



# Camas National Wildlife Refuge

*Planning Update 3, May 2012*



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*Waterfowl on Big Pond*

## Public Comments are Requested on Preliminary Management Alternatives

The draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA) process for Camas National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge/NWR) is moving forward. In this update we provide summaries of three preliminary management alternatives we are considering for the future of the Refuge. The alternatives are designed

to meet the Refuge’s purposes and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), while addressing the issues raised during the public scoping process. The Refuge’s preliminary management alternatives, a summary of each alternative, and a comparison of the alternatives are provided in this update. We welcome your thoughts on the

preliminary alternatives. The draft CCP/EA, which will analyze, evaluate, and compare the three management alternatives, will be available for public review and comment later in 2012. Actions in the final CCP will be determined, in part, by comments received on the preliminary alternatives and the draft CCP/EA.

## Tentative Planning Schedule

Planning Step	Target Date
Planning Update 1 (issued) .....	June 2010
Public Meetings (completed) .....	August 2010
Planning Update 2 (issued) .....	January 2011
Planning Update 3 (issued) .....	May 2012
Draft CCP/EA Public Comment Period.....	August 2012
Final CCP/EA.....	December 2012



*Mallard*

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# Preliminary Management Alternatives

## Introduction

From the beginning of the CCP planning process, we have been gathering public comments and natural resource data that have been used to develop refuge management actions identified in the CCP alternatives. We summarize the three preliminary alternatives here and also compare them side-by-side in a table. Your comments will be used to refine the alternatives in the draft CCP/EA.

## Actions Common to All Alternatives

Some projects and actions would occur regardless of which alternative is ultimately selected for implementation, including:

**Emphasis on Wildlife-Dependent Public Uses.** By law, Refuges are mandated to provide wildlife-dependent public uses—hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation—when these uses are compatible with the NWRS mission and Refuge purposes. Providing these uses is therefore a high priority in all alternatives. We will monitor the effects of public use on wildlife and habitat, and these uses may be modified if we determine that unacceptable levels of wildlife disturbance or habitat degradation occur.

**State and Tribal Coordination.** The Refuge will continue to maintain regular discussions with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG). Key topics include hunting seasons and regulations and elk hunting on the Refuge. We will coordinate and consult with

the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe of Idaho on a regular basis in matters pertaining to shared resource interests.

## Actions Considered but Dismissed

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

**Restoration of Habitat to Pre-settlement Conditions.** Restoring all components of Camas NWR's natural ecosystems, including restoration of Camas Creek hydrology, is not practical at this time. A project of this magnitude would require major alterations that would affect many outside interests and involve considerable expense. Although Camas Creek restoration could result in increased riparian habitat, improved water quality, and a reconnected floodplain, it could also lead to the loss of prime wetland habitat at Camas NWR, as well as the loss of senior water rights within the watershed.

**Resuming Livestock Grazing.** Reassessing the use of cattle grazing on the Refuge to improve habitat was suggested during public scoping. 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 objectives. Grazing was discontinued in 1994 as part of

a settlement agreement in the Audubon et al. v. Babbitt litigation, which alleged that incompatible secondary uses, including grazing, were being permitted on nine NWRs, including Camas NWR.

## Alternative 1: Current Management

**Wildlife and Habitat.** Under Alternative 1, the Refuge would continue to be managed primarily for migratory waterfowl production. Current management would continue, including providing 500-700 acres of deep marsh habitats; growing approximately 160 acres of grain and alfalfa, and haying 150 acres annually (all irrigated) to provide high-energy food for migrating waterfowl; irrigating shelterbelt habitats and replacing large trees near the end of their life spans; and conducting minimal management of riparian and sage-steppe habitat (primarily control of invasive weeds).

### Public Use.

The Refuge would continue to provide self-guided wildlife observation and photography opportunities through a ½-mile birding trail and 6.3-mile auto tour route. Hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing would continue to be allowed year-round on 27 miles of service roads. Off-road hiking will be allowed throughout the Refuge from July 15 through February 28. Guided tours and educational programs would be limited, and there would be no facilities or additional staffing for environmental education (EE). The Refuge would continue to provide limited opportunities to hunt waterfowl

# Preliminary Refuge Management Alternatives...

continued from page 2

and upland game birds on 2,500 acres. Big game hunting would not be allowed.

## Alternative 2: Preferred Alternative

### Wildlife and Habitat.

The Refuge would provide a more diverse array of wetland, riparian, and upland habitats not only for waterfowl, but for a variety of migratory birds and other wildlife. The Refuge would provide less deep marsh habitat but more shallow marsh and wet meadow. The Refuge would develop a habitat restoration plan for Camas Creek and Refuge wetlands by 2017. Under this plan, water would be managed to mimic natural hydrologic processes and partially recreate riparian habitat function, while conserving groundwater. Management of sage-steppe habitat would increase, but would be lower priority than wetland and riparian habitat. Shelterbelt would be managed as in Alternative 1, but supplemental funding sources would be sought. 160 acres of alfalfa and small grain would continue to be grown, but 80 acres would be put in dryland rotation if necessary. 150 acres of partially irrigated upland and wet meadows would be hayed annually.

### Public Use.

The Refuge would provide self-guided wildlife observation and photography opportunities through a 1.3-mile birding trail and 6.3-mile auto tour route. Photographers would be allowed to place portable blinds within

100 feet of roads. Hiking, biking, cross-county skiing, and snowshoeing would continue to be allowed year-round on 27 miles of service roads. Off-road hiking would not be allowed. Opportunities for EE and guided tours would increase, thanks to additional staffing (one full-time visitor services position at the Refuge, and a volunteer coordinator position for the Complex) and classroom facilities. A small visitor contact station/classroom/Refuge office would be constructed. Waterfowl and upland game hunting would continue as in Alternative 1. We would work with IDFG to develop a limited elk hunt on the Refuge.

## Alternative 3

### Wildlife and Habitat.

Wetland and riparian habitat would be managed as in Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative). Management of sage-steppe habitat would increase, but would receive equal emphasis with wetland and riparian management. Shelterbelt habitat would be managed as in Alternative 1, but the Refuge would seek outside funding sources to expand this habitat on the periphery of the existing stand. Farming on the Refuge would decrease from 160 acres to 80 acres of irrigated alfalfa and small grain. 150 acres of non-irrigated upland meadows would be hayed annually.

### Public Use.

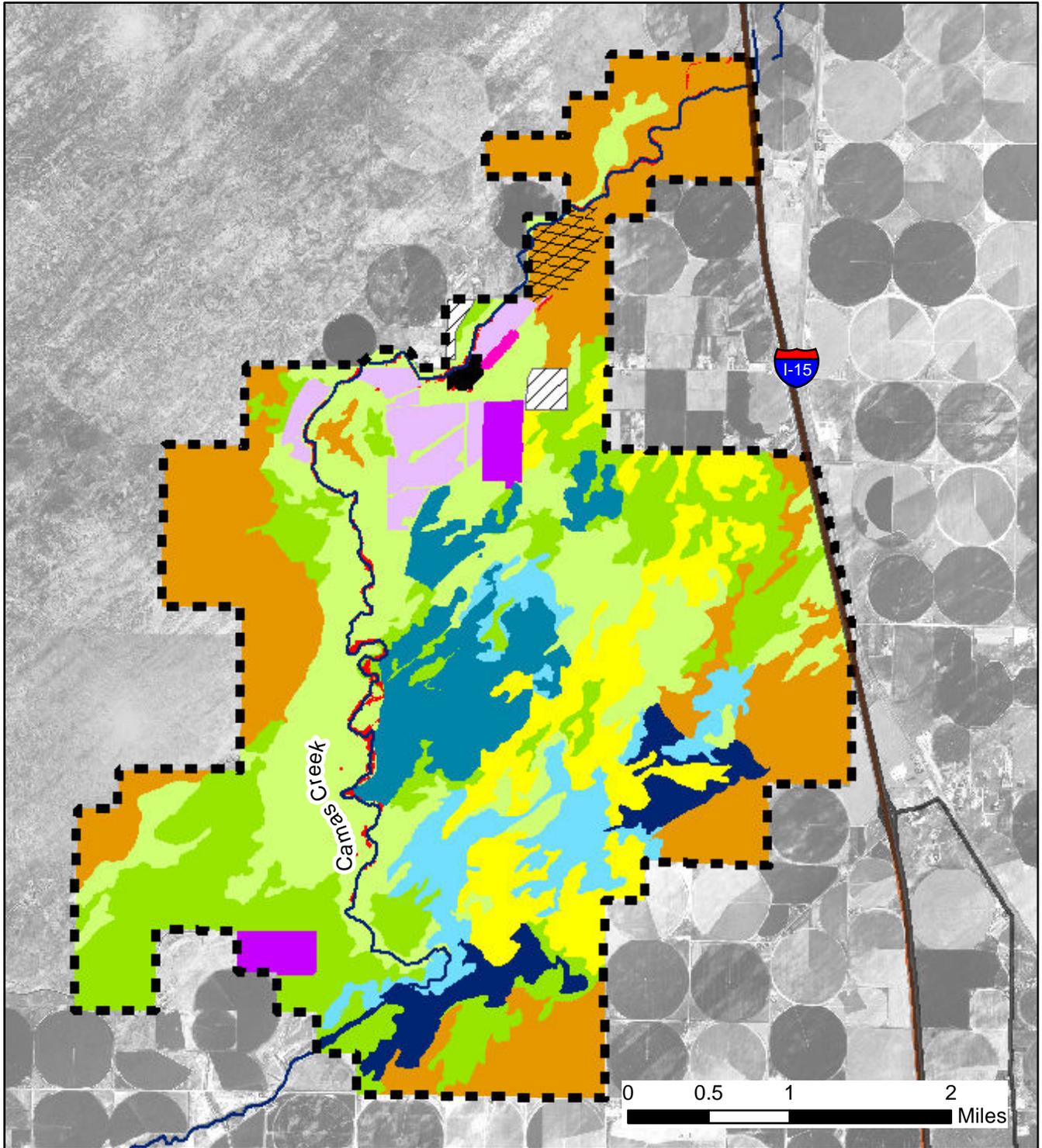
The Refuge would provide self-guided wildlife observation and photography opportunities through a 1.3 mile birding trail, three semi-permanent photography blinds, a 6.3-mile auto tour route, and the 7.5-mile Sandhole Lake loop road, which would be re-opened seasonally (July 1-Nov 1) to vehicle traffic. Hiking, biking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing would continue to be allowed year-round on 27 miles of service roads. Ten miles of service roads would be groomed in winter for cross-country skiing. Off-road hiking would be allowed year-round on 2,510 acres. As in Alternative 2, EE and guided tours would increase, thanks to additional staffing and facilities. Waterfowl and upland game hunting would continue as in Alternative 1. As in Alternative 2, we would work with IDFG to develop a limited elk hunt on the Refuge.

## Comparison of Preliminary Alternatives

Alternative Number	Alternative 1 (No-Action Alternative)	Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative 3
<b>Native Wetland Habitat Management</b>			
<b>Hemi-Marsh</b>	Maintain 500-700 acres in 8 wetland basins over the life of the plan	Over the next 5 years (2013-2017), decrease acres of hemi-marsh to 250-300 acres in 6 wetland basins	
<b>Shallow Marsh</b>	Maintain 40-60 acres over the life of the plan	Over the next 5 years (2013-2017), increase shallow marsh to 150-200 acres	
<b>Wet Meadow</b>	Maintain and enhance 60-70 acres over the life of the plan	Over the next 5 years (2013-2017), maintain and enhance 80-100 acres of wet meadow habitat	
<b>Camas Creek and Riparian (Woodland) Habitat</b>	Over the life of the plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain 4 miles in-stream habitat (Camas Creek)</li> <li>Maintain 20-40 acres riparian woodland habitat</li> </ul>	Over the next 5 years (2013-2017): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain 8 miles in-stream habitat (Camas Creek)</li> <li>Maintain 100-150 acres riparian woodland habitat</li> </ul>	
	Divert 58.1 cfs through 1 point-of-diversion on Camas Creek for impounded wetland habitat	Upon completion of Wetland and Riparian Management Plan in 2017, manage water to mimic natural hydrologic processes and partially recreate riparian habitat function, while conserving groundwater	
<b>Wetland and Riparian Management Plan</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From 2013-2017, conduct assessments of wetland and riparian habitat, and pilot projects to evaluate effects of changes in water management to habitat and wildlife</li> <li>By 2017, develop Wetland and Riparian Management Plan to re-establish dynamic wetlands and sustainable riparian habitat by 2027</li> </ul>	
<b>Native Upland Habitat Management</b>			
<b>Shrub Steppe (Sagebrush)</b>	Rehabilitate and restore 90 acres of non-native habitat to sage-steppe	<i>As in Alt 1, but also:</i> Establish test plots to evaluate restoration strategies	Rehabilitate and restore 425 acres of non-native habitat (including 80 acres of cropland) to sage-steppe
	Maintain rehabilitation and restoration efforts; lower priority than wetland management	Increase rehabilitation and restoration efforts, but lower priority than wetland management	Increase rehabilitation and restoration efforts; equal priority with wetland management
<b>Naturalized Habitat Management</b>			
<b>Shelterbelt (Non-Native Trees)</b>	Maintain 55 acres of shelterbelt in current location		Expand to 70 acres along the edges of existing habitat
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Groundwater irrigation</li> <li>Use Refuge base funding for shelterbelt management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partial groundwater and micro-irrigation</li> <li>Develop supplemental funding to support shelterbelt management</li> </ul>	<i>As in Alt 1</i>
<b>Agricultural Habitat Management</b>			
<b>Crops and Acres</b>	160 acres/2 fields (20 acres small grain, 140 acres alfalfa)	160 acres/2 fields (20 acres small grain, 140 acres alfalfa)	80 acres/1 field (20 acres small grain, 60 acres alfalfa)
<b>Farming Practices</b>	Utilize Cooperative Land Management Agreements (CLMAs) with local farmers to plant agricultural fields		
	Irrigated	Irrigated; dryland farm up to 80 acres if needed Rotate crops: 2 years grain/6 years alfalfa	Irrigated Rotate crops: 2 years grain/6 years alfalfa
<b>Haying</b>	Hay 150 acres of irrigated upland and wet meadow habitat.	Hay 150 acres of partially irrigated upland and wet meadow habitat.	Hay 150 acres of upland meadow habitat (no irrigation).

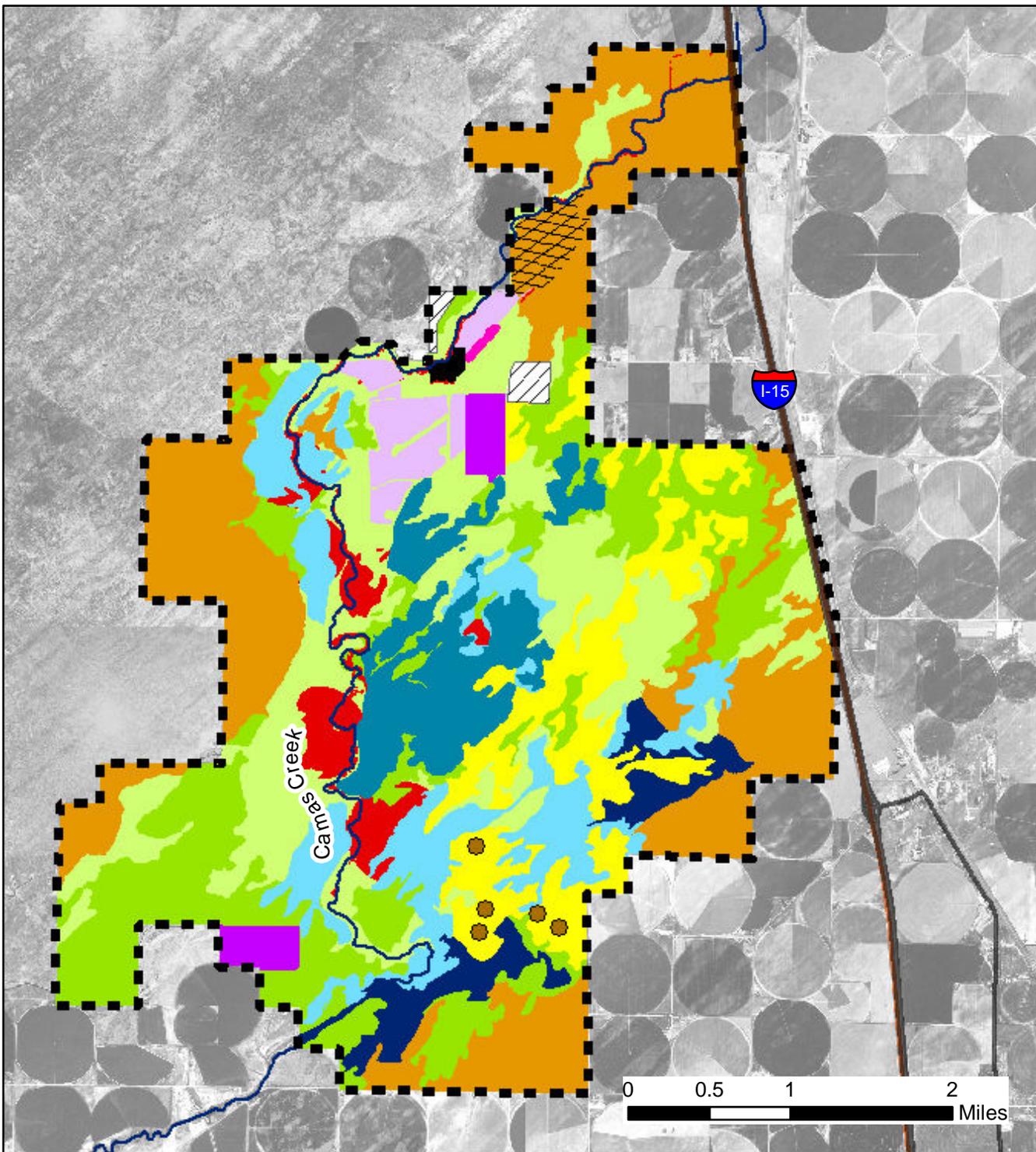
## Comparison of Preliminary Alternatives...continued from page 4

Alternative Number	Alternative 1 (No-Action Alternative)	Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative 3
<b>Visitor Services Program Facilities, Staffing, and Volunteers</b>			
<b>Facilities</b>	Provide self-service orientation facilities and a comfort station for visitors		
	Provide small visitor contact area in Refuge office	Construct new visitor contact station and environmental classroom staffed by Friends of Camas NWR volunteers.	
<b>Staffing</b>	No Refuge or Complex staff dedicated to visitor services, managing volunteers, or assisting Friends Group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff 1 full-time position at Camas NWR to conduct outreach, assist Friends Group, coordinate volunteers, and manage EE program.</li> <li>• Staff 1 full-time position at Southeast Idaho NWR Complex to oversee recruitment and training of Refuge volunteers, and development of EE programs</li> </ul>	
<b>Friends of Camas NWR</b>	Refuge Manager assists and coordinates with Friends Group	New visitor services manager assists Friends of Camas NWR with growing its membership, identifying projects, and supporting Refuge programs.	
<b>Wildlife Observation and Wildlife/Nature Photography</b>			
<b>Auto Tour Route and Vehicular Access</b>	6.3-mile, two-way, auto tour route with pullouts and interpretive panels open year round, weather permitting	<i>As in Alternative 1, except:</i> Change auto tour route to one-way	
	6.5 miles of additional roads open to vehicles during hunt season	14 miles of additional seasonally open roads: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6.5 miles open to vehicles during hunt season</li> <li>• 7.5 mile Sandhole Lake loop road open July 1-Nov 1</li> </ul>	
<b>Roads Open to Pedestrian/Bicycle Access</b>	0.5 mile birding trail (walking only)	1.3 mile birding trail (walking only)	
	6.3-mile auto tour route open to open year-round to walking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and dog walking (on leash only)		
	27 miles of dirt/gravel service roads open year-round to walking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and dog walking (on leash only)		
	27 miles of service roads un-maintained, un-groomed in winter	17 miles un-maintained 10 miles groomed in winter (for cross-country skiing)	
<b>Off-Road Hiking</b>	Permitted July 15-February 28 on 10,578 acres (entire Refuge)	Not permitted	Permitted year-round on 2,510 acres (areas open to public hunting)
<b>Wildlife Viewing Platforms, Tours</b>	One elevated wildlife observation platform at Camas Creek, near Refuge headquarters		
	Wildlife viewing tours conducted occasionally by Refuge Manager upon request	8 wildlife viewing tours annually, conducted by Visitor Services staff and volunteers	12 wildlife viewing tours annually, conducted by Visitor Services staff and volunteers
<b>Photography blinds</b>	None	Allow photographers to place their portable blinds within 100 feet of roads.	3 semi-permanent photo blinds available by reservation
<b>Environmental Education and Interpretation</b>			
<b>Members Of Public Reached Annually</b>	400-500, including: 250 students 150-200 tour participants	1,000-1,100, including: 800 students within 10 years 200-300 tour participants	2,000-2,400, including: 2,000 students within 10 years 400 tour participants
<b>Wildlife Based Educational Tours</b>	6-10 tours annually, led by Refuge staff	10-15 tours annually, led by Refuge staff and volunteers	20 tours annually, led by Refuge staff and volunteers
<b>Hunting</b>			
<b>Hunt Type/Acres</b>	Waterfowl, upland game hunting allowed on 2,510 acres		
	No big game hunting	Work with IDFG to develop a limited elk hunt.	

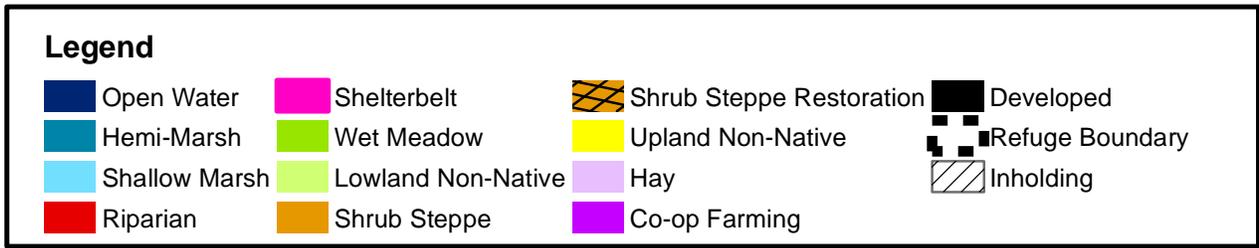
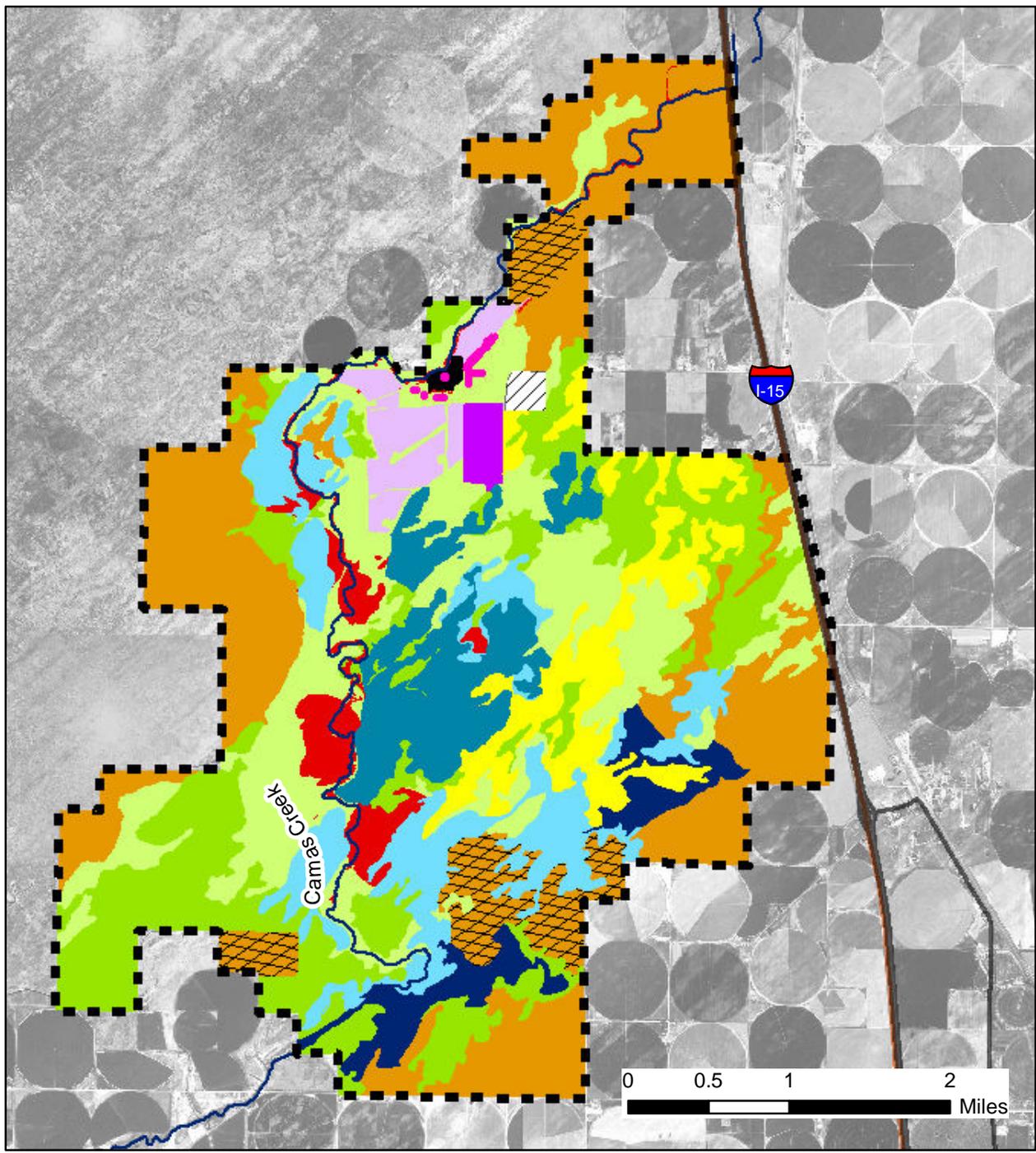


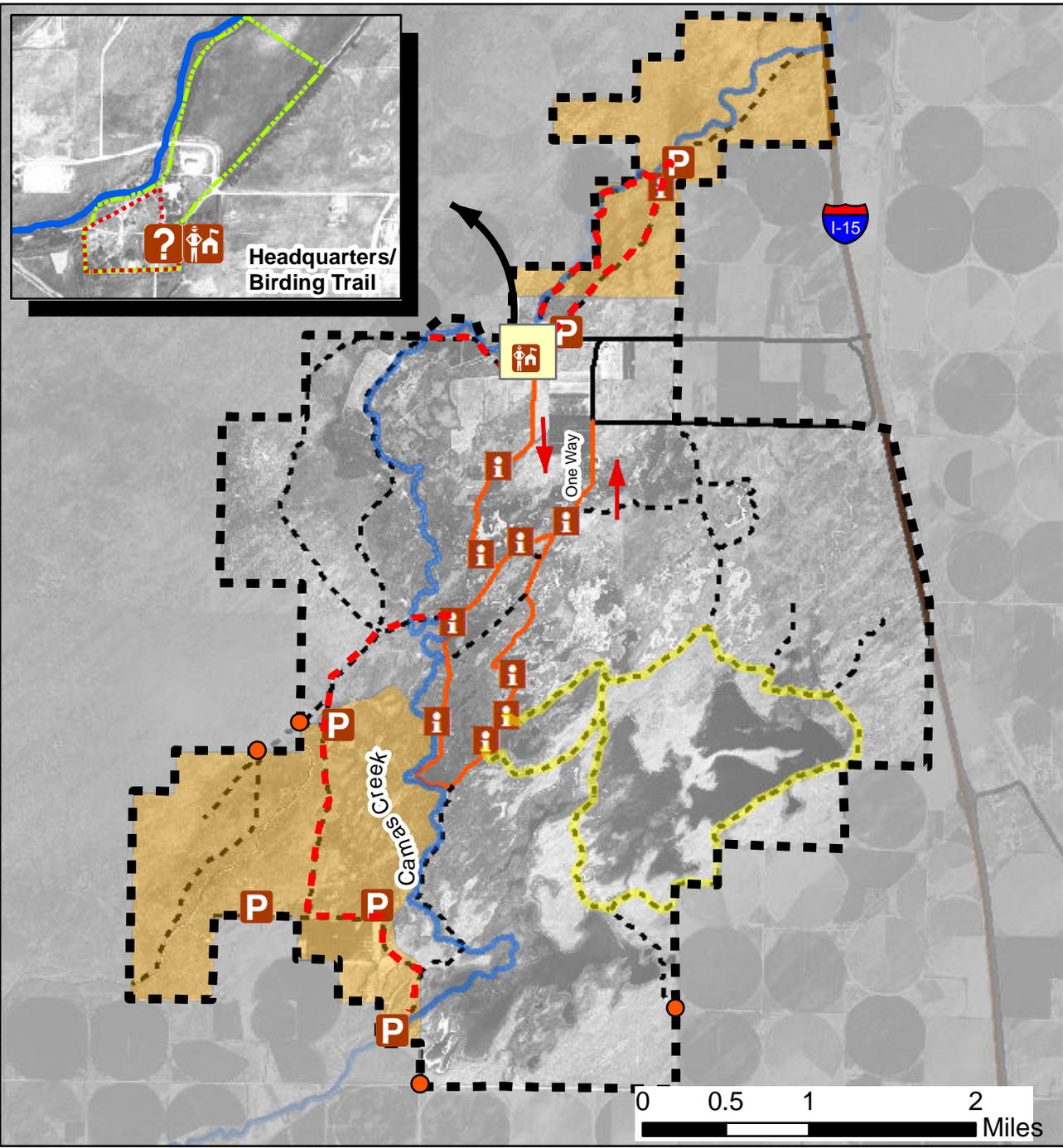
**Legend**

- |               |                    |                          |                 |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Developed     | Riparian           | Shrub Steppe             | Co-op Farming   |
| Open Water    | Shelterbelt        | Shrub Steppe Restoration | Refuge Boundary |
| Hemi-Marsh    | Wet Meadow         | Upland Non-Native        | Inholding       |
| Shallow Marsh | Lowland Non-Native | Hay                      |                 |



Legend			
 Open Water	 Shelterbelt	 Shrub Steppe Restoration	 Developed
 Hemi-Marsh	 Wet Meadow	 Upland Non-Native	 Inholding
 Shallow Marsh	 Lowland Non-Native	 Hay	 Refuge Boundary
 Riparian	 Shrub Steppe	 Co-op Farming	 Upland Restoration Test Site





**Legend**

- - - Service Roads (Closed to vehicle traffic)	Refuge Boundary
— Auto Tour Route	Headquarters and Information
— Roads open to vehicles year-round	Current Hunting Areas
- - - Hunting and Wildlife Observation Road	Info Kiosk
— Sandhole Lake Loop (Alt 3 only, July 1 - Nov 1)	Pull-out / Information Sign
- - - Birding Trail	Parking
- - - Proposed Birding Trail (Alts 2 & 3)	
● Gate and Access	



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Camas National Wildlife Refuge  
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10

## 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:**

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Hamer, Idaho 83425-5030

**Phone:** (208) 662-5423

**Fax:** (208) 662-5525

**E-mail:** [FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov](mailto:FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov)

(Please include “Camas NWR CCP” in the subject line.)

To learn more, visit our Refuge website:  
[www.fws.gov/camasnwr](http://www.fws.gov/camasnwr)

To learn more about refuge planning, visit our Planning website:  
[www.fws.gov/pacific/planning](http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning)



*Long-billed curlew*