



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 4, September 2011



Pronghorn antelope / USFWS

The Draft CCP/EIS is Available for Public Comments

Greetings. Over the past three years, we, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have been considering the comments you provided early in our planning process, and more recently, on the preliminary alternatives, as we developed the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (CCP/EIS).

We are now requesting comments on the Draft CCP/EIS, which is one of the best ways you can provide substantive input for the future management of the Refuge.

How Can I Comment on the Draft CCP/EIS?

You can review a copy of the Draft CCP/EIS on our Web site: www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/ or by visiting a public library in Lakeview, Oregon; Alturas,

California; or Winnemucca or Reno, Nevada. You can also request a CD-ROM copy from us and/or send comments to:

Sheldon-Hart Mountain
National Wildlife Refuge Complex
P.O. Box 111
Lakeview, OR 97630

Using our comment form on <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/main/docs/NV/docssheldon.htm> is another option for providing comments.

Your comments are important to us. Comments must be received by: **November 8, 2011.**

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Summary of the CCP Planning Process

How was the Draft CCP developed?

We developed the Draft CCP/EIS incrementally, by engaging the public, resource experts, and others in our CCP planning process. We held several public meetings, consulted with State and Tribal governments, and announced public comment periods in *Federal Register* notices and planning updates to solicit feedback.

We received thousands of comments in letters, e-mails, phone calls, and at our meetings. Based on the comments we received, we made several revisions to our goals and objectives for managing Refuge resources, to ensure that the least intrusive management actions are conducted within proposed wilderness, and to consider a full range of reasonable alternatives.

How were public comments on the preliminary alternatives addressed in the Draft CCP/EIS?

In June 2010, we distributed Planning Update 3. It included our three preliminary alternatives for public comments, and identified Alternative 2 as our preferred alternative. We received a number of comments, most stated support for or opposition to one or

more of our alternatives, including alternatives for management of feral horses and burros. Some comments were more specific, and we used them to improve our alternatives and our analysis of three issues; Refuge roads, hunting, and fish restocking. Summaries of those comments with our responses in italics, follow.

Refuge Roads. Many existing primitive roads and motorized routes are not needed for wildlife dependent public uses within Sheldon Refuge, and could be causing unacceptable resource impacts, primarily within the Virgin Valley area. *In response, we conducted a more detailed analysis of Refuge roads, and reduced the number of public access roads previously identified in Alternatives 2 and 3.*

Hunting. Include additional species in the Refuge's hunting program, such as coyote, bobcat, and mountain lion. *While we do not currently have sufficient wildlife population data to support a decision to allow additional hunting for the species mentioned, recreational hunting is a priority*

wildlife-dependent public use of the Refuge. Therefore, in response to comments, we are proposing to increase our monitoring of these wildlife populations to obtain adequate data for future decisions, and to meet our management goals in the Draft CCP/EIS.

Fish Restocking. Consider restocking Refuge reservoirs with additional trout species. *In response, we modified Alternatives 2 and 3, to include trout species indigenous to the region—which could include Lahontan cutthroat trout and redband trout—in our restocking efforts.*

What happens after the comment period ends? Once the comment period ends, we will consider the comments we receive, and make appropriate changes to the Final CCP/EIS, including compiling your comments and our responses in an appendix. When the Final CCP/EIS is completed, we will notify you. After it has been available to the public for 30 days, we can issue a Record of Decision announcing which alternative we will implement on the Refuge.

CCP Planning Schedule

Planning Step:

Target Date:

Planning Update 1.....	May 2008	COMPLETED
Public Scoping Meetings.....	May/June 2008	COMPLETED
Planning Update 2.....	April 2009	COMPLETED
Planning Update 3.....	June 2010	COMPLETED
Public review of Draft CCP/EIS/Release Planning Update 4.....	September 2011	CURRENT STEP
Final CCP/EIS and Planning Update 5 available.....	Winter 2011/2012	NEXT STEP
Record of Decision available.....	Winter/Spring 2012	FINAL STEP

Draft CCP/EIS Alternatives

A summary of the three management alternatives we analyzed in the Draft CCP/EIS follows.

Fish and Wildlife Populations		
<i>Management common to all alternatives</i>	<i>Maintain Lahontan cutthroat trout population in Catnip Reservoir.</i>	
Alternative 1, No Action Alternative	Alternative 2, Intensive Management Alternative (our preferred alternative)	Alternative 3, Low Intensity Management Alternative
Continue stocking sterile rainbow trout in Big Spring Reservoir.	Replace rainbow trout in Virgin Creek and Big Spring Reservoir with Lahontan cutthroat trout, and potentially Alvord cutthroat trout populations. Maintain populations through restocking if necessary.	Replace rainbow trout in Big Spring Reservoir with Lahontan cutthroat trout. Discontinue restocking at Big Spring Reservoir.
Continue current fish and wildlife monitoring.	Determine population trends, distribution, and migratory patterns, for priority species such as pronghorn, greater sage grouse, and other sagebrush obligate species. Initiate baseline surveys and/or increase monitoring for bats, reptiles and amphibians, and other species and populations.	Same as Alternative 1.
Feral Horse and Burro Populations		
<i>Management common to all alternatives</i>	<i>Continue to control feral horse and burro populations through gathers, adoption, sanctuary, and contraception.</i>	
	<i>Continue to maintain standard four-strand, wildlife-friendly fencelines along the Refuge boundary to prevent entry of wild horses or burros from surrounding Bureau of Land Management Herd Management Areas.</i>	
Alternative 1, No Action Alternative	Alternative 2, Intensive Management Alternative (our preferred alternative)	Alternative 3, Low Intensity Management Alternative
Maintain relatively stable populations of approximately 800 horses and 90 burros.	Remove all feral horses and burros within 5 years.	Remove all feral horses and burros within 15 years.
Populations controlled through gathers, adoption, sanctuary, and contraception.	In addition to Alternative 1, include the option for sale or auction as a last resort, if other methods of population control are ineffective.	Same as Alternative 1, except more gradual annual population reductions.

Management of Refuge Habitats

<i>Management common to all alternatives</i>	<i>Establish thresholds for amount (percent) of vegetative cover, age class distributions, key habitat components, and other measurable criteria as part of objectives for each major habitat type within the Refuge (See details in the Draft CCP/EIS, in Chapter 2, on pages 2-19 thru 2-38).</i>	
	<i>Use appropriate wildfire management response criteria to determine the most efficient, safe, and cost effective suppression actions for all wildfires within the Refuge.</i>	
	<i>Continue implementation of long-term fire effects monitoring to assess and research effectiveness of restoration efforts, fuels management techniques, and ecosystem health.</i>	
	<i>Except where necessary for the protection of life or property, limit the use of heavy equipment for fire suppression to existing roads and routes.</i>	
Alternative 1, No Action Alternative	Alternative 2, Intensive Management Alternative (our preferred alternative)	Alternative 3, Low Intensity Management Alternative
10-30% of habitats would be managed to meet standards and thresholds included in the Draft CCP	More than 60% of habitats would be managed to meet standards and thresholds included in the Draft CCP, primarily through removal of feral horses and burros within 5 years.	30-60% of habitats would be managed to meet standards and thresholds included in the Draft CCP, primarily through removal of feral horses and burros within 15 years.
Mechanical thinning and prescribed fire treatments would continue to be used to mimic and/or restore natural conditions.	Same as Alternative 1, and increase emphasis on western juniper removal where it is encroaching on habitats. Resume treatments for marshes and wet meadows after horse and burro population objectives are met.	Allow the use of natural fire (when appropriate) to restore natural processes. Minimal use of mechanical thinning or prescribed fire.
Use mechanical treatments, previously burned areas, and natural features to develop fire fuel breaks.	Same as Alternative 1.	Use previously burned areas, natural fire (where appropriate), and natural features to develop fire fuel breaks.
Control noxious weeds and other invasive plants with assistance from partners on a site-by-site basis.	Increase weed control to include road corridors. Emphasize eradication of small infestations and long-term containment and/or control of large infestations.	Emphasize early detection and rapid response to eradicate new and/or small infestations.
No actions to relocate primitive designated campgrounds.	Relocate up to 9 designated campgrounds to reduce impacts to riparian habitats and cultural resources.	Consolidate up to 4 campgrounds with other designated campgrounds.
Limited restoration activities.	Rehabilitate and restore damaged and degraded habitats using intensive management (seedings, erosion control structures, recontouring, etc.) techniques.	Emphasize natural recovery of damaged and degraded habitats.
Use a variety of native and non-native seed in rehabilitation activities.	Use only native seed in rehabilitation activities.	Same as Alternative 1.

Management of Refuge Habitats <i>continued</i>		
Alternative 1, No Action Alternative	Alternative 2, Intensive Management Alternative (our preferred alternative)	Alternative 3, Low Intensity Management Alternative
Continue current plant and habitat monitoring.	Initiate baseline surveys and increase monitoring for aspen, rare plants, microbiotic crusts, and other identified plants and habitats.	Same as Alternative 1.
Assess the Virgin Creek watershed and develop a restoration plan.	Restore and rehabilitate at least one mile of Virgin Creek habitat.	Same as Alternative 1.
Water Control Structures, Diversions, and other Developments		
<i>Management common to all alternatives</i>	<i>Maintain the following water control structures, diversions, and developments to fulfill Sheldon Refuge's purposes and to meet management objectives for fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Swan Lake Reservoir impoundment dam provides vital summer pronghorn antelope forage.</i> • <i>Dufurrena and McGee Ponds, and Catnip Reservoir primarily provide fish and wildlife habitat, and opportunities for compatible wildlife viewing, photography, recreational fishing, and environmental education, as well.</i> • <i>Water control infrastructure at the former IXL Ranch provides migratory bird stop-over habitat.</i> 	
Alternative 1, No Action Alternative	Alternative 2, Intensive Management Alternative (our preferred alternative)	Alternative 3, Low Intensity Management Alternative
Remove up to 4 spring developments.	Remove developments and actively restore at least 20 springs to more natural conditions.	Remove developments and allow at least 20 springs to naturally recover.
Maintain 18 existing wildlife water guzzlers.	Same as Alternative 1.	No guzzlers maintained.
Restore natural conditions to 1 playa. Continue to maintain other playa water developments through routine excavation.	Restore at least 20% of playas to natural conditions. Discontinue maintenance of playa water developments.	Allow all playas to naturally recover.
Remove structures and restore Pond 13.	Same as Alternative 1.	Do not maintain Pond 13 or Big Spring Reservoir.
Historic Structures		
Alternative 1, No Action Alternative	Alternative 2, Intensive Management Alternative (our preferred alternative)	Alternative 3, Low Intensity Management Alternative
Basic inventory of historic structures and other cultural resources as necessary for Refuge projects and activities.	Complete inventory of all historic structures (approximately 12 sites). Increase inventory for other cultural resources.	Same as Alternative 1.
Provide limited protection and interpretation for historic structures.	Convert some structures to overnight fee-use facilities. Protect and interpret remaining structures.	Allow sites to naturally deteriorate over time.

Public Use and Recreation

Alternative 1, No Action Alternative	Alternative 2, Intensive Management Alternative (our preferred alternative)	Alternative 3, Low Intensity Management Alternative
Continue to use existing facilities for public contact, visitor outreach, and environmental education.	Construct more accessible and efficient visitor facilities along Highway 140, including a visitor contact station, interpretive trail, and self-guided auto tour route.	Same as Alternative 1.
Maintain designated campgrounds at the existing level of development.	Construct additional improvements at Virgin Valley, Catnip, and Big Spring campgrounds and implement campsite fees.	Same as Alternative 1.
Continue to allow the public to use vehicles on 467 miles of roads and routes throughout Sheldon Refuge to allow continued public vehicle use.	Designate 551 miles of roads and routes throughout Sheldon Refuge for vehicle use by the public.	Designate 593 miles of roads and routes throughout Sheldon Refuge for vehicle use by the public.
Allow Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs) on Refuge roads and routes open to public use of vehicles.	Same as Alternative 1 and require OHV operators to register their vehicles with Sheldon Refuge.	Same as Alternative 1
Continue to allow rock-hounding with collection of up to 7 pounds of rock per person per day.	Same as Alternative 1 and increase law enforcement and education to minimize collection of artifacts and fossils.	Require Special Use Permits for rock-hounding.

Wilderness Recommendations

<i>Management common to all alternatives</i>	<i>Consider all currently proposed wilderness areas and all wilderness study areas for possible recommendation (approximately 439,200 acres).</i>	
Alternative 1, No Action Alternative	Alternative 2, Intensive Management Alternative (our preferred alternative)	Alternative 3, Low Intensity Management Alternative
Recommend existing wilderness proposal of approximately 341,500 acres, identified in 1974.	Recommend 341,598 acres for designation as wilderness, which includes part of (262,745 acres) the existing wilderness proposal developed in 1974.	Recommend 236,791 acres for designation as wilderness, which includes part of (193,966 acres) the existing wilderness proposal developed in 1974.

Overview of Management Alternatives

We considered three alternatives for managing the Refuge, and selected Alternative 2 as our preferred alternative for the following reasons.

- It best fulfills the mission of the Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- It best achieves the Refuge's purposes.
- It best implements national regulations and policies for management of the Refuge and its resources.

A summary of each alternative follows.

Alternative 1 (the no action alternative). Under Alternative 1, our current management activities would continue for maintaining populations of feral horses and burros within the Refuge, and using prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to achieve habitat management objectives.

Current public uses would continue, but few actions would be taken to expand public uses or reduce ongoing resource impacts from those uses.

Alternative 2 (the Service's preferred alternative). Under Alternative 2, most of the habitat management goals and objectives would be accomplished by removing all feral horses and burros from the Refuge over a period of five years. We would focus other habitat management actions on removing western juniper that is encroaching into sagebrush habitat, more targeted and aggressive control of noxious weeds, and restoration of springs and riparian habitats.

Current public uses would continue, but we would undertake a variety of actions to reduce or minimize resource impacts, and to increase public education and awareness about resource impacts

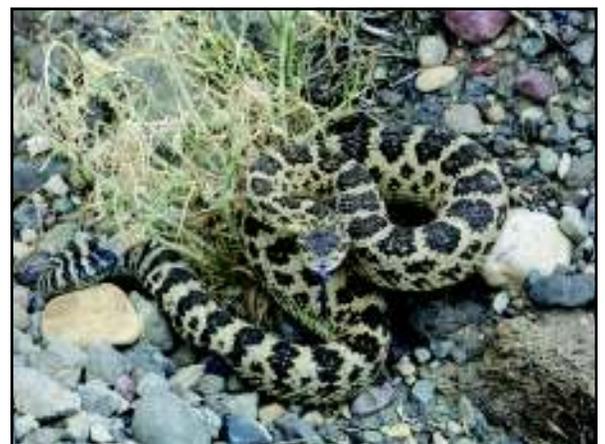
such as improving or relocating the visitor contact station, campgrounds, and roads.

Alternative 3 (less intensive Refuge management). Under Alternative 3, most of the habitat management goals and objectives would be accomplished by removing all feral horses and burros from the Refuge over a period of 10-15 years. We would focus other habitat management actions on creating conditions where natural processes, such as fire, could be allowed more frequently with less dependence on prescribed fire and other intensive management actions.

Other habitat management actions would occur, emphasizing natural restoration and recovery over intensive management actions. Current public uses would continue, but some facilities would be consolidated, and some uses would be curtailed instead of relying on more intensive improvements or relocation efforts to reduce resource impacts.



Lower Virgin Creek / Gail H. Collins, USFWS



Western rattlesnake / Aaron Collins, USFWS



Sheldon-Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex
P.O. Box 111
Lakeview, OR 97630

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How Do I Contact the Refuge?

You may send us comments or questions by any of the following methods.

Mail

John Kasbohm, Project Leader
Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 111
Lakeview, OR 97630

Fax 541-947-4414

Website

<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/main/docs/NV/docssheldon.htm>

**Comments must be
received by
November 8, 2011.**

To help us reduce our use of paper, you can request e-mail updates instead of receiving paper copies.
Please e-mail your request to: SheldonCCP@fws.gov