, the Maguire daisy (*Erigeron maguirei*) was declared recovered and removed from the list of threatened and endangered species. Our review of the species' status concluded that populations are stable, threats are addressed, and adequate regulatory mechanisms are in place to ensure that the species never again becomes threatened or endangered. When the Maguire daisy was listed as endangered in 1985, there were seven known plants. Now there are 163,000 plants within ten populations in southeastern Utah. This delisting is a success for the Endangered Species Act and would not have been

possible if not for the commitment of multiple Federal land management agencies. The Service and its Federal partners will monitor the species for at least 10 years to ensure the species' status does not deteriorate. This delisting became effective February 18, 2011.



Maguire daisy / NPS



Golden eagle / USFWS

# TRIBAL PARTNERS

## Eagle Summit II

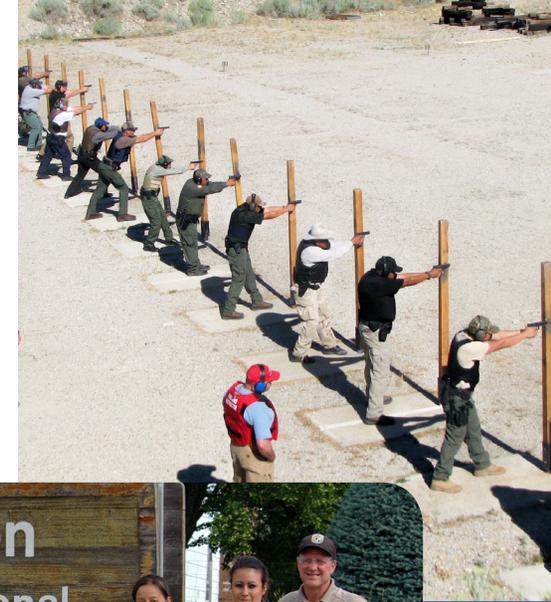
Oglala Sioux Tribe and the Service hosted Eagle Summit II in Rapid City, South Dakota, on May 2, 2011. More than 100 Tribal Council members, Fish and Game Directors, Cultural Resource Directors and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers from 29 tribes and federal agency staff members participated in the event. The Summit's goal was to continue to improve communication and understanding about eagles between the Tribes served by the region.



Native plant landscaping / USFWS

## Tribal Law Enforcement Training

Service special agents worked with tribal partners to provide law enforcement training for Tribal Law Enforcement Officers who work in and around Indian country. The training allows Service special agents to better work with Tribal Law Enforcement Officers to protect wildlife resources and public safety.



Right: Tribal officer training / USFWS



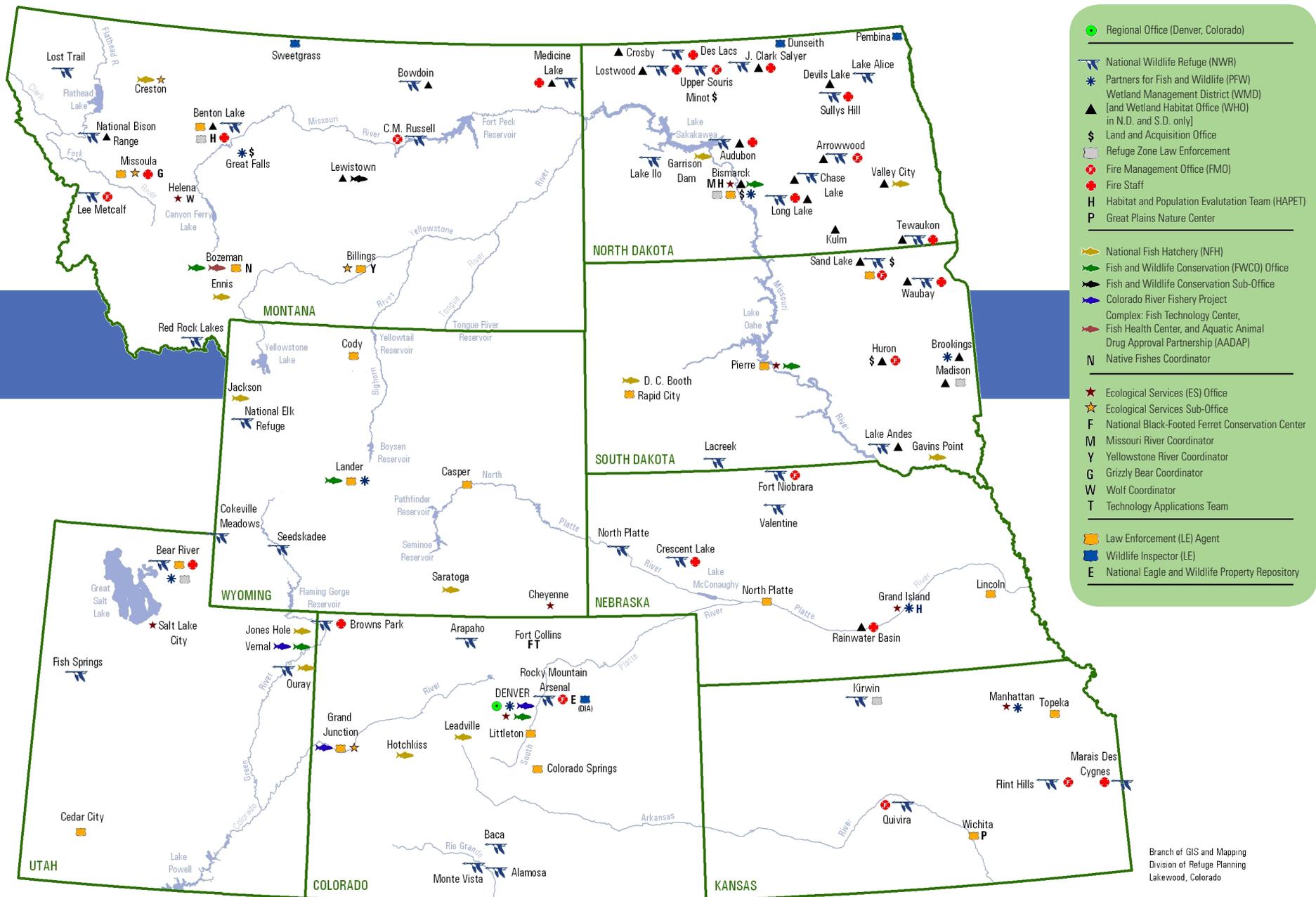
Youth Conservation Corp crew and Project Leader Mark Maskill (far right) pose in front of Creston entrance sign / USFWS

## Tribal Youth Conservation Corps

The Creston National Fish Hatchery (NFH) conducted a second year of the Northwest Montana Tribal Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program, hiring thirteen students and three crew leaders. The YCC crew spent two weeks at Creston NFH and six weeks on the Flathead Reservation working on various conservation projects including, habitat improvement at the Montana Waterfowl Foundation Holt Aviary, campground clean-up, trail restoration, fish stocking, invasive species and noxious weed

control, native plant landscaping and amphibian and reptile surveys. The YCC program provided the opportunity for tribal youth to gain valuable work experience, learn conservation practices and reconnect with the great outdoors. Creston NFH partnered with the Salish and Kootenai College, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Natural Resources Department, and the Washington Office Division of Fisheries to deliver this program.

# Mountain-Prairie Region Field Station Locations



Branch of GIS and Mapping  
Division of Refuge Planning  
Lakewood, Colorado



*Flock of pintails / ©Craig Bihrlle, ND Game and Fish Department*

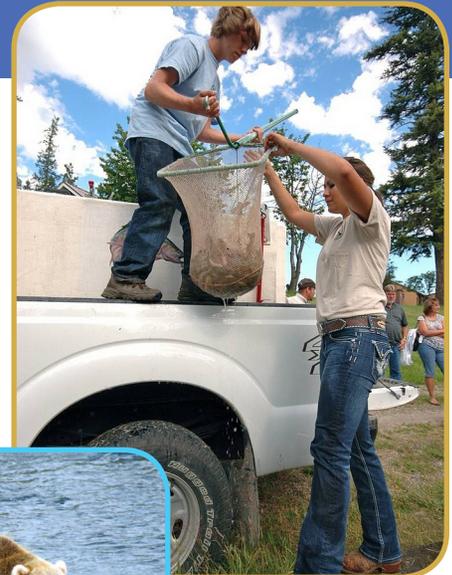
*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is, working with others, to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.*



*Silvery blue butterfly feeding on a standing milk vetch / USFWS*



*Flint Hills / USFWS*



*YCC crew members load fish into truck for stocking / USFWS*



*Upper Colorado River Basin floodplain / USFWS*



*Grizzly bear / USFWS*