



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 2, 2014 14-01

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
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RECORD NUMBER OF VISITORS PARTICIPATE IN REFUGE SLEIGH RIDE PROGRAM

National Elk Refuge sleigh rides proved to be a popular activity over the Christmas holiday, with a record number of participants enjoying the unique wildlife viewing experience. In the week following the Christmas holiday, 4,728 people rode on a sleigh to view wintering elk, with a record ridership of 862 people shuttled onto the Refuge via 55 sleighs on Saturday, December 28.

Sleigh rides are the Refuge's most popular educational program and are an exciting way to observe and photograph wildlife. In addition to elk, passengers routinely see coyotes, bald eagles, trumpeter swans, ravens, and other wildlife. Passengers are reminded that while elk are generally acclimated to the sleighs, they can easily be spooked by loud noises or unexpected movements. Riders are not allowed out of the sleighs near the elk because the recognizable sight of a human on the ground stresses the animals, causing them to bolt from the area. Minimizing human-caused stresses and repeated unnecessary movements are critical to the health and survival of wintering animals.

This winter, Refuge and sleigh ride contractor staffs have noticed an increase in the number of people pulling off Highway 89 onto the shoulder of the road and approaching the fence, which is designed to decrease conflicts between vehicles and animals. The North Highway 89 pathway, located on Refuge land between the highway and fence, is closed from November 1 through April 30 for the protection of wintering animals. A human presence on or near the pathway affects wintering animals at a time when they need to conserve energy. "Though the signs may not be visible to an observer, the distinguishable form of a human triggers physiological responses in animals," explains Refuge Manager Steve Kallin. Those interested in viewing wildlife are required to use pullouts on the highway and remain near their vehicle in the established parking areas.

For an additional opportunity to enjoy the abundant wildlife wintering on the Refuge, winter naturalists offer wildlife viewing excursions five days per week to those interested in a guided tour along the Refuge Road where elk, bighorn sheep, waterfowl, and other animals can frequently be seen close to the roadway. The program, which lasts approximately two hours, is free of charge.

For those that prefer to explore the Refuge Road on their own, a free publication is available at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center and on the maps link of the Refuge's web page. The Refuge Road Wildlife Viewing Guide indicates designated parking areas and outlines safety information regarding both driving and approaching wildlife. "We encourage wildlife watchers and photographers to enjoy the scenery and wildlife, but we want them to do so in a safe manner and one that doesn't disturb the animals," Kallin added.

For more information on National Elk Refuge wildlife viewing programs, please visit the Visitor Activities tab of the Refuge's web page at <http://1.usa.gov/1gscojQ>.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 16, 2014 14-02

PO Box 510
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REFUGE ROAD WORK PROPOSED

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin announced today the Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Teton County, is proposing a road project on the National Elk Refuge (Refuge) in Teton County, Wyoming. This project is being funded to address the degradation of the transportation facilities that take place naturally over time. The work will largely encompass adding aggregate surface course material to the majority of the public routes within the Refuge as well as establishing several pullouts to facilitate wildlife viewing and other recreational activities.

The National Elk Refuge is located adjacent to the town of Jackson, Wyoming with access located at the east terminus of Broadway Avenue. The Refuge, approximately 24,777 acres in size, is an integral component of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Refuge is bounded by Grand Teton National Park and the Bridger–Teton National Forest. Visitation reaches a minimum of 300,000 people annually, with peak visitation occurring from June through August. Many Refuge visitors arrive in cars and access the Refuge via the Elk Refuge Road. A substantial number of local residents also access the Refuge on foot and bicycle for routine recreation and exercise. Additionally, the Refuge Road leads to popular recreational areas of the Bridger–Teton National Forest. The proposed pullouts will provide safe wildlife viewing access for all Refuge visitors.

As a part of the environmental review process, the FHWA has responsibilities to comply with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (which has been later revised and recodified but still referred to as Section 4(f)). The intent of the Section 4(f) Statute, 49 U.S.C. Section 303, and the policy of the FHWA is to avoid transportation use of historic sites and publicly owned recreational areas, parks, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges. If the FHWA determines that a transportation use of these types of properties, also known as Section 4(f) properties, results in a *de minimis* impact on that property, an analysis of avoidance alternatives is not required, and the Section 4(f) evaluation process is complete. *De minimis* impacts on publicly owned parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges are defined as those that do not “adversely affect the activities, features and attributes” of the Section 4(f) resource.

The finding of a *de minimis* impact on recreational and wildlife resources can be made when:

- 1) The transportation use of the Section 4(f) resource, together with any impact avoidance, minimization, and mitigation or enhancement measures incorporated into the project, does not adversely affect the activities, features, and attributes that qualify the resource for protection under Section 4(f);
- 2) The public has been afforded an opportunity to review and comment on the effects of the project on the protected activities, features, and attributes of the Section 4(f) resource; and
- 3) The official(s) with jurisdiction over the property are informed of FHWA’s intent to make the *de minimis* impact finding based on their written concurrence that the project will not adversely affect the activities, features, and attributes that qualify the property for protection under Section 4(f).



During the design phase, every effort was made to minimize the footprint of the project. The work will consist of some minor widening in certain areas and will only involve 0.17 acres of the Refuge. This project will impact a relatively small portion, or 0.0007 percent, of the total Refuge acreage. The land to be impacted was selected in coordination with Refuge staff. Visitors and employees of the Refuge will benefit from the improved access and safety associated with the proposed improvements. The improvements will provide access to wildlife viewing locations and would not adversely affect the activities, features, or attributes that make the property eligible for Section 4(f) protection.

The work for this project will occur during the late spring and summer of 2015. During the actual road construction, pedestrian and bicycle travel may be significantly impacted. Vehicles should expect traffic control delays for up to 30 minutes with possible pilot car escorts required. As the construction moves north along the road, traffic delays and congestion will decrease.

Comments and questions regarding the Refuge Road project should be submitted by January 31, 2014. Please address all correspondence to Deputy Refuge Manager Cris Dippel at cris_dippel@fws.gov, or call 307.733.9212 x3. Comments mailed to the National Elk Refuge at PO Box 510, Jackson, WY should be postmarked no later than January 31, 2014.

– FWS –



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 24, 2014 14-03

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TWITTER FEEDS TO SHARE REFUGE NEWS

The National Elk Refuge has launched an addition to its social media communication practices. Twitter will be used to share news stories, photos, multimedia presentations, visitor opportunities, emergency notifications, and other information.

Twitter is an online networking service that allows users to send short messages, photos, and Internet links. National Elk Refuge Twitter “feeds” will alert users that new information is available on the Refuge web site or other news sources. Users can follow the @NatElkRefuge Twitter feed on a smartphone, tablet, or computer.

Twitter users can follow the National Elk Refuge at:

- @NatElkRefuge in Twitter
- <http://twitter.com/natlelrefuge>
- the Twitter icon on the Refuge home page at www.fws.gov/refuge/national_elk_refuge/

The National Elk Refuge’s preferred hashtag in Twitter is #ElkRefuge.

Other National Elk Refuge social media and online connections include:

- US Fish and Wildlife Service Mountain-Prairie Region Facebook page: www.facebook.com/USFWSMountainPrairie
- Refuge photo gallery on Flickr: <http://bit.ly/1d6kUEp>
- multimedia presentations: <http://1.usa.gov/1eW903M>

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 29, 2014 14-04

PO Box 510
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FORAGE SAMPLING INDICATES SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING CAN BE DELAYED

National Elk Refuge and Wyoming Game & Fish Department biologists have been closely monitoring forage this past month to measure the amount of plant material available to wintering elk and bison. Forage availability is a key factor in the Refuge's winter management program, as well as a consideration in determining if supplemental feeding may be necessary.

A forage survey conducted earlier this week noted most irrigated sites have been heavily consumed by elk or bison and are near levels where supplemental feeding is considered. However, there is very little snow in wet meadow areas and abundant forage remaining in areas west of the Poverty Flats management area. Interagency biologists determined that supplemental feeding will not be initiated this week. An additional survey will be conducted at the end of the week after the current winter storm passes to reassess conditions.

Forage measurements are taken at different times of the year and used for several purposes. In the fall, after the growing season has ended, Refuge staff calculates and records the amount of forage that has been produced on the Refuge in spring and summer. This information can be used to note seasonal environmental conditions, measure the effects of irrigation, and predict possible winter management operations. Consistent methods of gathering the data have been used on the Refuge since 1998, making the information more relevant when comparing numbers from year to year.

This past fall, 62 monitoring sites were sampled, with 33 plants community types included in the sampling. Both irrigated and non-irrigated areas were including in the monitoring locations. Estimated Refuge-wide production for the 2013 growing season put herbaceous (non-woody) forage at 10,885 tons, or 23% below the 15-year average, with total Refuge forage production (both herbaceous and woody plants) estimated to be 13,708 tons, or 21% below the 15-year average.

The relatively low 2013 forage production was attributed to below average precipitation in each month from May through August. Though irrigation of 3,136 acres significantly increased forage production in 2013, it did not completely mitigate for the effects of drought. Estimates indicate the Refuge's irrigation program produced 1,200 tons of additional forage and increased Refuge-wide herbaceous forage production by 12%.

Beginning in December, biologists shift from measuring forage production to monitoring the amount of plant material being consumed, calculating the availability of forage in pounds per acre. Biologists also note snow conditions that may limit an animal's ability to access natural food sources. Deep snow, icing, or crusting can make it difficult for an animal to paw through the ground cover to reach the remaining vegetation. The number of animals on the Refuge affects the rate at which forage is being depleted. This fall, elk and bison activity on the south end of the Refuge was very light due to a late migration and movement of animals off the Refuge by hunters. The lack of foraging activity on the Refuge during the fall conserved available vegetation.

Since 1995, the average date for initiating feeding has been January 28. The start date, ranging from December 31 to February 28, varies widely based on winter severity and available forage. The Refuge's management strategy includes limiting the time elk and bison are on supplemental feed in order to minimize the time they are concentrated and reduce the potential for disease transmission.

Photos of forage production and sampling on the National Elk Refuge can be viewed on the National Elk Refuge photo gallery.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 3, 2014 14-05

PO Box 510
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SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING TO BEGIN THIS WEEK

National Elk Refuge and Wyoming Game & Fish Department wildlife managers have determined that available forage on the Refuge has declined to levels where supplemental feeding of elk and bison is necessary. The winter feeding program is scheduled to begin on Tuesday, February 4. Approximately 6,000 elk and 600 bison are currently wintering on the Refuge.

Wildlife managers announced last week that despite low forage production due to drought during the 2013 growing season, enough available grasses and other herbaceous vegetation could delay feeding beyond the nearly 20-year average start date. The Refuge's management strategy attempts to reduce the need for supplemental feeding in order to minimize the time bison and elk are concentrated on the feedlines, thus reducing the potential for disease transmission.

Biologists returned to forage monitoring sites late last week to reassess conditions after the passing of a winter storm that brought both snow and cold temperatures to the area. Most of the evaluated sites were at or approaching an established threshold of 300 pounds of forage per acre. The wet meadows north of Nowlin Creek and west of the Poverty Flats management areas had the most available forage, but heavy elk use in these areas was resulting in declining amounts of natural food sources. The amount of remaining forage is one criteria used to decide when supplemental feeding may be necessary.

The February 4 feeding start date is one week later than the 1995–2013 average, and 11 days later than the 10-year average. The start date, ranging from December 31 to February 28, varies widely based on winter severity and available forage. More information on producing and measuring forage on the National Elk Refuge can be found at <http://1.usa.gov/1iPmT4k>. Photos of Refuge forage production and sampling are available on the National Elk Refuge photo gallery.

– FWS –

National Elk Refuge News – February 7, 2014

Refuge-Inspired Artwork on Display



Artists Mike Nordell (seated) and Barbara Hayton (standing, right) share their experiences with visitors.

It was a change of pace at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center last month as a temporary exhibit focused less on the biological aspects of wildlife and habitat and more on the inspiration they provide to artists.

An artist himself, Refuge winter naturalist Mike Nordell set up a temporary exhibit featuring the work of four local artists. Hesitantly, he included himself in the line-up. “Our goal was to spotlight the artwork of people that have a special relationship

with the Visitor Center and Refuge,” he explained. “I saw it as a chance to branch out from a standard interpretive program.” He humbly added, “This was the first time I’d ever publicly shared my graphite sketches.”

Nordell set up the exhibit in the Visitor Center’s small theater, transforming the dark, tight space into a lovely little gallery with wall panels and additional lighting. Tables and walls were covered with photography, ceramics, sketches, and other art pieces. Throughout the first week, winter

naturalists took turns staffing the exhibit. The featured artists also stopped in the Visitor Center for a few hours at a time to mingle with guests and share their stories of inspiration.

Guest artists included:

Mike Nordell – Refuge winter naturalist

Nordell’s contribution included both photography and illustrations, works that stem from his connection with the area’s natural world. Nordell discovered he could take his photographs to

another level when he used them as references for his sketches. Nordell has a great appreciation for wildlife and the difficult lives animals lead, noting how human behavior can profoundly impact their survival.

This winter is Nordell's second winter as a seasonal naturalist for the Refuge. He holds a degree in wildlife biology.

"I enjoy educating others about the importance of conservation and respecting wildlife – the same values as the National Elk Refuge and Refuge System. Their mission is to unselfishly protect land for the sake of wildlife." – Mike Nordell

Barbara Hayton – seasonal Grand Teton Association bookstore clerk at the Visitor Center

A passionate photographer, Hayton had four photos on display including a collage of goslings as they jumped from the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center roof.

Hayton describes the Refuge as an oasis of pure, raw nature and believes in enjoying the Refuge from its periphery in order to maintain the conservation of the habitat and wildlife. As an avid nature photographer, she feels inspired looking out over the marsh, the winding path of Flat Creek, and the buttes. In her role as a store clerk, she loves the sense of giving back she feels when she helps visitors gain an understanding of the purpose and importance of the Refuge.

"Not only do I find inspiration for my photography, but I find a sense of serenity that energizes my soul." – Barbara Hayton

Kathy Erickson – visitor services agent for the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce

Erickson enhanced the exhibit with several mediums, including graphite and color sketches, a scratchboard, French dye and silk, a decorated gourd, woodcut prints, and painted leather.

Erickson notes that Refuge guests are inspired and thrilled as they take a winter sleigh ride, learn from the displays in the Visitor Center, explore the ponds and wetlands in the summer, watch birds, and more. She cites many creative ideas and projects stemming from visits and time spent working at the Visitor Center. Whether with her camera, paints or other mediums, she's continually amazed at the beauty and wildlife that is so abundant.

"Having the opportunity to live and work in such a beautiful place has deeply inspired me to seek out and capture the grandeur of the scenes that surround me." – Kathy Erickson

Tenley Thompson – special use permittee on the Refuge as a wildlife tour manager

Thompson provided a few pieces of nature-inspired pottery and ceramics for the exhibit, an interest she pursues in addition

to photography. Thompson believes the Refuge is particularly inspirational and sees her artwork as a way to express her biological perspectives through creative processes. Thompson described how she is inspired daily by the landscapes of the area, hoping to help casual visitors fully appreciate the uniqueness and complexities of this ecosystem.

"Our landscape is a land of change and an extraordinary place from which to draw creativity." – Tenley Thompson

In conjunction with the displays provided by the artists, a special exhibit was set up to honor J.N. "Ding" Darling. Darling authored two books and twice won the Pulitzer Prize for cartooning, in 1923 and again in 1942. He used his satirical pen to promote issues of conservation and to bring national attention to environmental concerns. A video titled "America's Darling: The Story of Jay N. Ding Darling" ran throughout the day, exemplifying the theme of how art can inspire conservation – and conservation can inspire art.

The art exhibit was originally scheduled for the week of January 20 only. However, due to its popularity, the exhibit was extended an additional week. "We were very pleased with how well received the program was," Nordell said. "We look forward to expanding it next year." An estimated 650 people fully explored the exhibit and interacted with a naturalist or artist in the exhibit area.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 12, 2014 14-06

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VISITOR CENTER PROGRAM TO PROVIDE A GLIMPSE OF HISTORY

Presidents' Day is now popularly viewed as a day to celebrate all U.S. presidents past and present. In the spirit of history, the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center will be hosting a free event on Monday, February 17 to celebrate an important part of Jackson Hole's past. From 10:00 AM– 4:00 PM, several activities will celebrate the mountain man and trapper heritage that played a key role in the development of the valley. The Visitor Center is located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson.

Throughout the day, visitors can participate in a theme-based scavenger hunt inside the Visitor Center. Participants can pick up the list of scavenger hunt items at the front desk and, upon completion of the activity, enter to win a gift bag of items donated by the Grand Teton Association. The prize includes a set of publications on tracks, scat, edible plants, and area history.

Visitors can also learn the etymology of some area place names that can be traced back to prominent people in Jackson Hole's early history, especially those that were influenced by French trappers. An accompanying map will pinpoint the location of the peaks, lakes, and other areas highlighted in the activity.

Younger audiences will enjoy a crafts station where they can make a paper canoe, hat, or mountain man beard. The craft station will be set up from 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM and again from 2:00 – 4:00 PM.

The highlight of the day will be a living history performance from 1:00 – 2:00 PM that will give guests insight into the unique lives of the legendary mountain men or fur trappers who lived and trapped in Jackson Hole in the 1820s and 1830s. Dressed in appropriate attire, Grand Teton National Park Interpretive Specialist Andrew Langford will discuss and demonstrate many of the specialized skills that were required of these brave and industrious individuals. Langford's engaging performance is always enjoyed by people of all ages.

For more information on Monday's event, please call 307.734.9378.

– FWS –

National Elk Refuge News – February 9, 2014

Celebrating Valentine's Week



Humans aren't the only creatures that may choose a mate and remain together for life. Certain animals form bonds that last a lifetime.

To celebrate Valentine's week, the staff at the National Elk Refuge would like to share photos of some of our wildlife that mate for life.

Additional photos of National Elk Refuge wildlife can be found in our web site photo gallery at <http://bit.ly/MCAe20>. We also regularly share photos via our Twitter account at @NatlElkRefuge.



Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Bald eagles mate for life. Courting behavior begins in early April and often involves spectacular aerial displays of eagles diving and locking talons. Photo: USFWS / Lori Iverson



Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Although some start breeding at two years of age, Sandhill Cranes may reach the age of seven before breeding. They mate for life—which can mean two decades or more—and stay with their mates year-round. Photo: USFWS / Jim Crabb, National Elk Refuge volunteer



National Geographic: Ravens are believed to mate for life. They build large, stick nests in which females lay three to seven eggs each spring. Both parents care for their young, which remain dependent for several months. Photo: USFWS / Lori Iverson



Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Courting Red-tailed Hawks put on a display in which they soar in wide circles at a great height. The male dives steeply, then shoots up again. After several of these swoops he approaches the female from above, extends his legs, and touches her briefly. Sometimes, the pair grab onto one other, clasp talons, and plummet in spirals toward the ground before pulling away. Photo: USFWS / Ann Hough, National Elk Refuge volunteer



Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Canada Geese mate for life with very low “divorce rates,” and pairs remain together throughout the year. Geese mate “assortatively,” larger birds choosing larger mates and smaller ones choosing smaller mates. Photo: USFWS / National Elk Refuge volunteer



USFWS Chesapeake Bay Field Office: Ospreys three years or older usually mate for life and return to the same nest site year after year. Photo: USFWS / BJ Baker, National Elk Refuge volunteer



Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Trumpeter Swans form pair bonds when they are three or four years old. The pair stays together throughout the year, moving together in migratory populations. Trumpeters are assumed to mate for life, but some individuals do switch mates over their lifetimes. Some males that lose their mates do not mate again. Photo: USFWS / Mike Nordell, winter naturalist

National Elk Refuge News – February 21, 2014

Kids, Kids, Everywhere!



A group of preschoolers use their sense of touch to enjoy props brought to them by a Refuge naturalist.



While visitation at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center this month continues to climb, the average age of visitors may be lower than normal. Several large elementary school groups have filtered through the building during the past two weeks, using the Refuge as a field trip destination to learn more about wildlife and conservation. Numbers of youngsters in the Center were also bolstered by family visits over the Presidents' Day weekend, and off-site classroom presentations provided additional outreach to children.

Last week, 206 second grade students from Jackson Elementary School made their annual trek to the Refuge as part of their "Animals of Jackson Hole" unit of study. The previous week, Refuge

naturalists visited each of the ten classrooms to discuss the purpose of the Refuge and the adaptations necessary for animals to survive winter conditions. The subsequent field trip to the Refuge gave the students an opportunity to see firsthand the concepts presented by the naturalists. "We had pretty sporty winter conditions last week," explained seasonal naturalist Justin St. Onge, now in his second winter with the Refuge. "It helped the students see for themselves the difficult conditions animals endure during the winter."

While other naturalists accommodated the second graders at the Visitor Center, Jessie Stirling slipped away to entertain two groups of preschoolers at the Jackson Hole Children's Museum later that same week. The two- and three-year-olds

from the Children's Learning Center incorporated the Refuge's lesson into a classroom project called "Our Town." The students had selected three locations in Jackson to study and replicate in their preschool, including Jackson's renowned Town Square antler arches. The children built a paper version of an arch over their classroom door and used the Refuge presentation as an opportunity to learn more about antlers. Stirling brought many props and photos to share with the children, using the tangible items to appeal to the students' learning style.

Over the weekend, visitation at the Visitor Center flowed at a constant pace while steady rain and wind affected outdoor activities. Anticipating the holiday weekend, naturalists had planned

a series of programs for Monday, focusing on early Jackson Hole history and the influence that trappers and mountain men had in the valley. Though several of the activities were geared toward adult audiences, naturalists included a crafts station in the program line-up, giving children a chance to make paper canoes, hats, and “mountain man mustaches.” A living history program featuring Grand Teton National Park interpreter Andrew Langford was popular with visitors of all ages. A total of 2,944 people came to the Visitor Center that day, with many guests participating in the day’s special events.

This week, second graders again filled every nook and cranny in the visitor center as 85 students and 64 adults from Afton, Wyoming visited the Refuge. The students rotated through several learning stations to find out more about the Endangered Species Act.



Justin St. Onge makes a classroom visit with one of ten groups of Jackson second graders prior to their Refuge visit the following week.

The National Elk Refuge has only one permanent staff member assigned to the Visitor Center,

tasked with overseeing operations, maintenance, and budget. That leaves little time for the extensive scheduling and planning it takes to accommodate requests for school and group presentations. In order to offer educational programming, the Refuge uses non-government funds to hire three seasonal naturalists from December through early April when the demand for programs is high. “We try not to turn anyone away,” explains Visitor Center Manager Natalie Fath, “but some days we have every winter naturalist and visitor services volunteer booked. Our interagency partners take care of the drop-in visitors while we accommodate the school children.” Fath also serves as the Refuge’s volunteer coordinator.

The Refuge public use staff uses the proceeds from the contracted sleigh rides to fund the naturalist



An Afton elementary student offers his undivided attention during a naturalist presentation on Endangered Species at the Visitor Center.

positions. Planning the length of the naturalists' seasons is challenging because the amount of income that will be generated over the winter is unknown, with many factors potentially affecting proceeds. Consequently, the Refuge uses proceeds from sales in the bookstore to cover for any deficit in funds needed to pay the naturalists if sleigh ride revenue doesn't meet salary spending. The Grand Teton Association, the Refuge's nonprofit organization, manages both the non-government accounts used to hire the educational staff. "We're indebted to the Association for their funding," Fath explained. "Without it, we'd be severely limited in providing educational programming."

In addition to school and group requests for programs, the naturalist staff offers a daily program as well as guided wildlife tours five days per week.



Chamber of Commerce employee Mary Walker joins in the fun by donning a mountain man mustache during a Visitor Center event. Walker and other interagency staff covered the information desk while Refuge naturalists held educational programs on Presidents' Day.

Last year, February visitation at the Visitor Center totaled 21,972 for the month, averaging 785 people per day, or 98 people per hour. So far, 2014 seems to be on track. Both December and January saw record numbers of

sleigh riders, with 5,959 and 6,262 passengers, respectively. "Winter is very busy at the Visitor Center," Fath described. "We might see in one day what other Refuge visitor centers see in a month or more."



Refuge volunteer Terry Curry staffs a crafts station during a Visitor Center special event.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 7, 2014 14-07

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NATIONAL ELK REFUGE TO CELEBRATE THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The National Elk Refuge is pleased to offer an opportunity this month to celebrate several significant dates in the history of the National Wildlife Refuge System. From Friday, March 14 through Sunday, March 23, displays and naturalist presentations at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center will focus on the conservation efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The events listed below will each run daily throughout the ten-day celebration and are free of charge. The Visitor Center is located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson and is open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM daily.

President Theodore Roosevelt established the nation's first wildlife refuge on March 14, 1903 at Pelican Island National Bird Reservation in Florida. Since then, the National Wildlife Refuge System has grown into a vast network of habitats that benefits wildlife, provides outstanding outdoor experiences, and protects a healthy environment. To show how large the national wildlife refuge system has grown, National Elk Refuge naturalists will display a large U.S. map in the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, showing the location of all the refuges (over 560) throughout the country. Visitors will be asked to place a pin on the national wildlife refuge closest to their home. On March 24, the refuge receiving the most pins will be announced on Facebook (<http://on.fb.me/1e88uhF>) and Twitter (@NatElkRefuge).

Guests can learn more about the establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge System through two displays set up in the small theater located on the top level of the Visitor Center. The first exhibit will be a time line showing significant dates throughout the history of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, along with a brief description of each event. The second display will highlight the 80-year history of the Federal Duck Stamp program. President Roosevelt signed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, popularly known as the Duck Stamp Act, on March 16, 1934. Originally created as a license required for hunting migratory waterfowl, Duck Stamps have a much larger purpose today. They serve as a vital tool for wetland conservation, with ninety-eight cents out of every dollar generated by the sales going directly to purchase or lease wetland habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System. The sale of stamps is not restricted to hunters; many non-hunters collect the beautiful stamps and purchase them to support wildlife conservation. Refuge naturalists will share images of some of the previous Duck Stamps from throughout the years.

Visitor center staff will run a video entitled "America's Darling: The Story of Jay N. Ding Darling" continuously during the celebration to honor the conservation achievements of the man that designed the first Federal Duck Stamp. In addition to his Duck Stamp art, Darling authored two books and twice won the Pulitzer Prize for cartooning, in 1923 and again in 1942. He used his satirical pen to promote issues of conservation and to bring national attention to environmental concerns. On Sunday, March 16, naturalists will set up a table with art supplies and reference books outside of the theater, allowing children and adults to design their own Duck Stamp.

More information on the National Wildlife Refuge System can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/about/index.html>. To inquire about the Visitor Center events, please call 307.739.9322.



GREATER YELLOWSTONE COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Participating Agencies

US Department of the Interior

National Park Service

Grand Teton National Park
John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
Memorial Parkway
Yellowstone National Park

US Fish & Wildlife Service

National Elk Refuge
Red Rock Lakes
National Wildlife Refuge

Bureau of Land Management

US Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Beaverhead-Deerlodge
National Forest
Bridger-Teton National Forest
Caribou-Targhee National Forest
Custer National Forest
Gallatin National Forest
Shoshone National Forest

Chair

Dan Wenk

Executive Coordinator

Virginia Kelly

Interagency News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—March 6, 2014

Media Contacts: Virginia Kelly, (406) 587-6704, Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee
Marna Daley, (406) 587-6703, Custer and Gallatin National Forests
Al Nash, (307) 344-2015, Yellowstone National Park

Public Invited To Help Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee Chart A Path To The Future

The agencies entrusted with managing federal lands within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) are asking the public to help them determine which ecosystem issues should be the focus in the future.

The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC) is a group of eleven federal agencies who work together to manage over 15 million of acres of public land in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

GYCC managers are inviting the public to join them in a conversation in late March in Jackson, Wyo. Rather than hold a discussion about individual agency issues, the managers want the public to share their thoughts on cross-jurisdictional, ecosystem scale issues where they believe GYCC should focus in the coming years. Specifically, the GYCC wishes to explore questions related to cross-agency land and resource management opportunities, GYE-level priorities the GYCC should focus on, and future communication and collaboration with the public and stakeholder groups.

The conversation between the public and GYCC leadership is set for 1:00-5:00 p.m. on Monday, March 24, 2014 at the Teton County Library, 125 Virginian Lane, in Jackson, Wyo. The emphasis of the session will be on interaction and communication between all attendees.

Information gathered during this listening session will help the GYCC develop and strengthen its working relationships with the public and stakeholders as they collaborate to put their resources toward addressing joint challenges and opportunities in managing these shared landscapes.

Those who plan to attend are asked to commit to attending the full four hour session and to RSVP by March 19 to gycc-march24@fs.fed.us.

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ABOUT THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE COORDINATING COMMITTEE: *The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC) includes federal land managers from national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges and Bureau of Land Management's National System of Public Lands across the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA): the largest, essentially intact natural area in the lower 48 states. Together, these agencies manage 15 million acres of federal land. The committee was formed to pursue opportunities of mutual cooperation and coordination in the management of core federal lands within the GYA. Participating federal land managers administer three national parks (Yellowstone, Grand Teton & John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway), two national wildlife refuges (National Elk Refuge, Red Rock Lakes), six national forests (Bridger-Teton, Caribou-Targhee, Shoshone, Custer, Gallatin, and Beaverhead-Deerlodge), and Bureau of Land Management – administered lands in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.*

Information about the GYCC and links to member agency websites are available at: <http://www.fedgycc.org/>



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 13, 2014 14-09

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
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PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM TO BLEND ART AND SCIENCE

The National Elk Refuge is excited to partner with the National Museum of Wildlife Art for the museum's final Wild Wednesday program of the season on Wednesday, March 19 from 5:30 – 9:00 PM. The winter series at the art museum allows guests to indulge in a tapas-inspired menu in the Rising Sage Cafe, explore the galleries, and relax to the piano music of Francis Koerber, Teton Virtuoso.

On March 19, Refuge seasonal naturalist Mike Nordell will pair up with museum docent Bobbi Thomasma to offer a guided gallery tour at 6:00 PM, repeated at 8:00 PM. The duo will share both a naturalist's and artist's perspective on the pieces along the tour, with a special emphasis on two exhibitions: *The Darwin Legacy: The Evolution of Wildlife Art* and *Elegy: The African Photography of Nick Brandt 2001–2008*. "The Darwin exhibit provides a perfect platform to discuss the connections between scientists and artists," explains Becky Kimmel, Director of Programs and Events for the museum. "We look forward to the opportunity to examine the interchange between the two disciplines."

The National Museum of Wildlife Art recommends reservations for those that plan to dine at the cafe that evening. Seating times are available from 5:30 – 8:00 PM and can be reserved by calling (307) 732.5434.

The outreach by the National Elk Refuge staff is one of several activities planned this month in celebration of the 111th birthday of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Refuge staff will offer additional educational programming at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson, from March 14–23. More information on the 10-day celebration of national wildlife refuges can be found on the National Elk Refuge's web page at <http://1.usa.gov/1geRi5W>.

National Elk Refuge News – March 25, 2014

Ten-day Refuge System Celebration Draws to a Close



Above: The Snow King Hill Climb, a popular Jackson event, brought in enough local traffic on the last four days of the celebration to boost the regional number of pins.

Right: Winter naturalist Justin St. Onge watches as a visitor pins her refuge. Refuges in the western United States ended up getting more pins than those east of the Mississippi River.



For ten days this month, the first exhibit greeting guests at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center was a large United States map and a bowl of pins. The map, listing all the units within the National Wildlife Refuge System, went up on March 14 as part of celebration of the 111th birthday of the Refuge System and was a means to show visitors how large the System has grown. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a division of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service within the Department of the Interior.

In the spirit of March Madness and friendly competition, people were asked to place a pin on the national wildlife refuge closest to their home while winter naturalists kept an eye on which part of the country, what wildlife refuge, and which states led the challenge.

Though the east coast initially captured and retained the lead for the first few days, the western United States gained momentum and snatched the victory on the final weekend of the ten-day celebration. The victory was fueled by a large regional event held in

Jackson March 20 – 23 that brought in many visitors from throughout Wyoming and two of the neighboring states. Final results: refuges in the western United States = 391; refuges east of the Mississippi River = 246. The top five states receiving the most pins included:

- Wyoming – 76
- Texas – 44
- Idaho – 38
- Georgia – 39
- California – 34

Activity organizers were unsure of what the outcome of the

competition would be, but they set and reached their primary objective: to raise awareness of the number of refuges protecting habitat and wildlife throughout the nation. “We had people asking if they should pin the refuge closest to where they live now, where they were born ... we left it entirely up to them,” explained Education and Outreach Specialist Lori Iverson, who came up the idea of the map. “Either way, it got them looking at the number and location of wildlife refuges.” Staff watched with smiles as one of the first participants pulled out his mobile phone and navigated to Google Maps to ensure he selected the closest of several refuges near his home. “He was fastidious about making sure he was accurate,” Iverson added.

The map project was only one of several activities held to celebrate the establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Two temporary displays were set up in the small theater located on the top level of the Visitor Center. The first exhibit was a time line showing significant dates throughout the history of the Refuge System. The second display highlighted the 80-year history of the Federal Duck Stamp



Both children and adults enjoyed creating their own Duck Stamp. Rick Howe, Director of Visitor Services for the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, joined in the fun to create this art work.



A National Wildlife Refuge System time line used a variety of items such as signs, pictures, historical photos and text to interpret significant dates.

program. Duck Stamps serve as a vital tool for wetland conservation, with ninety-eight cents out of every dollar generated by the sales going directly to purchase or lease wetland habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System. Refuge naturalists shared images of some of the previous Duck Stamps from throughout the years and set up a crafts station nearby with art supplies and reference books. Visitors could create their own stamp on a template and hang up their completed work as part of the display.

An off-site evening program was also offered to guests during the National Wildlife Refuge System celebration. The National Elk Refuge partnered with the National Museum of Wildlife Art for the museum’s final “Wild Wednesday” program of the season on March 19. The winter series at the art museum allows guests to indulge in a tapas-inspired menu in the cafe, explore the galleries, and relax to piano music in the lobby.

On March 19, Refuge seasonal naturalist Mike Nordell paired up with museum docent Bobbi Thomas to offer guided gallery tours at 6:00 and 8:00 PM. The duo shared both a naturalist’s and artist’s perspective on the pieces along the tour, with a special emphasis on two exhibitions: *The Darwin Legacy: The Evolution of Wildlife Art* and *Elegy: The African Photography of Nick Brandt 2001–2008*. Nordell spoke on a variety of topics during his portion of the gallery walk, including National Elk Refuge history, wildlife conservation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Ivory Crush held last November in Denver.

“In general, people were excited to find and learn about refuges closest to their home,” said winter naturalist Justin St. Onge, who organized the event. “If our celebration results in raised awareness and more visits to refuges in the future, we accomplished our mission.”



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 31, 2014 14-10

PO Box 510
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SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING TO CONCLUDE FOR THE SEASON

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin announced today that supplemental feeding of elk and bison wintering on the National Elk Refuge will conclude for the season this week. The decision, made in conjunction with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department, was based on relatively warm temperatures and the rate of snow melt at Refuge monitoring sites.

As spring-like conditions move into the area, biologists monitor and record snow depths and signs of green-up. These serve as primary indicators that supplemental feeding can be ended for the year. During the past two weeks, biologists have measured a noticeable reduction in the snow pack at McBride Ridge, one of the Refuge's highest points of elevation, with more bare ground becoming exposed. A snow depth gauge at the Refuge headquarters site recorded 0" of snow cover last week.

Field observers have also noted numbers of both elk and bison moving to the northeast end of the Refuge and, in some cases, migrating off the Refuge. Some of the animals remaining on the Refuge have been staying at higher elevations during the day rather than retreating to lower ground where supplemental feed is provided. When snow-free ground becomes available, the wintering animals will search out new spring growth or residual forage from the previous growing season. Biologists have started seeing spring green-up throughout the Refuge at all elevations.

The end date and total number of days for the supplemental feeding program can vary greatly from year to year. This year's feeding program began on February 4, 11 days later than the 10-year average. Though the average end date for feeding is within the first few days of April, this season's feeding season will total 57 days, or two weeks shorter than the 10-year average of 71 days. Staff providing supplemental feed began reducing the amount of alfalfa pellets distributed daily last week, gradually reducing the amount of feed through Tuesday, April 1.

Horse-drawn rides on the National Elk Refuge are scheduled to continue through Saturday, April 5. Wagons are substituted for sleighs when inadequate snow remains, but visitors can still get close to elk remaining in the area. Tickets are sold at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, located at 532 North Cache Street in Jackson. For further information on the horse-drawn rides, please call 307.733.0277 or 1.800.772.5386.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 3, 2014 14-11

PO Box 510
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WINTER RANGE CLOSURES REMAIN IN EFFECT

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin has issued a reminder that two areas of the National Elk Refuge will remain closed to the public through April 30. The closures provide wintering animals protection at a time when their energy reserves are low and abundant new vegetation growth, or green-up, is not yet widely available for foraging.

From December 1 through April 30 each year, winter closures limit public travel on the Refuge Road. Traffic and pedestrian use is only allowed on the first 3.5 miles of the Refuge Road, from the Refuge entrance on Broadway Avenue to the Twin Creek subdivision. Access to the Refuge beyond the Twin Creek subdivision is restricted as part of an area closure to protect wintering wildlife and is coordinated with the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The Refuge Road will reopen for public travel beyond the Twin Creek subdivision on May 1, giving public access to the Curtis Canyon and Flat Creek Roads and adjoining National Forest. Access regulations are available for individuals traveling through the Refuge to the Bridger-Teton National Forest on or near May 1 on the Refuge's web site at <http://1.usa.gov/1scTh3R>.

The section of the North Highway 89 Pathway from Flat Creek to the Gros Ventre bridge also remains closed through April 30. The 5-mile segment of the pathway is subject to an annual closure as part of a condition of the agreement between Teton County and the National Elk Refuge for pathway use on U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service property. Unlike neighboring federal lands with multiple recreational opportunities, the National Elk Refuge is mandated to prioritize habitat conservation and wildlife management, adhering to a "wildlife first" mission when considering or allowing public uses. The seasonal closure of the pathway maximizes benefits to important wildlife habitat and migration corridors and allows the Refuge to be in compliance with its mission and purpose.

The National Elk Refuge announced last fall it would develop criteria allowing flexibility to open the North Highway 89 Pathway prior to May 1 on years when spring arrives unusually early. The Refuge will be testing criteria this spring, which includes looking at the number of animals remaining on the Refuge and the potential for conflicts with migration. GPS collar data shows that peak spring elk movements occur during the second and third weeks of April. "If our surveys show that numbers of elk on the Refuge have dropped to the May 1 long-term average, we would consider opening the pathway as early as April 15," Kallin explained. "It's really dependent on elk dispersal and location."

The pathway seasonal closure dates, based primarily on elk movement data, will be placed in the Draft Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, which will become available for public comment later this year.

For further information on road or pathway seasonal closures, please call the National Elk Refuge administrative offices at 307.733.9212.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 7, 2014 14-12

PO Box 510
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VISITOR CENTER TO CLOSE FOR FOUR DAYS IN APRIL

The Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center will be closed to the public from Friday, April 18 through Monday, April 21 as the final phase of a small construction project on the north end of the building wraps up. The interagency visitor center is located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson.

The current construction work on the building began in early March. An additional 300 square feet is being added to the lower floor of the building, squaring off an area that was previously "T" shaped. The expansion will greatly facilitate the flow of visitors in the popular building, which is open year-round. The construction work is being done by Brookhurst Construction & Development of Jackson.

The new space will become part of the retail area operated by the Grand Teton Association, the Refuge's nonprofit cooperating association. The Refuge's partnership with the Grand Teton Association is unique because not only does the Association work to increase public understanding and enjoyment of the National Elk Refuge, but it provides funding critical to Refuge projects. True to their nonprofit status, the Association returns sales proceeds to the federal agency to fund interpretive, educational, and research projects. Major projects funded in the past include the restoration of the historic Miller House in 2005, programs and costs related to the Refuge's centennial in 2012, and, most notably, the purchase and subsequent 2011 donation of the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center to the National Elk Refuge. Many of the Refuge's educational programs and seasonal staff are the direct result of the outstanding partnership with the Grand Teton Association.

During the time the visitor center is closed, visitor services will be available at alternate locations. Weekend hours may be limited or unavailable. Locations and contact numbers include:

- Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce – 112 Center Street, Jackson – (307) 733-3316
- Bridger-Teton National Forest – Supervisor's Office – 340 N. Cache Street, Jackson – (307) 739-5500
- Grand Teton National Park – Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center, Moose – (307) 739-3399
- Yellowstone National Park – (307) 344-7381
- Grand Teton Association sales outlets – (307) 739-3606 for a listing of locations
- Wyoming Game & Fish Department Jackson Regional Office – 420 N. Cache Street, Jackson (307) 733-2321
- National Elk Refuge Administrative Offices – 675 E. Broadway Street, Jackson – (307) 733-9212



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 22, 2014 14-13

PO Box 510
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NORTH HIGHWAY 89 PATHWAY TO OPEN EARLY

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin announced today the North Highway 89 Pathway will open for nonmotorized public use beginning Wednesday, April 23, eight days before the scheduled opening on May 1. Teton County Parks & Recreation will be sweeping the pathway this week as their schedule permits.

Last fall, the National Elk Refuge announced it would develop criteria to be tested this spring, using the number of animals remaining on the Refuge and the potential for conflicts with migration as the basis for an annual decision to open the pathway early. Kallin explained that if large numbers of elk migrated off the Refuge early, dropping the number of remaining animals to the May 1 long-term average of approximately 2,500 elk, the pathway could potentially open prior to the established date.

GPS collar data shows that peak spring elk movements occur during the second and third weeks of April. This season was no exception. On Saturday, April 19, roughly 5,000 elk remained on the south end of the Refuge. Elk numbers dropped significantly during the remainder of the weekend as large numbers of animals migrated off the Refuge, with many elk moving to the sagebrush flats just north of the Gros Ventre River and south of the Jackson Hole Airport. By April 21, the number of elk remaining on the Refuge had dropped to 1,300 animals.

The 5-mile segment of the pathway is subject to an annual closure as part of a condition of the agreement between Teton County and the National Elk Refuge for pathway use on U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service property. Unlike neighboring federal lands with multiple recreational opportunities, the National Elk Refuge is mandated to prioritize habitat conservation and wildlife management, adhering to a "wildlife first" mission when considering or allowing public uses. The seasonal closure of the pathway maximizes benefits to important wildlife habitat and migration corridors and allows the Refuge to be in compliance with its mission and purpose.

Pathway users are reminded that animals will continue to disperse and move from their winter ranges toward their summering sites. Animals can be wary of the presence of humans and may respond to cyclists and pedestrians by bolting onto nearby roadways. Motorists are also advised to be alert for animals that cross roads unexpectedly.

The Refuge Road will remain closed to public travel beyond the Twin Creek subdivision until 8:00 AM on May 1, giving public access to the Curtis Canyon and Flat Creek Roads and adjoining the Bridger-Teton National Forest. Access regulations are available for individuals traveling through the Refuge to the National Forest on or near May 1 on the Refuge's web site at <http://1.usa.gov/1scTh3R>.

For further information on Refuge road or pathway seasonal closures, please call the National Elk Refuge administrative offices at 307.733.9212.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 12, 2014 14-14

PO Box 510
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PLEIN AIR PAINTERS AT VISITOR CENTER TUESDAY

A group of painters will use the backdrop of the National Elk Refuge as artistic inspiration on Tuesday, May 13, giving visitors an opportunity to watch and ask questions as the artists create their works. The informal painting session will take place from 4:00 – 7:00 PM at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center.

The artists are part of the Teton Plein Air Painters, a group of artists who meet once a week from May – October in the Teton environs. Starting with two people during the summer of 2012, the group now has a communication list of over seventy. Typically, three to ten people are on-site to paint, referencing the landscape for motifs. Art mediums include oil, acrylic, watercolor, and pen and ink.

The group will spread out in the area of the visitor center, located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson. Weather permitting, likely locations will include the visitor center lawn, the covered upper deck of the facility, and the remote viewing deck across the lawn next to the wetlands area. Current visitor center hours are from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM, but visitors are welcome to stroll through the grounds after hours to enjoy the art session.

En plein air is a French expression which means “in the open air” and is used to describe painting done in an outdoor setting. The artists paint natural light, using color to define form. Depending on the light and weather, plein air paintings are generally done in one session. Artists may add final touches to their work once back in the studio.

For additional information on the Teton Plein Air Painters and Tuesday’s session, contact Bobbi Miller, Facilitator, at 307 / 543 2910.

– FWS –



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 18, 2014 14-15

PO Box 510
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RECORDS SET AT THE 47TH ANNUAL BOY SCOUT ANTLER AUCTION

A large crowd of spectators was treated to record-setting totals at the 47th Annual Boy Scout Antler Auction, held on Saturday, May 17. The sale, scheduled each year on the Saturday before Memorial Day weekend, makes available shed antlers collected from the National Elk Refuge.

This year, 13,698 pounds of antlers were sold at the auction, well above the 10-year average of 8,197 pounds. This year's total represents the largest number of antlers sold in the event's history. Previously, the largest amount was in 2011, when 13,104 pounds were sold. Factors that contribute to the number of antlers available include the number of bulls wintering on the Refuge and the timing of the elk migration off the Refuge to summer ranges.

More notable than the increase in the number of antlers, however, was the average price per pound paid this year by the 127 bidders registered at the sale. Bidders paid an average of \$16.65 per pound at Saturday's auction, or \$6.13 per pound higher than the \$10.52 average seen over the past 10 years. A number of matched pairs, which often bring in a higher sale price, were hitting totals as high as \$25 to \$29 per pound, with a non-typical set (lot #116) selling for \$38 per pound. Crowds cheered during several of the bidding wars, caught up in the excitement of the sale led by auctioneers Jim Loose and Brian Taylor.

With the large number of antlers for sale and the higher price paid per pound, Saturday's sale yielded a total of \$233,613. During the past decade, the amount generated from the auction has averaged \$84,876. Refuge records indicate this year's total sales and price per pound set records, surpassing the \$131,400 and \$15.43 per pound average paid in 2013. "This is great news for both the National Elk Refuge and the Jackson District Boy Scouts," said Refuge Manager Steve Kallin. "It couldn't have been done without the outstanding partnership we have with the Jackson District Boy Scout organization."

The majority of proceeds from the antler auction (75%) are donated to the National Elk Refuge, which manages approximately 25,000 acres as winter range for the Jackson Elk Herd. The funds are used for habitat enhancement work on the Refuge. In 2013, the proceeds were a key funding source for hiring four seasonal employees that work with the Refuge's range specialist in the irrigation program. The remaining 25% of the sale's proceeds are given to the Jackson District Boy Scouts, recognizing the extraordinary effort it takes to pull off such a large event as the antler auction. Each year, Scouts and Scout leaders donate approximately 2,000 hours to prepare and execute the sale, comparable to one staff member working a 40-hour week for a full year. The funding the Scouts receive supplements fees for day camps, leader and Scout training, and other activities. A photo collection and multimedia slide show on the Refuge's web site describe the behind-the-scenes work that goes into preparing for the auction as well as images from the day of the sale.

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's Great Elk Tour traveling exhibit, which is routinely on display during the annual Boy Scout antler auction, featured a striking set of antlers this year that came from the National Elk Refuge



in 2013. With the help of pictures taken by Refuge staff from earlier that winter, Scout leaders and Refuge staff were able to pair up the two antlers, which scored 436 7/8 non-typical inches using the Boone and Crockett scoring system. It was decided the pair would not be sold in the 2013 auction, but rather be shared with the public by entering them in the 2014 Great Elk Tour. Exhibit bulls are selected for their size, uniqueness and story. The display collection from this year as well as previous years can be viewed at www.rmef.org/Events/GreatElkTour/ViewtheBulls.aspx.

Next year's antler auction is set for Saturday, May 16. However, single antlers are available for sale throughout the year at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, located at 532 North Cache Street in Jackson.

– FWS –



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 22, 2014 14-16

PO Box 510
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NATIONAL ELK REFUGE ANNOUNCES 2014 SUMMER SCHEDULE OF FACILITIES

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin announced today the 2014 summer season schedule for public facilities on the National Elk Refuge.

The Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, located at 532 North Cache Street in Jackson, will expand its hours of operation to 8:00 AM through 7:00 PM daily beginning Saturday, May 24. The popular multi-agency center is staffed by personnel from the National Elk Refuge, Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Grand Teton National Park, and the Grand Teton Association. The facility is owned and operated by the National Elk Refuge and is a source for items such as maps, brochures, permits, and Federal lands passes. The Visitor Center also includes an extensive bookstore, which was recently expanded and remodeled by the Grand Teton Association. Proceeds from sales at the Visitor Center benefit educational programming on the Refuge.

The historic Miller House, located approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile north of the National Elk Refuge entrance on East Broadway Street in Jackson, will open for the season on Sunday, May 25. The charming homestead will be open from 10:00 AM through 4:00 PM daily, including weekends, through September 21. The Miller House and surrounding land was the first piece of property purchased for the creation of the National Elk Refuge, established in 1912. The homestead is decorated with period pieces and gives visitors the opportunity to learn more about the establishment and early history of the Refuge. The Grand Teton Association also operates a small sales outlet at the Miller House, carrying unique items representative of the early 20th century. Entrance to the Miller House is free of charge.

For additional information about activities or services at the National Elk Refuge, please call the administrative offices at (307) 733.9212.

– FWS –

National Elk Refuge News – June 25, 2014

Study Measures Condition of Aspen Stands



This vibrant aspen stand on the north end of the National Elk Refuge is one of 35 sites being monitored this summer.

Maybe it's their shimmering leaves rustling in the summer breeze. Perhaps it's their striking yellow brilliance in the autumn light. Regardless, aspen trees are loved by people for their aesthetic qualities. But as widely appreciated as they are by human populations, quaking aspen forests provide important breeding, foraging, and resting habitat for a variety of birds and mammals.

The northern hills of the National Elk Refuge are dotted with aspen, but little research has been done to document the ongoing health and vibrancy of the stands. Aspen have been declining throughout

the West over the past few decades, causing concern among wildlife managers because of the importance of the species to wildlife. Whether it's through providing hiding cover, thermal protection and summer shade, a source of food, or a site for nesting birds, aspen communities meet diverse habitat needs for many animals.

This month, a graduate student from Montana State University is working with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists to collect baseline data at the National Elk Refuge, documenting aspen age classes and calculating

the amount of browsing by ungulates in relation to their distance from supplemental feeding areas.

Jenny Edwards, a teacher from Casper, Wyoming is working towards a Masters of Science in Science Education degree. Her graduate school capstone project will capture aspen stand structure in 35 sites on the Refuge. Edwards is using GIS information to locate known Refuge aspen stands, classify the height of the trees within a designated plot, and measure both the tallest browsed stem and the highest base on the current year's growth.

“The measurements I take and the observations I note tell a story of browsing,” Edwards explains. “You can learn how an area has been used by wildlife.” Browse line refers to the range of lower stripped and eaten-back stems, indicating the height reached in feeding by ungulates like elk, deer, and moose. Saplings that are 8 feet or taller are less vulnerable to damage and have a greater chance of becoming adult trees.

While it may be unclear to Edwards why some stands break up and die when others remain stable, the information she’s collecting will identify trends and help track changes in the landscape and its use.

There is increasing concern that in the West, poor quaking aspen regeneration may in part be due to wildlife overbrowsing of saplings. Where browsing pressure is heavy, ungulates can limit quaking aspen regeneration before the shoots grow to adult height. To provide for quaking aspen regeneration in such areas, a surplus of new saplings needs to grow so that even after browsing animals use the area, enough new growth remains to attain adult height.

The most common method of regeneration in aspen is through root sprouting. As a fire adapted species, aspen can be stimulated to send up new shoots after a disturbance. However, areas that have large elk populations may see little growth of new shoots even after large-scale wildfires because of intense browsing. In these areas, quaking aspen saplings may require protection from browsing.

The Bison & Elk Management Plan, as well as the Refuge’s



Aspen that are 8 feet or higher are the most indicative of successful recruitment because they have grown outside of the range where they may be affected by heavy browsing.

upcoming Comprehensive Conservation Plan, addresses the need for a sufficient level of aspen recruitment and maintenance of various class conditions.

While in the field, Edwards is also noting the bird communities using the aspen stands. A diverse array of birds benefit from aspen by using them as feeding, hiding, and nesting sites. Through sight and sound, Edwards documents which

bird species are present in each of the sites she visits.

Edwards will wrap up her work during the beginning of July. Her study will be used in combination with elk GPS collar data to determine what levels of elk activity have led to current aspen conditions. The information will also help predict how aspen stands may be affected if elk patterns change due to a shift in Refuge management activities.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 30, 2014 14-17

PO Box 510
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(307) 201.5433

REFUGE BISON HUNTING PERMIT APPLICATION PERIOD TO OPEN IN MID-JULY

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin announced today the July dates for licensed bison hunters to apply for a National Elk Refuge 2014 bison permit. Beginning this season, hunters will apply for a Refuge-specific bison hunting permit by completing an application online.

Similar to the procedure used by Refuge elk hunters since 2008, bison hunters will begin their application for a National Elk Refuge hunt permit by visiting the Wyoming Game & Fish Department's Private Lands Public Wildlife Access Program web site at <http://bit.ly/1jppFQL>. A direct link to the online permit application is also provided on the bison hunting page of the National Elk Refuge's web site at <http://1.usa.gov/1gnsi21>.

Hunters must already have a Wyoming state bison license, issued by the Wyoming Game & Fish Department, to apply for a Refuge bison permit. Individuals who have not already applied and been selected for a 2014 Wyoming bison license are not eligible to hunt bison this year.

Bison hunters must apply for their Refuge permit between July 14 through July 31, initially applying for only one bison hunt period. The results of the computerized random draw will be posted on the application web site by 11:00 AM on August 4. The online system will continue to be active after 11:00 am on August 4 to allow hunters access to leftover and alternate permits later in the season. A thorough description of the application process, along with bison hunting information, hunt periods, regulations, and a map, is included in a four-page brochure available on the Refuge's web site or at the following Jackson, WY locations:

- Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, 532 North Cache Street
- Wyoming Game & Fish Department Jackson Regional Office, 420 North Cache Street
- National Elk Refuge Administrative Office, 675 East Broadway Avenue

Bison hunt management on the Refuge is designed to achieve optimum herd size as determined through a cooperative effort between the National Elk Refuge, Grand Teton National Park, and Wyoming Game & Fish Department managers. This year's bison season is scheduled for August 15, 2014 through January 18, 2015.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 7, 2014 14-18

PO Box 510
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(307) 201.5433

REFUGE TO PARTICIPATE IN PLEIN AIR EVENT

The National Elk Refuge is pleased to partner with the Rocky Mountain Plein Air Painters and Grand Teton Association to present a group painting demonstration on Thursday, July 17 from 5:00–8:00 PM at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center. The event is free of charge.

Approximately 20 artists will spread out onto areas overlooking the Refuge and will interact with the public as they work. Locations will include the visitor center lawn, the covered upper deck of the facility, the remote viewing deck across the lawn next to the wetlands area, and the Flat Creek turnout. While promoting awareness and enjoyment of plein air painting, the artists will be available to visit with guests about the creative process and explain various approaches and techniques used. “We look forward to welcoming the artists as they capture the beauty and inspiration of the National Elk Refuge while interacting with our visitors,” said Refuge Manager Steve Kallin.

The visitor center is located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson. Current hours are from 8:00 AM – 7:00 PM, but visitors are welcome to stroll through the grounds after hours to enjoy the art session.

En plein air is a French expression which means “in the open air” and is used to describe painting done in an outdoor setting. The painting demonstration at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center coincides with the 3rd annual Plein Air for the Park art show and sale in Grand Teton National Park from July 16–20. The new artwork created on July 17 will become part of the Plein Air in the Park show and will be for sale there. The painting demonstration on July 17 is also part of Jackson’s Third Thursday Art Walk series.

– FWS –

National Elk Refuge News – July 11, 2014

Long-Billed Curlew on the Move



Checking the weather, social media sites, or online news is often the first task people do after turning on their computers or mobile devices each day. For several biologists in Jackson, Wyoming and the Intermountain Bird Observatory in Boise, Idaho, they anxiously check on the status of “AJ,” a long-billed curlew that was fitted with a satellite transmitter on May 27 at the National Elk Refuge.

Since receiving her transmitter, the curlew has hatched her eggs, left the young with her male partner, and headed south. Her behavior is typical: females usually abandon their brood two to three weeks after they’ve hatched, leaving their mate to care for the young. After a notable stopover in Utah, she is currently on Mexico’s west coast, approximately 100 miles south of Mazatlan.

Long-billed curlews are North America’s largest shorebird, recognizable by their distinctive long, curved bill. Though they spend their winters on southern coasts and the interior of Mexico, they breed in grasslands of the prairies and Intermountain West.

Long-billed curlews are listed as a “species of greatest conservation need” in Wyoming and Idaho, and a species of concern with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Their populations have dwindled due to habitat loss and degradation. Satellite transmitters on the birds can provide valuable insights into the species’ migratory routes, migratory timing, and habitat



Though it's easier to spot the leg band, a satellite transmitter's antenna can be seen protruding from the back of this female long-billed curlew. Credit: Eric Cole

requirements as well as allow scientists to develop conservation plans.

Eighteen curlews were documented on the National Elk Refuge in early June, representing a significant concentration of the bird in western Wyoming. One of them became part of a larger study done by the Intermountain Bird Observatory, which involved equipping a total of nine curlews with solar-powered satellite transmitters. The eight other birds were captured in neighboring states.

AJ’s transmitter was generously paid for by the Meg and Bert

Raynes Wildlife Fund, which supports research and habitat protection in Wyoming and the Jackson Hole area. Because migration of long-billed curlews breeding in Wyoming is largely undocumented, organizers hope to expand the project to include more Wyoming-based curlews in the future.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Eric Cole, along with Wyoming Game & Fish Department biologists Susan Patla and Aly Courtemanch, assisted with the bird capture and transmitter fitting on the National Elk Refuge.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 18, 2014 14-19

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
307.201.5433

WYOMING ART WORK TO BE DISPLAYED AT THE JACKSON HOLE & GREATER YELLOWSTONE VISITOR CENTER

An exhibit featuring the top entries in the 2014 Wyoming Junior Duck Stamp Program will move to the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center next week, featuring the art work of winners from four age categories. The art work is currently on display at the National Museum of Wildlife Art and will be featured at the visitor center from July 24 through August 12. The visitor center is located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson.

The Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program is a dynamic arts curriculum that teaches wetlands and waterfowl conservation to students from kindergarten through high school. The program incorporates scientific and wildlife management principles into a visual arts curriculum. Participants complete a Junior Duck Stamp design at the completion of their studies. Students then submit their art work to a state or territory contest, with top entries moving on to a national competition. More than 27,000 students enter state Junior Duck Stamp art contests each year. The winning design from the national contest is used to create the Junior Duck Stamp for the following year.

Judging for the 2014 Wyoming Junior Duck Stamp contest was held at Seedskafee National Wildlife Refuge near Green River, Wyoming in March. Andrew Kneeland, age 16, of Rock Springs took the top honor of Best of Show with a stunning acrylic painting of a trumpeter swan with cygnets. Kneeland's success didn't stop there: he went on to take second place in the national Junior Duck Stamp contest in April. "We're excited that a Wyoming artist placed so high in that level of competition," said Visitor Center Manager Natalie Fath. "We're proud of all our state artists, but we especially look forward to showcasing Andrew's piece."

Proceeds from the sale of Junior Duck Stamps support conservation education and provide awards and scholarships for the students, teachers and schools that participate in the program. Through the Junior Duck Stamp program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service introduces participants to both the Federal Duck Stamp program and the National Wildlife Refuge System and educates new generations of citizens about the importance of waterfowl and wetlands conservation.

The Wyoming Junior Duck Stamp Program Art Work tour schedule for the remainder of the contest year includes these state locations:

- August 15 – September 7: Cokeville Branch of Lincoln County Library, Cokeville, WY
- September 9 – September 30: Lincoln County Library, Kemmerer, WY

More information on the Junior Duck Stamp Program and state contest can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/seedskafee/wyjrduck/>.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 25, 2014 14-20

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
307.201.5433

INTERAGENCY CREWS EXTINGUISH SMALL ROADSIDE FIRE

Teton Interagency fire crews responded to a small roadside fire on Friday afternoon, July 25, several miles north of Jackson along Highway 89. Both Teton Interagency Fire Dispatch and the Teton County Sheriff's Office received a number of calls shortly after noon regarding a possible fire north of the Grand Teton National Park south boundary sign at the top of Fish Hatchery Hill.

Passersby on Highway 89 took initial action, pulling off on the side of the highway to attempt to extinguish the small fire before it grew. The West Crossing fire was located immediately adjacent to the Highway 89 road surface, and though the specific cause of the fire could not be determined, it was declared human-caused. The fire blackened a 4 ft. x 20 ft. area and was officially declared out at 1:30 PM.

Fire danger in the Teton Interagency Fire area remains moderate, meaning fires can start easily and spread at a moderate rate. If a fire starts in open, dry grasslands, it can burn and spread quickly on windy days under such conditions. Fuels specialists have noted grasses throughout the area are now cured and can easily carry fire at the lower elevations. Current fire conditions, fire incidents, and fire prevention information can be found at www.tetonfires.com.

Area residents and visitors can report a wildfire or smoke by calling (307) 739.3630.

– FWS –



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 28, 2014 14-21

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
307.201.5433

TWO EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS SCHEDULED FOR EARLY AUGUST

The National Elk Refuge will host two programs during the first week of August at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson. Both programs, offered in cooperation with Refuge partners, are family-friendly and free of charge.

On **Saturday, August 2**, interagency staff from both the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will offer a series of activities celebrating this year's 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, the landmark conservation bill that created a way for Americans to protect their most pristine wildlands for future generations. Participants at the visitor center event will have the opportunity to explore various aspects of wilderness management, complete a Wilderness Explorer Jr. Ranger Activity booklet, and earn a Wilderness Explorer badge. Though the activities target youths ages 8–young adults, all local and visiting public are invited to join in the fun. The event is scheduled from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

A second family-friendly program will be offered on **Monday, August 4** as part of the Grand Teton Association's Membership Week. The Grand Teton Association, a nonprofit organization that operates sales outlets in a number of federally-operated visitor centers and contact stations throughout the area, is generously sponsoring the Teton Raptor Center for an hour-long program at 2:00 PM. The popular program features a live bird demonstration and will give guests a unique opportunity to view and photograph raptors up close and learn about their habits, characteristics, and rehabilitation.

During the Grand Teton Association's Membership Week, all current or new Association members will receive a 25% discount off all purchases throughout the week at any of the Association's locations. In addition to the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center sales outlet, the Grand Teton Association also operates a small store at the Refuge's historic Miller House, located $\frac{3}{4}$ mile north of the Refuge's entrance at the end of East Broadway Avenue. Proceeds from sales at the two locations support education, interpretive, and research projects at the National Elk Refuge.

– FWS –

National Elk Refuge News – July 31, 2014

*15th Annual Gros Ventre River Cooperative Spray Days
Held Last Week*



The Jackson Hole Weed Management Association (JHWMA) hosted their 15th annual cooperative noxious weed spray days on July 22-24, with the National Elk Refuge participating as a cooperator. Fifty volunteers came from throughout Teton County to team up for invasive weed control along the Gros Ventre River. Organized by Travis Ziehl, Assistant Supervisor at Teton County Weed and Pest District, the group targeted spotted knapweed, Dalmatian toadflax and perennial pepperweed. The invasive weeds treated compete with native vegetation, adversely impacting wildlife habitat and transforming ecosystem function.

“This was a great opportunity to team up with partner organizations and highlight the importance of managing invasive species across the Greater Yellowstone Area”, said Rachel Daluge, JHWMA President. “Working across jurisdictional boundaries for the betterment of the entire ecosystem is what the JHWMA is all about”.

Crews treated roughly 72 acres of invasive species in a 1,200 acre project area. The project started along the Gros Ventre River in the Bridger-Teton National Forest on Lower Slide Lake and continued 16.5 miles downstream on both public and private lands to the confluence of the Gros Ventre and Snake rivers.

Agencies, organizations and landowners that assisted with



Above: Crews treat invasive weeds along the Gros Ventre River corridor. Below: Spotted knapweed was one of the targeted species.

the project included Grand Teton National Park, National Elk Refuge, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Teton Conservation District, Teton County Weed and Pest District, Bureau of Land Management, Wyoming Department of State Lands, Jackson Hole Land Trust, Hanna Outfitting, Gros Ventre River Ranch, Fife Property, Serenity Ranch, Bar BC, Gros Ventre Warm Springs LLC, Biolochini Property and Jackson Hole Golf and Tennis.

“We were so pleased with the large turnout and all of the hard work contributed by everyone. JHWMA members have committed a tremendous amount of time and effort to this project over the last 15 years, and we are seeing some really great progress,” Ziehl said. “This is a prime example of federal, state and county agencies, as well as private stakeholders,

teaming up, helping one another, and collectively reducing the spread of noxious weeds in Teton County.”

The JHWMA was formed in 1998 to establish common long and short-term management policies, goals, and objectives necessary for cooperatively managing and funding noxious weed activities across all jurisdictional boundaries.

To learn more about the JHWMA, visit www.jhwma.org.





National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Grand Teton National Park

Jackie Skaggs
307.739.3393



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Elk Refuge

Lori Iverson
307.201.5433



National Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Bridger-Teton National Forest

Rita Ayers
307.739.5564

Interagency News Release

For Immediate Release
August 5, 2014

Good Neighbors and Defensible Space Workshop Set for Aug. 12 at Old Wilson School House

JACKSON, WY — Do you know if your home has protection from a wildland fire? The first step in defensible space is to understand what constitutes defensible space. The coordinating partners of Teton Area Wildfire Protection Coalition will host a public open house focusing on information concerning fire adapted communities and what it means to be good neighbors living in a fire adapted ecosystem.

This important free community event will be held Tuesday August 12th, starting at 6pm at the Old Wilson School House with snacks and educational display booths covering fire and home safety themes. Local guest speakers University of Idaho Professor Penny Morgan and Teton County Fire Marshall Kathy Clay will share their expertise in forest fuels reduction, fire prevention, International Wildland Fire Code and discuss the important challenges facing homeowners, land managers and communities in the western states in connection to wildfire and home safety. A fire safety kid's corner will be available for children starting at 6pm and through the discussion period.

The time to work towards defensible space is when the air is free of smoke so you can breathe a sigh of relief when there is smoke in the air.

For more information call Steve Markason, 307-739-5431, or visit www.tetonfires.com.

—XXX—



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 5, 2014 14-23

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
(307) 201.5433

HISTORIC MILLER HOUSE TO REMAIN OPEN THROUGH SEPTEMBER 21

Several weeks still remain in the 2014 season at the historic Miller House, with the charming homestead open for public tours through the close of business on Sunday, September 21. Located in a tranquil setting next to a cluster of cottonwood trees, the Miller House sits approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile north of the National Elk Refuge entrance on East Broadway Avenue in Jackson. Entrance to the Miller House is free of charge.

A special event is planned for the final weekend of the season, held in conjunction with the Town of Jackson's centennial celebration. On Saturday, September 20, the National Elk Refuge will host members of the Jackson Hole Quilt Guild who will demonstrate hand-quilting on a wooden frame from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, stitching in front of a backdrop of colorful finished quilts. "We're excited to have an old-time craft demonstration as part of our Town of Jackson centennial line-up," said Maureen Murphy, Special Events Coordinator for the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce. Also on display inside the Miller House is a quilted piece donated to the National Elk Refuge by Stitch 'N Time (Jackson, Wyoming) to help celebrate the Refuge's centennial in August 2012.

The Miller House and surrounding land was the first piece of property purchased for the creation of the National Elk Refuge, established in 1912. Decorated with period pieces, the homestead gives visitors the opportunity to learn more about the establishment and early history of the Refuge. Volunteer naturalists are on hand to share stories, answer questions, and give tours of the building. Additionally, the Grand Teton Association operates a small sales outlet at the Miller House, carrying unique items representative of the early 20th century.

Miller House hours of operation are from 10:00 AM through 4:00 PM daily, including weekends. More information on the Miller Ranch can be found on the Refuge's web site at <http://1.usa.gov/1cozUvV>, with photos of the historic site stored on the Refuge's photo gallery.

– FWS –

News Release



**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, Colorado 80228**

For Immediate Release
September 9, 2014

Public Comment Opportunity Available for National Elk Refuge Draft Management Plan

Contacts:

USFWS:

Steve Kallin, 307.733.9212; Steve_Kallin@fws.gov
Ryan Moehring, 303.236.0345; Ryan_Moehring@fws.gov

LAKESWOOD, Colo. – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today a Notice of Availability (NOA) for a draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the National Elk Refuge, located in Teton County in northwest Wyoming. These draft documents describe how the Service intends to manage the refuge for the next 15 years.

The Service works with partners and the public to prepare CCPs for every national wildlife refuge and wetland management district in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Each of these 15-year plans identifies specific goals for achieving the purpose and vision for each refuge and for the overall mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

This draft CCP and EA provides the public with a clear picture of what the Service intends to do for wildlife protection, habitat management, and visitor services on the National Elk Refuge. The documents describe four management alternatives for the National Elk Refuge. The proposed action is Alternative D, a blended alternative that would both increase public use opportunities with an emphasis on the six priority wildlife-dependent uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation) and focus management efforts on promoting natural processes and supporting the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, one of the largest relatively intact ecosystems on the planet.

“We understand the National Elk Refuge is a special place for many people, so we want to listen to the needs and desires of the surrounding community,” said Project Leader, Steve Kallin. “This comment period provides the public with an opportunity to review proposed management options and to suggest others. We value the public’s input and very much look forward to working with the community on this plan,” Kallin added.

The draft CCP and EA are companion documents to the National Elk Refuge Bison and Elk Management Plan and its contents, including supplemental feeding, are not part of this comment period.

Comments may be submitted in two ways:

Email: refuge_ccps@fws.gov (Include "National Elk Refuge CCP" in the subject line of the message.)

U.S. Mail:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Attn: Toni Griffin, Planning Team Leader
134 Union Boulevard, Suite 300
Lakewood, CO 80228

Copies of the draft CCP/EA may be obtained in three ways:

Writing to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Refuge Planning
134 Union Boulevard, Suite 300
Lakewood, CO 80228

Picking up at:

National Elk Refuge Administrative Office
675 E. Broadway
Jackson, WY 83001

Downloading from:

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/planning/ccp/wy/ner/ner.html>

The National Elk Refuge is also hosting a public meeting to provide an opportunity for the public to meet with staff and provide input on the draft plan. That meeting will take place Thursday September 25th, from 6-8 p.m. at:

Snow King Hotel
Summit Two Room
400 East Snow King Avenue
Jackson, WY 83001

Established in 1912, the National Elk Refuge spans approximately 25,000 acres and provides wildlife with a variety of habitat types, including grassy meadows, marshes, forest, sagebrush, and rock outcrops. Although the refuge is known for the large herd of elk that winters there, nearly 175 species of birds and at least 47 mammal species have been observed on the refuge. In addition to the large herd of elk, a free-roaming bison herd also winters at the refuge. Each year, more than 300,000 people visit the National Elk Refuge.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service.

For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/>. Connect with our Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/USFWSMountainPrairie>, follow our tweets at <http://twitter.com/USFWSMtnPrairie>, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwsmtnpairie/>



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 19, 2014 14-25

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
(307) 201.5433

JACKSON HOLE & GREATER YELLOWSTONE VISITOR CENTER TO RECEIVE A NEW ROOF

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin has announced the projected start date for replacing the roof on the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson. The National Elk Refuge secured funding for the project earlier this year, but work was delayed to avoid the facility's busiest months. Materials and equipment are scheduled to be delivered and staged on site beginning Monday, September 22.

The Visitor Center is more than 40 years old and has several maintenance deficiencies, including ongoing issues with leaking. A new roof was identified as a priority maintenance project to minimize damage to the building. Refuge staff explored the option of retaining a grass roof for the building, but the significant increase in costs over other types of materials was weighed along with the age and life expectancy of the building. The replacement roof will be constructed with asphalt roofing shingles.

The Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center is owned by the National Elk Refuge but is an interagency facility staffed by multiple organizations, including the Refuge, the Bridger-Teton National Forest, Grand Teton National Park, Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, and the Grand Teton Association. Through coordinated efforts of the participating organizations, an extensive array of services are available for both the local and visiting public. The facility's unique management and exemplary service provide a convenient one-stop location for visitors to the area.

The visitor center is open year-round and will shift to winter hours of 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM daily beginning Wednesday, October 1. The facility is not expected to close during the construction project. However, visitors should use caution when near equipment, materials, or workers and obey any signs redirecting vehicle or pedestrian traffic.

Salt River Roofing, located in Afton, Wyoming, was awarded the contract for the project. The work is expected to be completed later this fall.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 19, 2014 14-26

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
(307) 201.5433

2014 ELK HUNTING PERMIT APPLICATION PERIOD TO CLOSE SEPTEMBER 26

National Elk Refuge Manager Steve Kallin issued a reminder today that the on-line application period to apply for a 2014 Refuge-specific elk hunting permit will close next week. Hunters could begin applying for Refuge elk hunting permits on August 14; the on-line application period ends on Friday, September 26. Hunters may initially apply for only one of ten hunt periods, scheduled from October 11 through December 15. Results of the computerized random draw will be posted on the application web site no later than 11:00 AM on Tuesday, September 30.

When the results of the random draw are posted, the on-line system will continue to be active to allow access to any permits that were not issued during the initial random draw. Any unissued (leftover) permits will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. Persons who were successful for one hunt period during the initial random draw are also eligible to reapply for a leftover permit valid for another hunt period.

Once the season begins, hunters will also have the opportunity to apply for alternate permits, issued during weekly computerized draws. This year, daily field permits may also occasionally be available based on the number of current hunters that day and the safe dispersal of hunters and elk.

A full set of instructions on options for obtaining a National Elk Refuge elk hunting permit and the permit application process, along with hunt area maps, hunt period dates, and Refuge-specific regulations can be found on the Refuge's web site at <http://1.usa.gov/H6h1TI>. Hunters are responsible for reviewing all regulations and maps prior to applying for an elk permit.

The application process for Refuge elk hunting permits is conducted in cooperation with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department Private Lands Public Wildlife Access Program.

– FWS –



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 29, 2014 14-27

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
(307) 201.5433

NORTH HIGHWAY 89 MULTI-USE PATHWAY IN SECOND YEAR OF EXTENDED SEASON

National Elk Refuge Manager Steve Kallin issued a reminder today that the North Highway 89 multi-use pathway from Flat Creek to the Gros Ventre bridge will remain open through October 31. The pathway is located on National Elk Refuge land within the Wyoming Department of Transportation highway easement.

When the pathway opened in the spring of 2011, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Teton County, Wyoming agreed upon a seasonal closure date of October 1 to address concerns related to wildlife conflicts. Last fall, the seasonal closure date was extended through October 31 to reflect the most current data available regarding elk migration patterns near the pathway. The seasonal closure is a key condition of the agreement between Teton County and the National Elk Refuge for pathway use on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service land in order for the activity to be compatible with the agency's mission.

The pathway is maintained in partnership with Teton County through Jackson Hole Community Pathways. Signs on the pathway indicate the dates of the seasonal closure, which will reopen to public use on May 1. Overlay stickers have been ordered to modify the signs that currently list the previous closure date of October 1. Jackson Hole Community Pathways Coordinator Brian Schilling expects to have the signs modified later this week to reflect the adjusted date of October 31.

More information on the North Highway 89 multi-use pathway can be found on the Refuge's web site at <http://1.usa.gov/1sKwShg>.

– FWS –



GREATER YELLOWSTONE COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Participating Agencies

US Department of the Interior

National Park Service

Grand Teton National Park
John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
Memorial Parkway
Yellowstone National Park

US Fish & Wildlife Service

National Elk Refuge
Red Rock Lakes
National Wildlife Refuge

Bureau of Land Management

Idaho, Montana, Wyoming

US Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Beaverhead-Deerlodge
National Forest
Bridger-Teton National Forest
Caribou-Targhee National Forest
Custer Gallatin National Forest
Shoshone National Forest

Chair

Joe Alexander

Executive Coordinator

Virginia Kelly

Interagency News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—September 30, 2014

Media Contacts: Virginia Kelly, (406) 587-6704, Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee
Sarah Beckwith, (307) 287-3675, BLM Wyoming, Wind River/Bighorn Basin

Public Invited To Help Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee Chart A Path To The Future

Federal land managers within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) are asking the public to help them assess the ecosystem issues they focus on, and to build stronger relationships in the future.

The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC) is a group of eleven federal land managers who work together to manage more than 15 million acres of public land in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

GYCC managers are inviting the public to join them in a conversation in late October in Bozeman, Montana. Rather than hold a discussion about individual agency issues, managers are asking for input on cross-jurisdictional, ecosystem scale issues the GYCC can address. Specifically, the GYCC wishes to explore questions related to:

- Cross-agency land and resource management issues and opportunities;
- The GYCC's GYE-level priorities;
- Future communication and collaboration with the public and stakeholder groups.

This conversation between the public and GYCC leadership is set for 1-5 p.m. on October 28, 2014, at the Best Western GranTree Inn in Bozeman, Montana. The emphasis of the session will be on interaction and communication between all attendees, with participants discussing issues in small groups with agency leaders. Interested participants are also welcome to attend a more in-depth GYCC orientation from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the same location.

A similar meeting will be held in Cody in spring 2015. Information gathered during these sessions will help the GYCC develop and strengthen its working relationships with the public and stakeholders as they collaborate to address joint challenges managing these shared landscapes.

All are welcome. To help plan meeting logistics, those who plan to attend are encouraged to RSVP by October 22 to gycc-October28@fs.fed.us.

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ABOUT THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE COORDINATING COMMITTEE: *The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC) includes federal land managers from national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges and Bureau of Land Management's National System of Public Lands across the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA): the largest, essentially intact natural area in the lower 48 states. Together, these agencies manage 15 million acres of federal land. The committee was formed to pursue opportunities of mutual*

cooperation and coordination in the management of core federal lands within the GYA. Participating federal land managers administer three national parks (Yellowstone, Grand Teton & John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway), two national wildlife refuges (National Elk Refuge, Red Rock Lakes), five national forests (Bridger-Teton, Caribou-Targhee, Shoshone, Custer Gallatin, and Beaverhead-Deerlodge), and Bureau of Land Management – administered lands in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

Information about the GYCC and links to member agency websites are available at:

<http://www.fedgycc.org/>

News Release



**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, Colorado 80228**

For Immediate Release
October 6, 2014

Public Comment Period Extended for National Elk Refuge Draft Management Plan

Contacts:

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Ryan Moehring, 303-236-0345; Ryan_Moehring@fws.gov

LAKESWOOD, Colo. - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today an extension on its Notice of Availability (NOA) for a draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the National Elk Refuge, located in Teton County in northwest Wyoming. These draft documents describe how the Service intends to manage the refuge for the next 15 years. The original comment period was set to expire on October 9, 2014, but with the extension, the public now has until October 24, 2014 to comment.

“We understand the National Elk Refuge is a special place for many people, and we value the public’s input,” said Refuge Manager, Steve Kallin. “We have been asked by the public for more time to review and provide comment on the draft CCP/EA, so we are honoring that request.”

The draft CCP and EA are companion documents to the National Elk Refuge Bison and Elk Management Plan and its contents, including supplemental feeding, are not part of this comment period.

Comments may be submitted in two ways:

Email: refuge_ccps@fws.gov (Include “National Elk Refuge CCP” in the subject line of the message.)

U.S. Mail:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Attn: Toni Griffin, Planning Team Leader
134 Union Boulevard, Suite 300
Lakewood, CO 80228

Copies of the draft CCP/EA may be obtained in three ways:

Writing to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Refuge Planning
134 Union Boulevard, Suite 300
Lakewood, CO 80228

Picking up at:

National Elk Refuge Administrative Office
675 E. Broadway
Jackson, WY 83001

Downloading from:

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/planning/ccp/wy/ner/ner.html>

Established in 1912, the National Elk Refuge spans approximately 25,000 acres and provides wildlife with a variety of habitat types, including grassy meadows, marshes, forest, sagebrush, and rock outcrops. Although the refuge is known for the large herd of elk that winters there, nearly 175 species of birds and at least 47 mammal species have been observed on the refuge. In addition to the large herd of elk, a free-roaming bison herd also winters at the refuge. Each year, more than 300,000 people visit the National Elk Refuge.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service.

For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/>. Connect with our Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/USFWSMountainPrairie>, follow our tweets at <http://twitter.com/USFWSMtnPrairie>, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwsmtnpairie/>

National Elk Refuge News – October 8, 2014

Prescribed Fire to Restore Native Vegetation



Two igniters make their way across the prescribed fire unit with their drip torches.

Prescribed fires often bring to mind fuels reduction and wildland fire mitigation. However, a fire conducted by Teton Interagency Fire managers this week had a stronger tie to Jackson Hole history and early farming practices.

Beginning in 1862, individuals could apply for a 160-acre homestead west of the Mississippi through the Homestead Act. The land was free, but in order to obtain the deed, an owner had to meet several requirements within a span of five years. In addition to

residing on the land and building a dwelling, a homesteader needed to cultivate the land before “proving up.”

Many early settlers to the Jackson Hole valley combined both farming and ranching operations, introducing domestic grasses onto the landscape. In Grand Teton National Park, homesteaders selected the lands east of Blacktail Butte for cultivation because they recognized the richer soils deposited by the alluvial fan of Ditch Creek. The area, originally settled in the 1890s, later became

known as Mormon Row. By the 1920s, landowners had converted the area from native shrub-grass to agricultural grasses and forbs. Flood irrigation ditches from Kelly Warm Springs, Ditch Creek, and the Gros Ventre River also became part of the landscape.

Now, over a century later, Mormon Row and adjacent areas are still dominated by non-native agronomic grasses along with noxious weed species. Approximately 4,000 acres of former hayfields, abandoned since the 1970s, are targeted



An engine crew works alongside the fire personnel charged with firing operations.

Unit prescribed fire was initiated to remove both plants and accumulated plant litter that could reduce the effectiveness of herbicide applications and prevent the seed-to-soil contact needed when native seeds are reintroduced to the site.

The prescribed fire, which was assigned a low complexity rating, was completed in one day, followed up by monitoring of the site. Interagency crews from Grand Teton National Park and the Bridger-Teton National Forest carried out the firing and holding operations and engine work; the National Elk Refuge provided a fire information officer.

Additional photos of the Riniker Unit prescribed fire are posted on the National Elk Refuge's Flickr photo sharing site at <http://bit.ly/1semwFv>.

for restoration to return the fallow pasture lands back to native vegetation.

Non-native perennial grasses can be an impediment to native plant succession and restoration. Without intervention and management, the extant pasture grasses may remain, preventing natural succession from occurring on site.

The Bison and Elk Management Plan (BEMP) for the National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park, finalized and adopted by both agencies in 2007, outlines desired improvements to winter, summer, and transitional range of refuge and park lands, while at the same time ensuring that the biotic integrity and environmental health of the resources will be sustained over the long term.

The multi-stage hayfields restoration process, identified in the BEMP, calls for using fire as the first phase, followed by herbicide applications to remove non-native grasses and forbs and subsequent reseeding.

Monday's prescribed fire treated a 317-acre unit, one of 18 units in the restoration project. The Riniker



A firefighter assigned to the holding crew walks the north edge of the unit to ensure the prescribed fire remains within the designated area.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 10, 2014 14-30

PO Box 510
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PARTNERSHIP PROMOTES GRIZZLY BEAR AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

The National Elk Refuge will again partner with the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) this fall to provide bear-deterrent pepper spray for licensed hunters during the 2014 refuge elk and bison hunting programs. The purpose of the program is to educate hunters in the field who are interested in bear spray and would not otherwise use it as part of their own personal safety.

The canisters are available on a first-come, first-served basis for licensed hunters in the field who do not own or are not carrying bear-deterrent spray. Law enforcement officers will provide bear spray canisters to hunters in the field who are interest in participating in the voluntary program. In addition to the bear spray, officers will carry informational materials that explain bear spray's effectiveness and best practices for its deployment.

Chris Colligan, Wildlife Program Coordinator for the GYC, explained that one of the program's goal is to increase the voluntary use of bear spray by hunters on the refuge. Though grizzly bear sightings on the National Elk Refuge have been rare, two occurrences were documented last year outside of the hunting season. "We are encouraging hunters to take the proper precautions because we expect to see more bear activity on the refuge as the grizzly bear range expands," added Refuge Manager Steve Kallin.

The Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation is also sponsoring a bear-deterrent pepper spray program this hunting season, working with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department to make the product available to hunters in additional designated hunt areas outside of the National Elk Refuge.

Bear-deterrent pepper spray is also available for purchase from many outdoor retailers in Jackson as well as at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center. Proceeds from sales at the visitor center are returned to the National Elk Refuge through the Grand Teton Association to support educational programming and biological research.

This year, elk and bison hunting seasons on the National Elk Refuge run through December 14 and January 18, respectively.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 12, 2014 14-31

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PUBLIC INVITED TO CELEBRATE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WEEK

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin invites the public to celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week from October 12–18, 2014 with a visit to the National Elk Refuge. The National Elk Refuge is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which is a division of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service within the Department of the Interior.

The National Elk Refuge represents one of the last undeveloped low-elevation areas in Jackson Hole and provides important habitat for species that depend on limited snow cover, open grasslands, sagebrush shrub lands, and wetlands. Elk, bison, bighorn sheep, trumpeter swans, sandhill cranes, wolves, moose, pronghorns, and other charismatic species inhabit the refuge at various times of the year.

National wildlife refuges are the country's premier public lands dedicated to conserving and protecting wildlife and habitat. The mission of refuges within the National Wildlife Refuge System differs from that of national parks and national forests. Simply put, refuge lands are managed with a "wildlife first" mandate. As a result, the National Elk Refuge offers fewer recreational opportunities than its federal neighbors like the Bridger–Teton National Forest and Grand Teton National Park. Activities like camping, hiking, and boating are restricted in order to prioritize wildlife and habitat management. The limited public use in designated areas of the refuge helps keep the area pristine and gives wildlife uninterrupted tracts of land.

A special exhibit is on display at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center in Jackson to help visitors understand the National Elk Refuge's unique role in the Jackson Hole valley. Comprised of both paintings and photographs, the art work captures some of the undisturbed qualities of the refuge's landscape. The paintings were created by members of the Teton Plein Air Painters, who were allowed special access onto the refuge in early August to prepare for the exhibit. "We're so pleased to have this exhibit to share during Refuge Week," said Natalie Fath, Visitor Center Manager. The art work will remain on display through October 26.

Whether it's cycling or walking on the multi-use pathway, enjoying wildlife viewing and photography on the Refuge Road, taking a winter sleigh ride, or viewing programs and exhibits at the visitor center and historic Miller Ranch, the public can enjoy the National Elk Refuge year-round while supporting conservation ideas and values. Learn more about the refuge on our web site at www.fws.gov/refuge/national_elk_refuge/.

National Elk Refuge News – October 16, 2014

Trumpeter Swan Survey Results Summarized



National Elk Refuge volunteers Betty and Chuck Mulcahy document trumpeter swan numbers and activity from Miller Butte, one of six monitoring sites on the refuge this summer.

The National Elk Refuge completed a summary of the 2014 trumpeter swan nesting season this week, bringing with it good news regarding nesting pairs on the refuge. The survey supports efforts by the Greater Yellowstone Trumpeter Swan Working Group and monitoring goals identified in the National Elk Refuge's draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

Biologist Eric Cole and volunteers Betty and Chuck Mulcahy made weekly outings from mid-May

through the end of September to assess trumpeter swan numbers and activity at six sites on the refuge. In addition to documenting the maximum number of adult birds and nesting pairs, they noted the number of successful nests. They also recorded the number of cygnets that hatched and subsequently fledged.

The research included more than just bird numbers; the timing of the events was also key in the documentation. Cole's summary includes when the nests were

initiated, when cygnets hatched, and during which weeks any loss of cygnets was observed. When possible, the researchers noted the cause of both nest failures and swan mortality.

The summary published this week documented four nesting pairs on the refuge, a record high that has only been duplicated six other times since 1938. Also, twelve cygnets hatched on the refuge in 2014, with ten surviving to fledge later in the season. Though no match to the 18 cygnets that

hatched and fledged in 2007, the number exceeded the ten-year average of seven hatched cygnets and six that fledged.

The National Elk Refuge is an important contributor to an objective of 18 nesting pairs in the Wyoming Snake River core area, set by the Trumpeter Swan Management Plan.

Higher swan production is correlated with warm, dry spring conditions. This past season, precipitation was below average in both May and June.

Additional photos of trumpeter swans are included in the “Birds of the National Elk Refuge” photo set on the refuge’s gallery at <http://bit.ly/1sueAOj>



Graceful trumpeter swans delight visitors and are frequently photographed at the National Elk Refuge.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 16, 2014 14-32

PO Box 510
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MOTORISTS URGED TO USE CAUTION

Motorists driving on Highway 26 / 89 / 191 north of Jackson, Wyoming are urged to be especially vigilant this week while traveling between the hours of dusk to dawn due to the presence of wildlife. Drivers should be prepared to stop unexpectedly for animals crossing the road.

Refuge officials noted a significant movement of elk this weekend, with migration likely prompted by a winter storm that brought cold temperatures and up to a foot of snow in some areas. Hundreds of elk began moving in the vicinity of the National Elk Refuge, putting the animals near the highway late at night and in the early morning hours. Elk often move during low light conditions and can be difficult to see near the roadway. Icy road conditions may affect a driver's ability to effectively brake and avoid an animal on the highway. At least two wildlife-vehicle collisions occurred over the weekend.

Collisions between motor vehicles and wildlife may result in severe damage to the vehicle, serious injuries to the occupants of the vehicle, and/or death for the animal involved. Though wildlife-vehicle collisions can happen during any time of the year, motorists can reduce the likelihood of an accident by reducing speeds and using extra caution during times of peak migration.

To report a wildlife-vehicle collision, please call the Teton County Sheriff's Dispatch at (307) 733-2331, or 911 in the event of an emergency.

– FWS –



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 20, 2014 14-33

PO Box 510
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REFUGE WINTER TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS ANNOUNCED

Wildlife viewers are asked to respect all closures in and around the National Elk Refuge this winter season while enjoying the abundance of area wildlife.

In conjunction with Bridger–Teton National Forest winter travel restrictions, a portion of the National Elk Refuge Road will be closed to public travel from December 1, 2014 through April 30, 2015 to protect wintering wildlife. The closure, which begins approximately 3½ miles northeast of the Refuge’s entrance on East Broadway Avenue in Jackson, includes both Curtis Canyon and Flat Creek roads.

Elk and bison hunters with National Elk Refuge permits will be allowed to drive through the closure to access hunt parking lots during the days their permits are valid. Hunters must drive directly to the designated lots to park prior to hunting. The elk season concludes at dusk on Sunday, December 14, with the bison season running through Sunday, January 18. No public travel beyond the closure will be allowed after the hunting seasons conclude.

The Refuge Road is a popular destination in the winter as elk, bighorn sheep, and other animals can frequently be seen close to the roadway, providing both wildlife viewing and photography opportunities. Travelers on the roadway often stop, park, or leave vehicles unattended while observing wildlife, obstructing the safe movement and passing of other vehicles. While visitors are encouraged to take advantage of the rich wildlife viewing opportunities during the winter months, drivers that want to extend photography and wildlife viewing experiences should pull off the roadway, safely park, and allow for the free movement of other traffic.

All visitors and residents using the open portion of the Refuge Road should note that travel is confined to the roadway only. All off–road travel is prohibited, including walking, skiing, or other recreational activities. Dogs are also limited to the roadway and must be leashed at all times.

Wintering elk can be seen from Highway 26 / 89 /191 north of Jackson during most of the season, with turnouts on the east side of the highway allowing wildlife watchers a designated location away from traffic to view and photograph animals. However, people that leave their vehicles, violate the North Highway 89 pathway closure, and approach the refuge fence often create a disturbance for wintering elk that can cause the herd to bolt from the area as they react to the presence of a human on foot. Repeated disturbance throughout the winter from people walking into a closed area can impact an animal’s health during a time of year when energy conservation is key to their survival.

For questions about Refuge closures or access routes, please call the Administrative Offices at (307) 733-9212.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 24, 2014 14-34

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WINTER PROGRAMS TO BEGIN ON THE NATIONAL ELK REFUGE

The National Elk Refuge is pleased to announce the 2014 / 2015 winter program schedule for the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center. The visitor center, open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM daily during the winter season, is located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson.

The refuge's most popular educational program takes place from the unique setting of a horse-drawn sleigh. Sleigh rides begin for the season on Monday, December 15 and operate daily from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, except for Christmas Day. The rides are an exciting way to observe and photograph wildlife on the refuge. In addition to elk, passengers routinely see coyotes, bald eagles, trumpeter swans, ravens, and other wildlife.

Participants purchase sleigh ride tickets at the visitor center and are transported on a free shuttle bus to the sleigh boarding area three miles north of Jackson. Sleighs depart three to four times each hour throughout the day, with rides typically lasting an hour. The sleigh rides are operated under contract by Double H Bar, Inc. Rates are \$20 for adults and \$15 for children ages 5 through 12, with children under age 5 riding for free. Reservations are required for private tours and groups of 20 people or more; smaller groups or families may make reservations, but advanced booking is not necessary. Additional information on sleigh rides, including group rates, reservations, and gift certificate purchases, is available by visiting <http://1.usa.gov/1hwpEXj> or calling (307) 733-0277.

Refuge naturalists have planned a "Feature Creature" hour at the visitor center each day from 10:00 to 11:00 AM, highlighting animals found on the refuge. Visitors can use the opportunity to informally visit with staff to learn more about the featured animal's characteristics, habitat, and daily life. Naturalists often have props such as horns, antlers, furs, and photographs available as they discuss the wildlife with guests.

During the 2014 / 2015 season, the refuge will not be offering guided wildlife excursions as a formal program. However, naturalists are available at the visitor center to assist anyone interested in traveling on the Refuge Road in their own vehicle. Additionally, a Refuge Road Wildlife Viewing Guide is available online or at the visitor center. The wildlife viewing guide lists driving safety and wildlife observation tips and indicates area where parking is allowed on the Refuge Road. The Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce is also available to provide a complete listing of wildlife viewing companies operating commercially guided tours in the Jackson Hole valley. Many of the companies listed have a special use permit to include the Refuge Road as part of their tour package.

The Grand Teton Association, which is a nonprofit organization that operates sales outlets in a number of federally-operated visitor centers and contact stations throughout the area, has scheduled their annual winter holiday sale. The Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center serves as one of the association's largest sales outlets. All full-price merchandise is discounted 20% from November 28 through December 24, with current or new Grand Teton Association members receiving 25% off. Sales support educational, interpretive, and research projects on the National Elk Refuge.

National Elk Refuge News – December 22, 2014

2014 Refuge Elk Hunting Season Successful



A group of hunters head out onto the refuge on a snowy November morning. Hunting on the refuge helps reach specific management goals.

The National Elk Refuge elk hunt ended on December 14, and though hunter harvest reports continue to trickle in, the season total of elk taken is the highest since 2003.

Refuge staff issues elk hunting permits prior to the start of the season but distributes additional permits throughout the season, giving managers the flexibility to adjust the number of hunters in the field. The refuge releases approximately 1,560 elk permits annually through an on-line application site administered by the Wyoming Game & Fish Department, although not everyone that draws a permit shows up to hunt.

This year, late season daily permits were also available on days when officers noted low attendance in

the field. This new system may have contributed to the increased number of animals taken this year, with 268 elk reported thus far. This year's successful season raised the 10-year average of harvested animals from 149 to 157.

People are often surprised to learn that hunting is allowed on national wildlife refuges when, in fact, hunting is identified as a priority public use for the National Wildlife Refuge System. When the word "refuge" is isolated and interpreted to mean protection from danger or distress, hunting may seem an inconsistent use of the Refuge System. National wildlife refuges exist primarily to safeguard wildlife populations through habitat preservation, but they are not managed as sanctuaries. Hunting and fishing

as practiced on refuges do not pose a threat to wildlife populations, and, in some instances, are actually necessary for sound wildlife management.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes that hunt programs are important for wildlife management. They give resource managers a valuable tool to control populations of some species that might otherwise exceed the carrying capacity of their habitat and threaten their well-being, other wildlife species, and in some instances, human health and safety.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's policy permit hunting

on a national wildlife refuge when it's compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established. In fact, the Service requires that compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses like hunting are priority public uses of the Refuge System.

The taking of wildlife on refuges is carefully regulated to ensure a balance between population levels and wildlife habitat. At the National Elk Refuge, elk hunting seasons and number of available permits are determined in coordination with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department and assessed on an annual basis. The interagency coordination of all area hunts is critical because changes in one hunt area can affect the distribution of animals and the success of population management efforts.

Elk hunting is a key component in the current Bison and Elk Management Plan, which calls for

a phased transition from intensive supplemental winter feeding to a greater reliance on free-standing forage. The plan states a specific population objective of no more than 5,000 elk and 500 bison wintering on the refuge. As herd size and habitat objectives are met, supplemental feeding can then be further reduced.

Since the implementation of the Bison and Elk Management Plan in 2007, wildlife managers have made significant changes to the refuge hunt program in an effort to reduce the number of wintering animals. Adaptive management adjustments have included the reinstatement of a bison hunt, a one week extension of the refuge elk season, the addition of daily field permits to increase hunter participation, and an expansion of the hunt area to include a south unit limited-range weapons area.

The south unit hunt, implemented in 2007, was necessary not only

to increase hunt success rates, but to prevent the congregation of elk onto the south end of the refuge during fall and early winter. "Our management direction is to decrease the concentration of animals whenever possible, because that decreases the risk of disease transmission," explained Refuge Manager Steve Kallin. "If we have animals clustered in a non-hunt area prior to winter, they'll consume much of the forage needed to sustain them during the winter months," he added. "Less available forage in winter increases the need for supplemental feeding – that's contradictory to our objectives."

Managers continue to explore ways to modify the National Elk Refuge hunt program to improve management effectiveness and the quality of the hunting experience for this important public use.



A successful south unit hunter uses a wheeled cart and two helpers to retrieve a downed elk in the Miller Butte area.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 29, 2014 14-35

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REFUGE PLANS JANUARY BIRD PROGRAMS

In celebration of National Bird Day on January 5, and to recognize some of the other wildlife that frequents the National Elk Refuge, winter naturalists have scheduled a line-up of programs to recognize the avian species that inhabit the refuge both seasonally and year-round. National Bird Day was established to provide public education and support for conservation of the world's bird populations.

A series of displays will be exhibited in the upstairs theater of the Jackson Hole and Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center throughout the month. The displays will change each week, with a focus on raptors (January 3-10), waterfowl (January 11-17), songbirds (January 18-24), and bird migration routes (January 25-31). The displays will be accompanied by activities appropriate for a variety of ages and levels of knowledge related to bird identification.

Guests to the visitor center on Monday, January 5 can learn about bird beaks and how the form and structure of a beak can hint at the nature of a bird's food. Naturalists will have stations set up from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM with special foods and an array of tools; participants can determine which tool, and correspondingly which type of beak or bill, is best adapted for a food source of the same size and shape.

On Thursday, January 8, naturalists will offer a Birding for Beginners program at 9:30 AM. The program will include a 20-minute presentation at the visitor center on birding basics and a field session on the refuge to practice identification skills. Participants should be appropriately dressed for the outdoor outing, which will last up to 1½ hours. Naturalists will have binoculars and field guides to share, but guests are encouraged to bring their own supplies if available. Reservations are recommended. The class, offered free of charge, is limited to 16 participants. The class will be offered again on Saturday, January 31.

Other programs are scheduled for later in the month, including Build-A-Duck Day on Tuesday, January 13 and an educational display and activity highlighting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Junior Duck Stamp program. For more information on January programs at the visitor center, or to make reservations for one of the Birding for Beginners programs, please call (307) 201-5400. More information on National Bird Day can be found at www.nationalbirdday.com.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 31, 2014 14-36

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BISON ACTIVITY TRIGGERS CAUTION FOR USERS OF REFUGE ROAD

National Elk Refuge Manager Steve Kallin issued a statement today urging users of the Refuge Road to use caution due to the presence of bison.

Yesterday, Refuge staff hazed a group of 50 bison away from the U.S. Forest Service access parking lot across from Miller Butte, approximately 1½ miles north of the Refuge entrance on East Broadway Avenue. Wildlife managers were concerned about the personal safety of pedestrians using the Refuge Road for recreational walking and running. The animals moved north along the slope, crossing the Refuge Road just east of Miller Butte.

This morning, a group of 170 bison had moved as far south as the southeast corner of the Refuge near the Town of Jackson well house, approximately 250 yards north of East Broadway Avenue. "We are very concerned about bison moving into town because of the extreme safety risks that would create," Kallin explained. Refuge staff used vehicles and rubber bullets to again move the bison further from the city limits to mitigate for potential personal safety risks and property damage. The herd responded to the hazing actions by moving north, crossing the Refuge Road just north of the historic Miller House, and continuing along the Forest Service boundary before again crossing the road east of Miller Butte.

Bison are wild animals. Although they may appear docile, they are dangerous and unpredictable and may charge without warning. Despite their massive size, they can easily sprint more than 30 miles per hour. Anyone encountering a bison on foot should not approach them or try to scare them away. As with all wildlife watching, people should remain a safe distance away. All Refuge Road users should be aware that wildlife managers will continue to move bison that approach or near the Refuge entrance.

To report a bison sighting south of Miller Butte, please contact the Teton County Sheriff's Office at (307) 733-2331.

– FWS –
