



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Pahranagat National Wildlife Refuge

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Date: February 25, 2014

Dear Interested Party:

The following is a Draft Compatibility Determination for a visitor contact station or small visitor center at Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). If you are interested, please take a few moments to read this draft and provide us with any comments.

We need your comments by Friday, March 14. You may send them to me by:

mail: PO Box 510, Alamo, NV 89001; or

fax: (775) 725-3389; or

email: amy_lavoie@fws.gov

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service makes a compatibility determination in accordance with the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, as amended. The Act states "...the Secretary shall not initiate or permit a new use of a Refuge or expand, renew, or extend an existing use of a Refuge, unless the Secretary has determined that the use is a compatible use and that the use is not inconsistent with public safety."

In our situation, the Refuge is not proposing to change or add a new public use. The focus of this compatibility determination is for the operation and maintenance of a small visitor center *to facilitate and enhance current public uses* on Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge. Public uses on the Refuge currently consist of hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental interpretation, environmental education and outreach. At the new visitor center, we will support these existing uses with an emphasis on environmental interpretation, education, and outreach, as well as wildlife observation. Through operation and maintenance of this visitor contact station/small visitor center, our goal is to enhance and facilitate the public use program at Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge. If you have any comments about the Refuge facilitating and enhancing these existing uses through the visitor center, we would appreciate hearing from you.

Thank you.

Amy M. LaVoie

Wildlife Refuge Manager

**Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

***DRAFT Compatibility Determination for a
Visitor Contact Station/Visitor Center at
Pahranagat National Wildlife Refuge***

February 2014

Use: Visitor Contact Station/Visitor Center

Refuge Name: Pahranagat National Wildlife Refuge (NWR; Refuge), Lincoln County, Nevada

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities: Pahranagat NWR was established on August 16, 1963, to provide habitat for migratory birds, especially waterfowl. It encompasses 5,380 acres of marshes, open water, native grass meadows, and riparian habitat. The public lands within the Pahranagat NWR are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service).

Refuge Purpose(s): The purpose of Pahranagat NWR is "...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds..." (16 U.S.C. 715d).

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission: The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is:

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

(National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended [16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee])

Description of Use(s): The Service is not proposing to change or add a new public use. The focus of this compatibility determination is for the operation and maintenance of a new visitor contact station or small visitor center *to facilitate and enhance current public uses* on Pahranagat NWR. Public uses currently consist of hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental interpretation, environmental education and outreach. These public uses were analyzed and evaluated in a series of compatibility determinations completed for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) completed in 2009. Each of those public uses was determined to be compatible on Pahranagat NWR. Compliance for the CCP under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, consisted of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and a Record of Decision (Service 2009). The Final CCP/EIS and compatibility determinations (see Appendix G in the CCP/EIS) presented a detailed discussion and thorough analysis of the public use program on Pahranagat NWR to the public (Service 2009).

At the new visitor contact station/visitor center, we will support these existing public uses with an emphasis on environmental interpretation, education, and outreach, as well as wildlife

*U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
DRAFT Compatibility Determination for a
Visitor Contact Station/Visitor Center
at Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge*

observation. The small visitor center would serve as the portal to Pahrnagat NWR. It would introduce and educate the public about the Refuge, encouraging visitors to explore trails, observe wildlife, and connect with nature in the immediate vicinity of the visitor center and throughout the Refuge. It would also interpret the historical and cultural resources of the Refuge. Ultimately, through operation and maintenance of this visitor contact station/small visitor center, our goal is to enhance and facilitate the public use program at Pahrnagat NWR.

The small visitor center will be approximately 2,500 square feet with interior spaces that include a lobby, exhibit hall, a multipurpose room, and restrooms to support current public uses. Exterior support spaces to support the public uses will include a parking lot and a short trail with outdoor exhibits. The facility will meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green building rating system requirements, at least the Silver standard.

Public access onto Pahrnagat NWR is 24 hours a day, 365 days per year; but access to the walking trails and external restrooms are limited to daylight hours only. The hours of operation for the new visitor center are yet to be determined. The facility is expected to be staffed primarily by volunteers and by Refuge employees when available. Although administrative offices will also be part of this facility, a compatibility determination is not required for operation and maintenance of Service administrative facilities.

Availability of Resources: Costs to implement public use programs are listed and described in Appendix K of the Final CCP/EIS (Service 2009). Approved federal funds from the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act have been used to design and construct this facility. Funds to operate and maintain the facility will be provided by the annual Refuge budget.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use(s): Anticipated impacts of the public use program are described in detail in the final compatibility determinations for Pahrnagat NWR in Appendix G of the Final CCP/EIS (Service 2009). Since we are not proposing any changes to the public use program, no additional analysis of the public use program is necessary.

In regard to the environmental impacts from construction of the facility, an environmental assessment analyzed these impacts and was provided for public review and comment in May, 2012, and finalized in November, 2012. No threatened, endangered or proposed species, or designated or proposed critical habitat occurred in the project area. After consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office, cultural resource sites at the current Refuge Headquarters were not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; therefore there was no need for additional archaeological work or mitigation. In addition, Tribal Consultation with interested tribal governments occurred for the project. In late 2011, the Service collaborated with the Nuwuvi Working Group representing various Southern Paiute Tribes to provide input on the two considered locations for the visitor contact station and administrative office. Based on comments by the Nuwuvi Working Group and other factors, the existing headquarters site was selected as the preferred location.

*U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
DRAFT Compatibility Determination for a
Visitor Contact Station/Visitor Center
at Pahrangat National Wildlife Refuge*

Public Review and Comment: This draft compatibility determination will be made available to the public for a 14-day review period. The draft compatibility determination will be posted on the Refuge's website. The final compatibility determination will address any comments received on the draft.

Determination:

- Use is Not Compatible
 Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility: While potential operation and maintenance impacts were assessed to be minimal, stipulations have been required to ensure natural resources are adequately protected. As a result, a few stipulations have been identified below that will be carried out concurrently with operation and maintenance of the visitor contact station/small visitor center.

- The facility will meet and be maintained as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System in order to minimize the long term impacts of operation and maintenance on the environment.
- All parking surfaces have been sloped and will be maintained to prevent pooling of surface water and to direct runoff to storm water management area(s).
- Pervious surface materials have been used to the extent feasible when constructing drive and parking areas to minimize storm water runoff.
- Native plant landscaping will be maintained to deter the growth and spread of invasive plant species, as well as eliminate the long-term need for irrigation for landscaping.

Justification: One of the goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (System) is providing the public an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology, wildlife habitat and the human role in the environment. The Service strives to provide priority visitor uses when compatible with the purpose and goals of the Refuge and the mission of the System. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 identifies environmental education and interpretation as priority public uses for National Wildlife Refuges, along with hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography. Through operation and maintenance of this visitor contact station/small visitor center, we will enhance and facilitate the public use program at Pahrangat NWR.

*U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
DRAFT Compatibility Determination for a
Visitor Contact Station/Visitor Center
at Pahrangat National Wildlife Refuge*

Mandatory Reevaluation Date Month Day, Year:

Mandatory 15-year Reevaluation Date (for priority public uses)

Mandatory 10-Year Reevaluation Date (for all uses other than priority public uses)

NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision:

Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Statement

Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Statement

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

References:

Service (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). 2012. Final Environmental Assessment: Proposed Construction and Operation of an Administrative Office/Visitor Contact Station at Pahrangat National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pahrangat National Wildlife Refuge, Alamo, NV. 35pp.

Service (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). 2009. Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. 6 chapters plus appendices.

*U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
DRAFT Compatibility Determination for a
Visitor Contact Station/Visitor Center
at Pahrangat National Wildlife Refuge*

Signatures:

Prepared by: _____
(Signature) (Date)

Project Leader
Approval: _____
(Signature) (Date)

Concurrence

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature) (Date)

Assistant Regional
Director, Refuges: _____
(Signature) (Date)