



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge Oxford Slough Waterfowl Production Area

Planning Update 3, September 2012

Male redhead

The Refuge's Draft CCP/EA is Available for Public Comments

Your comments are important

The Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Assessment (DCCP/EA) for Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge, NWR) and Oxford Slough Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) is available for public review and comment. Between now and October 29, 2012, interested citizens, agencies, and organizations can review and comment on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) DCCP/EA, which includes an analysis of management alternatives for Bear Lake NWR, the Thomas Fork Unit, and Oxford Slough WPA.

We evaluated three draft alternatives, including Alternative

1, the No-Action alternative, Alternative 2, and Alternative 3, the Preferred Alternative. The DCCP/EA also describes management actions that are common to all alternatives, and actions that were considered but dismissed for further consideration. Your thoughts and comments on the alternatives are important, and we encourage you to share them with us. See options for sending us comments on page 10. The planning team will address your comments in the final CCP/EA. When it is completed, the final CCP/EA will guide Refuge management for 15 years, and actions will be implemented as funding becomes available.

The DCCP/EA was developed to provide reasonable, scientifically grounded guidance for improving the deep marsh, shallow marsh, riparian, instream, and upland habitats of Bear Lake NWR, the Thomas Fork Unit, and Oxford Slough WPA for the long-term conservation of migratory birds and native plants and animals. Actions for protecting and sustaining the natural resources, habitats, and migratory bird populations are identified in the DCCP/EA. Priority public use programs—hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation—are also evaluated in the DCCP/EA.

In this issue:

Summaries of Bear Lake NWR and Oxford Slough WPA Draft CCP/EA alternatives; comments are due to us by October 29, 2012.

Overview of the Draft CCP/EA Alternatives

Actions Common to All Alternatives

Some projects and actions would occur regardless of which alternative is ultimately selected for implementation. These include coordination with the State and Tribes (Shoshone-Bannock Tribe of Idaho and the Northwestern Band of Shoshone), PacificCorp coordination, invasive species control and monitoring (including carp control), fire management, and seeking partnership opportunities. PacificCorp owns and manages the water control systems that divert the Bear River through the Refuge into Bear Lake and then release water through the Outlet Canal. The Refuge and PacificCorp work together to manage water levels for wildlife and habitat on the Refuge while abiding by the stipulations of the Bear River Compact and the Rainbow Decree.

Land Protection Planning. Land protection as part of the National

Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) may include fee title acquisition, conservation easements, and cooperative agreements. Attempts will continue to be made to acquire the remaining 4,461 acres of private lands within the approved Refuge boundary. All lands would be purchased from willing sellers at fair market price.

The Service will expand the boundary of Bear Lake NWR to include the Thomas Fork Unit, which was transferred from the Farm Services Agency to the Service in 1995. Additionally, Refuge staff will continue to evaluate the conservation needs and priorities of lands adjacent to and nearby the existing Refuge units and the possibility of developing a new Land Protection Plan, which could expand the Refuge boundary. Any lands acquired within an expanded Refuge boundary would

be purchased only from willing sellers.

It is also anticipated that some landowners adjacent to the Refuge would participate in the easement program offered by the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area program, should that program be approved. This would afford protection to high quality habitats surrounding the Refuge.

Participation in Fish Passage Projects. The Refuge will work in partnership with PacificCorp and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to construct four fish passage ladder projects on Bear Lake NWR (Rainbow Bridge, Paris Creek, Paris Dike, and Bloomington Creek) to increase fish spawning passage and reconnect the two most genetically viable populations of Bonneville cutthroat trout in the Bear River by 2027.

Actions Considered but Dismissed

The following actions were considered during the development of alternatives but not carried forward for detailed analysis:

Restoration of Bear Lake Marsh to Pre-settlement Conditions.

The Bear Lake marsh (“Dingle Swamp”) has been substantially altered from historic conditions. However, restoring the natural hydrology of the Bear River and Bear Lake ecosystems is not feasible or practical at this time. A project of this magnitude would require major alterations that would affect many outside interests. Refuge staff will assess management options that mimic the natural hydrologic processes and variable wetland

habitats representative of the historic Dingle Swamp.

Resuming Livestock Grazing.

Livestock grazing is an economic use, and economic uses must contribute to the achievement of refuge purposes or the NWRS mission, in accordance with 50 CFR 29.1. Livestock grazing was not included in the alternatives because under current management, livestock grazing is not needed as a management tool to help meet Refuge habitat objectives, and was deemed incompatible with Refuge purposes in 1995. Therefore the appropriateness and compatibility of grazing will not be reevaluated in the CCP.



Cinnamon teal

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Draft Alternatives

Alternative 1: (No-Action Alternative) Continue Current Management:

Habitat Management. No change to current management will occur under Alternative 1. This alternative is considered the base from which to compare the action alternatives. Habitat management actions are designed to increase the probability that marshes on Bear Lake NWR and Oxford Slough WPA provide reliable levels of annual waterfowl production. Wetland habitats are managed to provide high quality marsh habitat for breeding waterfowl and colonial waterbirds. On Bear Lake NWR, considerable deep emergent marsh habitat exists during the summer and fall to provide breeding waterfowl habitat and waterfowl hunting opportunities.

The Refuge will continue to cooperatively grow crops on 214 acres of uplands and hay 3,533 acres of wet meadows at Bear Lake NWR, the Thomas Fork Unit, and the Oxford Slough WPA to provide forage and short-grass habitat for migratory birds, such as sandhill cranes and Canada geese. Management of upland habitats will be minimal and focus on invasive species control and monitoring. Bear Lake NWR will continue to partner with others on fish passage projects to benefit Bonneville cutthroat trout.

Public Use. Waterfowl hunting will continue on 7,450 acres (40 percent) of Bear Lake NWR during IDFG-established seasons. Upland hunting for gray partridge, grouse (sage, sharp-tailed, ruffed) and cottontails will also be allowed in this area, but only 300 acres of uplands provides

habitat for these species. Bear Lake NWR will be open to pole-and-line fishing for carp, perch, and trout, and bow fishing for carp. The Thomas Fork Unit will remain closed to all public use, while Oxford Slough WPA will remain open to hunting and trapping in accordance with State regulations. The Refuge will continue to maintain opportunities for self-guided wildlife observation and photography on the 2.4-mile Auto Tour Route, 1.9-mile seasonal pedestrian trail, two accessible photography blinds, and 1.5-mile seasonal canoe trail. Limited opportunities for environmental education are also available.



Cutthroat trout

USFWS

Alternative 2: Habitat Management:

There would be decreased emphasis on providing stable deep-water wetland habitat for waterfowl production at Bear Lake NWR; instead, the Refuge would be managed to mimic the varied hydrology of the historic Dingle Swamp. The Refuge would still provide sizeable emergent marsh habitat for waterfowl and colonial-nesting birds in the summer and fall, but there would be a substantial increase in seasonal and ephemeral wetlands that support a diverse migratory waterbird

community. By 2020, we would make recommendations on techniques to reduce sediment loading and populations of carp and non-native game fish within the Mud Lake Complex.

The Thomas Fork Unit would be managed for variable wetlands by simulating “drought” and “normal” water conditions. We would formulate a water management agreement with the Thomas Fork Irrigation Company by 2017. The Service would pursue strategies to increase reliability of late-season water in Oxford Slough. Under this alternative, farming and haying would be eliminated on the Refuge, the Thomas Fork Unit, and Oxford Slough WPA. Former cropland and hayed areas would be restored to natural meadow or grassland communities. Management of upland and riparian areas to improve habitat quality would increase considerably. We would restore 5 miles of stream habitat for spawning Bonneville cutthroat trout on Bear Lake NWR and the Thomas Fork Unit by 2022.

Public Use. At Bear Lake NWR, waterfowl hunting areas would be rotated every 5 years between 5,800 acres on the west side of the Outlet Canal (32 percent of the Refuge) and 7,450 acres on the east side of the canal (40 percent of the Refuge). Hunting for upland game birds and cottontails would continue to be provided on 300 acres of upland habitat.

The Refuge would perform a site assessment for construction of an office and visitor contact station on the Refuge and would increase opportunities for self-guided wildlife

continued on page 4

Draft Alternatives *continued from page 3*

observation and photography on the 2.4-mile Auto Tour Route, 2.1-mile seasonal non-motorized (pedestrian/bicycle) trail from the Refuge to the Bear Lake Heritage Trail, 3 accessible photography blinds, and a 1.5-mile seasonal canoe trail. A non-motorized (pedestrian/bicycle) trail from the Refuge to the Bear Lake Heritage Trail would be developed. Opportunities for interpretation and environmental education would increase through guided tours and school programs.

As in Alternative 1, the Thomas Fork Unit would remain closed to all public use, while Oxford Slough WPA would remain open to hunting and trapping in accordance with State regulations.

Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative):

Habitat Management. Bear Lake NWR would continue to provide habitat for waterfowl breeding and fall migration, but in addition would use water-level manipulations and other strategies to provide a variety of permanent, semi-permanent, seasonal, and temporary wetland habitats that benefit a wide range of priority species. Water would be managed to mimic natural “drought,” “normal,” or “flood” conditions in individual wetland units, while providing consistent annual acreage of wetland habitat types across the Refuge.

In comparison to Alternatives 1 and 2, a moderate increase in seasonal and ephemeral wetland habitats, and a large increase in submerged aquatic habitat, would occur. As in Alternative 2, we would make recommendations on techniques to reduce sediment loading and

populations of carp and non-native game fish within the Mud Lake Complex by 2020.

As in Alternative 2, we would formulate a water management agreement with the Thomas Fork Irrigation Company by 2017 and manage the Thomas Fork Unit to simulate “drought” and “normal” water conditions. In addition, we would create “flood” scenarios in years of excess snowpack. As in Alternative 2, the Service would pursue increased reliability of late-season water in Oxford Slough, but also increase variability and productivity of wetland habitats through controlled burns and other strategies. Approximately 154 acres of small grain and legume crops would continue to be cultivated for waterfowl and other key wildlife species on Bear Lake NWR, the Thomas Fork Unit, and Oxford Slough WPA. Haying within meadow and grassland habitats would be gradually reduced to 1,492 acres (44 percent of current 3,554 hayed acres) by 2027, and native habitats would be restored on previously hayed lands. As in Alternative 2, upland and riparian management activity would increase considerably. We would restore 5 miles of stream habitat for spawning Bonneville cutthroat trout on Bear Lake NWR and the Thomas Fork Unit by 2027.

Public Use. Waterfowl and upland game hunting programs at Bear Lake NWR would continue as described in Alternative 1; in addition, hunter access to the Rainbow Unit through Refuge property would be developed. Piers or fishing platforms would be constructed to provide a safer and more comfortable fishing experience.

As in Alternative 2, the Refuge would assess sites to construct an office and visitor contact station on the Refuge, and opportunities for interpretation and environmental education would increase through guided tours and school programs. Outreach to expand public awareness of wildlife conservation and the NWRS would increase. As in Alternatives 1 and 2, the Thomas Fork Unit would remain closed to all public access, and hunting and trapping would remain open at Oxford Slough WPA.

Public Involvement to Date

We initiated the public scoping phase of the planning process by publishing a notice in the Federal Register on June 23, 2010, announcing our intention to complete a CCP for the Refuge and WPA and obtain public comments. We distributed Planning Update 1 announcing the initiation of the planning process, inviting the public to an open house meeting, providing background information on the Refuge, and requesting public comments. The open-house style public meeting took place on July 1, 2010, in Montpelier Idaho. This meeting was announced through press releases, websites, and Planning Update 1.

In November 2010 we distributed Planning Update 2, which included a summary of public comments, a planning schedule, and a description of the CCP’s scope. Now we are requesting your comments on the DCCP/EA. To obtain a copy and/or provide comments, see pages 5 and 10 for information.

Copies of the DCCP/EA are available as follows:

Copies on CD-ROM may be obtained by contacting the Refuge Manager:

Annette de Knijf
 Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge
 Box 9
 Montpelier, Idaho 83254-0009
 Phone (208) 847-1757

Review or download from the following Internet sites:

www.fws.gov/bearlake
www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/

A printed copy is available at:

Bear Lake County Library
 138 North 6th Street
 Montpelier, Idaho 83254
 Phone (208) 847-1664

Larsen-Sant Public Library
 109 South 1st East
 Preston, Idaho 83263
 Phone (208) 852-0175

Your Refuge - Leaner, Greener and Reaching Out

To promote the availability of the DCCP/EA to a wider audience, and to reduce our use of the natural resources used to produce paper and CD-ROM copies of our documents, we will be posting the DCCP/EA on two websites and providing the listed library a printed and CD-ROM copy. Limited printed and CD-ROM copies are available, please contact us if you need to obtain a copy. Our contact information is on this page and page 10.



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*Immature black-crowned
 night heron*

Tentative Planning Schedule

| Planning Step | Target Date |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Planning Update 1 (issued) | June 2010 |
| Public Meeting (completed) | July 1, 2010 |
| Planning Update 2 (issued) | November 2010 |
| Planning Update 3 (issued) | August 2012 |
| Draft CCP/EA Public Comment Period..... | September 28-October 29, 2012 |
| Final CCP/EA..... | Winter 2012 |

Schedule dates are tentative and subject to change as the planning process progresses.



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White-faced ibis

Table Summarizing the Draft Alternatives

| Alternative Number | Alternative 1 (No-Action Alternative) | Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative) |
|---|---|--|---|
| Alternative Theme | Emphasize wetland productivity and waterfowl hunting opportunities | Restore natural habitats, increase wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities | Increase ecological integrity, increase wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities |
| Habitat Management Approach/Principles | | | |
| Wetland Management (Bear Lake NWR) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide reliable, steady-state, deep hemi-marsh habitat from year to year to maintain carrying capacity for waterbirds and waterfowl, maximize waterfowl and colonial waterbird production, and provide waterfowl hunting opportunities. Deep hemi-marsh habitat is comprised of 47% percent (5,069 acres) open water (including approx. 10% submerged aquatic vegetation) and 53% (5,759 acres) deep emergent vegetation (e.g., bulrush). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mimic the varied hydrology of the historic Dingle Swamp to support a diverse migratory waterbird community. Under this management scenario, there may be year-to-year variation in acres of different habitat types. Deep hemi-marsh habitat approx. the same acres as current, but with 50% less open water, 78% less submerged aquatic vegetation, and 50% more deep emergent vegetation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage wetlands dynamically to mimic natural ecological functions to support a diverse migratory waterbird community. Simulate natural “drought,” “normal,” or “flood” scenarios in individual wetland units, while providing consistent annual acreage of wetland habitat types across the Refuge. Slightly more (+7%) deep hemi-marsh habitat than at present, but with 43% less open water and 70% more submergent vegetation. (Acres of deep emergent vegetation approx. same as present.) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain the Mud Lake Complex (Bear Lake NWR) as one large impoundment without carp control capabilities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement feasibility and engineering studies on techniques to further reduce sediment loading within the Mud Lake Complex. By 2020, present recommendations on techniques to reduce sediment loading and populations of carp and non-native game fish within the Mud Lake Complex. | |
| (Thomas Fork Unit) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage for variable wetlands by simulating “drought” and “normal” hydrologic regimes. | <i>As in Alt 2, but also:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain spring runoff; simulate “flood” scenarios in years of excess snowpack. |
| | Protect water rights; ensure delivery of Refuge water shares. | <i>As in Alt 1 but also:</i> Formulate water management agreement with the Thomas Fork Irrigation Company by 2017. | |
| (Oxford Slough WPA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide consistent availability of quality marsh habitat for breeding waterfowl and colonial waterbirds and upland grasses for nesting cover. | <i>As in Alt 1, but also:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue strategies to increase reliability of late-season water in Oxford Slough. | <i>As in Alt 2, but also:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set back succession in deep emergent marshes through controlled burns and increase topographic variability in areas previously leveled for farm fields. |
| Farming, Haying, and Meadow Management (All Units) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain current cooperative farming and haying programs (farm 214 acres, hay 3,533 acres) to provide forage and short-grass habitat for migratory birds such as sandhill cranes and Canada geese. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate farming, haying by 2013. Restore former cropland and hayed areas to natural meadow or grassland communities to provide seasonal and temporary wetlands for all waterbirds. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gradually reduce farming by 28% and haying by 56% by 2027. Restore native habitats in retired hay fields and croplands. Provide a mixture of hayed and unhayed meadows to support a variety of wildlife species. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flood hay units in spring and dewater in summer to allow haying. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain inundation of shallow marsh and wet meadow habitat through the summer to allow broods of waterfowl and waterbirds to fledge. | |
| Habitat Management (Note: all acreages in this table are combined for Bear Lake NWR, the Thomas Fork Unit of Bear Lake NWR, and Oxford Slough WPA) | | | |
| Total Tall Emergent Wetlands | Annually maintain 17,110 acres of tall emergent wetlands, comprised of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10,828 acres of deep hemi-marsh habitat. 6,282 acres of shallow emergent habitat. | Annually provide an average acreage of 14,783 acres of tall emergent wetlands, comprised of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10,694 acres of deep hemi-marsh habitat. 4,089 acres of shallow emergent habitat. | Annually provide an average acreage of 15,773 acres of tall emergent wetlands, comprised of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11,599 acres of deep hemi-marsh habitat. 4,174 acres of shallow emergent habitat. |
| Deep Hemi-Marsh Habitats | Maintain 10,828 acres of deep hemi-marsh habitat. Hemi-marsh would have a ratio of 47% open water to 53% deep emergent vegetation, comprised | Provide an average acreage of 10,694 acres of deep hemi-marsh habitat. Hemi-marsh would have a ratio of 20% open water to 80% deep | Annually provide an average acreage of 11,599 acres of deep hemi-marsh habitat. Hemi-marsh would have a ratio of 50% open water to 50% deep |

| Alternative Number | Alternative 1 (No-Action Alternative) | Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4,632 acres of open water. • 437 acres of submerged aquatic habitat. • 5,759 acres of deep emergent habitat. | emergent vegetation, comprised of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,001 acres of open water. • 96 acres of submerged aquatic habitat. • 8,597 acres of deep emergent habitat. | emergent vegetation, comprised of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,650 acres of open water. • 3,090 acres of submerged aquatic habitat. • 5,859 acres of deep emergent habitat. |
| Ephemeral Wetlands (Wet Meadows) | Maintain 1,556 acres of ephemeral wetlands, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,095 acres of wet meadow. • 461 acres of alkali meadow. | Annually provide an average acreage of 2,876 acres of ephemeral wetlands, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,155 acres of wet meadow. • 721 acres of alkali meadow. | Annually provide an average acreage of 2,593 acres of ephemeral wetlands, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,932 acres of wet meadow. • 661 acres of alkali meadow. |
| Wooded and In-Stream Habitat | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and maintain 92 acres. • No restoration. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and maintain 122 acres. • Restore 30 acres by 2022. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and maintain 134 acres. • Restore 42 acres by 2027. |
| | | Restore 5 miles of in-stream habitat for spawning Bonneville cutthroat trout on Bear Lake NWR and the Thomas Fork Unit by 2022. | Restore 5 miles of in-stream habitat for spawning Bonneville cutthroat trout on Bear Lake NWR and the Thomas Fork Unit by 2027. |
| Native Uplands | Protect and maintain 1,825 acres of native uplands, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 442 acres of alkali upland meadow. • 920 acres of meadow grass. • 463 acres of mixed-shrub habitat. | Protect and maintain 2,902 acres of native uplands, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 552 acres of alkali upland meadow. • 1,801 acres of meadow grass. • 549 acres of mixed-shrub. | Protect and maintain 2,143 acres of native uplands, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 467 acres of alkali upland meadow. • 1,134 acres of meadow grass. • 542 acres of mixed-shrub habitat. |
| Upland Habitat Restoration | No habitat restoration. | Restore 1,077 acres of native uplands, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 110 acres of alkali upland meadow. • 881 acres of meadow grass. • 86 acres of mixed-shrub habitat. | Restore 318 acres of native uplands, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 acres of alkali upland meadow. • 214 acres of meadow grass. • 79 acres of mixed-shrub habitat. |
| Agricultural Management | | | |
| Crops | Provide 214 acres of small grains and green browse annually for migratory waterfowl in upland areas, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bear Lake NWR: 91 acres. • Thomas Fork Unit: 44 acres. • Oxford Slough WPA: 79 acres. | Eliminate Refuge farming program in the first year of CCP implementation (2013). | Provide 154 acres of small grains and green browse annually for migratory waterfowl in upland areas, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bear Lake NWR: 80 acres. • Thomas Fork Unit: 44 acres. • Oxford Slough WPA: 30 acres. |
| | | All Units: Restore 21 agricultural fields totaling 214 acres of cropland to native upland or meadow habitat by 2027. | Bear Lake NWR: Restore 2 agricultural fields totaling 11 acres of cropland to native upland or meadow habitat by 2016. |
| Haying | Provide 3,533 acres of hayed meadow with ratio of 90% hayed to 10% unhayed, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bear Lake NWR: 2,896 acres. • Thomas Fork Unit: 337 acres. • Oxford Slough WPA: 300 acres. | Provide 0 acres of Refuge hay. | Provide 1,492 acres of hayed meadow with a ratio of 60% hayed to 40% unhayed including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bear Lake NWR: 1128 acres (810 acres in rotational haying and 318 acres annually hayed). • Thomas Fork Unit: 214 acres in rotational haying. • Oxford Slough WPA: 150 acres in rotational haying. |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discontinue current Refuge haying (3,533 acres) program in the first year of CCP implementation (2013). • By 2019, restore native upland, meadow and seasonal wetland habitats on retired hay units. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discontinue haying on 2,041 acres (56% of current 3,533 hayed acres) by 2027. Phase haying reductions at Bear Lake NWR over three, 5-year increments; Thomas Fork and Oxford Slough over 5 years. • By 2027, restore native upland, meadow and seasonal wetland habitats on retired hay units. |

Table Summarizing the Draft Alternatives *continued from page 7*

| Alternative Number | Alternative 1 (No-Action Alternative) | Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative) |
|---|--|---|---|
| Public Use | | | |
| Welcome and Orient Visitors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Refuge or Complex staff dedicated to volunteer coordination, visitor services, or outreach. Refuge office located off-site. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within 5 years of CCP completion, develop plan for Refuge office/visitor contact point located on or near Refuge. Develop outreach program. Create an on-site Visitor Services staff position to develop and deliver outreach and visitor services program. Staff a Volunteer Coordinator Position in the Southeast Idaho NWRC Office in Pocatello, ID. | <i>As in Alt 2, except:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No on-site Visitor Services staff position. |
| Wildlife Observation and Photography (Bear Lake NWR) | <p>Maintain opportunities for self-guided wildlife observation and photography on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.4-mile Auto Tour Route (open-year round). 1.9-mile ABA-accessible pedestrian trail with 2 accessible photography blinds (March 15-Sept 20). 1.5-mile seasonal canoe trail (July 1-Sept 20). Allow boat use in 7450-acre hunt area Sept 20-Jan 15. Allow pedestrian access to hunt area July 1-Jan 20. | <p>Provide opportunities for self-guided wildlife observation and photography on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.4-mile Auto Tour Route (open year-round). 2.1-mile ABA-accessible pedestrian trail with 3 accessible photography blinds (March 15-Sept 20). 1.5-mile seasonal canoe trail (July 1-Sept 20). Boating prohibited in hunt areas, except to access hunting and fishing. Pedestrian access allowed on service roads and dikes in east side hunt area July 1-Jan 20 in years when east side area is open to hunting. Develop non-motorized (pedestrian/bike) trail on the St. Charles or the Bunn Lake levee with linkage to Bear Lake Heritage Trail. Develop 6-8 vehicle turnouts along Merkley Lake Road. Provide at least one guided wildlife observation/photography tour per month May-Sept. | <i>Same as Alt 1, except:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop boardwalk and observation platform along North Beach Road. Boating prohibited in 7450-acre hunt area, except to access hunting. Pedestrian access allowed on service roads and dikes in 7450-acre hunt area July 1-Jan 20. Develop 2 vehicle turnouts along Merkley Lake Road. Provide at least one guided wildlife observation/photography tour per month May-September. |
| (Thomas Fork Unit, Oxford Slough WPA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oxford Slough WPA open year-round to pedestrian access and nonmotorized boating. No facilities or programs supporting these uses. | <p><i>Oxford Slough WPA:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide volunteer-led educational programs. Close WPA to public access from April 1-August 1(except for trapping in accordance with State regulations) to reduce disturbance to colonial nesting birds. | <p><i>Oxford Slough WPA: As in Alt 2, but in addition:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop interpretive panels located at strategic sites for viewing the WPA. |
| | Thomas Fork Unit closed to public use. | | <p><i>Thomas Fork Unit: As in Alt 1, but in addition:</i></p> <p>Develop displays along overlooks on Highways 89 and 30 to interpret the Thomas Fork Unit.</p> |
| Environmental Education and Interpretation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide occasional staff-led interpretive programs when requested. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct up to 5 annual staff-led interpretive programs by 2017. Develop Refuge-based environmental education (EE) | <i>As in Alt1, except:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct up to 3 annual staff-led interpretive programs by 2017. |

| Alternative Number | Alternative 1 (No-Action Alternative) | Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative) |
|--|--|---|---|
| (Bear Lake NWR Only) | | <p>program for area schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop outreach program to expand public awareness of species diversity and ecology, habitat management actions, and the NWRS mission. • Hire a full-time volunteer coordinator position in the Southeast Idaho NWR Complex Office and Refuge position dedicated to public outreach, and developing and delivering on-site interpretive and EE programs. | |
| Waterfowl Hunting (Bear Lake NWR) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7,450 acres Bear Lake NWR (40% of Refuge) open to waterfowl hunting in accordance with State seasons and regulations. • 2 ABA-accessible hunting blinds and associated trail. • Provide Refuge youth hunting opportunity the weekend prior to opening weekend. | <p>Alternate waterfowl hunting units every 5 years between 7,450 acres (40% of Refuge) Rainbow/Mud Lake Units and Bloomington/Bunn Lake Units totaling 5,800 acres (32% of Refuge). Hunting will be in accordance with State regulations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One ABA-accessible hunting blind and associated trail. • Provide Refuge youth hunting opportunity the weekend prior to opening weekend and develop additional programs to attract and educate youth hunters. | <p><i>As in Alt 1, but in addition:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop hunter access to Rainbow Unit through Refuge property (currently through private property). • Develop additional programs to attract and educate youth hunters. |
| (Thomas Fork Unit, Oxford Slough WPA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 1,840 acres of Oxford Slough open to waterfowl hunting in accordance with State seasons and regulations. • All 1,004 acres of the Thomas Fork Unit closed to waterfowl hunting. | | |
| Upland Game Hunting, Big Game Hunting, Trapping (Bear Lake NWR) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide upland game hunting opportunities (gray partridge, sharp-tailed and ruffed grouse, sage-grouse, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontails) • Maintain closure of Bear Lake NWR to big-game hunting. | <p><i>As in Alt 1, except:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In years when the west side of the Refuge is open to waterfowl hunting, allow upland game hunting on 300 acres of the Mud Lake Unit east of Merkley Lake Road. | <p><i>As in Alt 1.</i></p> |
| (Thomas Fork Unit, Oxford Slough WPA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 1,840 acres of Oxford Slough WPA open to hunting of upland game and furbearers, big game, and trapping of furbearers in accordance with State seasons and regulations. • All 1,004 acres of Thomas Fork Unit closed to upland game, big game hunting, and trapping. | | |
| Fishing (Bear Lake NWR Only) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank fishing allowed on the Outlet Canal north of the former Paris Dike and north of the Lifton Pump Station. • No developed fishing facilities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank fishing allowed on the Outlet Canal north of the former Paris Dike. • Close area north of the Lifton Pumping Station to fishing. • Increase quality of fishing program by constructing piers/fishing platforms. • Open 2000 acres of Mud Lake to seasonal boat access (Sept 1-freezeup). Limit boat speed to 15 mph. • Increase carp fishing opportunities by 2017 by developing bowfishing classes and tournaments. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank fishing allowed on the Outlet Canal north of the former Paris Dike. • Close area north of the Lifton Pumping Station to fishing. • Increase quality of fishing program by constructing piers/fishing platforms. • Open fishing from Refuge banks along Merkley Lake Road. |



Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Oxford Slough Waterfowl Production Area
Box 9
Montpelier, ID 83254-0009

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Your Comments are Important

Your comments help shape the future of the Refuge. Please send your comments and requests to us by any of the following methods:

Mail:

Annette de Knijf
Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Box 9
Montpelier, Idaho 83254-0009

Phone: (208) 847-1757

Web site: www.fws.gov/bearlake; select “Contact Us.”

E-mail: FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov
(Please include “Bear Lake NWR DCCP/EA” in the subject line)

Comments are due to us by October 29, 2012.

To learn about the Refuge, visit our website:

<http://www.fws.gov/bearlake/>

**To learn more about refuge conservation planning,
visit the planning website:**

<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/>

