

Environmental Assessment Supplement

Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge New Bunkhouse

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Prepared by the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

U.S. Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 6 (Mountain-Prairie Region)

Executive Order 14154, *Unleashing American Energy* (Jan. 20, 2025), and a Presidential Memorandum, *Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity* (Jan. 21, 2025), require the Department to strictly adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 *et seq.* Further, such Order and Memorandum repeal Executive Orders 12898 (Feb. 11, 1994) and 14096 (Apr. 21, 2023). Because Executive Orders 12898 and 14096 have been repealed, complying with such Orders is a legal impossibility. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service verifies that it has complied with the requirements of NEPA, including the Department's regulations and procedures implementing NEPA at 43 C.F.R. Part 46 and Part 516 of the Departmental Manual, consistent with the President's January 2025 Order and Memorandum.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

National Wildlife Refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the purposes of an individual refuge, federal laws and executive orders, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes, but is not limited to, the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 United States Code [U.S.C.] 668dd *et seq.*), the Refuge Recreation act of 1962 and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations and the Service manual.

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, as outlined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 668dd), is:

"... to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 directs the Secretary of the Department of the Interior to ensure that refuges are fulfilling the intended mission of the refuge system and the purposes of individual refuges (16 U.S.C. 668dd(5)(a)(3)(A-M)).

The Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (Refuge) was established in 1928 by a Presidential Proclamation and Public Law 304 of the 70th Congress, and the legislative purpose for the refuge is as follows:

1. As "a suitable refuge and feeding, and breeding grounds for migratory wild fowl." (Bear River Migratory Bird Act, April 23, 1928, P.L. 70-304)
2. "For the establishment and maintenance of migratory waterfowl refuges." (Utah Code Annotated 23-21-6(1))

1.2 Management Action

The Service will be designing and building a new bunkhouse for seasonal and temporary employees, volunteers, and interns.

In 2024 the Service completed a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and shared it for public comment on August 1, 2024. A final EA was completed and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) signed on August 28, 2024. The Service selected, Alternative B, Construct New Bunkhouse/New Location.

Subsequently, the Service worked diligently to complete the acquisition of the parcel that was selected in the EA as the new bunkhouse location; however, due to unforeseen circumstances, the Service was unable to acquire the property. This supplement analyzes another location for the proposed bunkhouse.

1.2 Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose and need for the proposed action remain the same as stated in the August 2024 Final EA. The Refuge has limited staffing to complete various management goals and objectives. To offset shortages in staffing, the Refuge offers housing opportunities for residential volunteers and interns. The Refuge partners with youth organizations to provide career development opportunities at the Refuge, while at the same time providing much needed assistance to the Refuge. A requirement of the youth organizations is to offer housing as the interns receive a stipend that is often insufficient to rent off-Refuge housing.

Currently, there is a three-bedroom, 1,800-square-foot double-wide modular home on the Refuge that serves as the Refuge's bunkhouse. This modular home came with the property when purchased. The mobile home sits on 2.5 acres of land, most of which is wetlands, that contains a small garage and a concrete pad for residential volunteers with their own recreational vehicle or travel trailer. A 2021 Comprehensive Condition Assessment (USFWS 2021) states that the mobile home does not contain adequate safety provisions, such as fire sprinklers, proper emergency egress, and multiple other safety issues. There are also deficiencies related to accessibility standards in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Furthermore, the report states that the "asset has reached its life expectancy" and replacement is recommended.

The purpose of the action is to provide safe housing for interns, volunteers, seasonal employees, and others supporting the Refuge. Due to the condition of the existing Refuge bunkhouse and the high cost of housing, a new temporary housing solution is needed to meet the mission of the Service and the Refuge. Funding for this project will come from the Great

American Outdoors Act, which was passed in 2020. This Act aims to provide major investments in federal infrastructure to address deferred maintenance needs on public lands.

Chapter 2: Involvement, Coordination and Consultation

2.1 Public Involvement

The draft EA was available for public review and comment from August 1st through 15th of 2024. Members of the public were notified of the availability of the documents via Facebook, a news release and a post on the Refuge website. A hard copy of the document was made available at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge Visitor Center and via email. The EA was available for download from the Refuge website, or the public could contact the Refuge for access to the document in an alternative format. Comments could be submitted in writing via email or by mail.

One comment was received. This comment was in favor of Alternative B, the preferred alternative at that time and requested that sustainable materials be used during construction.

This draft Supplemental EA will be available for public comment from 4/25/2025 through 5/25/2025. A hard copy will be available at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge Center at 2155 W Forest Street, Brigham City, Utah, via e-mail bearriver@fws.gov, and by download from the Refuge website at <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/bear-river-migratory-bird>.

2.2 Coordination

The Northwest Band of the Shoshone Nation (NWBSN) was consulted via letters, email and in-person conversations on all planning efforts for the Refuge, including the Habitat Management Plan and Comprehensive Conservation Plan. The NWBSN responded in appreciation of the Bunkhouse EA availability and the Service's consultation with the State Historic Preservation Act. The NWBSN was consulted regarding the new alternative via letter on 6 March 2025. No reply was received.

Coordination with the Brigham City Planning Department also occurred, and the EA was shared with them for comment. The Planning Department and adjacent neighbor were both notified regarding the new alternative and the availability of the Supplemental EA for comment.

Chapter 3: New Alternative

3.1 Alternative C

Under this new alternative (Alternative C), the bunkhouse would be moved approximately 0.75 miles east of the previously preferred location (Alternative B), which is approximately 0.12 miles from the existing bunkhouse, and 0.75 miles from Interstate 15. The new bunkhouse would be adjacent to Forest Street and access would be directly from Forest Street or an adjacent service

road. Alternative C is considered upland habitat and is located on the Refuge. It is approximately 1 acre in size and is adjacent to Forest Street and the Wildlife Education Center main parking lot. See Figure 1.



Figure 1 showing Alternative A, B and C locations.

This alternative still involves demolition of the existing bunkhouse and building a new bunkhouse in a new location as described in the August 2024 Final EA with all the same features. Utility service would be provided from existing infrastructure already along Forest Street.

Chapter 4: Affected Environment and Environmental

Consequences

The impact analysis evaluates a variety of criteria, as defined below, to describe the context and intensity of impacts of the new alternative on affected resources.

- ☐ •Cumulative effects: effects on the environment resulting from the incremental effects of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency (e.g., federal or non-federal) or person undertakes the action
- ☐ •Direct effects: caused by the action and occur at the same time and place •Indirect effects: incidentally caused by the action and are often later in time or farther in distance but are still reasonably foreseeable
- ☐ •Short-term effects: occurring in or relating to a relatively short period of time
- ☐ •Long-term effects: occurring in or relating to a relatively long period of time

As with the August 2024 Final EA, the following resources were not considered for further analysis as any impact to these resources will be negligible or unlikely to occur, or the affected environment does not contain the resource:

- ☐ Candidate, Threatened, Endangered, or Special Status Species - There are no candidate, threatened, endangered, or special status species within the Refuge.
- ☐ Climate Change – Construction during this project will produce negligible emissions. The new bunkhouse is replacing the old bunkhouse.
- ☐ Special Land Status Designation – There is no special land status designation for the project area.
- ☐ Wetland/Floodplains - The Alternative C bunkhouse location is within upland habitat and contains no wetlands. Best management practices will be in place to protect any wetlands in the area outside of the project footprint.
- ☐ Visitor Use – The project area has been and will continue to be closed to visitors.
- ☐ Aesthetic/Viewsheds - The project area is a fallow upland area, with a cattle pasture to the west and the Refuge Wildlife Education Center and associated parking lots to the east. There will be minor blocking of the view of the upland from the road but would not be readily apparent to passing traffic on Forest Street.
- ☐ Socioeconomics/Local Economy - Construction will provide a small temporary boost to the local economy. The bunkhouse provides temporary housing for no more than four people; thus, the impact to the economy is negligible.
- ☐ Geology/Soils/Water Resources - The proposed site is flat and has no water resources that would be impacted by construction of the proposed bunkhouse. Geology/soils are consistent with fallow land with poor soils. No erosion or runoff is expected as the disturbed areas will have vegetated buffers surrounding it.
- ☐ Air Quality - Air quality in the project area is based on the overall quality of the Great Salt Lake area. Air quality often decreases due to wind-blown dust from the lake when the lakebed is exposed and the inversions that are experienced in the summertime. Emissions due to construction of the bunkhouse will be negligible.
- ☐ Land Use –The proposed use of the site as a bunkhouse would be consistent and compatible with other residential and infrastructure housing in the surrounding area.

4.1 General Description of Affected Environmental Applicable to All Affected Resources

The Refuge is in Northern Utah as part of the Bear River Watershed and the Great Salt Lake Ecosystem. Consisting of almost 80,000 acres, the Refuge is made up of managed wetlands and uplands. Additionally, the Refuge has various infrastructure consisting of a Visitor Center/Wildlife Education Center, equipment storage barns, garages, and a double-wide mobile home that serves as the current and existing bunkhouse.

4.2 Natural Resources

Habitat and Vegetation: Affected Environment

This new location (Alternative C) is adjacent to a highly trafficked and disturbed area. Existing vegetation is a mixture of native shrubs and non-native upland grasses in an area that historically was comprised of terrestrial grasses and meadow species. However, the topography of this area has since been altered during the construction of the Wildlife Education Center. In recent years, the area has not been irrigated or intensely managed, and the vegetation has degraded resulting in an area that is disturbed and dominated by introduced upland grasses with little wildlife value. Non-native and invasive vegetation on site include tumble mustard, poison hemlock, and common teasel.

Fish and Wildlife Species: Affected Environment

The new location does not provide any significant habitat for wildlife. There are a small number of greasewood shrubs in the area that may provide shelter or nesting habitat for small songbirds. The non-native grasses on the proposed new location may also provide shelter and nesting habitat for ground-nesting birds, but none have been observed.

Fish and Wildlife Species: Environmental Consequences

As with Alternative B, there may be short-term, minor effects to small birds, insects, and herptiles that utilize the non-native vegetation for shelter, food, or other needs from direct effects of construction disturbance. Direct but minor effects may occur as there would be the loss of approximately 2,200 square feet of open space due to construction of the bunkhouse foundation.

Noise: Affected Environment

As with Alternative B, Alternative C is adjacent to a busy city street that has frequent traffic and experiences common residential noise.

Noise: Environmental Consequences

The impacts for Alternative C are predicted to be very similar to those for Alternative B. There may be temporary short-term impacts directly from the sound of heavy equipment during the construction of the house, along with sound from people working in the area. There would be no long-term noise impacts as this location is next to a busy street and an equipment storage building.

4.3 Refuge Resources

Management and Operations: Affected Environment

The provision of short-term housing accommodations to interns, volunteers, and visiting Service staff is pivotal for fulfilling Refuge purposes and management objectives. These individuals play a crucial role in conducting fieldwork, delivering visitor services, and supporting essential functions. Given the scarcity and expense of rentals in the local area, the bunkhouse is indispensable. Its absence would adversely affect management operations.

Management and Operations: Environmental Consequences

As with Alternative B, constructing a four-bedroom bunkhouse under Alternative C would enhance capacity, enabling the refuge to accommodate more individuals, thereby improving refuge management.

4.4 Cultural Resources

Service archaeologists visited the Alternative C project area on October 24, 2024, and noted the proposed site has been heavily disturbed. There was no observation of any evidence or indication of any potential impacts to cultural resources. The Utah State Historic Preservation office concurred with the determination of “No Historic Properties Affected” for this undertaking as per §36CFR800.4(d)(1).

4.5 Cumulative Impacts

None of the alternatives would have incremental impacts to the above affected natural and Refuge resources when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions, because there are no known environmental trends, or planned or foreseeable actions impacting the already disturbed site of the existing bunkhouse nor the proposed site for the new bunkhouse.

4.6 Summary of Analysis

Impacts on all resources would be short-term and limited primarily during the time of construction. After construction, long-term impacts would be minimal or negligible from people using the bunkhouse as there is already an existing Refuge building with equipment and use in place currently. There are no significant impacts under either alternative.

Chapter 5: List of Preparers and Sources

5.1 List of Preparers

Michael Dunphy, Deputy Project Leader, Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

Jennifer Wright, Biologist, Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

Dawn Roderique, Regional Planner (Contractor) Mountain-Prairie Region

References

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2021). Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge Comprehensive Condition Assessment. Internal Report.