



Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Restoring First Creek



Overarching Goals

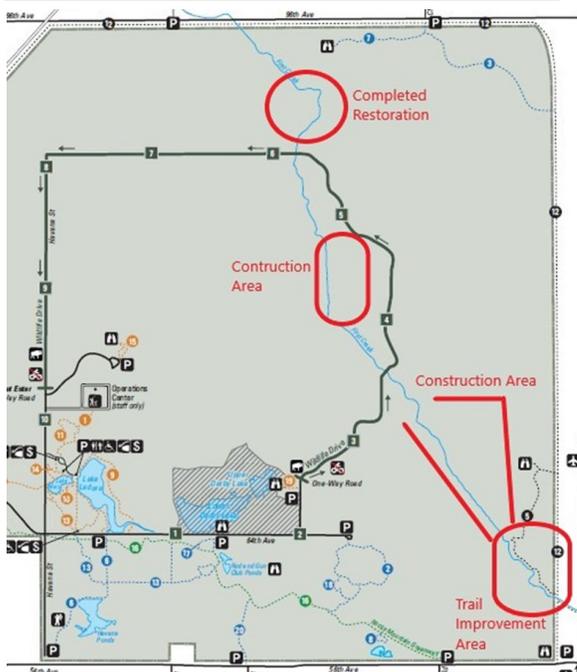
- Repair First Creek Trail from major flood damage.
- Restore 3 miles of the First Creek riparian corridor.
- Replace existing water control structures with low water crossing better suited for large water flow.
- Plant approximately 1,500 native trees, shrubs, and sedges for habitat restoration.

Project Overview

The First Creek Project is a 2-year effort at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR to restore 3 miles of riparian wildlife corridor and 1 mile of trail. First Creek enters the Refuge from the Southeast corner flowing through mixed-grass prairie and exits the Refuge flowing into the South Platte River. In partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Mile High Flood District, and Generation Wild, the restoration project is expected to be completed by winter of 2026.

Project Vision

This project will enhance the safety and recreational experience of First Creek Trail users while the corridor enhancements will prevent erosion, reestablish the natural floodplain, and create diverse habitat. The project also holds importance for the protected Bald Eagle, as a new generation of trees will offer nesting opportunities as existing cottonwood trees reach their end-of-life. Furthermore, following major flooding, restoring the natural floodplain and soil will make way for native plant regeneration as well, supporting wildlife of the Refuge.



The Trail to Success

Restoring Historical Conditions

Battling Changes

The creek's natural path has been altered by human activities leading to ecosystem function failures. This has resulted in less native vegetation, water runoff, and increased erosion resulting in a frail riparian corridor. In the early 1900s, portions of First Creek were channelized by homesteads for farming needs. Later, the water alignment was altered again by roads and construction during WWII.

A Path Forward

In years to come, the creek's flow rate will continue to escalate as storm duration and intensity increases. Additionally, invasive plants outcompete native vegetation which damages the integrity of remaining prairie. Restoring creek alignment will aid in fresh water access, plant diversity, and a resilient habitat for wildlife species as the native vegetation offers high quality forage and shelter needed to sustain local wildlife.

The Trail to Success

In collaboration with Mile High Flood District, established to help local governments with flooding mitigation, a computer design model was created that considers climate change and neighboring housing developments to predict accurate water overflow flow rates. The Refuge is currently implementing MHFD's comprehensive plan, which guides the restoration of the floodplain and bank stabilization protocols for priority creek areas. A series of restoration projects will be taking place on the Refuge over the course of two years. Visitors can expect to see staff, heavy equipment, and landmark changes along the creek.



What to Expect

- Construction over the course of the 2 years.
- Heavy equipment visible from trails and wildlife scenic drive.
- Personnel in work sites restricted to the public.
- Vibrant habitat regrowth.



**NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
REFUGE SYSTEM**