



Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update #1/Fall 2010

Comprehensive Conservation Planning Begins Soon

Greetings from the Refuge Manager



View of Ruby Marsh facing west / FWS

Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) is about to embark on an important multi-year process to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the refuge. This plan will help guide overall refuge management for the next 15 years. Your ideas and comments will be an important part of the process, so I'd like to invite you to participate.

Before we begin the process, I'd like to provide background about the refuge's history and current management. You'll also find some information about the National Wildlife Refuge System and how comprehensive conservation planning fits into the overall picture of refuge management.

Planning will officially begin in November when our public scoping

process starts. We will hold an informal public scoping meeting in Elko on November 3. More details are on the back cover. I hope you can make it.

We will frequently refer to background materials provided in this planning update (Planning Update #1) throughout the CCP process. Please try to read it before our first meeting; this will help all of us start on the same page, so to speak, when we begin our public scoping meetings.

I hope you'll feel free to contact me or Mark Pelz, Refuge Planner, if you have any questions. See page 7 to learn about the CCP and page 8 for our phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

Guy Wagner

Guy Wagner, Refuge Manager

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What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The FWS manages the 150-million acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses more than 552 refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas.

It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices, and 78 ecological services field stations.

The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign

governments with their wildlife and habitat conservation efforts.

The FWS also oversees the Federal Assistance program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.



Tundra swans / FWS

What is the National Wildlife Refuge System?



In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt protected an island with nesting pelicans, herons, ibis, and roseate spoonbills in Florida's Indian River from feather collectors who were decimating their colonies. He established Pelican Island as the nation's first bird sanctuary and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his tenure. This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand, later becoming the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

Today, over 100 years later, Ruby Lake Refuge is one of 552 National Wildlife Refuges encompassing more than 150 million acres nationwide. The Refuge System is the largest system of lands in the world primarily dedicated to the conservation of wildlife. It is spread across 50 states, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Johnston Atoll, Midway Atoll, and several other Pacific Islands. About

20.6 million acres in the Refuge System are managed as wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964.

In 1997 Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Act), legislation that provides clear guidance for the management of the Refuge System. The act includes a new statutory mission statement and directs the FWS to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to conserving wildlife and maintaining the biological integrity of ecosystems.

This law requires the FWS to develop a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for each refuge. It also states that certain wildlife-dependent recreational uses are priority public uses on refuges and strengthens the compatibility determination process for assuring that these and other activities do not conflict with refuge management purposes and goals.

What's in a name?

Many people confuse state and federal fish and wildlife agencies because their names are similar. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of Interior. The Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) is a state agency.

Our names are similar and so are our missions: Both agencies are dedicated to wildlife conservation for the benefit of present and future generations. Our jurisdictions are different. The FWS is the lead agency responsible for federally-listed species and migratory birds, whether they are located on federal, state, or private lands. The NDOW has primary responsibility for resident fish and wildlife on state and private lands and oversees state-listed species. Ruby Lake Refuge is managed by the FWS, which coordinates with NDOW on a variety of natural resource management issues.

What is the mission of the Refuge System?

National Wildlife Refuges are places where "wildlife comes first."

"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."

Lands within the Refuge System are managed first and foremost for the benefit of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. Our mission differs from other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, which focuses on forest stewardship and sustainable forest uses; the Bureau of Land Management, which deals with the productivity and multiple use of the land; and the National Park Service, which conserves scenery, wildlife, and historic objects for people's recreational enjoyment.

"Wild beasts and birds are by right not the property merely of people who are alive today, but the property of unknown generations whose belongings we have no right to squander."

President Theodore Roosevelt



Canvasbacks / FWS



White-faced ibis / FWS

Refuge acquisition history

Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1938 as a "...refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife." The initial acquisition boundary included approximate 37,540 acres. In 1938, four tracts were acquired totaling 28,322 acres. That same year, an additional 6,058 acres were withdrawn from the public domain.

Between 1940 and 1970, a number of tracts along the eastern edge of the marsh and a large tract along the south

end of the marsh were acquired. The first tract totaling 41 acres was acquired in 1941. In 1959, 80 acres of public domain land were withdrawn for the Refuge by Public Land Order (PLO) 1878. In 1965, 1,655 acres were acquired with funding from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund. In 1970, 440 more acres of public domain lands were withdrawn for the Refuge (PLO 4795).

In 2002, the Refuge acquired an additional 1,655 acres through a land exchange. In 2006, 645 acres of Bureau of Land Management public domain land were legislatively transferred to the Service to be managed as part of Ruby Lake Refuge.

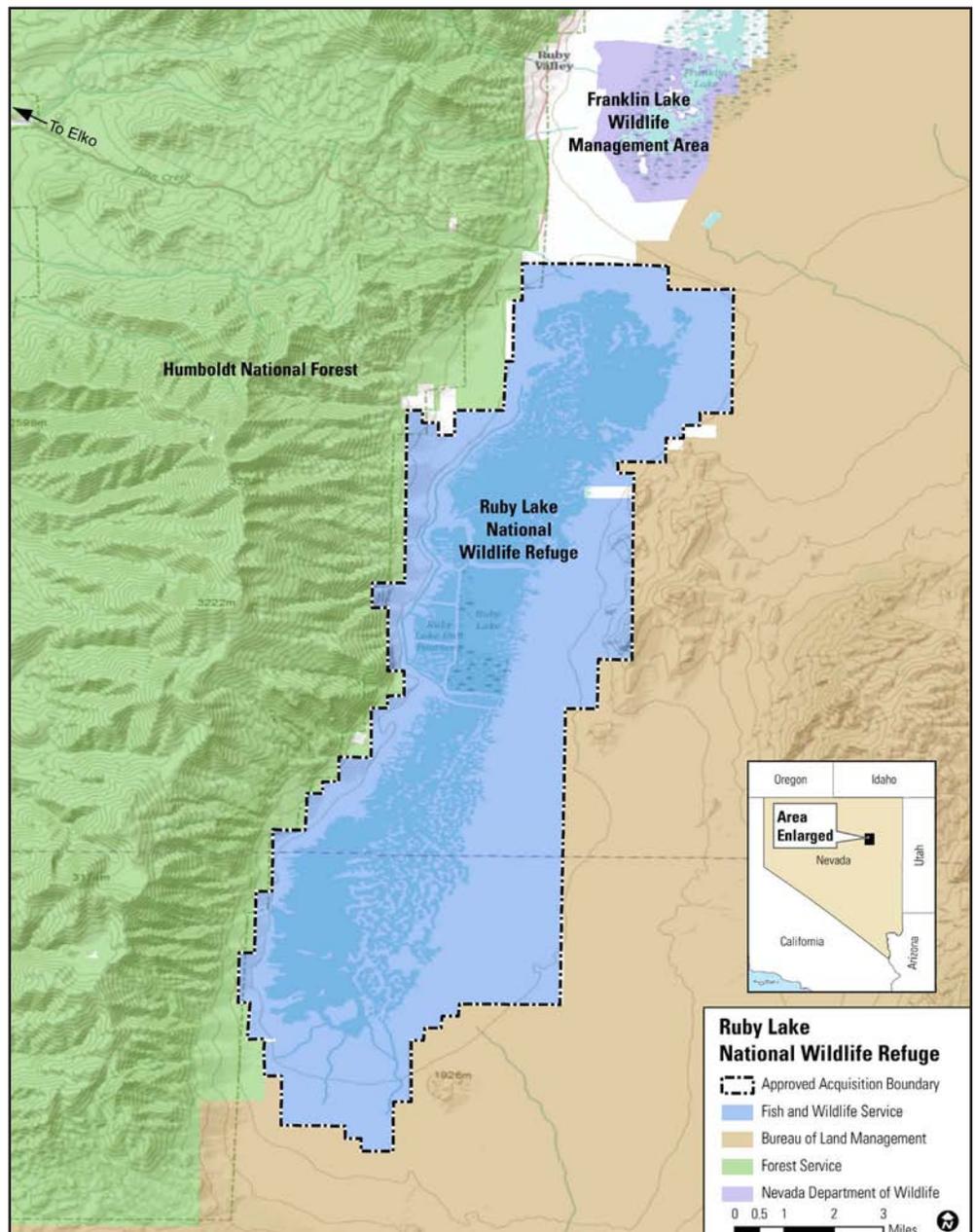
"[Ruby Lake] is one of the most important marsh areas in the desert country between Utah and California"

*D.H. Madsen, Superintendent
Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge,
May 13, 1929*

Project location and watershed

Ruby Lake Refuge is located at the foot of the Ruby Mountains in northeastern Nevada, just over 60 miles south of Elko. The Refuge is located within the Ruby Valley watershed.

The Refuge is bordered by Humboldt National Forest to the west, Bureau of Land Management lands to the south and east, and private lands to the north. Nevada Department of Wildlife-administered Franklin Lake Wildlife Management Area is located approximately 1.5 miles north of the Refuge.



Refuge purposes

The purposes identified below for Ruby Lake Refuge are defined by language within a number of acts of Congress which grant the FWS general authority to acquire land for National Wildlife Refuges:

- ...for use as ... a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. *Executive Order 7923, July 2, 1938*
- ...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds. *16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)*



Compatibility of refuge uses

Prior to allowing various public uses on a refuge, federal law requires that the FWS first determine that these specific uses are compatible.

A compatible use is a proposed or existing use of a national wildlife refuge that, based on sound professional judgement of the refuge manager, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the refuge.

Compatibility determinations are used to help evaluate such uses and will be integrated as part of the CCP planning process.

What activities can be enjoyed at refuges?

There are laws and policies which guide management of public use on National Wildlife Refuges. Only those public uses which are determined to be compatible with the mission of the Refuge System and the purposes of the Refuge are allowed. The Refuge Improvement Act identified six wildlife dependent public uses as priority uses:

- Environmental Education
- Wildlife Photography
- Environmental Interpretation
- Hunting
- Wildlife Observation
- Fishing



Refuge Entrance Sign / FWS



North Marsh / FWS

Ruby Lake Refuge today

Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge lies at the southern end of the Ruby Valley in northeast Nevada. Located at an elevation of 6,000 feet and flanked on the west by the rugged and scenic Ruby Mountains, it is one of the most remote refuges in the lower 48 states. The refuge encompasses 39,928 acres and consists of a marsh bordered by meadows, grasslands, and brush-covered uplands. The National Park Service designated the South Marsh a National Natural Landmark because of the biological diversity and pristine condition of the habitat.

Wildlife

Ruby Lake Refuge serves as a magnet for a wide diversity of wildlife species and is strategically located along migration corridors serving both the Pacific and Central Flyways. A pristine marsh, meadows, grasslands, and shrub-steppe uplands provide essential habitat for thousands of nesting and migrating

waterfowl, waterbirds, songbirds, and native wildlife.

The refuge has been identified as one of 500 Globally Important Bird Areas by the American Bird Conservancy. Over 220 species of birds regularly visit the refuge. Providing nesting habitat for migratory birds is the primary purpose of the refuge, and waterfowl are the most conspicuous breeders. Canvasback and redhead ducks, among other waterfowl species, reproduce here. Ruby Lake Refuge is one of the most important waterfowl nesting areas in the Great Basin and intermountain West. The South Marsh supports the largest population of nesting canvasback ducks west of the Mississippi River (outside Alaska), and holds the highest concentration of nesting canvasbacks in North America. The once-endangered trumpeter swan, originally transplanted between 1947 and 1958 from Red Rocks Lake Refuge in Montana, is also found at Ruby Lake Refuge. Several pairs nest and raise young each year, and 40 or more birds may winter here. In all, 15 species of waterfowl nest on this refuge,

as well as a variety of other water-dependent birds such as coots, grebes, sandhill cranes, great blue herons, white-faced ibis, black-necked stilts, avocets, yellow-headed blackbirds, common yellow-throats, and marsh wrens.

Seven species of fish inhabit refuge waters. The relict dace is the only native species of fish on the refuge, and is present in only a few other basins in northeastern Nevada. A small number of Lahontan speckled dace remain from a transplant made in 1950.

Management

Management programs focus on maintaining and restoring native habitats. The refuge encompasses a large variety of wetland and upland vegetation types. Refuge wetlands include permanently and seasonally flooded shallow marsh (a mosaic of open water, bulrush stands, and islands) and infrequently flooded alkali playas.

These habitats are critical to the existence of many species of wildlife because wetlands are rare in the Great Basin high desert. The islands

and bulrush provide nesting sites for waterfowl, marsh bird, and songbird species. Submerged marsh plants growing in open water areas provide feeding sites for birds. Water elevations in some marsh units are controlled to provide nesting and feeding areas for waterfowl and other marsh birds.

Vegetation in the meadows and grasslands is managed to provide nesting cover and feeding areas for wildlife. Transition areas between marsh and upland habitats are dominated by sedges, rushes, grasses, and forbs. Meadows and grasslands are important to migratory birds for feeding and nesting. Grasslands, which contain a different complex of vegetation than meadows because grassland soils are drier, provide nesting cover for waterfowl and songbirds.

These areas also support large populations of small mammals, which are an important food source for birds of

prey. Over time, vegetation in meadows and grasslands becomes heavily matted and nesting habitat is lost. Prescribed fire is used to remove matted vegetation, restoring nesting habitat. Cattle grazing and haying are used as habitat management tools to provide feeding areas for birds.

Shrub-steppe upland habitat dominates the dryer sites on the refuge. Sagebrush is the principal shrub species on the west side of the marsh, and greasewood dominates the east side. Great Basin wild rye, a prevalent grass species, is abundant in the shrub-steppe and grassland plant communities. Migratory and resident bird species use shrub-steppe areas for feeding and nesting.

Recreation

The refuge is open year-round for fishing, the most popular recreational activity on the refuge. Trout and largemouth bass

provide anglers with some of the best fishing in northeast Nevada. Trout fishing is best in early spring, fall, and winter. Bass fishing peaks in summer.

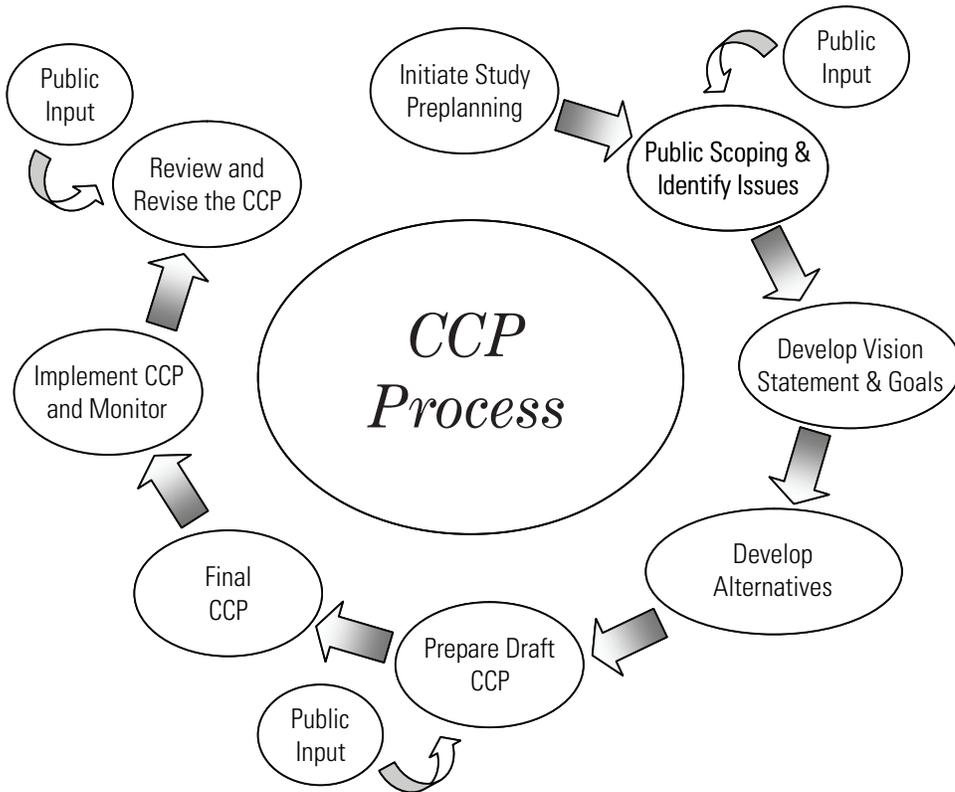
Seasonal hunting is allowed in designated areas of the South Marsh for migratory birds including ducks, geese, coots, common moorhens, and common snipe. Reservations are not required, and there is no fee.

There are two boat launching areas in the South Marsh that provide public access to the marsh. These launch sites are connected by over six miles of marked canoeing and boating channels. Boats are not allowed on the refuge from January 1 to June 14.

The refuge is open year-round for wildlife observation, birding, and photography. An auto tour route, which follows interior levees through the marsh, provides excellent wildlife viewing opportunities. The refuge is open to the public from one hour before sunrise until two hours after sunset.



Ruby Lake Refuge in spring. / FWS



What is a CCP?

When Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, it incorporated an underlying philosophy that “wildlife comes first” on refuges.

The Act provides the FWS with guidance for managing refuges to ensure the long-term conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. Two important principles of the Act are to maintain biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge, and facilitate compatible wildlife-dependent recreation.

Every refuge is to have a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) completed by 2012. The CCP will outline refuge goals, objectives, and management strategies. It is a flexible, “living” document that will be updated every 15 years.

The CCP:

- Ensures that management of the refuge reflects the purposes of the refuge and the mission, policies, and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System;

- Provides the public with an understanding of the reasons for management actions on the refuge;
- Provides a vision statement for the refuge;
- Ensures the compatibility of current and future uses of the refuge with its purposes;
- Provides long-term continuity in refuge management; and
- Provides budget justification for operation and maintenance and facility development requests.

The CCP will provide broad management direction and guidance for the refuge, contingent upon future funding and resources. The accompanying environmental document, required by the National Environmental Policy Act, will describe the alternatives considered and their environmental effects. You will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft CCP and environmental document.

In November 2010 we will hold our public scoping meeting to help identify issues and gather information. The key planning steps are listed above and will be listed in future updates so you can track our progress through the planning process.

What are the goals of this planning process?

The goals of this planning process are to:

- Outline refuge management priorities for the next 10 to 15 years;
- Describe significant refuge resources and their importance;
- Identify how the refuge can best protect these resources;
- Clarify what public uses are, and are not, compatible with managing significant resources;
- Identify the refuge’s role within the local community and as a national resource.

CCP Schedule

October 2010

Mail out background information

November 2010

Hold public scoping meetings and begin the CCP process

Late Spring 2012

Draft CCP public review



Fishing at Ruby Marsh / Ol' Florida Boy

Public Meeting

Wednesday, November 3, 2010

6:30 - 8:30 PM

Hilton Garden Inn
3650 E. Idaho Street
Elko NV 89801

For more information, visit our
website at:
<http://www.fws.gov/rubylake/>

Help us plan the future

To begin developing the CCP, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold a public scoping meeting in the evening to help identify issues and gather information. Interested individuals, agencies, Tribes, organizations, and other stakeholders will be invited to express their concerns and share their visions for the refuge. This will be your opportunity to help us identify issues and concerns and receive answers to any questions you may have. Your comments and/or participation will be critical to the success of this planning effort.



Ruby Lake NWR / FWS

Please feel free to contact us!

We are available to provide additional information about the refuge history, goals, and accomplishments to date, and to answer any questions about the planning process. Feel free to call, write, e-mail, or visit us in person.

If you did not receive this newsletter through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, please contact us. If you would like to be removed from the list or are receiving multiple copies of these notices, please let us know.

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