

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Fish and Wildlife Service**

[FWS-R6-R-2014-N126;
FXRS1261060000-145-FF06R06000]

**San Luis Valley National Wildlife
Refuge Complex, Alamosa, Rio
Grande, and Saguache, CO;
Comprehensive Conservation Plan and
Environmental Impact Statement**

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service,
Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request
for comments.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and
Wildlife Service, announce the
availability of a draft comprehensive
conservation plan (CCP) and draft
environmental impact statement for the
San Luis Valley National Wildlife
Refuge Complex (refuge complex) in
Alamosa, Rio Grande, and Saguache,
Colorado. In these documents, we
describe alternatives, including our
proposed action alternative, to manage
the refuge complex for the 15 years
following approval of the final CCP.

DATES: To ensure consideration, please
send your written comments by October
27, 2014. We will hold public meetings;
see *Public Meetings* under

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION for dates,
times, and locations.

ADDRESSES: You may submit your
comments or requests for copies or more
information by one of the following
methods. You may request hard copies
or a CD-ROM of the documents.

Email: SLVrefuges@fws.gov. Include
"San Luis Valley National Wildlife
Refuge Complex CCP" in the subject
line of the message.

Fax: Attn: Laurie Shannon, Planning
Team Leader, 303-236-4792.

U.S. Mail: Laurie Shannon, Planning
Team Leader, Division of Refuge
Planning, P.O. Box 25486, Denver, CO
80225-0486.

In-Person Drop-off: You may drop off
comments during regular business hours
at the above address, or at the San Luis
Valley National Wildlife Refuge
Complex administrative office located at
8249 Emperius Road, Alamosa, CO
81101.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
Laurie Shannon, Planning Team Leader,
303-236-4317 (phone) or
laurie_shannon@fws.gov (email); P.O.
Box 25486, Denver Federal Center,
Denver, CO 80225-0486.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Introduction**

With this notice, we continue the CCP
process for the San Luis Valley National

Wildlife Refuge Complex. We started
this process through a notice in the
Federal Register on March 15, 2011 (76
FR 14042). The refuge complex is
located in the San Luis Valley, a high
mountain basin located in Alamosa, Rio
Grande, and Saguache Counties,
Colorado. A wide variety of habitats are
found across the three refuges,
including wet meadows, playa
wetlands, riparian areas within the
flood plain of the Rio Grande and other
creeks, desert shrublands, grasslands,
and croplands. Totalling about 106,000
acres, the refuges are an important
stopover for numerous migratory birds.
The refuges support many groups of
nesting, migrating, and wintering birds,
including grebes, herons, ibis, ducks,
geese, hawks, eagles, falcons,
shorebirds, owls, songbirds, and others.

Background*The CCP Process*

The National Wildlife Refuge System
Administration Act of 1966, as amended
(16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee)
(Administration Act) by the National
Wildlife Refuge System Improvement
Act of 1997, requires us to develop a
CCP for each national wildlife refuge.
The purpose for developing a CCP is to
provide refuge managers with a 15-year
plan for achieving refuge purposes and
contributing toward the mission of the
National Wildlife Refuge System
(NWRS), consistent with sound
principles of fish and wildlife
management, conservation, legal
mandates, and our policies. In addition
to outlining broad management
direction on conserving wildlife and
their habitats, CCPs identify wildlife-
dependent recreational opportunities
available to the public, including, where
appropriate, opportunities for hunting,
fishing, wildlife observation and
photography, and environmental
education and interpretation. We will
review and update the CCP at least
every 15 years in accordance with the
Administration Act.

Public Outreach

We started the public outreach
process in March 2011. At that time and
throughout the process, we requested
public comments and considered them
in numerous ways. Public outreach has
included holding six public meetings,
mailing planning updates, maintaining a
project Web site, and publishing press
releases. We have considered and
evaluated all the comments we have
received during this process.

CCP Alternatives We Are Considering

During the public scoping process
with which we started work on this
draft CCP and EIS, we, other
governmental partners, Tribes, and the
public raised several issues. Our draft
CCP and EIS addresses them. A full
description of each alternative is in the
draft EIS. To address these issues, we
developed and evaluated the following
alternatives, summarized below.

Alternative A: No Action

Habitat and wildlife management:
There would be few changes in
management of habitats and wildlife
populations across the refuge complex
through the manipulation of water. We
would continue to manage wetland
areas, wet meadows, riparian areas, and
upland habitats to provide for a variety
of waterbirds and other migratory birds.
We would continue to protect habitat
for the federally endangered
southwestern willow flycatcher and
other species of concern, including the
Rio Grande sucker and Rio Grande chub
on Baca NWR. We would continue to
produce small grains at current levels
on Monte Vista NWR to provide food for
spring-migrating sandhill cranes. The
management of elk populations would
be limited to nonlethal dispersal, agency
culling, and the distribution hunts on
the former State lands of Baca NWR. We
would phase out the existing
arrangement with The Nature
Conservancy for season-long bison use
within Baca NWR, and we would not
use bison as a management tool in the
future.

Water resources management: We
would continue to manage water in the
same manner, except as modified by
changed State rules, regulations, and
policies, and we would augment water
supplies in accordance with State law.

Visitor services: We would continue
to provide for limited wildlife-
dependent public uses, including
waterfowl and small game hunting on
Monte Vista and Alamosa NWRs. We
would not build new facilities to
support visitor services. Baca NWR
would remain closed to all public access
except for limited guided tours, and
access to refuge offices.

*Cultural resources, partnerships, and
refuge complex operations:* There would
be few changes from current
management. When the legislation
passed authorizing the Baca NWR, it did
not come with additional funding, and
additional operations costs were
absorbed into the current operations.
We would seek some additional staff
and operations funding to support
current management needs.

Wilderness review: We would not recommend protection for any areas having wilderness characteristics or values.

Alternative B: Proposed Action (Wildlife Populations, Strategic Habitat Restoration, and Enhanced Public Uses)

Habitat and wildlife management: Although we would manage wetland and riparian areas within the refuge complex to achieve a variety of wetland types and conditions in order to support a diversity of migratory birds, we would focus on the focal species, including the federally listed southwestern willow flycatcher and other wildlife species like the Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker that represent larger regional and landscape conservation goals. In specific areas, we would restore historical water flow patterns through more effective and efficient water management practices (e.g., moving water to areas that historically held more water). This could include removal or replacement of water infrastructure. We would restore riparian habitat along streams in Baca NWR and along selected areas along the Rio Grande in Alamosa NWR, and we would manage upland habitats to create a variety of conditions to provide for a diversity of wildlife species. We would use public hunting, including elk hunting, to complement the State's management across the refuge complex, with more limited dispersal hunting used on Alamosa and Monte Vista NWRs. We would phase out the existing arrangement with The Nature Conservancy for bison management on Baca NWR, but we would research the feasibility of using semi-free-ranging bison year-round to effectively maintain and enhance refuge habitats. We would continue to grow limited amounts of small grain on Monte Vista NWR to provide food for spring-migrating sandhill cranes.

Water resources management: We would continue to work with other landowners and agencies throughout the watershed to keep flexibility as well as to protect and, if necessary, augment our water rights as State regulations evolve. Our water infrastructure, delivery, and efficiencies would require upgrades to make sure our wildlife, habitat, and visitor services objectives are met.

Visitor services: In addition to allowing for waterfowl and limited small game hunting, we would offer limited elk hunting on Monte Vista and Alamosa NWRs, and we would open Baca NWR for big game and small game hunting. We would improve public access on Monte Vista and Alamosa NWRs, including allowing more access

from approximately July 15 through February 28 for wildlife viewing and interpretation on roads and trails that are currently only open to waterfowl hunters during hunting season. We would also improve existing access. We would seek funding to build a visitor center and refuge complex offices at Monte Vista NWR to provide for safer access to the refuge complex headquarters and to provide for a modern work environment, as well as to offer a place for visitors to come and learn more about the refuge complex resources. We would open Baca NWR for a variety of compatible, wildlife-dependent opportunities, including providing facilities to support them, including an auto tour route, trails, viewing blinds, and offering interpretation and environmental education programs.

Cultural resources, partnerships, and refuge complex operations: We would increase our efforts toward identifying and protecting the significant cultural resources found on the refuge complex. We would work with partners and volunteers to accomplish our objectives, but we would also seek increased staffing levels of both full-time and seasonal employees, as well as increased funding for operations.

Wilderness review: We would recommend protection of about 13,800 acres along the southeastern boundary of Baca NWR and adjacent to Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve that possess wilderness characteristics and values.

Alternative C: Habitat Restoration and Ecological Processes

Habitat and wildlife management: We would take all feasible actions to restore—or mimic, where needed—the native vegetation community, based on ecological site characteristics, ecological processes, and other factors. We would restore the function of the riparian and playa areas on the Baca NWR. Where possible, we would restore natural waterflow patterns. We would phase out and end the production of small grains for migrating sandhill cranes on Monte Vista NWR. Similar to alternative B, we would use hunting to manage elk populations across the refuge complex. Periodically (not annually), we would use bison on Baca NWR to mimic the ecological benefit they may have once provided.

Water resources management: We would manage water to restore the hydrologic conditions, with less focus on habitat management for specific species or for providing wildlife viewing. In some years, water might not be available to meet life cycle needs for

some waterfowl species. Existing water infrastructure would be removed or modified as needed.

Visitor services: We would continue to allow waterfowl and limited small game hunting on the Monte Vista and Alamosa NWRs. Similar to under alternative B, we would open the Baca NWR for big game and small game hunting, whereas, on the Monte Vista and Alamosa NWRs, we would rely on limited public hunting or agency dispersal methods for elk management.

There may be other changes in public use, depending on the habitat management action. Some areas could be closed, or wildlife viewing would be more limited. Current public access would be evaluated on the Alamosa and Monte Vista NWRs. If existing roads or trails are not needed, or if these facilities fragment habitat, they could be removed or altered. Viewing areas for sandhill cranes may be moved, depending on restoration efforts. As under alternative B, on Monte Vista and Alamosa NWRs, we would also allow for additional walking and biking on trails and roads within the hunt boundary from July 15 through February 28. We would not build a refuge headquarters or visitor center on Monte Vista Refuge. Except for limited hunting access to achieve our management objectives, there would be few visitor facilities or programs on Baca NWR, and most of the refuge would remain closed.

Cultural resources, partnerships, and refuge complex operations: Our actions would be similar to those under alternative B, except that on Baca NWR, roads that are not needed or that are fragmenting habitat would be removed.

Wilderness review: This would be the same as under alternative B; we would recommend protection of about 13,800 acres along the southeastern boundary of Baca NWR.

Alternative D: Maximize Public Use Opportunities

Habitat and wildlife management: Under this alternative, our habitat management practices would be a blend of alternatives A and B. We would manage wildlife habitats on the refuge complex consistent with our mission and purposes, while maximizing and emphasizing quality visitor experiences and wildlife-dependent public uses. For example, we could irrigate areas that are closer to public access to facilitate wildlife viewing. We would increase agricultural production of small grains for sandhill cranes on Monte Vista NWR, including the consideration of producing grain in specific places to enhance wildlife viewing. We would offer a variety of opportunities for elk

hunting (e.g., youth hunts or additional provisions for persons with disabilities), managing numbers at levels that would restore and foster the long-term health of native plant communities. We would introduce and manage a small bison herd on a confined area of the Baca NWR, emphasizing wildlife viewing and interpretive opportunities.

Water resources management: We would manage water similar to alternative B, except we would make a concerted effort to make sure there is water in specific areas to enhance wildlife viewing; this practice could require additional augmentation of water.

Visitor services: We would provide for the widest variety of compatible wildlife-dependent recreation. Similar

to under alternative B, public access and visitor programs would be expanded; however, there would be additional trails, viewing blinds, and seasonal auto tour routes across the refuge complex. Subsequently, we would increase interpretation and environmental education opportunities and seek more staff, volunteers, and partnerships to support the visitor services program. We would allow for limited fishing access on Alamosa NWR. We would also consider additional commercial uses.

Cultural resources, partnerships and refuge complex operations: Our actions would be similar to those under alternative B, except there would be greater emphasis on using students and volunteers to help us survey areas with high potential for cultural resources. We

would pursue more outside partnerships and seek to increase staffing and funding to support our refuge complex operations.

Wilderness review: This would be the same as that under alternative B; we would recommend protection of about 13,800 acres along the southeastern boundary of Baca NWR.

Public Availability of Documents

In addition to any one method in ADDRESSES, you can view or obtain documents at the following locations:

- *Our Web site:* http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/planning/ccp/co/alm_bac_mtv/alm_bac_mtv.html.
- *Public libraries:*

Library	Address	Phone number
Alamosa Public Library	300 Hunt Avenue, Alamosa, CO 81101	(719) 589-6592
Carnegie Public Library	120 Jefferson Street, Monte Vista, CO 81144	(719) 852-3931
Baca Grande Library	67487 County Road T, Crestone, CO 81131	(719) 256-4100
Saguache Public Library	702 Pitkin Ave, Saguache, CO 81149	(719) 655-2551

Public Meetings

Opportunity for public input will be provided at public meetings. The specific dates and times for the public meetings are yet to be determined, but will be announced via local media and a planning update.

Submitting Comments/Issues for Comment

We particularly seek comments on the following issues:

- Issue 1—Habitat and wildlife management;
- Issue 2—Water resources management;
- Issue 3—Landscape conservation and protection;
- Issue 4—Visitor services management;
- Issue 5—Partnerships and refuge operations;
- Issue 6—Cultural resources management and tribal coordination;
- Issue 7—Research, science, and wilderness review;

We consider comments substantive if they:

- Question, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of the information in the document;
- Question, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of the environmental assessment;
- Present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the draft EIS; and/or
- Provide new or additional information relevant to the assessment.

Next Steps

After this comment period ends, we will analyze the comments and address them in the form of a final CCP and final EIS.

Public 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.

Dated: July 16, 2014.

Matt Hogan,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

U.S. Geological Survey

[GX14RN00EAA0100]

Agency Information Collection Activities: Request for Comments

AGENCY: U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Interior.

ACTION: Notice of a revision of a currently approved information collection (1028-0100).

SUMMARY: We (the U.S. Geological Survey) will ask the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to approve the information collection (IC) described below. As required by the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, and as part of our continuing efforts to reduce paperwork and respondent burden, we invite the general public and other Federal agencies to take this opportunity to comment on this IC. This collection is scheduled to expire on December 31, 2014.

DATES: To ensure that your comments are considered, we must receive them on or before October 27, 2014.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this information collection to the Information Collection Clearance Officer, U.S. Geological Survey, 12201 Sunrise Valley Drive MS 807, Reston, VA 20192 (mail); (703) 648-7197 (fax); or gs-info_collections@usgs.gov (email). Please reference 'Information Collection 1028-0100, Did You See it?—Report a Landslide' in all correspondence.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rex Baum by mail at U.S. Geological Survey, Denver Federal Center, Box 25046, M.S. 966, Denver, CO 80225-0046, or by telephone at 303-273-8610.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: