Dated: July 5, 2011.

Alan D. Bersin,
Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service


Cold Springs and McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuges, Umatilla County, OR; Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent; request for comments.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) intend to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental assessment (EA) for Cold Springs and McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuges, located in Umatilla County, Oregon. We provide this notice in compliance with our CCP policy to advise other Federal and State agencies, Tribes, and the public of our intentions and to obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to consider in the planning process.

DATES: To ensure consideration, please provide your written comments by August 12, 2011.

ADDRESSES: Send your comments or requests for more information by any of the following methods:

- E-mail: mcriver@fws.gov. Include “Cold Springs and McKay Creek NWRs CCP” in the subject line of the message.
- Fax: Attn: Lamont Glass, Refuge Manager, (509) 546–8303.
- U.S. Mail: Mid Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Cold Springs and McKay Creek CCP, 64 Maple Street, Burbank, WA 99323.
- In-Person Drop-off: You may drop off comments during regular business hours at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
Lamont Glass, Refuge Manager, Cold Springs and McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuges, (509) 546–8313 (phone), lamont_glass@fws.gov (e-mail).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

With this notice, we initiate our process for developing a CCP for Cold Springs and McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs), in Umatilla County, Oregon. This notice complies with our CCP policy to (1) Advise other Federal and State agencies, Tribes, and
the public of our intention to conduct
detailed planning on these refuges and
(2) obtain suggestions and information
on the scope of issues to consider in the
environmental document and during
development of the CCP.

Background

The CCP Process

668dd–668ee) (Refuge Administration Act), as amended by the National
Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, requires us to develop a
CCP for each national wildlife refuge. The purpose for developing a CCP is to
provide refuge managers with a 15-year plan for achieving refuge purposes and
contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System,
consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife management, conservation,
legal mandates, and our policies. In addition to outlining broad management
direction on conserving wildlife and
their habitats, CCPs identify wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities
available to the public, including
opportunities for hunting, fishing,
wildlife observation and photography,
and environmental education and
interpretation. We will review and
update the CCP at least every 15 years in accordance with the Refuge
Administration Act.

Each unit of the National Wildlife
Refuge System was established for
specific purposes. We use these
purposes as the foundation for
developing and prioritizing the
management goals and objectives for
each refuge within the National Wildlife
Refuge System mission, and to
determine how the public can use each
refuge. The planning process is a way
for us and the public to evaluate
management goals and objectives that
will ensure the best possible approach
to wildlife, plant, and habitat
conservation, while providing for
wildlife-dependent recreation
opportunities that are compatible with
each refuge’s establishing purposes and
the mission of the National Wildlife
Refuge System.

Our CCP process provides
participation opportunities for Tribal,
State, and local governments; agencies;
organizations; and the public. At this
time we encourage input in the form of
issues, concerns, ideas, and suggestions
for the future management of Cold
Springs and McKay Creek NWRs.

We will conduct the environmental
review of this project and develop an
EA in accordance with the requirements
of the National Environmental Policy
Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) (42
U.S.C. 4321 et seq.); NEPA regulations
(40 CFR Parts 1500–1508); other
appropriate Federal laws and
regulations; and our policies and
procedures for compliance with those
laws and regulations.

Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge

Cold Springs NWR covers 3,117 acres
of rich and diverse wetland habitats,
surrounded by upland habitat of big
sagebrush and native steppe grasses. Cold Springs NWR was created by
President Theodore Roosevelt on
February 25, 1909, as “preserves and
breeding grounds for native birds” and
“for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for
any other management purpose, for
migration birds.” It overlays Cold
Springs Reservoir, a U.S. Bureau of
Reclamation (BOR) storage facility, the
primary source of irrigation water for
local agriculture. The Service manages
the lands, whereas the reservoir’s water
levels are regulated by the BOR. Full
pool occurs in May with 1,550 acres of
open water. By late August, an average
of only 200 acres of water remain.

A mix of several distinct habitat
types—open water, riparian, shrub-
steppe upland, and seasonal wetlands—
attracts a variety of wildlife to the
refuge. The open water habitat of the
reservoir provides isolation for the
resting needs of migrating waterfowl.
Large numbers of waterfowl, primarily
Canada geese and mallards, can be seen
on the open water in winter. They move
between the reservoir and the river
daily, looking for food or quiet space.

Dense, wide stands of cottonwoods and willows represent the riparian
zones on Cold Springs NWR. The area
where water meets the land is especially
important as it offers wildlife food and
shelter choices. The thick underbrush
provides excellent habitat for many
species of songbirds and is a good place
to look for deer, elk, and other animals
feeding or resting.

The shrub-steppe upland consists of
sagebrush, bitterbrush, rabbitbrush, and
native bunchgrasses. Mule deer, coyote,
badger, ring-necked pheasant, California
quail, and the small resident elk herd
can be seen using the uplands
throughout the year. Swainson’s,
Cooper’s, and red-tailed hawks and
American kestrels may be seen soaring
over the uplands.

McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuge

McKay Creek NWR covers 1,837 acres
nestled between the plains and the Blue
Mountains of eastern Oregon. The
refuge was established by President
Calvin Coolidge on June 7, 1929, as “a
refuge and breeding ground for birds
* * * subject to the use * * * for
grazing, and to any other valid existing
rights.” It overlays the McKay Creek
Reservoir, a BOR storage facility, serving
the irrigation needs of the Umatilla
River Basin. The Service manages the
lands, whereas the water levels are
regulated by the BOR. At full pool the
refuge consists of 1,300 acres of water
and 537 acres of upland habitat. By late
September, an average of 250 acres of
water remains at minimum pool.

The refuge serves as a recreational
destination for residents of nearby
Pendleton, Oregon, receiving over
50,000 visitors annually. The majority of
visitors engage in fishing. Upland bird
hunting is also popular, with many area
hunters taking part in the annual
pursuit of pheasant and quail. Other
visitors simply enjoy bird watching,
wildlife photography, or nature.

The mix of several distinct habitat
types, including open water, riparian, and
upland grasslands, along with the
lack of other local wetland habitats,
elevates the importance of this refuge as
a home to a variety of wildlife and plant
species. Aquatic habitats and open
water serve as resting and feeding
grounds for wintering waterfowl,
wading birds, and migrating shorebirds.
During peak winter migration, the
refuge historically supported large
numbers of waterfowl. Mallards and
Canada goose comprise the majority of
waterfowl, while American wigeon,
green-winged teal, and pintail account
for smaller numbers.

Thick stands of willow and
cottonwood represent the riparian
zone—the areas on the refuge where
land meets water, which are especially
important to wildlife as they offers food
and shelter. Osprey nest in the
cottonwoods, and bald eagles
frequent the area in fall and winter. The
thick underbrush provides excellent
habitat for many species of songbirds,
like yellow warblers and song sparrows,
and is a good place for deer and small
animals to feed and rest. During the late
summer drawdown, migrating
shorebirds can be seen probing the
exposed mudflats in search of high
energy foods, while colonial nesting
birds, like great blue herons and egrets,
stan still, waiting for prey.

The surrounding upland grassland
community comprises the remaining
refuge habitat and consists of a mix of
grasses and forbs, including wheatgrass
and fescues. A variety of wildlife
species can be seen using the uplands
throughout the year: ring-necked
pheasant, quail, mule deer, songbirds,
and hawks.
Scoping: Preliminary Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

We have identified preliminary issues, concerns, and opportunities for the refuges that we may address in the CCP. We have briefly summarized these issues below. During public scoping, we may identify additional issues.

Cold Springs NWR and McKay Creek NWR

The decline of waterfowl use at the refuges; management of wetland habitats to best benefit waterfowl and other wildlife species; management for long-term viability of riparian habitat; providing benefits to shrub-steppes or grassland obligate species; management of non-wildlife-oriented recreational activities given the increasing visitation at the refuges; increasing the understanding of the natural and cultural resources of the refuges; control of invasive and non-native species; determining if big game hunting is a viable public use at either or both refuges; effective law enforcement; the impacts of climate change and increasing development; monitoring and control of mosquitoes and related human health hazards.

Public Comments

Opportunities for the public to provide input will be announced in press releases, planning updates, and on our Web sites at http://www.fws.gov/coldsprings/management.html, and http://www.fws.gov/mckaycreek/management.html. There will be additional opportunities to provide public input throughout the CCP process.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Dated: June 17, 2011.

Richard R. Hannan,
Acting Regional Director, Region 1, Portland, Oregon.

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