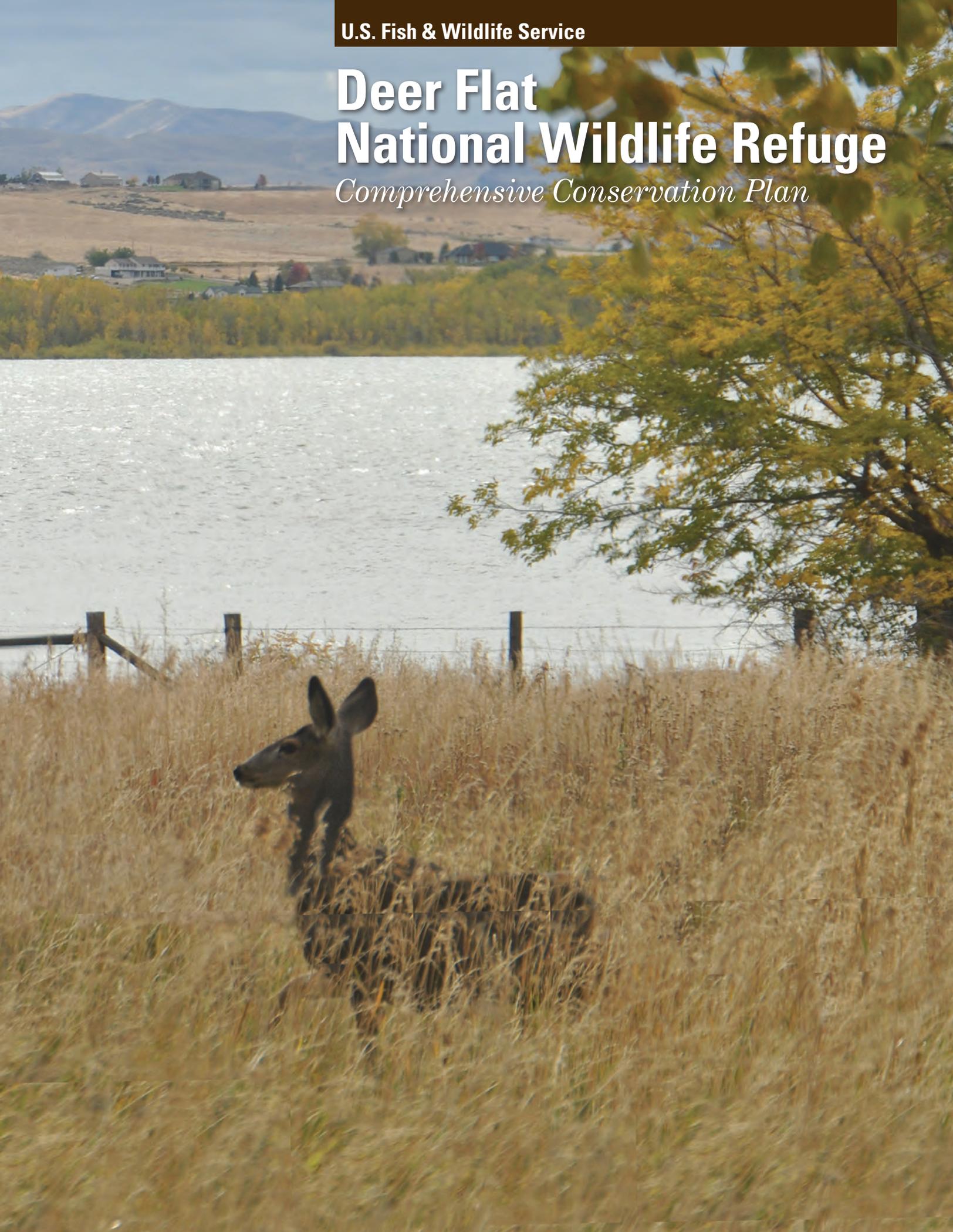


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Plan



A Vision of Conservation



Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge is enjoyed, appreciated, protected, and treasured as a place where wildlife comes first. The public actively supports and advocates for the Refuge purpose and programs. Residents of the Treasure Valley value the oases of wildlife habitat in their backyard, both at Lake Lowell and the Snake River Islands. The clean, clear waters and lush riparian landscapes of Lake Lowell and the Snake River Islands provide nesting, resting, and feeding habitat for spectacular concentrations of migratory birds and other wildlife. Reductions in disturbance to important nesting, breeding, resting and feeding areas allow wildlife in all Refuge habitats to successfully produce and raise their young thereby sustaining wildlife populations for future generations of Americans to enjoy. The removal of invasive and/or undesirable plant and animal species on the islands of the Snake River and at Lake Lowell provides habitats where songbirds, nesting waterfowl and colonial waterbirds, and native mammals thrive. Habitat goals are met without impacts to the irrigation resources of Lake Lowell.

The Refuge is a place where all visitors are able to enjoy and connect with nature and realize the value of wildlife and habitats. Staff and volunteers share their love of the Refuge and its resources with visitors. In addition to being a destination for hunting, fishing, wildlife photography and observation, children and adults learn in the outdoor “living classroom” that the Refuge provides. The Refuge also provides for other recreational uses that allow people to enjoy the outdoors without impacting wildlife and habitats. All public use opportunities maintain the integrity of the wildlife resources, instill in visitors the importance of protected open spaces, and provide memorable outdoor experiences for present and future generations of Americans.

Comprehensive Conservation Plans provide long-term guidance for management decisions and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes and identify the Service's best estimate of future needs. These plans detail program planning levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning and program prioritization purposes. The plans do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.

*The refuge headquarters and visitor center rests on the shore of Lake Lowell.
Addison Mohler/USFWS*

Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Prepared by:
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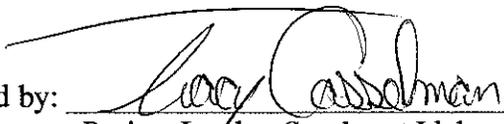
November 2015

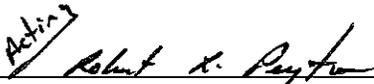
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**Approval Submission
for the
Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge
Comprehensive Conservation Plan**

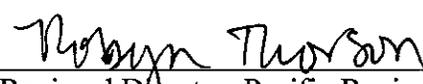
In accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act as amended, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has completed this Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The purpose of this CCP is to specify management direction for the Refuge for the next 15 years. The goals, objectives, and strategies for improving Refuge conditions—including the types of habitat and recreation we will provide, partnership opportunities, and management actions to be implemented to achieve desired future conditions, are described in the CCP.

This CCP is submitted for the Regional Director's approval.

Submitted by:  4/1/15
Project Leader, Southeast Idaho
National Wildlife Refuge Complex Date

Concur: ^{Acting}  4/1/15
Refuge Supervisor, Pacific Region Date

Concur:  4/1/15
Regional Chief, Pacific Region
National Wildlife Refuge System Date

Approved:  4/3/15
Regional Director, Pacific Region
Portland, Oregon Date

U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service

**Record of Decision for the
Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge
Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement
(Canyon, Payette, Owyhee, and Washington Counties, Idaho, and Malheur County, Oregon)**

Introduction

Through this Record of Decision (ROD), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) selects the management direction for the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). This ROD includes brief summaries of our public involvement process, the alternatives we analyzed in our Final CCP and environmental impact statement (EIS), and our rationale for selecting Alternative 2 for management of the Refuge. The CCP will provide guidance for managing and conserving the Refuge's natural resources and public uses during the next 15 years.

Planning and Public Involvement Process

We initiated our planning and public involvement process in July 2010 by announcing our intention to complete a CCP/EIS in the Federal Register, issuing a press release, and distributing Planning Update 1. We invited the public to participate in our planning process and open house meetings, and we requested public comments. Our open house meetings and work sessions engaged elected officials, representatives from agencies and groups, and other stakeholders in identifying issues and developing solutions. Refuge staff members attended meetings held by stakeholders and engaged in numerous activities throughout the process to reach out to our diverse stakeholders, listen to their comments, and answer their questions.

In Planning Update 2 (December 2010), we summarized the significant planning issues we identified in public comments. In Planning Update 3 (May 2011), we described our four preliminary management alternatives that addressed public comments, resource needs, and refuge management regulations and policy. Several issues were identified; however, potential changes to boating on the Refuge's Lake Lowell Unit and protecting the lake's wildlife and habitats were recognized as primary concerns. We requested comments on the alternatives, including our preferred alternative. Additional meetings were held with key stakeholders including Idaho Fish and Game.

In Planning Update 4 (October 2011), we summarized the comments we received on the preliminary alternatives and the subsequent revisions to the alternatives. We presented our refined alternatives in the Draft CCP/EIS, distributed to the public in March 2013. We requested public comments in a news release, Federal Register notice, and in Planning Update 5. The comments we received on the Draft CCP/EIS were addressed in the Final CCP/EIS, which was available to the public on February 20, 2015, as announced in our press release, Federal Register notice, and Planning Update 6.

Range of Alternatives Considered

We analyzed four alternatives for managing the Refuge in the Final CCP/EIS, including a no-action alternative (Alternative 1) as required under the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508). Summaries of the alternatives follow:

Under Alternative 1, we would continue current wildlife, habitat, and public use management. Invasive species control and limited restoration would be our habitat management focus. The Lake Lowell no-wake zone and seasonal closure October 1—April 14 for migratory birds would continue. Compatible priority and other public uses would continue. No additional trail or lake access would occur. Limited invasive species control and restoration would occur on the Snake River Islands Unit, which would open June 1—January 31 for free-roam activities and shoreline fishing.

Alternative 2, our preferred alternative, would protect Lake Lowell's shoreline feeding and nesting sites for wintering and migratory birds by continuing the seasonal closure of the lake October 1—April 14; establishing a new 200-yard no-wake zone on the south side and in the Narrows; and expanding the southeast no-wake zone to Gotts Point. Wildlife observation, fishing, and wildlife interpretation would be emphasized, and Gotts Point would open to vehicles, with increased law enforcement. We would increase wildlife inventory and monitoring, invasive species control, and restoration on the Snake River Islands Unit, and we would adjust closures to protect nesting and wading birds. Hunting for deer, upland game birds, and waterfowl would continue to be allowed. Most islands would be open for shoreline fishing and free-roam activities June 15—January 31; heron- and gull-nesting islands would be open July 1—January 31.

Alternative 3 would protect wildlife resources in Lake Lowell by closing emergent plant beds located in Murphy's Neck and near Parking Lots 3-8; closing the lake seasonally for wintering/migrating birds; closing areas within 500 yards of grebe-nesting sites; implementing a seasonal, 100-yard shoreline closure from Murphy's Neck to the Narrows; a 200-yard closure and no-wake zone in the southwest area; and a no-wake zone in the East Pool. Boating season would end on September 20. Upland game bird and controlled waterfowl hunting would be allowed, horseback riding and dog walking would not be allowed, and bicycling would be limited. Wildlife inventory and monitoring, invasive species control, and restoration would increase on the Snake River Islands Unit; closure dates would change to protect birds. Wildlife observation and hunting would occur on the islands. The islands would be open June 15—January 31 for fishing and free-roam activities. Heron-and gull-nesting islands would be open July 1—January 31.

Alternative 4 is described below as the Environmentally Preferable Alternative.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The definition of “environmentally preferable alternative” (40 CFR 1505.2(b)) is different from that of the preferred alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative generally causes the least damage to the environment and best protects natural and cultural resources. For this CCP/EIS, Alternative 4 is the environmentally preferable alternative; it would protect wildlife and their habitats through restrictions not found in Alternatives 1—3 and other actions.

Alternative 4 would reduce disturbance to feeding and resting wildlife by allowing boating at no-wake speeds only on all areas of Lake Lowell open to the public from April 15 to September 30. All emergent beds and the southeast end of the lake would be closed to public use to protect nesting and feeding waterbirds, waterfowl, and shorebirds. The entire lake would continue to be closed for wintering and migrating birds from October 1 to April 14 each year. The shoreline from Murphy's Neck to the Narrows would be protected by a 100-yard year-round closure in order to provide undisturbed loafing and feeding habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl. Trees would be removed in this area to enhance mudflats for migrating shorebirds. An increase in habitat enhancement through invasive species removal and vegetation manipulation would occur. Increases in wildlife and habitat

research and assessments would be focused on providing a strong scientific base for future management decisions.

The Refuge would not be open to nonwildlife-dependent activities, including horseback riding, pet walking, bicycling, and ice skating. To minimize conflicts with and improve the quality of the waterfowl hunt program, upland game hunting under Alternative 4 would no longer be allowed at the Lake Lowell Unit. Waterfowl hunting would be allowed on the south side of the Lake Lowell Unit from Parking Lots 1 to 8 with a daily limit of 25 shotgun shells per hunter.

Refuge staff would emphasize management of the Snake River Islands Unit under Alternative 4 by increasing wildlife inventory and monitoring efforts, invasive species control (following the Integrated Pest Management Plan), and restoration efforts. The most biologically intact islands would receive higher management priority. Island closure dates would be adjusted to better protect nesting geese, wading birds, gulls, and terns. An array of management techniques may be used including prescribed fire and aerial application of herbicide and/or seed.

Existing public uses would continue on the Snake River Islands Unit, including wildlife observation, and hunting for deer, upland game species, and waterfowl on 1,219 acres. The Snake River Islands Unit would be open for off-trail, free-roam activities and shoreline fishing would also be available, from June 15 to January 31 each year on all islands under Alternative 4.

Selected Alternative

Based on our comprehensive review and analysis of Deer Flat Refuge's resources and issues, the Service has selected Alternative 2, our preferred alternative, for implementation. We will implement Alternative 2, as it is described in the Final CCP/EIS, with two modifications identified on the following page. In reaching our decision to implement Alternative 2, we identified and analyzed its impacts to the Refuge environment in Chapter 6 of the Draft and Final CCPs/EISs. Issues, concerns, and opportunities presented throughout the planning process by organizations, agencies, individuals, and all other stakeholders, were also considered.

Factors Considered in Making the Decision

The range of alternatives we analyzed in the Final CCP/EIS identified four scenarios for managing Deer Flat Refuge as a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Measures for protecting wildlife and habitat varied from area closures to more expansive wildlife protection. Alternative 2 was selected because it is the most effective alternative for addressing the key issues identified during the planning process, and it will guide management of the Refuge in a manner that:

- Achieves the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the purposes, vision, and goals of the Refuge.
- Emphasizes interpretive programs and connecting families to nature through increased interpretive programs and by providing access to new facilities, as well as a wide range of wildlife-dependent and nonwildlife-dependent recreational activities
- Maintains and restores the ecological integrity of the Refuge's habitats and populations.
- Emphasizes management of the Snake River Islands Unit by increasing wildlife inventory and monitoring efforts and increasing invasive species control and restoration efforts.
- Addresses the legal mandates of the Service and the Refuge.
- Applies the scientific principles of sound wildlife management.

- Facilitates priority public uses appropriate and compatible with the Refuge's purposes and the National Wildlife Refuge System mission.

Alternative 1, the status quo, is the least protective of wildlife. Alternative 1 was not selected, because it would not provide sufficient protection for the Refuge's wildlife and habitat. Impacts to wildlife habitats and species would be significant if daytime disturbances by high-speed boating and other water sports continue. Significant negative effects to nesting and feeding habitats for waterbirds, waterfowl, and shorebirds would occur if visitation increases over time, public use remains unrestricted, and only minimal habitat management is conducted.

As a wildlife refuge near a major urban center, Deer Flat Refuge has an opportunity to engage new and diverse audiences to build an urban conservation constituency which ultimately benefits the entire National Wildlife Refuge System and the broader conservation community by nurturing increased education and support among these audiences. Alternative 3 was not selected because the public use restrictions would unnecessarily limit the Refuge's ability to connect with a diverse group of refuge visitors and build an urban conservation constituency because the additional public uses that were found to be compatible under Alternative 2 would be restricted under Alternative 3.

Similarly, Alternative 4, although it is environmentally preferred, was not selected because the public use restrictions would unnecessarily limit the Refuge's ability to connect with a diverse group of refuge visitors and build an urban conservation constituency because the additional public uses that were found to be compatible under Alternative 2 would be restricted under Alternative 4.

Changes Made to the Selected Alternative

Two changes were made to wildlife-dependent public uses between the Final CCP/EIS and this ROD for the final CCP, they follow.

- We clarified that noncompetitive jogging, bicycling, and horseback riding groups of 10 or fewer people without a special use permit (SUP) are allowed, *even if they are training*, but competitive events are still not allowed and an SUP is still required for groups larger than 10.
- We re-evaluated the restriction on boats using wake-generating devices (wake-boats) and have found that the use is compatible, with stipulations identified in the Compatibility Determination for Recreational Boating in Appendix B.

The original prohibition on wake-boats stems from concerns that their ballast could introduce invasive species into Lake Lowell and that wake-boats create wakes greater than other allowed boats. However, the invasive species issue can be addressed by adding filtering systems, and some boats without wake-generating devices are capable of causing similar wakes.

While we remain concerned about wake impacts to grebes, the greatest threats to the grebe colony at Lake Lowell are the withdrawal of water during incubation and nest disturbance which results in predation. We believe that the new no-wake zones will provide some additional protection and that public education and compliance with the new no-wake zones can provide the appropriate balance of boating opportunities and wildlife protection. We will continue to evaluate the effects of boating on wildlife to ensure that the permitted uses remain compatible and revise the Compatibility Determination, as necessary, to ensure that uses do not materially interfere or detract from the fulfillment of the Refuge System or the purposes of the refuge.

Stipulations for all compatible uses are identified in Appendix B of the final CCP.

Measures to Minimize Environmental Harm

All practicable measures to avoid or minimize environmental harm that could result from implementing Alternative 2 were identified and incorporated into the Final CCP/EIS in Chapter 2 (Alternatives, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies), Chapter 6 (Environmental Consequences), and Appendix B (Compatibility Determinations). The stipulations identified in Appendix B ensure that public uses and other uses are compatible with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and the Refuge's purposes. The stipulations and other mitigation measures identified in Alternative 2 and Appendix B are adopted by the Service in this ROD, and will be implemented by Refuge staff members, collaborators, volunteers, and other stakeholders.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Executive Orders

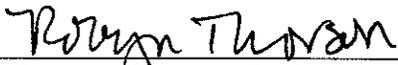
The proposed action complies with all federal laws and executive orders related to the National Wildlife Refuge System CCP planning process. A compliance statement has been completed, which explains how the selected alternative complies with the requirements of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended, (16 U.S. Code [U.S.C.] 688dd-688ee); the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.); the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531-1544, 87 Stat. 884); the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470-470b, 470c-470n); the Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1131-1136); Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands; Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review; Executive Order 13186, Protection of Migratory Birds; Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice; Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and 517 DM 1 and 569 FW1, Integrated Pest Management.

For Further Information

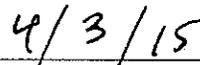
Questions about this CCP/EIS may be directed to Annette de Knijf, Refuge Manager, Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge, 13751 Upper Embankment Road, Nampa, Idaho, 83686-8046, phone number (208) 467-9278, and e-mail annette_deknijf@fws.gov. View this ROD and related documents on our Website http://www.fws.gov/refuge/deer_flat/.

Final Decision

To further protect the wildlife and habitats of the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge, and to enhance the public uses and visitor experiences provided by the Refuge, the Service selects Alternative 2 for implementation over the next 15 years.



Regional Director, Pacific Region
Portland, Oregon



Date

Supporting References

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2013. Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge, Nampa, ID.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2015. Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge, Nampa, ID.

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Executive Summary

Refuge Information and Background

The Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) is located in Idaho’s Canyon, Payette, Owyhee, and Washington Counties; and Malheur County, Oregon. This summary provides a brief overview of the Refuge’s Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended, to develop a CCP for all units of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

The Refuge was established by Theodore Roosevelt in 1909 to provide a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. The Refuge encompasses two units totaling approximately 11,617 acres. The Lake Lowell Unit is approximately 10,582 acres; it is an overlay refuge on the Bureau of Reclamation’s Lake Lowell Reservoir irrigation facility, and includes adjacent uplands. The Snake River Islands Unit encompasses approximately 1,035 acres on 104 islands in the Snake River. The Refuge provides opportunities for a variety of activities, and is a popular recreation destination.

The Refuge’s staff manages habitat for more than 215 bird species including waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds, raptors, and passerines. The Refuge is also an important resting and wintering area for birds migrating along the Pacific Flyway, and more than 25 species of mammals and invertebrates have been documented on the Refuge. Lake Lowell is the largest physical feature on the Refuge, providing open water, emergent vegetation, and mudflats. Other habitat types found on the Refuge include sagebrush-steppe uplands and riparian habitats.

The management direction in Chapter 2 was analyzed in our draft and final CCPs/EISs as Alternative 2, our preferred alternative. We selected Alternative 2 in our Record of Decision, for implementation on the Refuge. We will conserve the Refuge’s fish, wildlife, and plants, by monitoring their populations, reducing human-caused disturbance, managing and restoring habitats, and controlling invasive and feral species. The Refuge’s priority wildlife-dependent public uses include wildlife observation and photography, hunting, fishing, environmental education, and interpretation. Actions for managing these and a variety of nonwildlife-dependent uses, in a manner that is compatible with the Refuge’s purposes are also in Chapter 2. This CCP will guide Refuge management for 15 years.

Refuge Purposes

The Refuge’s conservation purposes were fundamental in formulating the management direction in this CCP. The purposes for establishing the Refuge follow.

- “as a refuge and breeding grounds for migratory birds and other wildlife” (Executive Order 7655, dated July 12, 1937).
- “for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds” (16 U.S.C. 715d, Migratory Bird Conservation Act).
- “suitable for—(1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species” (16 U.S.C. 460k-1, Refuge Recreation Act).

- “the Secretary ... may accept and use ... real ... property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors” (16 U.S.C. 460k-2, Refuge Recreation Act [16 U.S.C. 460k-460k-4], as amended).

Our Vision

The Service’s vision for the future of Deer Flat Refuge follows.

Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge is enjoyed, appreciated, protected, and treasured as a place where wildlife comes first. The public actively supports and advocates for the Refuge purpose and programs. Residents of the Treasure Valley value the oases of wildlife habitat in their backyard, both at Lake Lowell and the Snake River Islands. The clean, clear waters and lush riparian landscapes of Lake Lowell and the Snake River Islands provide nesting, resting, and feeding habitat for spectacular concentrations of migratory birds and other wildlife. Reductions in disturbance to important nesting, breeding, resting and feeding areas allow wildlife in all Refuge habitats to successfully reproduce and raise their young thereby sustaining wildlife populations for future generations of Americans to enjoy. The removal of invasive and/or undesirable plant and animal species on the islands of the Snake River and at Lake Lowell provides habitats where songbirds, nesting waterfowl and colonial waterbirds, and native mammals thrive. Habitat goals are met without impacts to the irrigation resources of Lake Lowell.

The Refuge is a place where all visitors are able to enjoy and connect with nature and realize the value of wildlife and habitats. Staff and volunteers share their love of the Refuge and its resources with visitors. In addition to being a destination for hunting, fishing, wildlife photography, and observation, children and adults learn in the outdoor “living classroom” that the Refuge provides. The Refuge also provides for other recreational uses that allow people to enjoy the outdoors without impacting wildlife and habitats. All public use opportunities maintain the integrity of the wildlife resources, instill in visitors the importance of protected open spaces, and provide memorable outdoor experiences for present and future generations of Americans.

Our Refuge Management Goals

The vision will be fulfilled, by managing Refuge resources to achieve the following goals.

Wildlife and Habitat Goals

Goal 1: Protect, maintain, and enhance viable mudflat, emergent-bed, and open-water habitats associated with Lake Lowell to benefit migratory birds and other wildlife.

Goal 2: Protect, maintain, and enhance riparian forest, benefiting migratory birds and other riparian-dependent species.

Goal 3: Protect, maintain, and enhance nonlake wetland habitats for the benefit of migratory birds and other wildlife.

Goal 4: Protect, maintain, and enhance shrub-steppe habitats characteristic of the historical Columbia Basin.

Goal 5: Protect, maintain and enhance managed grasslands and agricultural crops to support migrating waterfowl as well as resident wildlife.

Goal 6: Gather sufficient scientific information to guide responsible adaptive management decisions for the Refuge's trust resources.

Public Use and Cultural Resources Goals

Goal 1: Visitors of all ages will enjoy abundant native wildlife and increase their understanding and appreciation of the importance of the Refuge as wildlife habitat.

Goal 2: Hunters of all ages and abilities will enjoy a family-friendly, safe, quality hunt that minimally impacts Refuge habitats and wildlife and increases their understanding and appreciation of the importance of Deer Flat NWR as wildlife habitat.

Goal 3: Anglers will enjoy a family-friendly, quality, accessible fishing opportunity that minimally impacts Refuge habitats and wildlife and increases their understanding and appreciation of the importance of Deer Flat NWR as wildlife habitat.

Goal 4: Students, teachers, and Refuge visitors will understand the biology and management of the Refuge and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and will demonstrate stewardship of the Refuge and other wildlife habitats.

Goal 5: Visitors will have limited impacts to wildlife, feel safe during their visit, and understand Refuge regulations and how they help protect wildlife and wildlife habitat as well as other visitors.

Goal 6: The Refuge will initiate and nurture relationships and develop cooperative opportunities to nurture stewardship of the Refuge and instill in others an understanding and appreciation of the importance of Deer Flat NWR as wildlife habitat.

Goal 7: The Refuge will protect and manage cultural resources and look for ways to gain new understanding of the history and cultural resources of the Lake Lowell and Snake River Islands Units.

Public Involvement

The Refuge staff conducted extensive outreach to engage a wide variety of stakeholders in our planning process throughout development of the CCP. We began the planning and public involvement process in July 2010 by publishing a notice in the Federal Register; holding Open Houses at the Refuge's Visitor Center; and requesting public input to identify management issues. Public comments were also requested on our preliminary draft alternatives in June 2011, and again when we released our Draft CCP/EIS in March 2013. We addressed public comments in our final CCP/EIS. For additional information see the Summary of Public Involvement in Appendix H.

Management Direction

We selected Alternative 2, as the basis for the management direction in the CCP. Our primary emphasis will be to reduce disturbance to important wildlife breeding, nesting and feeding areas, reduce undesirable plant and animal species, and improve compatible recreation opportunities. We will emphasize connecting families to nature by providing access to new facilities and a wide range of wildlife-dependent and nonwildlife-dependent recreational activities. Activities will be managed to protect wildlife, reduce conflicts between users, and increase safety.

Lake Lowell Unit

On Lake Lowell, we will protect shoreline feeding and nesting sites in no-wake zones and seasonal closed areas, and feature the Refuge's conservation purpose and goals in interpretive programs.

Management of Wildlife and Habitat. To provide needed protections for lake-dependent wildlife, a 200-yard no-wake zone will be established along the south side of the lake between Parking Lots 1 and 8. The entire lake will continue to be closed to motorized boating from October 1 to April 14 each year for the benefit of wintering and migrating birds. No-wake zones will be required in the Narrows, and the no-wake zone on the southeast end of the lake will be expanded to start at a line between Gotts Point and Parking Lot 1. Motorized boats will be allowed in the no-wake zones at speeds that do not create a wake (generally less than 5 mph).

Seasonally closed areas will protect heron rookeries, eagle nests, and grebe nesting colonies, which will allow us to adapt management actions to changes in the nesting and feeding requirements of wildlife, while ensuring that the areas actively used by wildlife are protected from potentially-disturbing activities. This will provide more flexible protections for wildlife, as well as more opportunities for compatible public uses. We will also increase habitat enhancement through invasive species removal and vegetation manipulation. Increases in wildlife and habitat research and assessments will be focused on providing a strong scientific base for future management decisions.

Management of Public Uses. We will provide access for a wide range of outdoor recreational activities. Management efforts will focus on increasing participation in all six priority wildlife-dependent recreational activities. Fishing and interpretation will be emphasized to serve a growing diverse, urban population. We will seek to connect people with nature and build support for wildlife conservation. Seasonal, on-trail regulations will protect wildlife while allowing visitors to experience wildlife in Refuge habitats. We will open Gotts Point to vehicles when a cooperative agreement is in place for increased law enforcement.

Snake River Islands Unit

Management of Wildlife and Habitat. Refuge staff will emphasize management of the Snake River Islands Unit by increasing wildlife inventory and monitoring efforts and increasing invasive species control and restoration efforts. Islands management needs will be prioritized using several factors. The most biologically intact islands will be a higher management priority. An array of management techniques may be used, including prescribed fire and aerial application of herbicide and/or seed. Island closure dates will be adjusted to better protect nesting geese, wading birds, gulls, and terns.

Management of Public Uses. Existing public uses will continue and include wildlife observation and hunting for deer, upland birds, and waterfowl on over 1,200 acres. Most of the Snake River Islands Unit will be open for off-trail, free-roam activities including shoreline fishing, from June 15 to January 31 annually. Heron- and gull-nesting islands (four to six islands) will be open for off-trail, free-roam activities from July 1 to January 31.