Chapter 2. Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

Mountain view across North Marsh at Pahranagat National Wildlife Refuge

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2.1 Planning Process Overview

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex) were prepared in accordance with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) planning policies and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This chapter describes the planning process for CCP development. Figure 2.1-1 diagrams the CCP planning process. Key steps in the planning process include:

- Forming the planning team and conducting preplanning;
- Initiating public involvement and scoping;
- Identifying issues and developing vision and goal statements for each refuge;
- Developing alternative management actions and assessing their environmental effects;
- Identifying the preferred alternative;
- Publishing the Draft EIS/CCP; and
- Revising the Draft EIS/CCP and publishing the Final EIS and separate CCP.

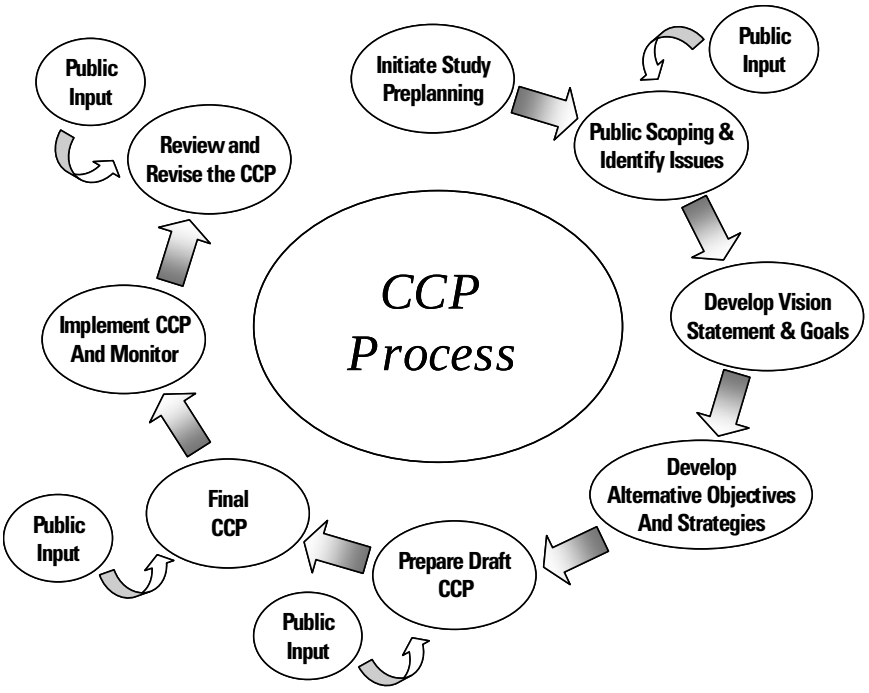

Figure 2.1-1. The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

Preliminary CCP planning began in the spring of 2002, and the official process began in the fall of the same year. A core planning team was established to prepare the CCP and EIS. Planners, biologists, and archaeologists from the Service's consultant (SWCA) also helped with the planning effort. Meetings were held throughout the process to discuss various planning issues and develop vision statements, goals, objectives, strategies, and alternative management actions.

An Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) comprising staff from the Service and other federal, state, and local agencies, which consists of cooperating agencies and extended planning team members, was formed to provide information and support during development of the CCP and EIS. Input from the IDT involved various forms of communication (emails, meetings, and phone conversations), and team members were invited to review and provide comments on the administrative draft document. Meetings were held throughout the process, as discussed below under Section 2.2 (Public, Agency, and Tribal Involvement). The team included staff members from the following agencies and organizations in addition to the Service:

Federal

- U.S. Air Force – Nellis Air Force Base (USAF–NAFB; Cooperating Agency)
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM; Cooperating Agency)
- U.S. National Park Service (NPS), including Death Valley National Park (Cooperating Agency) and Lake Mead National Recreation Area
- U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration Central Federal Lands

State

- Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW; Cooperating Agency)
- Nevada Division of Forestry
- Nevada State Historic Preservation Office

Local

- Clark County
- Lincoln County
- Nye County
- City of North Las Vegas
- City of Las Vegas
- Southern Nevada Water Authority

Consolidated Group of Tribes and Organizations (CGTO)

- Benton Paiute Indian Tribe
- Bishop Paiute Indian Tribe
- Chemehuevi Indian Tribe

- Colorado River Indian Tribes
- Duckwater Shoshone Tribe
- Ely Shoshone Tribe
- Fort Independence Indian Tribe
- Kaibab Band of Southern Paiutes
- Las Vegas Indian Center
- Las Vegas Paiute Tribe
- Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe
- Moapa Band of Paiutes
- Pahrump Paiute Tribe
- Paiute Indian Tribes of Utah
- Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley
- Timbisha Shoshone Tribe
- Yomba Shoshone Tribe

2.2 Public, Agency, and Tribal Involvement

Consultation and coordination with interested parties was an important part of the planning and EIS process. Chapter 6, Compliance, Consultation, and Coordination with Others, provides details on consultation and coordination with others throughout the process. Public involvement activities and planning issues raised through these activities are described briefly below.

On August 21, 2002, the Service published a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register for the preparation of an EIS for the Desert Complex CCP. The NOI gave notice of public meetings and encouraged interested parties to become involved in the process. Five meetings were held in southern Nevada in September 2002 (see Chapter 6, Compliance, Consultation, and Coordination with Others). Planning updates were also distributed throughout the planning process; details on these updates as well as other public, agency, and tribal correspondence are provided in Chapter 6.

An interagency scoping meeting was held on August 28, 2002. Cooperating agencies and agencies with interests in and/or responsibilities for resources within the Desert Complex were invited to provide comments on issues that should be analyzed during development of the CCP and EIS. Interagency planning team meetings were held on March 11, 2003, July 10, 2003, and February 22, 2006, to solicit input and feedback on various aspects of the planning process, including alternatives development and reviewing early versions of the document.

The Service has a unique relationship with affiliated tribes that involves a trust responsibility unlike that of the general public. The Service has engaged in meetings with affiliated tribes and solicited input from the CGTO during the planning process. Tribal coordination meetings were held on April 7–8, 2004, June 18–19, 2005, and June 22–23, 2006. At these meetings, Service staff acquainted tribal

representatives with the refuges and the planning process and obtained input on planning issues. The CGTO's Document Review Committee has reviewed and provided comments on the administrative draft document as well as on the cultural resources overview prepared in support of the environmental document.

2.3 Planning Issues

Based on input from the public, agencies, and affiliated tribes, the following planning issues have guided the development of alternatives and preparation of the Draft CCP/EIS. These issues are discussed in the public scoping report, available on the Service's Web site at http://www.fws.gov/desertcomplex/ccp.htm.

2.3.1 Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

- Endemic and Federally Listed Species
  - Upland Habitat Management: How many acres of upland habitat for endemic species should be restored? How can upland habitat for endemic species best be managed?
  - Baseline Data: How much restoration baseline data should be collected? How can the Service collect baseline data on wildlife (sensitive and non-sensitive)?
  - Vegetation: How can the Service gather information on historic vegetation on the Refuge?
  - Riparian Restoration: How many miles of riparian vegetation should be restored?
  - Carson Slough Restoration: How many acres of the historic Carson Slough system should be restored?
  - Springs and Outflow Systems: What level of restoration is required for the spring systems that are essential habitat for Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish, Warm Springs pupfish, and Ash Meadows speckled dace?
  - Pest Management: How should invasive plant and wildlife species be managed?
  - Fire Management: What is the Refuge's fire history?
  - Water Resources Management: How can water resources for the Refuge best be protected and managed?
  - Federally Listed Species Monitoring: How intensively should the Service monitor the status of federally listed species?
  - Refuge Expansion: Should the Service pursue acquisition of remaining private lands within the approved Refuge boundary from wiling sellers?
  - Natural Resources Protection: Should existing roadways and parking areas be improved?
- Fire and Fuels Management
  - Wildland/Urban Interface: What steps need to be taken to provide protection to constructed values at risk in and near the Refuge?

- Fire Use: How, when, and where should fire be used as a tool to improve or maintain native plant/animal habitat or to reduce hazardous fuels?
- Management: Which appropriate management responses are suitable for use on the Refuge and under what conditions?

- Research
  - Research: What opportunities should be provided for research that supports Refuge and Service objectives?
- Visitor Services
  - Environmental Education: How should environmental education opportunities be expanded?
  - Interpretation: How should interpretive opportunities be expanded on the Refuge?
  - Outreach: What is the best way to expand outreach opportunities?
  - Visitor Services: Can opportunities for wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and recreation be expanded? Should Crystal Reservoir be open for swimming and fishing?
  - Hunting: Should opportunities for waterfowl and upland game hunting be reduced? Can hunting opportunities be improved in terms of quality? Can opportunities for waterfowl and upland game hunting be expanded? Can hunt boundaries be clarified and identified for visitors?
  - Public Access: Should main roads through the Refuge be paved? Should all-terrain vehicles be allowed by permit or during special events?
- Cultural Resources
  - Management: How can cultural resources on the Refuge best be managed?
  - Interpretation: How should cultural resources interpretation opportunities be expanded?
  - Protection: How can vandalism at known cultural resources sites be reduced?
- Refuge Management
  - Staffing: What additional staff is needed to manage Refuge?
  - Cooperative Agreements: Should cooperative agreements be established with other agencies or land owners?
- Climate Change
  - Management: How will the Refuge be affected by climate change? What should the Service do to address impacts of climate change on Refuge resources? Would the Service's actions contribute to climate change?

2.3.2 Desert National Wildlife Refuge

- Bighorn Sheep Management
  - Population: What subpopulation objectives for bighorn sheep should be established?

- Habitat Management: What measures should be taken to prevent unauthorized uses?
- Population Management: What steps should be taken to maintain subpopulations?
- Monitoring: How many helicopter surveys should be conducted?

- Wildlife Diversity
  - Baseline Inventories and Monitoring: What types of wildlife monitoring and surveys should be implemented?
  - Resource Protection: What measures should be taken to prevent unauthorized uses?
  - Corn Creek Restoration: What actions should be taken to restore Corn Creek springs?
  - Predator Control: Can a predator control program be developed?
  - Guzzlers: Should more guzzlers be created on the Refuge? Can existing guzzlers be better maintained?
- Fire and Fuels Management
  - Wildland/Urban Interface: What steps need to be taken to provide protection to constructed values at risk in and near the Refuge?
  - Fire History: What was the Refuge's fire history and what role did fire play in creating and maintaining native plant/animal communities?
  - Fire Use: How, when, and where should fire be used as a tool to improve or maintain native plant/animal habitat or to reduce hazardous fuels?
  - Management: Which appropriate management responses are suitable for use on the Refuge and under what conditions?
  - Natural Fire: Where, for what purpose, and under what conditions should naturally ignited fires be allowed to burn in order to achieve resource benefits?
- Specialty Management Areas
  - U.S. Air Force Overlay: Should any changes be made to the U.S. Air Force Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) when it is updated?
  - Research Natural Areas (RNAs): What types of research and monitoring activities in RNAs should occur?
  - Wilderness: How many acres should be recommended for wilderness designation?
  - Pinyon-Juniper Habitat Management: How can prescribed burns in pinyon-juniper habitat be designed to best consider wildlife habitat needs?
  - Energy Corridor: How would the proposed West-Wide Energy Corridor affect the Refuge?
- Visitor Services
  - Environmental Education and Interpretation: What quantitative visitor objectives should be established? How

should environmental education and interpretation activities be expanded? Can a museum be provided at Corn Creek?

- Outreach: How should outreach opportunities be expanded?
- Wildlife observation and photography: How should wildlife observation and photography opportunities be expanded? How can access for wildlife observation be increased?
- Hunting: How should the existing hunt program be maintained? How can a representative of culturally affiliated tribes participate in the annual hunting of one bighorn sheep per year? Can hunting opportunities be more flexible during extreme weather situations? Can hunt boundaries be clarified and identified for visitors?
- Public Access: Should all-terrain vehicles be allowed? Can roads be regularly maintained and identified as closed or open?

- Cultural Resources
  - Management: How can cultural resources on the Refuge best be managed?
  - Interpretation: How should cultural resources interpretation opportunities be expanded?
  - Protection: How can vandalism at known cultural resources sites be reduced?
- Refuge Management
  - Staffing: What additional staff is needed to manage Refuge?
  - Research: What research opportunities are available on the Refuge?
  - Cooperative Agreements: Should cooperative agreements be established with other agencies or land owners?
- Climate Change
  - Management: How will the Refuge be affected by climate change? What should the Service do to address impacts of climate change on Refuge resources? Would the Service's actions contribute to climate change?

2.3.3 Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge

- Endemic and Special-Status Species
  - Habitat Restoration: How can habitat for endemic and special-status species best be restored?
  - Wildlife Inventory: How intensively should the Service inventory wildlife?
  - Water Resources: How should Refuge water resources be monitored and managed? What are the effects on off-Refuge water use?
  - Moapa Dace Habitat Protection: What activities should be undertaken to protect Moapa dace habitat?
  - Vegetation: Are palm trees native? Should palm trees be removed from streams to reduce impacts to fish and minimize fire potential?

- Refugium: Should a refugium be created on the Refuge?

- Fire and Fuels Management
  - Wildland/Urban Interface: What steps need to be taken to provide protection to constructed values at risk in and near the Refuge?
  - Fire Use: How, when, and where should fire be used as a tool to improve or maintain native plant/animal habitat or to reduce hazardous fuels?
  - Management: Which appropriate management responses are suitable for use on the Refuge and under what conditions? Should fire hydrants be placed on the Refuge?
- Visitor Services
  - Visitor Services: How many visitors should be targeted? How should environmental education and interpretation activities be expanded?
  - Swimming: Should the pools be open and accessible for swimming?
  - Outreach: Can programs be developed for Moapa Valley residents to visit the Refuge?
- Refuge Management
  - Staffing: What additional staff is needed to manage Refuge?
  - Research: What research opportunities are available on the Refuge?
  - Cooperative Agreements: Should cooperative agreements be established with other agencies or land owners?
- Climate Change
  - Management: How will the Refuge be affected by climate change? What should the Service do to address impacts of climate change on Refuge resources? Would the Service's actions contribute to climate change?

2.3.4 Pahranagat National Wildlife Refuge

- Wetland Habitat
  - Open Water Habitat: How should Upper Lake water levels be managed and carp populations reduced?
  - Restoration of Springs and Outflow Systems: What level of restoration is required for the spring systems that are essential habitat for Pahranagat speckled dace?
  - Marsh Habitat: How should seasonal marshes be flooded to maintain marsh habitat?
  - Wet Meadow Habitat: Should wet meadow habitat be improved by applying water year-round?
  - Alkali Flats Habitat: How many months should alkali flats habitat be maintained?
  - Water Resources Management: How can water resources for the Refuge best be managed? How can pending water rights be addressed?

- Invasive Vegetation: How can invasive vegetation be managed—grazing or fire?

- Wildlife Diversity
  - Southwestern Willow Flycatcher/Riparian Habitat: How many acres of new habitat should be established or restored?
  - Sandhill Cranes/Grassland Habitat/Agriculture: How many acres of new habitat should be established or restored?
  - Pahranagat Roundtail Chub/Aquatic Refugium: Should a roundtail chub refugium be constructed?
  - Speckled Dace: How can springs and seep/outflow systems be restored and managed?
  - Waterfowl: Should a percentage of the Refuge be identified for waterfowl use? How can waterfowl be managed to achieve Refuge purpose and address trust resource responsibilities under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act?
- Fire and Fuels Management
  - Wildland/Urban Interface: What steps need to be taken to provide protection to constructed values at risk in and near the Refuge?
  - Fire History: What is the Refuge's fire history and what role did fire play in creating and maintaining native plant/animal communities?
  - Fire Use: How, when, and where should fire be used as a tool to improve or maintain native plant/animal habitat or to reduce hazardous fuels?
  - Management: Which appropriate management responses are suitable for use on the Refuge and under what conditions?
- Visitor Services
  - Hunting: Should current harvest levels be maintained?
  - Fishing: Should sport-fishing opportunities be increased? How should fishing be managed?
  - Camping: Can more areas be developed for camping? Should a fee system be used?
  - Wildlife Observation and Photography: How many visitors should be targeted? How should wildlife observation and photography opportunities be increased?
  - Interpretation, Environmental Education, and Outreach: How can interpretation, environmental education, and outreach opportunities be increased?
  - Hunting: Can hunt boundaries be clarified and identified for visitors?
- Cultural Resources
  - Management: How can cultural resources on the Refuge best be managed?
  - Interpretation: How should cultural resources interpretation opportunities be expanded?

- Protection: How can vandalism at known cultural resources sites be reduced?

- Refuge Management
  - Staffing: What additional staff is needed to manage the Refuge?
  - Research: What research opportunities are available on the Refuge?
  - Cooperative Agreements: Should cooperative agreements be established with other agencies or land owners?
- Climate Change
  - Management: How will the Refuge be affected by climate change? What should the Service do to address impacts of climate change on Refuge resources? Would the Service's actions contribute to climate change?

2.4 Development of Refuge Vision Statements and Goals

As part of the CCP process, the refuge managers, with assistance from the core planning team, developed vision statements and goals for each refuge to guide them in developing alternative management actions for analysis in the EIS. Refuge vision statements and goals are provided in Chapter 1. This section provides an overview of the process for developing the vision statements and goals.

2.4.1 Vision Statements

Prior to the start of the CCP process, each refuge had a purpose that was established by law, but none of the refuges had specific vision statements or management goals. The planning process started with the core planning team developing a vision statement for each refuge consistent with the refuge's purpose. The vision statement is a concise statement of what the refuge should be, based primarily on the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) mission and specific refuge purposes.

2.4.2 Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Alternatives

Following development of the vision statement, the core planning team developed a statement of goals for each refuge. A wide range of management objectives and strategies to achieve those goals was then developed by the extended planning team and clustered into logical groupings to form the action alternatives for each refuge. In addition, a no-action alternative was developed for each refuge, as required by NEPA, and to serve as a baseline for the action alternatives. For each refuge, one of the action alternatives was selected as the preferred alternative.

Goals and alternatives for each refuge are summarized in Chapter 3, Alternatives, and detailed descriptions of the goals, objectives, and strategies for the Preferred Alternative for each refuge are provided in Appendix F.

Key planning terms used in the CCP are defined as follows:

- Goal: a broad statement of desired future conditions that conveys a purpose.
- Objective: a concise statement of specific desired results, preferably quantified.
- Management Action/Strategy: a specific action used to achieve an objective.
- Alternative: different sets of management actions to achieve refuge goals.

2.4.3 Screening Criteria for Alternatives

Throughout the planning process, several objectives and management actions suggested through public input or by Service staff were eliminated from detailed evaluation in the CCP and EIS. Factors used to screen alternatives included:

- Inconsistency with the NWRS mission;
- Inconsistency with refuge purpose, vision, or goals;
- Excessive costs; and
- Infeasibility due to technical, legal, or other factors.

The management actions eliminated from further consideration for each refuge are listed in Chapter 3, Alternatives, with the rationale for their elimination.