

Alternative B: Optimize Wildlife-Dependent Public Use and Management (Proposed Alternative)

The proposed alternative, Alternative B, would emphasize management of the natural resources of Clarks River NWR based on maintaining and improving wetland habitats, monitoring targeted flora and fauna representative of the surrounding Clarks River watershed, and providing quality public use programs and wildlife-dependent recreational activities. All species occurring on the refuge would be considered, and certain targeted species would be managed for and monitored in addition to species of Federal responsibility. These species would be chosen based on the criteria that they are indicators of the health of important habitat or species of concern. Information gaps in knowledge of the refuge's aquatic species would be addressed.

Restoration efforts, habitat management, a prescribed fire program, and forest management would reflect best management practices determined after examination of historical regimes, soil types and elevation, and the current hydrological system. Management actions would be monitored for effectiveness and adapted to changing conditions, knowledge, and technology. A habitat management plan would be developed to plan future habitat projects and evaluate previous actions.

Overall public use would be monitored to determine if any negative impacts are occurring on resources from overuse. Education programs would be reviewed and improved to complement current management and current staffing. Public use programs would be updated to support and teach the reasons behind management actions, and to provide quality experiences to visitors. The refuge headquarters would be developed to provide more visitor services. In an increasingly developing region, a balanced wildlife-dependent recreational program would be a focus under this alternative. A new visitor center would be constructed. Archaeological resources would be surveyed.

The refuge currently has fee-title ownership of about 8,634 acres with an approved acquisition boundary of 19,605 acres. Lands are purchased on a willing-seller basis only. Alternative B includes a proposed expansion of 34,269 acres and would bring the total refuge acquisition boundary to approximately 53,874 acres, and would protect lands along the east and west forks of the Clarks River. Land acquisitions within the existing and

proposed expanded acquisition boundaries would be based on importance of the habitat for target management species. We would offer interpretation of refuge wildlife and habitats, as well as demonstrate habitat improvements for individual landowners.

In general, under Alternative B, management decisions and actions would support wildlife species and habitat occurring on the refuge based on well-planned strategies and sound scientific judgment. Quality wildlife-dependent recreational uses and environmental education and interpretation programs would be offered to support and explain the natural resources of the refuge.

This alternative would add six new positions to current staffing in order to protect resources, provide visitor services, and attain goals of facilities and equipment maintenance in the future. The biological environment would improve as adaptive and best management practices are utilized. Socioeconomic values should also increase as we offer increased wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities. Areas such as this are beneficial to local ecotourism trade and residents searching for natural landscapes and associated benefits.

Alternative C: Maximize Wildlife-Dependent Recreation and Management

Alternative C would emphasize maximizing wildlife-dependent recreational uses on the refuge. The increase of nine staff members in addition to the existing employees would support public use activities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation. In general, the focus would be on expanding public use activities to the fullest extent possible, while conducting only mandated resource protection, such as conservation of threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, and archaeological resources.

All management programs for conservation of wildlife and habitat, such as monitoring, surveying, and researching, would support species and resources of importance for public use enhancement. Emphasis would be placed more on interpreting and demonstrating these programs than actual implementation. Providing access with trails would be maximized, as well as providing public use facilities throughout the refuge. Federal trust species and archaeological resources would be monitored as mandated, but other species targeted for management

would depend on which ones the public is interested in utilizing. Habitat restoration efforts would be based on public use demands and criteria rather than determined through methods using a strategic habitat conservation approach.

With the majority of staff time and funds supporting a public use program, wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education and interpretation could be more successful than in the other alternatives. Land acquisitions within the approved acquisition boundary would be based on importance of the habitat for public use. The refuge headquarters and visitor center would be developed for public use activities such as interpretation and outreach.

Next Step

After the comment period ends, we will analyze the comments and address them.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Authority

This notice is published under the authority of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Pub. L. 105-57).

Dated: January 4, 2012.

Mark J. Musaus,

Acting Regional Director.

[FR Doc. 2012-3477 Filed 2-14-12; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

National Park Service

[FWS-R6-R-2011-N211;
FXRS1265066CCP0S2-123-FF06R06000]

Detailed Planning To Consider Additional Land Protection on the Missouri River From Fort Randall Dam to Sioux City, IA; National Environmental Policy Act Documents

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent; request for comments.

SUMMARY: This notice advises the public that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Department of the Interior, as lead agencies, intend to gather information necessary to complete detailed planning and prepare associated documents under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and its implementing regulations, in order to consider additional land protection on the Missouri River from Fort Randall Dam to Sioux City, Iowa. The FWS and NPS are furnishing this notice in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended, and the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, as amended, to advise other agencies, Tribal governments, and the public of our intentions and to obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to include in the environmental documents. Special mailings, newspaper articles, and other media announcements will inform people of the opportunities for input throughout the planning process.

DATES: We are soliciting written comments and will hold public scoping meetings in February 2012. Information on meeting dates and times will be available at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/niob-ponca> when that information is available.

ADDRESSES: Send your comments or requests for more information by any of the following methods.

Email: niobrara_ponca@fws.gov.

U.S. Mail: Nick Kaczor, USFWS, Division of Refuge Planning, P.O. Box 25486, DFC, Denver, CO 80225.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nick Kaczor, Planning Team Leader, Division of Refuge Planning, USFWS, P.O. Box 25486, DFC, Denver, CO 80225.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

With this notice, the FWS and NPS, as lead agencies, propose to complete detailed planning on a joint comprehensive conservation strategy and land protection plan (LPP) for the Niobrara Confluence and Ponca Bluffs areas of the Missouri River in southeast South Dakota and northeast Nebraska aimed to improve floodplain management. The LPP would develop a proposal for a comprehensive conservation strategy, including a plan aimed at enhancing wildlife habitat, increasing recreational opportunities, and improving floodplain management

within the study area, by working with willing landowners to strategically protect land through acquisition and conservation easements.

The Niobrara Confluence segment between Fort Randall Dam and Lewis and Clark Lake is one of the last portions of the middle Missouri River that remain un-channelized, relatively free-flowing, and undeveloped. This area of the Missouri River's main channel in the old, wider river valley contains important habitat for at least 60 native and 26 sport fish. In addition, the riparian woodlands and island complexes are important for approximately 25 year-round bird species and 115 species of migratory birds, including piping plovers, least terns, and bald eagles.

The Ponca Bluffs segment between Gavins Point Dam and Sioux City is a diverse, relatively unaltered, riverine/floodplain ecosystem characterized by a main channel, braided channels, wooded riparian corridor, pools, chutes, sloughs, islands, sandbars, backwater areas, wetlands, natural floodplain and upland forest communities, pastureland, and croplands. This area also supports a wide variety of wildlife and fisheries resources similar to the Niobrara Confluence segment.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 outlines six priority public uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation) that are to be facilitated on national wildlife refuges, where compatible.

The river reaches are components of the National Wild and Scenic River System as designated by Congress in 1978 and 1991 under the Wild and Scenic River Act (Pub. L. 90-542, as amended). The National Park Service is the river administering agency and is tasked to protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable recreational, fish and wildlife, and scenic or similar values. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act specifies that these river reaches shall be preserved in free-flowing condition and that their Outstandingly Remarkable Values shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Public feedback into the land protection planning process is essential to ensure that the FWS and NPS include society's input into the proposed project. FWS and NPS will request public review and comment throughout the planning process.

Background

The Missouri River basin encompasses 530,000 square miles—

approximately one-sixth of the continental United States. The main stem, stretching from Three Forks, Montana, to St. Louis, Missouri, is the longest river in the United States, at more than 2,300 miles long. Historically, the Missouri River was a dynamic ecosystem, characterized by a changing interplay of open free-flowing, braided channel, sandbar, prairie, wetland, and forest habitats. Although manmade structures and activities have altered many of these natural processes, important habitats still remain, for a rich diversity of plants and animals. The dynamic nature of the Missouri River means that habitats change on a daily, seasonal, annual, and long-term basis. Erosive forces constantly transport sediment down the river, creating and modifying habitat and removing terrestrial vegetation from some areas while creating suitable conditions for new plants to grow in other areas. Seasonal river flow patterns flood river-bottom wetlands and maintain chutes, backwaters, and lakes in the floodplain that provide important wildlife breeding and foraging habitat. The combination of open water, floodplain wetlands, and river vegetation is particularly important for the large number of migratory birds that use the Missouri River during spring and fall migrations.

Despite significant alterations of impoundment and stabilization, portions of the Missouri River have shown resiliency, exhibiting numerous historical characteristics witnessed by Lewis and Clark during their explorations in the early 1800s. The FWS and NPS will work with local communities and willing landowners to conserve significant stretches of the Missouri River. The opportunity to preserve and potentially improve important processes and habitats for fish and wildlife will provide benefits to visitors, neighbors, and local communities of these areas now and into the future. The project proposal is designed to improve conditions within the channel migration zone, retaining those habitat characteristics important to federally managed species such as pallid sturgeon, least tern, and piping plover, while potentially mitigating flooding impacts in the future. In addition, the project proposal is also designed to enhance recreation opportunities such as boating, fishing, hunting, and camping, while increasing scenic values along the river and protecting cultural resources.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your

comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Authorities

The FWS and NPS are furnishing this notice in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd–668ee) (Administration Act), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997; the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, as amended; and the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) and its implementing regulations.

Dated: December 2, 2011.

Matt Hogan,

Acting, Deputy Regional Director, Mountain-Prairie Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dated: December 20, 2011.

Michael T. Reynolds,

Regional Director, NPS, Midwest Region.

[FR Doc. 2012–3491 Filed 2–14–12; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[LLCON06000–L16100000–DP0000]

Notice of Resource Advisory Council Meetings for the Dominguez-Escalante Advisory Council

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Public Meetings.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Dominguez-Escalante Advisory Council (Council) will meet as indicated below.

DATES: Meetings will be held March 21, 2012; April 4, 2012; and May 2, 2012. All meetings will begin at 3 p.m. and will normally adjourn at 6 p.m. These meetings are in addition to the already-scheduled meeting on March 7, 2012, which was advertised through a separate notice. Any adjustments to duration of meetings will be advertised on the Dominguez-Escalante RMP Web site, http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html. Field trips may be scheduled in these months as well.

Notice of field trips will also be posted on the Web site.

ADDRESSES: Meetings on March 21 and May 2 will be held at the Delta County Courthouse, Room 234, 501 Palmer, Delta, Colorado. The meeting on April 4 will be held at the Mesa County Courthouse Annex, Training Room A, 544 Rood, Grand Junction, Colorado.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Katie Stevens, Advisory Council Designated Federal Official, 2815 H Road, Grand Junction, CO 81506. Phone: (970) 244–3049. *Email:*

kasteven@blm.gov. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1–800–877–8339 to contact the above individual during normal business hours. The FIRS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to leave a message or question with the above individual. You will receive a reply during normal business hours.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The 10-member Council advises the Secretary of the Interior, through the BLM, on a variety of planning and management issues associated with the resource management planning process for the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area and Dominguez Canyon Wilderness.

Topics of discussion during the meeting may include informational presentations from various resource specialists working on the resource management plan, as well as Council reports relating to the following topics: recreation, fire management, land-use planning process, invasive species management, travel management, wilderness, land exchange criteria, cultural resource management and other resource management topics of interest to the Council raised during the planning process.

These meetings are anticipated to occur monthly, and may occur as frequently as every two weeks during intensive phases of the planning process. Dates, times and agendas for additional meetings may be determined at future Advisory Council Meetings, and will be published in the **Federal Register**, announced through local media and on the BLM's Web site for the Dominguez-Escalante planning effort, www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html.

These meetings are open to the public. The public may present written comments to the Council. Each formal Council meeting will have time allocated at the beginning and end of each meeting for hearing public comments. Depending on the number of persons wishing to comment and time

available, the time for individual oral comments may be limited at the discretion of the chair.

Dated: February 9, 2012.

Helen M. Hankins,

State Director.

[FR Doc. 2012–3490 Filed 2–14–12; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[LLMTB07900 09 L10100000 PH0000 LXAMANMS0000]

Notice of Public Meeting; Western Montana Resource Advisory Council

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Public Meeting.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Western Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC) will meet as indicated below.

DATES: The meeting will be held March 14, 2012, beginning at 9 a.m. with a 30-minute public comment period and will adjourn at 3 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be in the BLM's Butte Field Office, 106 N. Parkmont, in Butte, MT.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This 15-member council advises the Secretary of the Interior on a variety of management issues associated with public land management in Montana. During these meetings the council will participate in/discuss/act upon several topics, including the BLM's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy, a report from the RAC's recreation fee subgroup, and reports from the Butte, Missoula and Dillon field offices.

All RAC meetings are open to the public. The public may present written comments to the RAC. Each formal RAC meeting will also have time allocated for hearing public comments. Depending on the number of persons wishing to comment and time available, the time for individual oral comments may be limited.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

David Abrams, Western Montana Resource Advisory Council Coordinator, Butte Field Office, 106 North Parkmont, Butte, MT 59701, 406–533–7617, *dabrams@blm.gov.* Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1–800–877–8339