

**U.S. Department of the Interior
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Interior Regions 5 and 7, Denver, Colorado**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Improved Visitor Access at the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge
Boulder County & Jefferson County, Colorado

Consistent with its 2005 Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) would further improve visitor access to the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). Working with the Federal Highways Administration and multiple local governments, the FWS would improve approximately 8.2 miles of non-motorized trails within, and immediately adjacent to, the Refuge. The FWS completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate potential environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Action to improve off-road connections to existing regional trail systems, to complete minor improvements to the Refuge's existing main entrance and parking area, and support a partner-led project funded through the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) to create two additional connections to adjacent open space lands. The resulting EA evaluates two alternatives: Alternative A, a no action alternative; and Alternative B, the preferred alternative, to complete improvements to visitor access at the Refuge. Several alternatives beyond the scope of this proposal were considered, but have been eliminated from further analysis.

Alternative B, the preferred alternative, was selected for implementation because it best supports wildlife-dependent recreation required by the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Act of 2001 (Pub. L. No. 107-107), is consistent with past planning efforts, and minimizes impacts to wildlife and habitat found on the Refuge.

Public Involvement

The FWS has participated in extensive public outreach, consultation, and coordination with its partners and other stakeholders, on issues related to the proposed action. On July 16, 2020, the FWS released the draft EA for public review. Members of the public were notified of the availability of the draft EA through a press release that the document would be posted on the Refuge's website at https://www.fws.gov/refuge/rocky_flats/. Following the release of the draft EA, the FWS opened a 14-day public comment period that ended July 30, 2020. The public was encouraged to submit comments on the draft EA via email to rockyflats@fws.gov or by mail.

Comments were received from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife, several local governments, and members of the public. Once all correspondence was received, FWS staff read each one and identified specific comments within each piece of correspondence.

Effects of the Proposed Action

This EA has taken a hard look at the environmental impacts to inform the public and ourselves about the consequences of the proposed action (the FWS' preferred alternative).

In determining whether this project is a major action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, we looked at both the context and intensity of the action (40 CFR § 1508.27, 40 CFR § 1508.14) as required by NEPA. In terms of context, the preferred alternative will be within and immediately adjacent to the Refuge, but we have evaluated whether it will have effects on the human environment on a broader scale. In addition to our thorough analysis of physical environmental effects, we carefully considered the manner in which the local people and natural resources relate to the surrounding environment, though economic and social effects are not intended by themselves to require preparation of an environmental impact statement (40 CFR § 1508.14).

Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact

The analysis indicates that there will not be a significant impact¹, individually or cumulatively, on the quality of the human environment² as a result of this proposed action. I agree with this conclusion and therefore find that an EIS need not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors.

1. Environmental consequences of improving visitor access would create temporary disturbance to soils and vegetation during trail construction. Approximately 3.4 miles of trails would be constructed. Protection of native grassland habitat(s) would be a priority during construction and a significant portion of new trails would follow past roadways. Work would likely be completed during one season and would temporarily displace some wildlife. Based on intra-FWS Section 7 consultation, the proposed action will have no effect on the majority of federally threatened or endangered species. It was also determined the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse or result in adverse modification of critical habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse. Benefits to the Refuge include Native grass species restoration of the areas within the project will be restored with native grass species.
2. The proposed action would pose no known risk to public health or safety. Portions of the Refuge were once a part of the former Rocky Flats plant. This was a large industrial facility subject to extensive environmental remediation. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency certified that cleanup and closure was completed and lands that encompass the Refuge are acceptable for unrestricted use and unlimited exposure. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment provided comments in support of the proposed action stating that the agency "does not believe it presents any significant risk to human health or the environment."
3. The effect of the proposed action on the quality of the human environment is not highly controversial.

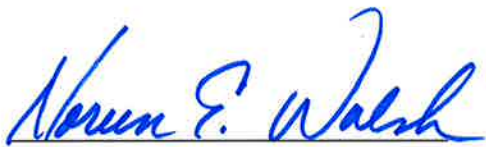
¹ 40 CFR § 1508.27 "Significantly" as used in NEPA requires considerations of both context and intensity (a) Context. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), and affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant; and (b) Intensity. This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action.

² 40 CFR § 1508.14 "Human environment" shall be interpreted comprehensively to include the natural and physical environment and the relationship of people with that environment. (See the definition of "effects" (40 CFR § 1508.8).) This means that economic and social effects are not intended by themselves to require preparation of an environmental impact statement. When an environmental impact statement is prepared and economic or social and natural or physical environmental effects are interrelated, then the environmental impact statement will discuss all of these effects on the human environment.

4. The proposed action would not affect sites, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would it likely cause any loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.
5. The proposed action would provide beneficial impacts by creating non-motorized off-road trail connections, which provide a more positive experience for current and future Refuge visitors.
6. No significant cumulative effects were identified through this assessment. The EA discussed the cumulative effects on and off the Refuge with those actions proposed by others.

Therefore, in light of required cultural and environmental analyses and my review of the information contained in the supporting reference, I have determined that that the action of improving approximately 8.2 miles of non-motorized trails within, and immediately adjacent to, the Refuge is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment with the meaning of Section 102(2)(C) of NEPA.

The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and supporting NEPA analysis will be available to the public upon request. Copies of the EA are available for all affected agencies, private groups, and other interested parties. These documents are on file at the Colorado Front Range National Wildlife Refuge Complex, 6550 Gateway Road, Headquarters, Commerce City, Colorado 80022; telephone: (303) 289-0232).



Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Lakewood, Colorado

Supporting Reference:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2020. Environmental Assessment: Improved Visitor Access at the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge. iv., 33 p.