

Final Environmental Assessment

**Disposal
of the
Roosevelt Upland Bird Management Unit
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources**

Duchesne County, Utah

Decision Relating
to Federal Assistance Grant
#W-42-L

March 19, 2008

Prepared by

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

and the

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Division of Wildlife and
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Denver, Colorado

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PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of this proposed action is dispose of 117.38 acres of land, known as the Roosevelt Upland Bird Management Unit (Roosevelt Unit), owned by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR). Disposal of this land is being pursued to eliminate land with minimal wildlife habitat value and isolated holdings, and reduce administrative costs. The property is located 2.5 miles north-northwest of Roosevelt City, Duchesne County, Utah.

BACKGROUND

A 117.38-acre tract initially known as the “Roosevelt Upland Bird Sanctuary” and 46.5 shares of irrigation stock in the Dry Gulch Irrigation Company were acquired by the Utah Fish and Game Department (predecessor of the DWR) on May 28, 1948 from J. William and Moselle Mae McArthur through Federal Aid Grant Agreement W-42-L with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Federal funds provided 75% of the cost of the land and water Share purchase.

The property and water were purchased to provide habitat for ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) and California quail (*Callipepla californica*) production. Hunting was expressly prohibited on the property. Under the terms of the original agreement DWR had to manage the property as “an inviolate sanctuary.” Surplus birds were to be trapped for relocation and released into other hunting areas. In the early 1950’s, this management approach was re-examined, the property was re-identified as a “management unit,” and open hunting seasons were established. During that time, small grains were produced on the property and used as feed for captive chukars (*Alectoris chukar*) that were being pen-reared as part of DWR’s chukar rearing and release operation. Because rearing and release of game birds was ultimately found to be of limited benefit in terms of long-term improvement in hunter success and game bird population levels, DWR discontinued their upland bird rearing and release efforts in the mid-1980’s.

For some time, the Roosevelt property continued to function as an easily-accessible hunting area in an increasingly residential patchwork of agricultural lands and homes. Over time, many homes were constructed near the property and a substantial portion of the parcel could no longer provide hunting opportunities since Utah law stipulates that firearms may not be discharged within 600 feet of homes or other buildings without the written consent of the owner. Eventually DWR decided that the Roosevelt property should be disposed due to its limited wildlife value and inability to serve as a hunting area.

In 1981, DWR obtained a Grant Agreement Amendment from the Service authorizing disposal of the tract and the 46.5 shares of water. For various reasons, however, DWR did not follow through on the disposal of the property at that time.

Currently, construction of residential homes is again increasing near Roosevelt City and the Roosevelt Unit. This continues to degrade any value of the parcel as wildlife habitat. Therefore, DWR has decided to again pursue disposal of the property.

DWR’s proposed disposal of the 117.38-acre Roosevelt Unit requires approval of the Service and is considered a Federal action subject to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy

Act of 1969, as amended. This act requires the Service to analyze the effects their actions may have and to document those findings prior to deciding on a final course of action. The Service will use this environmental assessment as the basis for determining if the proposed action is likely to result in significant impacts to the environment. If it is determined that none are likely, the Service would issue a finding of no significant impact, or “FONSI,” and move ahead with a grant amendment. If it is determined, conversely, that significant impacts might occur, the Service would be required to prepare an environmental impact statement for a more detailed assessment if potential impacts on the human environment.

ALTERNATIVES

Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative is to sell the 117.38-acre parcel and the 46.5 shares of water purchased in part with Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program funds on the open market. An additional 40 shares of water, purchased solely with State funds, would be sold concurrently. The water shares are not transferable out of the irrigation company and instead can only be sold with the approval of the irrigation company, for use within the company’s service area.

The revenue would be held, accruing interest, and reinvested within three years of sale toward an as-yet unidentified property which would have to be approved in a subsequent Federal Aid grants. If other wildlife properties could not be identified and approved for acquisition in a subsequent Federal Aid grant prior during the three-year period, the sale proceeds and accrued interest would be credited back to DWR’s Wildlife Restoration Act Grant W-65-M for use in other projects.

The market value of the property (land and water) would be established through preparation of a complete, self-contained appraisal report by a State-certified appraiser. The appraisal would comply with the provisions of both the *Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions* and the *Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice*. The appraisal report and its conclusions then would be reviewed by an independent State-certified appraiser. Once the original appraiser and the reviewer reach concurrence on the appraised values, the Service would issue a grant amendment allowing DWR to sell the property based on the current market value.

No Action

The “No Action” would consist of DWR maintaining ownership of the land or water shares and managing it in its current condition.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The property proposed for disposal is a 117.38-acre tract comprising lots 6 and 7, and the SE ¼ of the SW ¼ of Section 6, T2S, R1W, Uintah Special Base & Meridian, in Duchesne County; and 46.5 water shares owned in the Dry Gulch Irrigation Company.

Physical Resources

Water

The Roosevelt Unit is traversed by a two historic stream courses which consist of “trickles” fed largely by irrigation return flows from surrounding lands and from the irrigated portions of the Roosevelt Unit. No other aquatic resources occur on the property.

Prime and Unique Farmland

There are no prime or unique farmlands, nor any farmlands of statewide significance, located on or near the Roosevelt property.

Biological Resources

Vegetation

A good portion of the property is farmed with crops of grass hay, alfalfa, and small grains. Other portions of the property are heavily modified pasture or rangeland consisting of various grass and forb species, shrubs such as sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp.) and greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*); and a few cottonwood and willow trees. Another portion of the property is second growth vegetation consisting of weeds and grasses that have reinvaded areas previously cut or heavily modified by human activity during historic periods. (See the Appendix A-1 for aerial photos of the area.)

Wildlife

The property is inhabited by a small number of few ring-necked pheasants, California quail, and common passerine species which frequent farm landscapes of eastern Utah. The land serves as winter habitat of marginal quality for mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) as there is little cover or forage available.

Fish and Other Aquatic Species

This property is not a site capable of supporting fish or other aquatic species, with the exception of aquatic insect life and a few common amphibian species.

Federally-listed Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate Species, and State Sensitive Species

In Duchesne County the following federally listed species may occur in the county: Barney Ridge-cress (*Lepidium barnebyanum*); Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*); Bonytail (*Gila elegans*); Canada Lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*); Colorado Pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*); Humpback Chub (*Cila cypha*); Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*); Razorback Sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*); Shrubby Reed-mustard (*Schoenocrambe suffrutescens*); Uinta Basin Hookless Cactus (*Sclerocactus glaucuc*); Ute Ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*); and

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*).

No Federally-listed species are found on the site and the site does not provide any habitat needs for listed species.

Although not residing on the Roosevelt Unit specifically, the Utah Natural Heritage data indicate that white-tailed prairie-dogs (*Cynomys leucurus*), a *Wildlife Action Plan* Tier II species, occur in one colony less than one-quarter mile west of the property, and several others occur one to three miles north of the parcel. The prairie dogs west of the Unit feed mainly in the private agricultural field and idle lands surrounding it but have likely occasionally foraged on the Unit as well.

Goodrich penstemon (*Penstemon goodrichii*), ranked as S2/G2 in the Natural Heritage Program, occurs one mile south-southeast and one mile north of the Unit. These populations comprise the western outlying location for the species in the state. Although no specimens are known on the Unit, appropriate habitat for the penstemon occurs there

Historical and Cultural Resources

A cultural resources database search did not disclose any features eligible for the National Register on the Unit, although one lithic scatter was recorded within a mile to the south.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

DWR proposes to sell the Roosevelt Unit property on the open market. Consequently, it is impossible to foretell all possible future activities on the land. However, based on the home building activity and market interest in the surrounding area, it is reasonable to assume that the most likely use of the property following its sale is as residential development.

Physical Resources

Water

The sale of the Unit and potential development of residential housing and associated landscaping would be anticipated to eventually impact the two historic stream courses. Because these channels account for negligible flows and do not support any notable populations of aquatic species, the effects would be considered minor.

Prime and Unique Farmland

Because no prime or unique farmland occurs on the property, no effects would occur.

Biological Resources

Vegetation

The sale of the Unit and potential development of residential housing and associated landscaping would be expected to result in a reduction of natural vegetative species and an increase in landscape vegetation, which ultimately could modify invertebrate and vertebrate species inhabiting the parcel and the value of the property as habitat.

Wildlife

The sale of the Unit and potential development of residential housing and associated landscaping and increase in human disturbance would be anticipated to reduce any potential wildlife use of the property. Because the parcel currently provides little wildlife benefit, the reduction would not be expected to have significant effects on wildlife populations across the general area.

Fish and other Aquatic Species

Because the stream channels on the Unit do not support any notable populations of aquatic species (fish or invertebrates), the effects would be considered minor.

Federally-listed Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate Species, and State Sensitive Species

Because no Federally-listed threatened, endangered, or candidate species or habitat occur on the property, no effects from the proposed action would occur.

Similarly, no white-tailed prairie dogs or Goodrich penstemon are found on the property; consequently, sale of the Unit and potential development of residential housing and associated landscaping would have no effect on these species.

Historical and Cultural Resources

Prior to selling the Unit, a cultural and historic resource survey would be carried out by a Utah State Historic Preservation Officer-permitted archaeologist to locate and record historic features that might exist on the property. If any historic artifacts eligible for listing on the National Historic Register are located, they will be protected by covenants to the deed which would run with the property in perpetuity. Consequently, any impacts to potentially-occurring historic resources would be mitigated or avoided.

Cumulative Impacts

Suburban encroachment is impacting wildlife habitats in the general area, although not as predominantly as in places such as the Wasatch Front where the human population is substantially higher. The Roosevelt tract is already impacted by suburban development. Disposal of the Roosevelt Upland Bird Management Unit likely will result in some increase in

residential development close by. The low wildlife values observed by DWR combined with wildlife values in the surrounding area might result in additional impacts to wildlife habitat in general. These negligible impacts to wildlife use and habitat are not considered to have a significant impact on the human environment.

While beyond the scope of the present analysis or proposed action the impact of population growth and land development in the general vicinity are beyond the control of DWR and are contributing to a reduction in wildlife values in the area of the Roosevelt tract.

Public Involvement

The EA was released for a 15-day public review period via a statewide news release and was also available on the Service's Region 6 website. The comment period ended on March 15, 2008, and no comments were received. The FONSI will be made available to the public through a statewide public news release and will be posted on the Service's Region 6 website at <http://mountainprairie.fws.gov/federalassistance>. The EA is on file at the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration, 134 Union Boulevard, Lakewood, Colorado, 80228, and is available for public review upon request.

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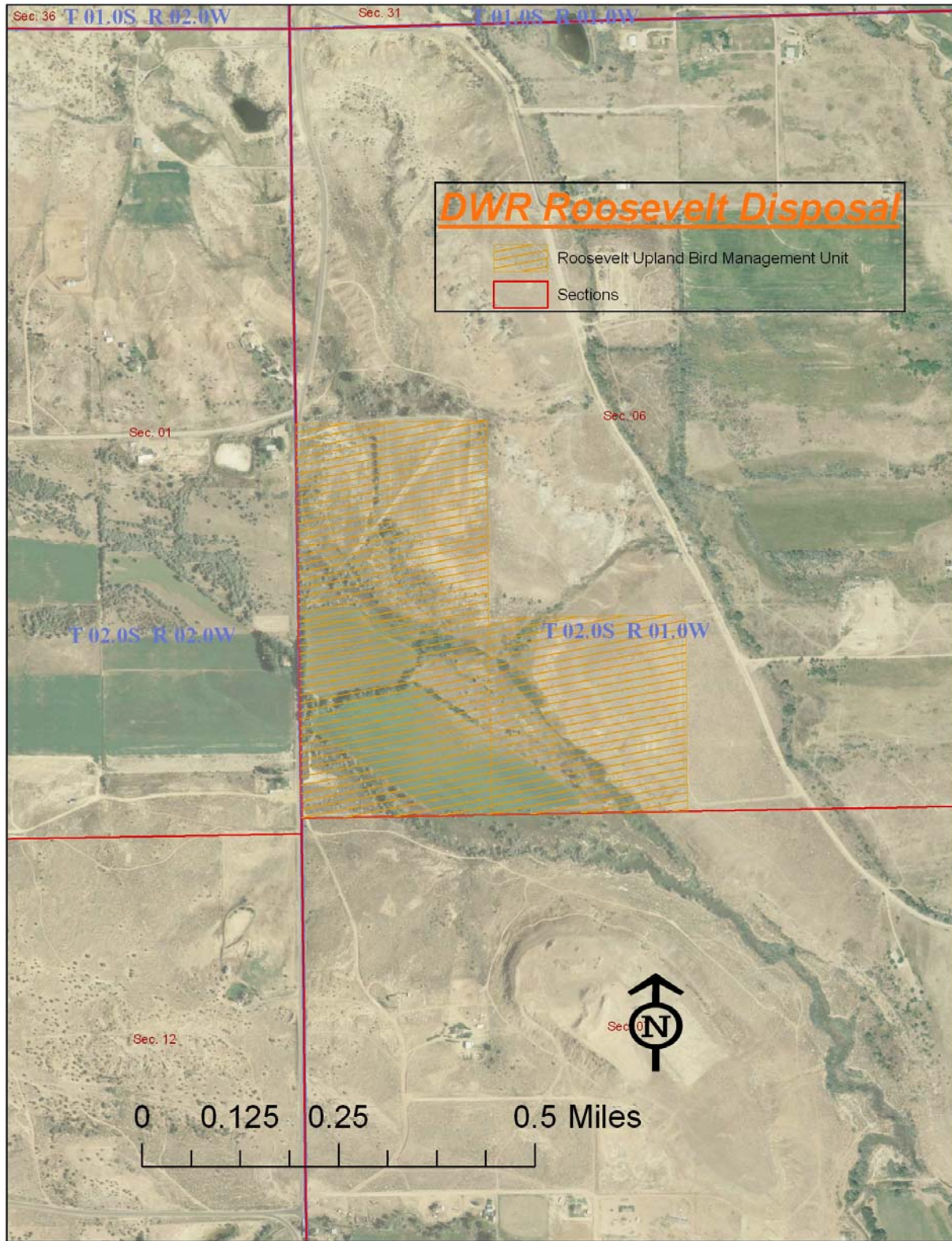


Figure A-1. Map of project area using National Agricultural Inventory Program (NAIP) imagery gathered in 2006.

Figure A-2. Aerial imagery (1-ft. resolution) obtained from Duchesne County, showing DWR disposal property.

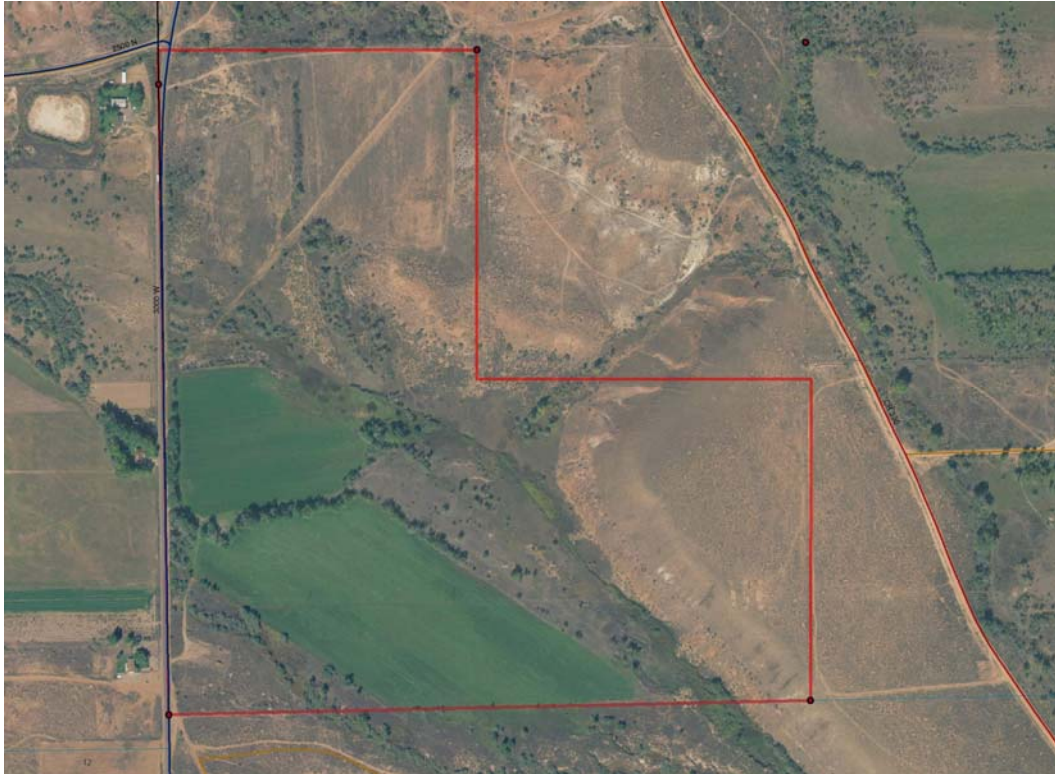


Figure A-3. View to the east-northeast from slightly south of center of western edge of the more southerly agricultural field on the DWR tract. Note two-pole powerline running east to west. The rock strata visible along the toe-slope of the bluff may contain rock art, if any ultimately is found on the DWR tract (image taken in Spring 2007; snow covers the landscape, presently).



Figure A-4. View to the east from southwest corner of DWR tract. Shows greasewood shrubs and decadent haystack in the mid-ground. The two-pole powerline is visible in the background.



Figure A-5. New home built directly across the street from the DWR tract. Image taken in Spring 2007.

