



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Columbia National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 2, February 2011



Mallards and other waterfowl are abundant on Columbia National Wildlife Refuge / Tim McCabe, USFWS

Thank You for Participating!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Columbia National Wildlife Refuge (NWR or Refuge). When the CCP/EA is completed, it will guide management of the Refuge for 15 years.

We began the CCP planning process in June 2009 by requesting public input on management issues and

opportunities through Planning Update 1, news releases, and other outreach efforts. We posted the update on our web site and distributed it to the public, interest groups, research organizations, government agencies, Tribes, and interested parties.

We described the planning process, the preliminary issues, and the Refuge purposes in Planning Update 1. We also held a Public Open House

Meeting on June 16, 2009.

We received 35 comments at the public meeting and 12 comment letters at the Refuge. The suggestions we received for managing the Refuge are summarized on page 2.

We would like to thank everyone who provided comments. Public comments are critical to the success of this planning effort.

Your Comments are Important

Development of the Draft CCP/EA is moving forward; public comments, preliminary draft goals, and three preliminary alternatives are presented here.

- Under Alternative 1, the current management focus would continue, including managing moist soil areas, providing waterfowl habitat

with little active management of habitat for imperiled species, and providing some visitor services.

- Under Alternative 2, passive public uses would be emphasized to reduce wildlife and habitat impacts.
- Under Alternative 3, recreational opportunities would expand in a

manner compatible with wildlife and habitat conservation.

Summaries of the alternatives are on pages 4 and 5. Comments received on the draft CCP/EA, which will be released for public review in the spring of 2011, will be considered and addressed in the final CCP.

A Summary of Public Comments

We reviewed and organized the comments we received into topics—Habitat Resources Management, Wildlife Management, Water Quality and Quantity, Public Uses/Visitor Services, and Research. We further grouped comments under bullets with similar subjects. A brief summary of the comments we received follows.

Habitat Resources Management

- Restore riparian habitats. Remove remaining Russian olive trees and replace them with willows and other native species. Plant black cottonwood.
- Improve upland habitat/nesting cover for pheasants and quail.
- Too much alfalfa is planted—plant more grains. Conduct a fall corn harvest on the Corfu Unit and investigate different forage mixes on croplands to enhance production of waterfowl and upland birds.
- Discontinue controlled burning. Determine if proposed actions will degrade air quality
- Provide flexibility in land use and wildlife management when needed. Develop an adaptive management plan that addresses anticipated impacts from climate change.
- Protect the quality and connectivity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats.
- Identify the Refuge's road miles and

density. Consider reducing road use in priority habitats, and identify proposed road management changes.

Wildlife Management

- Increase beaver control to prevent the loss of cottonwoods and to keep water structures unclogged.
- Establish burrowing owls on the Refuge.
- Manage for predators—increase populations of bobcat, cougar, and even smaller predators like mink.

Water Quality and Quantity

- Identify the water quality of the Refuge's waterbodies, drinking water, and wetlands, and measures to meet water quality standards. Determine if proposed actions will degrade water quality.

Public Uses/Visitor Services

- Open more areas to public access.
- Provide bilingual signs/brochures. Include cultural resources in brochures (historic trails).
- Create a brochure to enhance birdwatching.
- Establish bird watching blinds.
- Provide more designated trails. Establish horse trails.
- Acquire the gravel pit for a Visitor Center; better visitor contact facilities are needed.

- Create an education center. Develop materials for children. More school field trip assistance is needed. Be more proactive with outreach to the schools. Create an education program about the area's unique geology. Provide information on natural history of the shrub-steppe ecosystem.
- Improve campsites and provide camping at lakes that are not critical for wildlife.
- Provide more interpretive tours.
- Expand hunting opportunities by adding a field unit, increasing deer hunting access, and creating opportunities for muzzleloaders.
- Provide hunting and fishing opportunities for individuals with physical impairments. Upgrade goose blinds at Royal Lake.
- Discontinue hunting and trapping.
- Leave management as it is.
- Create a task force to address public needs.
- Expand local collaboration, education, and law enforcement.
- The Crane Festival must be a priority.

Research

- Coordinate research better to save money.
- Generate a list of studies completed and ongoing.



Sandhill cranes and a center-pivot irrigation post on the Refuge's Corfu Farm Unit /© Steve Voght

Preliminary Draft Goals

Goals are broad statements intended to provide direction for the future management of the Refuge. They are based on the purposes of the Refuge, the mission and policies of the National Wildlife Refuge System, comments we have received, and the key issues identified for the Refuge. The planning team has developed draft goals for the Refuge and will need your input.

Goal 1. Protect, maintain, and where feasible, restore upland habitats and plant communities representative of the Columbia Basin.

Goal 2. Protect, maintain, and where feasible, restore a diverse assemblage of open-water and riparian habitats characteristic of the Columbia Basin.

Goal 3. Protect and maintain a diverse assemblage of wetland habitats characteristic of the Columbia Basin.

Goal 4. Support recovery and protection efforts for the Washington ground squirrel.

Goal 5. Gather scientific information (inventories, monitoring, research and assessments) to support adaptive management decisions.

Goal 6. Provide opportunities for high-quality recreation compatible with resource protection.

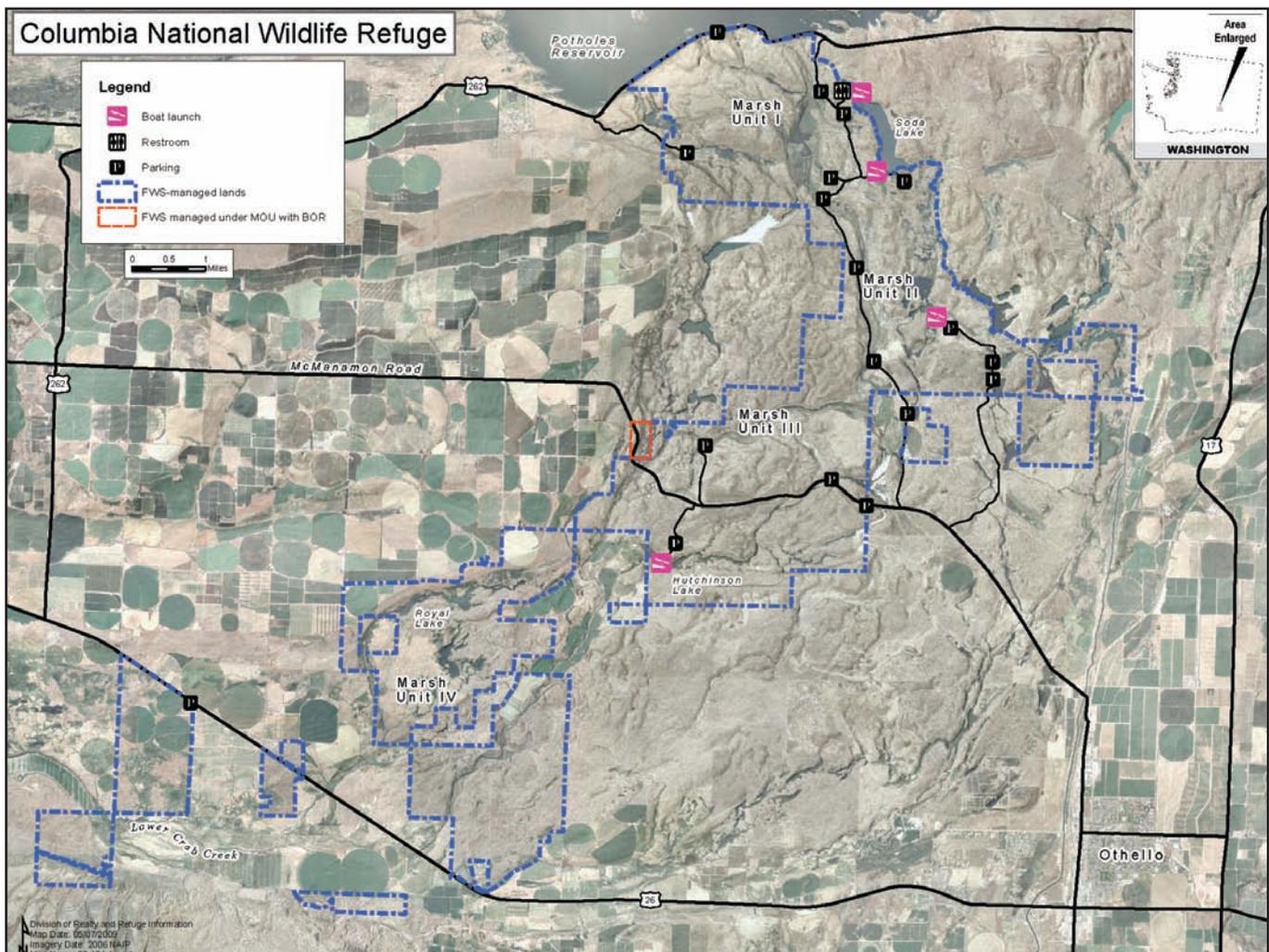
Goal 7. Provide Refuge visitors opportunities to understand and appreciate the importance of the Channeled Scablands area within the Columbia Basin through

interpretation, environmental education, and wildlife-dependent recreation.

Goal 8. Provide high-quality hunting and fishing programs on the Refuge that promote visitor appreciation and support for Refuge programs.

Goal 9. Manage cultural and geological resources for their educational, scientific, and cultural values for the benefit of present and future generations of Refuge users and communities.

Goal 10. Contribute to the protection of the long-term environmental health of the Columbia Basin through land exchanges, agreements, land acquisition, or disposal of Refuge lands or interests.





Washington ground squirrels (left) and burrowing owls (above) occur on Columbia National Wildlife Refuge.

Photos: Washington ground squirrel pup/© Gregthebusker. Burrowing owls/USFWS.

Preliminary Alternatives

Our management proposals for the Refuge

Alternative 1, Continue Current Management.

Alternative 1 assumes no significant changes to current management and is the base from which to compare other alternatives. Refuge management would continue much as is, consistent with available funding and staffing. CNWR lands would continue to be managed using a mix of natural processes and substantial management intervention. For example, many wetland areas are mainly allowed to follow natural succession—although noxious weed control, prescribed fire and other ‘maintenance’ actions are undertaken—but several moist soil management areas require water level manipulation, dike maintenance, extensive soil preparation, planting and other treatments. Specialized habitats, such as rock outcroppings and alkali wetlands, receive little direct attention, while a cooperative farming program to provide artificial food sources for select species involves extensive management. Considerable attention is provided to waterfowl habitat, while little active

management—apart from providing habitat—is undertaken for state or federal species of concern, such as the Washington ground squirrel and sage-grouse.

Public use is a blend of active and passive. Camping is provided at two locations, although Bluebird Campground is reserved for educational purposes. Fish stocking occurs, but few fishing facilities are provided (e.g., ADA-compliant fishing platforms). Most hunting has minimal oversight, other than refuge-specific regulations and law enforcement, but CNWR does have a hunting lottery for a few waterfowl blinds. Hiking is allowed, but few trails are provided. Interpretation is generally limited to a few signs, and environmental education programs are limited and sporadic. However, considerable staff and monetary resources and organizational effort goes into an annual Sandhill Crane Festival that attracts hundreds of people from throughout the Northwest.

Alternative 2, Emphasis on Passive, Non-consumptive Visitor Use.

Under Alternative 2, biological management would remain similar to Alternative 1, except that 164 acres of emergent wetlands in Marsh Unit III would be converted to riparian habitat; the Crab Creek channel would be restored; specialized habitats (e.g., rock outcroppings) would receive more planned attention; farming would emphasize organic and low-impact techniques; and management of state and federal species of concern would be emphasized. For example, we would consider moving Washington ground squirrels to the refuge.

Visitor use would be focused around passive recreation, and some uses might be restricted or eliminated to enhance the natural functioning of the various habitats. For example, horseback riding and bicycling would be prohibited under this alternative. Camping would be eliminated. Providing or construction of additional facilities would be limited, mainly

Continued on page 5



Much of the Refuge is within the Drumheller Channels National Natural Landmark

involving seasonal photography blinds and an ADA-compliant fishing area and hunting blind. The waterfowl hunting lottery would be eliminated, and permanent blinds removed, excluding ADA-compliant blinds. Morgan Lake Road would be closed to overnight travel. Interpretive and educational programs would remain limited, although numerous informational brochures would be developed to enhance passive recreational use of the refuge. The Sandhill Crane Festival would remain a priority.

The existing plans that direct refuge management would still continue to do so, and new, step-down plans on signs, cultural resource management, habitat management, and others related to the goals and objectives in this CCP would be developed. In addition, new guidance on issues like inadvertent discoveries of Native American artifacts and remains and the needs of local schools would also be developed.

Alternative 3, Emphasis On Active and Consumptive Visitor Use.

Biological actions under Alternative 3 are much the same as Alternative 2, except farming will focus on traditional practices.

A much greater emphasis on visitor services exists under Alternative 3, although the types of use would change. As in Alternative 2, camping would be eliminated at both the Bluebird and Soda Lake Campgrounds; however, the Soda Lake Campground would be converted to day use facilities, and the area around the Bluebird Campground would be available by permit for day use as an educational site. ADA-compliant facilities would be developed to promote hunting and fishing. Waterfowl and big game hunting opportunities would be substantially expanded by opening new areas, providing for additional weapons, and implementing additional youth hunt days, areas and seasons; the waterfowl hunting

lottery would be retained. The current use of horses and bicycles would be retained, and Morgan Lake Road would remain open for 24-hour use. A new hiking and interpretive trail would be developed within the Drumheller Channel National Natural Landmark. Seasonal and permanent wildlife observation blinds would be provided. New interpretive and educational programs would be developed, and as in Alternative 2, new brochures to aid visitors would be developed. The Sandhill Crane Festival would remain a priority. Since fish stocking is allowed under Alternative 3, it would only be discontinued in the lakes with the highest likelihood of success for northern leopard frog recovery.

The development of additional plans and guidance would be the same as described in Alternative 2. However, water rights and/or agreements would be pursued to ensure the availability of water for moist soil management.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 Columbia National Wildlife Refuge
 64 Maple Street
 Burbank, WA 99323

In this issue:

Review summaries of the public comments we received and our preliminary management alternatives.

Visit our Web site:

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

How Do I Contact the Refuge?

To be included on the mailing list, provide comments, ask questions, or request information, please contact us as follows:

Mail:

Columbia National Wildlife Refuge
 64 Maple Street
 Burbank, WA 99323

Phone: (509) 546-8300

Fax: (509) 546-8303

Email: mcriver@fws.gov (Please use "Columbia NWR" in the subject line.)



Planning Schedule

- Planning Update 1issued June 2009
- Public Open House.....held June 16, 2009
- Planning Update 2issued February 2011
- Draft CCP/EA Comment periodSpring 2011
- Final CCPSummer 2011

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