

# Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex

*Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan  
and Environmental Impact Statement*

**Volume 1**



**Disclaimer**

CCPs provide long term guidance for management decisions and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes and identify the Service's best estimate of future needs. These plans detail program planning levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning and program prioritization purposes. The plans do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.

# **Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

## **Ash Meadows, Desert, Moapa Valley, and Pahranagat National Wildlife Refuges**

### *Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement Volume I – July 2008*

#### **National Wildlife Refuge System Mission**

*To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.*

#### **Refuge Purposes**

*...for the protection, enhancement, and maintenance of wildlife resources, including bighorn sheep... (Public Land Order 4079, dated August 31, 1966, as amended by P.L. 106-65).*

*...to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species...or (B) plants... (ESA, 16 USC Sec. 1534).*

*...suitable for (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species... (16 USC Sec. 460k-1).*

*...the Secretary...may accept and use...real...property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors... (Refuge Recreation Act, as amended, 16 USC Sec. 460k-2).*

*...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds... (16 USC 715d).*

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
California and Nevada Region  
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-1832  
Sacramento, CA 95825

July 2008

**Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
Ash Meadows, Desert, Moapa Valley, and Pahranaagat  
National Wildlife Refuges  
Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan  
and Environmental Impact Statement  
Clark, Lincoln, and Nye Counties, Nevada**

Type of Action: Administrative

Lead Agency: U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service

Responsible Official: Steve Thompson, Regional Director, Region 8

For Further Information: Cynthia Martinez, Project Leader  
Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
4701 North Torrey Pines Drive  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89130  
(702) 515-5450

**Abstract:** The Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (Draft CCP/EIS) provides a description of the preferred alternative and other alternatives developed for each refuge, the refuges' affected environments, and environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives. The alternatives for each refuge address wildlife, habitat, and cultural resources management and opportunities for compatible recreation to help achieve refuge purposes, visions, and goals. The Final CCP, Final EIS, and Record of Decision (ROD) will identify and describe the selected alternative for each refuge. The purpose of this Draft CCP/EIS is to inform the public of the environmental effects of the Proposed Action and provide an opportunity for public comment. All comments received during the public comment period will be considered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in preparation of the Final CCP and Final EIS.

The Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex) consists of four National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs): Ash Meadows, Desert, Moapa Valley, and Pahranaagat. Three alternatives, including a Preferred Alternative and a No Action Alternative, are described, compared, and assessed for Ash Meadows and Moapa Valley NWRs, and four alternatives, including a Preferred Alternative and a No Action Alternative, are described, compared, and assessed for Desert and Pahranaagat NWRs. In each case, Alternative A is the No Action Alternative, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act regulations. The alternatives for each refuge are summarized below.

**Ash Meadows NWR**

**Alternative A – No Action:** This alternative assumes no change from past and current management programs and serves as the baseline with which all other action alternatives are compared. There would be no major changes in habitat management or the current visitor services program under this alternative.

**Alternative B – Improve Habitat for Endemic Species on Portions of the Refuge and Increase Visitor Services:** This alternative provides management actions to improve species management on portions of the Refuge through habitat restoration and enhancement, modification of hydrology, and invasive plant control. Visitor services would be improved through implementation of Visitor Services, Outreach, and Environmental Education Plans.



**Alternative C (Preferred Alternative) – Improve Habitat for Endemic Species Throughout Refuge and Increase Visitor Services:** This alternative would expand the management actions identified in Alternative B to improve habitat throughout the Refuge. Visitor services would be similar to Alternative B, except for an increase in off-site programs and a reduction in roadway and parking area improvements.

### Desert NWR

**Alternative A – No Action:** This alternative assumes no change from past and current management programs and serves as the baseline with which all other action alternatives are compared. There would be no major changes in habitat management or the current visitor services program under this alternative.

**Alternative B – Minor Improvement in Wildlife and Habitat Management and Moderate Increase in Visitor Services:** This alternative provides management actions to improve bighorn sheep management and expand wildlife diversity. Visitor services would be improved through expanded environmental education and interpretive programs and an increase in visitor facilities.

**Alternative C (Preferred Alternative) – Moderate Improvement in Wildlife and Habitat Management and Minor Increase in Visitor Services:** This alternative would reduce some management actions compared with Alternative B, but would increase monitoring and habitat protection efforts. Bighorn sheep management would be improved, and a Sheep Management Plan would be prepared to guide future management. Visitor services would be improved similar to Alternative B; however, an auto tour route and wildlife viewing trails would not be constructed under this alternative.

**Alternative D – Moderate Improvement in Wildlife and Habitat Management and Limited Increase in Visitor Services:** This alternative would implement fewer management actions than Alternatives B and C with regard to visitor services, and wildlife management would be similar to Alternative C with a slight increase in habitat protection.

### Moapa Valley NWR

**Alternative A – No Action:** This alternative assumes no change from past and current management programs and serves as the baseline with which all other action alternatives are compared. There would be no major changes in habitat management or the current visitor services program under this alternative.

**Alternative B – Improve Habitat and Wildlife Management on Portions of the Refuge and Increase Visitor Services:** This alternative improves habitat and wildlife management on portions of the Refuge compared with Alternative A. The alternative includes actions to restore habitat, gather baseline and population data, manage water resources, and remove invasive species. Visitor services would be expanded through opening of the Refuge to the public on a limited basis. New facilities would be constructed to accommodate the increase in visitors, and the environmental education and interpretation programs would be improved.

**Alternative C (Preferred Alternative) – Improve Habitat and Wildlife Management Throughout the Refuge and Expand Visitor Services:** This alternative includes Refuge-wide habitat restoration efforts and would include expansion of the Refuge boundary. Visitor services would be improved beyond Alternative B by opening the Refuge daily to the public and providing more visitor service programs.

## **Pahrnagat NWR**

**Alternative A – No Action:** This alternative assumes no change from past and current management programs and serves as the baseline with which all other action alternatives are compared. There would be no major changes in habitat management or the current visitor services program under this alternative.

**Alternative B – Limited Improvements in Water Resource and Habitat Management and Minor Increase in Visitor Services:** This alternative would include management actions to expand water monitoring, invasive plant removal efforts, foraging habitat for sandhill cranes, and bird surveys. A new refugium for Pahrnagat roundtail chub is also considered under this alternative pending a feasibility assessment. Visitor services would be improved to accommodate an increase in visitors and monitor visitor use.

**Alternative C – Minor Improvements in Water Resource and Habitat Management and Minor Increase in Visitor Services:** This alternative would expand upon the management actions in Alternative B and provide increased invasive species control, additional species inventories, additional grain crops for foraging, improved water resources management, and additional restoration of springs and riparian habitat. Visitor services would also be improved similar to Alternative B, except the campground would be converted to a day use area.

**Alternative D (Preferred Alternative) – Moderate Improvements in Water Resource and Habitat Management and Moderate Increase in Visitor Services:** This alternative would expand upon management actions presented in Alternatives B and C, including restoring additional foraging habitat for sandhill cranes, acquiring additional water rights, expanding monitoring efforts for wildlife, and expanding invasive plant control efforts. Visitor services would be similar to Alternative C, except vehicle access would not be allowed in the day use area.

# *Reader's Guide*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will manage the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex) in accordance with an approved Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). This CCP provides long-range guidance on refuge management through its vision, goals, objectives, and strategies. The CCP also provides a basis for a long-term adaptive management process that will include monitoring the progress of management actions, evaluating and adjusting management actions based on new information or techniques, and revising management and monitoring plans accordingly. Additional step-down planning will be required prior to implementation of the various data gathering, restoration, wildlife management, and major visitor service proposals included in the CCP.

In accordance with the Service's CCP Policy, the CCP and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) have been combined into one document, referred to as the CCP/EIS. The Draft CCP/EIS provides information on each alternative and the anticipated impacts of each management action that could occur from implementation of the CCP. The Draft CCP/EIS will be available for public review for a limited time, within which the Service will hold public meetings in the communities near the refuges to solicit public comments and provide additional information on the document. The Service will then review public comments and prepare the Final CCP/EIS, which will provide responses to public comments and revisions to the Draft CCP/EIS. The following chapter and appendix descriptions are provided to assist readers in locating and understanding the various components of this combined document.

## **Volume 1:**

**Chapter 1, Introduction and Background**, includes the purpose of and need for a CCP; an overview of policies, regulations, and relevant planning documents; the regional context, establishment, and purposes of the Ash Meadows, Desert, Moapa Valley, and Pahrangat National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs); and vision and goals for future management of the refuges.

**Chapter 2, Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process**, includes an overview of the CCP process and key issues identified through public, agency, and tribal scoping.

**Chapter 3, Alternatives**, describes the various management alternatives proposed for the four refuges. Three alternatives are presented for Ash Meadows and Moapa Valley NWRs, and four alternatives are described for Desert and Pahrangat NWRs. Each alternative represents a different approach to achieving the vision, goals, and objectives for the refuges. Alternative A (No Action) for each refuge describes current management practices. Alternative C is the Preferred Alternative for Ash Meadows, Desert, and Moapa Valley NWRs, and Alternative D is the Preferred Alternative for Pahrangat NWR. This chapter also highlights the common features of each refuge's set of alternatives and the management actions eliminated from further consideration.

**Chapter 4, Affected Environment**, describes the existing physical and biological environment, cultural resources, visitor services, and socioeconomic conditions. This setting represents baseline conditions for the analysis provided in Chapter 5. This chapter provides descriptions of the regional and refuge-specific environments.

**Chapter 5, Environmental Consequences**, describes the potential impacts of each of the alternatives on the resources, uses, and conditions outlined in Chapter 4. This chapter also provides a description of cumulative impacts.

**Chapter 6, Compliance, Consultation, and Coordination with Others**, discusses compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act; summarizes public involvement, interagency coordination, and tribal consultation; and acknowledges those agencies, organizations, and individuals who provided significant contributions to the CCP process.

## **Volume 2:**

**Appendix A, Index**, indicates where the concepts or subject areas that may be of interest to the reader are discussed in the document.

**Appendix B, References**, provides bibliographic references for the citations in this document as well as references for documents that provide background information for the refuges, but that are not specifically cited.

**Appendix C, List of Preparers and Contributors**, contains the names and project roles of those individuals directly involved in writing and preparing the Draft CCP/EIS. The names and positions of those who contributed in other ways to the preparation of the document are also included.

**Appendix D, Distribution List**, contains the list of federal, tribal, state, and local agencies; nongovernmental organizations; libraries; and individuals who received planning updates, summaries, and other mailings associated with this planning effort, including the release of the Draft CCP/EIS.

**Appendix E, Applicable Laws, Policies, and Regulations**, outlines the various federal laws, Executive Orders, regulations, and other guidance pertinent to implementation of the CCP.

**Appendix F, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies for Preferred Alternative**, discusses the goals, objectives, and strategies for each refuge's Preferred Alternative, including rationale for the proposed management actions.

**Appendix G, Compatibility Determinations for Existing and Proposed Refuge Uses**, describe uses, anticipated impacts, stipulations, and a determination of compatibility or non-compatibility for all existing and proposed visitor services on the four refuges.

**Appendix H, Biological Resources**, provides descriptions of special-status species that occur on the refuges, identifies potential for special-status species to occur, provides a list of management priority bird species, and provides lists of wildlife observed on each refuge.

**Appendix I, Wilderness Review**, provides the wilderness inventory for Ash Meadows, Moapa Valley, and Pahrangat NWRs and the existing wilderness proposal for Desert NWR.

**Appendix J, Desert NWR Bighorn Sheep Discussion**, describes bighorn sheep presence on Desert NWR, including historic sheep counts and population estimates.

**Appendix K, CCP Implementation**, addresses step-down planning, funding, phasing, monitoring, and adaptive management practices as they relate to the various habitat and wildlife management actions included in the preferred alternatives. It also provides cost estimates for proposed visitor services programs and addresses current and future staffing for the refuges.

**Appendix L, Land Protection Plan and Conceptual Management Plan for Moapa Valley NWR**, includes copies of the plans for expansion of the Moapa Valley NWR acquisition boundary.



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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACEC	Area of Critical Environmental Concern
afy	acre-feet per year
AMR	appropriate management response
BIDEH	biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health
BLM	U.S. Bureau of Land Management
BMP	best management practice
CCDAQM	Clark County Department of Air Quality Management
CCP	Comprehensive Conservation Plan
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
cfs	cubic feet per second
CGTO	Consolidated Group of Tribes and Organizations
CO	carbon monoxide
Desert Complex	Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex
DOD	U.S. Department of Defense
DOE	U.S. Department of Energy
DOI	U.S. Department of the Interior
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FMU	Fire Management Unit
FY	fiscal year
GIS	geographic information system
GPS	global positioning system
HMA	Herd Management Area
IBA	Important Bird Area
I-15	Interstate 15
IDT	Interdisciplinary Team
INRMP	Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IWJV	Intermountain West Joint Venture
LVVWD	Las Vegas Valley Water District
mg/L	milligrams per liter
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSHCP	Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan
msl	mean sea level
MVWD	Moapa Valley Water District
mya	million years ago
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NAFB	Nellis Air Force Base
NAWMP	North American Waterfowl Management Plan
NDEP	Nevada Department of Environmental Protection
NDOT	Nevada Department of Transportation
NDOW	Nevada Department of Wildlife
NDWR	Nevada Division of Water Resources

## *Acronyms and Abbreviations, cont.*

NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NNHP	Nevada Natural Heritage Program
NO <sub>2</sub>	nitrogen dioxide
NOA	Notice of Availability
NOI	Notice of Intent
NPS	National Park Service
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NTTR	Nevada Test and Training Range
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
NWRS	National Wildlife Refuge System
O <sub>3</sub>	ozone
PEC	Preferred Equities Corporation
PEIS	Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
PL	Public Law
PM <sub>10</sub>	particulate matter less than 10 microns
RNA	Research Natural Area
ROD	Record of Decision
Service	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
SNWA	Southern Nevada Water Authority
SO <sub>2</sub>	sulfur dioxide
SR	State Route
SSURGO	Soil Survey Geographic Database
STATSGO	State Soil Geographic Database
SWCA	SWCA Environmental Consultants
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
USAF	U.S. Air Force
USC	United States Code
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WRCC	Western Regional Climate Center

*Chapter 1.  
Introduction and  
Background*



Canyon Springs cliff face overlook at Desert National Wildlife Refuge



# *Chapter 1. Introduction and Background*

## **1.1 Introduction**

The Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex) is located in southern Nevada and consists of four separate refuges: Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Desert NWR, Moapa Valley NWR, and Pahrnagat NWR (Figure 1.1-1). The Desert Complex encompasses more than 1.6 million acres in Clark, Lincoln, and Nye Counties, Nevada. The four refuges represent some of the best-quality Mojave Desert wetland, riparian, and montane ecosystems and are home to species of plants and animals found nowhere else on earth.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) officially began the process of developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Desert Complex during fall 2001. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Refuge Improvement Act) directs the Service to develop a CCP for all of the refuges by 2012. Development of the CCP and EIS is a multi-year process that will produce a single plan for the four refuges in the Desert Complex. The CCP will guide overall refuge management for its lifetime (approximately 15 years), at which time it will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

This Draft CCP/EIS describes the preferred alternative and other alternatives developed for each refuge, the refuges' affected environments, and the environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives. The alternatives for each refuge address wildlife, habitat, and cultural resources management and opportunities for compatible recreation to help achieve refuge purposes, visions, and goals. The Final CCP, Final EIS, and Record of Decision (ROD) will identify and describe the selected alternative for each refuge.

## **1.2 Proposed Action**

At the Draft EIS stage, the Service's Proposed Action is to implement the preferred alternative for each refuge. Details of the specific goals, objectives, and management actions comprising the preferred alternatives are provided in Chapter 3. At the Final EIS stage, the Service's Proposed Action will be to select and implement the CCP and an alternative for each refuge. The selected alternative can be the preferred alternative, one of the other alternatives, or a new alternative derived from a combination of the existing alternatives. The Service will adopt the selected alternative when the ROD is signed. Future projects implemented after adoption of the alternative and as part of implementation of the CCP will be evaluated in subsequent NEPA documents. These projects are discussed at a programmatic-level in this EIS, except where sufficient details are known to evaluate the actions at a project-specific level.

### **1.3 Purpose of and Need for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan**

The purpose of developing the CCP for the Refuge is to provide managers with a 15-year strategy for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), consistent with the sound principals of fish and wildlife conservation and legal mandates. The CCP is flexible; it will be revised periodically to ensure that its goals, objectives, strategies, and timetables are still valid and appropriate.

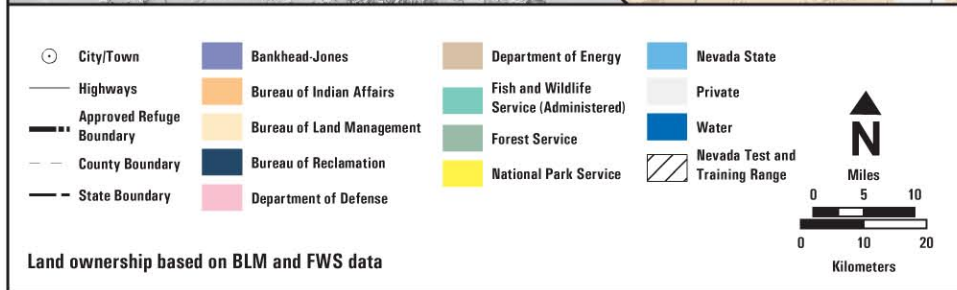
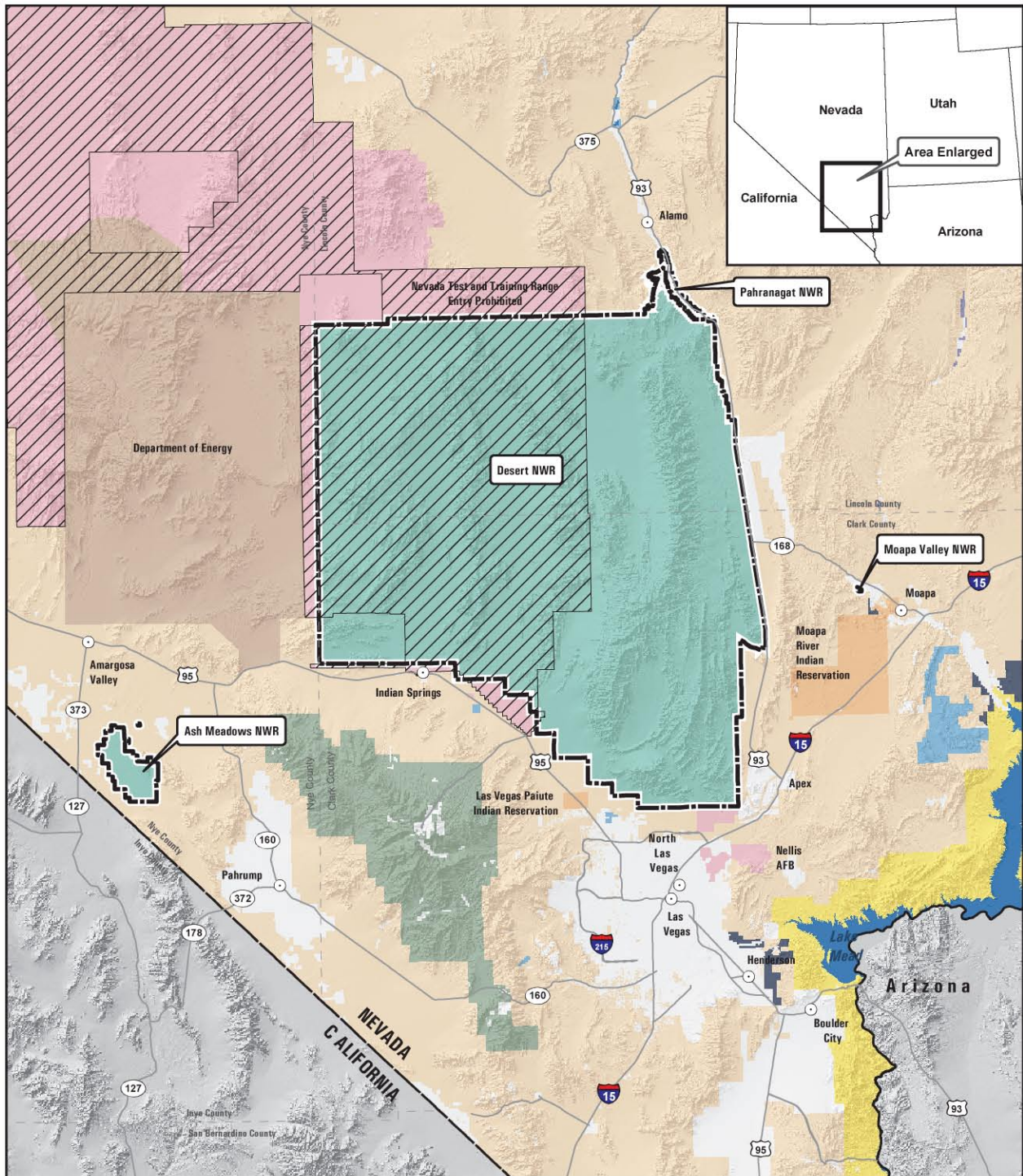
The Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 requires that the Service develop a CCP for each refuge by 2012 and that refuges be managed in a way that ensures the long-term conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats and provides for compatible wildlife-dependent recreation. The purposes for developing a CCP are to:

- Provide a clear statement of direction for the future management of the refuges;
- Provide long-term continuity in management;
- Communicate the Service's management priorities for the refuges to its conservation partners, neighbors, visitors, and the general public;
- Provide an opportunity for the public to help shape the future management of the refuges;
- Ensure that management programs on the refuges are consistent with the mandates of the NWRS and the purposes for which each refuge was established;
- Ensure that the management of the refuges fully considers resource priorities and management strategies identified in other federal, state, and local plans;
- Provide a basis for budget requests to support the refuge's needs, staffing, operations, maintenance, and capital improvements; and
- Evaluate existing and proposed uses of each refuge to ensure that they are compatible with the refuge purpose(s) as well as the maintenance of biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health.

### **1.4 Legal and Policy Guidance**

Legal mandates and Service policies govern the Service's planning and management of the NWRS. A list and brief description of the policies can be found at the "Division of Congressional and Legislative Affairs" Web site (<http://laws.fws.gov>). In addition, the Service has developed draft or final policies to guide NWRS planning and management. These policies can be found at the "NWRS Policies" Web site (<http://www.fws.gov/refuges/policymakers/nwrpolicies.html>).

The main sources of legal and policy guidance for the CCP and EIS are described below. Additional laws and policies guiding the CCP and EIS are listed in Appendix E.



**Figure 1.1-1**  
**Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

### *National Wildlife Refuge System Overview*

The NWRS is the largest system of lands in the world dedicated to the conservation of fish and wildlife. Operated and managed by the Service, it currently includes 545 refuges with a combined area of more than 94 million acres. The majority of refuge lands (more than 77 million acres) are located in Alaska. The remaining acreage is scattered across the other 49 states and several island territories. About 20.6 million acres are managed as wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964.

The NWRS was established in 1903, when President Theodore Roosevelt protected an island with nesting pelicans, herons, ibis, and roseate spoonbills in Florida's Indian River from feather collectors decimating their colonies. He established Pelican Island as the nation's first bird sanctuary and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his tenure. This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand, later becoming the NWRS. In contrast to other public lands, which are managed for multiple uses, refuges are specifically managed for fish and wildlife conservation.

### *National Wildlife Refuge System Mission and Goals*

The mission of the NWRS, established by the Refuge Improvement Act, is:

*"To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."*

The goals of the NWRS, as established by the National Wildlife Refuge System Mission, Goals, and Purposes Policy (601 FW 1), are to:

- Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats, including species that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
- Develop and maintain a network of habitats for migratory birds, anadromous and interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations that is strategically distributed and carefully managed to meet important life history needs of these species across their ranges.
- Conserve those ecosystems, plant communities, wetlands of national or international significance, and landscapes and seascapes that are unique, rare, declining, or underrepresented in existing protection efforts.
- Provide and enhance opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation).
- Foster understanding and instill appreciation of the diversity and interconnectedness of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.

### *National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997*

Statutory authority for Service management and associated habitat management planning on units of the NWRS is derived from the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (Refuge Administration Act), which was significantly amended by the Refuge Improvement Act (16 United States Code [USC] 668dd–668ee). Section 4(a)(3) of the Refuge Improvement Act states, “With respect to the [NWRS], it is the policy of the United States that – (A) each refuge shall be managed to fulfill the mission of the [NWRS], as well as the specific purposes for which that refuge was established...”

The Refuge Improvement Act also states that the “...purposes of the refuge and purposes for each refuge mean the purposes specified in or derived from law, proclamation, executive order, agreement, public land order, donation document, or administrative memorandum establishing, authorizing, or expanding a refuge, refuge unit, or refuge subunit.”

The Refuge Administration Act, as amended, clearly establishes wildlife conservation as the core NWRS mission. House Report 105–106, accompanying the Refuge Improvement Act, states “...the fundamental mission of our System is wildlife conservation: ...wildlife and wildlife conservation must come first.” In contrast to other systems of federal lands, which are managed on a sustained-yield basis for multiple uses, the NWRS is a primary-use network of lands and waters. First and foremost, refuges are managed for fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. In addition, units of the NWRS are legally closed to all public access and use, including economic uses, unless and until they are officially opened through an analytical, public process called the refuge compatibility process. With the exception of refuge management activities, which are not economic in nature, all other uses are subservient to the NWRS’ primary wildlife management responsibility, and they must be determined compatible before being authorized.

The Refuge Improvement Act provides clear standards for management, use, planning, and growth of the NWRS. Its passage followed the promulgation of Executive Order (EO) 12996 (April 1996), Management of Public Uses on National Wildlife Refuges, reflecting the importance of conserving natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations of people. The Refuge Improvement Act recognizes that wildlife-dependent recreational uses, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible with the mission of the NWRS and purposes of the Refuge, are legitimate and appropriate public uses. Section 5(C) and (D) of the Refuge Improvement Act states “compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are the priority general public uses of the Refuge System and shall receive priority consideration in planning and management; and when the Secretary determines that a proposed wildlife-dependent recreational use is a compatible use within a refuge, that activity should be facilitated, subject to such restrictions or regulations as may be necessary, reasonable, and appropriate.”



The Refuge Improvement Act also directs the Service to maintain adequate water quantity and quality to fulfill the NWRS mission and refuge purposes and to acquire, under state law, water rights that are needed for refuge purposes.

### *Compatibility Policy*

Lands within the NWRS are different from other multiple-use public lands in that they are closed to all public uses unless specifically and legally opened. The Refuge Improvement Act states “. . . the Secretary shall not initiate or permit a new use of a Refuge or expand, renew, or extend an existing use of a [refuge], unless the Secretary has determined that the use is a compatible use and that the use is not inconsistent with public safety.” The Refuge Improvement Act also states that “. . . compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses [hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, or environmental education and interpretation] are the priority general public uses of the [NWRS] and shall receive priority consideration in [refuge] planning and management.”

In accordance with the Refuge Improvement Act, the Service has adopted a Compatibility Policy (603 FW 2) that includes guidelines for determining if a use proposed on an NWR is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established. A compatible use is defined in the policy as a proposed or existing wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of an NWR that, based on sound professional judgment, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the NWRS mission or the purposes for which the refuge was established and contributes to the maintenance of biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health. The Policy also includes procedures for documentation and periodic review of existing refuge uses.

The Compatibility Policy does not apply to overflights above a refuge or to activities authorized, funded, or conducted by a federal agency (other than the Service), which has primary jurisdiction over a refuge or portion of a refuge, if the management of those activities is in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretary or the Director and the head of the federal agency with primary jurisdiction over the refuge governing the use of the refuge.

The first step in determining if a use is compatible is to determine if the use is appropriate (called an appropriateness finding). The Service evaluates each use to determine if it is appropriate based on the NWRS mission and refuge purpose(s). If a use is not appropriate, the use is not further considered, and a compatibility determination is not required. If a use is determined to be appropriate, the Service must prepare a compatibility determination. When a determination is made as to whether a proposed use is compatible or not, this determination is provided in writing and is referred to as a compatibility determination.

An opportunity for public review and comment is required for all compatibility determinations. For compatibility determinations prepared concurrently with a CCP or step-down management plan, the opportunity for public review and comment is provided during the

public review period for the draft plan and associated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document. A summary of the appropriateness findings and the compatibility determinations prepared in association with this CCP/EIS are provided in Appendix G.

*Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health Policy*

Section 4(a)(4)(B) of the Refuge Improvement Act states, “in administering the [NWRS], the Secretary shall...ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the [NWRS] are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans...” This legislative mandate represents an additional directive to be followed while achieving refuge purposes and the NWRS mission. The Act requires the consideration and protection of a broad spectrum of fish, wildlife, plant, and habitat resources found on a refuge. Service policy guiding implementation of this statutory requirement provides a refuge manager with an evaluation process to analyze his/her refuge and recommend the best management direction to prevent further degradation of environmental conditions and, where appropriate, and in concert with refuge purposes and NWRS mission, to restore lost or severely degraded resource components. Within the Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health Policy (601 FW 3[3.7B]), the relationships among biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health; NWRS mission; and refuge purposes are explained as follows: “...each refuge will be managed to fulfill refuge purpose(s) as well as to help fulfill the [NWRS] mission, and we will accomplish the purpose(s) and our mission by ensuring that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of each refuge are maintained and where appropriate, restored.”

When evaluating the appropriate management direction for refuges, refuge managers will use sound professional judgment to determine their refuge’s contribution to biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health at multiple landscape scales. Sound professional judgment incorporates field experience, an understanding of the refuge’s role within an ecosystem, and the knowledge of refuge resources, applicable laws, and best available science, including consultation with resource experts both inside and outside the Service.

The priority public uses of the NWRS are not in conflict with this policy when they have been determined to be compatible. The directives of this policy do not envision or necessitate the exclusion of visitors or the elimination of visitor use structures from refuges; however, maintenance and/or restoration of biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health may require spatial or temporal zoning of visitor use programs and associated infrastructures. General success in maintaining or restoring biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health will produce higher-quality opportunities for providing wildlife-dependent recreational uses.

*Draft Wilderness Stewardship Policy Pursuant to the  
Wilderness Act of 1964*

This policy updates guidance on administrative and public activities on wilderness and proposed wilderness within the NWRS. The purpose of the policy is to prescribe how the Service:

*“preserves the character and qualities of designated wilderness while managing for the refuge establishing purpose(s), maintains outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined type of recreation, and conducts minimum requirements analyses before taking any action that may impact wilderness character.”*

The policy emphasizes recreational uses that are compatible and wilderness-dependent. The policy clarifies conditions upon which generally prohibited uses (motor vehicles, motorized equipment, mechanical transport, structures, and installations) may be necessary for wilderness protection. It confirms that:

*“We will generally not modify habitat, species population levels, or natural ecological processes in refuge wilderness unless doing so maintains or restores ecological integrity that has been degraded by human influence or is necessary to protect or recover threatened or endangered species.”*

*National Environmental Policy Act of 1969*

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 USC Secs. 4321 et seq.) requires that federal agencies prepare an EIS for major federal actions that significantly affect the quality of the human environment. This EIS has been prepared consistent with the requirements of NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Secs. 1500 et seq.), and the U.S. Department of Interior’s (DOI’s) NEPA procedures (Department Manual, Part 516).

The Service is the NEPA lead agency responsible for EIS preparation. The Draft EIS and CCP were prepared with the assistance of a third-party contractor, SWCA Environmental Consultants (SWCA). The Service served as lead agency and independently reviewed, modified, and approved the contractor’s work. Several cooperating agencies provided reviews of the document prior to the Draft EIS and CCP and contributed to various portions of the process, including U.S. Air Force (USAF), Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), and the Consolidated Group of Tribes and Organizations (CGTO) Document Review Committee.



## **1.5 Relationship to Regional Conservation Goals**

In addition to the mission and goals of the NWRs, the Service assists others in meeting conservation goals established by government and non-government agencies, when and where possible. These goals can be found in management or conservation plans that have been prepared for the region, state, county, or local area and relate to the species and habitats found on the refuges. A brief description of related plans and their goals or objectives is provided below.

### **1.5.1 Nevada Wildlife Action Plan**

As a requirement of the State Wildlife Grant program, passed by Congress in 2001, each state was required to develop a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy by October 2005. NDOW completed the Nevada Wildlife Action Plan in September 2005 with the assistance of other organizations, including The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Lahontan Audubon Society, and the Nevada Natural Heritage Program (NDOW 2005a). The Wildlife Action Plan “is intended to serve as a plan of action for state wildlife conservation and funding by targeting the species of greatest conservation need and the key habitats on which they depend, and lays out strategies for conserving wildlife in each of the key habitats.”

The Nevada Wildlife Action Plan is designed to provide scientific support for CCP development, input on impact analyses, and support for implementation of management actions. Partnerships and close coordination between NDOW and the Service are key to incorporating the Nevada Wildlife Action Plan into the CCP process.

### **1.5.2 Continental and Regional Bird Conservation Plans**

#### *Continental Plans*

The Partners in Flight North American Landbird Conservation Plan provides a continental synthesis of priorities and objectives to guide landbird conservation actions at national and international scales (Rich et al. 2004). This plan covers 448 species of native landbirds that regularly breed in the United States and Canada, including species that are threatened by habitat loss, have declining populations, or have limited distribution. This plan also highlights the need for stewardship of the species and landscapes characteristic of each portion of the continent, identifying 158 species that are particularly representative of large avifaunal biomes, and whose needs should be considered in conservation planning. Recommended actions vary from region to region, and each region should prepare a step-down management plan.

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan is a coordinated national initiative for shorebird conservation (Brown et al. 2001). The plan is intended to provide an overview of the current status of shorebirds, the conservation challenges facing them, current opportunities for integrated conservation, broad goals for the conservation of shorebird species and subspecies, and specific programs necessary to meet the overall vision of restoring stable and self-sustaining populations of all shorebirds.

The North American Waterbird Conservation Plan provides an overarching continental framework and guide for conserving waterbirds (Kushlan et al. 2002). It sets forth goals and priorities for waterbirds in all habitats from the Canadian Arctic to Panama, from Bermuda through the U.S. Pacific Islands, at nesting sites, during annual migrations, and during nonbreeding periods. It advocates continent-wide monitoring; provides an impetus for regional conservation planning; proposes national, state, provincial and other local conservation planning and action; and gives a larger context for local habitat protection. The goal of these activities is to assure healthy populations and habitats for the waterbirds of the Americas.

### *Regional or Statewide Plans*

Several bird conservation or management plans have been prepared for the Intermountain West or Nevada to provide more specific management direction for bird species identified in the continental plans. The 2005 Coordinated Implementation Plan for Birds in Nevada (Nevada Bird Plan) provides a framework for implementing the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) in the Intermountain West (Service 1986) and develops a more specific plan for the state of Nevada (Nevada Steering Committee 2005). The Nevada Bird Plan incorporates shorebird, waterbird, and landbird conservation priorities for the Intermountain West as well as objectives of the 1986 NAWMP. The Nevada Bird Plan also provides guidance for the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) Management Board in considering and ranking various habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement projects for funding by the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and other programs.

The Nevada Bird Plan incorporates priority species and habitat objectives identified in the Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan for Nevada (Nevada Partners in Flight 1999), the Intermountain West Regional Shorebird Plan (Oring and Oring 2000), the Intermountain West Waterbird Conservation Plan (Ivey and Herziger 2005), and NAWMP, as well as from other conservation organizations, particularly TNC's Ecoregional Conservation Blueprint for the Great Basin (Nachlinger et al. 2001). The Nevada Bird Plan distills these planning documents into lists of priority bird species and develops statewide goals and measurable objectives for 12 major habitat types over a six-year period (2004 to 2010). Statewide goals and objectives from the Nevada Bird Plan that are most likely to apply to the four refuges in the Desert Complex include:

- **Wetlands Goal**: Protect and maintain existing wetland habitats in good condition, and restore and improve degraded wetland habitats whenever opportunities arise.
- **Wetlands Objective**: Permanently protect and/or restore 25,000 acres of high-quality wetlands and associated habitats in Nevada.
- **Lowland Riparian Goal**: Protect, restore, and enhance lowland riparian systems wherever possible.
- **Lowland Riparian Objective**: Permanently protect and/or restore 300 linear miles of lowland riparian habitat in Nevada.

- **Mesquite/Catclaw Goal:** Minimize the loss of mesquite and catclaw habitats wherever possible.
- **Mesquite/Catclaw Objective:** Permanently protect and/or restore 8,000 acres of mesquite and catclaw habitat in Clark County and other areas of southern Nevada affected by growth and development.
- **Pinyon-Juniper Goal:** Manage pinyon-juniper stands for habitat quality and diversity of succession to maintain a diverse population of pinyon-juniper-obligate bird species.
- **Pinyon-Juniper Objective:** Implement alternative management on 75,000 acres of pinyon-juniper forest in Nevada to support diversity of successional stages.

The Service will incorporate these statewide goals and objectives into the management planning for each refuge. Each of the above goals and objectives was considered in the development of alternatives for the four refuges in the Desert Complex. Step-down management plans will provide more specific details and management actions that describe how the Service will help achieve the statewide goals and objectives. Refuge staff will coordinate with the Service's Ecological Services branch to implement the Nevada Bird Plan and NAWMP goals and objectives.

### **1.5.3 Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan**

The Service acted as lead agency during preparation of an EIS for the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). County-wide conservation actions identified in the MSHCP may be implemented on the Desert NWR and Moapa Valley NWR. In addition, funding has been provided for research on the refuges through the MSHCP. The MSHCP was established to provide a means to address the conservation needs of sensitive biological resources (plants and wildlife) on non-federal lands in Clark County, Nevada (Clark County and Service 2000). The MSHCP and EIS were prepared in accordance with the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) (Section 10a) and NEPA. The purpose of the MSHCP was to obtain a permit or permits from the Service to allow the take of currently listed threatened and endangered species and of species proposed for listing as threatened or endangered for projects implemented on non-federal properties. The purpose of the MSHCP in terms of conservation of species is to:

*“achieve a balance between long-term conservation and recovery of the diversity of natural habitats and native species of plants and animals that make up an important part of the natural heritage of Clark County and the orderly and beneficial use of land in order to promote the economy, health, well being, and custom and culture of the growing population of Clark County.”*

Conservation measures were identified in the MSHCP with the intent that they would be implemented as a cooperative effort of the applicable federal, state and local agencies. These measures may be implemented on the refuges in Clark County and include actions to inform and educate the public, implement adaptive management, restore and enhance habitat, protect habitat, and modify underlying management actions. Due to the lack of available data for several of the species identified in the MSHCP, the 2000 version was designed to be Phase I, and Phase II would follow once additional data become available. Adaptive management would allow for modifications in the proposed conservation measures as new data become available.

#### **1.5.4 Recovery Plan for the Endangered and Threatened Species of Ash Meadows**

The Service prepared the Recovery Plan for the Endangered and Threatened Species of Ash Meadows in cooperation with members from the Eastern Mohave Desert Fishes Recovery Team (Service 1990a). The purpose of the plan is to provide background information on the threatened and endangered species that occur in Ash Meadows, identify criteria for their delisting or downlisting, and identify actions needed to recover the species. The plan's objective was to delist all listed species in Ash Meadows except for the Devils Hole pupfish, which could only be downlisted to threatened due to its specific habitat requirements. The Ash Meadows NWR was established specifically for protecting threatened and endangered species; therefore, the plan's goals and strategies are central to the Refuge's purpose. These goals and strategies were considered during the CCP planning process and were incorporated into the alternatives for the Refuge.

The criteria identified in the plan for recovering species include restoring them to their historic ranges, establishing self-sustaining populations, removing threats from their habitats, restoring historic water flows in historic channels and discharge rates from springs, establishing two Devils Hole pupfish refugia, and restoring plant and aquatic communities to historic structure and composition. Several actions were identified to help meet those criteria:

1. Secure habitat and water sources for the Ash Meadows ecosystem.
2. Conduct research on the biology of the species.
3. Conduct management activities within essential habitat.
4. Reestablish populations and monitor new and existing populations.
5. Determine or verify recovery objectives.

### **1.5.5 Recovery Plan for the Rare Aquatic Species of the Muddy River Ecosystem**

The Service prepared the Recovery Plan for the Rare Aquatic Species of the Muddy River Ecosystem to recover and protect aquatic species in the Muddy River area, particularly the Moapa dace (Service 1996). The purpose of the plan is to provide background information on the rare aquatic species, identify criteria for their delisting or downlisting, and identify actions needed to recover the species. Criteria and actions are provided for the Moapa dace, with the expectation that those actions would also aid in the recovery of other rare species. The plan's objective is to delist the Moapa dace and other listed species in the Muddy River area. Moapa Valley NWR was established specifically for protecting threatened and endangered species; therefore, the plan's goals and strategies are central to the Refuge's purpose. These goals and strategies were considered during the CCP planning process and were incorporated into the alternatives for the Refuge.

The criteria identified in the plan for fully recovering and delisting the Moapa dace include restoring the adult dace population to 6,000 individuals in the five spring systems and the upper Muddy River for five consecutive years; restoring 75 percent of the historical habitat in the five spring systems and the upper Muddy River to provide spawning, nursery, cover, and/or foraging habitat; and control or eradicate nonnative fish and parasites so that they no longer adversely affect the long-term survival of the Moapa dace. These criteria may be modified as new data become available for the species.

Several actions were identified to help meet those criteria:

1. Protect instream flows and historic habitat within the upper Muddy River and tributary spring systems.
2. Conduct restoration/management activities.
3. Monitor Moapa dace population.
4. Research population health.
5. Provide public information and education.

### **1.5.6 Final Recovery Plan for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher**

The endangered southwestern willow flycatcher is known to nest on two refuges within the Desert Complex: Ash Meadows and Pahranaagat. The Service approved a Recovery Plan for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher in August 2002 (Service 2002b). The plan was prepared by the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Recovery Team, Technical Subgroup, with the assistance of several individuals. The purpose of the plan is to identify recovery criteria for the flycatcher's downlisting and ultimately for its delisting and to identify management actions that may contribute to the flycatcher's recovery, including costs and timeframes. The recovery objectives for the southwestern willow flycatcher are to downlist the species to

threatened status and delist it once certain criteria have been met. The delisting criteria include increasing the total known population to a minimum of 1,950 territories or approximately 3,900 individuals with a geographic distribution that allows properly functioning metapopulations, protecting the species from threats into the distant future, and securing sufficient habitat to maintain the metapopulations over time. Suitable habitat for the southwestern willow flycatcher occurs at Ash Meadows, Moapa Valley, and Pahranaagat NWR.

Nine types of recovery actions were identified in the plan:

1. Increase and improve occupied, suitable, and potential breeding habitat.
2. Increase metapopulation stability.
3. Improve demographic parameters.
4. Minimize threats to wintering and migration habitat.
5. Survey and monitor.
6. Conduct research.
7. Provide public education and outreach.
8. Assure implementation of laws, policies, and agreements that benefit the flycatcher.
9. Track recovery progress.

Implementation of these actions is anticipated to allow the species to be downlisted to threatened by 2020, and the species could be delisted within 10 years after downlisting. The Service considered these actions in the CCP planning process and incorporated applicable measures into alternatives for each of the appropriate refuges. Specific actions to aid in recovery of the southwestern willow flycatcher will be identified in step-down management plans.

### **1.5.7 Recovery Plan for the Aquatic and Riparian Species of Pahranaagat Valley**

The Service approved the Recovery Plan for the Aquatic and Riparian Species of Pahranaagat Valley in May 1998 (Service 1998b). The recovery plan covers three native, endangered species: Pahranaagat roundtail chub, Hiko White River springfish, and White River springfish. The primary threats to the species include habitat alteration, introduction of nonnative species, and disease. The objective of the recovery plan is to delist the three species. Recovery criteria vary for each species, but generally include establishing self-sustaining populations and reducing impacts to the species and their habitat so the species are no longer threatened with extinction or an irreversible population decline.

Management actions to achieve those criteria include:

1. Maintaining and enhancing aquatic and riparian habitats in Pahranaagat Valley.
2. Developing and implementing monitoring plans.
3. Providing public information and education.
4. Establishing and maintaining populations at Dexter National Fish Hatchery, Key Pittman Wildlife Management Area, and Pahranaagat National Wildlife Refuge.
5. According to the recovery plan, the species would be able to be delisted by 2015 if the recovery criteria are met.

The goals and strategies of the plan were considered in the CCP planning process and in development of alternatives for the Pahranaagat NWR. The Service will incorporate applicable strategies into the management of the Refuge.

### **1.5.8 Nevada Bighorn Sheep Management Plan**

The Bighorn Sheep Management Plan (NDOW 2001) is a planning document to guide bighorn sheep management and conservation. The plan focuses on habitat management and conservation efforts to increase populations across the state of Nevada. Bighorn sheep populations in Nevada have experienced a severe decline since the late 19th century. The sheep previously were found in almost every mountain range across the state, but their populations are now scattered between a few mountain ranges, with a large population on the Desert NWR.

The Bighorn Sheep Management Plan identifies policies to protect existing habitat, improve forage and water availability, increase population numbers, allow bighorn sheep hunting, and increase public awareness and appreciation for the bighorn sheep. For each of these policies, the plan describes specific management actions and strategies to implement. NDOW is tasked with implementing this plan, and the Service has incorporated many of the strategies into management of the Desert NWR.

### **1.5.9 Nevada Bat Conservation Plan**

The Nevada Bat Conservation Plan is an effort of the Nevada Bat Working Group to develop a comprehensive plan for 23 species of bat found in Nevada (Altenbach et al. 2002). The plan provides information on the current status of bat conservation efforts and identifies strategies for improving and standardizing those efforts. Guidelines for bat conservation are provided in the plan and are intended to educate public and private land managers about bat conservation. Because bats occur on each of the four refuges in the Desert Complex, strategies identified in the Nevada Bat Conservation Plan may be incorporated into refuge management.

### **1.5.10 Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan**

The Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) for the Nellis Air Force Base (NAFB) and Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) provides guidance for the conservation of natural resources on NTTR and NAFB properties (NAFB 2007). The USAF developed these guidelines within the context of the military mission of NTTR and NAFB because the military mission takes precedence over all guidance provided by the INRMP. However, the INRMP is executed within the constraints of existing laws and in a manner that sustains the ranges for future missions.

The USAF established a primary goal to “maintain ecosystem integrity and dynamics on NAFB and NTTR without compromising the military mission” (NAFB 2007). This goal ensures that implementation of mission actions maintains ecosystem integrity to promote good stewardship by supporting existing biodiversity, ensuring sustainable use of the installation, and minimizing management costs and efforts. USAF natural resource managers and mission planners are provided with guidance from the INRMP to enable them to establish mission actions that minimize impacts to natural resources at NAFB and the NTTR. Because a portion of the NTTR overlays the Desert NWR, the USAF has a joint responsibility with the Service, through a Memorandum of Understanding, to ensure minimal impacts to natural resources that occur within the boundaries of the Refuge. The Service and USAF work together to protect and conserve the resources on the Refuge.

## **1.6 Prioritizing Wildlife and Habitat Management on Refuges**

Refuge management priorities derive from the NWRS mission, individual refuge purpose(s), laws that specify Service trust resources, and the mandate to maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the public’s refuges. These mandates are consistent with the Refuge Administration Act, as amended by the Refuge Improvement Act. Management on a refuge should first and foremost address the individual refuge purpose, using that purpose to direct its efforts toward the appropriate trust resources. In addition, management should address maintenance and, where appropriate, restoration of biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health. In this approach, the refuge contributes to the goals of the NWRS (601 FW 1) and achievement of the NWRS mission.

Purposes are the essential objective of our refuge stewardship. They are the legislative, legal, and administrative foundations for administration and management of a unit of the NWRS. This includes establishment of goals and objectives and authorization of public uses, which must be shown to be compatible with the refuge purpose(s) before they are allowed.

Service trust species are designated by various statutes governing the Service, as well as treaties that the Service is charged with implementing. These trust species include migratory birds, interjurisdictional fish, marine mammals, and federally listed



threatened and endangered species (Table 1.6-1). Although the refuge purpose is the first and highest obligation, management for trust species, when appropriate, is an added responsibility of refuges and is a priority for management on a refuge (601 FW 1.9B). Furthermore, management for trust species directly supports the NWRS mission.

**Table 1.6-1. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Trust Species**

<i>Trust Species</i>	<i>Legislative Authority</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Threatened and Endangered Species	Endangered Species Act (16 USC Secs. 1531–1544)	Desert tortoise, Devils Hole pupfish, Moapa dace
Migratory Birds	Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 USC 703–711) Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 USC 668a-668d)	Ducks, songbirds, raptors, and shorebirds
Marine Mammals	Marine Mammal Protection Act (16 USC 13611407)	West Indian manatee, polar bear, Pacific walrus, and sea otter
Interjurisdictional Fish	Anadromous Fish Conservation Act (16 USC 757a-757g)	Anadromous species of salmon, paddlefish, and sturgeon

An additional directive to be followed while achieving refuge purposes and the NWRS mission is that related to biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health (BIDEH). This requires that we consider and protect the broad spectrum of native fish, wildlife, plant, and habitat resources found on a refuge: “In administering the [NWRS], the Secretary shall...ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the [NWRS] are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans...” (Refuge Improvement Act, Section 4(a)(4)(B)).

The Policy on BIDEH (601 FW 3.3) is the Service’s statement of how it will implement this mandate. The policy provides information and guidance to refuge managers to prevent degradation of BIDEH. It also offers ways to restore lost or severely degraded ecological components, where appropriate.

## 1.7 Refuge Establishment and Management

Each refuge in the Desert Complex was established separately and has different management purposes. This section presents a brief discussion of each refuge’s location, history, purpose, vision, and goals. Refuge purposes are a key aspect of refuge planning because management activities must be compatible with the refuge’s purpose(s). The purpose of a refuge is “...specified in or derived from the law, proclamation, executive order, agreement, public land order, donation document, or administrative memorandum establishing,

authorizing, or expanding a refuge, refuge unit or refuge subunit” (Refuge Planning Policy, 602 FW 1.6). Each refuge’s purpose or purposes are identified in the following overview of the refuges.

### **1.7.1 Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge**

#### *Location*

Ash Meadows NWR encompasses approximately 24,000 acres of land in southern Nye County, Nevada (Figure 1.7-1). It is located approximately 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas and 30 miles west of Pahrump. The entire Refuge is located in Amargosa Valley and is only a few miles northeast of Death Valley National Park’s eastern entrance from Death Valley Junction. U.S. Highway 95 runs just north of the Refuge.

#### *Land Status*

The Service owns approximately 13,828 acres of land within the approved Refuge boundary, including a 382-acre access easement. The Refuge’s approved boundary also includes: approximately 9,700 acres of lands administered by the BLM, some of which is managed by the Service under a cooperative agreement; approximately 676 acres of private land; and 40 acres of land managed by the NPS. The entire boundary of the Refuge abuts BLM-managed lands that are designated as the Ash Meadows Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and are set aside for protection of the endemic species found at Ash Meadows.

#### *History of Establishment and Acquisition*

The Ash Meadows area has been modified and influenced by human use for at least 4,000 years (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). A key recent alteration occurred in the early 1960s when the extensive marshland in Carson Slough was destroyed by a peat-mining operation. This mining eliminated approximately 2,000 acres of habitat supporting one of the largest concentrations of waterfowl in southern Nevada. This marsh was also occupied by the Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish, Ash Meadows speckled dace, and the now-extinct Ash Meadows killifish (Fisher 1983; R. Miller 1948).

Large-scale habitat alteration occurred again in Ash Meadows in the late 1960s when Spring Meadows Ranch, Inc. began a ranching operation (Sanchez 1981). For the next several years land was leveled for crop production, and aquatic habitats were altered for water diversion. Groundwater was pumped so excessively that the feeding and reproducing habitat of the nearby Devils Hole pupfish was dangerously decreased; simultaneously, the population of this fish declined to fewer than 150 individuals. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that removal of groundwater would have to be limited to avoid eliminating or diminishing the value of Devils Hole, a component of the Death Valley National Monument (Service 1980). During the late 1970s, Spring Meadows Ranch, Inc. ceased operations and sold its holdings to Preferred Equities Corporation (PEC), which proposed developing the area into a municipal, agricultural, and recreational community for 50,000 people. Nye County and the State of Nevada

approved plans for completion of part of this development, which was named Calvada Lakes. In 1984 TNC purchased all of PEC's land (12,614 acres) in Ash Meadows.

The Ash Meadows NWR was established on June 18, 1984, through the purchase of 11,177 acres of former agricultural lands from TNC. According to the Service's 1984 Environmental Assessment: Proposed Acquisition to Establish Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, the purpose of the acquisition was "... to protect the endemic, endangered, and rare organisms (plants and animals) found in Ash Meadows ...". Since the original acquisition from TNC in 1984, an additional 2,309 acres have been acquired from several different landowners.

The Refuge provides habitat consisting of spring-fed wetlands and alkaline desert uplands for at least 25 plants and animals found nowhere else in the world. The Ash Meadows NWR has a greater concentration of endemic life than any other local area in the United States and the second greatest concentration in all of North America.

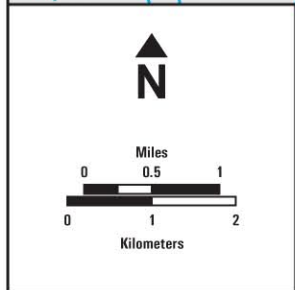
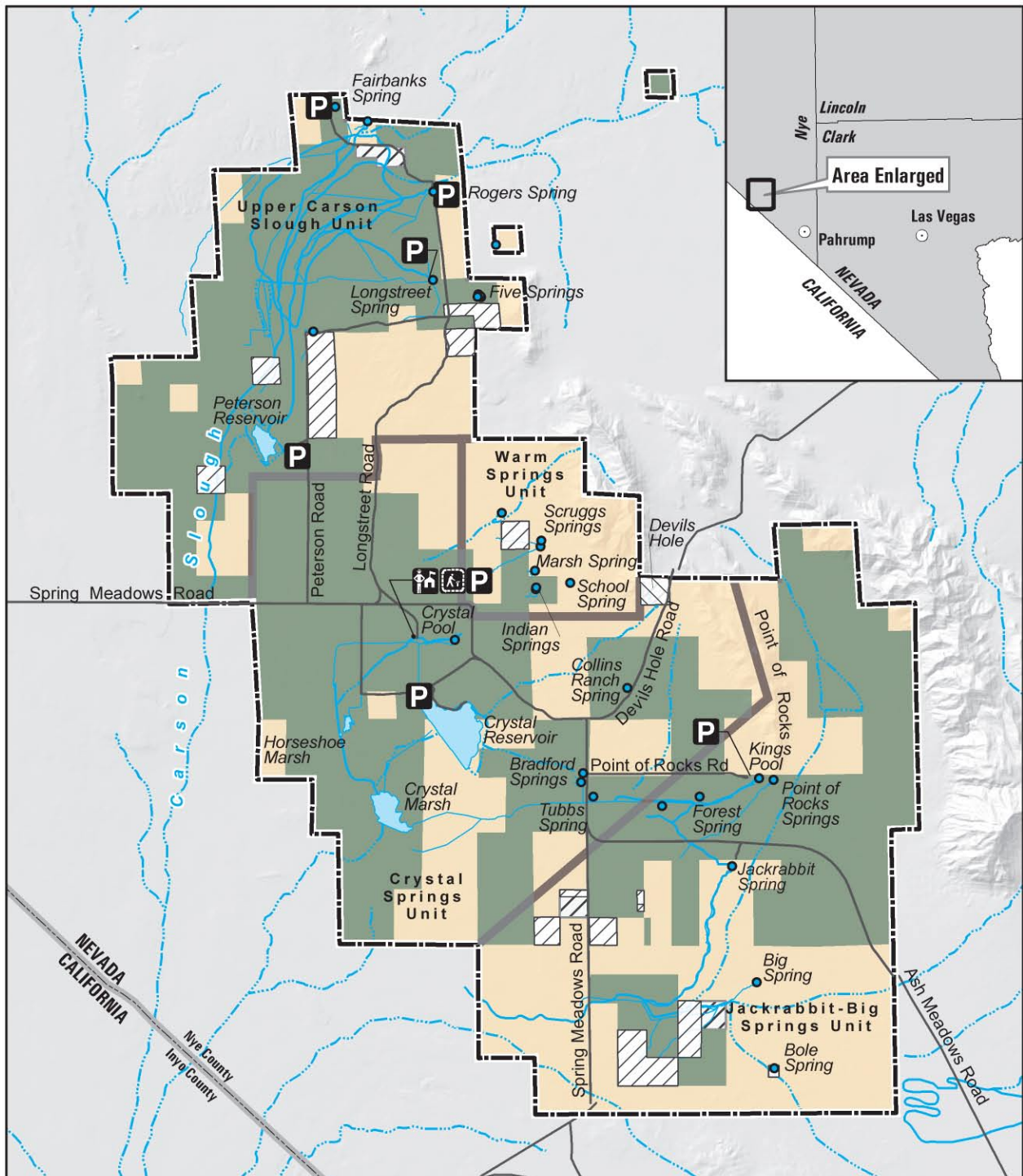
Many of the Refuge's seeps, springs, pools, and streams supporting sensitive species have been destroyed or altered by human activities in the last 100 years. Habitat alterations during agricultural, municipal, and mining development caused the extinction of one fish species, at least one snail species, and possibly an endemic mammal species (Ash Meadows montane vole, *Microtus montanus nevadensis*). NDOW is currently aiding the Refuge in evaluating the status of the montane vole on the Refuge.

The natural Devils Hole population of pupfish is on NPS-managed land within the Refuge boundary. Devils Hole was added as a unit to Death Valley National Park in 1952. The Refuge once supported two refugia populations of Devils Hole pupfish. Plans are under way to develop a new refugium on the Refuge for the species.

Ash Meadows NWR currently provides habitat used by seven listed species: southwestern willow flycatcher (endangered), Yuma clapper rail (endangered), Devils Hole pupfish (endangered), Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish (endangered), Warm Springs pupfish (endangered), Ash Meadows speckled dace (endangered), and Ash Meadows naucorid (threatened). Five of these listed species are endemic to the Refuge area (Appendix H).

### *Historic Conditions*

The Ash Meadows area has been intensively used and modified by humans for at least 4,000 years, including periodic burns and diverting and excavating water sources, and it has been influenced by herbivory by ungulates introduced by Europeans (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). Fire and herbivory on the Refuge likely affected wetlands in the Ash Meadows area. The effects of water diversions for irrigation and agricultural uses have been present for long periods of time and, as a result, have partially obscured pre-settlement conditions at the Refuge, making it difficult to describe historic conditions.



- Streams and Channels
- Roads
- Approved Refuge Boundary
- Management Units
- FWS Fee Title Lands
- BLM Lands (managed by FWS under MOA)
- Private Property
- National Park Service
- P Visitor Contact Station
- P Boardwalk/Interpretive Displays
- P Parking

**Figure 1.7-1**

**Land Status**

**Ash Meadows NWR**

Based on aerial imagery and an understanding of human disturbances in the past century, historic conditions on the Refuge consisted of a dominance of upland vegetation, with several wet areas traversing the lowland areas with adjacent transitional vegetation (wetland/riparian) (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). Upland vegetation likely consisted of creosote bush scrub and cottontop cactus hillsides with sparse vegetation cover. Wetland and transitional areas likely contained alkali meadows, alkali shrub/scrub, mesquite bosques, and emergent vegetation, depending on the groundwater table and surface water depth. Invasive vegetation has since become dominant in disturbed areas, and wetlands have decreased in size due to water diversions and agricultural uses.

### *Refuge Partnerships*

The Ash Meadows NWR has partnerships with a variety of organizations and other agencies to manage the Refuge and its resources. The Service works with the following organizations and agencies:

- Death Valley Natural History Association: Plans and stocks bookstore at Refuge visitor contact station, funds educational projects, publishes needed material, works on development of future publications, and assists in outreach to local communities.
- NPS (Death Valley National Park): Education staff assists with programs for third- and fourth-graders, fish biologists assist with exotic aquatic removal programs, and a hydrotech assists with water monitoring program.
- Southern Nye County Conservation District: Funds transportation costs for local schools to participate in education programs, assists in outreach to local communities.
- Nuclear Waste and Environmental Advisory Board for the Town of Pahrump: Hosts the Pahrump Earth Day Fair.
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) – Reno and Las Vegas Offices: Participate in recovery team and recovery actions.
- Desert Fishes Council: Assists in outreach to scientific community and provide letters of support.
- Local Land Owners: Involved in conservation partnerships.
- Desert Springs Action Committee: Assists in aquatic removal program.
- NDOW: Participates in recovery team and recovery actions, assists in restoration projects, and assists in aquatic removal program.
- Service – Ecological Services: Assists in restoration projects, assists in aquatic removal program, and participates in recovery team and recovery actions.
- Great Basin Bird Observatory: Conducts periodic bird surveys, provides data summary of Ash Meadow study sites, and assists in outreach to birding communities.
- Desert Research Institute: Maintains an on-line weather station and conducts spring snail surveys.

- **Southern Oregon University:** Participates in recovery team, recovery actions, and naucorid restoration.
- **CGTO:** Provides recommendations/feedback on proposed Refuge projects and provides tribal monitors for construction projects.

### *Special Designations*

**Wetland of International Importance.** In 1986, the Ash Meadows NWR was among the first sites in the United States to be designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Under this international treaty, 118 contracting parties agreed to work together to develop national policies for wetland conservation, to cooperate in managing shared wetlands and their migratory species, and to devote special attention to the conservation of designated sites.

**Important Bird Area (IBA).** IBAs are sites that provide essential habitat for one or more species of bird. To qualify as an IBA, sites must satisfy at least one of the following criteria:

- Support species of conservation concern (e.g., threatened and endangered species);
- Support species with restricted ranges (species vulnerable because they are not widely distributed);
- Support species that are vulnerable because their populations are concentrated in one general habitat type or biome; or
- Support species, or groups of similar species (such as waterfowl or shorebirds), that are vulnerable because they occur at high densities due to their gregarious behavior.

Ash Meadows NWR is one of two routes offering perennial surface water and cover for birds migrating through the western Great Basin (Pahranagat Valley is the other). More than 239 different species of birds have been recorded on the Refuge. Fall and especially spring migration periods produce the greatest diversity and numbers. Spring migration usually occurs in April and May, and fall migration occurs from mid-August through September. In the winter, marshes and reservoirs support the largest variety of water birds. Mesquite and ash tree groves throughout the Refuge harbor resident and migratory birds year-round, including typical southwestern species such as Crissal thrasher, verdin, phainopepla, and Lucy's warbler. Two endangered species success stories, the peregrine falcon and bald eagle, also use Ash Meadows seasonally as a migration stop-over. In addition to migrants, a few pairs of endangered southwestern willow flycatchers use Ash Meadows as breeding habitat from June through August each year.

**Wilderness Status.** In accordance with the Service's Refuge Planning Policy, a wilderness review of the Ash Meadows NWR was conducted during the CCP process (see Appendix I). Ash Meadows NWR was found not suitable for wilderness designation.

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### Refuge Purpose

The Ash Meadows NWR derives its purpose from the ESA, which authorized its creation:

*“...to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species...or (B) plants...” (16 USC Sec. 1534).*

### Vision

A vision statement is a concise statement of what a refuge should be, based primarily on the NWR mission, specific refuge purposes, and other mandates. A vision statement helps articulate the direction the refuge should be heading. The following is Ash Meadows NWR's vision statement:

*The springs, wetlands, and other native habitats of Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge support and protect the highest concentration of endemic plant and animal species anywhere in the United States. The Refuge's natural communities are restored to their historic extent and condition, and threatened and endangered species populations are recovered and maintained at sustainable levels through innovative coordination and partnerships. Refuge management continually responds to changes in the environment through adaptive management. Water supplies are ample, reliable, and of appropriate quality and temperature to sustain endemic and other fish and wildlife populations.*

*Researchers are drawn to the Refuge where science-based management and monitoring is used to guide habitat restoration and endangered species recovery efforts and, in the process, further scientific knowledge of fields such as species genetics, regional water flow, geology and even the cultural and historical significance of this long inhabited area. Visitors find sanctuary among the crystal pools and springs nestled among the expansive Mojave Desert landscape.*

*Local residents and visitors enjoy learning about and gaining an appreciation for the Refuge and its unique wildlife and plant species. Local educators recognize the Refuge as an exceptional regional resource for environmental education and for unique wildlife and habitat community tours. Volunteers find a meaningful and personally enriching application for their interests and talents in a responsive and appreciative setting that contributes to the conservation of rare, unique and beautiful species of wildlife and plants for the enjoyment of present and future generations of Americans.*

### *Goals*

The Service developed five goals for the management of Ash Meadows NWR. These goals were used to identify appropriate objectives and strategies and develop alternatives with specific management actions.

**Species Management (Goal 1).** Restore and maintain viable populations of all endemic, endangered, and threatened species within the Refuge's Mojave Desert oasis ecosystem.

**Habitat (Goal 2).** Restore and maintain the ecological integrity of natural communities within the Ash Meadows NWR.

**Research (Goal 3).** Encourage and provide opportunities for research that supports Refuge and Service objectives.

**Visitor Services (Goal 4).** Provide visitors with wildlife-dependent recreation, interpretation, and environmental education opportunities that are compatible with and foster an appreciation and understanding of Ash Meadows NWR's wildlife and plant communities.

**Cultural Resources (Goal 5).** Manage cultural resources for their educational, scientific, and traditional cultural values for the benefit of present and future generations of refuge users, communities, and culturally affiliated tribes.

## **1.7.2 Desert National Wildlife Refuge**

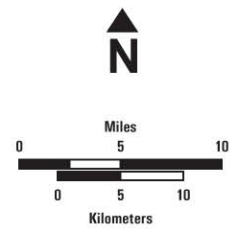
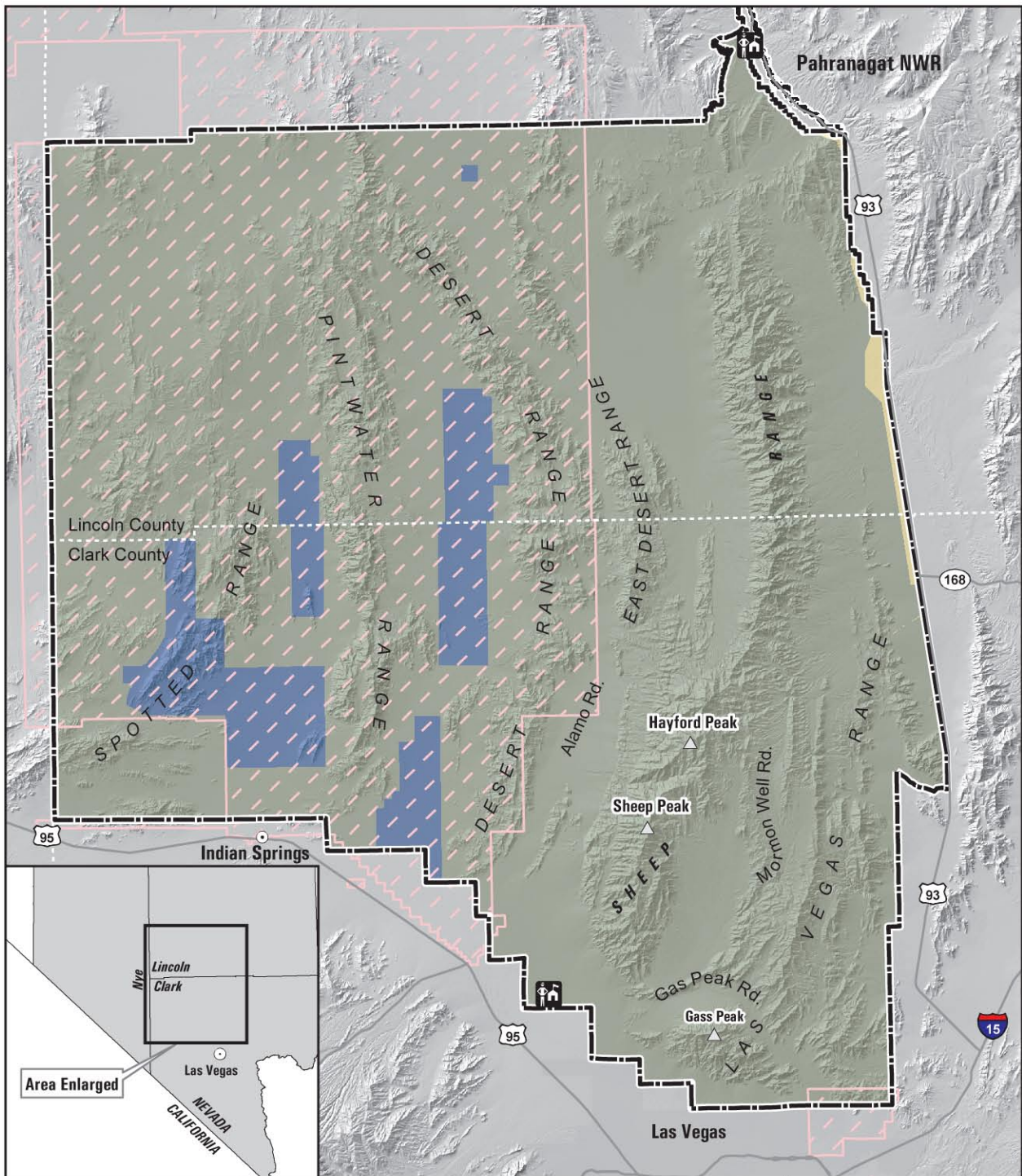
### *Location*

Desert NWR is located about 20 miles north of Las Vegas and encompasses 1.6 million acres of rugged mountain ranges and panoramic valleys in Clark and Lincoln Counties (Figure 1.7-2). It is the largest Refuge in the continental United States and the largest protected area in Nevada. Desert NWR contains six distinct mountain ranges, with elevations ranging from 2,200 feet on valley floors to nearly 10,000 feet in the Sheep Range. The Refuge's wide ranges of elevation and rainfall have created diverse habitats suited to a wide variety of flora and fauna. The southern border of the Refuge will soon abut the northern border of the rapidly expanding city of North Las Vegas. The Refuge is bordered by U.S. Highway 93 on the east and U.S. Highway 95 along the southwest corner. Interstate 15 (I-15) through Las Vegas is located just southeast of the Refuge.

### *History of Establishment and Acquisition*

On May 20, 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Desert Game Range for "the conservation and development of natural wildlife resources" (EO 7373). The 2.25 million-acre Game Range, under the joint administration of the Service and BLM, included most of the lands within the current Refuge boundary, but stretched south to include portions of the Spring Mountains, including the area currently occupied by Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.





- Visitor Center
- Approved Refuge Boundary
- Nevada Test and Training Range
- Private
- FWS Lands
- DOD Lands (FWS secondary jurisdiction)

DOD has secondary jurisdiction over portion of refuge overlain by Nevada Test and Training Range

**Figure 1.7-2**  
**Land Status**  
**Desert NWR**

In 1939, a 320-acre ranch at Corn Creek was acquired from a private landowner under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act. This site became the administrative headquarters for the Game Range.

In October of 1940, approximately 846,000 acres of the Desert Game Range were reserved for the use of the War Department (U.S. Department of Defense [DOD]) as an aerial bombing and gunnery range (now known as the NTTR). This order took precedence over, but did not revoke or rescind, EO 7373. However, the Service retained primary jurisdiction of the lands. The USAF's use of a portion of the Desert Game Range was governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 1949. The MOU was most recently updated in 1997 on December 22.

The approximately 10,623-acre Nellis Small Arms Range is located 3 miles northwest of NAFB on Range Road (USAF 2007). It is managed by NAFB. The range overlays a small portion of the Desert NWR in the southeast corner. The range is used for small arms training, and most of the land is undeveloped.

Public Land Order 4079, dated August 31, 1966, as amended by Public Law (PL) 106-65 (Sec. 3011[b][3]), established the Desert National Wildlife Range under the sole administration of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife (now the Service). It also reduced the size of the refuge to 1,588,000 acres.

Between 1970 and 1985, 440 acres in the vicinity of Corn Creek were purchased from a variety of private land owners under the authority of the ESA (16 USC Sec. 1534) and Refuge Recreation Act (16 USC Sec. 460k-460).

As stated in a 1977 Desert NWR Environmental Assessment for the proposed acquisition of Corn Creek area lands (Service 1977), the justification for adding lands to the Refuge was for wildlife goals and compatible human use goals, including:

*"1. Preserve and maintain wildlife habitat necessary to support migratory and indigenous wildlife such as the desert bighorn, desert tortoise, quail, doves, owls, nighthawk, hummingbirds, flickers, flycatchers, ravens, wrens, thrashers, warblers, etc. Typical flora includes mesquite, creosote bush, shadscale, cactus and grasses. 2. Protect and enhance habitat for the Pahrump killifish, an endangered species, and others known to be rare. 3. Provide opportunities for wildlife and ecological studies, environmental education, and wildlife interpretation... [and] 4. Maintain open space for public enjoyment."*

The Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1999 (PL 106–65) transferred primary jurisdiction of 112,000 acres of bombing impact areas on Desert NWR from the Service to DOD. However, the Service retained secondary jurisdiction over these lands. According to PL 106–65 as amended, the Secretary of the Interior must determine, at least every five years, whether it is suitable to open any withdrawn lands for mineral resource entry. The intent of this decision is based on three factors: (1) to protect the public from injury due to ordnance hazards; (2) to ensure national security is not compromised; and (3) to ensure that military programs can be conducted without interruption. PL 106–65 also states that management plans will be developed by the Secretary of the Interior “after consultation with the Secretary of the military department concerned.”

On November 6, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002 (PL 107–282), which administratively transferred 26,433 acres of BLM land adjacent to Desert NWR’s east boundary to the Service. Desert NWR’s land base changed again with the passage of the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2004 (PL 108–424). As part of the Act, administrative jurisdiction over approximately 8,382 acres of land along the eastern boundary of Desert NWR and west of U.S. Highway 93 was transferred from the Service to the BLM for use as a utility corridor. In addition, 8,503 acres of BLM-administered land were transferred to the Service to be managed as part of the Desert NWR. This land is located at the northeastern boundary of the Desert NWR and the western boundary of Pahranaagat NWR.

### *Historic Conditions*

The Desert NWR has been relatively undisturbed by EuroAmericans, except for small areas affected by agricultural uses (e.g., Corn Creek) and other uses (e.g., military operations). As a result, current conditions are likely similar to pre-settlement conditions, with vast acreages of upland vegetation supporting a diversity of flora and fauna and occasional springs and wetlands. Human disturbances, such as grazing, reduction in natural herbivores, and wood harvesting, may have affected the historic conditions on the Refuge (NAFB 2007).

Lower elevation upland habitats include creosote bush and saltbush scrubs in the southern portion, and blackbrush and Great Basin desert scrub in the northern portion (NAFB 2007). Blackbrush may have been more dominant in historic times. Higher-elevation upland habitats include pinyon-pine and pinyon-juniper. Natural artesian springs were more common throughout the Las Vegas Valley, resulting in distinct riparian habitats supporting cottonwoods, willows, and cattails. These spring habitats, as well as the nearby Las Vegas Big Spring and Creek, supported oases in the arid desert landscape.

### *Refuge Partnerships*

Desert NWR has partnerships with a variety of organizations and other agencies to manage the Refuge and its resources. The Service works with the following organizations and agencies:

- NDOW: Coordinates desert bighorn sheep hunt program on the refuge, including setting bag limits for each hunt unit, assists (or takes lead) with annual fall sheep surveys, works with Service and Fraternity of the Desert Bighorn to maintain water developments, conducts wildlife surveys on the Refuge, conducts removal of nonnative aquatic species from Corn Creek ponds, and assists with monitoring Pahrump poolfish refugium populations.
- USAF: Provides a minimum of 20 hours of aircraft support annually, and if available, other support equipment with operating personnel as negotiated on a case-by-case basis for the purposes of aerial patrol, search and rescue, maintenance, wildlife inventory, water hole inspection, and other wildlife management practices on the Refuge; facilitates access to portions of the Refuge within the NTTR for guzzler maintenance; facilitates access to the Refuge during the bighorn sheep hunt; provides a mandatory Range Safety Briefing and Natural/Cultural Resources Briefing for all hunters; and cooperates on cultural resources management and tribal coordination.
- Fraternity of the Desert Bighorn: Assists with maintenance of sheep water developments (including manpower and funding for equipment and helicopter time).
- Southern Nevada Interpretive Association: Staffs and manages visitor contact station on Refuge, provides environmental education programs for school groups at Corn Creek, and leads hikes into back country areas and informational walks around Corn Creek.
- CGTO: Provides recommendations/feedback on proposed refuge projects and tribal monitors for construction projects.
- Service – Ecological Services: Monitors Pahrump poolfish populations, assists with Section 7 consultation, and assists with Refuge surveys for special-status species.
- USGS: Monitors water levels from Corn Creek springs.

### *Special Designations*

**Proposed Wilderness.** In 1974, approximately 1.3 million acres of land within the Refuge were proposed for wilderness designation under the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Appendix I). In the President's message to Congress accompanying the proposal, he recommended that Congress defer action on the proposal until a mineral survey was completed. The Final EIS for the proposal was released in August of 1975. A mineral assessment of the refuge was completed in 1993 as part of the mineral withdrawal, which was later completed in 1999. However, Congress has yet to act on the wilderness proposal, and the area continues to be managed to protect its wilderness values.

Figure 3.3–1 in Chapter 3 (Alternatives) shows the area proposed for wilderness in 1974; Table 1.7-1 shows the wilderness review timeline for the Refuge from the most recent proposal to the original wilderness study report.

**Table 1.7-1. Wilderness Review Timeline for Desert NWR**

<i>Proposal/Study</i>	<i>Area (acres)</i>
Final Environmental Impact Statement (Service 1975)	1,398,900 acres* proposed
Revision to Wilderness Proposal (Service 1971a) due to public hearing	1,460,340 acres* determined suitable
Wilderness Proposal (Service 1971a; October)	1,443,100 acres** determined suitable
Wilderness Study Report (Service 1971b; April)	1,442,000 acres** determined suitable
Draft Wilderness Study Report, pre 1971	1,646,000 acres** determined suitable

\*Acreage includes 76,000 acres of BLM land previously outside the Refuge boundaries.

\*\*Acreage includes 58,000 acres of BLM land previously outside the Refuge boundaries

**Research Natural Areas.** Research natural areas (RNAs) are part of a national network of reserved areas under various ownerships. RNAs are intended to represent the full array of North American ecosystems with their biological communities, habitats, natural phenomena, and geological and hydrological formations.

In RNAs, as in designated wilderness, natural processes are allowed to predominate without human intervention. Under certain circumstances, deliberate manipulation may be used to maintain the unique features for which the RNA was established. Table 1.7-2 lists the RNAs on Desert NWR. Figure 3.3–1 shows their locations on the Refuge.

**Table 1.7-2. Research Natural Areas on Desert NWR**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Plant Community Represented</i>	<i>Area (acres)</i>
Basin	Interior Ponderosa Pine	650
Deadhorse	Grama-Galleta Steppe	3,000
Hayford Peak	Bristlecone Pine	2,000
Papoose Lake	Saltbush	23,680
Pinyon-Juniper	Pinyon-Juniper	500

**Important Bird Area.** In 2004, the Audubon Society designated 24,000 acres of the southern Sheep Range as an IBA, one of 35 in Nevada (National Audubon Society 2004). With a wide range of elevation and aspect, the Sheep Range IBA supports a variety of plant communities, including Mojave scrub, pinyon-juniper woodland, ponderosa pine and aspen forest, as well as scattered springs and seeps. The Sheep Range IBA provides important breeding habitat for flammulated owl, gray flycatcher, black-throated gray warbler, and Grace's warbler. It also represents the northern limit of the Mexican whip-poor-will (McIvor 2005).

### *Refuge Purposes*

Desert NWR has four purposes derived from laws under which it was established:

*"...for the protection, enhancement, and maintenance of wildlife resources, including bighorn sheep..."*  
(Public Land Order 4079, dated August 31, 1966, as amended by PL 106-65).

*"...to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species...or (B) plants..."* (ESA, 16 USC Sec. 1534).

*"...suitable for (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species..."* (16 USC Sec. 460k-1).

*"...the Secretary...may accept and use...real...property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors..."* (Refuge Recreation Act, as amended, 16 USC Sec. 460k-2).

### *Vision*

Desert NWR's vision statement is:

*As the largest refuge in the contiguous United States, Desert National Wildlife Refuge provides the highest quality, intact habitat for desert bighorn sheep and other fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats native to the Great Basin and Mojave Desert ecosystems.*

*This rugged, arid landscape supports a full range of desert habitats from playas on the valley floors through desert scrub and coniferous woodlands to ancient bristlecone pine groves on the mountain peaks. The vast, rugged wild spaces provide wildlife and people a refuge and a place for harmonious recreational opportunities.*



### *Refuge Goals*

The Service developed five goals for management of Desert NWR. These goals were used to identify appropriate objectives and strategies and develop alternatives with specific management actions.

**Bighorn Sheep (Goal 1).** Maintain and, where necessary, restore healthy population levels of bighorn sheep on Desert NWR within each of the six major mountain ranges.

**Wildlife Diversity (Goal 2).** Maintain the existing natural diversity of native wildlife and plants, including special-status species, at Desert NWR.

**Specially designated Areas (Goal 3).** Manage specially designated areas such that they augment the purposes of the Desert NWR.

**Visitor Services (Goal 4).** Visitors understand, appreciate, and enjoy the fragile Mojave/Great Basin Desert ecosystem.

**Cultural Resources (Goal 5).** Manage cultural resources for their educational, scientific, and traditional cultural values for the benefit of present and future generations of refuge users, communities, and culturally affiliated tribes.

### **1.7.3 Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge**

#### *Location*

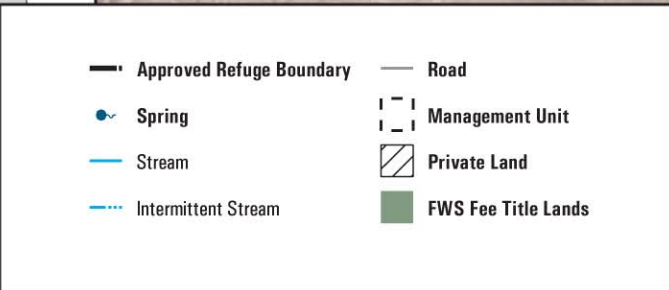
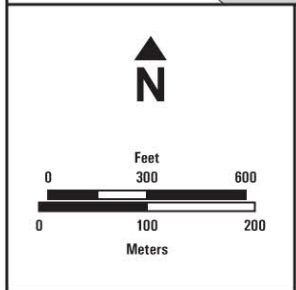
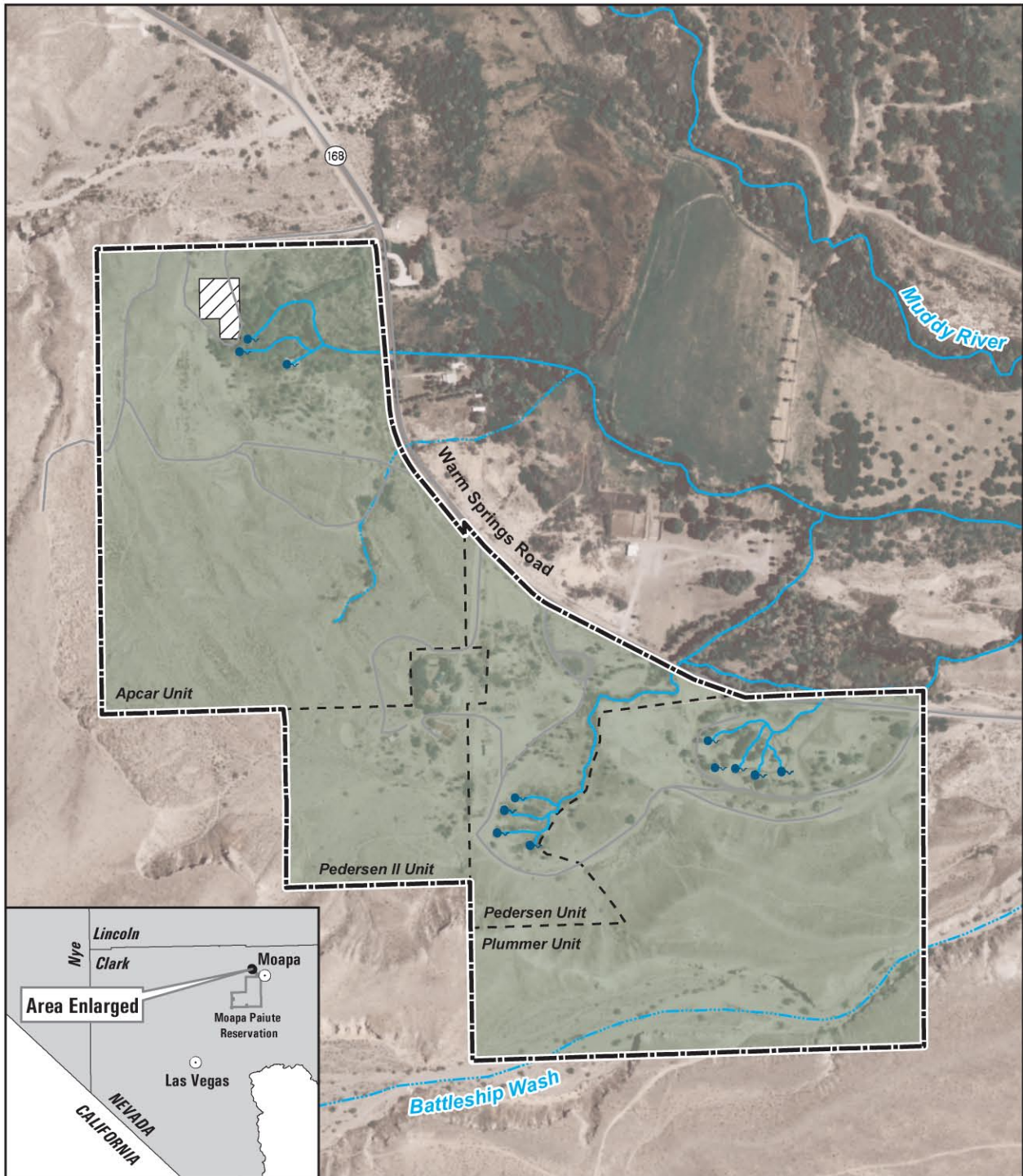
Moapa Valley NWR encompasses 116 acres and is located about 60 miles northeast of Las Vegas in Clark County (Figure 1.7-3). The Refuge is part of a unique system of thermal springs that are part of the headwaters of the Muddy River, which eventually flow into Lake Mead east of Las Vegas. The Refuge is located south of State Highway 168 and the upper Muddy River, between I-15 and U.S. Highway 93. The entire Refuge lies within the upper Moapa Valley. It is bounded on the north by Warm Springs Road, on the south by Battleship Wash, and on the east and west by private property. The Moapa Indian Reservation is located 5 miles south of the Refuge.

#### *History of Establishment and Acquisition*

Moapa Valley NWR was established on September 10, 1979, to secure and protect habitat for the endangered Moapa dace.

As stated in a 1979 Environmental Assessment of Proposed Land Acquisition for Moapa Dace (Service 1979):

*“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes: 1. To acquire, in fee or by exchange in the upper Moapa Valley of Clark County, Nevada, approximately 90 acres of land deemed essential habitat of the endangered Moapa dace, *Moapa coriacea*, for the purpose of protecting this fish and enhancing its survival prospects.”*



**Figure 1.7-3**  
**Land Status**  
**Moapa Valley**  
**NWR**



The endemic Moapa dace lives out its lifecycle in the Warm Springs thermal spring complex that includes more than 20 springs located within the Refuge. Historic uses of the spring pools and the surrounding landscape for agricultural and recreational purposes have altered the habitat of the Moapa dace.

The Refuge comprises multiple adjacent but visually distinct units. The original Pedersen Unit was acquired in 1979 and is 30 acres in size. An additional 11 acres were purchased in 2006 from Richard and Lorena Pedersen and are referred to as the Pedersen II Unit. The Plummer Unit was acquired in 1997 and is 28 acres in size, and the Apcar Unit was acquired in 2000 and is 48 acres in size. Each unit has a separate stream system supported by the steady and uninterrupted flow of several springs that surface at various places throughout the Refuge.

Due to the Refuge's small size, fragile habitats, ongoing restoration work, and removal of unsafe structures, the Refuge has been closed to the public since its establishment. Plans to open the Refuge to the public are currently under way as part of this planning process. Agency scientists with the USGS Biological Resources Division and NDOW, as well as local conservation and community organizations, are working with Service staff to restore the historical landscape and habitat on the Refuge, which is critical to the survival of the Moapa dace. Public education and outreach are also important to the recovery of the Moapa dace.

### *Historic Conditions*

The Muddy River area has been affected by human activities associated with development, recreation, agricultural uses, and other land disturbing activities. The Muddy River historically flowed into the Virgin River prior to the construction of Hoover Dam (TNC 2000). It is a remnant of the White River system, which also flowed through Pahrangat NWR. Historically, the streams in the area were bordered by willow and mesquite, but activities in the past century have introduced palm trees and tamarisk into the riparian habitats along streams (Service 1996). Ash and cottonwood are also considered native, although cottonwoods were believed to have been brought into the area by Mormon settlers (TNC 2000).

### *Refuge Partnerships*

Moapa Valley NWR has partnerships with a variety of organizations and other agencies to manage the Refuge and its resources. The Service works with the following organizations and agencies:

- **USGS:** Assists with monitoring Moapa dace and other native and nonnative fish on the Refuge, provides recommendations on restoring habitat for dace, conducts research on Moapa dace and other species that provides critical info for restoration and management, and monitors water levels.
- **NDOW:** Assists with monitoring Moapa dace populations and provides input regarding non-game wildlife regarding habitat restoration efforts.

- Partners in Conservation: Assists in Refuge volunteer events and efforts.
- Muddy River Regional Environmental Implementation Action Committee: Assists in Refuge volunteer events and efforts and assists with removal of nonnative vegetation on the Refuge.
- Service – Ecological Services: Conducts Moapa dace and other nonnative fish population counts and monitoring and assists with trapping and removal of nonnative fish and reptiles from Refuge streams and spring pools.
- CGTO: Provides recommendations/feedback on proposed refuge projects and provides tribal monitors for construction projects.

### *Special Designations*

**Important Bird Area.** Moapa Valley IBA encompasses riparian, mesquite, and Mojave Desert scrub habitat in the Moapa Valley and along the upper reaches of the Muddy River. This area supports a diversity of birds, including breeding populations of the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher. The presence of a rare habitat type in Nevada distinguishes this area from others and warrants its recognition as an IBA.

**Wilderness.** In accordance with the Service’s Refuge Planning Policy, a wilderness review of Moapa Valley NWR was conducted during the CCP process (see Appendix I). Moapa Valley NWR was found not suitable for wilderness designation.

### *Refuge Purpose*

The purpose of Moapa Valley NWR derives from the ESA:

*“...to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species...or (B) plants...” (16 USC Sec. 1534).*

### *Vision*

Moapa Valley NWR’s vision is:

*Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge supports and protects a healthy, thriving population of Moapa dace at the headwaters of the Muddy River. Stable flows from the Refuge’s numerous warm springs fill meandering channels downstream that provide ideal habitat for dace, Virgin River chub and other species of endemic fish and invertebrates.*

*The spring bank and riparian plant communities provide habitat for southwestern willow flycatcher as well as a rich diversity of migratory and resident songbirds, colonial nesting species, and other native wildlife.*

*Local residents and visitors learn about and enjoy this restored desert oasis. Volunteers take personal satisfaction from contributing to the conservation and protection of Refuge wildlife and the unique spring system nourished habitats on which they depend.*

### *Goals*

The Service developed two goals for management of the Moapa Valley NWR. These goals were used to identify appropriate objectives and strategies and develop alternatives with specific management actions.

**Endemic and Special-Status Species (Goal 1).** Protect and restore, when possible, healthy populations of endemic and special-status species, such as the endangered Moapa dace, within the Muddy River headwaters.

**Visitor Services (Goal 2).** Local communities and others enjoy and learn about the resources of Moapa Valley NWR and participate in its restoration.

## **1.7.4 Pahrnat National Wildlife Refuge**

### *Location*

Pahrnat NWR is located approximately 90 miles north of Las Vegas along U.S. Highway 93 at the southern end of Pahrnat Valley (Figure 1.7-4). It encompasses 5,380 acres of marshes, open water, native grass meadows, cultivated croplands, and riparian habitat in Lincoln County. The town of Alamo is a few miles north of the Refuge.

### *History of Establishment and Acquisition*

Pahrnat NWR was established on August 16, 1963, to provide habitat for migratory birds, especially waterfowl. The Refuge is an important stopping point for numerous migratory birds during their fall and spring migrations. It is also an important tourist attraction for visitors traveling on U.S. Highway 93 to or from Las Vegas.

Public Land Order 3348 in 1964 withdrew an additional 1,466 acres from public domain for incorporation into the Refuge boundary, bringing the acreage of Pahrnat NWR to a total of 5,382 acres. In 1966, the Service also acquired a 347-acre lake bottom on the Refuge.

### *Historic Conditions*

The Pahrnat River has been modified and disturbed as a result of human activities related to agricultural uses and development. The river is primarily fed by spring discharge from Ash and Crystal Springs (Tuttle et al. 1990). Historically, these springs and the river likely contained a thick riparian corridor of ash, cottonwood, and willow. Native upland vegetation includes pinyons and junipers in the mountains and greasewood and sage at lower elevations.

Human activities have channelized, diverted, and dried up portions of the Pahrnagat River drainage. Concrete channels have been installed to control and divert flows for irrigation of agricultural fields north of and within the Refuge. The Pahrnagat River historically flowed into Maynard Lake and was a relic of the White River drainage, which discharged into the Virgin River (Tuttle et al. 1990). The White River drainage has dried up and is represented now by springs located throughout its historic channel. The Pahrnagat River is now an intermittent drainage affected by agricultural uses, and it discharges into three man-made lakes on the Refuge.

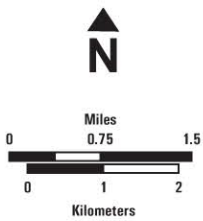
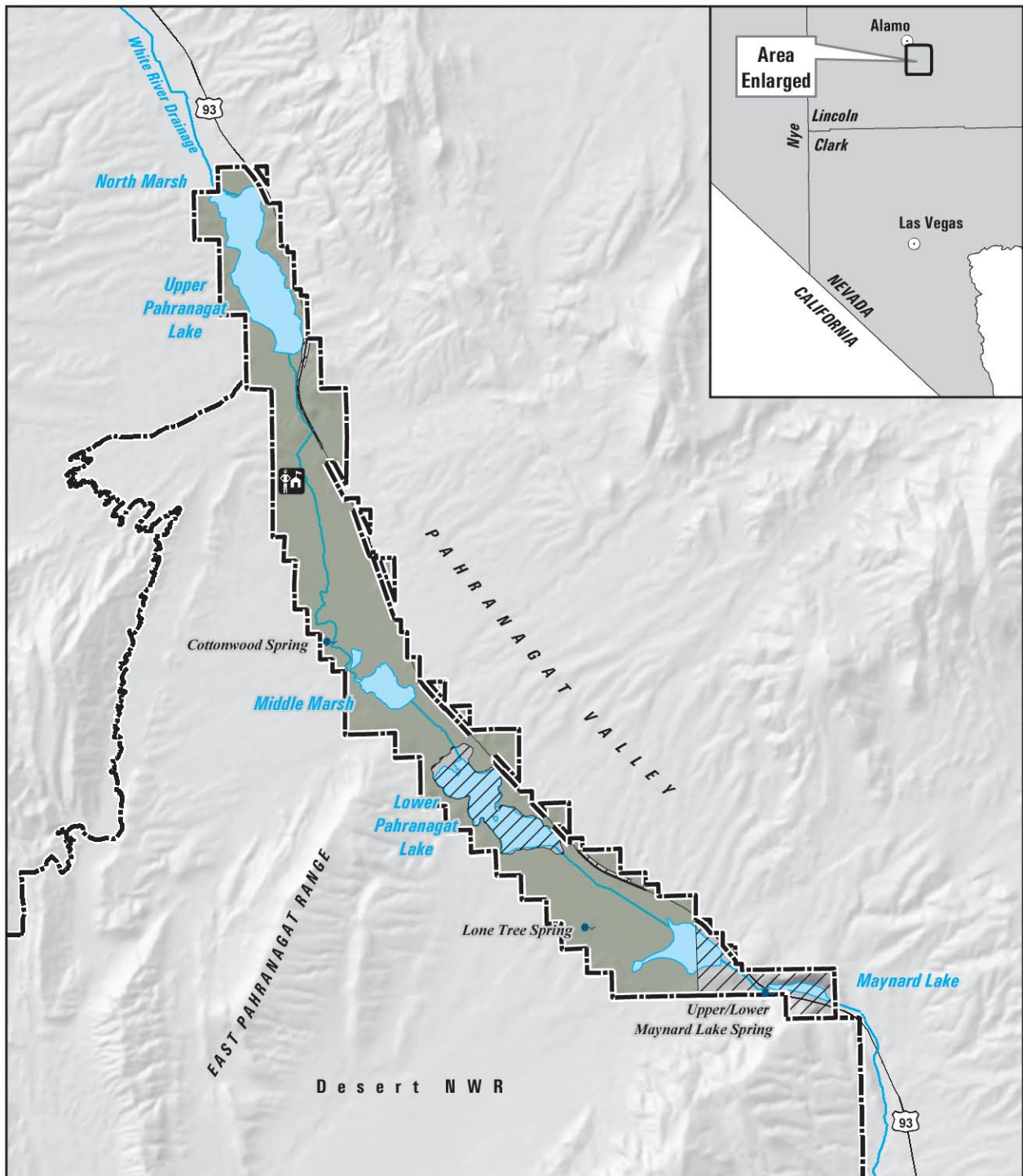
### *Refuge Partnerships*

Pahrnagat NWR has partnerships with a variety of organizations and other agencies to manage the Refuge and its resources. The Service works with the following organizations and agencies:

- **NDOW**: Administers portions of waterfowl and upland game hunt program, conducts periodic wildlife surveys, conducts mid-winter waterfowl surveys, has a cooperative agreement to manage warm-water sport fishery, conducts yellow-billed cuckoo surveys and produces an annual report, conducts southwestern willow flycatcher surveys and produces an annual report, and conducts montane vole genetic research.
- **U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**: Conducts southwest willow flycatcher surveys.
- **Great Basin Bird Observatory**: Conducts breeding bird surveys and administers biologist contract for oversight of preplanning wetland restoration project.
- **CGTO**: Provides recommendations/feedback on proposed refuge management plans and provides tribal monitors for inventory of Black Canyon.
- **Service – Ecological Services**: Conducts spring inventories, killdeer nest monitoring, and spring restoration.
- **BLM**: Researches Russian knapweed treatments.
- **Southern Nevada Water Authority**: Provides native vegetation for stabilization of the Las Vegas Wash.
- **University of New Mexico**: Conducts montane vole genetics research.
- **Northern Arizona University**: Conducts research on cottonwood trees.
- **NPS Exotic Plant Management Team and USGS**: Conduct research on exotic/invasive plant management techniques.

### *Special Designations*

**Important Bird Area.** Pahrnagat Valley is one of two routes that offers surface water and cover for birds migrating through the western Great Basin (Ash Meadows NWR is the other). More than 230 different species of birds use Refuge habitats.



- Approved Refuge Boundary
- Visitor Contact Station
- FWS Fee Title
- BLM Land
- Spring
- Stream
- Open Water

**Figure 1.7-4**  
**Land Status**  
**Pahrnagat**  
**NWR**

Bird abundance and diversity is highest during spring and fall migrations, when large numbers of songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors are present. Common ducks are pintail, teal, mallards, and redhead. Great blue herons are found near lakes, while black-necked stilts and American avocets are found feeding in shallow water. Greater sandhill cranes can be seen from February to March and again in October and November as they migrate between nesting and wintering areas. Red-tailed hawks, northern harriers, Cooper's hawks, and American kestrels are most abundant during winter months, and bald eagles and golden eagles are also winter visitors. Cottonwood-willow habitat provides nesting habitat for warblers, orioles, flycatchers, and finches. The open fields attract shrikes, meadowlarks, blackbirds, and mourning doves. The uplands are home to Gambel's quail, roadrunners, and various sparrow species.

**Wilderness.** In accordance with the Service's Refuge Planning Policy, a wilderness review of Pahranaagat NWR was conducted during the CCP process (see Appendix I). Three small units of Pahranaagat NWR along the western side of the Refuge and adjacent to the proposed desert wilderness on Desert NWR were determined to meet the criteria for wilderness designation.

#### *Refuge Purpose*

The purpose of Pahranaagat NWR derives from the Migratory Bird Conservation Act:

*"...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds..."* (16 USC 715d).

#### *Vision*

Pahranaagat NWR's vision statement is:

*The Pahranaagat National Wildlife Refuge is managed as a sanctuary where present and future generations of people can discover a connection to the rhythms of life. In spring, indigo bush and beavertail cactus bloom at the edges of verdant meadows and wetlands, fed by brimming lakes. The vital, spring-fed waters of this Mojave Desert oasis attract thousands of migratory birds each year. Pahranaagat NWR's seasonal marsh, wet meadows, and alkali flats provide high quality resting and foraging habitat for wintering and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds and other waterbirds along the Pacific Flyway. Riparian gallery forests of willow, cottonwood, and associated plant communities support a flourishing population of southwestern willow flycatcher as well as a rich diversity of migratory and resident songbirds, colonial nesting species and birds of prey. Coveys of Gambel's quail emerge at dusk along with abundant cottontails and jackrabbits as nighthawks, coyotes, and owls*

*begin to hunt. Each fall brings returning waterfowl and waterfowl hunters, while mountain lions follow mule deer down into the valley.*

*Wetlands, wet meadows, upland plant communities, natural springs, and cultural history entice scientists and scholars to study Refuge resources and further human understanding of the processes and environments that are the foundation for the rich diversity of life on Pahrnagat NWR and how humans have interacted with that environment over millennia.*

*Other researchers focus on understanding the role of southwestern wetlands and diversity in the regional and national refuge system, the preeminent example of a habitat conservation system in the United States and perhaps the world. This ever expanding understanding contributes to conservation and management of Mojave Desert environments important to southern Nevada, the southwest, and the United States.*

*Visitors from near and far find sanctuary among the crystal pools and springs as they learn about the Refuge's unique plant and animal communities. Local people take pride in the Refuge, and visitors tell their families and friends about this brilliant desert gem. Educators recognize the Refuge as an exceptional regional resource for environmental education and observation of wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend. Volunteers take great personal satisfaction from applying their interests and abilities to the conservation and interpretation of a unique, natural Mojave Desert community for the enjoyment of present and future generations of Americans.*

### *Goals*

The Service developed four goals for the management of Pahrnagat NWR. These goals were used to identify appropriate objectives and strategies and develop alternatives with specific management actions.

**Wetland Habitat (Goal 1).** Restore and maintain wetland habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds with an emphasis on spring and fall migration feeding and resting habitat requirements.

**Wildlife Diversity (Goal 2).** Restore and maintain the ecological integrity of natural communities within Pahrnagat NWR and contribute to the recovery of listed and other special-status species.

**Visitor Services (Goal 3).** Provide visitors with compatible wildlife-dependent recreation, interpretation, and environmental education opportunities that foster an appreciation and understanding of Pahrnagat NWR's wildlife and plant communities.

**Cultural Resources (Goal 4).** Manage cultural resources for their educational, scientific, and traditional cultural values for the benefit of present and future generations of refuge users, communities, and culturally affiliated tribes.

## **1.8 Intent of This CCP/EIS**

The CCP/EIS is a programmatic document intended to analyze proposed management actions on a conceptual level, except in those cases where sufficient information is available to provide project-specific analysis. Therefore, the extent of analysis provided for each wildlife/habitat management and/or public use proposal reflects the level of detail currently available for the specific proposal. It is during subsequent project-level planning, referred to as “step-down” planning, that additional studies would be conducted, additional baseline data would be gathered, the appropriate project-level NEPA documentation would be prepared, all necessary permits would be acquired, and final engineering and planning would be conducted. Step-down planning would also include a public involvement component similar to that provided during the CCP process.



*Chapter 2.*  
*Comprehensive Conservation*  
*Planning Process*



Mountain view across North Marsh at Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge



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 willing 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 Pahrnagat 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 Pahrnagat 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?
  - Pahrangat 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.

## *Chapter 3. Alternatives*



Crystal Springs overlook at Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

# Chapter 3. Alternatives

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the management actions identified for the alternatives for each refuge in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex). The alternatives described in this chapter comprise the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) actions for which potential impacts are analyzed in Chapter 5, Environmental Consequences. The chapter includes a description of the No Action Alternative, which consists of a continuation of the current management actions and is used as a baseline to compare the action alternatives.

Appendix F provides detailed descriptions of the goals, objectives, and management actions or strategies to achieve the preferred alternative for each refuge. It also provides rationales for each objective to explain the need for the management actions and identify how the objective meets the goals of the refuge.

In this chapter, the following topics are presented for each refuge:

- Features common to all alternatives;
- Description of alternatives considered;
- Comparison of alternatives; and
- Management actions considered but eliminated from detailed analysis as part of the alternatives

The Service proposes to develop and implement a CCP for the refuges in the Desert Complex that best achieves the purposes for which each refuge was established, helps fulfill the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), is consistent with sound fish and wildlife management, and ensures that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the NWRS are maintained. The Final CCP will include proposals for wildlife and habitat management, habitat enhancement and—where appropriate—habitat restoration, and visitor services. The Service examined a wide range of management alternatives for each refuge. Of these, Alternative C represents the Service's preferred alternative for the Ash Meadows, Desert, and Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs), and Alternative D represents the Service's preferred alternative for Pahrnagat NWR. Of the alternatives evaluated, these alternatives appear to best achieve the purpose, vision, and goals for the Refuges while also appropriately addressing the major issues and relevant mandates identified for each Refuge during the CCP process.



## **3.2 Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge Alternatives**

Ash Meadows NWR's alternatives consist of the No Action Alternative and two action alternatives. The No Action Alternative contains a variety of management actions that have recently been implemented on the Refuge or will be implemented before the CCP is approved. The two action alternatives contain management actions to improve Refuge conditions at varying levels. Alternative B would improve habitat for endemic species on portions of the Refuge and increase visitor services and facilities. Alternative C would improve habitat throughout the Refuge and provide increased visitor services, but visitor facilities would remain similar to current conditions.

### **3.2.1 Features Common to All Alternatives**

A number of current management actions would be implemented for the Ash Meadows NWR under each of the alternatives. The two action alternatives propose additional management actions to improve Refuge conditions. Actions that are common to all alternatives are described below and are not repeated in each alternative description.

#### *Species Management*

To manage special-status plants and wildlife, the Service would continue to monitor species and conduct baseline inventories. Specifically, the Service would continue to inventory vegetation communities, small mammals, herpetofauna, and pollinators. The four-year baseline inventory and monitoring for endemic fish species, three-year refuge-wide survey of reptiles, and three-year baseline inventory and monitoring for the southwestern willow flycatcher would be completed. The Service would also monitor changes in the environment, such as changes in vegetation communities, wildlife trends, and surface and groundwater levels, to assess the effects of climate change on the Refuge, if any. These actions would allow the Service to gain valuable knowledge about Refuge resources and make informed decisions for species management.

The Refuge provides one refugium for the Devils Hole pupfish at Point of Rocks. Under each of the alternatives, the Service would close the refugium and establish a new refugium, possibly at the Amargosa Pupfish Station site, that would be regularly monitored, including conducting quarterly fish counts and periodic water quality measurements. The refugium would be designed with a fully automated monitoring and control system (independent power, battery backup, temperature control, pump backup, remote transmittal of data, and alarms). In addition, the Service would construct a separate refugium for Warm Springs pupfish and manage it similarly. Once these refugia are operating successfully, the Service would close the refugium at Point of Rocks and restore the spring outflow and channel.

The natural communities of the Refuge would continue to be managed and monitored with an emphasis on invasive species control and removal (vegetation and aquatic species), and monitoring, restoration, and other activities would occur as staffing and funding are available.

These communities include spring outflow habitat, streams and associated habitats, wetlands, mesquite and ash groves, and desert uplands. The Service would also improve the Refuge-wide vegetation map using ground surveys and updating the geographic information system data in order to initiate long-term annual vegetation monitoring and assess impacts to vegetation communities.

The Service would continue a variety of management actions relating to maintaining springs and protecting resources, including:

- Continue monitoring springs to maintain existing water flows (17,000 acre feet per year [afy]; Mayer 2006) and natural temperature range for the 30 known Refuge springs;
- Maintain existing spring outflow structures and stream channels at monitoring sites;
- Remove invasive plants and exotic aquatic species;
- Seed and plant native vegetation to restore habitats;
- Manipulate and enhance substrates;
- Remove hydrologic barriers;
- Continue current levels of enforcement measures to protect plants and wildlife;
- Continue current fuel breaks and fuel reduction projects to reduce risk of wildfire;
- Maintain the existing boundary fence to exclude wild horses; and
- Continue closing nonessential roads to control access.

As a part of water resources management, the Service would continue to monitor water parameters (flow, levels, and temperature) at springs and wells identified in the Water Monitoring Plan (Mayer 2003), compare water quality and quantity with past measurements on a biannual basis, and implement measures in coordination with the State Engineer to defend water rights and mitigate substantial changes in water flow or temperature and maintain constant water parameters.

The Service would continue to protect and manage habitat by repairing post and cable barriers, installing additional barriers where needed to protect resources, and replacing or adding gates and signs on service or fire roads to prevent unauthorized access. Wildland fires on the refuge would be managed using the appropriate management response (AMR). The response would consider resource values at risk and potential negative impacts of various fire suppression measures. Firefighter and public safety would be the highest priority for every incident.

### *Restoration*

In order to enhance habitat on the Refuge for endemic species, the Service would complete and begin implementing Restoration Plans for five areas: Upper Point of Rocks, Jackrabbit Spring, the Warm Springs Management Units (North and South Indian Springs and School Springs), Crystal Springs Unit, and Carson Slough. These plans involve restoring and enhancing native habitat for endemic species. Nonnative or invasive plants would be replaced with native plants that

were historically present on the Refuge. In addition, approximately 30 acres of native upland habitat would be restored in the Warm Springs Complex and Jackrabbit/Big Springs Units.

Invasive plant and wildlife management would continue to occur on a project-by-project basis, with the greatest threats being prioritized. The Service would continue to remove invasive plant species at restoration sites and in burned areas using physical (cutting and extraction) and chemical (herbicides) means, as appropriate based on the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan (Service 2006b). Mechanical methods would continue to be used around man-made reservoirs and other open water sources to control vegetation and improve open water habitat for fish and wildlife.

The Service would complete the pending land and mineral withdrawal with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in order to transfer the BLM-managed lands within the approved Refuge boundary to the Service. This would optimize the Service's ability to manage the Refuge for its intended purposes. Because Refuge staff already manages BLM lands and Refuge resources are being spent to create capital improvements on BLM lands, completing the land and mineral withdrawal would not require allocation of additional Refuge resources.

Private lands within the Refuge boundaries would also continue to be acquired from willing sellers. For private lands that are not acquired, the Service would continue to coordinate with the landowners to protect the resources.

#### *Research*

Research opportunities on the Refuge would vary by alternative. Research activities would continue to be allowed on a case-by-case basis using special use permits.

#### *Visitor Services*

To expand visitor knowledge of the Refuge and its resources, the Service would continue to develop environmental education and interpretive materials. The Interpretation Plan for the Refuge would be implemented to provide direction on preparing interpretive materials and constructing interpretive facilities (signs, trails, boardwalks, etc.). Specifically, Devils Hole and pupfish life history information would be included in Refuge brochures, fact sheets, and maps. Information on other endemic and special-status species would also be incorporated into environmental education and interpretive information, as appropriate. Current visitor services for wildlife-dependent recreation activities, such as pupfish viewing, bird watching, and hunting, would continue to be offered in accordance with the existing Public Use Management Plan (Service 1998a), and virtual geocaching (use of geographic positioning system units for treasure hunts) would continue to be allowed in accordance with Refuge policy.

Boardwalks are being designed to follow Kings Pool Stream from the parking lot to Kings Pool with a pool overlook. Specific interpretive materials are also being developed to educate visitors, including displays along the new boardwalks and panels for the new boardwalk and overlook at Longstreet Spring Pool. In addition, parking areas at Point of Rocks and Longstreet Cabin are being improved for visitor safety and access, and Refuge boundary signs would continue to be replaced as needed to control access. Spring Meadows Road would be maintained as a through road for non-commercial traffic. Other designated roads and visitor use areas would also be maintained.

Visitor education needs and opportunities would continue to be assessed through informal contact with visitors. A study would be conducted to determine the number of visitors using the Refuge and the purpose of their visits.

Hunting opportunities for upland game and waterfowl would continue to be offered in designated areas of the Refuge, consistent with Service and Refuge policies and goals. The hunt program would continue based on the interim Hunt Plan until a revised Hunt Plan is completed.

### *Cultural Resources*

Cultural resources management and protection would vary by alternative.

### **3.2.2 Alternative A – No Action (Current Management)**

Alternative A is the current management situation, or No Action Alternative, for the Refuge. It serves as a baseline with which the objectives and management actions of the two action alternatives, Alternatives B and C, can be compared and contrasted. Because this alternative reflects current management, it would not result in substantial changes to the way the Refuge would be managed in the future. Figure 3.2-1 graphically summarizes the actions that would continue under this alternative.

### *Species Management*

The Service would continue to implement those management actions identified under “Features Common to All Alternatives.” Species management on the Refuge is currently guided by the 2006 Geomorphic and Biological Assessment (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). This document provides an overview of the resources on the Refuge and identifies recommendations for species management. Management actions identified in the document are evaluated and implemented as appropriate and as staffing and funding become available.

### *Restoration*

The Service would continue to implement those management actions identified under “Features Common to All Alternatives.” In addition to restoration of 30 acres of native upland habitat, the Service would restore 70 acres of alkali/wet meadow habitat and 30 acres of mesquite bosques/lowland riparian habitat. In addition, approximately 10 to 25

percent of the old agricultural fields would be rehabilitated by controlling invasive plants and planting native species.

Restoration activities would involve modifying or altering hydrology of streams and channels to more closely resemble historic conditions and planting native species in appropriate areas, such as where nonnative and invasive plants are removed, roads are closed, or hydrology is modified.

#### *Research*

The Service would continue to implement those management actions identified under “Features Common to All Alternatives.”

#### *Visitor Services*

In addition to the management actions described under “Features Common to All Alternatives,” the Service would continue to provide limited environmental education activities and off-Refuge outreach about the value of wildlife and the public’s involvement on the Refuge. In addition, the Service would continue to allow boats to be used to access waterfowl hunting areas.

#### *Cultural Resources*

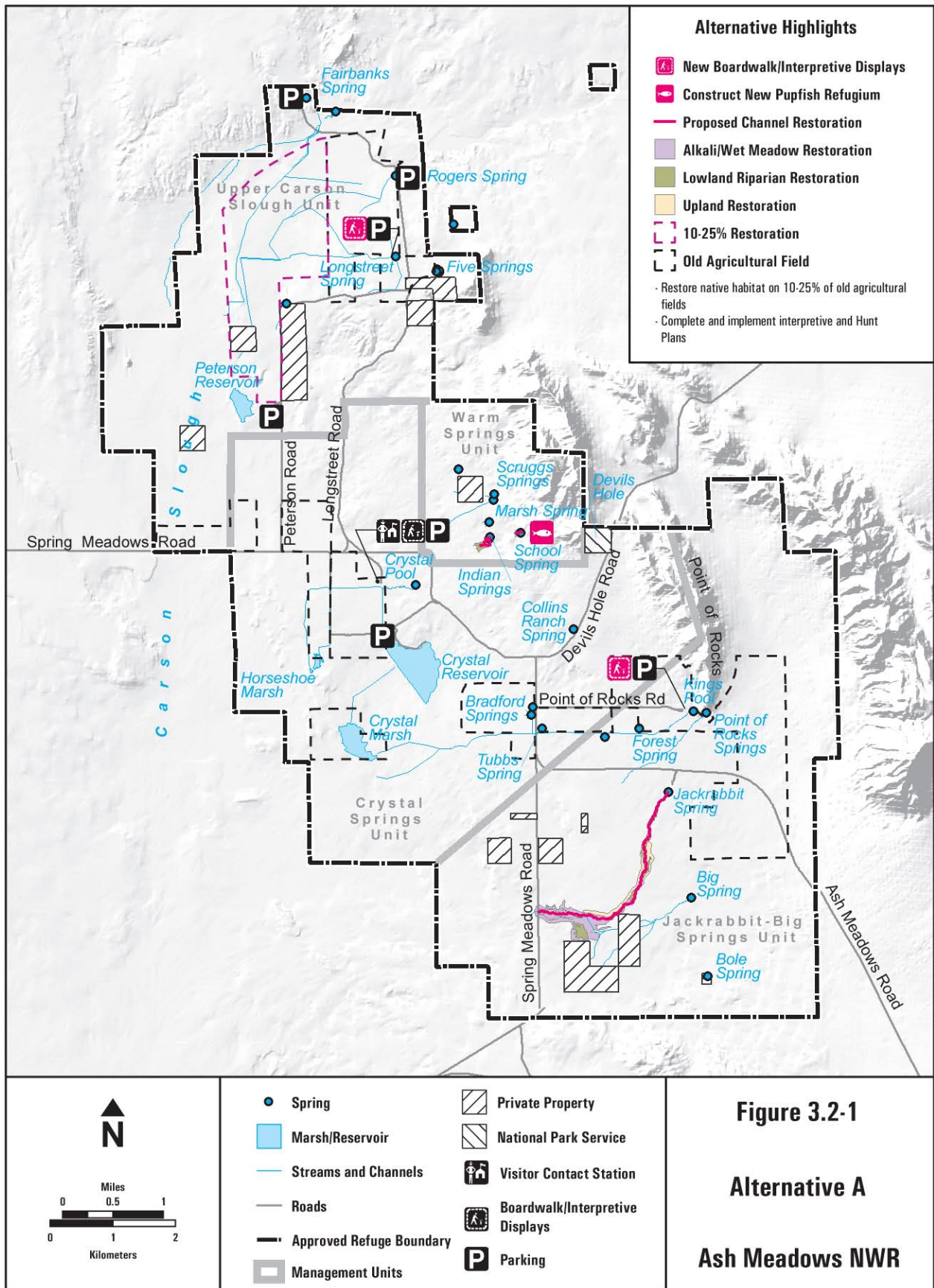
The Service would continue to inventory, manage, and protect cultural and historic resources on the Refuge on a project-by-project basis to comply with applicable laws and regulations. Appropriate educational information on cultural resources would continue to be provided to visitors at the visitor contact station through informal outreach.

### **3.2.3 Alternative B – Improve Habitat for Endemic Species on Portions of the Refuge and Increase Visitor Services**

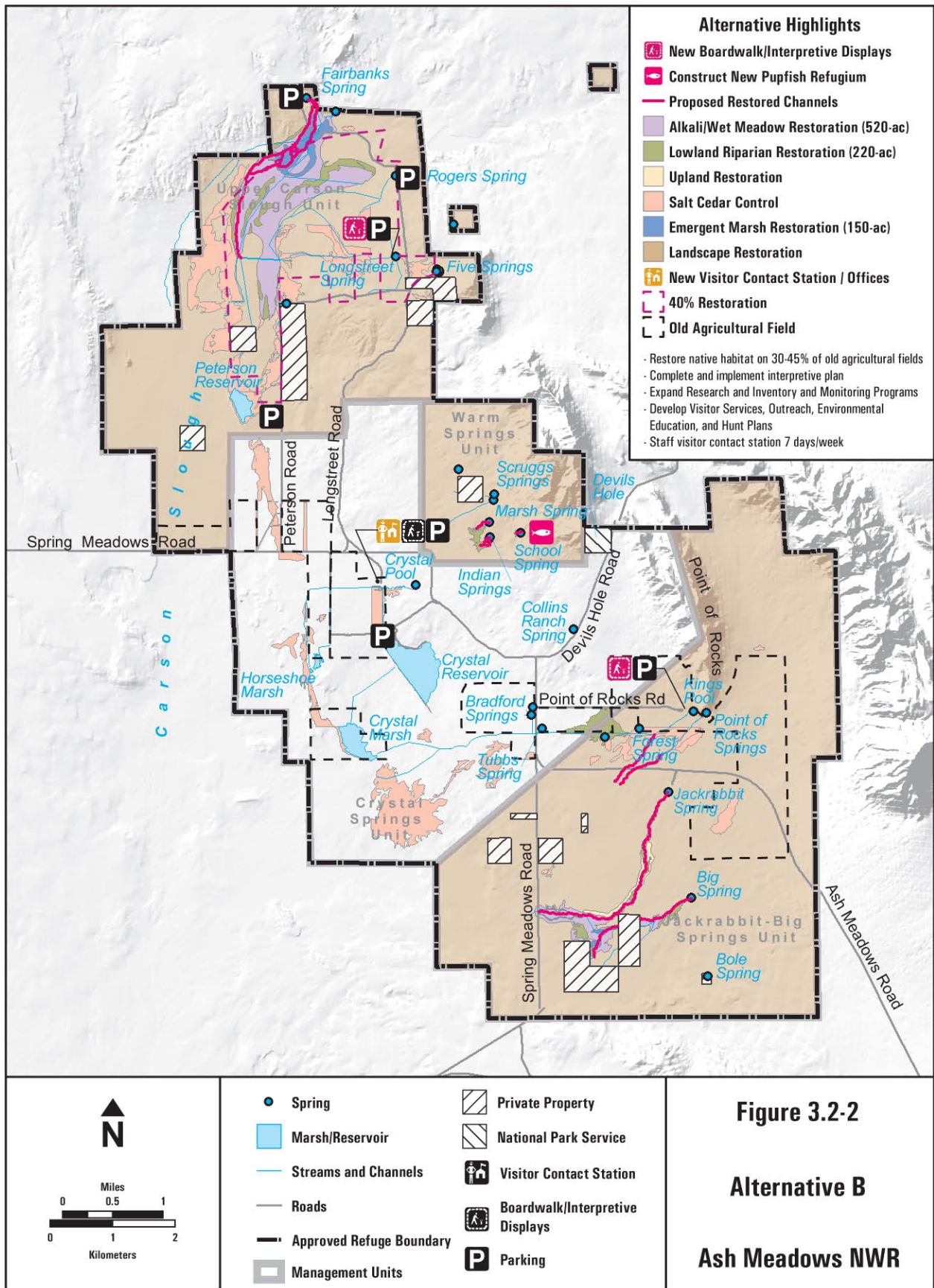
Alternative B provides for moderately increased management actions for all resource areas when compared to Alternative A (No Action). This alternative involves the objectives and management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section and additional management actions for more active management. Alternative B actions are portrayed in summary form in Figure 3.2-2.

#### *Species Management*

In order to obtain baseline population data on additional species, the Service would inventory listed endemic invertebrates, nonnative fish, and non-listed endemic invertebrates. Baseline data on 17 springs identified in the Geomorphic and Biological Assessment (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006) would also be collected within two years of approval of the CCP. Endemic species, nonnative species that adversely affect endemic species, and game species would be monitored to assess their population levels and effects on other species. The Service would establish long-term monitoring plots and transects to monitor vegetation annually.







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Specific management actions to benefit endemic and native species include the following:

- Restore population of Ash Meadows speckled dace to 5 to 25 percent of its historic range on the Refuge by restoring suitable habitat (flowing streams with riffles) and transplanting individuals between populations for genetic diversity;
- Double the current range of the Ash Meadows naucorid population to encompass a minimum area of 20 to 40 square meters by restoring the Point of Rocks spring outflow channel habitat to be suitable for the naucorid (flowing streams with substrate);
- Investigate the use of private aquaria as refugia for sensitive fish species;
- Identify suitable areas to expand endemic plant populations within 10 years;
- Begin transplanting endemic plants to suitable habitats on the Refuge within 15 years to expand their populations; and
- Prepare a feasibility study to evaluate the construction of an on-site greenhouse to supply native plants for restoration projects.

The Service would increase law enforcement patrols on the Refuge to control and prevent off-highway vehicles, fires, species collection, and other inappropriate activities. Additional road gates (up to 15) would be installed in appropriate locations to prevent unauthorized use of roads and damage to resources (i.e., habitat, species, cultural sites, and springs). Prescribed fire may be used where appropriate to create, improve, or maintain desired plant and animal communities, as well as to treat hazardous fuels.

### *Restoration*

The Service would restore natural hydrology in the Warm Springs, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, and Upper Carson Slough Management Units to improve habitat conditions and biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge. Berms, ditches, dams, impoundments, and unnecessary roads would be removed, as appropriate, to allow flows to return to historic conditions. Fish barriers would be installed, as needed, along water courses to allow the Service to control invasive fish.

As part of the Refuge-wide landscape restoration efforts, the Service would implement Restoration Plans for Lower Point of Rocks, Lower Kings Pool, and Marsh, Big, and Fairbanks Springs. These plans would include restoring historic hydrology, removing nonnative and invasive plants, and restoring native habitat. Once restoration activities are complete, the Service would regularly maintain and monitor the habitats to ensure restoration success.



Specific objectives for restoring habitat in the Warm Springs Complex, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Upper Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs Management Units include restoration of approximately:

- 520 acres of alkali wet meadow;
- 220 acres of mesquite bosque/lowland riparian; and
- 30 acres of native upland; and
- 150 acres of emergent marsh.

In addition, 30 to 45 percent of old agricultural fields would be rehabilitated by removing hydrologic barriers, controlling invasive plants, and planting native species.

The Service would also maintain the following communities in the Warm Springs Complex, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Upper Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs units by restoring natural hydrology and actively revegetating appropriate areas:

- 3,935 acres of alkaline meadow/wet meadow;
- 5,500–5,750 acres of native upland desert; and
- 1,000 acres of mesquite bosque.

Modifications to the hydrology of these areas would allow the habitats to naturally return to historic conditions, and native vegetation would be planted in appropriate areas, such as where nonnative species are removed or areas become exposed due to changes in hydrology.

A large part of habitat restoration is the management of pest, or invasive, species. The Refuge has completed an IPM Plan that describes specific management actions to implement for management of nonnative fish, invasive and nonnative plants, and other pest species. Long-term management of the Refuge is dependent on the control and removal of pest species.

The Service would implement appropriate techniques from the IPM Plan to control nonnative fish and nonnative and invasive plants in the various habitats on the Refuge (alkaline meadow/wet meadow, mesquite bosques, marshes, and desert uplands). Open water habitat would be expanded for birds and fish through the control of cattails, a species that forms uniform stands in open water habitat.

Salt cedar and Russian knapweed are noxious weeds that have become well established on the Refuge and throughout Nevada. Management efforts to control and reduce these plant populations are important to restoring habitats on the Refuge. The Service would remove salt cedar and Russian knapweed over the next 10 years to reduce their extent by between 50 and 75 percent of their 2006 distribution on 4,000 acres of Refuge land, and work with BLM to control these species on the adjacent BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Habitats containing listed plant species would be prioritized for pest management, and these species' responses to the removal of invasive plants would be monitored. Adverse effects to listed plants would require the Service to adjust their methods for pest species management to minimize the effects on listed plants.

Crayfish are a predator of native, endemic fish and invertebrates. Crayfish populations would be managed to maintain or reduce current distributions through regular trap and removal activities in spring habitats. Target areas for pest management would include the 10 most infested and important Refuge aquatic systems, as determined by the Service's Ecological Services program and Refuge staff; these areas would be expanded as appropriate.

In order to conserve the Refuge lands, the Service would establish conservation agreements with landowners or acquire inholdings from willing sellers. They would also evaluate the current land uses to ensure regulatory compliance.

### *Research*

Research opportunities on the Refuge would be expanded to include projects such as:

- Ecology and management of invasive species;
- Taxonomy, ecology, and management of rare and endemic species;
- Ecosystem energetics and dynamics;
- Historic and current plant community diversity, composition, and structure and the role of natural processes (fire, flood, drought); and
- Wildlife-habitat relationships.

### *Visitor Services*

To improve visitor services management, the Service would develop a comprehensive Visitor Services Plan, an Outreach Plan, and an Environmental Education Plan. The comprehensive Visitor Services Plan would evaluate and prescribe management actions to develop and manage compatible wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, related infrastructure, and associated staffing and funding needs on the Refuge. The Outreach Plan would provide direction on communicating with the public about habitat restoration needs and efforts, with a focus on the Carson Slough Restoration Plan. The Environmental Education Plan would assess visitor education needs and opportunities and incorporate the environmental education goals of the Ash Meadows species recovery plan, the Southern Nevada Valley-wide Environmental Education Strategy, the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, and the Ramsar Convention. Implementation of the Visitor Services and Environmental Education Plans would begin by 2010. The Service would coordinate with local affiliated tribes to develop education interpretation information for Refuge visitors.

The Service would work with the public, non-government entities, and private partners to develop an off-site refugium for pupfish species to promote awareness of the endangered pupfish and other endemic species at the Refuge. The Service would also contact local schools and provide at least three to five on-site programs per year for school children. The Service would participate in two or three off-Refuge annual events, such as the Nye County Fair, Pahrump Harvest Day, and Earth Day. The Service would develop an educational video on the endemic fish and other wildlife of Ash Meadows.

The Service would develop multilingual interpretative materials and construct new interpretive facilities at Fairbanks Springs. A volunteer program would be created to staff the visitor contact station seven days a week and provide other services for visitors and support for Refuge staff.

The Service would also improve visitor facilities on the Refuge. A new Refuge headquarters and visitor contact station building would be constructed within five years of obtaining funding. Other interpretive facilities identified in the Interpretive Plan (in progress) would be constructed as well, such as trails, boardwalks, signs, and similar facilities. The Service would improve existing roadways and parking areas to good condition based on the Refuge Transportation Plan.

Refuge staff would obtain baseline information on hunting activities on the Refuge and create a hunting step-down plan to address opportunities and restrictions on waterfowl and upland game hunting on the Refuge. The Service would also monitor hunting use on the Refuge to ensure regulatory compliance and minimal effects on resources. The Service would restrict or eliminate boat use for waterfowl hunting to prevent the introduction of quagga mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*), an invasive mollusk that attaches itself to boats. Quagga mussels have been a growing concern in Lake Mead and other surface waters in southern Nevada (Benson et al. 2008); the mussels could outcompete with native and endemic special-status fish on the Refuge and affect their populations.

### *Cultural Resources*

The Service would expand knowledge of cultural resources on the Refuge and develop educational materials for visitors about the Refuge's cultural resources. The Service would conduct a cultural resources inventory at all visitor facilities and areas that would be affected by Refuge projects. Eligible Traditional Cultural Properties and sacred sites would be nominated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. A site stewardship volunteer program would be established to assist with site monitoring, education and interpretation, and promoting cultural resources conservation in neighboring communities.

Cultural resources would be protected from looting, vandalism, erosion, and deterioration through installation of barriers and signs to preserve the resources. Samples would also be preserved to provide research opportunities and mitigate adverse effects. Habitats would be protected and restored to provide harvesting opportunities for Native

Americans. Traditional plant uses would be studied to determine appropriate locations on the Refuge for harvesting and other traditional uses.

### **3.2.4 Alternative C – Improve Habitat for Endemic Species Throughout the Refuge and Increase Visitor Services**

Alternative C is the preferred alternative. It is characterized by an increased emphasis on management actions for most of the resource areas, expanding upon those presented in Alternative B. This alternative includes the management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section and some management actions from Alternative B in addition to the activities discussed in this section. Activities that would not be implemented under this alternative are also noted; these actions would achieve different goals than those this alternative is targeting. Alternative C actions are summarized in Figure 3.2-3.

#### *Species Management*

In addition to the inventories and monitoring activities identified under Alternative B, the Service would complete inventories of nonnative and native species diversity and distribution and monitor all non-listed endemic and game species.

The Service would expand fish populations on the Refuge by expanding the management actions identified under Alternative B to restore endemic fish populations on 25 to 50 percent of their historic range on the Refuge. In addition, the Service would reestablish Ash Meadows speckled dace to historic habitats after restoration of springs and streams. Refugia may be useful for other endemic species; therefore, the Service would conduct a feasibility assessment to determine which additional species may benefit from refugia populations.

To protect habitat, the Service would implement management actions identified under Alternative B and “Features Common to All Alternatives” and develop a Resurfacing Plan for main roads. The plan would provide direction on roads to improve for public access and would consider changes in the Refuge due to habitat and hydrologic restoration projects. Road improvements are necessary to ensure visitors stay on designated roads and to protect habitat.

#### *Restoration*

In addition to Alternative B management actions, the Service would implement the following management actions to restore habitats and natural hydrology on the Refuge:

- Remove berms, ditches, dams, impoundments, and unnecessary roads within the Crystal Springs Management Unit, as necessary;
- Mitigate landscape disturbances from graded lands, mines, fences, and other activities by restoring native habitat;

- Implement the plan to modify or remove Crystal Reservoir to minimize adverse environmental effects on special-status species and alleviate potential concerns for visitor safety and Refuge management;
- Implement Restoration Plans for Tubbs, Bradford, Crystal, Forest, and North and South Scruggs Springs to restore and enhance native habitat; and
- Implement Restoration Plans to restore native habitat at Longstreet and Rogers Springs based on the Carson Slough Restoration Plan.

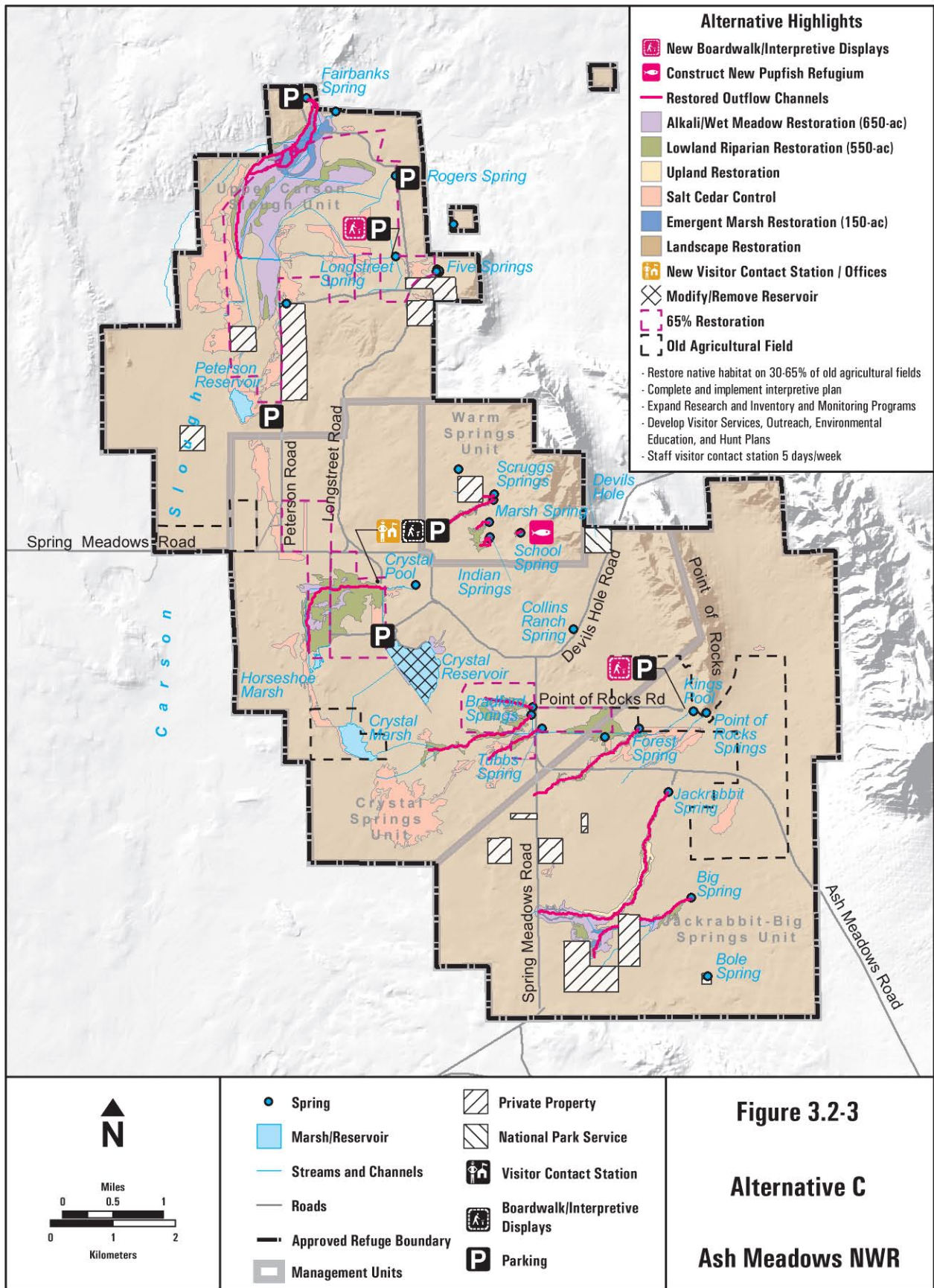
Specific objectives for restoring habitat in the Warm Springs Complex, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Upper Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs Management Units include restoration of larger amounts of habitat than under Alternative B. These objectives include restoring approximately:

- 650 acres of alkali wet meadow;
- 550 acres of mesquite bosque/lowland riparian; and
- 30 acres of native upland; and
- 150 acres of emergent marsh.

The alkali wet meadow habitat would be restored so that alkali sacaton and salt grass become the dominant species along with other native vegetation, such as Hall's meadow hawksbeard, alkali cordgrass, Baltic rush, foxtail barley, saltbush, and associated native plant species. Several endemic species are predominately found in alkali wet meadow habitat, including the threatened spring loving century and Ash Meadows Ivesia (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006).

The mesquite bosque/lowland riparian habitat would be restored to contain native plant species, such as leather-leaf ash, narrow-leaved willow, Gooddings willow, mesquite, quailbrush, arrow weed, Emory's baccharis, and other associated native plant species. Lowland riparian habitat is important for many federally listed species; other special-status species, including the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, peregrine falcon, vermilion flycatcher, Phainopepla, yellow-breasted chat, and long-eared myotis; and many other riparian-dependent landbird and migratory birds and resident animals (Clark County and Service 2000).

Native upland habitat would be managed to establish a range of native upland desert plant communities, including gradations between creosote bush–white bursage; dry ridgetop plant communities of predominately cotton top, beavertail cactus, and cholla; and shrub/scrub habitat with other native desert species. Two special-status species, chuckwalla and burrowing owls, use creosote-dominated upland habitat for burrowing sites and protection from predators (Nevada Department of Wildlife [NDOW] 2005c).



The emergent marsh habitat would be managed to establish plant communities dominated by bulrushes, saw-grass, and rushes with only minimal, sporadic patches of southern cattail. Refuge marshes provide rich habitat for native endemic fish, migratory birds, resident amphibians, and resident aquatic invertebrates (NDOW 2005a).

In addition, 40 to 65 percent of old agricultural fields would be rehabilitated by removing hydrologic barriers, controlling invasive plants, and planting native species.

The Service would also maintain the following communities in the Warm Springs Complex, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Upper Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs units by restoring natural hydrology and actively revegetating appropriate areas:

- 7,850 acres of alkaline meadow/wet meadow;
- 11,000–11,500 acres of native upland desert; and
- 2,000 acres of mesquite bosque.

The Service would expand pest management in addition to the management actions under Alternative B by evaluating alternative pest control actions (sterilization and biological control) and expanding activities to cover all Refuge aquatic systems. The target for reducing salt cedar and Russian knapweed distribution would be higher than Alternative B at between 75 and 95 percent of the 2006 distribution on 4,000 acres of Refuge land. In addition, pest species in aquatic habitats would be managed and controlled, including implementation of an aggressive trap and removal program for crayfish in spring and channel habitats (targeting Marsh, North and South Indian, North and South Scrugg, Jackrabbit, Kings, Point of Rocks, Big and Crystal springs), installation of temporary fish barriers until nonnative fish eradication is complete at Big and Jackrabbit springs, and removal of cattails from outflow channels at Kings, Point of Rocks, and Crystal springs.

### *Research*

The Service would prepare a feasibility study to evaluate the need for an on-site research facility. If appropriate, the facility would be constructed and operated to accommodate an increase in research opportunities.

### *Visitor Services*

To improve visitor services on and off the Refuge, the Service would expand environmental education, interpretation, and outreach opportunities. The Environmental Education Plan would be fully implemented by 2010. The Service would provide 10 off-site programs to local public and home schools. Additional off-Refuge educational outreach would also be provided to educate the local public on the value of wildlife and the public for the Refuge.

The visitor contact station would be staffed five days a week. Unlike Alternative B, however, no roadway or parking area improvements would be implemented.

### *Cultural Resources*

The Service would implement the management actions identified under Alternative B.

#### **3.2.5 Comparison of Alternatives**

A comparative summary of the alternatives for the Ash Meadows NWR is found in Table 3.6-1 at the end of this chapter.

#### **3.2.6 Management Actions Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis as Part of Alternatives**

During the alternatives development process, the Service evaluated additional management actions as part of the current alternatives. These actions are identified below with their reasons for elimination:

- Continue allowing public use of Crystal Reservoir for swimming and fishing. (Not compatible with human safety, Refuge purposes, and biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge.)
- Pave all main roads through the Refuge. (Would increase high-speed, commercial and non-commercial through traffic to the detriment of terrestrial animals and human safety; would impact hydrology by increasing impermeable surfaces on Refuge, increasing disturbance of sensitive Refuge habitat.)
- Allow all-terrain vehicles by permit or during special events as a visitor service. (Not compatible with Refuge purposes and biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge.)

### **3.3 Desert National Wildlife Refuge Alternatives**

Desert NWR's alternatives consist of the No Action Alternative and three action alternatives. The No Action Alternative contains a variety of management actions that have recently been implemented on the Refuge or are planned for implementation and are covered under another NEPA document. The three action alternatives contain management actions to improve Refuge conditions at varying levels. Alternative B would provide minimal increases in wildlife and habitat management with improved visitor services. Alternative C would provide moderate increases in wildlife and habitat management with only minor increases in visitor services. Alternative D would provide moderate increases in wildlife and habitat management with very limited increases in visitor services.

#### **3.3.1 Features Common to All Alternatives**

A number of current management actions would continue to be implemented for the Desert NWR under each of the alternatives. The three action alternatives propose additional management actions to improve Refuge conditions. Actions that are common to all alternatives are described below and are not repeated in each alternative description.



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### *Bighorn Sheep Management*

The Service would continue to manage the desert bighorn sheep population on Desert NWR through the following actions:

- Maintain existing water sources (springs and catchments);
- Install signs, fences, and barricades and use law enforcement patrols to prevent unauthorized uses and protect habitat;
- Prevent domestic livestock grazing to minimize the potential for disease transmission;
- Set the number of hunt permits based on population levels and herd health; and
- Conduct one fall helicopter survey per mountain range to estimate population size, adult sex ratio, ram age structure, and lamb survival/recruitment.

The Service would also continue to allow research on the Refuge by issuing special use permits for activities that involve the bighorn sheep.

### *Wildlife Diversity*

Resources would be protected through maintenance of designated roads and visitor use areas and replacement of regulatory signs along boundaries and designated roadways. The Service would continue to promote awareness of and solicit support for efforts to combat trespassing along the southern boundary to protect resources. In addition, wildfires would be managed using an AMR that considers resource values at risk and potential negative impacts of various fire suppression measures. Response may range from monitoring high-elevation fires (above 5,000 feet) to full suppression where resource values at risk indicate that is the appropriate response. Firefighter and public safety would be the highest priority for every incident, regardless of other resources at risk. In addition, invasive weed surveys and treatments would continue.

The Pahrump poolfish population in the refugium at Corn Creek would continue to be monitored to ensure its survival. Baseline and monitoring surveys for wildlife species would continue to be conducted on a project-by-project basis and in coordination with others. During bighorn sheep helicopter surveys, the Service would continue to record observations of raptors. Wild horses or burros that occur on the Refuge would be removed as soon as possible to protect Refuge resources and minimize competition with wildlife. Well water use and discharge at Corn Creek would continue to be monitored, and the Service would work with the State Engineer to defend water rights and mitigate substantial changes in temperature or flow.

Volunteers would continue to be used for habitat restoration and maintenance efforts. The Service would also monitor changes in the environment, such as changes in vegetation communities, wildlife trends, and surface and groundwater levels, to assess the effects of climate change on the Refuge, if any.

The Service would participate in programmatic National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes, as appropriate, to evaluate impacts to Refuge resources from future energy projects relating to the proposed energy corridor through the Refuge.

### *Specially Designated Areas*

Under each of the alternatives, the Service would continue to protect and maintain the proposed wilderness areas until Congress acts on the proposal. Protection efforts would involve prohibiting motorized activities within the proposed wilderness, except where motorized activities are authorized by stipulations in the 1974 proposal or unless an approved minimum tool analysis documents that motorized activities would be acceptable. The Service would also prepare a revised wilderness proposal which includes technical corrections such as: correcting overlaps with the bombing range; allowing repair or relocation of hazardous sections of road; and allowing the use of helicopters to repair and maintain water developments and access remote areas for wildlife surveys.

### *Visitor Services*

Although visitor services would be improved under the three action alternatives, most of the current visitor service actions would continue to be implemented to support public use of the Refuge. The Service is also constructing a visitor center and new office space at Corn Creek Field Station to improve visitor contact and services at the Refuge. The visitor center project is an ongoing, independent action that has been evaluated under a separate Environmental Assessment (Service 2007).

Public facilities and roads would continue to be maintained, including parking, camping, and picnic areas; Mormon Well Road; and Alamo Road. Regulatory, directional, and interpretive signs along roads, trails, and at the refugium would be replaced and updated, as needed, to provide guidance to visitors. Information about the closure of the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) to the public due to safety and security reasons would be provided at the visitor center and on appropriate signs throughout the Refuge. Volunteers, including Get Outdoors Nevada (Southern Nevada Interagency Volunteer Program) volunteers, would continue to be used on the Refuge to provide interpretation, environmental education, and guidance for visitors.

The Service would continue to work with NDOW, which manages the hunting program for desert bighorn sheep. Tags would continue to be issued based on annual population estimates. Information on Refuge-specific and NDOW hunting guidelines and regulations would continue to be available to the public at Refuge headquarters.

### *Cultural Resources*

Cultural resources management and protection would vary by alternative.

### **3.3.2 Alternative A – No Action (Current Management)**

Alternative A is the current management situation, or No Action Alternative, for the Refuge. It serves as a baseline with which the objectives and management actions of the three action alternatives, Alternatives B, C, and D, can be compared and contrasted. Because this alternative reflects the current management, it would not result in substantial changes in the way the Refuge would be managed in the future. Figure 3.3-1 graphically summarizes the actions that would continue under this alternative.

#### *Bighorn Sheep Management*

The bighorn sheep management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section are current and ongoing management actions. No additional actions would occur under this alternative.

#### *Wildlife Diversity*

The wildlife diversity management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section are current and ongoing management actions. No additional actions would occur under this alternative.

#### *Specially Designated Areas*

The Air Force Overlay Area is currently managed through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and the Service. The current MOU would be renewed without changes.

The Service has not implemented an active research and monitoring program for the existing Research Natural Areas (RNAs) due to limited staffing and funding. RNAs are designed to provide baseline information for comparison with management actions. The RNAs on the Desert NWR include Basin, Hayford Peak, Deadhorse, Pinyon-Juniper, and Papoose Lake. No new research and monitoring activities would be implemented for the RNAs.

#### *Visitor Services*

In addition to the current and ongoing management actions identified in the “Features Common to All” section, the Service would continue to provide public outreach through participation in two major community events annually.

#### *Cultural Resources*

The Service would continue to manage and protect cultural resources on the Refuge on a project-by-project basis prior to land-disturbing projects to comply with applicable laws and regulations. Appropriate interpretive information on cultural resources would continue to be provided to visitors at the field station through informal outreach.

### **3.3.3 Alternative B – Minor Improvement in Wildlife and Habitat Management and Moderate Increase in Visitor Services**

Alternative B provides for increased management actions for natural and cultural resources and for visitor services when compared to Alternative A (No Action). This alternative involves the objectives and management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section and additional actions. Alternative B actions are portrayed in summary form in Figure 3.3-2.

#### *Bighorn Sheep Management*

In addition to a fall helicopter survey, the Service would conduct yearly spring helicopter surveys to identify lambing and recruitment sites. They would also use historical records, sightings, and radio tracking data to determine the connectivity between subpopulations on the Refuge.

Sheep would be translocated between subpopulations on the Refuge and to populations outside of the Refuge with help from NDOW to maintain subpopulations on the Refuge and provide genetic diversity for the Nevada population of bighorn sheep.

#### *Wildlife Diversity*

The Service would conduct regular bird surveys at Corn Creek to monitor the effects of habitat restoration and management activities and gain a better understanding of the value of Corn Creek as a stop-over and breeding habitat for birds. Regular surveys would provide valuable information on the bird species that visit or use habitat on the Refuge throughout the year.

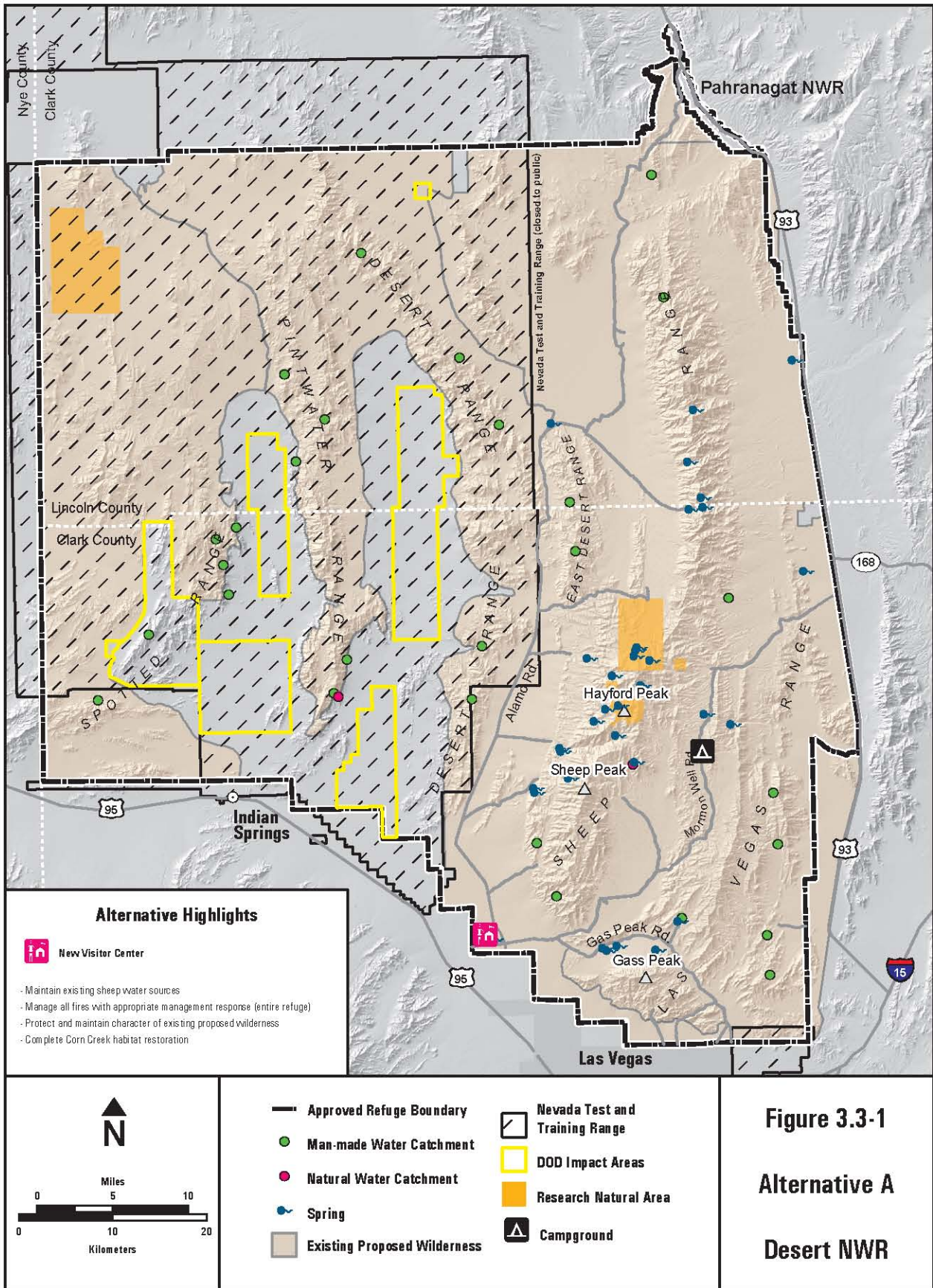
To protect resources on the Refuge from unauthorized uses, the Service would construct and maintain a southern boundary fence and increase law enforcement presence and patrols, with an emphasis on the southern boundary. The post-and-cable fence would be constructed to allow desert tortoise movement between the Refuge and adjacent habitats. The Service would monitor the Refuge using aerial photography, satellite imagery, or geographic positioning systems (GPSs) to identify damage caused by off-road vehicle trespassing, particularly along the southern boundary.

Monitoring efforts would allow the Service to determine if their actions are working to protect resources, and they would modify their actions, such as through increased law enforcement patrols or more signs, if additional measures are needed.

Staff and volunteers would be used to expand litter removal efforts throughout the Refuge and improve habitat conditions for wildlife.

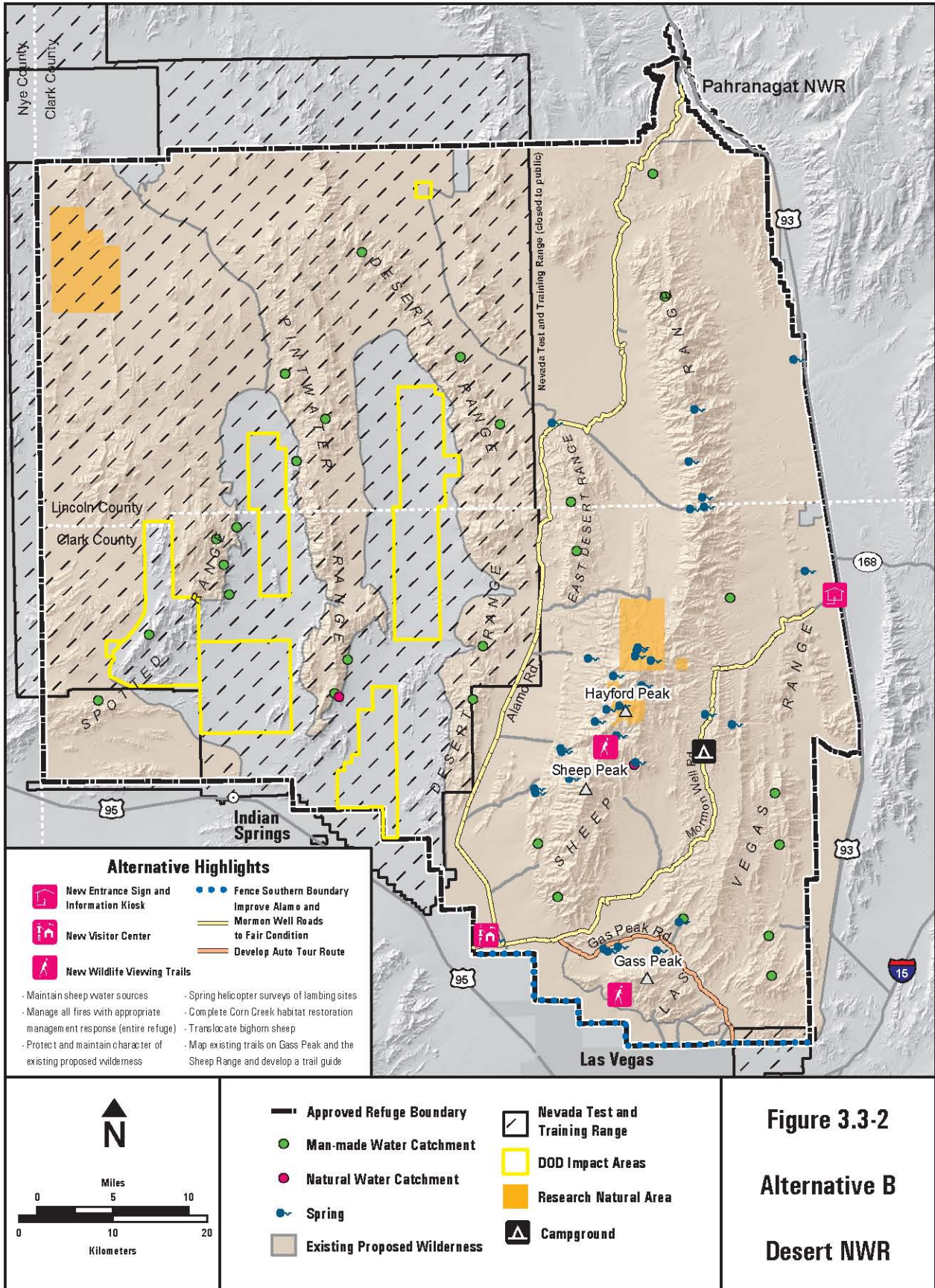
#### *Specially Designated Areas*

The Service would update its current MOU with the USAF, which covers management and use of the western portion of the Refuge which is overlain by the NTTR.



**Figure 3.3-1**  
**Alternative A**  
**Desert NWR**





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The Service would improve its use of RNAs by surveying and marking RNA boundaries, conducting photographic reconnaissance and documentation of all RNAs, and using the RNAs as control for monitoring the effects of habitat management on other areas of the Refuge.

### *Visitor Services*

The Service would create a Refuge environmental education program using funding from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act. The volunteer program would also be expanded to allow the visitor contact station (or new visitor center) to be staffed full-time during peak use seasons and for four hours per day during other seasons. The Service would also establish a seasonal volunteer resident host/docent at the Desert Pass campground to monitor visitor activities.

As part of the environmental education and interpretation program, interpretive panels and signs would be installed at the designated entry points, including an entrance sign and information kiosk at the east end of Mormon Well Road. Interpretation and educational efforts would be expanded through the development of cultural resources materials in coordination with local affiliated Native American tribes. The Service would also develop a live “sheep cam” at water sources to educate the public on the bighorn sheep. The video would be streamed through the Web site and at the new visitor center for viewing by the public.

The Service would improve Mormon Well Road and Alamo Road to “fair” condition for public access based on the Road Inventory for the Refuge (Federal Highway Administration 2000). They would also create new wildlife viewing trails in the Gass Peak and Sheep Range Units, construct photography blinds at key wildlife viewing spots, and designate parking turnouts along Alamo, Mormon Well, and Gass Peak roads using post-and-cable fencing. New trails developed on the Refuge would be designed and located to minimize impacts to desert bighorn sheep and minimize maintenance costs. An auto tour route would also be designed to allow Refuge visitors to drive along Gass Peak Road from Corn Creek to State Route (SR) 215 and view the Refuge.

To improve visitor services, the Service would develop a trail guide using geographic information system (GIS) software to map existing trails and show new trails in Gass Peak and the Sheep Range. The existing and new trails would be managed to minimize visitor impacts on desert bighorn sheep, which could result in controlled public access during portions of the year along some trails. Also, the Service would evaluate the management benefits of establishing a recreation-fee program.

The Service would expand the Refuge outreach program by participating in three major community events annually and conducting an annual open house for the public. They would install a permanent environmental education/interpretive display at a public venue in the Las Vegas area. To inform the public about the Refuge, the Service would create and distribute a video to the community that

highlights the Refuge, develop a quarterly Refuge newsletter, and prepare and distribute an annual Congressional briefing. To monitor the program's effectiveness, the Service would conduct annual surveys of the public's knowledge of the Refuge and its opportunities.

The Service would begin monitoring the hunting program in coordination with NDOW. Populations of game species would be surveyed annually, and the results would be discussed in an annual report. The number of hunters and species harvested would also be inventoried to record information on the program each year. Signs would also be posted and maintained to inform visitors of the designated hunt areas.

### *Cultural Resources*

Background information on the cultural resources on the Refuge would be compiled to create databases and digital, GIS, and hard copy maps for retention in administratively confidential Refuge files. As part of the data collection effort, the Service would identify potential critical/priority critical cultural sites on the non-military overlay of the Refuge and develop a cooperative program and solicit funding to survey and record the sites. The gathered data on site locations, information, and survey areas would be used for planning, monitoring, and interpretation efforts related to cultural resources. Additional data collection efforts would be implemented to identify and evaluate resources that may be subject to looting, vandalism, erosion, or deterioration and allow the Service to implement measures, such as restricting or controlling access, to reduce threats, provide stabilization, or conduct data recovery on significant sites.

Other management actions implemented on the Refuge, such as wildlife management, habitat restoration, fire management, and trail construction, would incorporate cultural resource values, issues, and requirements into their designs and implementation procedures. The educational, interpretive, and outreach programs would also incorporate cultural resources information in their materials. The Service would use a site stewardship volunteer program to assist in site monitoring, creating and delivering educational and interpretive literature and programs, and promoting cultural resources conservation through various public outreach methods.

In addition, the Service would identify and evaluate cultural resources that could educate visitors on how humans have interacted with wildlife and habitats in the past, and they would consult with affiliated tribes and other stakeholders on ways to use these resources to achieve educational, scientific, and traditional cultural needs. The Service would also work with affiliated Native American tribes on projects to restore native habitat and harvest native plants (for traditional non-commercial purposes). To educate the public, the Service would work with affiliated tribes and other stakeholders to design and implement educational materials, programs, and activities that would address traditional or sacred resources and increase awareness on- and off-Refuge about the sensitivity of cultural resources to visitor impacts and the penalties for vandalism.



### 3.3.4 Alternative C – Moderate Improvement in Wildlife and Habitat Management and Minor Increase in Visitor Services

Alternative C is the preferred alternative. It involves the actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section, some of the activities discussed in Alternative B, and some additional activities to improve Refuge management as well as reductions in activities. Activities that would not be implemented under this alternative are also noted; these actions would achieve different goals than those this alternative is targeting. The actions for this alternative are summarized in Figure 3.3-3.

#### *Bighorn Sheep Management*

To protect bighorn sheep habitat from wildfires, the Service would remove highly flammable vegetation around catchments as needed.

As with Alternative B, the Service would translocate sheep between subpopulations on the Refuge and to outside the Refuge to maintain subpopulations as needed. The Service would also develop and implement a Sheep Management Plan as well as a formal agreement with NDOW regarding sheep management on the Refuge. As part of bighorn sheep management, predator populations (mountain lions) on the Refuge would be monitored. As necessary, the Service would construct additional rainwater catchments if existing sources are determined to be inadequate based on the Sheep Management Plan. Data collection efforts would involve conducting at least one annual fall helicopter survey to estimate adult bighorn sheep population parameters; conducting radio telemetry studies to assess bighorn sheep mortality factors, home ranges, and habitat usage; and collecting blood and fecal samples to determine the general health status of the herd, diet composition, nutrient uptake, and genetic diversity.

#### *Wildlife Diversity*

In order to track long-term trends in vegetation communities on the Refuge, the Service would establish and inventory permanent plots below 5,000 feet. Sample design would ultimately be decided by a pilot study and subsequent analysis, but may include 20 900-square-meter plots (after Webb et al. 2000) per distinct ecosystem type (up to 100 plots total) and would use field techniques for measuring vegetation as described in Elzinga et al. (2005). Inventories would be conducted every five years to monitor natural changes in plant and wildlife composition and abundance.

In order to obtain information on special-status species on the Refuge, the Service would implement an Inventory and Monitoring Plan for these species. Implementation of the plan would involve conducting surveys for special-status species in combination with vegetation surveys and establishing monitoring protocols for each species to obtain additional information on their populations, health, diversity, range, and habitat requirements. Depending on suitable habitat characteristics at Corn Creek and management objectives, the Service

would consider reestablishing Pahrump poolfish in the streams, ponds, or springs at Corn Creek.

The Service would use prescribed burns and naturally ignited fires above 5,000 feet to restore vegetation characteristics representative of a natural fire regime. Some naturally ignited fires above 5,000 feet would be allowed to burn under prescribed fire conditions, and such events would be managed as fire use events with appropriate staffing to reflect the complexity of the incident. As part of fuels management, the Service would consider the habitat needs of special-status species, such as Gilbert's skink (NDOW Species of Conservation Priority) and Partners in Flight priority bird species (pinyon jay and gray vireo), and modify management actions appropriately to maintain or improve habitat for these species. Once restoration activities are complete, the Service would regularly maintain and monitor the habitats to ensure restoration success.

The Service would implement additional resource protection measures, including fencing the eastern boundary (post and cable) where necessary; posting boundary signs along the entire southern, eastern, and northern boundaries; and expanding law enforcement presence and patrols throughout the Refuge with additional emphasis along the eastern boundary. Trespassing and Endangered Species Act violations would be enforced through increased awareness and support from other agencies. A second entrance point would be designated at the southeast end of the Refuge in addition to the existing entrance at Corn Creek Field Station.

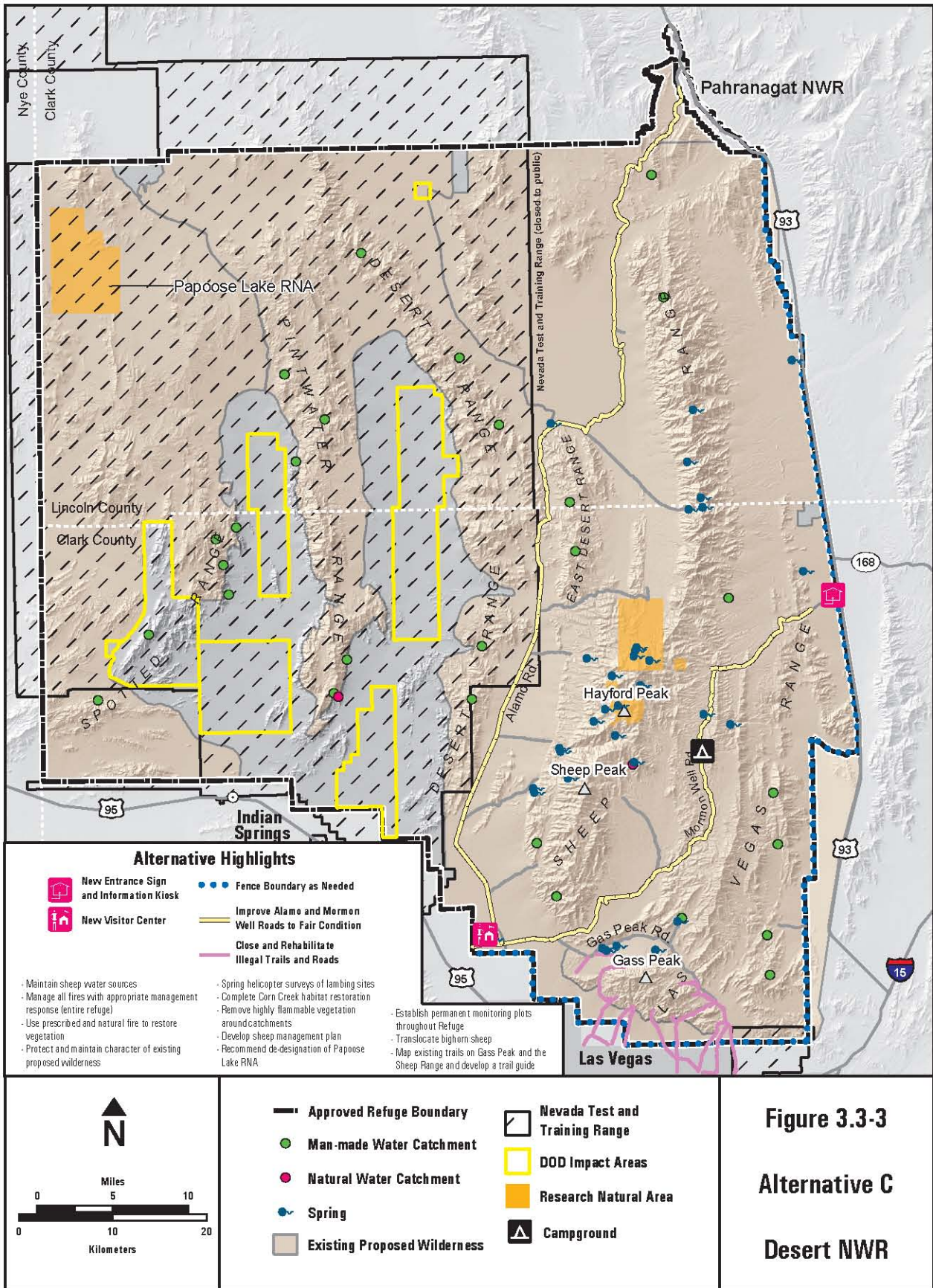
The Service would coordinate with local jurisdictions along the southern boundary to ensure compatible development occurs adjacent to the Refuge. Possible measures to ensure compatibility include establishment of a greenbelt or construction of walls along the north side of developments. To rehabilitate and protect habitat along the southern boundary, the Service would develop and implement a plan to close illegal trails and rehabilitate damaged resources (i.e., habitat). Native upland vegetation would be planted to restore damaged habitat.

#### *Specially Designated Areas*

In addition to the management actions described for Alternative B, the Service would submit a request to the Service Director to de-designate the Papoose Lake RNA due to its inaccessibility because of the military overlay. In addition to monitoring activities in RNAs, academic and agency scientists would be encouraged to conduct non-manipulative research and obtain information on the RNAs.

#### *Visitor Services*

In addition to the management actions described for Alternative B, the Service would distribute educational materials to the public to inform them about the use of fire for habitat management. Two management actions would not be implemented under Alternative C: the auto tour route and wildlife viewing trails at Gass Peak and Sheep Range.



**Figure 3.3-3**  
**Alternative C**  
**Desert NWR**

### *Cultural Resources*

To improve cultural resources management on the Refuge, the Service would implement the following actions:

- Prepare evaluation criteria and conduct a cultural resources inventory at all public use areas, roads, affected areas, and other “destinations” on the Desert NWR;
- Inventory, evaluate, and nominate eligible Traditional Cultural Properties and sacred sites to the NRHP, in consultation with affiliated tribes;
- Inventory, evaluate, and mitigate adverse effects and stabilize samples of cultural resources on Desert NWR using a research design prepared in consultation with affiliated tribes and the scientific community; and
- Conduct studies of ethnobotany and traditional plant use on the Refuge.

### **3.3.5 Alternative D – Moderate Improvement in Wildlife and Habitat Management and Limited Increase in Visitor Services**

Alternative D involves the actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section, some of the activities discussed in Alternatives B and C, and minimal additional activities to improve wildlife management on the Refuge with several reductions in visitor services. Activities that would not be implemented under this alternative are also noted; these actions would achieve different goals than those this alternative is targeting. The actions for this alternative are summarized in Figure 3.3-4.

#### *Bighorn Sheep Management*

Instead of transplanting sheep between subpopulations within the Refuge, as identified under Alternatives B and C, the Service would translocate sheep from outside sources onto the Refuge to maintain and increase Refuge subpopulations and improve genetic diversity. The Service would also implement a Sheep Management Plan and improve sheep management similar to Alternative C.

#### *Wildlife Diversity*

In addition to the establishment of permanent plots below 5,000 feet, as identified under Alternative C, the Service would establish permanent plots for monitoring plant communities above 5,000 feet using the same techniques discussed under Alternative C.

To improve resource protection efforts, the Service would construct a post-and-cable fence along the northwest boundary of the East Pahrangat Range Unit as well as the boundary fences along the southern and eastern boundaries.

### *Specially Designated Areas*

The Service would submit a request to the Service Director to de-designate Papoose Lake RNA, but non-manipulative research in the RNAs would be discouraged to minimize the staffing needed to oversee research projects.

### *Visitor Services*

Environmental education and interpretation would be improved for the most part as described under Alternative B, except for the following:

- A seasonal volunteer/docent would not be used at Desert Pass campground; and
- The volunteer program would be expanded to staff the visitor contact station full-time during peak use, but only for four hours per day on weekends during the rest of the year.

Public outreach would be minimal and would include participation in two major community events annually, conducting an annual public open house, and preparing and distributing an annual Congressional briefing. Other actions described under Alternative B would not be implemented due to the need for increased staffing and funding to support an increase in outreach activities.

Additional visitor services related to wildlife observation and photography would be expanded as under Alternatives B; however, the Service would not improve Mormon Well and Alamo Roads, construct an auto tour route or wildlife viewing trails in Gass Peak and Sheep Range Units, or map trails at Gass Peak and Sheep Range. The Service would not evaluate implementation of a recreation-fee program. These activities would not be implemented due to the need for increased staffing and funding to support such projects.

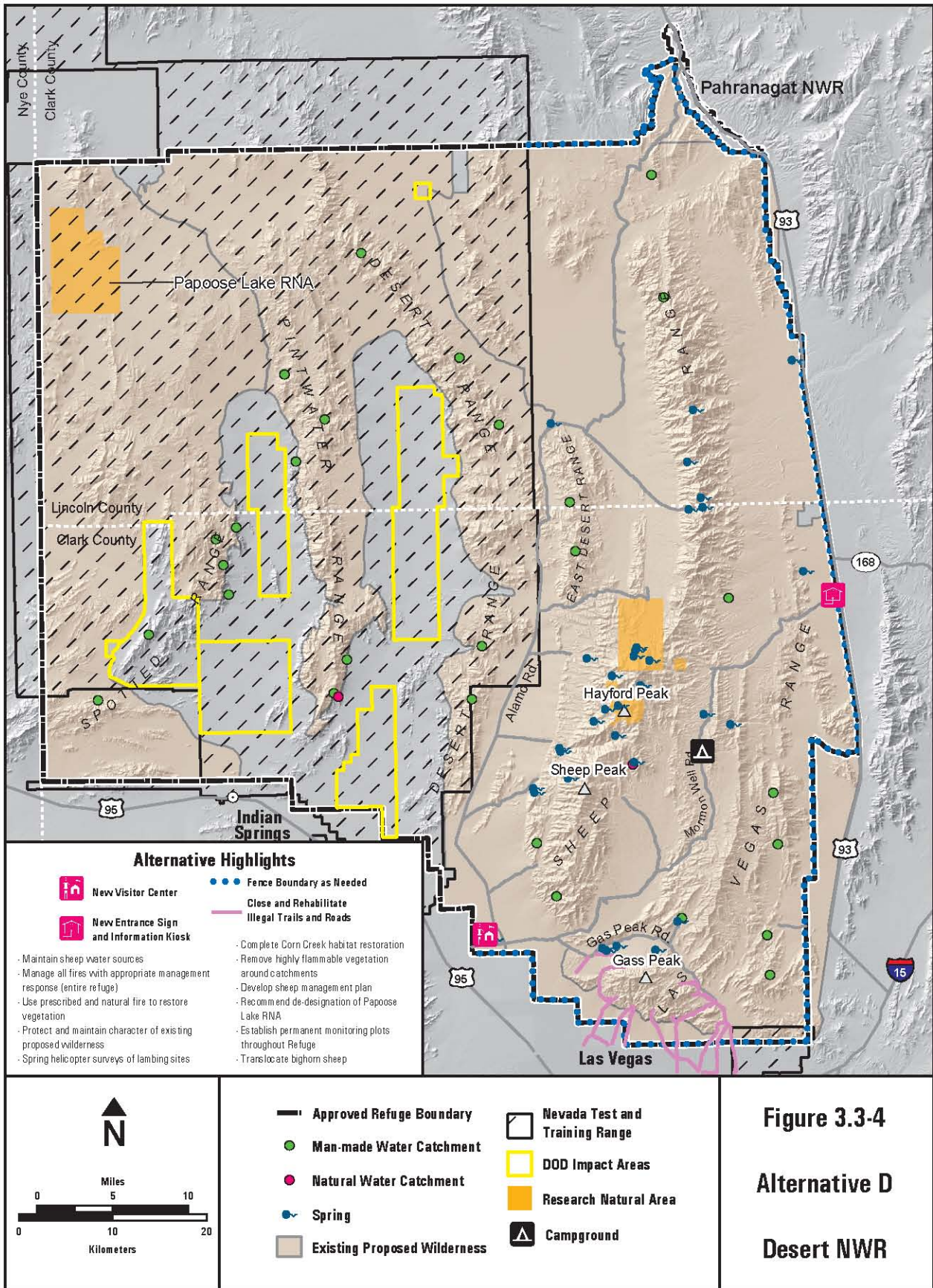
### *Cultural Resources*

The Service would implement the management actions described under Alternatives B and C, except education and outreach would be the same as Alternative A (current management). No additional actions are proposed under Alternative D.

## **3.3.6 Comparison of Alternatives**

A comparative summary of the alternatives for the Desert NWR is provided in Table 3.6-2.





**Figure 3.3-4**  
**Alternative D**  
**Desert NWR**

### 3.3.7 Management Actions Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis as Part of Alternatives

During the alternatives development process, Desert NWR staff evaluated additional management actions as part of the current alternatives. These actions are identified below with their reasons for elimination:

- Allow off-highway or all-terrain vehicle use. (Not appropriate use of Refuge.)
- Develop a museum at Corn Creek. (Not feasible.)
- Develop a visitor center along the southern boundary near Gass Peak. (Not feasible.)

## 3.4 Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge Alternatives

Moapa Valley NWR's alternatives consist of the No Action Alternative and two action alternatives. The No Action Alternative contains a variety of management actions that have recently been implemented on the Refuge or will be implemented before the CCP is approved. The two action alternatives contain management actions to improve Refuge conditions at varying levels. Alternative B would improve habitat and wildlife management for two spring systems on the Refuge with an increase in visitor services. Alternative C would improve habitat and wildlife management for three spring systems on the Refuge and expand visitor services more than in Alternative B.

### 3.4.1 Features Common to All Alternatives

A number of current management actions would continue to be implemented for the Moapa Valley NWR under each of the alternatives. The two action alternatives propose additional management actions to improve Refuge conditions. Actions that are common to all alternatives are described below and are not repeated in each alternative description.

#### *Endemic and Special-Status Species*

The Service would continue ongoing restoration and revegetation efforts on the Plummer Unit. As part of restoration project design and implementation, the Service would consider habitat needs of special-status fish and invertebrates in addition to the Moapa dace, including Moapa White River springfish, Moapa pebblesnail, grated tryonia, Moapa Warm Spring riffle beetle, Amargosa naucorid, and Moapa naucorid. Restoration activities involve restoring native overstory, mid-level, and understory vegetation (using local seed and seedlings) along riparian corridors, in transitional upland sites, and in any disturbed or newly exposed areas on the Plummer Unit. Volunteers would also continue to be used for restoration efforts.

In addition, to improve habitat conditions for endemic species, the Service would develop management actions to remove nonnative fish species, including mollies and mosquitofish, from Refuge waters. Other nonnative aquatic species would also continue to be periodically removed.

As part of the restoration activities on the Plummer Unit, the Service would remove palm trees associated with riparian areas to restore habitat for the endangered Moapa dace. In addition, periodic palm tree maintenance would be required to reduce the wildfire risk. Unwanted fires would be extinguished as fast as safely possible to minimize potential adverse impacts on Moapa dace. These efforts would allow the Service to protect and maintain natural habitat, including water quality and quantity in the Refuge springs and channels, at suitable levels for Moapa dace survival, reproduction, and recruitment.

The Service would continue collecting data on Moapa dace and Moapa White River springfish through annual surveys and monitoring. This information would be used for management of the species during and following restoration activities. The Service would monitor the Moapa dace population before and after restoration activities to identify beneficial or adverse effects on its population.

The Service would continue to track monitoring of water flow and temperature of Pedersen and Pedersen East Springs and the Warm Springs West flume by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). They would also continue to participate in local and regional water resources management efforts to assess impacts to water resources and protect water resources on the Refuge. Participation in the Muddy River Regional water monitoring planning process is a key aspect of water resources management for the Muddy River area. The Service would also monitor changes in the environment, such as changes in vegetation communities, wildlife trends, and surface and groundwater levels, to assess the effects of climate change on the Refuge, if any.

Additional protection measures for the Refuge would include maintaining the existing boundary fence and gates and maintaining regulatory signs in good condition. Signs, fencing, and gates would be replaced as staffing and funding allow.

#### *Visitor Services*

The Service would continue to use volunteers for habitat restoration projects on the Refuge. Outreach staff would continue to attend the Moapa Day community event or other local community events, and information on Refuge resources would be provided upon request to the local community. At a minimum, the current entrance signs for the Refuge would be maintained. The Service would continue to work on establishing an accessible trail for visitors.

The Service would explore opportunities for partnerships to develop environmental education programs and for community-based outreach during on-Refuge activities. An annual open house would be held for volunteers that help on the Refuge. The Service would continue informal education of Refuge visitors on cultural resources of the area.

To comply with applicable laws and regulations, the Service would continue to inventory, manage, and protect any cultural resources on the Refuge on a project-by-project basis.



### **3.4.2 Alternative A – No Action (Current Management)**

Alternative A is the current management situation, or No Action Alternative, for the Refuge. It serves as a baseline with which the objectives and management actions of the two action alternatives, Alternatives B and C, can be compared and contrasted. Because this alternative reflects the current management, it would not result in substantial changes in the way the Refuge would be managed in the future. Figure 3.4-1 graphically summarizes the actions that would continue under this alternative.

#### *Endemic and Special-Status Species*

The Service would continue to implement the management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section.

#### *Visitor Services*

The Refuge would remain closed to the general public, and the Service would continue limited participation in local community events. Existing parking facilities would be maintained for visitor safety, and the current Refuge entrance signs would be maintained. The current interpretive and environmental education materials would be periodically updated to maintain accuracy. Information about Refuge resources would be provided to visitors and the public upon request.

### **3.4.3 Alternative B – Improve Habitat and Wildlife Management on Portions of the Refuge and Increase Visitor Services**

Alternative B provides for moderately increased management actions for all resource areas when compared to Alternative A (No Action). This alternative involves the objectives and management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section, some modifications of actions identified in Alternative A, and additional actions for more active management. Alternative B actions are portrayed in summary form in Figure 3.4-2.

#### *Endemic and Special-Status Species*

In addition to restoration of the Plummer Unit, the Service would continue channel restoration on the Pedersen Unit to benefit Moapa dace by planting native species, such as coyotebrush, *Sporobolus*, spikerushes, saltgrass, and bushy bluestem, in and surrounding spring sources. Restoration would involve maintaining water temperatures between 30 and 32 degrees Celsius (86 to 89.6 degrees Fahrenheit), establishing and maintaining flows between 0.3 and 1.0 meters per second, and planting native plant species, such as waternymph, watercress, spikerush, sedges, and grasses, in and surrounding spring sources. Riparian habitat near larger channels would be restored to contain herbaceous and woody species, such as velvet ash, cottonwood, willow, screwbean mesquite, and understory sedges. Once restoration activities are complete, the Service would regularly maintain and monitor the habitats to ensure restoration success.

The Service would also monitor streams for endemic fish and invertebrate populations before and after restoration activities to identify potential impacts and changes in their populations.

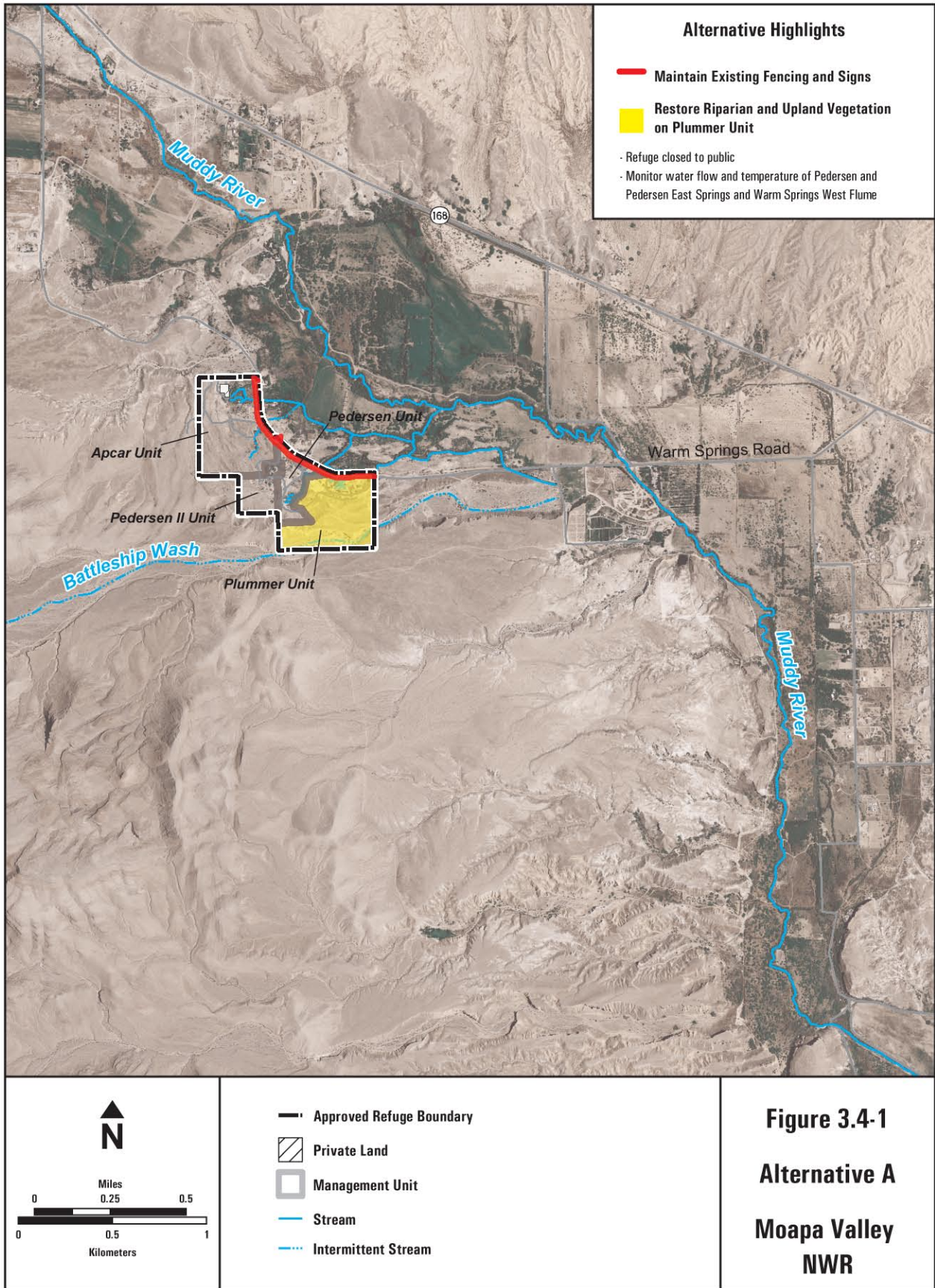
The Service would collect baseline data for fish and wildlife species to improve management of the Refuge. For federally listed and other special-status fish species, the Service would develop and implement an Inventory and Monitoring Plan within five years of CCP approval to establish strategies and protocol for monitoring and inventories, consistent with the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (Clark County and Service 2000). Surveys would be conducted for special-status species (federally listed, proposed, candidate, and other status) throughout the Refuge and for invertebrates and amphibians in aquatic habitat to determine species composition and abundance.

Once implemented, the Service would repeat inventories every five years to track long-term trends in populations. By 2009, the Service would complete an inventory of existing upland habitat to record information on migratory birds, mammals, and reptiles that use the Refuge. Restored stream habitat would be monitored consistent with the Muddy River Aquatic Species Recovery Plan (Service 1996).

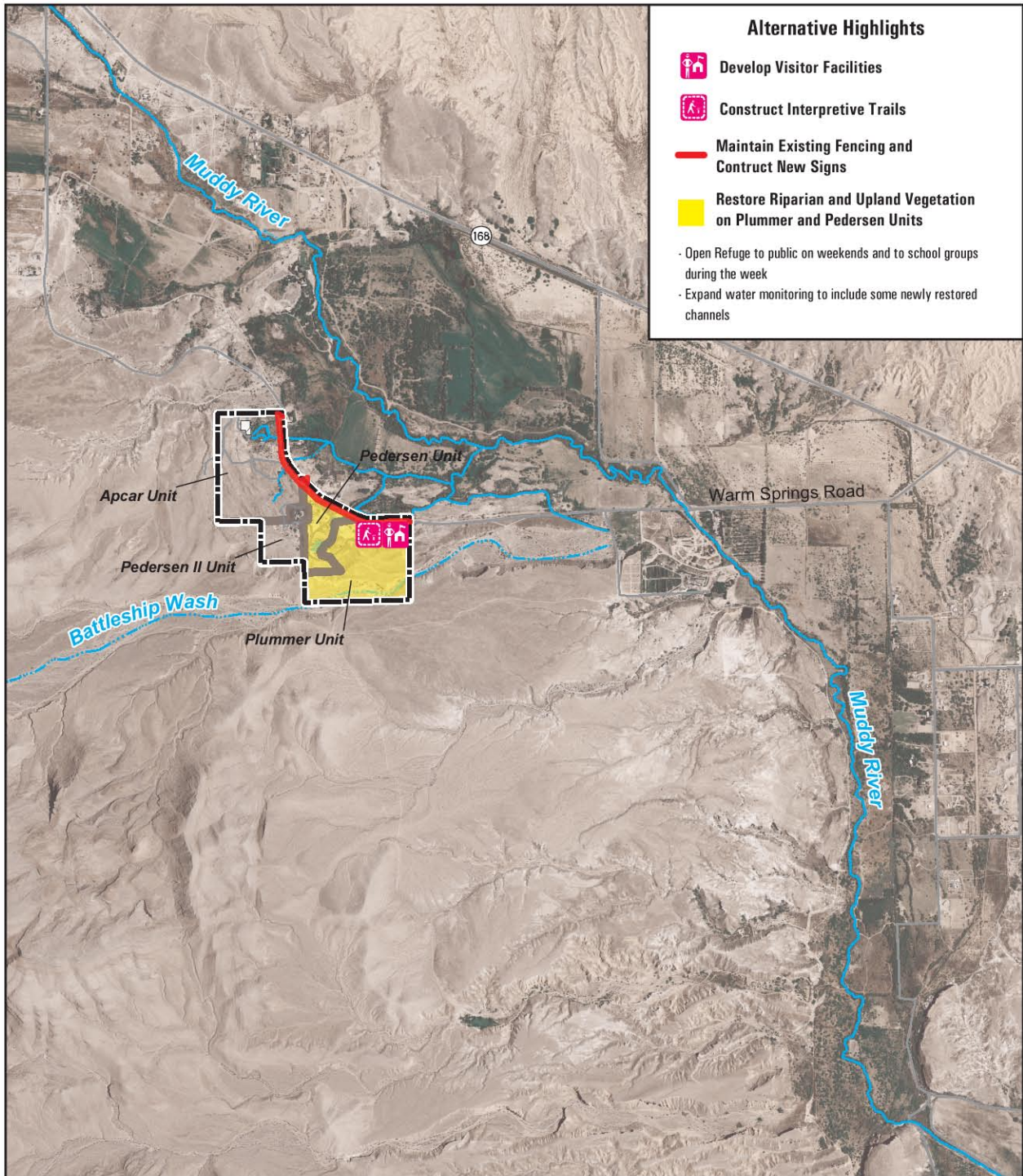
The Service would develop a long-term Water Resources Management Plan for the Refuge and implement additional actions to improve monitoring of the springs and streams. These actions could include identifying appropriate protocols for monitoring (locations, timing, parameters, and equipment), installing equipment, and monitoring specific parameters (flow, temperature, and quality) at some springs and streams on the Plummer and Pedersen Units. The Service would collect monthly monitoring data for water flow and temperature of Pedersen East and Pedersen East Springs and Warm Springs West flume and for water quality parameters (temperature, flow, dissolved oxygen, pH, and total dissolved solids) at other Refuge springs as needed.

To protect native habitats, wildlife, and fish on the Refuge, the Service would implement an IPM Plan that would involve controlling and eradicating invasive species encroachment using an early detection/early response approach. The Service would participate in community-based fire safe planning on and off the Refuge and use prescribed fire where appropriate to reduce hazardous fuels and treat unwanted vegetation. These planning efforts would allow the Service to explore other options for protecting the Refuge and its habitats from fire.

To protect habitats and control public access, the Service would install additional entrance signs, as appropriate, and install directional, regulatory, and interpretive signs on and off the Refuge. Additional interpretive, regulatory, and directional materials would be developed to guide and enhance the visitor experience.



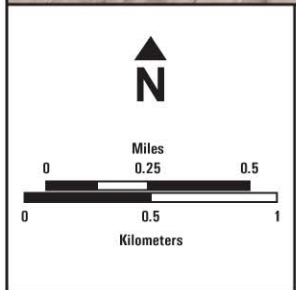









### Alternative Highlights

-  Develop Visitor Facilities
-  Construct Interpretive Trails
-  Maintain Existing Fencing and Contract New Signs
-  Restore Riparian and Upland Vegetation on Plummer and Pedersen Units

- Open Refuge to public on weekends and to school groups during the week
- Expand water monitoring to include some newly restored channels



-  Approved Refuge Boundary
-  Private Land
-  Management Unit
-  Stream
-  Intermittent Stream

**Figure 3.4-2**  
**Alternative B**  
**Moapa Valley**  
**NWR**

### *Visitor Services*

The Service would open the Refuge to the public on a limited basis. The Refuge would be open to the general public on weekends and to school groups during the week through prior arrangement. Signs would be installed along Interstate 15 (I-15) and U.S. Highway 93 and at the entrance to the Refuge at Warm Springs Road to promote and direct the public to the Refuge. The Service would work with the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) on sign installation.

Additional facilities would be constructed on the Refuge to accommodate the visitors. The Service would expand and improve parking and access roads, as necessary, to accommodate the increase in visitors. Specifically, interpretive panels would be installed along a trail system of the Plummer and Pedersen Units, and a basic trail would be constructed along the riparian corridor on the Plummer Unit.

The Service would develop an environmental education program by 2012 and create interpretive and environmental educational materials for distribution to the public, as staff or funding becomes available. Refuge education materials would be offered to local school contacts upon request. Interpretive materials, such as brochures and fact sheets, would be developed to guide and enhance visitor experience and provide information on the benefits of stream habitat restoration for the enhancement of Moapa dace habitat and human safety. To inform visitors of cultural resources in the area, the Service would develop regionally focused environmental education and interpretation materials for self-guided tours. Information would be developed in coordination with culturally affiliated tribes to incorporate their history and knowledge of native plant and animal species.

To improve outreach for the Refuge, the Service would conduct a public open house every two to three years to encourage interactions and foster relationships between Refuge staff and local constituents, as well as seek opportunities for community-based outreach, such as participation in off-Refuge activities. The Service would provide outreach at the Moapa Valley Community Center by invitation and as the staff is available. Docents would be recruited to staff the Refuge on weekends and facilitate tours, and the Service would collect data on the number of visitors using sign-in sheets to modify their visitor services accordingly.

#### **3.4.4 Alternative C – Improve Habitat and Wildlife Management Throughout the Refuge and Expand Visitor Services**

Alternative C is the preferred alternative. It involves the actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section, the activities discussed in Alternative B, and some additional activities. Some activities from Alternative B are expanded under this alternative to improve Refuge management. The actions are summarized for this alternative in Figure 3.4-3.

### *Endemic and Special-Status Species*

In addition to restoring the springs and streams on the Plummer and Pedersen Units, the Service would complete restoration of the spring heads and channels on the Apcar Unit by 2015. Native plants would be planted where nonnative and invasive species are removed and in other disturbed areas within the Apcar Unit.

The Service would collect additional data on migratory birds, mammals, and reptiles in the upland habitat by 2009 and prepare a Monitoring Plan for those species. The long-term Inventory and Monitoring Plan identified under Alternative B would be expanded to include all federally listed, proposed, candidate, and other special-status species. The Service would also coordinate with NDOW to conduct surveys of palm tree habitat for use by bats.

Springs on the Apcar Unit would also be monitored for water quality parameters based on current and past monitoring protocols. In addition, the Service would monitor habitat changes, maintain and continue improvements for restoration efforts and other landscape improvements, and provide adequate levels of monitoring and maintenance for invasive species control and fire management.

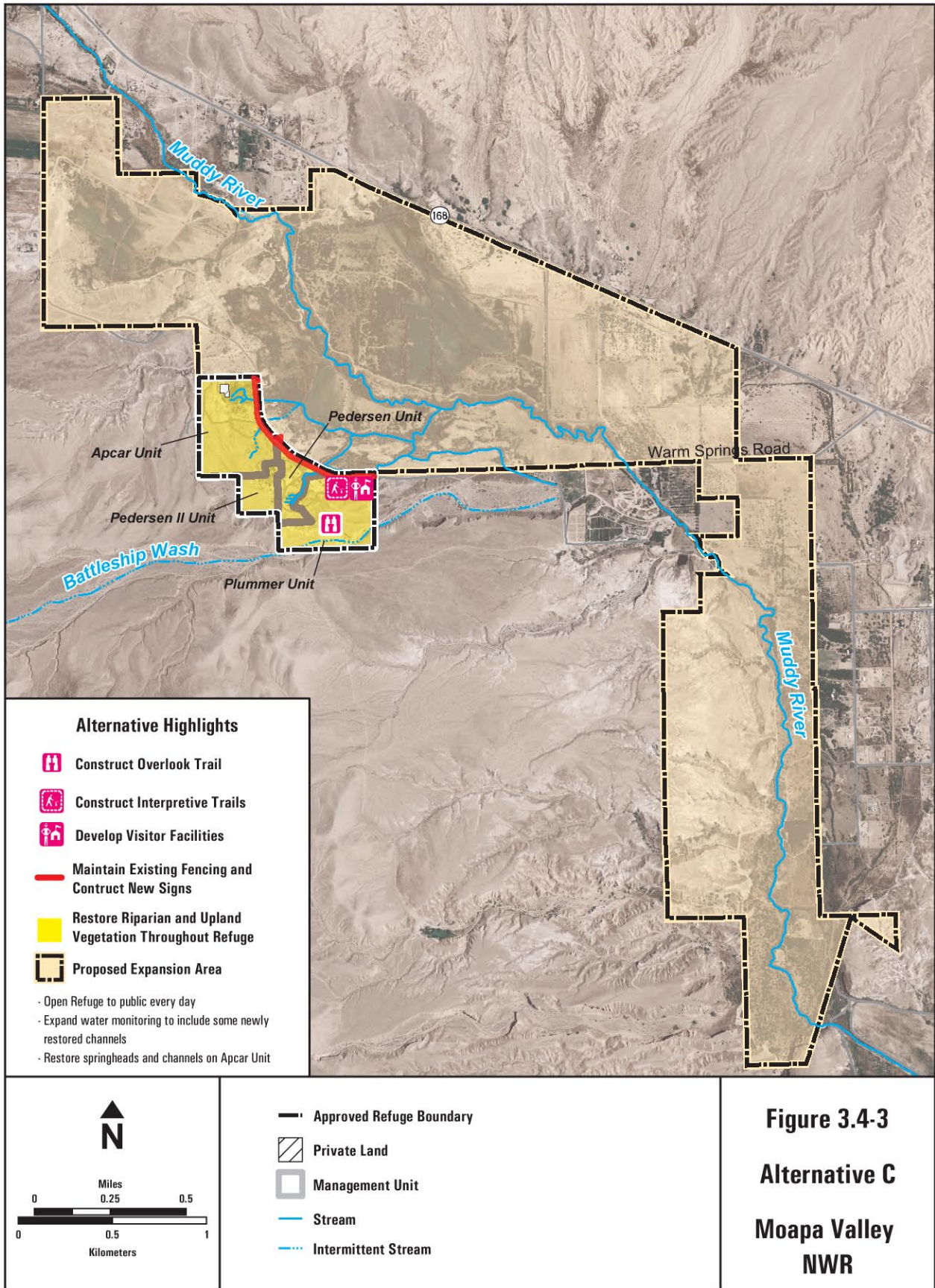
The Service would also expand the Refuge acquisition boundary by 1,503 acres and work with partners to protect habitat within the expanded boundary through purchase, transfer, and/or agreement (see Land Protection Plan in Appendix L). Step-down habitat management plans would also be prepared for habitats within the expanded boundary.

### *Visitor Services*

The Refuge would be open daily to the public for self-guided or staff-guided tours. Additional parking areas, a school bus turnout, and an overlook trail with interpretive panels and shade structure would be constructed or improved to accommodate the increase in visitors. The overlook trail with interpretive panels and shade structure would be located on top of the hill on the Plummer Unit for viewing the Refuge and the Moapa Valley. A self-guided trail system would be constructed along the spring head, pools, and riparian corridor on the Plummer Unit to accommodate visitors.

The Service would develop an environmental education program at the Refuge and develop interpretive and environmental education materials for distribution to the public. A public open house would be conducted annually to encourage interactions and foster relationships between Refuge staff and local constituents.







The Service would expand outreach through construction of a permanent environmental education display at the Moapa Valley Community Center or other local public venue. To encourage schools to visit the Refuge, the Service would organize local school contacts and generate enthusiasm for visiting the Refuge and experiencing its endemic species. In addition, the Service would seek opportunities for community-based outreach, such as participation in off-Refuge activities.

Moreover, the Service would conduct a cultural resources inventory of the entire Refuge to assist in future planning efforts and improve management and protection of significant sites from inadvertent public visitation impacts.

### **3.4.5 Comparison of Alternatives**

A comparative summary of the alternatives for the Moapa Valley NWR is provided in Table 3.6-3.

### **3.4.6 Management Actions Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis as Part of Alternatives**

During the alternatives development process, Refuge staff evaluated additional management actions as part of the current alternatives. These actions are identified below with their reasons for elimination:

- Open pools to public for swimming. (Not compatible with Refuge vision, purpose, or goals.)
- Remove all palm trees from the Refuge. (Not appropriate since they provide habitat for some bats, other mammals, and birds.)

## **3.5 Pahrnat National Wildlife Refuge Alternatives**

Pahrnat NWR's alternatives consist of the No Action Alternative and three action alternatives. The No Action Alternative contains a variety of management actions that have recently been implemented on the Refuge or will be implemented before the CCP is approved. The three action alternatives contain management actions to improve Refuge conditions at varying levels. Alternative B would provide limited improvements in water resource and habitat management with some improvements to visitor services. Alternative C would provide minor improvements in water resource and habitat management with an increase in visitor services. Alternative D would provide moderate improvements in water resource and habitat management with an increase in visitor services.

### **3.5.1 Features Common to All Alternatives**

A number of current management actions would continue to be implemented for the Pahrnat NWR under each of the alternatives. The three action alternatives propose additional management actions to improve Refuge conditions. Actions that are common to all alternatives are described below and are not repeated in each alternative description.

### *Wetland Habitat*

The Service would continue to maintain the current amounts of open water (640 acres), wet meadow (700 acres), and alkali flat (350 acres) habitats on Pahrnagat NWR. For the open water habitat, the Service would complete and implement a wetland restoration plan to improve the quality of the existing habitat for waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds, and other migratory birds. As part of this planning effort, the amount of open water habitat would be evaluated and may be modified appropriately to provide suitable habitat for migratory birds. Current management would be continued until the plan is complete, including the following:

- Maintaining the water level of Upper Pahrnagat Lake within a range of 4 to 11 feet between October and April to maintain the sport fishery and monitor inflow to the lake;
- Discharging water into Middle Marsh and Lower Pahrnagat Lake to provide migratory waterfowl habitat;
- Clearing vegetation in irrigation ditches annually as staffing allows; and
- Maintaining current maintenance, repair, and improvement efforts on North Marsh and Upper Pahrnagat Lake.

Marsh habitat would be maintained with 30 percent open water and 70 percent emergent vegetation. Supplemental flows from pumped well water into Middle Marsh would be used as needed to maintain water levels. Water would continue to be supplied to the wet meadow habitat at Middle Marsh from October to March to maintain the habitat. The alkali flats habitat in the Lower Pahrnagat Lake area would continue to be flooded from December to June for breeding and migrating waterfowl, waterbirds, and shorebirds. Once restoration activities are complete, the Service would regularly maintain and monitor the habitats to ensure restoration success.

Water resources management would continue under existing conditions to maintain these habitats between October and April of each year, with a primary goal of providing waterfowl and migratory bird habitat throughout the Refuge. Additional water resource management would include:

- Pursuing the 1996 application for year-round water discharges;
- Surveying existing groundwater wells and repairing or capping as appropriate;
- Monitoring inflow to Upper Pahrnagat Lake;
- Installing a flume or weir at the outflow of Lower Pahrnagat Lake;
- Installing and monitoring flow meters and data loggers on each of the three groundwater wells;
- Completing the update of the Water Management Plan by 2012; and
- Completing a Refuge-wide water budget.

To improve wetland habitat for waterfowl, carp populations in the open water habitat would be studied and may be controlled through electroshocking and netting. Nonnative carp uproot aquatic vegetation when spawning and feeding and suspend benthic sediments, resulting in limited light for plant growth. A reduction in carp populations would allow emergent and submergent vegetation to establish along the edges of Upper Pahranaagat Lake and North Marsh.

The Service would continue to use prescribed burns as needed in wet meadow and marsh habitats to control vegetation. Noxious weed surveys would be coordinated with county, state, and federal agencies to map the extent of weeds on the Refuge. Weed removal efforts would occur as staffing and funding become available. The Service would also continue to implement limited IPM efforts within the existing 112-acre grassland habitat to contain knapweed and reduce its extent.

To monitor waterfowl response to habitat management, the Service would continue conducting spring waterfowl surveys using volunteers and Refuge staff, as available, and would coordinate with NDOW to conduct fall and winter waterfowl surveys. Information on the Pahranaagat Valley montane vole on the Refuge would continue to be collected to determine its population status, distribution, and demography.

#### *Wildlife Diversity*

The existing 100 acres of cottonwood-willow riparian habitat would be maintained around North Marsh to provide habitat for the southwestern willow flycatcher and other migratory birds. The endangered flycatcher has been documented nesting in this habitat during annual surveys over the past several years (Koronkiewicz et al. 2006). The Service would also implement additional surveys of the Refuge to collect information on riparian habitat (percentage of cover, density, age, and structure), southwestern willow flycatcher (presence or absence), and vegetation (as directed by project objectives and efforts).

To protect upland habitat, the Service would continue to enforce prohibitions of off-road vehicles and maintain Refuge fences to reduce encroachment of cattle from adjacent lands. The Service would also prepare a wilderness study report and NEPA document to evaluate options for preserving wilderness values of the three small wilderness study areas along the western boundary of the Refuge adjacent to the proposed wilderness on Desert NWR. Wildland fires on the Refuge would be managed using the AMR, which considers resource values at risk and potential negative impacts of various fire suppression measures. Firefighter and public safety would be the highest priority on every incident.

Habitat around springs and channels on the Refuge would be improved through implementation of site Restoration Plans. These plans would include restoring native habitats, restoring springs to conditions similar to those before development, and improving hydrology and water quality to benefit native fish species. Six of the springs are currently degraded or have been modified, including three spring

outflows (Cottonwood Spring, Cottonwood Spring North, and Lone Tree Spring) that have been dredged or trenched to varying degrees. To obtain information on the vegetation and wildlife that use the spring and channel habitats, the Service would conduct inventories and monitoring of the habitats.

The Service would also monitor changes in the environment, such as changes in vegetation communities, wildlife trends, and surface and groundwater levels, to assess the effects of climate change on the Refuge, if any.

#### *Visitor Services*

The Refuge provides visitor services and facilities for a variety of recreational opportunities, including hunting for upland game, waterfowl, and rabbits; sport fishing; wildlife observation; walking trails; and photography. Visitor facilities would be maintained with help from volunteers and as staff is available to ensure visitor safety, and visitor numbers would continue to be monitored to ensure the facilities are adequate to accommodate the number of visitors. The observation deck on Upper Pahrnagat Lake and established trails throughout the Refuge would also be maintained for visitor use.

As part of the hunting program, the Service would continue to provide Refuge-specific and NDOW hunting guidelines, regulations, and other information at Refuge headquarters and post and maintain designated hunting area signs on the Refuge. Wildlife lists would also be available at Refuge headquarters to support wildlife observation and similar activities.

The Refuge policy to prohibit swimming at all open water locations would be enforced, and regulatory signs at the open water areas would be maintained. Swimming poses a public health and safety concern and can adversely affect fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

#### *Cultural Resources*

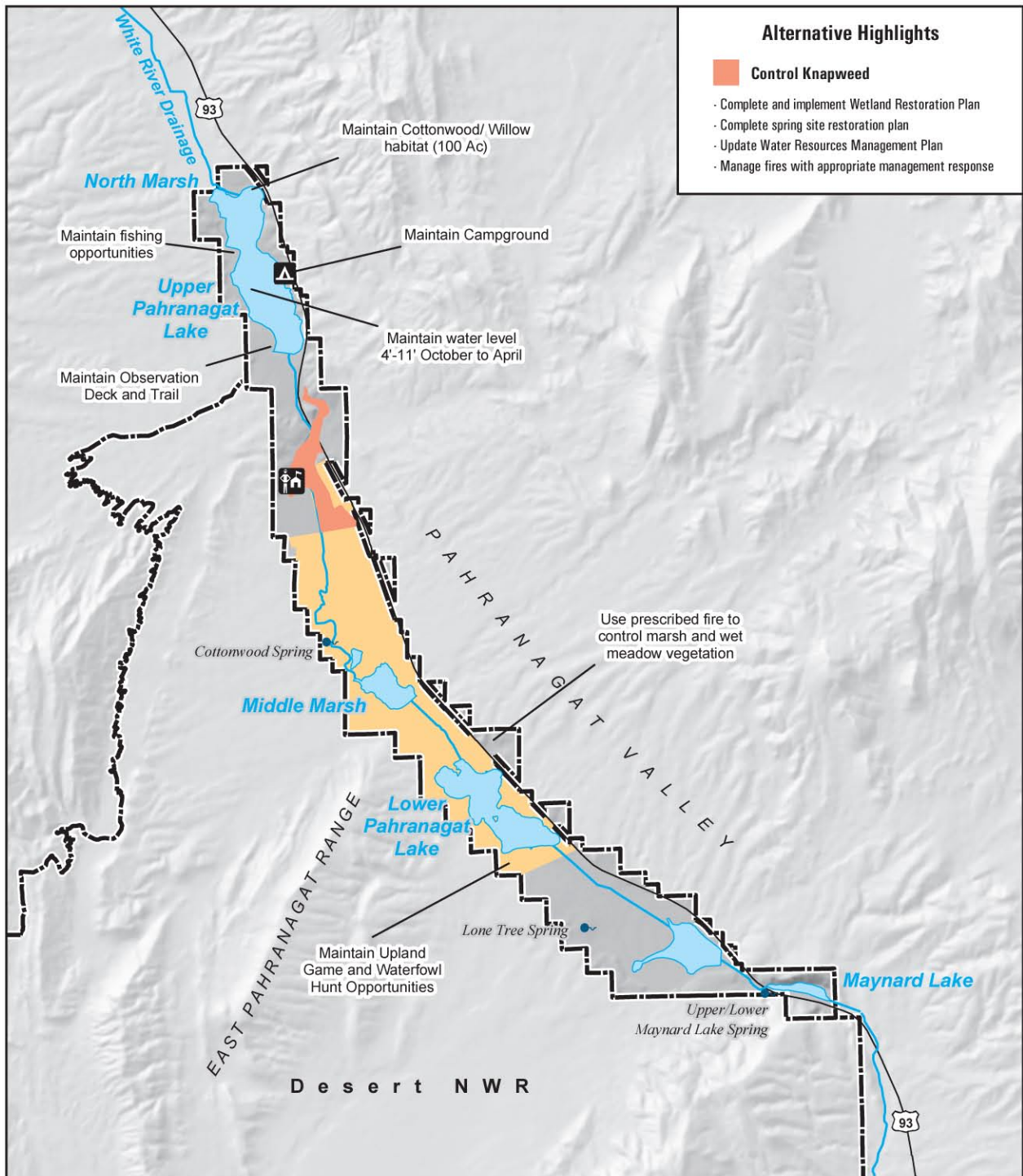
Cultural resources management and protection would vary by alternative.

### **3.5.2 Alternative A – No Action (Current Management)**

Alternative A is the current management situation, or No Action Alternative, for the Refuge. It serves as a baseline with which the objectives and management actions of the three action alternatives, Alternatives B, C, and D, can be compared and contrasted. Because this alternative reflects the current management, it would not result in substantial changes in the way the Refuge would be managed in the future. Figure 3.5-1 graphically summarizes the actions that would continue under this alternative.

#### *Wetland Habitat*

The Service would continue to implement the management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section.



**Alternative Highlights**

- Control Knapweed**
  - Complete and implement Wetland Restoration Plan
  - Complete spring site restoration plan
  - Update Water Resources Management Plan
  - Manage fires with appropriate management response

Miles: 0, 0.75, 1.5
   
 Kilometers: 0, 1, 2

Approved Refuge Boundary	Campground
Spring	Visitor Contact Station
Stream	Road
Open Water	Hunt Area

**Figure 3.5-1**  
**Alternative A**  
**Pahrnanagat NWR**

### *Wildlife Diversity*

The Service would continue to implement the management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section.

### *Visitor Services*

The Service would maintain the campground in its current state.

The Service would continue to implement limited interpretation, environmental education, and outreach activities as needed and as staff is available. The Service would continue to participate in up to three outreach events per year, such as International Migratory Bird Day, National Wildlife Refuge Week, and Earth Day, as staff is available.

### *Cultural Resources*

The Service currently implements minimal cultural resources management activities. The Service would continue to provide appropriate interpretive information on cultural resources to visitors at the visitor contact station through informal outreach and protect cultural resources on a case-by-case basis. Cultural resources would be managed on a project-by-project basis.

### **3.5.3 Alternative B – Limited Improvements in Water Resource and Habitat Management and Minor Increase in Visitor Services**

Alternative B provides for limited increased management actions for all resource areas when compared to Alternative A (No Action). This alternative involves the objectives and management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section and additional actions for more active management. Alternative B actions are graphically summarized in Figure 3.5-2.

### *Wetland Habitat*

The Service would install a new pump for Well 3 and monitor outflow.

The Service would also expand current invasive plant removal efforts by developing an IPM Plan. Expanded efforts would include controlling knapweed in the grassland habitat and at Black Canyon (with appropriate tribal consultations) and using prescribed burning, mowing, spraying, and planting, as needed, to achieve the targeted plant cover throughout the year.

The Refuge is not currently managed to provide foraging habitat for sandhill cranes. To increase wildlife diversity, the Service would plant and irrigate 40 acres of grain crops between Upper Pahrangat Lake and Middle Marsh. The grain crops would provide forage for migrating sandhill cranes, waterbirds, and waterfowl and would help control invasive species.

### *Wildlife Diversity*

To protect upland habitat, the Service would close unused roads as necessary and in coordination with the BLM. Salt cedar and Russian olive trees would be removed in riparian habitat to allow native species, such as willow and cottonwood, to establish.

Although the Pahranaagat roundtail chub is not currently present on the Refuge, it has been documented there historically. Habitat conditions on the Refuge are also not currently suitable for reintroducing the chub. The Service would plan and develop, if feasible, a refugium on the Refuge for the chub and associated native fish based on their habitat requirements.

The Service would continue to obtain information on the species that use the Refuge, and they would expand their surveys to include participation in the annual Christmas bird count. To monitor waterfowl and bird responses to Refuge management actions, the Service would obtain data collected by other agencies on a seasonal basis, conduct additional surveys in the fall and spring, and include breeding pair and brood counts during current fall and winter surveys coordinated with NDOW.

### *Visitor Services*

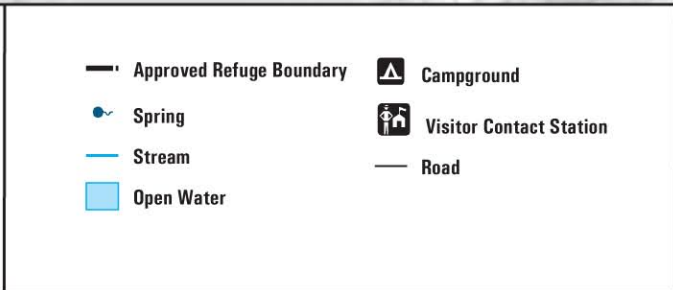
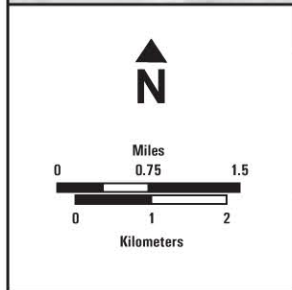
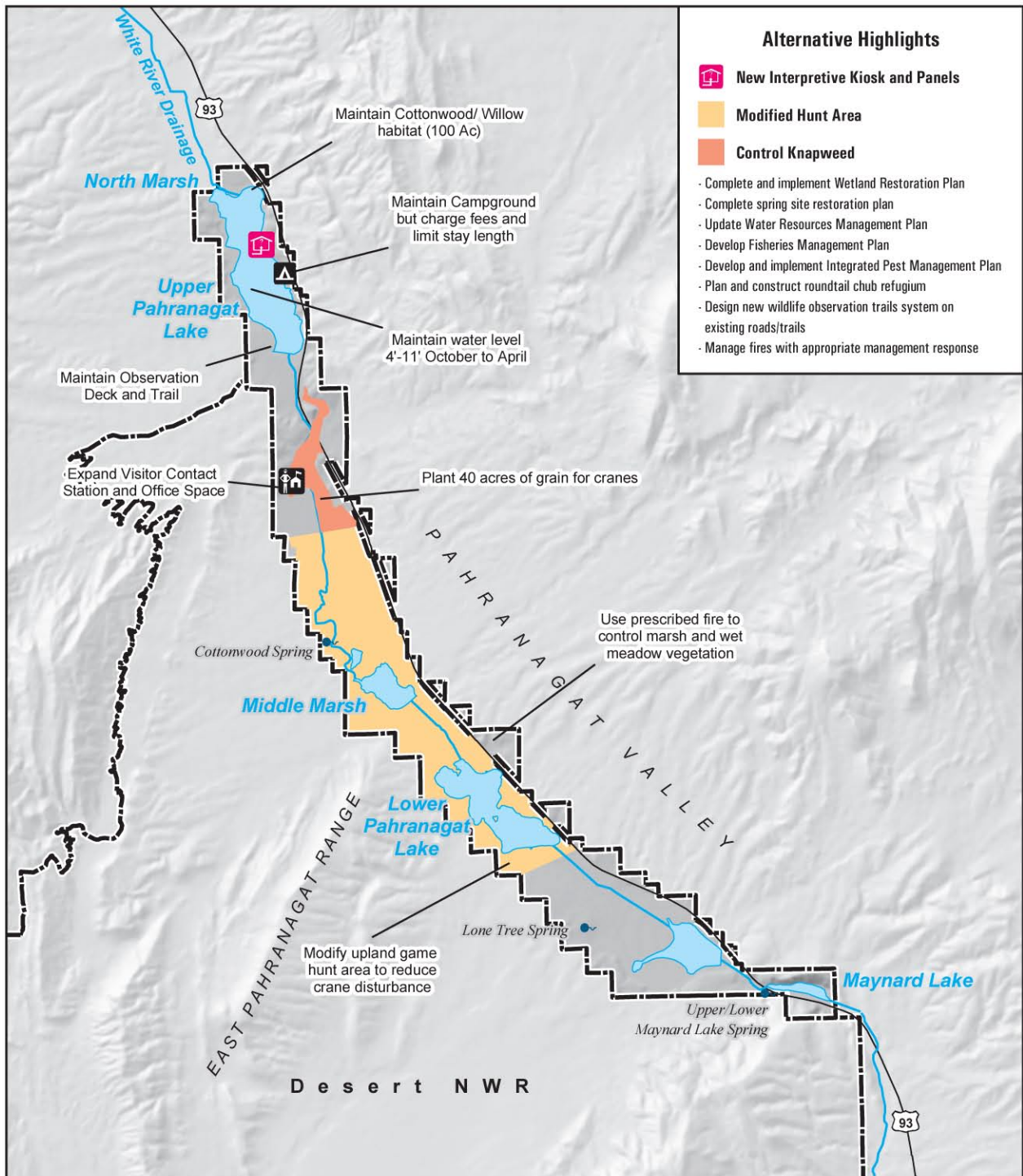
The Service would monitor the number of visitors using the Refuge each day. The hunt program would continue on the Refuge, but the designated hunting area would be modified to redirect upland game hunting to areas of the Refuge south of Dove Dike (away from the Refuge headquarters and Middle Marsh). A Fisheries Management Plan would be prepared within three years of CCP implementation. The campground would be maintained, and the Service would begin collecting fees and limit the length of stays to seven days. Generators would be prohibited between the hours of 10 p.m. and 8 a.m.

Visitor services on the Refuge would be improved and expanded to accommodate visitors and ensure visitor safety. The visitor contact station would be expanded to accommodate the growing number of visitors; new interpretive panels would replace old panels at the kiosk; environmental education and interpretive materials would be developed, including “least-wanted” posters for invasive plant species; and a wildlife observation trail system would be constructed throughout the Refuge, possibly along the historic farming and ranching roads. The Service would also construct new offices at the Refuge headquarters to accommodate additional staff and the public visiting the Refuge.

### *Cultural Resources*

Background information on the cultural resources on and near the Refuge would be collected and compiled to create digital, GIS, and hard copy maps, databases, and a library for the Refuge. Additional data collection efforts would be implemented to identify and evaluate resources subject to looting, vandalism, erosion, or deterioration and allow the Service to implement measures to reduce threats and preserve the resources.





**Figure 3.5-2**

**Alternative B**

**Pahrnagat NWR**

Other management actions implemented on the Refuge, such as wildlife management, habitat restoration, fire management, and trail construction, would incorporate cultural resource values, issues, and requirements into their designs and implementation procedures.

The educational, interpretive, and outreach programs would incorporate cultural resources information in their materials. To educate the public, the Service would work with affiliated tribes and other stakeholders to design and implement educational materials, programs, and activities that would describe traditional or sacred resources and increase awareness on- and off-Refuge about the sensitivity of cultural resources to visitor impacts and the penalties for vandalism. The Service would implement site clearance protocols for all visitation by the general public, volunteers, and researchers.

### **3.5.4 Alternative C – Minor Improvements in Water Resource and Habitat Management and Minor Increase in Visitor Services**

Alternative C would include the management actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section, actions identified under Alternatives A and/or B, and some additional actions for Refuge management. Activities that would not be implemented under this alternative are also noted; these actions would achieve different goals than those this alternative is targeting. The actions are summarized for this alternative in Figure 3.5-3.

#### *Wetland Habitat*

In addition to the management actions identified previously for open water habitat, the Service would identify actions to encourage carp management on private and state-managed lands upstream of the Refuge.

In addition to the vegetation control methods identified under Alternative B, the Service would expand invasive species management efforts to control salt cedar and other species in the Lower Pahrangat Lake area and replant with native riparian shrubs where appropriate. Additional IPM efforts would involve determining techniques for a Refuge-wide inventory of invasive species, identifying techniques for eradication and removal, and using appropriate methods to control bulrush, salt cedar, Russian olive, Russian knapweed, Scotch thistle, and other species (mechanical, chemical, cultural, and biological). Implementation of invasive species would continue to be a priority for the Refuge. IPM efforts would be coordinated with upstream property owners to reduce the extent of invasive plants and noxious weeds and minimize their potential to return to the Refuge.

The Service would implement a species Inventory and Monitoring Plan for marsh birds, waterfowl, and shorebirds to gather more information on the species that use the Refuge. In addition, the Service would conduct surveys every three years of birds and bats using the marsh habitat and add spring and fall surveys and breeding pair and brood counts to current fall and winter surveys coordinated with NDOW.

To increase wildlife diversity, the Service would plant and irrigate 65 acres of grain crops (instead of the 40 acres identified under Alternative B) between Upper Pahrnagat Lake and Middle Marsh for sandhill cranes, waterfowl, and waterbirds. Once the crops are in place, the Service would monitor their effectiveness by collecting information on the presence of sandhill cranes and their use of Refuge habitats.

To improve water resources management, the Service would determine the status of groundwater wells on record and repair or abandon them as appropriate. As necessary, the Service would apply for changes in point of use with the Nevada Division of Water Resources. Water infrastructure on the Refuge would also be repaired as staffing and funding allow. Gauges and data-logging equipment would also be installed at springs adjacent to Middle Marsh.

#### *Wildlife Diversity*

To improve habitat for the southwestern willow flycatcher, the Service would plant and establish 200 additional acres of willow habitat between Upper Pahrnagat Lake and Middle Marsh. They would also monitor the response of birds to wetland restoration activities by surveying the habitats after restoration.

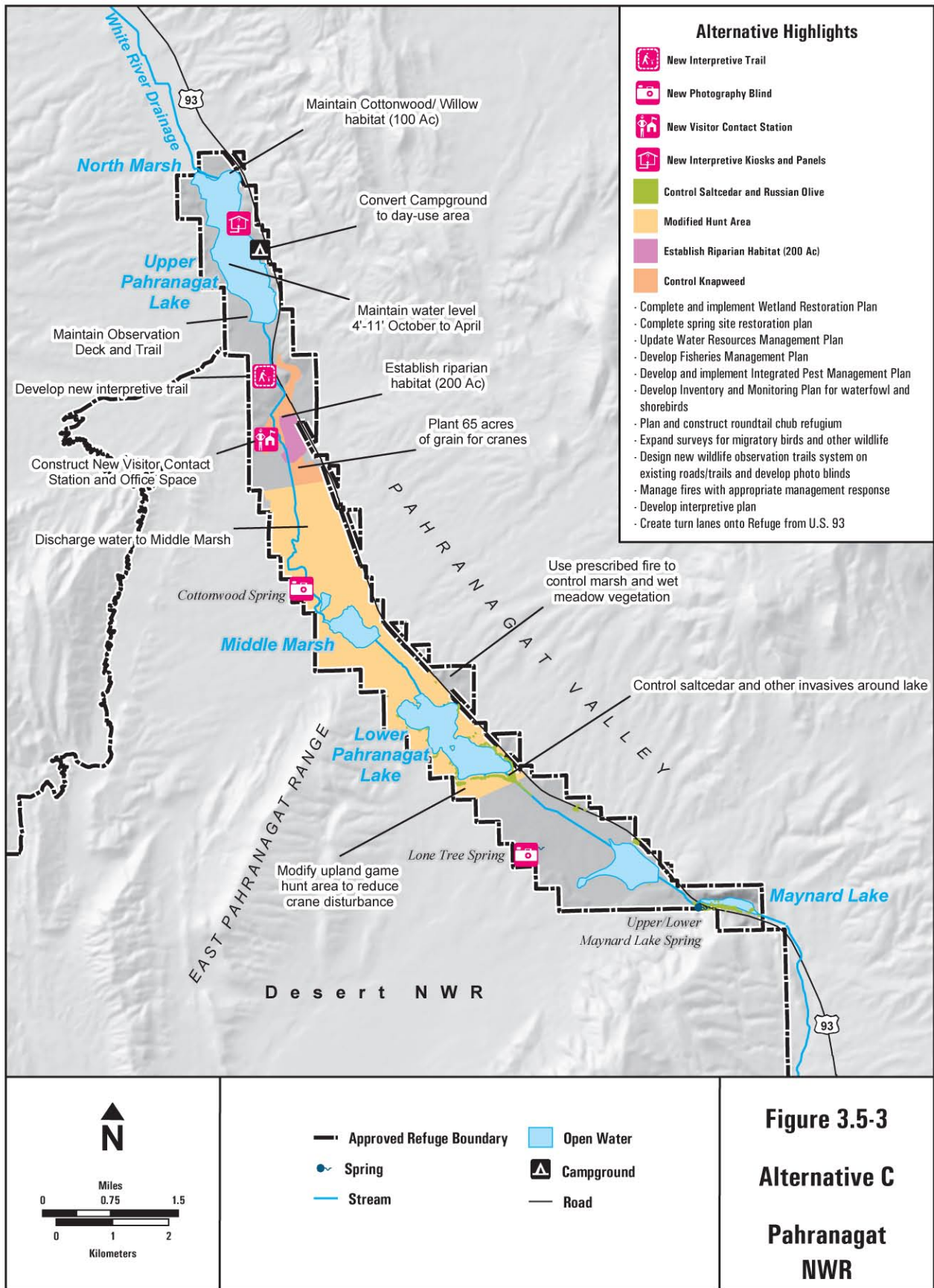
The site Restoration Plans for spring pools and channels would be implemented to restore habitat in those areas and increase species diversity.

Bird responses to fishing activities would also be monitored, and sensitive areas would be closed as necessary during appropriate seasons. Upland habitat would also be inventoried and monitored on a regular basis, and physical barriers would be installed to prevent vehicle traffic in closed areas and protect sensitive resources, such as wildlife, plants, and cultural resources.

#### *Visitor Services*

The Service would improve visitor services on the Refuge and implement an Interpretive Plan. The campground would be converted to a day use area, and vehicle access would be provided. Visitor facilities would be improved and maintained for visitor safety, including constructing an interpretive walking trail that connects Upper Pahrnagat Lake with the Headquarters Unit, constructing a new visitor contact station and office space at the Headquarters Unit, constructing additional parking at the Headquarters Unit, and constructing photography and observation blinds along the trail route.

Visitor use would be monitored to assess visitor experience and numbers. For the hunt program, the Service would conduct annual surveys and reporting of game species population numbers and the numbers of hunters and species harvested, and a registration box would be installed at the Refuge entrances to obtain information on the number of hunters using the Refuge.



To improve public access and awareness of the Refuge, the Service would install directional signs along U.S. Highway 93 and I-15 with assistance from the NDOT. Also, turn lanes would be created along the highway in coordination with NDOT to allow visitors to safely turn onto the Refuge.

The Service would increase public outreach through participation in a minimum of six activities throughout the year.

### *Cultural Resources*

To improve cultural resources management on the Refuge, the Service would inventory cultural resources and evaluate their historic or prehistoric significance.

The Service would implement the following actions:

- Conduct cultural resource inventories at all public use areas, roads, affected areas, and other destinations on the Refuge and evaluate any discovered sites' eligibility for listing on the NRHP;
- Develop historic contexts for classes of cultural resources;
- Inventory, evaluate, and nominate Traditional Cultural Properties and sacred sites to the National Register, in consultation with affiliated tribes;
- Identify, evaluate, and mitigate adverse effects and stabilize selected cultural resource sites on the Refuge using a Cultural Resources Management Plan prepared in consultation with affiliated tribes; and
- Use data collected on site locations and information for planning, monitoring, and interpretation efforts related to cultural resources.

The Service would continue to work with affiliated Native American tribes on projects to restore native habitat and allow harvesting of native plants (for traditional non-commercial purposes).

The Service would create a site stewardship volunteer program to assist in site monitoring, conservation efforts, development and delivery of educational and interpretive literature and programs, and to promote cultural resources conservation in neighboring communities.

### **3.5.5 Alternative D – Moderate Improvements in Water Resource and Habitat Management and Moderate Increase in Visitor Services**

Alternative D is the preferred alternative. It involves the actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section, some management actions from the other two action alternatives, and additional actions not discussed previously. Some activities from Alternatives B and C are expanded under this alternative to improve Refuge management, while others are reduced. Activities that would not be implemented under this alternative are also noted; these actions



would achieve different goals than those this alternative is targeting. The actions are summarized for this alternative in Figure 3.5-4.

#### *Wetland Habitat*

In addition to the actions identified in the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section and unlike Alternatives B and C, the Service would restore and manage 40 acres of native forage for migrating sandhill cranes between the Headquarters Unit and Lower Pahranaagat Lake. Sandhill crane usage of the Refuge would be monitored. The Service would acquire additional water rights from willing sellers and explore opportunities for additional water supplies through coordination with the Alamo, Richardville, and Hiko Water Boards, Lincoln County, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

The Service would monitor vegetation and wildlife responses to habitat management actions and modify their actions appropriately to minimize adverse effects. In addition to monitoring responses to habitat management, the Service would seek funding to monitor avian species abundance in wet meadow habitat and elsewhere to determine their responses to habitat manipulation during the fall and spring migration periods. Surveys of nesting colonial waterbirds would also be conducted every three years.

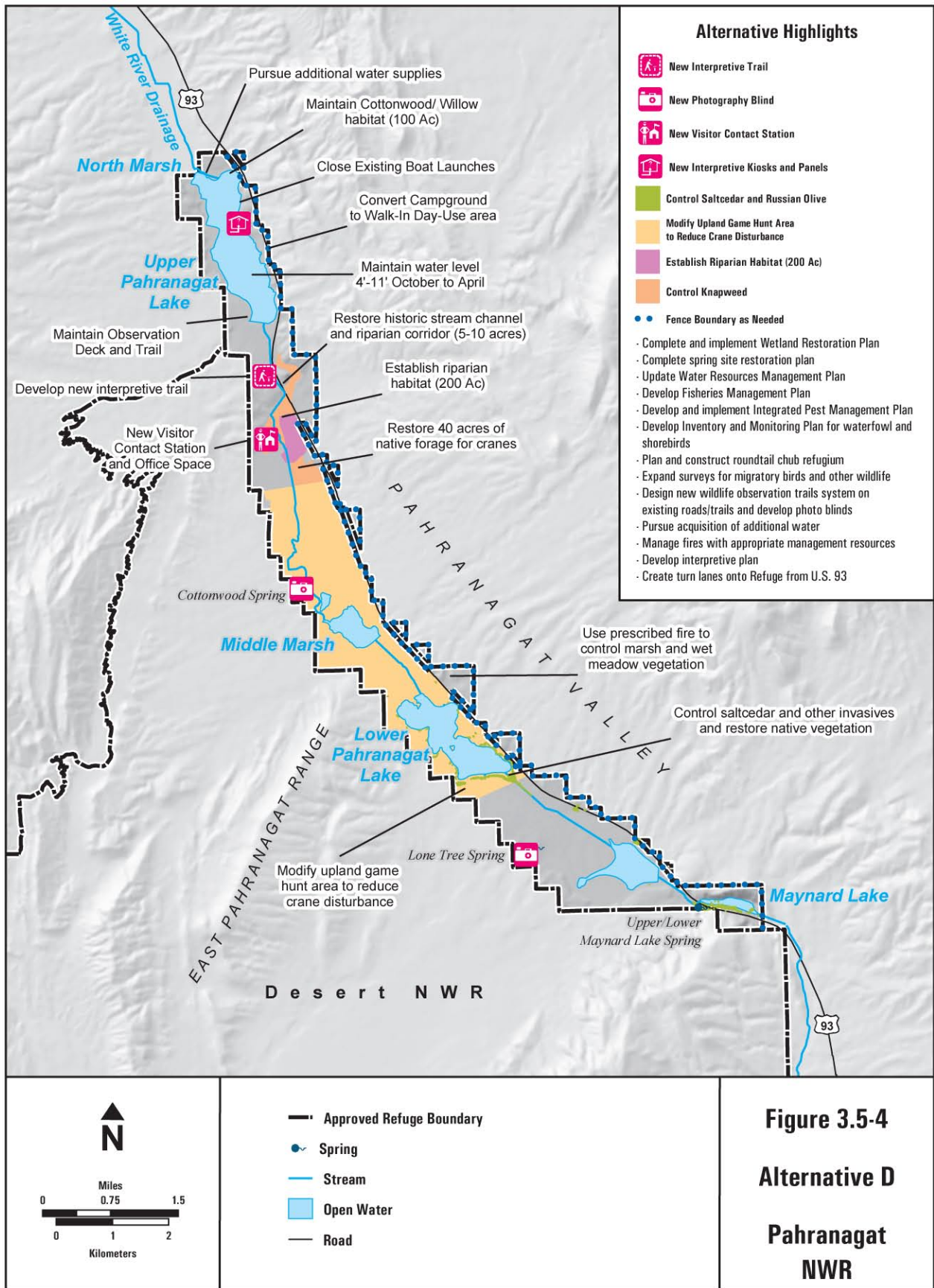
#### *Wildlife Diversity*

In addition to the management actions identified under the “Features Common to All Alternatives” section and Alternative B, the Service would restore the historic stream channel and riparian corridor (5–10 acres) through Black Canyon. After salt cedar is controlled around Lower Pahranaagat Lake, native upland habitat would be restored. To protect the Refuge’s habitats and resources and prevent encroachment, a fence would be installed along the eastern boundary.

#### *Visitor Services*

The Service would not improve visitor services beyond those management actions identified under the other alternatives; however, the campground area would be converted to a day use area, as identified under Alternative C, but vehicles would not be allowed. A gate would be installed to prevent vehicular access. In addition, the boat ramps in the campground area would be closed, and a new car-top boat launch would be designated. With vehicular access being restricted in the day use area, the existing boat ramps could not be used. Use of boat ramps also poses a concern with the introduction of quagga mussels, an invasive mollusk known to be present at Lake Mead and other major water bodies in southern Nevada (Benson et al. 2008). Use of car-top boat launches would reduce the risk of introducing quagga mussels by eliminating the types of boats that typically carry the mussels.

The Service would develop and implement an annual road maintenance program to improve roads for public access, safety, and use. Public outreach would be slightly expanded beyond Alternative C’s actions through participation in a minimum of nine outreach activities each year.





### *Cultural Resources*

In addition to management actions identified under the other alternatives, the Service would identify and evaluate cultural resources that could educate visitors on how humans have interacted with wildlife and habitats in the past, and they would consult with affiliated tribes and other stakeholders on ways to use these resources to achieve educational, scientific, and traditional cultural needs. The Service would also conduct a study of ethnobotany and traditional plant use on Pahrnagat NWR through assistance and consultation with the affiliated Native American tribes.

#### **3.5.6 Comparison of Alternatives**

A comparative summary of the alternatives for the Pahrnagat NWR is found in Table 3.6-4.

#### **3.5.7 Management Actions Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis as Part of Alternatives**

During the alternatives development process, Refuge staff evaluated additional management actions as part of the current alternatives. These actions are identified below with their reasons for elimination:

- Develop additional areas for camping to expand the allowable limit. (Not feasible.)
- Plant and maintain riparian vegetation around Lower Pahrnagat Lake. (Soils not suitable.)

### **3.6 Comparison of Alternatives**

The following tables provide a comparison of each of the alternatives for each refuge in the Desert Complex. Additional details on the preferred alternatives, including rationale explaining management actions and additional information on cooperation with other agencies, are provided in Appendix F.

**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>		
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Species Management</b>			
<b>Gather Baseline Population Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct baseline inventories on vegetation communities, small mammals, herpetofauna, and pollinators</li> <li>▪ Complete a four-year baseline inventory and monitoring for endemic fish species, a three-year baseline inventory and monitoring for the southwestern willow flycatcher, and a three-year refuge-wide reptile survey</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complete baseline inventory on listed invertebrates, nonnative fish, and non-listed endemic invertebrates</li> <li>▪ Implement monitoring for all listed endemic species, nonnative species that adversely affect endemic species, and game species</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complete inventory of nonnative and native species diversity and distribution</li> <li>▪ Implement monitoring for all non-listed endemic and game species</li> </ul>
<b>Special-Status Species Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue current monitoring strategies for special-status plants and wildlife</li> <li>▪ Monitor changes in the environment that may be a result of climate change</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restore Ash Meadows speckled dace to 5%–25% of historic Refuge range through habitat restoration and translocation</li> <li>▪ Double the current range of the Ash Meadows naucorid population to minimum of 20–40 square meters</li> <li>▪ Restore Point of Rocks spring outflow channel habitat to known suitability for Ash Meadows naucorid and monitor parameters</li> <li>▪ Identify suitable areas for range expansion of endemic plant populations within 10 years</li> <li>▪ Within 15 years begin out planting endemic plants to suitable habitats</li> <li>▪ Complete a feasibility study for construction of an on-site greenhouse</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restore endemic fish populations to 25%–50% of historic Refuge range</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>		
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Endemic Fish Refugia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Construct refugia for both Devils Hole pupfish and Warm Springs pupfish</li> <li>▪ Maintain and monitor the newly established pupfish refugia</li> <li>▪ Conduct quarterly fish counts and periodic water quality measurements</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Investigate the use of private aquaria as refugia</li> <li>▪ Update MOU with NDOW, Ecological Services, and NPS on management responsibilities under the Ash Meadows Recovery Plan</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reestablish Ash Meadows speckled dace to historic habitats after restoration of springs and streams is complete</li> <li>▪ Complete a feasibility assessment of refugia for all other Ash Meadows NWR endemic species</li> </ul>
<b>Habitat Protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ For the 30 known Refuge springs, protect and maintain existing water flows (17,000 acre feet per year) and natural temperature range</li> <li>▪ Continue to monitor and assess water flows, levels, and temperatures at springs and wells identified in the current Water Monitoring Plan</li> <li>▪ Analyze water quality and quantity biannually, and implement measures in coordination with the State Engineer to defend water rights and mitigate substantial changes in temperature or flow</li> <li>▪ Maintain the existing spring outflow structures and stream channels at monitoring sites</li> <li>▪ Maintain current level of enforcement measures to protect plants and wildlife</li> <li>▪ Maintain existing boundary fence as a wild horse enclosure</li> <li>▪ Repair post-and-cable barriers and install other barriers where needed to protect resources</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish permanent, long-term vegetation monitoring plots/transsects</li> <li>▪ Within 10 years of CCP approval, obtain baseline data for 17 springs identified in the Refuge Geomorphic and Biological Assessment</li> <li>▪ Increase law enforcement to prevent off-highway vehicles, fires, collecting of species, and other inappropriate activities</li> <li>▪ Add 11–15 road gates to prevent unauthorized use of roads and resource damage</li> <li>▪ Use prescribed fire where appropriate to create, improve, or maintain desired plant and animal communities, as well as to treat hazardous fuels</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a Resurfacing Plan for main roads through and on the Refuge that considers the restoration of slough hydrology</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>		
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Replace or add gates on service or fire roads and post signs on them</li> <li>▪ Maintain closure of nonessential roads</li> <li>▪ Continue fuel reduction projects and maintain current fuel breaks</li> <li>▪ Manage wildland fires on the Refuge using the AMR, which considers resource values at risk and potential negative impacts of various fire suppression measures; firefighter and public safety will be the highest priority on every incident</li> <li>▪ Improve Refuge-wide vegetation map through ground surveys and updating of GIS layers and initiate long-term, annual vegetation monitoring</li> </ul>		
<b>Restoration</b>			
<b>Landscape/Hydrologic Restoration</b>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess and initiate removal of berms, ditches, dams, impoundments, and unnecessary roads within the Warm Springs, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, and Upper Carson Slough Management Units to restore natural hydrology on a landscape scale</li> <li>▪ Design and construct fish barriers to control movement of invasive fish</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess and initiate removal of berms, ditches, dams, impoundments, and unnecessary roads within the Crystal Springs Unit to restore natural hydrology on a landscape scale</li> <li>▪ Inventory, assess, and mitigate landscape disturbances including graded lands, mines, fences, and other disturbances</li> <li>▪ Implement the plan for the modification or removal of Crystal Reservoir that minimizes adverse environmental impacts</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>		
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Spring/Channel Restoration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complete and implement Restoration Plans for Upper Point of Rocks, Jackrabbit Spring, and the Warm Springs Unit (North and South Indian Springs and School Springs)</li> <li>▪ Develop a restoration plan for Crystal Spring Unit by 2011</li> <li>▪ Remove invasive plants and exotic aquatic species</li> <li>▪ Seed and plant native vegetation</li> <li>▪ Manipulate and enhance substrate</li> <li>▪ Remove hydrologic barriers</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Manage and monitor previously restored springs</li> <li>▪ Complete and implement the Restoration Plans for Lower Point of Rocks, Lower Kings Pool, Marsh, Big, and Fairbanks Springs</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop and implement restoration plans for Tubbs, Bradford, Crystal, Forest, and North and South Scruggs Springs</li> <li>▪ Based on outcome of Carson Slough Restoration Plan, develop and implement Restoration Plans for Longstreet and Rogers Springs</li> </ul>
<b>Native Plant Community Restoration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain existing man-made reservoirs and other open water sources using mechanical methods to control vegetation</li> <li>▪ Continue to control invasive plant species at restoration sites and in burned areas</li> <li>▪ Restore and maintain approximately 70 acres of alkali/wet meadow, 30 acres of mesquite bosque/lowland riparian, and 30 acres of native upland in the Warm Springs Complex and Jackrabbit/Big Springs Units by restoring natural hydrology and actively revegetating appropriate areas</li> <li>▪ Rehabilitate 10%–25% of old agricultural fields by controlling invasive species and planting native plants</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restore approximately 520 acres of alkali/wet meadow, 220 acres of mesquite bosque/lowland riparian, 30 acres of native upland, and 150 acres of emergent marsh in the Warm Springs Complex, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Upper Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs Units by restoring natural hydrology and actively revegetate appropriate areas based on outcome of Transportation Plan, cultural investigations, and linear disturbance assessment</li> <li>▪ Rehabilitate 30%–45% of old agricultural fields by removing hydrologic barriers, controlling invasive species, and planting native plants</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restore approximately 650 acres of alkali/wet meadow, 550 acres of mesquite bosque/lowland riparian, 30 acres of native upland, and 150 acres of emergent marsh in the Warm Springs Complex, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Upper Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs Units by restoring natural hydrology and actively revegetate appropriate areas based on outcome of Transportation Plan, cultural investigations, and linear disturbance assessment</li> <li>▪ Rehabilitate 40%–65% of old agricultural fields by removing hydrologic barriers, controlling invasives species, and planting native plants</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>		
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop restoration plan for Carson Slough</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain 3,935 acres of alkaline meadow/wet meadow habitat, 5,500–5,750 acres of native upland desert plant communities, and 1,000 acres of mesquite bosque habitat in the Warm Springs Complex, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Upper Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs Units by restoring natural hydrology and actively revegetate appropriate areas</li> <li>Maintain and monitor habitats on a regular basis after restoration activities are complete</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain 7,850 acres of alkaline meadow/wet meadow habitat, 11,000–11,500 acres of native upland desert plant communities, and 2,000 acres of mesquite bosque habitat in the Warm Springs Complex, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Upper Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs Units by restoring natural hydrology and actively revegetate appropriate areas</li> </ul>
<b>Pest Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain current management for invasive plant and wildlife, responding to greatest threats on a project-by-project basis</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use IPM techniques for long-term nonnative fish management</li> <li>Control nonnative invasive plants, prioritizing areas with listed plant species, and monitor the response of listed plant species</li> <li>Minimize and control impacts on aquatic habitat due to cattail growth</li> <li>Within 10 years, reduce salt cedar and Russian knapweed distribution by between 50% and 75% of the 2006 distribution on 4,000 acres of Refuge land and work with BLM to control salt cedar and Russian knapweed on adjacent BLM land</li> <li>Implement nonnative plant species control as outlined in the IPM Plan for all habitat types</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate alternative pest control strategies (sterilization, biological control) in cooperation with other agencies</li> <li>Within 10 years, reduce salt cedar and Russian knapweed distribution by between 75% and 95% of the 2006 distribution on 4,000 acres of Refuge land and work with BLM to control salt cedar and Russian knapweed on adjacent BLM land</li> <li>Aggressively trap and remove crayfish from spring and channel habitat from 10 spring systems (Marsh, N &amp; S Indian, N &amp; S Scruggs, Jackrabbit, Kings, Point of Rocks, Big, Crystal, and Bradford springs)</li> <li>Install temporary fish barriers until bass eradication is complete at Big and Jackrabbit springs</li> </ul>



**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>	
		<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reduce or contain crayfish populations Refuge-wide such that current distributions are not exceeded</li> <li>▪ Regularly trap and remove crayfish from spring habitat</li> <li>▪ Focus on 10 most infested and important Refuge aquatic systems and expand program as necessary</li> <li>▪ Implement other crayfish control strategies identified during development of the IPM Plan</li> <li>▪ Evaluate current land uses such as utility corridors and ensure regulatory compliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Remove cattails from outflow channels at Kings, Point of Rocks and Crystal springs</li> </ul>
<b>Land Conservation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complete the pending land and mineral withdrawal with the BLM</li> <li>▪ Continue ongoing efforts to acquire remaining lands within the authorized Refuge boundary from willing sellers</li> <li>▪ Continue coordination with private landowners to protect Refuge resources</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish conservation agreements or acquire in-holdings from willing sellers</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B
<b>Research</b>			
<b>Research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to allow research activities by others on a case-by-case basis using special use permits</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expand research on Refuge to include: ecology and management of invasive species; taxonomy, ecology, and management of rare and endemic species; ecosystems; historic and current plant community diversity, composition, and structure and role of natural processes (fire, flood, drought); wildlife-habitat relationships</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Substantially expand research on the topics listed under Alternative B</li> <li>▪ Within 15 years of CCP approval, complete a feasibility study of the need for an on-site research facility; if appropriate, construct the facility</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Management Actions Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Visitor Services</b>			
<b>Environmental Education and Outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue existing, limited environmental education activities</li> <li>▪ Develop environmental education materials with assistance of Desert Complex staff on a project-by-project basis</li> <li>▪ Assess visitor education needs and opportunities through informal contact with visitors</li> <li>▪ Provide off-Refuge educational outreach to the local public on the value of Ash Meadows NWR for wildlife and the public, as requested and depending on staff availability</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop and begin implementing an Environmental Education Plan by 2010</li> <li>▪ Incorporate environmental education goals of relevant plans</li> <li>▪ Contact local schools and provide at least 3–5 on-site programs a year</li> <li>▪ Work with partners to develop off-site refugium for pupfish to promote awareness of the endangered pupfish and other endemic species at the Refuge</li> <li>▪ Provide off-Refuge educational outreach in 2–3 local community events annually</li> <li>▪ Develop an Outreach Plan to support the Carson Slough Restoration Plan</li> <li>▪ Develop an educational video on the endemic fish and other wildlife of Ash Meadows</li> <li>▪ Develop education and interpretation materials with affiliated tribes</li> <li>▪ Provide 10 off-site programs to local public and home schools</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop and implement an Environmental Education Plan by 2010</li> <li>▪ Develop cooperative agreements with public, non-government entities and private partners to provide off-Refuge educational outreach to the local public on the value of the Refuge for wildlife and the public</li> <li>▪ Provide no off-site programs</li> </ul>
<b>Wildlife Observation and Interpretation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop interpretive materials with the assistance of the Regional Office and Desert Complex on a project-by-project basis</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop multilingual interpretive materials and construct new interpretive facilities at Fairbanks Springs</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff visitor contact station five days per week</li> <li>▪ No roadway or parking area improvements</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>		
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Design and construct boardwalks to follow Kings Pool Stream from parking lot to Kings Pool, with a pool overlook</li> <li>▪ Design and construct interpretative displays for new boardwalks to be installed at Point of Rocks</li> <li>▪ Design and construct interpretative panels for the new boardwalk and overlook at Longstreet Spring pool</li> <li>▪ Maintain designated roads and visitor use areas</li> <li>▪ Maintain Spring Meadows Road and allow non-commercial through traffic</li> <li>▪ Improve Point of Rocks and Longstreet Cabin parking areas</li> <li>▪ Begin implementing the Ash Meadows NWR Interpretation Plan</li> <li>▪ Maintain current visitor services for wildlife-dependent recreational activities in accordance with existing Public Use Management Plan</li> <li>▪ Conduct a study of Refuge visitation to determine the number and purpose of visits</li> <li>▪ Improve signs on Refuge boundary</li> <li>▪ Include location of Devils Hole and pupfish life history information in Refuge brochures, fact sheets, and maps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Within five years of funding, complete design and construction of a new Refuge headquarters/visitor contact station building</li> <li>▪ Design and construct interpretive facilities identified in the Interpretive Plan</li> <li>▪ Staff visitor contact station seven days per week</li> <li>▪ Develop and begin implementing a comprehensive Visitor Services Plan by 2010</li> <li>▪ Improve existing roadways and parking areas to good condition as described in the Ash Meadows Refuge Roads Inventory (2004), based on Geomorphic and Biological Assessment</li> </ul>	

**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>		
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Hunting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue hunt program under the interim Hunt Plan until a revised Hunt Plan is completed</li> <li>▪ Allow access by boat for waterfowl hunting</li> <li>▪ Provide opportunities for waterfowl and upland game hunting on the entire Refuge</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Obtain baseline information on Refuge hunting and within three years create a hunting step-down plan that addresses waterfowl and upland game hunting</li> <li>▪ Monitor hunting use on the Refuge</li> <li>▪ Restrict or eliminate boat use on the Refuge</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B
<b>Cultural Resources</b>			
<b>Management and Protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue informal outreach on cultural resources to visitors that stop at the visitors contact station</li> <li>▪ Collect cultural resources background information on a project-by-project basis</li> <li>▪ Continue to inventory, manage, and protect cultural resources on a case-by-case basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepare evaluation criteria and conduct a cultural resource inventory at all visitor facilities and areas that would be affected by Refuge projects</li> <li>▪ Inventory, evaluate, and mitigate adverse effects, and stabilize samples of cultural resources on the Refuge using a research design prepared in consultation with culturally affiliated tribes and the scientific community</li> <li>▪ Identify and evaluate cultural resources subject to looting/vandalism, erosion, or deterioration, and implement steps, including barriers and signs, to reduce these threats and preserve the resources</li> <li>▪ Implement projects to restore habitats associated with important native plants and to harvest native plant foods (for traditional, non-commercial purposes) in coordination with culturally affiliated tribes</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B

**Table 3.6-1. Ash Meadows NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>		
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inventory, evaluate, and nominate Traditional Cultural Properties and sacred sites to the NRHP in consultation with tribes</li> <li>▪ Conduct a study of ethnobotany and traditional plant use on Ash Meadows NWR in consultation with tribes</li> <li>▪ Create and implement a site stewardship volunteer program to assist in site monitoring, educational and interpretive programs, and to promote cultural resources conservation in neighboring communities</li> </ul>	

**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>	<i>Alternative D</i>
<b>Bighorn Sheep</b>				
<b>Habitat Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain existing water sources (springs and catchments)</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A, except: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove highly flammable vegetation around catchments as needed to protect from wildfires</li> <li>Construct additional rainwater catchments if existing sources are inadequate</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C
<b>Habitat Protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install signs, barricading, and fencing</li> <li>Conduct law enforcement patrols to prevent unauthorized uses (e.g., off-road vehicles)</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A
<b>Population Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent domestic livestock grazing on the Refuge to minimize potential for disease transmission</li> <li>Set hunt permit limits based on population levels and herd health</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Translocate sheep to the Refuge from outside sources to maintain and restore sub-populations</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement a Sheep Management Plan</li> <li>Develop a formal agreement with NDOW covering sheep management on the Refuge</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Translocate sheep to and from the Refuge as needed to maintain desert bighorn sheep subpopulations and genetic diversity</li> </ul>
<b>Surveys</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct one fall helicopter survey per mountain range to estimate adult sex ratio, ram age structure, lamb survival/recruitment, and population size</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct yearly spring helicopter survey to identify bighorn sheep lambing and recruitment sites</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B	Same as Alternative B

**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>	<i>Alternative D</i>
<b>Research and Monitoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to allow research on the Refuge through special use permits</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine connectivity between sheep subpopulations using historical records, sightings, and radio tracking data</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct radio telemetry study to assess bighorn sheep mortality factors, home ranges, and habitat utilization</li> <li>▪ Collect blood and fecal samples to determine general health status of herd, diet composition, nutrient uptake, and genetic diversity</li> <li>▪ Monitor vegetation response to burns on the Refuge</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C
<b>Wildlife Diversity</b>				
<b>Baseline Inventories and Monitoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct surveys for special-status species on a project-by-project basis</li> <li>▪ Continue monitoring the health of the Pahrump poolfish population in the refugium</li> <li>▪ Maintain a record of raptors observed during helicopter surveys for bighorn sheep</li> <li>▪ Continue invasive weed surveys and treatments</li> <li>▪ Monitor changes in the environment that may be a result of climate change</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct regular bird surveys at Corn Creek Field Station</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish permanent plots in plant communities throughout the Refuge and inventory plant and animal species composition and abundance every five years in those plots</li> <li>▪ Conduct surveys for special-status species on the Refuge</li> <li>▪ Develop and implement an Inventory and Monitoring Plan for special-status species</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish permanent plots in plant communities above 5,000 feet and inventory plant and animal species composition and abundance every five years in those plots</li> </ul>



**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative D
<b>Resource Protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain designated roads and visitor use areas</li> <li>▪ Maintain and replace regulatory signs along boundaries and designated roadways</li> <li>▪ Promote awareness of and solicit support for efforts to combat trespassing and resulting impacts along the southern boundary</li> <li>▪ Manage wildland fires on the refuge using an AMR that considers resource values at risk and potential negative impacts of various fire suppression measures. Response may range from monitoring high elevation fires (above 5,000 feet) to full suppression. Firefighter and public safety will be the highest priority for every incident, regardless of other resources at risk</li> <li>▪ Continue utilization of volunteers for habitat restoration and maintenance efforts</li> <li>▪ Continue monitoring well water use and spring discharge at Corn Creek</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use aerial photography, satellite imagery, and/or GPS to monitor damage caused by off-road vehicle trespass</li> <li>▪ Construct and maintain post-and-cable fencing along the southern boundary, with consideration for desert tortoise movement</li> <li>▪ Expand litter removal efforts using staff and volunteers</li> <li>▪ Increase law enforcement presence and patrols with an emphasis on the southern boundary</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fence and maintain the eastern boundary where necessary</li> <li>▪ Increase law enforcement patrols throughout the Refuge with an emphasis on the eastern boundary</li> <li>▪ Develop and implement a plan to close illegal roads and rehabilitate damaged habitat along the southern boundary</li> <li>▪ Designate one point of entry on the southeast boundary of the Refuge in addition to the entrance at Corn Creek Field Station</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with local jurisdictions to ensure development adjacent to boundary is compatible (greenbelt, walled residential)</li> <li>▪ Promote awareness of and solicit support to combat Endangered Species Act violations along the boundaries</li> <li>▪ Install boundary signs at regular intervals along the entire southern, eastern, and northern boundaries</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative C and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Construct and maintain fence along northwest boundary of East Pahrnagat Range Unit</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>	<i>Alternative D</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with the State Engineer to defend water rights and mitigate substantial changes in temperature or flow</li> <li>▪ Pursue renewal of mineral withdrawal</li> <li>▪ Participate in programmatic EIS development process relating to proposed energy corridor to evaluate impacts to Refuge resources</li> </ul>			
<b>Wildlife and Habitat Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No current pinyon-juniper habitat management</li> <li>▪ Remove any wild horses or burros that occur on the Refuge as soon as possible</li> <li>▪ Restore wetland and spring habitats at Corn Creek</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use prescribed fire and naturally ignited fires to restore vegetation characteristics representative of a natural fire regime</li> <li>▪ Allow some naturally ignited fires to burn under prescribed conditions above a 5,000-foot elevation; these incidents would be managed as Fire Use Events, with appropriate staffing to reflect the complexity of the incident</li> <li>▪ Consider habitat needs of special-status species, such as Gilbert's skink and pinyon jay and gray vireo, when doing prescribed burns in pinyon-juniper habitat</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C

**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative D
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consider reestablishing Pahrump poolfish at Corn Creek if suitable habitat is available and is compatible with management objectives</li> <li>▪ Maintain and monitor habitats on a regular basis after restoration activities are complete</li> </ul>	
<b>Specially Designated Areas</b>				
<b>Air Force Overlay</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with USAF to update the existing MOU</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A
<b>RNAs</b>	No research or monitoring in RNAs	Develop research and management program for RNAs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Survey and mark all RNA boundaries</li> <li>▪ Conduct photographic reconnaissance and documentation of all RNAs</li> <li>▪ Use RNAs as control for monitoring effects of habitat management in other areas of Refuge</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Submit request to Service Director to de-designate Papoose Lake RNA</li> <li>▪ Encourage academic and agency scientists to conduct non-manipulative research in the RNAs</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Submit request to Service Director to de-designate Papoose Lake RNA</li> </ul>
<b>Wilderness</b>	Protect and maintain the wilderness character of the proposed 1.37 million-acre Desert Wilderness Area until Congress acts on proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prohibit all motorized activities within the proposed wilderness unless authorized by stipulations</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A

**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative D
	<p>in 1974 proposal or an approved minimum tool analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit recommendation to technically correct the wilderness proposal to correct overlap with bombing range, allow repair/relocation of hazardous sections of roads, and allow use of helicopters to repair/maintain water developments and access remote areas for wildlife surveys</li> </ul>			
<b>Visitor Services</b>				
<b>Environmental Education and Interpretation</b>	<p>Provide opportunities to support up to 100,000 visits per year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain and replace interpretive signs (visitor contact station, trails, and refugium) and update sign content as needed</li> <li>Continue using Southern Nevada Interpretive Association volunteers to provide interpretation and environmental education programs for visitors</li> <li>Use volunteers as available to provide interpretation and guidance to visitors at Corn Creek Field Station</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand volunteer program on Refuge with a target of staffing visitor center full-time during peak use and 4 hours/day during other seasons</li> <li>Create environmental education program using funding from Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act</li> <li>Establish seasonal volunteer resident host/docent at Desert Pass campground</li> <li>Develop and install interpretive panels and signs at designated entry points</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide educational materials to the public about the use of fire in habitat management</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand volunteer program to staff visitor contact station/visitor center full-time during peak use periods and four hours/day on weekends during other seasons</li> <li>No docent at campground</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative D
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete planning, design, and construction of a visitor center and office space at Corn Creek Field Station</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop live “sheep cam” at water development and stream video through Web site and to visitor contact station/visitor center</li> <li>Develop cultural resources interpretive and environmental education materials in coordination with affiliated Native American tribes</li> </ul>		
<b>Outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in two major community events annually</li> <li>Provide information at the visitor center and appropriate signs regarding the closure of the portion of Refuge within the NTTR due to safety and security reasons</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in three major community events annually</li> <li>Develop and install a permanent environmental education/interpretive display at a prominent public venue</li> <li>Conduct an annual public open house</li> <li>Develop and distribute a Refuge video</li> <li>Prepare and distribute an annual Congressional briefing</li> <li>Develop a quarterly Refuge newsletter</li> <li>Conduct annual surveys to measure program effectiveness</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct an annual public open house</li> <li>Prepare and distribute an annual Congressional briefing</li> </ul>
<b>Wildlife Observation and Photography</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain visitor facilities (Mormon Well and Alamo Roads, parking areas, camping/picnic area)</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve and maintain Mormon Well and Alamo Road to “fair” condition</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No auto tour route or wildlife viewing trails in Gass Peak or Sheep Range Units</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative C, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No road improvements</li> <li>No mapping of trails and no recreation-fee program</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>	<i>Alternative D</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain and replace regulatory, directional, and interpretive signs as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use post-and-cable fencing to designate parking turnouts along Alamo, Mormon Well, and Gass Peak Roads</li> <li>▪ Construct an entrance sign and information kiosk at the east end of Mormon Well Road</li> <li>▪ Plan, design, and develop site-specific NEPA documentation for an auto tour route on Gass Peak Road from Corn Creek to SR 215</li> <li>▪ Map existing trails in Gass Peak and Sheep Range Units using GPS, develop guide for visitors, and manage trails to minimize impacts to sheep</li> <li>▪ Evaluate and develop new wildlife viewing trails in the Gass Peak and Sheep Range Units; design and site trails to minimize maintenance costs and impacts to sheep</li> <li>▪ Plan and construct photography blinds</li> <li>▪ Evaluate the management benefits resulting from a recreation-fee program</li> </ul>		

**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative D
<b>Hunting</b>	<p>Provide safe opportunities for hunting bighorn sheep on the Refuge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue current NDOW-managed hunt program based on annual population surveys</li> <li>Provide Refuge-specific and NDOW hunting guidelines and regulation materials to the public at the Refuge headquarters</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct annual surveys and reporting of game species population numbers and the number of hunters and species harvested in coordination with NDOW</li> <li>Post and maintain designated hunting area signs on Refuge</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B	Same as Alternative B
<b>Cultural Resources</b>				
<b>Cultural Resources Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to manage and protect cultural resources on the Refuge on a project-by-project basis prior to land-disturbing projects to comply with applicable laws and regulations</li> <li>Continue to provide appropriate interpretive information on cultural resources to visitors at the field station through informal outreach</li> </ul>	<p>Manage cultural resources in compliance with federal regulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compile all existing baseline data on cultural resources sites, surveys, and reports within and near the Refuge, and create secure digital, GIS, and hard copy databases, maps, and a library</li> <li>Incorporate cultural resource values, issues, and requirements into design and implementation of the other habitat, wildlife, and visitor service activities and strategies conducted by the Desert Complex</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare evaluation criteria and conduct a cultural resource inventory at all visitor facilities and areas that would be affected by Refuge projects</li> <li>Inventory, evaluate, and mitigate adverse effects, and stabilize samples of cultural resources on the Refuge using a research design prepared in consultation with culturally affiliated tribes and the scientific community</li> <li>Inventory, evaluate, and nominate Traditional Cultural Properties and sacred sites to the NRHP in consultation with tribes</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C



**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>	<i>Alternative D</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create a cultural resource layer in the Desert Complex GIS database that aids in the identification, planning, monitoring, and interpretation of cultural sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct a study of ethnobotany and traditional plant use on Ash Meadows NWR in consultation with tribes</li> </ul>	
<b>Education and Outreach</b>	Provide minimal public outreach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue informal outreach on cultural resources to visitors that stop at the visitor center</li> </ul>	Manage cultural resources and cultural resource information for research, education, and interpretation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incorporate cultural resources information into education and interpretive programs and media</li> <li>▪ Identify and evaluate cultural resources that can educate Refuge users on how humans have interacted with wildlife and habitats in the past</li> <li>▪ Use appropriate cultural resources to achieve educational, scientific, and traditional cultural needs</li> <li>▪ Identify potential priority cultural sites on the non-military overlay of the Refuge and survey and record the sites</li> <li>▪ Implement projects to restore habitats of important native plants and to harvest (for traditional, non-commercial purposes) native plant foods in coordination with the tribes</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B	Same as Alternative A

**Table 3.6-2. Desert NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative D
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and implement educational materials, programs, and activities that would address traditional or sacred resources to increase awareness on- and off-Refuge about the sensitivity of cultural resources to visitor impacts and the penalties for vandalism</li> </ul>		
<b>Protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to protect any cultural and historic resources on the Refuge on a project-by-project basis to comply with applicable laws and regulations</li> </ul>	Implement measures to protect cultural resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and evaluate cultural resources subject to looting/vandalism, erosion, or deterioration, and implement steps, including barriers and signs, to reduce these threats and preserve the resources</li> <li>Implement cultural resources monitoring and enforcement activities to decrease impacts on cultural resources</li> <li>Create and implement a site stewardship volunteer program to assist in site monitoring, educational and interpretive programs, and to promote cultural resources conservation in neighboring communities</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B	Same as Alternative B

**Table 3.6-3. Moapa Valley NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Management Actions Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Endemic and Special-Status Species</b>			
<b>Habitat Restoration</b>	<p>Implement measures to restore habitat on the Refuge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restore native overstory, mid-level, and understory vegetation (using local seed and/or seedlings) in riparian corridors, transitional upland sites, and any disturbed or newly exposed areas on the Pedersen Unit</li> <li>▪ Consider habitat needs of other special-status fish and invertebrates when designing and implementing restoration projects (Moapa White River springfish, Moapa pebblesnail, grated tryonia, Moapa warm spring riffle beetle, Amargosa naucorid, and Moapa naucorid)</li> <li>▪ Develop and implement strategies to remove nonnative fish species, including mollies and mosquitofish, from Refuge</li> <li>▪ Monitor streams before and after rehabilitation to determine benefits or detriments to Moapa dace</li> <li>▪ Continue to use volunteers for restoration efforts</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue channel restoration on the Plummer Unit by planting native species</li> <li>▪ Monitor streams before and after rehabilitation to determine impacts on endemic fish and invertebrate populations</li> <li>▪ Maintain and monitor habitats on a regular basis after restoration activities are complete</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ By 2015, complete restoration of the spring heads and channels on Aparcar Unit</li> </ul>
<b>Inventory Wildlife</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to conduct annual surveys and monitoring of Moapa dace and surveys of Moapa White River springfish</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Within five years of the CCP's approval, conduct baseline inventories of federally listed, proposed, candidate, and species of concern on the Refuge and of aquatic habitat for invertebrates and amphibians to determine species composition and abundance</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inventory existing upland habitat for migratory birds, mammals, and reptiles by 2009 and prepare and implement a Monitoring Plan for these groups</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with NDOW to conduct surveys for the presence and use of fan palm habitat by bats</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-3. Moapa Valley NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Management Actions Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ By 2009, inventory existing upland habitat for migratory birds, mammals, and reptiles</li> <li>▪ Repeat inventories every five years to monitor trends in community composition</li> <li>▪ Monitor restored stream habitat consistent with the Muddy River Aquatic Species Recovery Plan</li> <li>▪ Develop and implement an Inventory and Monitoring Plan for federally listed and special-status fish species</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a long-term Inventory and Monitoring Plan for all federally listed, proposed, candidate, and special-status species on the Refuge</li> </ul>
<b>Water Resources Monitoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with partners to continue monitoring water flow and temperature of Pedersen and Pedersen East Springs and Warm Springs West flume</li> <li>▪ Participate in local and regional water resources management efforts to assess impacts and protect water resources on the Refuge</li> <li>▪ Participate in the Muddy River regional water monitoring planning process</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collect monthly monitoring data for water flow and temperature of Pedersen and Pedersen East springs and Warm Springs West flume and collect monthly monitoring data for water quality parameters, including temperature, flow, dissolved oxygen, pH, and total dissolved solids at other Refuge springs as needed</li> <li>▪ Develop a long-term Water Resources Management Plan for the Refuge</li> <li>▪ Determine appropriate monitoring site locations, frequency, parameters, and equipment</li> <li>▪ Purchase and install equipment</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Include monitoring at Apcar by 2009</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-3. Moapa Valley NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Management Actions Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Habitat Protection</b>	<p>Protect and maintain natural habitat, including water quality and quantity in the Refuge springs and channels suitable for Moapa dace survival, reproduction, and recruitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain existing boundary fencing and gates and replace as staffing and funding allow</li> <li>▪ Maintain regulatory signs on the Refuge in good condition and replace as staffing and funding allow</li> <li>▪ Remove dead fan palm fronds and thin the underbrush and overgrowth as needed to reduce risk of fire</li> <li>▪ Unwanted fires would be extinguished as fast as safely possible to minimize potential negative impacts to Moapa dace.</li> <li>▪ Continue periodic removal of nonnative aquatic species</li> <li>▪ Monitor changes in the environment that may be a result of climate change</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop and implement an IPM Plan to control and eradicate invasive species encroachment using an early detection/early response approach</li> <li>▪ Install directional, regulatory, and interpretive signs both on- and off-Refuge</li> <li>▪ Erect entrance signs as appropriate</li> <li>▪ Participate in community-based fire safe planning both on- and off-Refuge and explore other options for protecting the Refuge from fire</li> <li>▪ Use prescribed fire where appropriate to reduce hazardous fuels and treat unwanted vegetation</li> <li>▪ Develop regulatory, directional, and interpretive signs and materials, such as brochures and fact sheets, to guide and enhance visitor experience</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitor habitat changes, maintain and continue improvements for restoration efforts and other landscape improvements, and provide adequate level of monitoring and maintenance for invasive species control and fire management</li> <li>▪ Expand Refuge Acquisition Boundary by 1,503 acres and work with partners to protect habitat within the expanded boundary through purchase, transfer, and/or agreement (see Land Protection Plan in Appendix L)</li> <li>▪ Prepare step-down habitat management plan for lands acquired within the expansion area</li> </ul>
<b>Visitor Services</b>	<p>Provide public outreach and visitor service opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain Refuge as closed to the general public</li> <li>▪ Continue participation in local community events (e.g., Clark County Fair, Moapa Day Celebration, Earth Day) as staffing and funding allow</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Open Refuge to the general public on weekends and to school groups during the week through prior arrangement</li> <li>▪ Recruit docents to staff the Refuge on weekends and facilitate tours</li> <li>▪ Construct adequate parking and public access to accommodate 500 Refuge visits annually</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Open Refuge every day to the general public for self-guided or Refuge staff-guided tours</li> <li>▪ Recruit docents to staff the Refuge and facilitate tours</li> <li>▪ Construct adequate parking, including school bus turnouts, and public access to accommodate 1,000 Refuge visits annually</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-3. Moapa Valley NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Management Actions Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain current parking facilities for visitor safety</li> <li>▪ Provide information about Refuge resources upon request</li> <li>▪ Explore opportunities for development of environmental education programs with potential partners</li> <li>▪ Revise current interpretive and environmental education materials periodically to maintain accuracy</li> <li>▪ Maintain current Refuge entrance signs</li> <li>▪ Continue providing opportunities for volunteers to assist in habitat restoration projects</li> <li>▪ Continue work on an accessible trail</li> <li>▪ Conduct an annual open house for volunteers that assist in restoration</li> <li>▪ Explore opportunities for community-based outreach during on-Refuge activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide outreach, by invitation and as staff is available, at the Moapa Valley Community Center</li> <li>▪ Create a basic trail along the riparian corridor on the Plummer Unit</li> <li>▪ Design and install interpretive panels along trail system of Plummer and Pedersen Units</li> <li>▪ Develop an environmental education program at the Refuge by 2012</li> <li>▪ Develop interpretive and environmental education materials</li> <li>▪ Offer refuge educational materials to school contacts upon request</li> <li>▪ Work with NDOT to erect signs on I-15 and U.S. Highway 93 promoting and directing the public to the Refuge</li> <li>▪ Erect a Refuge entrance sign near Warm Springs Road</li> <li>▪ Conduct a public open house every two to three years to encourage interactions and foster relationships between Refuge staff and local constituents</li> <li>▪ Seek opportunities for community-based outreach, such as participation in off-Refuge activities</li> <li>▪ Monitor number of Refuge visitors through sign-in sheets at the visitor contact station</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coordinate the installation of a permanent environmental education display at the Moapa Valley Community Center or other public venue</li> <li>▪ Construct an overlook trail with interpretive panels and shade structure on top of the hill on the Plummer Unit for viewing the Refuge and the Moapa Valley</li> <li>▪ Plan and construct a self-guided trail system along the spring head, pools and riparian corridor on the Plummer Unit</li> <li>▪ Organize local school contacts to generate enthusiasm for the Refuge and its endemic species</li> <li>▪ Develop one environmental education program at the Refuge by 2009</li> <li>▪ Develop interpretive and environmental education materials</li> <li>▪ Conduct an annual public open house to encourage interactions and foster relationships between Refuge staff and local constituents</li> </ul>	

**Table 3.6-3. Moapa Valley NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Management Actions Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Cultural Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to inventory, manage, and protect any cultural resources on the Refuge on a project-by-project basis to comply with applicable laws and regulations</li> <li>▪ Continue with informal cultural resources education of Refuge visitors</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop regionally focused cultural resources environmental education and interpretation materials for self-guided tours</li> <li>▪ Confer with culturally affiliated tribes to incorporate their history and native plant and animal species knowledge as part of the interpretive program at the Refuge</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct cultural resource inventory of the entire Moapa Valley NWR to assist in any future planning efforts and to improve management and protection of any significant site from inadvertent public visitation impacts</li> </ul>



**Table 3.6-4. Pahrnagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C</i>	<i>Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Wetland Habitat</b>				
<b>Open Water Habitat (640 acres)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complete and implement wetland restoration plan to improve quality of existing open water habitat for waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds, and other migratory birds</li> </ul> <p>Continue current management until wetland restoration plan completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain Upper Pahrnagat Lake water level between 4 and 11 feet from October to April</li> <li>▪ Discharge water into Middle Marsh and Lower Pahrnagat Lake to provide migratory waterfowl habitat</li> <li>▪ Use electro-shock and netting to control carp populations</li> <li>▪ Clear vegetation in irrigation ditches annually</li> <li>▪ Maintain current maintenance, repair, and improvement efforts on North Marsh and Upper Pahrnagat Lake</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encourage reduction of carp populations on private and state-managed lands in coordination with upstream water resources management entities and users</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Every three years, conduct surveys of nesting colonial waterbirds</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-4. Pahranaagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C</i>	<i>Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Marsh Habitat (400 acres)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain marsh with 30% open water and 70% emergent vegetation</li> <li>▪ Use prescribed fire as needed to control vegetation</li> <li>▪ Supplement flows into Middle Marsh with pumped well water to help maintain water levels</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Every three years, conduct surveys of birds and bats using the marsh habitat</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitor vegetation and wildlife response to habitat management</li> </ul>
<b>Wet Meadow Habitat (700 acres)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Manage 700 acres of wet meadow habitat by applying water from October to March</li> <li>▪ Use prescribed fire on a three- to five-year cycle to control vegetation</li> <li>▪ Continue conducting spring waterfowl surveys using volunteers and Refuge staff as limited resources allow</li> <li>▪ Continue to coordinate fall and winter waterfowl surveys with NDOW</li> <li>▪ Continue project to determine population status, distribution, and demography of Pahranaagat Valley montane vole on the Refuge</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Obtain waterfowl data collected by other agencies on a seasonal basis</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Add spring and fall surveys and breeding pair and brood counts to current fall and winter surveys coordinated with NDOW</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitor avian species abundance during fall and spring migration for response to habitat manipulation</li> </ul>
<b>Alkali Flat Habitat (350 acres)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain 350 acres of flooded alkali flat habitat in the Lower Pahranaagat Lake area from December to June</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Control salt cedar and other invasive species in the Lower Pahranaagat Lake area</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C

**Table 3.6-4. Pahrnagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)
<b>Foraging Habitat for Sandhill Cranes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No current habitat management for cranes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plant and irrigate 40 acres of grain between Upper Pahrnagat Lake and Middle Marsh to provide forage for sandhill cranes, waterfowl, and geese</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement a Species Inventory and Monitoring Plan for waterfowl and shorebirds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restore and manage 40 acres of native forage for migrating sandhill cranes between the Headquarters unit and Lower Pahrnagat Lake</li> <li>Monitor sandhill crane usage of the Refuge</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plant and irrigate 65 acres of grain crops between Upper Pahrnagat Lake and Middle Marsh to control invasives and to provide forage for migrating sandhill cranes</li> <li>Monitor sandhill crane usage of the Refuge</li> </ul>	
<b>Water Resources Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain current water resources management</li> <li>Monitor inflow to Upper Pahrnagat Lake</li> <li>Pursue 1996 application to Nevada Division of Water Resources for year-round water discharges</li> <li>Survey existing groundwater wells and repair or cap as appropriate</li> <li>Install a flume or weir at the outflow of Lower Pahrnagat Lake</li> <li>Install and monitor flow meters and data loggers on each of the three groundwater wells on the Refuge</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install new pump for Well 3 and monitor flow</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine the status of groundwater wells of record, and repair and/or abandon as appropriate, and apply for change(s) in point of use with Nevada Division of Water Resources</li> <li>Install gauges and data-logging equipment at springs adjacent to Middle Marsh</li> <li>Repair existing water infrastructure as staffing and funding allow</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative C and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquire additional water rights from willing sellers</li> <li>Coordinate with the Alamo, Richardville, and Hiko Water Boards, Lincoln County, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to explore opportunities for additional water supplies</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-4. Pahranaagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C</i>	<i>Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complete update of Water Management Plan by 2012</li> <li>▪ Complete Refuge-wide water budget</li> <li>▪ Monitor changes in the environment that may be a result of climate change</li> </ul>			
<b>Integrated Pest Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue integrated pest management efforts in existing 112-acre grassland habitat to contain spreading of knapweed and reduce its extent</li> <li>▪ Continue to coordinate noxious weed surveys and mapping efforts with county, state, and federal agencies</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complete and implement IPM Plan within five years of CCP completion</li> <li>▪ Expand invasive plant control efforts to control knapweed in the grassland habitat and Black Canyon (with appropriate tribal consultations)</li> <li>▪ Continue to use prescribed burning, mowing, spraying, and planting, as needed, to achieve the targeted plant cover throughout the year</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Control salt cedar, Russian olive, Russian knapweed, Scotch thistle, and other invasive species using appropriate methods (mechanical, chemical, cultural or biological)</li> <li>▪ Coordinate IPM Plan projects with upstream property owners</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C
<b>Wildlife Diversity</b>				
<b>Southwestern Willow Flycatcher/Wetland Habitat</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain existing 100 acres of cottonwood-willow riparian habitat around the North Marsh for southwestern willow flycatcher and other migratory birds</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participate in the annual Christmas bird count</li> <li>▪ Control salt cedar and Russian olive in riparian habitat</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish 200 new acres of willow habitat between Upper Pahranaagat Lake and Middle Marsh</li> <li>▪ Monitor impacts of fishing on bird use of habitats and adopt seasonal closure of sensitive areas as necessary</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restore historic stream channel and riparian corridor (5–10 acres) through Black Canyon</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-4. Pahrnagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to cooperate with U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on limited presence-absence surveys for the southwestern willow flycatcher</li> <li>▪ Continue to coordinate vegetation surveys with other governmental agencies as directed by project objectives and efforts</li> <li>▪ Conduct riparian habitat vegetation surveys that include percent cover, density, age, and structure</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitor response of birds to wetland establishment</li> </ul>	
<b>Spring Habitat</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complete inventory and monitoring of vegetation and wildlife in spring habitat</li> <li>▪ Complete site Restoration Plans to restore six degraded/modified spring pools and channels on the Refuge</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implement spring head and channel restoration</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C
<b>Upland Habitat (1,000 acres)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to enforce prohibitions for off-road vehicles</li> <li>▪ Maintain Refuge fences to reduce encroachment from cattle on adjacent lands</li> <li>▪ Manage wildland fires on the refuge using the fitting AMR that considers resource values at risk and potential negative impacts of various fire suppression measures;</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Close unused roads as necessary</li> <li>▪ Coordinate road closures with BLM</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inventory and monitor upland habitat on a regular basis</li> <li>▪ Install physical barriers to prevent vehicle traffic in closed areas</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ After salt cedar is controlled, restore native upland habitat adjacent to Lower Pahrnagat Lake</li> <li>▪ Fence eastern boundary to prevent encroachment</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-4. Pahrnagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C</i>	<i>Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)</i>
	<p>firefighter and public safety will be the highest priority for every incident</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare wilderness study report and NEPA document to evaluate options for preserving wilderness values of three wilderness study areas along the western boundary</li> </ul>			
<b>Pahrnagat Roundtail Chub/Aquatic Refugium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Roundtail chub not present at the Refuge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan and, if feasible, design and construct a refugium for roundtail chub and associated native fish species by 2010</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B	Same as Alternative B
<b>Visitor Services</b>				
<b>Hunting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain current hunting opportunities for upland game, waterfowl, and rabbits</li> <li>Provide Refuge-specific and NDOW hunting guidelines and regulations to the public at Refuge headquarters</li> <li>Post and maintain designated hunting area signs on Refuge</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Redirect upland game hunting to areas of the Refuge that are south of Dove dike or WHIN dike</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct annual surveys and reporting of game species population numbers and the number of hunters and species harvested in coordination with NDOW</li> <li>Monitor the number of hunters using the Refuge by establishing a registration box at multiple Refuge entry points</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C
<b>Fishing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to provide sport fishing opportunities</li> <li>Continue to maintain visitor facilities</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare a fisheries management plan within three years</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B	<p>Same as Alternative B, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Close existing boat ramps and provide alternative car-top boat launch</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-4. Pahrnagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)
<b>Camping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain swimming prohibitions at all open water locations and maintain regulatory signs at those locations</li> <li>Maintain campground in its current state</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin collecting fees</li> <li>Limit length of stays to seven days</li> <li>Prohibit use of generators between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convert campground to day use area (vehicles still allowed)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convert campground to walk-in day use area</li> <li>Install gate to prevent vehicular access to former campground area</li> </ul>
<b>Wildlife Observation/ Photography</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain existing visitor facilities with help from volunteers</li> <li>Continue to offer wildlife lists at the Refuge headquarters</li> <li>Maintain the observation deck on Upper Pahrnagat Lake and trails throughout the Refuge</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor the number of visitors using the Refuge each day</li> <li>Design and construct a wildlife observation trail system, possibly on historic farming and ranching roads</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct photography/observation blinds along trail route</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative C and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement an annual road maintenance program</li> </ul>
<b>Interpretation/ Environmental Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain existing level of interpretation, environmental education, and outreach</li> <li>Monitor Refuge visitation</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative A, except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the existing visitor contact station to accommodate growing numbers of visitors</li> <li>Develop new interpretive panels and replace panels</li> <li>Develop environmental education materials and "least-wanted" posters for invasive plant species</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative B and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct interpretive walking trail that connects Upper Pahrnagat Lake with the Headquarters Unit</li> <li>Construct a new visitor contact station and office space at headquarters unit</li> <li>Construct additional parking to accommodate visitors at the Headquarters Unit</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative C</p>



**Table 3.6-4. Pahrnagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

Issue Area	Management Actions			
	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct office space to accommodate additional staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate with NDOT to create turn lanes so visitors can safely exit highway to visit the Refuge</li> <li>Develop and implement an Interpretative Plan for the Refuge</li> </ul>	
<b>Outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue participating in up to three outreach events per year</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in a minimum of six outreach activities each year within three years</li> <li>Coordinate with NDOT to install directional signage for I-15 and US Highway 93 to promote Refuge visitation</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C, except: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in a minimum of nine outreach activities each year within three years</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural Resources</b>				
<b>Cultural Resources Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to manage cultural resources on a project-by-project basis</li> <li>Continue to provide to Refuge visitors with appropriate interpretive information on cultural resources through informal outreach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate cultural resource values, issues, and requirements into design and implementation of the other habitat, wildlife, and visitor service activities and strategies conducted by the Desert Complex</li> <li>Compile all existing baseline data on cultural resources sites, surveys, and reports within and near the Refuge, and create digital, GIS, and hard copy databases, maps, and a library</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct cultural resource inventories at all public use areas, roads, affected areas, and other “destinations” on the Refuge and evaluate the discovered sites’ eligibility to the NRHP.</li> <li>Develop historic contexts for classes of cultural resources</li> <li>Inventory, evaluate, and nominate Traditional Cultural Properties and sacred sites to the NRHP in consultation with tribes</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and evaluate cultural resources that could educate visitors on how humans have interacted with wildlife and habitats in the past.</li> <li>Consult with affiliated tribes and other stakeholders on ways to use these resources to achieve educational, scientific, and traditional cultural needs.</li> </ul>

**Table 3.6-4. Pahrnagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C</i>	<i>Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop educational, scientific, and traditional cultural needs for cultural resources management in coordination with the Consolidated Group of Tribes and Organizations</li> <li>▪ Create a GIS-enabled element in the Cultural Resources Management Plan that aids in the identification, planning, monitoring, and interpretation of cultural sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify, evaluate, and mitigate adverse effects and stabilize selected cultural resource sites on Pahrnagat NWR using a Cultural Resources Management Plan prepared in consultation with affiliated tribes and the scientific community, and use the above data on site locations and information for planning, monitoring, and interpretation efforts related to cultural resources</li> <li>▪ Secure Refuge System and non-Refuge System funding to develop and implement a mitigation, stabilization, or research project</li> <li>▪ Implement projects to restore habitats of important native plants and to harvest (for traditional, non-commercial purposes) native plant foods in coordination with affiliated Native American tribes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct a study of ethnobotany and traditional plant use on Pahrnagat NWR through assistance and consultation with affiliated tribal representatives.</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural Resources Protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to attempt to protect cultural resources on a case-by-case basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify and evaluate cultural resources subject to looting/vandalism or deterioration; implement steps to reduce these threats and preserve the resources</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B	Same as Alternative B

**Table 3.6-4. Pahrnagat NWR: CCP Alternatives**

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Management Actions</i>			
	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C</i>	<i>Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement cultural resources monitoring and enforcement activities to decrease impacts to cultural resources</li> </ul>		
<b>Education and Outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue informal outreach on cultural resources to visitors that stop at the visitor contact station</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and implement educational materials, programs, and activities that would be used to address traditional or sacred resources to increase awareness on- and off-Refuge about the sensitivity of cultural resources to visitor impacts and the penalties for vandalism</li> <li>Incorporate cultural resources information into education and interpretive programs and media</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative B and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create and implement a site stewardship volunteer program to assist in site monitoring, delivery of educational and interpretive literature and programs, and to promote cultural resources conservation in neighboring communities</li> <li>Develop educational, scientific, and traditional cultural needs for cultural resources management</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative C

*Chapter 4.  
Affected  
Environment*



Kings Pool at Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

# *Chapter 4. Affected Environment*

This chapter provides a description of the affected environment for the four refuges in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex) in terms of the physical, biological, cultural, and socioeconomic environments. Section 4.1 provides a regional overview of the environment focusing on southern Nevada. Sections 4.2 through 4.6 provide descriptions of each refuge in the Desert Complex: Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Desert NWR, Moapa Valley NWR, and Pahranaagat NWR.

## **4.1 Regional Overview**

### **4.1.1 Physical Environment**

#### *Physiography and Climate*

The Desert Complex is located in southern Nevada in the southern part of the Great Basin and northern extent of the Mojave Desert in the Basin and Range Province (Figure 4.1-1). The Desert Complex region is bordered by the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains on the west, the Great Basin Desert to the north, the Colorado River to the east, and the San Bernardino Mountains and the Sonoran Desert to the south. The Sierra Nevada Mountains form a massive mountain barrier that markedly influences the climate of the state.

The region is characterized by generally north-trending, linear mountain ranges separated by intervening valleys. The Ash Meadows, Pahranaagat, and Moapa Valley NWRs are located within valleys, whereas the Desert NWR consists of both mountain ranges and valleys (Figure 4.1-2).

In the United States, one of the greatest contrasts in precipitation found within a short distance occurs between the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada in California and the valleys just to the east in Nevada. As the warm, moist air from the Pacific Ocean ascends the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada Range, the air cools, condenses, and then falls as precipitation. In contrast, as the air descends the eastern slope of the range, it is warmed by compression and as a result, very little precipitation occurs in the region. The effect of the Sierra Nevada Mountains as a barrier to cooler temperatures and moisture is felt throughout the state, resulting in the desert environment found throughout the lower elevations in Nevada.

Precipitation in Nevada is lightest over the southern portion of the state where the Desert Complex is located. In valleys, the average annual precipitation is less than 5 inches. Average precipitation on the refuges in the Desert Complex range from 4.4 to 6.4 inches in valleys (Western Regional Climate Center [WRCC] 2003). Precipitation in the form of snow also occurs during the cooler months on some of the mountain ranges surrounding the refuges and on the Desert NWR, most commonly at higher elevations of the Sheep Range.

The region is subject to high-intensity storms that can generate high peak surface flows during the late winter and summer months. Runoff from precipitation is practically non-existent during the rest of the year.

In southern Nevada, the summers are long and hot and the winters are short and mild. Long periods of extremely cold weather are rare. The Desert Complex is characterized by strong surface heating during the day and rapid nighttime cooling, which results in wide ranges of daily temperature. The average range between the highest and the lowest daily temperatures is about 30 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit (°F), with more extreme daily temperature ranges occurring in the summer (WRCC 2003). Summer temperatures above 100°F occur frequently in the south and occasionally over the rest of the state. A climatic summary for the Desert Complex is shown in Table 4.1-1.

**Table 4.1-1. Climatic Summary for the Desert Complex**

Refuge	Average Temperature (°F)		Average Precipitation (inches)	Precipitation Peak Months
	Maximum (July)	Minimum (December–January)		
Ash Meadows	103	30	4.5	February–March, August
Desert (Corn Creek Field Station)	102	29	4.4	February–March, July–September
Moapa Valley	105	31	5.1	March, August
Pahranagat	98	26	6.4	March, August

Source: WRCC 2003

The climate of Nevada has been affected by global changes in climate as a result of increased atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases over the past century (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] 1998). Temperature and precipitation have increased in many areas of the state. In particular, Elko, Nevada, has experienced an average increase in temperature by 0.6°F. Data collected near the Ash Meadows area shows an increase in average precipitation by more than 10 percent. Future trends cannot be accurately predicted, but Nevada's climate is expected to continue to be affected by global climate change.

Increases in precipitation, particularly more rapid snowmelt, could lead to increased flooding and higher potential for flash floods. Water quality of Nevada's waters could be affected by increased flooding as a result of increased erosion and sedimentation and transportation of pollutants into the surface waters, such as Lake Mead.



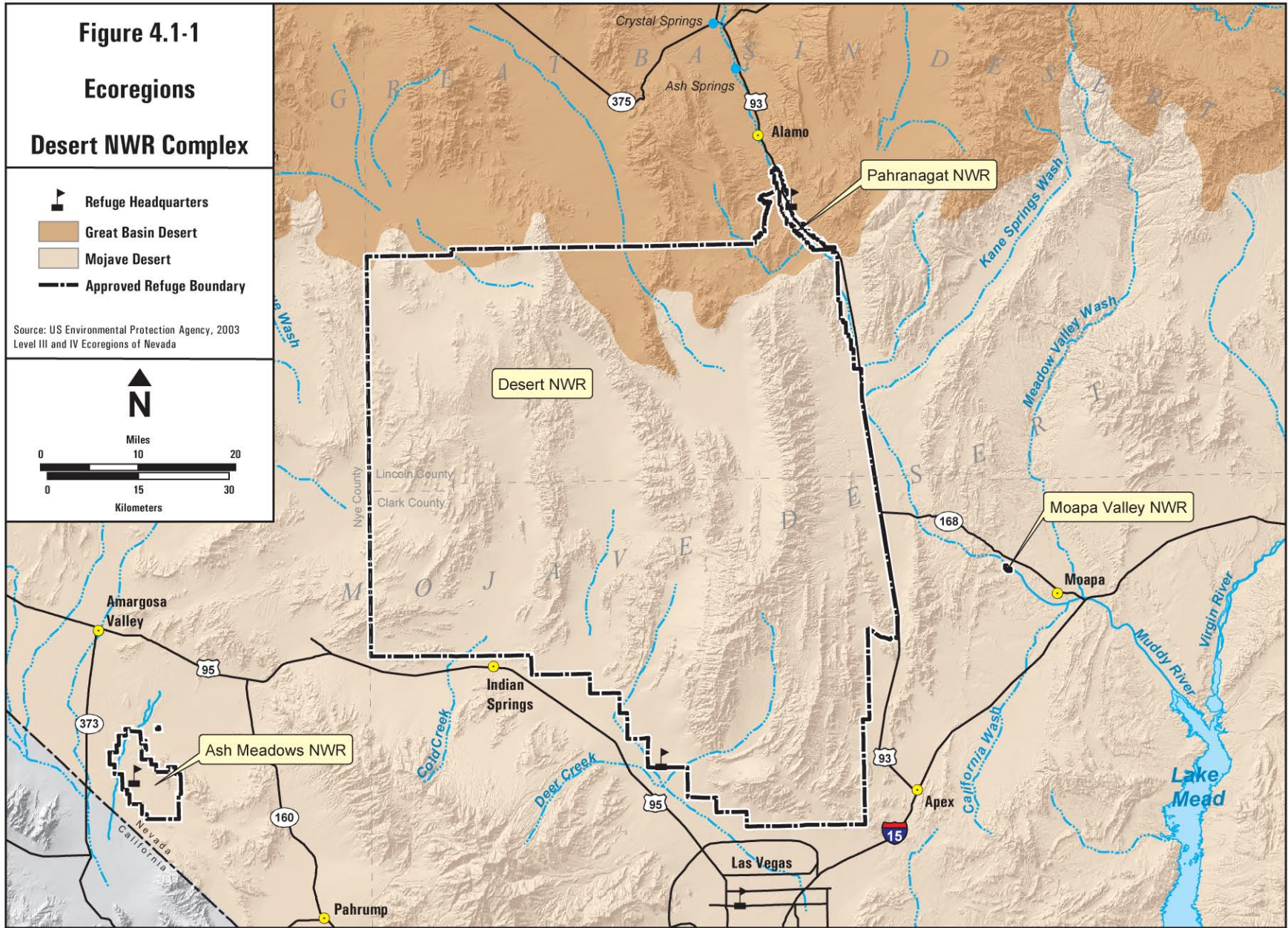
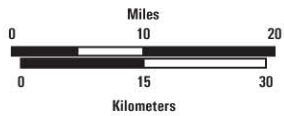
Figure 4.1-1

Ecoregions

Desert NWR Complex

-  Refuge Headquarters
-  Great Basin Desert
-  Mojave Desert
-  Approved Refuge Boundary

Source: US Environmental Protection Agency, 2003  
Level III and IV Ecoregions of Nevada



May 27, 2008

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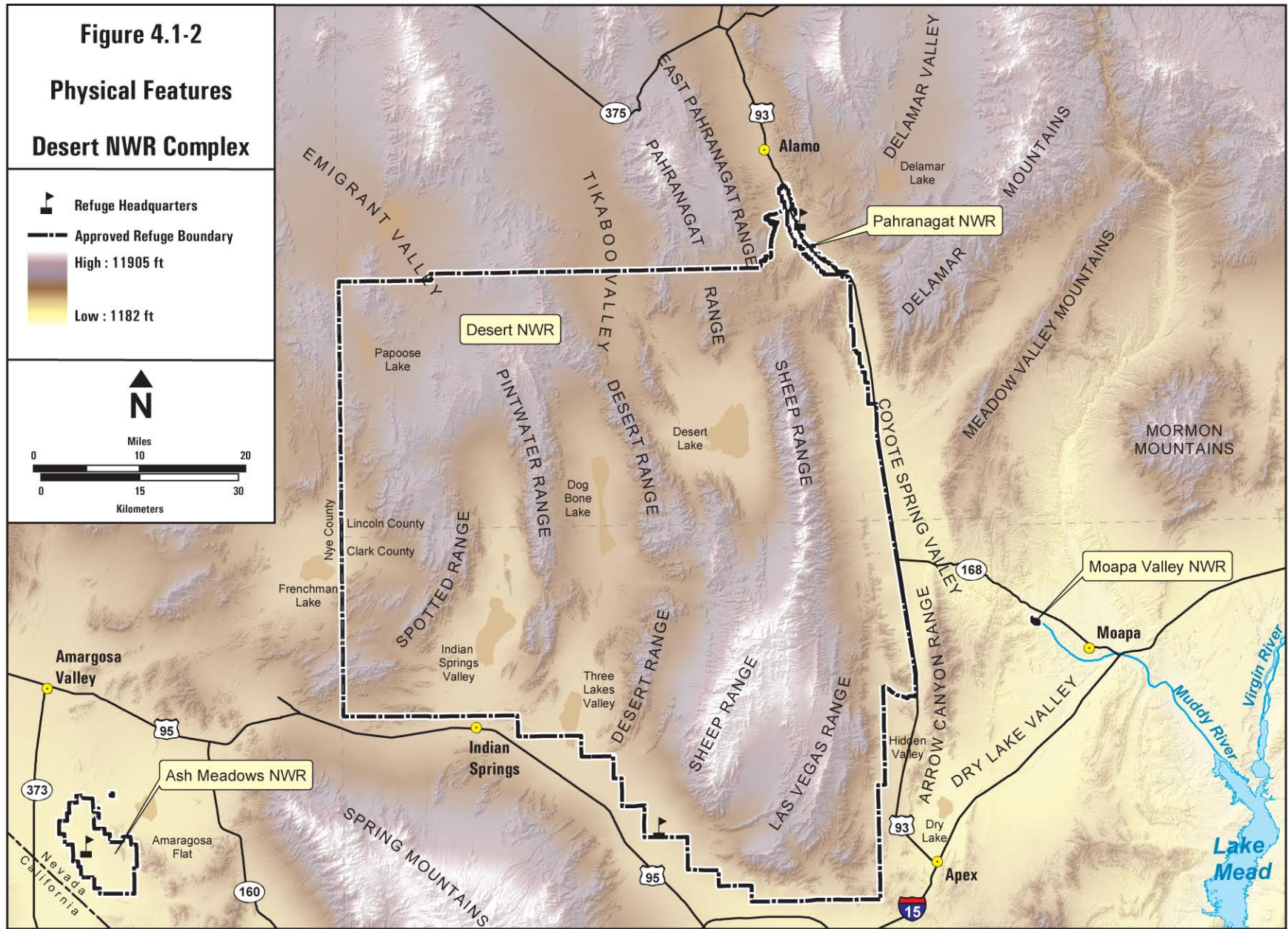
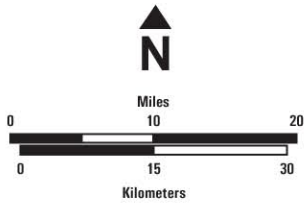


Figure 4.1-2

Physical Features

Desert NWR Complex

- Refuge Headquarters
- Approved Refuge Boundary
- High : 11905 ft
- Low : 1182 ft





Climate changes could also affect Nevada's forests by altering species composition, geographic range, and health and productivity. Hotter, drier weather could lead to a reduction in forest cover as grasslands and arid lands (deserts) become more dominant. The intensity of the changes is dependent on a variety of factors that require human intervention to control. Specific effects of climate change on each of the refuges have not been evaluated, but changes in climate could affect the special-status species found on the refuges as well as the habitats that support these species.

### *Geology and Minerals*

The geologic structure of the Basin and Range Province, including the area of the Desert Complex, is the cumulative product of multiple episodes of compression and extension of the Earth's crust. During the last 30 million years, extension of the Earth's crust accompanied by other actions resulted in the pattern of elongated mountain ranges and intervening basins or valleys. The estimated total displacement along the major north-trending faults during the last 12 million years ranges from less than 330 feet to more than 1,600 feet (Tschanz and Pameyan 1970).

The presence of or potential for minerals at each refuge is discussed in their respective sections of this chapter.

### *Paleontological Resources*

Each of the refuges in the Desert Complex has potential to contain paleontological resources based on the geologic units that have been mapped. Within the Ash Meadows NWR, spring, playa and lake deposits have high paleontological potential for mollusk shells and isolated deposits of horse, camel, bison, sheep, and deer (Longwell et al. 1965). Paleozoic, Tertiary, and Quaternary deposits within Desert NWR have the potential to contain common types of fossils, such as mollusks, corals, barnacles, algae, and other invertebrates (Tschanz and Pameyan 1970; Longwell et al. 1965). The Quaternary and Tertiary alluvium and Bird Spring Formation within Moapa Valley NWR have high fossil-containing potential for algae, echinoderm, and fusulinid (Longwell et al. 1965). The Panaca Formation surrounding Pahrnagat NWR contains gastropods, ostracods, trace fossils, diatoms, plant fossils, and extinct horse remains (Tschanz and Pameyan 1970).

### *Soils*

Nevada, with its wide mix of geologic parent material, has a vast array of different soil types. Differences in climate, parent material, topography, and erosional conditions result in soils with diverse physical and chemical properties. The distribution and occurrence of soils is highly variable and is dependent on a number of factors, including degree of slope, geology, vegetation, climate, and age. Soils in the Desert Complex area are derived mainly from sedimentary and volcanic rocks and alluvium.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has published a Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO) that provides soil association maps for most of Nevada in digital format. SSURGO includes information on soils at Ash Meadows, Moapa Valley, and Pahrnagat NWRs (NRCS 2003b). No SSURGO data exist for the Desert NWR; however, soil data are available from the State Soil Geographic (STATSGO) database (NRCS 2003a). These sources were used to describe soil conditions at each refuge; the information is presented in Sections 4.2 to 4.6.

### *Water Resources*

The Great Basin and Mojave Desert are relatively arid and have few large rivers. Each of the four refuges can be characterized by an interaction between springs discharging from the regional carbonate aquifer, groundwater stored in local alluvial aquifers, and surface flow as a result of spring discharge and precipitation. Groundwater originates as high-altitude winter precipitation in the higher mountain ranges (such as the Spring and Sheep Ranges) and can flow great distances through the carbonate rocks that make up the mountain ranges and underlie the valleys (Thomas et al. 1986). The major springs associated with the Desert Complex are part of several large regional groundwater flow systems, including the Death Valley regional groundwater flow system, which consists of multiple interconnected basins that transfer groundwater to and from adjacent basins (Bedinger and Harrill 2004). Regional flow patterns are influenced by topographic relief and relative altitudes of each basin. Groundwater flow patterns are shown in Figure 4.1-3, which are based on various studies of the Death Valley regional flow system. For this reason, surface water resources within each of the four refuges can be affected by uses elsewhere within the same flow systems.

### *Hazardous Materials*













Hazardous materials are defined as any substance that, due to quantity, concentration, physical, chemical, or infectious characteristics, may present substantial danger to public health, welfare, or the environment when released. Hazardous materials are not known to be present on Ash Meadows, Moapa Valley, or Pahrnagat NWRs. Solid and hazardous wastes are generated from activities on the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR), which overlays a portion of the Desert NWR.

### *Fire History and Management*

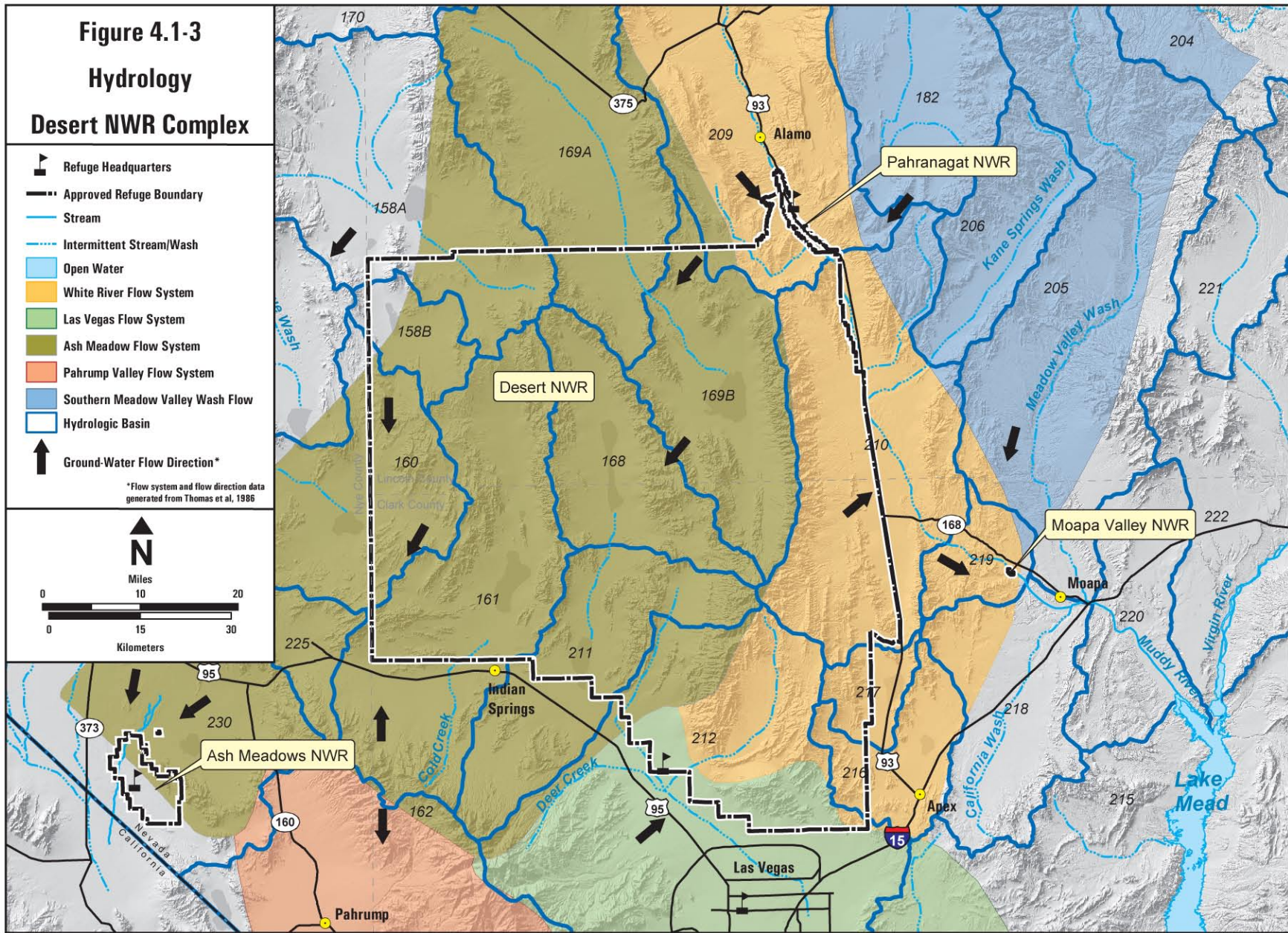
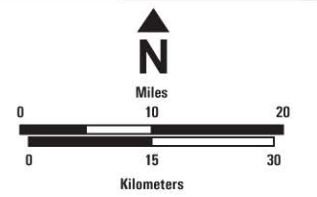
Each refuge in the Desert Complex has a Fire Management Plan that identifies and integrates all wildland fire management guidance, direction, and activities required to implement national fire policy. Because each refuge contains different sensitive resources and has different management purposes, refuge-specific fuels management is discussed separately for each refuge.

**Figure 4.1-3  
Hydrology**

**Desert NWR Complex**

-  Refuge Headquarters
-  Approved Refuge Boundary
-  Stream
-  Intermittent Stream/Wash
-  Open Water
-  White River Flow System
-  Las Vegas Flow System
-  Ash Meadow Flow System
-  Pahrump Valley Flow System
-  Southern Meadow Valley Wash Flow
-  Hydrologic Basin
-  Ground-Water Flow Direction\*

\*Flow system and flow direction data generated from Thomas et al, 1986



## *Air Quality*

Air quality of the four refuges in the Desert Complex can be described in terms of climate, regulatory requirements, and ambient air quality conditions. Climate and meteorology describe the atmospheric conditions, which affect the general air quality. Air quality regulations define the limits and controls on emissions necessary to maintain good air quality within the region. Ambient air quality provides a measure of the ambient concentration of various pollutants that affect air quality. This section defines the regulatory requirements for southern Nevada.

The U.S. Congress has promulgated National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to regulate the ambient air quality through the nation. The pollutants include nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), carbon monoxide (CO), particulate matter less than 10 microns (PM<sub>10</sub>), and ozone (O<sub>3</sub>). Areas where measured concentrations of these pollutants are above the NAAQS are defined as nonattainment areas. All others are defined as attainment. Local air quality regulations for Nye and Lincoln Counties have been delegated to the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection (NDEP). Clark County air quality is regulated by the Clark County Department of Air Quality Management (CCDAQM).

The four refuges are in a region that has been classified as attainment areas for all pollutants, except for the southern portion of the Desert NWR, which is within the Las Vegas Valley Airshed. The Las Vegas Valley Airshed is considered nonattainment for CO and PM<sub>10</sub> (Clark County 2000 and 2001, CCDAQM 2003a). As required by the EPA, CCDAQM has developed state implementation plans for CO and PM<sub>10</sub> to reduce emissions countywide.

The CO State Implementation Plan for Las Vegas Valley Nonattainment Area adopted measures associated with on-road mobile sources to reduce CO emissions (Clark County 2000). The PM<sub>10</sub> State Implementation Plan developed several new rules to reduce the amount of fugitive dust that enters the atmosphere, with a focus on reducing fugitive dust from construction sites (Clark County 2001).

### **4.1.2 Biological Resources**

#### *Vegetation*

The Mojave Desert is the smallest of the four North American deserts, lying primarily in California, but also including the southern quarter of Nevada and small portions of Utah and Arizona (Royo 2002). Unlike the Sonoran Desert, the lower elevations of the Mojave Desert have only one tree, the Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*). This tree-like yucca is endemic to the Mojave Desert and usually grows at elevations of 3,500 feet above mean sea level (msl) and greater. The Mojave Desert also hosts approximately 200 other plants that are not found in the Sonoran or Great Basin Deserts. Although a published flora of the Mojave Desert is incomplete, approximately 2,600 vascular plant taxa are known to occur in the Mojave Desert floristic province (excluding the higher elevations, greater than 8,000 feet above msl, of the Spring, Sheep, and Panamint Mountain Ranges), representing one of the most



diverse floristic regions in the United States (Andre and Knight 1999). Although home to about 200 endemic plant species, the proportion of the Mojave Desert flora comprising special-status taxa is relatively low (10 percent of flora).

Many noxious weeds can be found dominating the areas along Nevada's borders (U.S. Bureau of Land Management [BLM] 1999b), and a variety of invasive species and noxious weeds occur on each of the refuges within the Desert Complex (Appendix H). Noxious weeds mostly occur in riparian and wetland areas. They out-compete native vegetation and can spread quickly in a short time span.

### *Wildlife*

Wildlife species are more abundant in the Mojave Desert than they are in the Great Basin Desert (MacMahon 1992), which may be due to the occurrence of fewer plant species in the Great Basin Desert. Plant communities are home to specific wildlife. For example, the creosote bush community is known to have at least 30 species of reptiles, 33 species of birds (eight of which are permanent residents), and 44 species of mammals (see list of common species in Appendix H). The blackbrush community has fewer species—19 reptiles, 26 birds, and 33 mammals—but it still contains diverse fauna. More than 200 bird species use the wetland habitats in the Mojave Desert, and approximately 20 species of fish and seven amphibians can be found in the desert springs and marshes. Each refuge within the Desert Complex provides important and unique habitat for wildlife, including some endemic species.

Special-status, or sensitive, species occur on each of the refuges. Special-status species are those species that have been listed as endangered or threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), are candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), or are considered sensitive by another federal or state agency or wildlife management plan (Appendix H and Sections 4.2-4.6). Federally listed wildlife species are also protected in the State of Nevada under Nevada Revised Statutes 501 and Nevada Administrative Code Chapter 503.

### **4.1.3 Cultural Resources**

Because the four refuges that make up the Desert Complex are so widely separated within southern Nevada, it is difficult to characterize the prehistoric and historic setting of the region as a whole. The prehistoric people who used the lands that are now part of these four different areas were well adapted to the climate and resources within their homelands. The prehistory and history of southern Nevada is summarized in a variety of major sources. Although there is general agreement on the broad patterns of regional prehistory, many areas of controversy remain, and the data needed to answer some basic research questions are lacking.

Although typically grouped within the Great Basin culture area (D'Azevedo 1986), a number of major culture areas overlap in southern Nevada. The prehistory and history of these areas spans the last 12,000

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years or more. Particularly in the period after 500 A.D., Far Western Puebloan, Fremont, Patayan, and Numic traditions overlap in the region.

Cultural resources encompass a wide range of resources that are and have been important to tribes and other indigenous people. These resources include cultural artifacts as well as plants, wildlife, water resources, or other aspects of the environment that are associated with cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that may be rooted in that community's history or are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community.

### *Prehistoric Archaeology*

Archaeologists believe that native people occupied the southern Great Basin by approximately 12,000 years ago. The limited data from the region suggest these people relied heavily on hunting for subsistence, with a focus upon large game animals that were plentiful in the riparian, marsh, and grassland environments typical at the end of the last Ice Age. Sites dating to the Paleoarchaic are rare in most parts of the southern Great Basin. The best-documented Paleoarchaic sites occur in the Mojave Desert along the shores of Pleistocene Lake Mojave, California (Campbell et al. 1937; Warren and Phagan 1988), and at Fort Irwin, California (Basgall and Hall 1991, 1994). While relatively few of these sites are associated with reliable radiocarbon dates, the consensus is that they date between 11,200 and 7,500 years ago.

In the period following the Paleoarchaic, lakes that contained plenty of water during the ice ages began to dry up as the region became increasingly arid. People broadened their resource base and began to exploit more plants and other kinds of game than during the previous period. Warren (1980) postulates that about 9,000 years ago, people began to cluster around permanent water sources. Several early archaic sites have been investigated in the southern Great Basin, including Pintwater Cave on the Desert NWR.

About 3,000 B.C., a period of increased moisture began in the region. A variety of cultural assemblages have been noted at this time with an increased number of sites. One of the best-known regional sites dating to the later portions of the Archaic is Gypsum Cave (Harrington 1933).

Cultural diversification with strong regional emphases developed after about 500 A.D. While some Indian People took up farming, others continued the Archaic lifestyle of seasonal transhumance typical of earlier times, and some probably used aspects of both. During this time, strong Southwestern influences were evident in southeastern Nevada within the drainages of the Moapa and Muddy Rivers and in the Las Vegas Valley. Far western ancestral puebloan people practiced increasingly intensive agriculture adjacent to reliable water sources, which may have occurred at Corn Creek.

Western Shoshone and Southern Paiute/Chemehuevi still occupied the southern Great Basin and northeastern Mojave Desert when the first Euro-Americans and other ethnic groups entered the area in the 1800s

and earlier. These groups practiced collecting and foraging strategies similar to those of earlier periods in addition to agriculture. Kelly and Fowler (1986) note that the Pahrnagat Paiute practiced some forms of agriculture during the Protohistoric Period, including burning areas and scattering an unidentified grass seed, and floodplain agriculture along the edges of the lakes. There is also evidence that the Las Vegas and Moapa Paiute practiced horticulture at springs and rivers.

### *Historic Archaeology*

Southern Nevada has long been a crossroads in the American West: a crossroads of cultures (both prehistoric and historic), a crossroads of economies, and a literal crossroads. The area began as part of the Spanish Empire, became part of independent Mexico, and then joined the United States at the cessation of the Mexican-American War. As part of the historical American West, southern Nevada first was home to Mormon settlers bent on expanding their religious territory and bringing their doctrine to the local native populations. It later became a key link in the western transportation network for Mormons and non-Mormons alike.

The earliest transportation route to traverse southern Nevada was the Old Spanish Trail/Mormon Road. With the coming of the Los Angeles, San Pedro, and Salt Lake railroad in 1905, southern Nevada—and Las Vegas in particular—thrived as a connection in the transportation grid that linked California with Utah and other areas farther east (Myrick 1991).

Mormon influence waned after 1857 when most of the residents of the Las Vegas community returned to Utah. From then on the small Las Vegas Valley community focused on ranching and farming to supply regional mining interests. In the Las Vegas, Moapa, and Virgin Valleys, farming communities continued to develop from the 1850s until the early 1900s. Mining ventures in southern Nevada were typically short-lived, and most of the areas survived as transportation hubs or ranching centers.

#### **4.1.4 Public Access and Recreation**

Because of the differences in location, size, habitat, and wildlife of each of the refuges, public access and recreational opportunities are quite different and are therefore discussed in the sections addressing conditions at each refuge.

#### **4.1.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

##### *Social and Economic Regional Overview*

Southern Nevada is one of the fastest-growing regions in the United States. According to U.S. Census data, the population of the state increased by more than 20 percent between 2000 and 2005 to more than 2.4 million residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). The Nevada Development Authority (2004) notes that the Las Vegas metropolitan area accounts for most of the growth. The rapid growth in the Las Vegas Valley is a driving force in the social and economic settings. Increasing growth in the Las Vegas Valley exerts environmental



pressures on the Desert Complex as development moves closer to the largest refuge—the Desert NWR. Development also creates an increased demand for open spaces, which will likely translate into more visitors to the Desert Complex, and increased environmental pressures, such as on the groundwater aquifer.

This rapid growth also means that other more rural and remote communities may experience different pressures, such as more growth as people relocate from the Las Vegas Valley to nearby communities, or possibly declining growth as people move away for the increased economic opportunities elsewhere. The BLM is undergoing a process of land disposal in Clark and Lincoln Counties, which will result in some of these lands being transferred to private ownership and may provide land for development opportunities.

### Clark County

The population of Clark County was estimated at about 1.7 million people in 2005, which represents an increase of almost 25 percent since the 2000 Census (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). More than 70 percent of Nevada's population resided in Clark County in 2005. The population is projected to increase to 2,751,082 by the year 2024, an increase of about 60 percent over the 20-year period. Communities in Clark County include larger, rapidly developing cities in the urbanized areas of Las Vegas Valley and Mesquite, as well as those in more rural areas such as Indian Springs, Moapa, Overton, and Logandale.

### Lincoln County

Lincoln County's population was estimated at 4,391 people in 2005, an increase of 5.4 percent from the 2000 Census population of 4,165 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Most of the population is found in the towns of Alamo, Caliente, Panaca, Pioche (the county seat), and Rachel. Lincoln County's population is expected to increase to 5,292 people by 2024. According to the 2001 Lincoln County Master Plan, future population growth is expected to change and shift to the area near the southern county line shared with Clark County, particularly in the area near Mesquite (Lincoln County 2001).

### Nye County

Nye County's population was estimated at 40,477 in 2005, an increase of 24.5 percent since the 2000 Census (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). The communities in Nye County range from rural to urban. While the small town of Amargosa Valley practices traditional farming and mining, the larger, more urban town of Pahrump serves as a major service center, with 73 percent of the county's population in 2000.

### *Refuge Management Economics*

The Desert Complex is managed by a staff located in Las Vegas, and each of the refuges has separate budgets and staff located at the refuges. The current Desert Complex staff consists of six permanent full-time employees. The refuge operations budget for the Desert Complex in 2005 was \$432,533. The maintenance budget for the Complex in 2005 was \$14,900. There were also funds in the amount of \$72,531 for volunteers at the Complex and four refuges. Fire-related

budgets for the Desert Complex and four refuges included \$83,481 for fire protection and management services, \$50,000 for wildland urban interface services, and \$449,735 for burned area emergency restoration. Additional funds for specific projects at each refuge are provided through the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act; these funds are allocated separately and are not identified as part of the refuge management budgets.

### *Environmental Justice*

In 1994, the President of the United States issued Executive Order (EO) 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations." The objectives of the EO include developing federal agency implementation strategies, identifying minority and low-income populations where proposed federal actions could have disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, and encouraging the participation of minority and low-income populations in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

Each of the four refuges in the Desert Complex holds special traditional and cultural significance to the affiliated Native American tribes who inhabited southern Nevada. The same present-day affiliated Native American tribes in southern Nevada and neighboring California and Arizona maintain rich cultural heritage ties to these areas. The affiliated tribes may be considered low-income, minority populations in the vicinity of the refuges.

### *Regional Land Use*

Lands in southern Nevada are primarily managed by federal agencies, with a small portion in private, state, or municipal ownership. The disposal of lands by the BLM throughout Clark and Lincoln Counties is increasing the amount of land that is in private or municipal ownership, which is also increasing the availability of land for development. The following sections provide information on the land owners and managers in the counties where the Desert Complex is located. Figure 1.1-1 (Chapter 1, Introduction) shows an overview of the land ownerships and managers in southern Nevada.

#### Clark County

Of the 5.12 million acres of land in Clark County, about 4.5 million acres (approximately 90 percent) are administered by seven federal agencies or departments (BLM unknown date). These are:

- Department of Defense (379,961 acres),
- Bureau of Land Management (2,727,406 acres),
- National Park Service (466,746 acres),
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (517,249 acres),
- Forest Service (274,574 acres),
- Bureau of Reclamation (39,998 acres), and
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (78,832 acres).

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The remaining 10 percent of lands in Clark County (approximately 500,000 acres) are under private ownership or state and local government ownership.

### Lincoln County

Lincoln County is the third-largest county in terms of land area in Nevada, consisting of 6.8 million acres. It is primarily a rural county in which most of the land is under public ownership (Lincoln County 2001). The federal government currently manages more than 98 percent of the land in the county:

- Bureau of Land Management (5.6 million acres),
- Department of Defense (DOD) (771,087 acres),
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (268,698 acres), and
- U.S. Forest Service (29,371 acres).

Only 129,000 acres are privately owned, and a scant 5,700 acres are under state jurisdiction.

### Nye County

Of the 11.6 million acres of land in Nye County (including lands within the Department of Energy [DOE]-controlled Nevada Test Site and the DOD-controlled Nevada Test and Training Range [NTTR]), approximately 11.3 million acres (about 97 percent) are administered by the following federal agencies:

- Bureau of Land Management (6.5 million acres; 8,400 acres are jointly managed with the Service),
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (13,700 acres),
- U.S. Forest Service (1.9 million acres),
- Department of Defense (1.8 million acres),
- Department of Energy (863,000 acres),
- National Park Service (107,000 acres), and
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (8,000 acres).

An additional 19,000 acres are under state jurisdiction, and a total of 249,000 acres in Nye County are privately owned.

### *Aesthetics*

Aesthetics, or visual resources, include both natural and man-made physical features and infrastructure that provide a particular landscape its character and importance as an environmental and visual factor. There are different approaches to identify aesthetics of a landscape that have been used by different agencies. Typical features that provide an overall impression of a landscape include the presence or absence of land features, vegetation, water, color, surrounding scenery, and man-made and cultural features. Criteria used for this discussion include scenic quality, distance from selected public viewpoints, and distance from areas of interest.

The overall Desert Complex is made up of four different areas that have unique features within them, but are within an area generally defined as transition between the Mojave Desert and the Great Basin. The topography consists of a series of mountain ranges, generally in a north-south orientation separated by broad valleys. Elevation ranges from 2,200 feet at the desert floor to about 10,000 feet above msl. The mountains consist of side slopes, ridgelines, rock outcrops, and canyons. In the valleys, there are playas, alluvial fans and plains, small hills, intermittent drainages, and occasional volcanic rock formations. There are dry desert lakes as well as isolated perennial springs.

Creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) is the dominant plant in the desert shrub habitats, with sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.), saltbush (*Atriplex* spp.), and blackbrush (*Coleogyne ramosissima*) consistently found throughout the area. Agriculture is limited in the region. Riparian areas and associated vegetation are primarily located within the refuges and are subject to protection and preservation.

The areas surrounding and in the vicinity of the Desert Complex consist of very low density desert and rural lands, scattered with small, rural towns and unincorporated areas. The exception is the Las Vegas metropolitan area, which is south of the Desert NWR and is beginning to encroach on the views to and from the refuge. As both Las Vegas and North Las Vegas develop to the north toward the Desert NWR, the area will become subject to aesthetic impacts, particularly along major roads, such as Interstate 15 (I-15), U.S. Highway 95, U.S. Highway 93, and Clark County 215, due to pollution, traffic, light, and glare.

## **4.2 Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge**

### **4.2.1 Physical Environment**

#### *Physiography*

The approved boundary of Ash Meadows NWR encompasses approximately 24,000 acres (Figure 1.7-1, Chapter 1, Introduction). The Refuge is located at the southern end of the Amargosa Valley and is bordered to the north, south, and west by the Amargosa Desert and to the east by the Devils Hole Hills.

The valley floor of the Refuge slopes gently to the southwest and has an average elevation of 2,060 feet above msl. The Devils Hole Hills have an elevation of approximately 3,100 feet above msl at the Refuge boundary. A large playa is located at the northwest corner of the Refuge and collects runoff from Rock Valley and adjacent uplands to the north. The playa drains to the south into Death Valley via Carson Slough, which empties into the Amargosa River. A smaller playa is located along the southern boundary and collects runoff from Devils Hole Hills located to the east, from the Resting Spring Range located to the south, and from several springs located along the southeast corner of the Refuge.

### *Geology and Minerals*

The valley floor of the Ash Meadows NWR is underlain primarily by alluvial fan and playa deposits of Quaternary age (1.8 million years ago [mya] to present). Tertiary age (65 to 1.8 mya) sedimentary rocks are exposed near the southwestern boundary and central portion of the western boundary. The alluvial fan deposits consist of gravel and rubble near the highlands and grade downward into sand and silt playa deposits in the valley bottoms (Denny and Drewes 1965; Hess and Johnson 2000). The total thickness of the Quaternary sediments in the Ash Meadows Valley is unknown. Data collected from several water well drilling logs installed at a ranch located a few miles northwest of the Refuge indicate that gravel and clay are encountered to depths in excess of 700 feet (Denny and Drewes 1965).

The eastern boundary of the Refuge is formed of limestone and dolomite ridges from the Cambrian period (545 to 490 mya) (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). This boundary contains carbonate hills and ridges as a result of bedrock being dropped down along the Ash Meadows fault system.

The Ash Meadows NWR is located in the Ash Meadows mining district, which was established in 1917 (Tingley 1998). The Ash Meadows district was once the largest producer of calcium and bentonite in Nevada and is in an area of historic mining interest, primarily for specialty clays and zeolite. In the early 1960s approximately 2,000 acres of marshland in the Carson Slough were disturbed by peat mining (Service 2006a). Although some major oil companies still retain mineral rights in portions of the district, production of bentonite has been at a standstill since the 1930s (Cornwall 1972). A review of Singer (1996) and Lovering (1954) indicates that neither metal nor radioactive ores are present at the Refuge. Twenty-six mining and two mill claims have been reported within the Refuge boundary (Service 1999a); however, more recent records from the BLM indicate there are three active placer claims and five lode claims (BLM 2007). The Service has a mineral withdrawal application pending with BLM covering 9,460 acres of BLM land and 5,360 acres of Service land within the Refuge's approved boundary. No private lands or valid existing mineral rights were affected by the proposed withdrawal (Service 1999a).

### *Paleontological Resources*

Within Ash Meadows NWR, spring, playa and lake deposits have the highest paleontological potential. The deposits in the region are composed of thin horizontal layers of sand, silt, and clay with abundant mollusk shells and isolated deposits of Quaternary vertebrate remains, including horse, camel, bison, sheep, and deer (Longwell et al. 1965). In the Ash Meadows Quadrangle, Denny and Drewes (1965) found no fossils in the spring and playa deposits, but similar deposits in Amargosa Valley where these sediments occur contain Pleistocene mammal remains.

No fossils have been found in the other geological units mapped in Ash Meadows NWR (Denny and Drewes 1965), but those units may overlie other geologic units that contain fossils (Service 2000b).

### *Soils*

A total of 16 soil-mapping units are present on the Refuge, and the soils generally consist of gravelly sandy loam derived from either mixed rock sources or lake deposits (NRCS 2003b). Finer loam soil types (silty clay loam, sand to clayey loam) are derived from or occur near lake deposits, on the distal edges of alluvial fans, or on floodplains.

### *Water Resources*

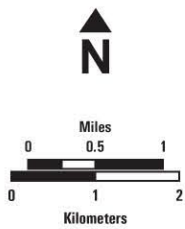
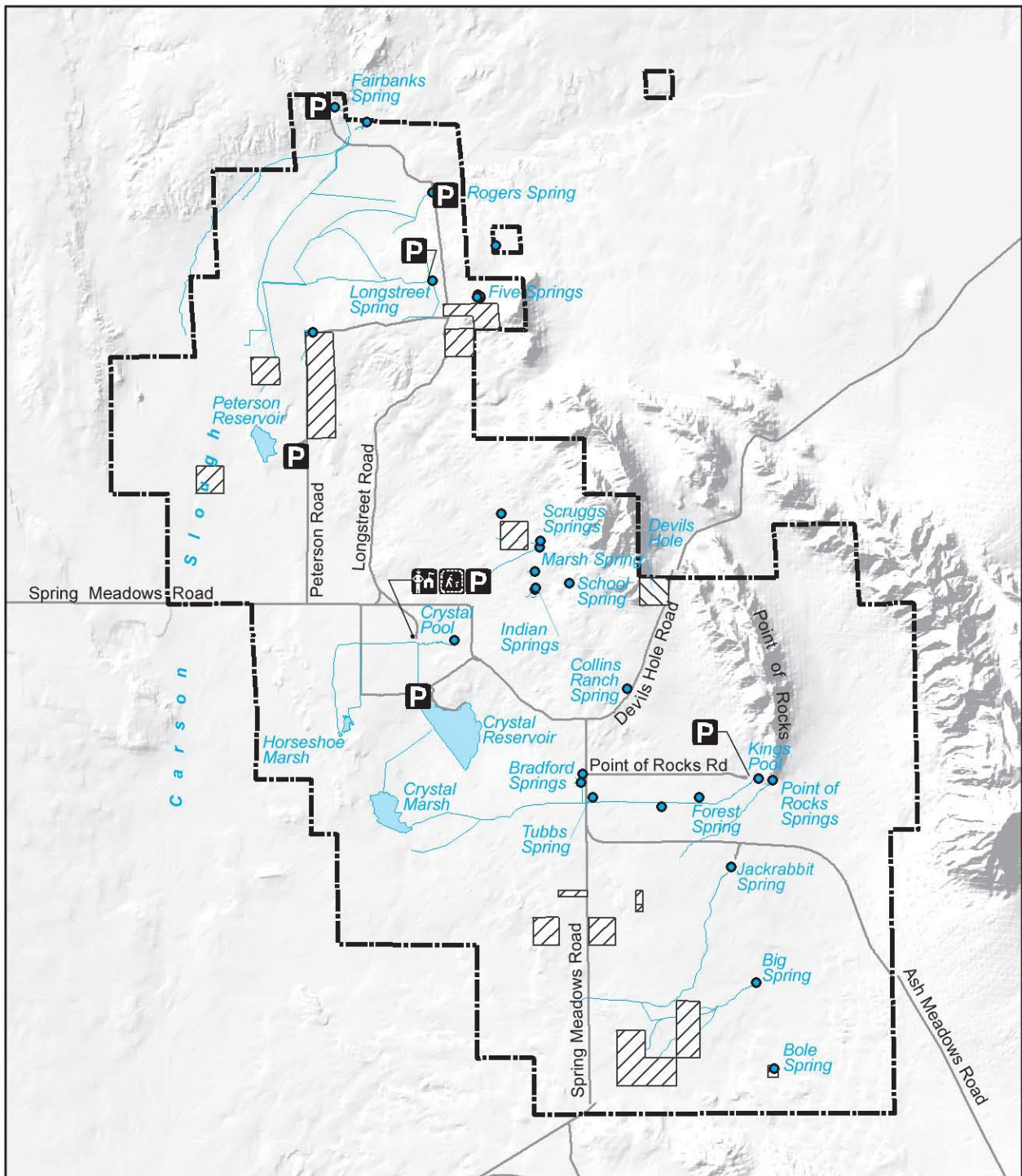
#### Surface Water

Ash Meadows NWR lies within the Upper Amargosa hydrologic subbasin, which is characterized by surface water drainage southwest towards Death Valley (Figure 4.2-1). The primary drainage within Ash Meadows is the Carson Slough, a tributary to the Amargosa River. Crystal Spring and Jackrabbit/Big Spring drainages are tributary to the slough and drain large portions of the Refuge. Little to no water exits the Refuge, except during major storm events that produce a large amount of surface runoff (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006).

Surface water originates from precipitation and from more than 30 flowing springs that discharge groundwater from the Ash Meadows Flow System (Denny and Drewes 1965). The major springs on the Refuge consist of circular pools 20 to 40 feet in diameter and 5 to 20 feet deep (Denny and Drewes 1965). The total annual discharge of Refuge springs has been estimated at about 17,000 acre-feet per year (afy) (Laczniak et al. 1999). Runoff from the springs feeds the two man-made reservoirs.

Devils Hole, an opening to the carbonate aquifer, is one of the most widely recognized and significant water features within the Refuge boundaries (actually part of Death Valley National Park). Devils Hole is a rectangular opening in a carbonate rock formation that is approximately 10 feet wide by 65 feet long (Hunt and Robinson 1960). The depth of Devils Hole has not been mapped, but the deepest any diver has been is about 436 feet (Riggs and Deacon 2002). Devils Hole is a unique habitat for a species of desert pupfish, which is listed as endangered. The pupfish breed on ledges just a few inches below the water surface.

The stability of water levels within Devils Hole is crucial to maintaining pupfish habitat, and thus the impacts of local groundwater pumping are of major concern. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, groundwater use for local irrigation resulted in declines in the pool level. A U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1976 mandated a minimum water level in the pool and resulted in cessation of local irrigation. Following the Supreme Court decision, water levels improved, although they continue to slowly decline.



- Spring
- Marsh/Reservoir
- Streams and Channels
- Roads
- - - Approved Refuge Boundary
- ▨ Private Property
- ▧ National Park Service
- 🏠 Visitor Contact Station
- 🚶 Boardwalk/Interpretive Displays
- P Parking

**Figure 4.2-1**

**Hydrology**

**Ash Meadows NWR**



The Service is currently engaged in restoration of many of the historic stream channels on the Ash Meadows NWR. The Ash Meadows area was previously farmed, and many of the surface water channels were redirected into man-made ditches. Work has recently been conducted at Point of Rocks and Crystal Pool to redirect spring flow into historic flow channels, although this work is not yet complete.

Historic redirection of springs and flow channels for irrigation also had a major impact on Carson Slough, which used to be one of the largest wetland areas in southern Nevada. Carson Slough was drained, mined for peat, and recontoured for farming. Surface flows were redirected into man-made reservoirs: Peterson and Crystal.

### Groundwater

Ash Meadows NWR lies within the Amargosa Valley hydrographic basin. The Refuge is underlain by a regional carbonate aquifer and a local valley-fill aquifer (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). The valley-fill aquifer is fed by regional groundwater through direct flows and surface water percolation from springs created by groundwater. Groundwater surfaces along the Ash Meadows fault system, which trends southeast to northwest through the eastern portion of the Refuge; springs are created by groundwater discharge along the fault, such as at Point of Rocks and Crystal Spring. All of the springs discharge carbonate water. At Point of Rocks, springs appear to discharge directly from the carbonate aquifer because of the carbonate rock outcrop. Other springs on the Refuge discharge from the valley-fill aquifer, which is derived from and connected to the carbonate aquifer but is covered by valley-fill sediments.

Warmer springs (greater than 90°F) tend to be found on the eastern side of the Refuge, where the groundwater travels a shorter distance to the surface from the carbonate aquifer (Walker and Eakin 1963). Springs in the central to western portion of the Refuge tend to be cooler (less than 90°F) because groundwater travels through the valley-fill aquifer, which contains lower temperature waters, to reach the surface.

The perennial yield of the Amargosa Valley hydrographic basin is estimated at 24,000 afy (Walker and Eakin 1963). Most of the groundwater yields spring flow (17,000 afy), while the remainder (7,000 afy) remains as subsurface flow and flows towards Death Valley to the west or supports evapotranspiration in the Ash Meadows area. Spring discharge in Ash Meadows has been estimated within a range of 16,500 to 17,500 afy (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006).

### Water Quality

Water quality from springs generally varies depending on the source area of the spring. Springs connected to regional flow systems have discharge waters containing relatively large concentrations of sodium, potassium, chloride, and sulfate ions. Some springs discharge thermal water warmer than 80°F. These waters have been in transit for thousands of years and thus have small concentrations of tritium, which is a result of radioactive fallout from nuclear testing in the 20th century. Water derived locally, instead of from regional flow systems,

would have smaller concentrations of ions, larger concentrations of tritium, and lower temperatures (U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] 1999). Water quality from major springs within Ash Meadows NWR is consistent with water from the regional flow system, rather than local precipitation and runoff. Water quality is fair overall. Levels of dissolved solids are approximately 450 milligrams per liter (mg/L), which is below the recommended level for potable water of 500 mg/L.

### Water Use

Within the Refuge, groundwater is a complex interaction between springs discharging from the regional flow system and groundwater in the aquifers. Dewatering of the aquifers likely occurred as a result of historic pumping in the area (Dudley and Larson 1976). Since cessation of local pumping, water levels appear to have stabilized or recovered in some areas of the Refuge, although the lack of historic water level information makes it difficult to fully analyze the conditions.

Since the Nevada Division of Water Resources (NDWR) began maintaining records in 1982, annual groundwater pumping from the Amargosa Valley has varied between 4,000 afy and nearly 16,000 afy (NDWR 2003). In general, groundwater use between 1982 and 1992 was between about 4,000 and 10,000 afy; beginning in 1993, water use increased and now fluctuates between 12,000 and 15,500 afy. Agriculture still accounts for the bulk of water use. Industrial use has ranged from generally less than 1,000 afy in the 1980s to about 2,500 afy in the 1990s. Commercial use began a sharp increase from 10 to 20 afy prior to 1995 to over 1,000 afy in 2000. Domestic uses were in decline in the 1980s, reaching an average of about 100 afy from 1986 to 1996, but more recently rising to about 370 afy. Development of surface and groundwater resources on private inholdings is limited and regulated by the Nevada State Engineer.

Groundwater levels within the Refuge may also be affected by groundwater development elsewhere in the Amargosa Valley hydrographic basin. The largest source of concern is pumping from agricultural areas north of the Refuge and groundwater users located within 5 miles of the Refuge, including the Amargosa Dairy and the American Borate mining facilities (recently closed). Water levels in the agricultural area have been in decline. The hydrologic connection between the agricultural pumping and water levels within Ash Meadows NWR is unclear, but at this time, water levels within the Refuge do not exhibit a similar decline. Recent water use of the dairy and mining facilities averages approximately 1,500 afy and 700 afy, respectively; however, the potential for these groundwater users to affect groundwater resources at Ash Meadows NWR is also unknown. The area is being studied by various agencies and private groups as a key indicator of long-term hydrologic, geologic, and climatologic change in southern Nevada due to its proximity to the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository, which is located approximately 20 miles north of the Refuge.

Because the springs at Ash Meadows NWR are derived from the regional flow system, groundwater use in other, more distant basins is also a concern, including as far as Pahrnagat Valley and the Spring Mountains. Currently, upgradient uses include DOE wells in Frenchman and Yucca Flat (DOE 2002). In Frenchman and Yucca Flat, DOE peak historic water demand is 530 and 912 afy, respectively. In Yucca Flat, this amount of pumping has likely exceeded the perennial yield of the basin and may have decreased downgradient subsurface flow by decreasing underground storage.

### Water Rights

There are few current uses of groundwater within Ash Meadows NWR. Domestic uses of groundwater within the Refuge do not require a water right. According to records from the NDWR (2003), the Service has filed for 57 water rights on the Ash Meadows NWR (55 rights for spring flow, two rights for wells). All rights have been certified by the Nevada State Engineer. The total quantity of water rights held by the Service is approximately 17,674 afy for the Ash Meadows NWR (Mayer 2006).

Development of water rights within the Amargosa Valley hydrographic basin has the potential to affect groundwater levels and spring flow on the Refuge. Within the basin, more than 56,000 afy of water rights have been certified, including both groundwater and surface water rights. Groundwater rights within the basin amount to approximately 28,000 afy. However, only about 12,000 to 15,500 afy of this amount are currently pumped (NDWR 2003).

### *Hazardous Materials*

Ash Meadows NWR is largely undeveloped land with no history of development other than agriculture and homesteads. The only past mining activity on the Refuge was bentonite mining, which took place in the early 1900s. A review of Lovering (1954), Garside (1979), and Singer (1996) indicates that neither metal nor radioactive deposits are present on the Refuge.

### *Fire History and Management*

Ash Meadows NWR currently lacks the site-specific histories of fire and forest structure that are necessary for scientifically based land-management planning in the region (Service 2004b). Site-specific fire histories provide the physical evidence of historical conditions that are critical to assessing the need for active management of specific watersheds, e.g., mechanical fuel treatment, prescribed fire or wildland fire use, and justifying such management actions within agencies and to the public. In general, fire regimes varied across space in response to variation in factors such as topography and climate. Although archival records reveal the modern factors such as fuel structure through fire exclusion, the influence of factors on past fire regimes is not fully understood. Extrapolating historical fire regimes across Nevada is further hampered by the nearly complete lack of information on historical fire regimes in any watershed in this region.

Fire occurrence in the desert areas of Ash Meadows has been historically infrequent (Service 2004b). However, fire frequencies may increase, due both to increased human-caused fires and to increased continuity of fine fuels caused by the growing dominance of introduced annual grasses.

Ash Meadows NWR is managed as part of the Ash Meadows Fire Management Unit (FMU); this unit consists of both the Refuge and the surrounding Ash Meadows Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), which is managed by the BLM. Records from the BLM for the Ash Meadows FMU, which covers about 52,600 acres, indicate an average of 0.3 ignitions per year between 1980 and 2002, with an average of 63 acres burned per year (Service 2004b). Fires ranged in size from 0.3 to 1,100 acres, and 71 percent were less than 100 acres in size. The median wildfire size was 206 acres, with an average of approximately 628 acres burned per decade. Fires generally occurred from April through October. Human-caused ignitions accounted for 86 percent of all fires, with the remaining 14 percent attributed to lightning. Most wildfires in this FMU occurred in tamarisk-infested areas. Typically, these fires are wind driven and are of moderate to high intensity. Small, low-intensity wildfires in tamarisk are less common but do occur.

Approximately two-thirds of the Ash Meadows FMU is riparian and marsh vegetation (Service 2004b). In undisturbed areas of this habitat, saltgrass is the carrier fuel and will burn at moderate intensity and spread. The remainder of the FMU (the surrounding ACEC) is predominantly creosote bursage and saltbush, with scattered stands of mesquite/acacia. Wildfires in this portion of the FMU are rare and generally depend upon ephemeral buildups of red brome and other introduced fine fuels.

The riparian/marsh portion of this FMU is infested with tamarisk, mainly along a series of irrigation channels (Service 2004b). These introduced nonnative fuels allow transport of fire into the interior of the marsh system. Tamarisk and other undesirable plant species also promote wildfires of larger size and intensity, versus the historical norm for this ecosystem.

Most wildfires in this FMU occur on the Refuge and generally involve tamarisk as the carrier fuel (Service 2004b). Although not typical, tamarisk fires in this FMU tend to be fuel driven, rather than wind dependent. Aside from tamarisk, the other vegetative type that is prone to fire within this FMU consists of scattered stands of mesquite/acacia woodland. Tamarisk fires here have exhibited high intensity and spread, whereas fires in the mesquite/acacia are usually single tree. The large fires in this FMU have been human-caused ignitions.

A recent example of a wildfire on the Refuge is the Longstreet Fire, which was caused by lightning and started on August 1, 2004 (Service 2004b). The fire was controlled on August 4 at 1,670 acres (1590 USFWS, 80 BLM). The origin was 0.5 mile southeast of private land near Cold Spring. Fuels consisted of annual grasses, perennial grasses,

tamarisk, and mesquite. The fire was considered extreme, and a single-engine airtanker was initially used to combat it; however, this method was not effective due to heavy accumulation of annual and perennial grasses. A variety of methods were considered, and indirect attacks using existing roads were found to be the most effective. Fuel breaks at the ownership boundary of private land were effective in having an established anchor point to proceed with burn-out operations.

Only one known prescribed fire has occurred on the Refuge. In 1990 an old cotton field was burned (Service 2004b). Recent fire history at Ash Meadows suggests that a component of prescribed fire would be desirable to maintain the diversity necessary to protect existing threatened and endangered species. Prescribed burns could also be used as part of a program to control noxious and exotic plants.

### *Air Quality*

Ambient air quality is not currently measured at Ash Meadows NWR. It is expected that low ambient concentrations of criteria pollutants would occur in this area based on nearby uses. Fugitive dust may occasionally produce high amounts of pollutants from nearby activities related to the American Borate facility closure, as well as traffic on nearby dirt roads. The nearest development sources of emissions are in Pahrump (approximately 22 miles to the southeast) and the Las Vegas area (approximately 80 to 90 miles to the southeast). Due to synoptic wind patterns and the overall distance from these cities, these sources are not expected to have an impact on this region. The NDEP has operated a PM<sub>10</sub> ambient monitor in Pahrump since 2001. Although the data indicate that there have been exceedances of the 24-hour PM<sub>10</sub> standard, these conditions were eliminated from the attainment determination due to naturally occurring emissions, which are a reoccurring problem in Amargosa Valley (NDEP 2003).

## **4.2.2 Biological Resources**

### *Vegetation*

#### Habitat Types

In 2006, the Service completed a coarse-scale vegetation mapping effort that involved identifying and describing the different habitat types on the Ash Meadows NWR and creating geographic information system (GIS) data and maps of the habitat types (Figure 4.2-2). This effort was part of the Geographic and Biological Assessment that also included management recommendations for the Refuge (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). The habitat types described and mapped for the Ash Meadows NWR include wetlands (emergent vegetation), riparian woodlands and shrublands (mesquite bosque and tamarisk), meadows (alkali wet meadow), alkali or saltbush shrub, creosote bush shrub, and nonnative oldfields. More than 350 plant species are known to occur on the Refuge, 15 of which are special-status species. More than 60 invasive species and 10 species of noxious weeds have been observed on the Refuge (Service 2006b). Because Ash Meadows NWR was historically developed as agricultural lands, the distribution of the native vegetation has been altered. Thousands of

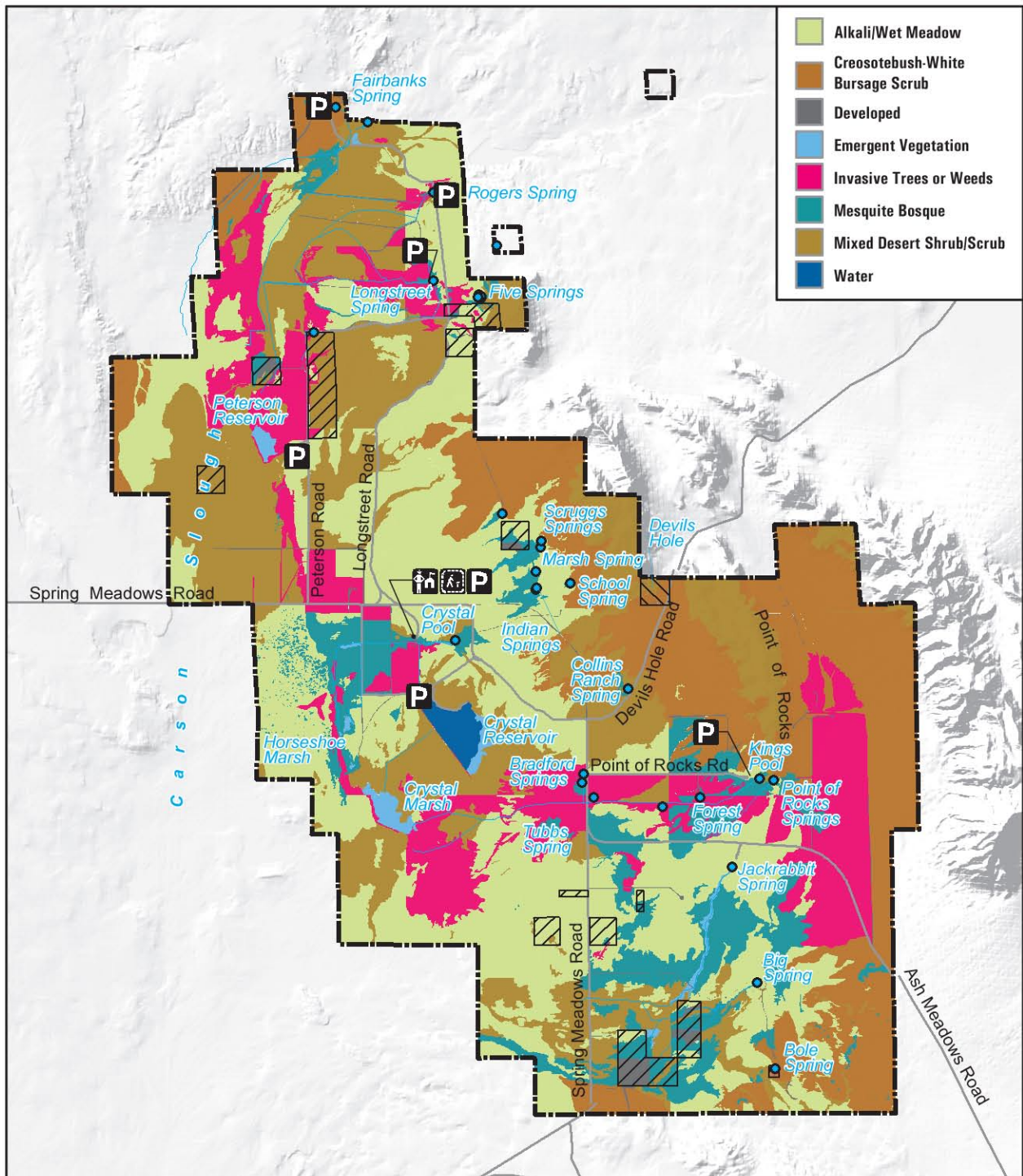
acres were affected by Spring Meadows Ranch, Inc., during the early 1970s for alfalfa farming and cattle grazing (Service 1990a).

For purposes of managing the various habitats, the Service has established multiple management units on the Refuge. These units were established based on the hydrologic features of the Refuge and encompass the surrounding habitats. The major units on the Refuge include Warm Springs, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Upper Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs. Other smaller units encompass the various springs and their habitats. Descriptions of the habitats found throughout the Refuge are provided below.

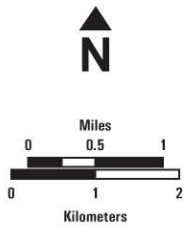
Wetland habitat at Ash Meadows NWR has been isolated for thousands of years, which has prevented several plant species from expanding their range outside the Refuge boundaries (Service 1990). Many of these plants have become distinct from others in the region and are now endemic to Ash Meadows NWR. Due to their limited range, these species are considered sensitive and are protected by the Service and the State of Nevada. A further discussion of the sensitive species found at Ash Meadows NWR is provided in the Sensitive Species section.

Approximately 30 seeps and springs provide high-quality habitat for many wildlife species. Emergent vegetation occurs around these water sources and around some of the reservoirs. Emergent vegetation is frequently or continually inundated and consists of herbaceous plants that are adapted to saturated conditions, such as cattails (*Typha* spp.) and rushes (*Juncus* spp.). Common species at the Refuge include southern cattail (*Typha domingensis*), rush, spikerush (*Eleocharis* spp.), bulrush (*Scirpus* spp.), and wetland grasses (*Sporobolus* spp. and *Distichlis* spp.) (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). Emergent vegetation covers approximately 132 acres of the Refuge, which is about 0.5 percent of the total area.

Riparian woodland and shrubland habitat types occur along drainages or outflow channels throughout the Refuge and around springs. Riparian habitat includes mesquite bosques, which cover approximately 2,000 acres or 8 percent of the Refuge, and tamarisk, which covers approximately 1,200 acres or 5 percent of the Refuge (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). Common overstory species associated with riparian habitat on Ash Meadows NWR include mesquite (*Prosopis pubescens* and *P. glandulosa*), Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), willow (*Salix* spp.), and the invasive tamarisk (*Tamarix* spp.). Common understory species include saltbush (*Atriplex* spp.), saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*), arrowweed (*Pluchea sericea*), and coyote willow (*Salix exigua*). Seasonal flooding is common in mesquite bosques, and annual flooding or high water tables are common in areas with tamarisk. Restoration efforts are currently under way to remove tamarisk and restore native mesquite bosques and other habitat on the Refuge.



- Alkali/Wet Meadow
- Creosotebush-White Bursage Scrub
- Developed
- Emergent Vegetation
- Invasive Trees or Weeds
- Mesquite Bosque
- Mixed Desert Shrub/Scrub
- Water



- Spring
- Streams and Channels
- Roads
- Approved Refuge Boundary
- Private Property
- National Park Service
- P Parking
- i Visitor Contact Station
- A Boardwalk/Interpretive Displays

**Figure 4.2-2**  
**Vegetation Types**  
**Ash Meadows NWR**



Alkali meadows are the dominant habitat type on the Refuge; they currently occupy approximately 7,900 acres or 33 percent of the Refuge (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). Alkali meadows occur throughout the Refuge, with the largest contiguous meadows in the southern and central portions at lower elevations. Common vegetation in the alkali meadow habitat includes Baltic rush (*Juncus balticus*), mesquite, desert isocoma (*Isocoma acradenia*), alkali sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*), saltgrass, and velvet ash (*Fraxinus velutina*).

Alkali meadows tend to provide habitat for rare species, and at Ash Meadows, they provide the largest habitat for Ash Meadows ivesia (*Ivesia eremica*) and the spring loving centaury (*Centaurium namophilum*). Alkali meadows are reliant on shallow groundwater, which is critical to the characteristics species found in the habitat. Areas where groundwater has lowered tend to become dominated by alkali shrub or saltbush species.

Alkali shrub is the second most common habitat type on the Refuge; it occupies approximately 5,000 acres or 21 percent (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). Saltbush species, such as big saltbush (*Atriplex lentiformis*), fourwing saltbush (*A. canescens*), and shadscale (*A. confertifolia*) dominate the habitat. Other common species include rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus* spp.), greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*), and inkweed (*Suaeda moquinii*). Alkali shrub is frequently intermixed with alkali meadows.

Groundwater pumping in the area and vegetation manipulation may have resulted in the conversion of alkali meadows to alkali shrub due to the lowering of the groundwater table; however, the extent of this conversion is unknown. In some areas, alkali shrub occurs on mounds within alkali meadow habitat.

Alkali shrub is most common in the northern portion of the Refuge, in the Carson Slough area. The Carson Slough was historically the largest wetland in southern Nevada (Service 1990). Approximately 2,000 acres of marshland in Carson Slough were destroyed when it was drained and mined for peat during the 1960s (Service 1990). Today, the Carson Slough is an ephemeral channel in the northwestern portion of the Refuge that contains alkali shrub habitat, some riparian woodlands dominated by the nonnative tamarisk, and some alkali meadows.

The creosote bush shrub or creosote–white bursage (*Larrea tridentata*-*Ambrosia dumosa*) scrub alliance is one of the most common habitat types in the Mojave Desert. This habitat type occurs on approximately 4,500 acres or 19 percent of the Refuge (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006). Creosote bush and white bursage are the codominants in this habitat. Other common species include fourwing saltbush, desert holly (*Atriplex hymenelytra*), brittlebrush (*Encelia farinosa*), wolfberry (*Lycium* spp.), and beavertail (*Opuntia basilaris*). The herbaceous layer is sparse, but seasonally abundant after rain events. Creosote bush shrub habitat occurs primarily along the eastern, southern, and extreme northwestern boundaries of the

Refuge. The habitat is relatively undisturbed, except for an area east of Point of Rocks Spring that has been leveled, irrigated, and furrowed.

Nonnative oldfields occur throughout the Refuge adjacent to native habitats. They occupy approximately 2,000 acres or 8 percent of the Refuge. The Refuge's history of land and water manipulation for various purposes has resulted in the establishment of nonnative plants, and in some areas (i.e., the oldfields), nonnative plants have become the dominant species. Typical species in the oldfields include Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*), star thistles (*Centaurea* spp.), other thistles (*Cirsium* spp.), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), tansy mustards (*Descurania* spp.), and tamarisk. In some areas, native species, such as creosote bush and mesquite, are recolonizing where nonnative species or agricultural fields previously occurred. Native species may continue to recolonize previously disturbed areas, but the presence of noxious weeds (e.g., Russian knapweed and tamarisk) currently prevents native species from reestablishing.

On steep upland hillslopes and dry ridgetops, creosote bush and bursage disappear, and succulents dominate the shrub layer. This habitat type is sparse on the Refuge, occurring on approximately 900 acres or 4 percent of the Refuge. Common succulent include beavertail cactus, cottontop (*Echinocactus polycephalus*), and cholla (*Opuntia* spp.). Common herbaceous species include fluff grass (*Erioneruon pulchellum*), buckwheat (*Eriogonum* spp.), and phacelia (*Phacelia* spp.).

#### Sensitive Plant Species

There are 15 sensitive plant species found at Ash Meadows NWR (Appendix H). Nine of these species are endemic to Ash Meadows. One is federally endangered, Amargosa niterwort (*Nitrophila mohavensis*), and six are federally threatened: Ash Meadows milkvetch (*Astragalus phoenix*), spring-loving centaury (*Centaureum namophilum*), Ash Meadows sunray (*Enceliopsis nudicaulis* var. *corrugata*), Ash Meadows gumplant (*Grindelia fraxino-pratensis*), Ash Meadows ivesia (*Ivesia eremica*), and Ash Meadows blazing star (*Mentzelia leucophylla*).

The other plant species are considered sensitive by other organizations, such as the State of Nevada or the Nevada Natural Heritage Program (NNHP). Six plants are on Nevada's "At Risk" list (NNHP 2004): white bearpoppy (*Arctomecon merriamii*), alkali mariposa lily (*Calochortus striatus*), Ash Meadows lady's tresses (*Spiranthes infernalis*), Tecopa birdsbeak (*Cordylanthus tecopensis*), Death Valley blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium funereum*), and St. George blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium radicum*). Three others are considered sensitive by the NNHP: Darin buckwheat (*Eriogonum concinnum*), Parish's phacelia (*Phacelia parishii*), and Death Valley sage (*Salvia funerea*).

A recovery plan for 12 endangered and threatened species at Ash Meadows NWR has been approved and is being implemented by the Service (1990). The recovery plan describes each species and its habitat in detail, along with recovery goals and objectives.

### Noxious Weeds

Sixty-three nonnative species have been identified on Ash Meadows NWR, of which 10 are considered noxious.

The Service prepared an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan in 2006 and is beginning to implement strategies to manage invasive species (Service 2006b). The IPM Plan describes a variety of methods that include a combination of biological, mechanical, chemical, and cultural controls. The use of chemical and mechanical controls on Ash Meadows NWR is limited by the presence of sensitive species. Removal of weeds must be combined with revegetation and restoration techniques to avoid adverse effects to these sensitive species. The IPM Plan outlines herbicide methods, specific time frames, adaptive management, and cost estimates for control of invasive, nonnative plants, especially the noxious weeds.

### *Wildlife*

Ash Meadows NWR is a haven for wildlife, especially rare fish, plants, snails, and insects, many of which are found nowhere else on earth (See Appendix H for a species list). Water bubbles up from underground sources into clear spring pools as silvery blue and grayish green pupfish dart between swaying strands of algae. Pebbled streams gurgle from small hillside springs, sheltering tiny beetles and snails. The water is warm and the air moist, in contrast to the surrounding Mojave Desert.

Ash Meadows NWR has a greater concentration of endemic species than any other local area in the United States, and it has the second greatest concentration in North America. Five of these species are fish, one is a mammal, at least 12 are aquatic snails, and two are aquatic insects. Several of these species are considered sensitive. One fish, at least one snail, and possibly one mammal have become extirpated from the Refuge in the past century due to habitat loss related to human activities, particularly agricultural, municipal, and mining development.

### Amphibians and Reptiles

Five amphibians and 20 reptiles are known to occur on the Ash Meadows NWR. Reptiles and amphibians are most visible during the spring and fall. Toads are most visible right after spring and summer rains, when they become very active feeders and breeders. Snakes are also observed more often during the spring and early fall because they become more nocturnal during the heat of mid-summer (Service 2006a). Horned lizards (*Phrynosoma platyrhinos*) are present at the Refuge and are commonly collected for personal and commercial uses.

Bullfrogs (*Rana catesbeiana*) were introduced into the wetlands and natural springs sources on the Refuge (Service 1994b). Bullfrogs prey on native fish, including their eggs and young, and thus adversely affect recovery efforts. Following completion of an Environmental Assessment for frogging activities (Service 1994b), the Service has allowed bullfrog harvesting by Refuge staff, Nevada Department of

Wildlife (NDOW) staff, and permitted members of the public to protect native fish species.

### Birds

More than 239 different species of birds have been recorded within Ash Meadows NWR. The greatest diversity and numbers of birds occur during migration periods from the Pacific Flyway migration route. Spring migration usually occurs during April and May, and fall migration occurs from mid-August through September, when Ash Meadows supports thousands of pass-through migrants fattening up for the coming breeding season or for wintering in the tropics. It appears to be a very important stop-over site for migrant landbirds. During the winter, marshes and reservoirs support a large variety of water birds.

Mesquite and ash tree groves throughout the Refuge harbor resident and migratory birds year-round. Several species of migrants and residents that occur at Ash Meadows are listed on the Service list of Birds of Conservation Concern and as conservation priorities in the Partners in Flight bird conservation plan for Nevada. Some of these priority bird species include eared grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*), western grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*), Franklin's gull (*Larus pipixcan*), black tern (*Chlidonias niger*), snowy egret (*Egretta thula*), marbled godwit (*Limosa fedoa*), snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*), white-throated swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*), Arizona Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii arizonae*), southwestern willow flycatcher, western yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus occidentalis*), and canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*) (see Appendix H for more species and the habitats the species occur in on the Refuge).

A few pairs of endangered southwestern willow flycatchers have been documented using Ash Meadows as breeding habitat from June through August each year (Service 2006a). Two endangered species success stories, the peregrine falcon and bald eagle, also use Ash Meadows seasonally as a migration stop-over.

### Mammals

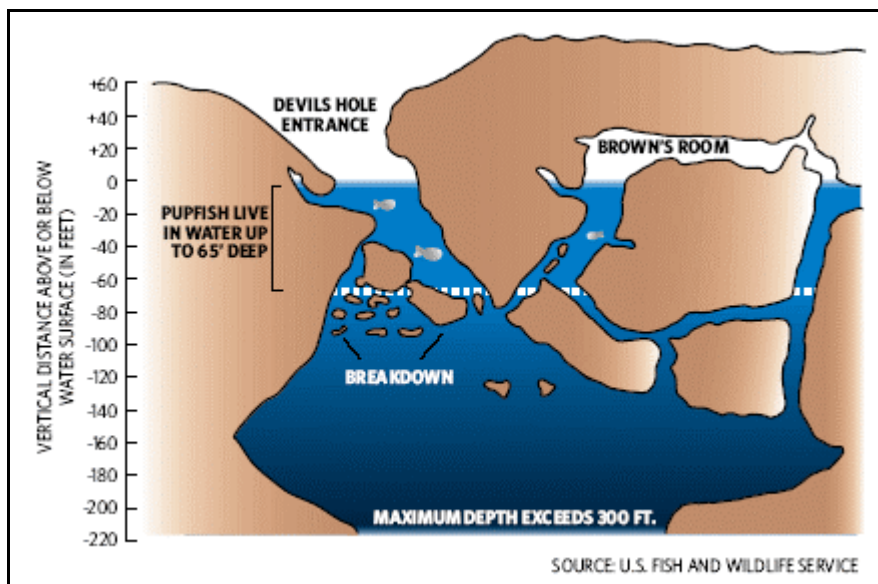
More than 30 species of mammals have been observed on the Refuge. Desert bighorn sheep are occasionally observed at Point of Rocks Spring and Devils Hole (Service 2006a). Small game species also occur on the Refuge, such as cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus* spp.) and jackrabbits (*Lepus* spp.).

### Aquatic Species

Four of the 10 species of fish present in Refuge waters are endangered; the other six are introduced exotic species (Service 2006a). Nonnative species such as largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*), and sailfin molly (*Poecilia latipinna*) are being removed by the Service, as they are harmful to the native fish by competing for the same limited resources, preying on native fish, and introducing nonnative parasites (Service 1990). Crystal Reservoir provides favorable spawning habitat for nonnative species and is a source for these predatory nonnative species

that threaten native fish populations in the springs and channels upstream.

Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish (*Cyprinodon nevadensis mionectes*) can be observed year-round at all the major springs and streams on the Refuge, but they are most visible at Point of Rocks Spring. Male pupfish take on a bluish cast during the spring and summer breeding season, whereas females remain olive green year-round. Warm Springs pupfish (*Cyprinodon nevadensis pectoralis*) can be found in a wide variety of habitats, including shallow and deep streams flowing from springs. The Ash Meadows speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus nevadensis*) were historically located in numerous springs and streams on the Refuge, but these populations were extirpated except at Bradford and Jackrabbit Springs. The Devils Hole pupfish occurs in a small, water-filled cavern called Devils Hole (Figure 4.2-3). Devils Hole is the most restricted habitat in the world containing the entire population of a vertebrate species (Service 1980). The National Park Service (NPS) manages the habitat and species of pupfish at this location. The Refuge also supported two refugia populations of the pupfish, one at Point of Rocks (currently online) and a second refugium at School Springs (currently offline).



**Figure 4.2-3. Devils Hole Pupfish Habitat**

Like many of the endemic species on the Refuge, aquatic invertebrates have become isolated from other similar populations due to their specialized habitat requirements. Their ancestors tend to resemble species found in South America and southern latitudes in North America (Service 1990). The Ash Meadows naucorid (*Ambrysus amargosus*) is endemic to Ash Meadows. Other aquatic invertebrates endemic to Nevada with habitat or known occurrences on the Refuge include the Devils Hole warm spring riffle beetle (*Stenelmis calida calida*), sportinggoods tryonia (*Tryonia angulata*), Point of Rocks tryonia (*T. elata*), minute tryonia (*T. ericae*), median-gland Nevada spring snail (*Pyrgulopsis pisteri*), Fairbanks spring snail (*P.*

*fairbanksensis*), and other spring snails (*Pyrgulopsis* spp.) (Otis Bay and Stevens Ecological Consulting 2006).

Mollusks and crustaceans, such as spring snails and crayfish, occupy the spring pools and immediate outflows of most of the local springs and seeps on the Refuge. The nonnative Malayan trumpet snail (*Melanooides tuberculata*) is found in Refuge springs. The nonnative Louisiana crayfish (*Procambarus clarkii*) preys on native fish in the springs and streams of Ash Meadows NWR. Crayfish were likely introduced through the release of live bait, and they have spread into streams and spring habitats throughout Nevada. Active crayfish trapping programs are implemented on the Refuge to control this species; however, crayfish continue to threaten native aquatic species.

### Sensitive Wildlife Species

Fifty-three sensitive wildlife species have the potential to occur at Ash Meadows NWR. These species are federally listed as threatened or endangered or are considered sensitive by the NNHP or state of Nevada (Appendix H). Of these species, two are reptiles, 16 are birds, 13 are mammals, four are fish, and 18 are invertebrates. Species accounts for the federally listed species are provided in Appendix H. Some details on the fish and birds are described above.

All of the sensitive fish species are endemic to Nevada, as are several of the invertebrates and one of the mammals. The endangered and threatened species include: southwestern willow flycatcher, Yuma clapper rail, bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, delisted August 8, 2007, being monitored), Devils Hole pupfish, Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish, Warm Springs pupfish (*Cyprinodon nevadensis pectoralis*), Ash Meadows Speckled Dace, and the threatened Ash Meadows naucorid.

A Recovery Plan for the Endangered and Threatened Species of Ash Meadows has been approved and is being implemented by the Service (1990). The recovery plan describes each species, its habitat needs, and its recovery goals in detail.

## **4.2.3 Cultural Resources**

### *Introduction*

Water was a key resource for prehistoric and historic-period people attempting to survive in a harsh desert environment. The plant and animal habitat at the springs provided sustenance for these groups and allowed them to thrive despite the harsh surroundings. Most of the Ash Meadows NWR has been recently investigated through archaeological reconnaissance surveys.

### *Prehistoric Archaeology*

Nearly 300 prehistoric and/or historic sites are known to exist on the Refuge that reflect short-term, limited types of activities, and some are extensive campsites representing a variety of activities over several thousand years. At the sites determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), diagnostic artifacts, hearths, and fire-affected rock are often found, and a variety of

grinding tools are common. Ceramics associated with the Southern Paiute and Shoshone as well as Far Western Puebloan groups have also been recorded.

### *Historic Archaeology*

Historic sites are those sites that resulted from use of the region by Euro-Americans or other groups after contact with native peoples. They document interactions between Euro-Americans and Native Americans. For many portions of southern Nevada, this happened during the mid-1800s. On the Ash Meadows NWR, a smaller percentage of historic sites relate to mining and ranching activities in the area. These generally consist of modest structural remains and associated historic debris scatters or trash dumps. Buildings on the Refuge include a cabin made of railroad ties and others made of rock and wood. Some of the buildings are evident only through observation of piles of fallen bricks. One important historic site is the Charles King homestead. It was the first Anglo homestead at Ash Meadows established as a modest ranch to supply the miners near Death Valley with beef. The site includes King's house and associated historic-period debris. The Jack Longstreet cabin is associated with an extensive lithic and pottery scatter that documents his close association with many of the Paiutes living in Ash Meadows. He was married to a Southern Paiute woman and befriended other Paiutes on occasion in dealing with other Anglo-Americans in the area. Both of these sites have characteristics that make them eligible for listing on the NRHP. There is also an Indian Cemetery within the Refuge that tribal descendants still visit that reflects the long, continued use of the Ash Meadows area.

## **4.2.4 Public Access and Recreation**

### *Public Access*

Ash Meadows NWR is open daily to the public year-round from sunrise to sunset; access is free of charge. The public is encouraged to visit the Refuge and experience this valuable and unprecedented example of desert oases that are now extremely uncommon in the southwestern United States.

The southern entrance to Ash Meadows NWR can be accessed from Pahrump, Nevada, by traveling west on Bell Vista Road (aka Bob Rudd Memorial Highway) and turning north onto Spring Meadows Road (Figure 1.7-1). Access to the western portion is via Nevada State Route (SR) 373/Highway 127 from Death Valley Junction. None of the roads on the Refuge are paved, and many are inaccessible during and following inclement weather. Refuge roads are subject to closure in the wet winter months due to high clay content on native roads. Because of the sensitivity of many of the listed species and their habitats, vehicles are restricted to major roads. The entire Refuge, including roads, is closed to off-highway vehicle use by the public. Vehicle parking is restricted to existing parking areas (Service 2000a).

The Refuge receives visitors from the local areas of Amargosa Valley, Pahrump, and Las Vegas, as well as from numerous other states and foreign countries. A visitor sign-in sheet is located at the Refuge office, and visitors are asked for comments and the number of people in their



group. Traffic counters are located on the access roads to track the number of cars entering the Refuge. Based on recent estimates, Ash Meadows NWR receives approximately 65,000 visitors annually.

### *Recreation*

The Refuge is a day use area, open sunrise to sunset, with numerous recreational opportunities. Wildlife-dependent activities include wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, interpretation, and hunting. Non-wildlife-dependent activities include picnicking, recreational boating, and virtual geocaching. Wildlife observation, picnicking, and hunting are the more popular activities enjoyed by Refuge visitors (Service 2006a).

The Refuge administrative office serves as a visitor contact station. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. as staffing permits. The visitor contact station is currently closed on weekends. Brochures, maps, and fact sheets are available at the visitor contact station. The Crystal Springs Interpretive Boardwalk Trail and an interpretive kiosk are located near the visitor contact station. The boardwalk offers a unique opportunity for visitors to view the restored spring system and associated wildlife. Picnic tables and restrooms are located at the visitor contact station, and one picnic table and portable toilet are located at the Point of Rocks parking area. The planning and design for a loop boardwalk in the Point of Rocks/Kings Pool area with interpretive panels, improved parking, and restrooms are currently under development. Power, phone service, and running water are available at the administrative offices and at select locations on the Refuge for maintenance purposes.

Nature trails, kiosks, and the administrative office/visitor contact station are the primary facilities used by visitors (Service 2006a). During fiscal year (FY) 2002, almost 8,000 people stopped at the contact station, about 4,000 people visited the kiosks, and 14,000 visitors hiked the nature trails and paths.

### Wildlife-Dependent Recreation

Wildlife photography and observation opportunities are available throughout the Refuge, with the best places being near bodies of water and at Carson Slough. The presence of riparian vegetation and open water attracts numerous birds to the area and makes bird-watching a popular activity. The National Audubon Society performs surveys for birds at Ash Meadows NWR, and bird lists generated from the Refuge have been included in the Nevada Breeding Bird Atlas. A bird list is available at the Refuge headquarters and online at the Ash Meadows NWR Web site. The Refuge is also internationally known as a top birding spot because of its classification as a Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Convention 2004) and is designated as a Nevada Important Bird Area (IBA).

Opportunities for observing the endangered Ash Meadows pupfish exist at all major springs, but are best at Kings Pool, located at Point of Rocks. Devils Hole, home of the endangered Devils Hole pupfish, is managed by the NPS and is part of Death Valley National Park.

Educational opportunities are available on and off the Refuge. Ash Meadows NWR has a partnership with Death Valley National Park to educate the community about the Devils Hole pupfish. During FY 2002, 1,125 visitors participated in environmental education opportunities (Service 2006a). Less than half of these visits were staff-conducted tours, with students and teachers as the primary participants. Off-site educational outreach opportunities include group presentations and exhibits. Ash Meadows NWR had an estimate of 30 visits to environmental education exhibits and 201 visits to interpretation exhibits during FY 2005. Other special events to promote the Refuge include news releases and radio or television spots. Many of these activities have decreased in the past three years due to limited funding and staff; however, Refuge visitors have increased more than three-fold since 2000.

An active volunteer program provides additional opportunities for the public to enjoy the Refuge and interact with the staff. The Service works with the other public land agencies in southern Nevada to coordinate volunteer work through the Southern Nevada Interagency Volunteer Program—Get Outdoors Nevada. Internships are also available for students to earn college credits. Some of the volunteer projects include tree-planting and habitat restoration. The Ash Meadows NWR is extensively used by students and professionals for environmental ecosystem research, including endangered and threatened species studies, groundwater modeling, groundwater chemistry studies, and habitat conservation. College classes occasionally take field trips to the Refuge.

The Desert Complex hosts events for National Wildlife Refuge Week and Migratory Bird Day, and the Refuge had a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the restored Jack Longstreet cabin in 2005. The Desert Complex staff also attends local events to promote environmental education about Ash Meadows NWR. Such events include the Clark County Fair, Clark County ECOJAM (Earth Day event), Gran Fiesta (September 2002), and Boy Scout Day Camp (May 2003). Desert Complex staff or Refuge staff also attended the Governor's Conference on Tourism, Dia de los Niños, and Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Preview, depending on staff availability and funding.

Hunting for waterfowl, dove, and quail is allowed on the Refuge where posted and in accordance with state regulations (Service 2000a) (Figure 4.2-4). Waterfowl hunting generally occurs at Peterson Reservoir, the southern portion of Crystal Reservoir, and Lower Crystal Marsh. During the migratory waterfowl hunting season, only nonmotorized boats or boats with electric motors can be used. Target practicing is not allowed at any time. In FY 2002, 2,900 visitors participated in hunting activities (Service 2006a).

Fishing is not currently allowed on the Refuge. The largemouth bass was introduced into most Refuge waters in the 1960s. This nonnative fish is considered a threat to the native endangered fish and is being removed from Refuge waters (Service 2000a).

### Non-Wildlife-Dependent Recreation

Hiking is available along designated roads and trails. No camping or overnight parking is permitted (Service 2000a). Due to the presence of waterfowl and sensitive species, swimming is prohibited in all spring pools. Only boats without motors, or with electric-powered motors (no gas-powered) are allowed on Crystal and Peterson Reservoirs and Lower Crystal Marsh. Off-road vehicle use is also prohibited on the Refuge. Virtual geocaching is allowed with permission from the Refuge Manager.

Picnicking opportunities are currently available at the visitor contact station and at the Point of Rocks Spring area. The visitor contact station also has picnic tables and restrooms. Point of Rocks Spring has picnic tables and a portable toilet.

### **4.2.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

#### *Refuge Management Economics*

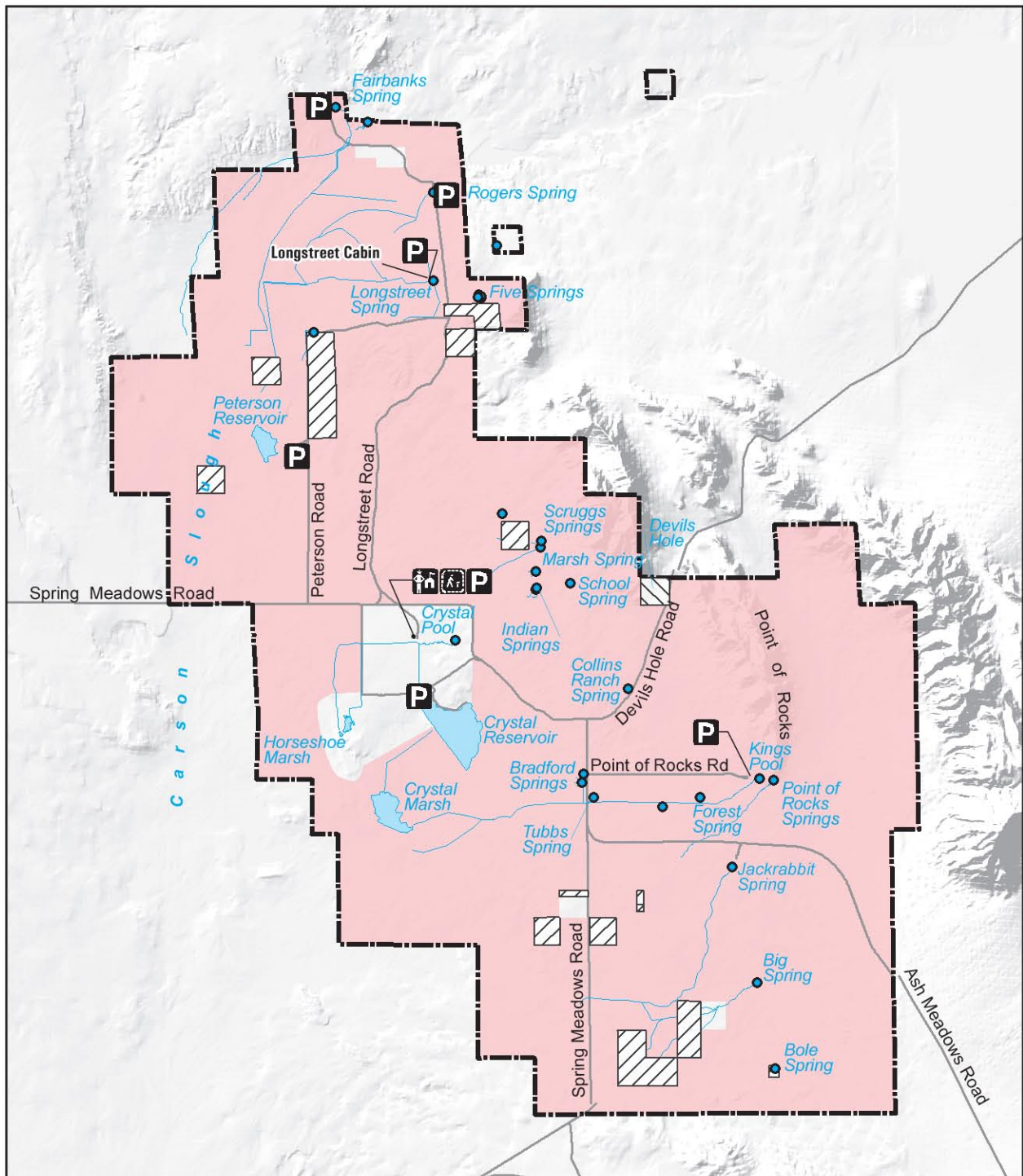
The current Refuge staff consists of four full-time employees, one non-funded biologist, and one non-funded outdoor planner and laborer. The refuge operations budget for 2005 was \$235,000. The maintenance budget for the Refuge was \$58,175.50.

NWRs contribute funds to local counties through revenue-sharing programs that are intended to cover costs for either lands purchased in fee title or lands reserved from the public domain. For FY 2003, Nye County received payment in the amount of \$21,895 from the federal government under this revenue-sharing program.

#### *Environmental Justice*

The Ash Meadows NWR is located within an area once occupied by Western Shoshone, particularly the Timbisha Shoshone, the Pahrump Paiute Tribe, and the Las Vegas (*Tuh'du Ningwoo*) Paiute band (Kelly 1934; Kelly and Fowler 1986; Martineau 1992; Steward 1997; Department of Interior [DOI] and Timbisha Shoshone Tribe 2000). The Timbisha Shoshone reservation currently includes approximately 10,600 acres throughout southwestern Nevada and eastern California. The Timbisha Shoshone also co-manage 300,000 other acres within Death Valley National Park. In 2000, the Timbisha Shoshone Homeland Act (Public Law [PL] 106-423) identified the potential for a cooperative agreement between the affiliated tribe and the Service.

The communities of Pahrump and Amargosa Valley are located within 10 miles of the Refuge. Both communities indicate that the Hispanic or Latino population is the largest minority group, approximating 10 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). The communities may also be considered low-income communities based on the median family income, which is approximately \$10,000 less than the state median family income, although it is comparable to the county's median family income at around \$40,000.



**Figure 4.2-4**

**Visitor Services**

**Ash Meadows NWR**

### *Land Use*

Land surrounding Ash Meadows NWR is a rural setting with a low population density and a relatively small number of ranches, farms, and mining enterprises (Service 1987a). From 1980 to 1983 municipal development activities disturbed 12,654 acres of private land, which are now within the Refuge boundary (Service 1984b).

The land was subsequently purchased by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and resold to the Service to establish the Ash Meadows NWR (Service 1990). Since establishment of the Refuge on June 18, 1984, the Service has undertaken restoration activities throughout the Refuge.

Of the 24,000 acres within the approved Refuge boundary, the Service manages approximately 22,729 acres (including BLM lands), the NPS manages 40 acres around Devils Hole, and the rest are privately owned (approximately 676 acres) (Figure 1.7-1). Private lands are mostly unoccupied and consist of residences, a clay processing plant, and a private landing strip. The Service has a Cooperative Management Agreement with the BLM to manage BLM-administered lands within the Refuge. The NPS manages and monitors Devils Hole to protect and research the Devils Hole pupfish.

The entire boundary is surrounded by BLM lands that were designated as the Ash Meadows ACEC. This area has been set aside for the protection of the endemic species of Ash Meadows.

### *Aesthetics*

Ash Meadows NWR consists of more than 24,000 acres of spring-fed wetlands and alkaline desert uplands and provides excellent views of the night sky for stargazers due to the lack of light sources in the vicinity. The Refuge provides habitat for at least 25 plants and animals found nowhere else in the world and provides a unique visual quality opportunity.

The Refuge is a major discharge point for a large underground aquifer system stretching 100 miles to the northeast. Water-bearing strata come to the surface in more than 30 seeps and springs, providing a rich and complex variety of habitats. Wetlands, springs, and springbrook channels are scattered throughout the Refuge. Sandy dunes, rising up to 50 feet above the landscape, appear in the central portions of the Refuge.

Mesquite and ash groves flourish near wetlands and stream channels, and saltbush dominates large portions of the Refuge in dry areas adjacent to wetlands. Creosote bush habitat occurs in the drier elevated areas along the east and southeastern portions of the Refuge. Cacti occur along the outer eastern edge of the Refuge, with a variety at Point of Rocks.

The land within Ash Meadows NWR was intensively farmed in the 1960s and 1970s, prior to its establishment as a Refuge. As a result, many of the visual qualities associated with that use are still evident. The Refuge is currently in the habitat restoration stage and will likely

remain so for years to come. The overall goal of the Refuge is to restore the area to its natural historic condition by re-directing spring outflows back into former natural channels, restoring wetlands, removing nonnative species, restoring native riparian and upland vegetation, and removing unnecessary structures such as roads, fences, dams, levees, and power lines. Once this is accomplished, visual quality will be improved.

### **4.3 Desert National Wildlife Refuge**

#### **4.3.1 Physical Environment**

##### *Physiography*

The boundary of the Desert NWR encompasses approximately 1.6 million acres. The Desert NWR consists of typical basin and range topography—a series of narrow north/south-trending mountain ranges separated by wide valleys. Desert NWR is bordered to the north by Emigrant Valley, Desert Mountain Range, Tikaboo Valley, Pahranaagat Range, East Pahranaagat Range, and the Pahranaagat NWR; to the east by the Delamar Mountains, Coyote Spring Valley, and Hidden Valley; to the south by Las Vegas Valley; and to the west by Frenchman Flat and the Halfpint Range (Figure 4.1-2).

Six primary mountain ranges are located within the Desert NWR and consist of, from west to east, the Spotted Range, the Pintwater Range, the Desert Mountain Range, the East Desert Range, the Sheep Range, and the Las Vegas Range. The Papoose Range, a relatively small mountain range, occurs in the northwest corner of Desert NWR. Most of Desert NWR consists of closed hydrographic basins (basins that have interior drainage). Exceptions are the east side of the Sheep Range, where drainage flows east toward Coyote Spring Valley, and the east side of the Las Vegas Range, where drainage flows east toward Hidden Valley. In addition, drainage from the western side of the Spotted Range flows west towards Frenchman Lake, which is a large playa that covers most of Frenchman Flat.

Elevations of Desert NWR extend from approximately 3,500 feet above msl in the valleys to 9,950 feet above msl in the Sheep Range. The elevations of both mountains and valleys are lower in the western half of Desert NWR.

##### *Geology and Minerals*

Desert NWR is characterized by a series of north/south-trending mountain ranges separated by wide valleys. Mountains consist mostly of carbonate rocks dating from the Paleozoic period from 543 mya to 248 mya (Tschanz and Pameyan 1970). Some mountains also contain Precambrian (more than 543 mya) and Tertiary (65 to 1.8 mya) rocks. Valleys contain deposits of Tertiary and Quaternary (1.8 mya to present) alluvium derived from erosion of adjacent mountain ranges.

Several faults cross through the mountain ranges on the Refuge. The larger faults run north to south parallel to the ranges (Tingley et al. 1993). Some of these faults include Wildhorse Pass Fault, Mormon Pass Fault, Sheep Basin Fault, and Gass Peak Thrust. Other faults

that run southwest to northeast along the mountain ranges in the northeast portion of the Refuge include Maynard Lake Fault, Buckhorn Fault, and Arrowhead Mine Fault.

Both nonmetallic (mostly construction materials) and metallic minerals such as zinc, silver, lead, gold, and uranium are found in the Desert NWR (Tingley et al. 1993). Although the Desert NWR probably contains large amounts of material that would be suitable for construction aggregate, under current market conditions, aggregate production from the Desert NWR is not economically competitive due to high transportation costs (Tingley 1998). Review of Tingley (1998) and Tschanz and Pameyan (1970) indicates that there were six mining districts within the Desert NWR: Papoose, Southeastern, Slate, Joe May Canyon, White Caps, and Gass Peak. These mines were active during the early 20th century but are no longer in operation.

In 1994, the BLM withdrew 769,543 acres of public mineral estate from location and entry under the mining laws to protect the Desert NWR (BLM 1994). The land has been and will remain open to mineral leasing.

### *Paleontological Resources*

A number of geologic units in Desert NWR have the potential to contain fossils. In general, Paleozoic, Tertiary, and Quaternary deposits have the potential to contain fossils in the region, while Precambrian rocks and igneous or molten rocks are of low potential. Common types of fossils found in those units include primarily sea creatures, such as mollusks, corals, barnacles, algae, and other invertebrates (Tschanz and Pameyan 1970; Longwell et al. 1965). Horse and other vertebrate fossils may also be present.

Mammoth and bison fossils have been found on the Refuge and have been dated to approximately the Pleistocene era (Hallman 1998). Fusulinid fossils have also been found in the Arrow Canyon and Las Vegas Ranges on the Refuge (Langenheim et al. 1977). These fossils are indicator fossils because of their abundance. They have formed entire limestone formations in some areas and date to the Mississippian Period. Brachiopod fossils have also been found in the Wamp Spring area of the Las Vegas Range (Mills and Langenheim 1987).

### *Soils*

Soil mapping and classification has not been completed for the Desert NWR. However, STATSGO data are available from the NRCS (2003a). General soil characteristics are described below for each major vegetative community (Service 1994a).

Soils are generally silty loam within the saltbush community. Soils within the creosote bush community are commonly sandy loams developed from alluvial deposits. In many places there is an overlapping of desert pavement or cobblestone. Soils common to the blackbrush community have developed from the older alluvium deposited on the upper slopes and the rocky soils of the lower



mountains. This desert soil is slightly darker and contains more organic material than the soil in the creosote bush community.

Soils associated with the pinyon-juniper community tend to be deep sandy loams with some development of distinct soil horizons. Soils in the fir-pine community are higher in organic content than those in the pinyon-juniper community. There is a well-developed soil horizon, and the surface is commonly covered by conifer needles and other ground litter. Soils are shallow and fragile in the bristlecone pine community, which is restricted to steep slopes and ridges at the highest elevations of the Sheep Range.

### *Water Resources*

#### Surface Water

Surface water on Desert NWR is comprised primarily of direct runoff from precipitation, with the exception of Corn Creek Springs and seeps and springs at higher elevations. Precipitation flows into playa lakes that have no external drainage, including Frenchman Flat, Papoose Lake, Desert Lake, and Dog Bone Lake. Like the springs at Ash Meadows NWR, Corn Creek Springs is a perennial water source that contains discharge from a regional carbonate flow system. The high elevation seeps and springs collect water from precipitation and runoff and provide a small, but important, source of surface water for wildlife. Other surface waters that the Service has rights to include Sand, Tim, Indian Spring Canyon, and Quartz springs within the NTTR overlay.

A variety of artificial rainwater catchments have also been built on Desert NWR to expand the quantity and distribution of water for wildlife. There are currently at least 27 functional catchments in scattered locations (Service 1994a). Artificial catchments of two types are used on Desert NWR. Guzzlers use an impermeable surface of sheet metal, fiberglass, or polyethylene to collect rainwater. Slickrock developments use a small concrete dam to collect rainwater/runoff from a smooth, up-canyon rock surface. Water collected by both types is piped to one or more enclosed tanks with storage capacities from 1,000 to 6,600 gallons. Water from the tanks is piped to float-regulated troughs for wildlife use. There are also two natural water catchments, known as tinajas, which are of value to desert bighorn sheep and other wildlife.

#### Groundwater

Corn Creek Springs spring flow is typical of regional groundwater because the springs are relatively high yielding, have warmer temperatures, and do not display seasonal variability. Spring flow is suspected to derive largely from precipitation falling in the Sheep Range on the eastern edge of the Refuge that is forced to the surface through faults (Thomas et al. 1996). Compared to the Ash Meadows NWR, Corn Creek Springs are relatively small, with an annual discharge of about 200 afy. Groundwater information is sparse for the Refuge, and only general inferences about groundwater flow paths in carbonate and alluvial aquifers can be made.

In addition to Corn Creek Springs, there are 35 other known springs on the Refuge, many of which are shown in Figure 4.3-1 (Service 1994a). Instead of being fed by the deep carbonate aquifer system (such as Corn Creek Springs), these springs are local springs that receive water from precipitation. Twenty-nine of the springs are typical small mountain springs with flows derived from nearby areas of higher altitude.

Local springs typically have small, variable flow rates ranging from several gallons per minute to only a few gallons per hour. Discharges are seasonably variable, with highest flows occurring during or immediately after spring runoff and storm events and then diminishing or ceasing in late summer or early fall. Discharge from the springs usually travels only a short distance because much of the flow is lost to evapotranspiration.

Water catchments with float-regulated troughs, or drinkers, have been strategically located and constructed across the Refuge. Several thousand gallons of water can be stored in large reservoirs at these mountainous sites where precipitation is seasonally or severely reduced during dry conditions. Thirty springs have been improved, and 26 water troughs have been constructed and maintained.

Though derived from local precipitation, Coyote Spring, on the east side of the Sheep Mountains, is also reported to be relatively high yielding. Recharge from the Sheep Mountains flows eastward, discharging from an alluvial, water-bearing zone in the bluffs on the west side of the White River channel.

A few groundwater monitoring wells exist on the Refuge in the Corn Creek Springs area and on the east side of the Sheep Mountains, but not all have data collected from them. The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) and Las Vegas Valley Water District (LVVWD) have proposed to install new wells and use existing wells to monitor groundwater on the Refuge.

### Water Quality

With the exception of Corn Creek Springs, little is known about the groundwater quality in the majority of springs on Desert NWR. Water from Corn Creek Springs is quite similar to that from springs at Ash Meadows NWR with respect to dissolved solids (418 mg/L). In contrast, water sampled from other springs is of poorer quality, with concentrations of dissolved solids as high as 3,700 mg/L (Thomas et al. 1996).

### Water Use

Primary water use on Desert NWR is by wildlife from springs and catchments, with some domestic water use at Corn Creek Field Station. Groundwater pumping occurs in the Las Vegas Valley for domestic uses, and about 58,000 acre-feet of water were pumped in 2001 (NDWR 2001).

### Water Rights

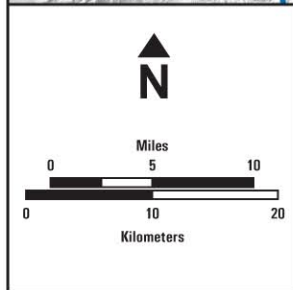
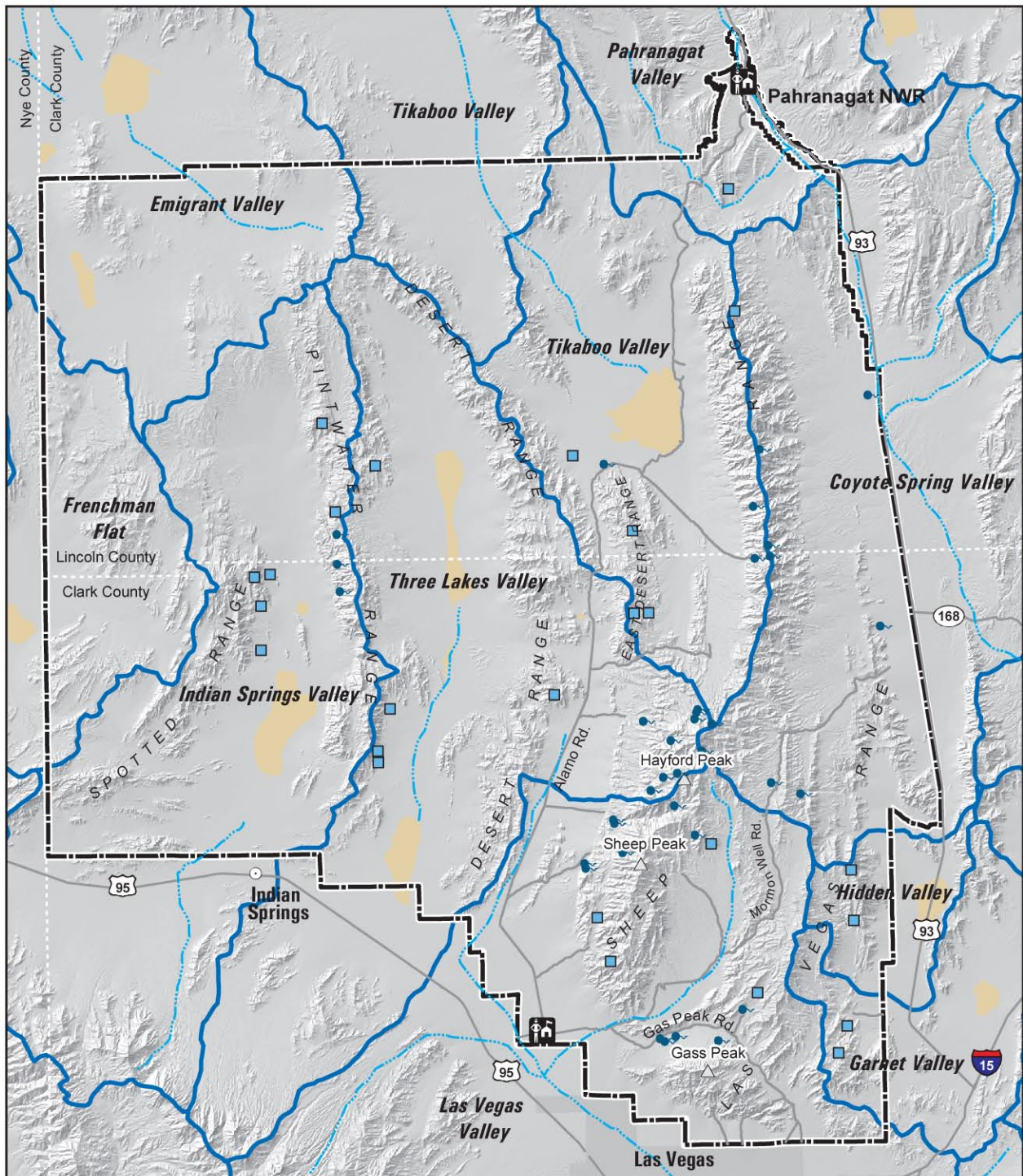
Water rights within the main undeveloped hydrographic basins that comprise Desert NWR total approximately 22,000 afy. About 1,300 afy of groundwater rights are held within 6 miles of Corn Creek Springs, primarily by the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe. The SNWA was recently granted water rights in Three Lakes and Tikaboo Valleys.

According to records from the NDWR (2003), the Service has filed for 34 water rights on Desert NWR (32 rights for spring flow, two rights for wells). Most of these rights are either vested or federal reserved rights. The remaining water rights include a vested water right of 71.5 acre-feet at Corn Creek Springs. Fourteen rights were documented in the Las Vegas Artesian Basin Decree (December 23, 1999 Findings of Fact). Federal reserved rights are not quantified, but generally allow the use of enough water to allow the reserved lands to fulfill their planned use.

### *Hazardous Materials*

The Desert NWR is located in the South Range of the NTTR. Solid and hazardous wastes are generated on the South Range. Trash disposal areas, exploded ordnance disposal sites, practice and live ordnance ranges, and electronic countermeasures sites are typical examples. In addition, depleted uranium from munitions testing; residues from bomb testing, spills, and aircraft crashes; and radiation testing have also presented environmental concerns on the Desert NWR. Site and facility assessments conducted by the USAF on the NTTR overlay of the Refuge concluded that buried solid waste does not have the potential to cause adverse environmental effects, and the use of depleted uranium rounds on one target complex of the NTTR does not appear to pose a hazard to public health or create an environmental hazard (BLM 2001).

The USAF implements measures to contain hazardous materials and prevent environmental impacts. Hazardous wastes are stored on designated sites for up to 90 days prior to being picked up by a contractor and transported to appropriate off-site disposal facilities. The waste materials are typically stored in drums or other containers that are sealed, labeled, and placed on spill containment pallets or wooden pallets and covered with a tarp or hard Apoly shell. At hazardous waste accumulation points, containers are housed within locked and ventilated hazardous waste containment buildings or within other appropriate facilities. The wastes are isolated from the ground with asphalt, concrete, or bermed concrete surfaces. The accumulation site locations are fenced. Underground storage tanks on the NTTR are removed or replaced when they are found to be leaking (BLM 2001).



- Spring
- Catchment
- Intermittent Stream/Wash
- Approved Refuge Boundary
- Dry Lake
- Hydrologic Basin
- i Visitor Contact Station

**Figure 4.3-1**  
**Hydrology**  
**Desert NWR**

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### *Fire History and Management*

Desert NWR's fire history generally revolves around naturally ignited fires occurring at higher elevations of the Refuge. Generally, most natural ignitions occur on the Refuge from June to October (Service 2004c). In lower-elevation portions of the Refuge, the fuels are not continuous and fire size is limited. In higher elevations, lightning-caused fire likely played a key role in maintaining an open stand structure. The fire frequency of pinyon-juniper woodlands varies with the abundance of fine fuels, but they generally burn every 50 to 100 years when fuels are sparse. It is unknown what role Native Americans had in fire ignitions.

Fire exclusion probably began with the establishment of the Corn Creek Ranch in the early 1900s (Service 2004c). At present, the burning season (including human-caused ignitions) is primarily April through September. Current fire history shows an average of three fires per year for a total of 10 acres. These data are not accurate due to remoteness and lack of observed fire activity. Most fires are caused by lightning and occur during the monsoonal season, usually from July through September.

Fire occurrence on the Refuge has a higher incidence than what is recorded because of the remoteness of the area and difficulties with detection. Numbers of detected fires per year vary from zero to usually fewer than 10. Most fires occur on the Sheep Range as a result of lightning. The largest fire in the pinyon-juniper habitat from records dating back to 1946 was 100 acres. Fires in the low desert shrub fuel type have burned in excess of 1,000 acres, e.g., the Pinenut Fire of 1994. More recent fires have burned even larger areas of the Refuge. In most instances, fires are extinguished by rain or lack of adjacent fuels rather than suppression efforts.

There is no recorded recent prescribed fire history on the Refuge.

### *Air Quality*

Currently, ambient air quality is not measured at Desert NWR, and the nearest major sources of emissions are in the Las Vegas area. It is expected that low ambient concentrations of criteria pollutants would occur in most of this area. The nearest air quality sampling station is located less than 5 miles south of the Desert NWR boundary at Bemis Road and Craig Road. This station is located in an area where new construction is occurring and measurements of concentrations are likely higher than in non-construction areas. Although these concentrations may be representative of the southern boundary of the Desert NWR, the concentrations are expected to be significantly lower as one moves further north of the developed areas (CCDAQM 2003b).

The regional air quality section (Section 4.1.1) provides additional information on air quality protection and regulatory measures in Clark County.

## 4.3.2 Biological Resources

### *Vegetation*

#### Habitat Types

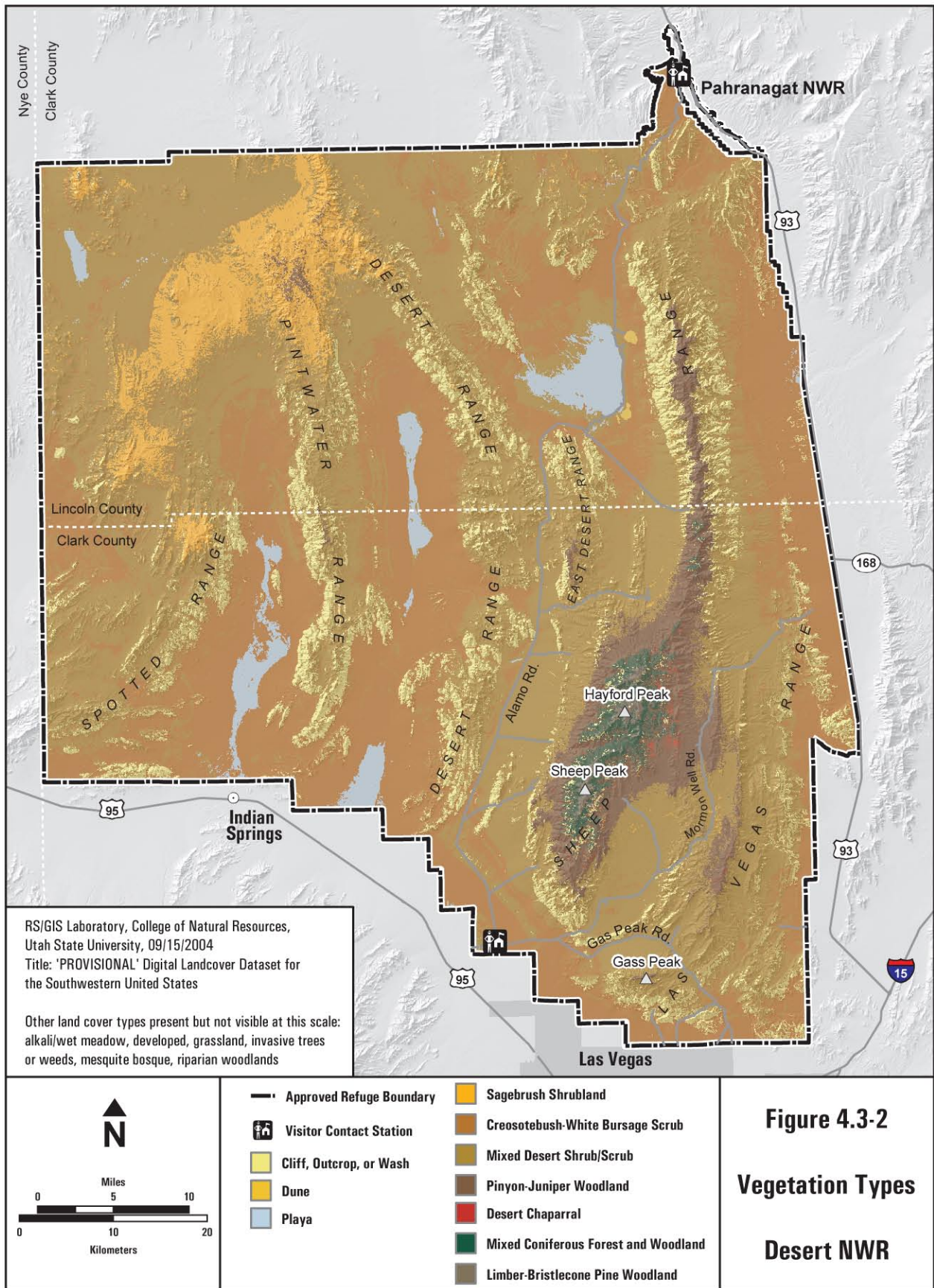
Desert NWR is located in a transition zone between the Mojave and Great Basin Deserts and contains diverse flora and fauna found over a wide elevation range that are representative of both deserts (Figure 4.3-2). The Refuge contains more than one-third of the 75 different ecological systems mapped in Nevada (USGS 2004). The predominant communities are desert shrubland and montane (Ackerman 2003). Corn Creek consists of a small amount of riparian, wetland, and aquatic habitats. Ackerman (2003) identified 702 plant species in 80 families within the Desert NWR. Of the species identified, 52 are introduced or nonnative species. Most of the introduced species (31 species) occur in the Corn Creek Field Station and vicinity. Ackerman also discovered three plants endemic to the Desert NWR: Ackerman milkvetch (*Astragalus ackermanii*), remote rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus eremobius*), and pygmy poreleaf (*Porophyllum pygmaeum*). A description of each habitat type is provided in the following paragraphs.

Corn Creek Field Station contains the main aquatic habitat on the Desert NWR. Corn Creek Springs are part of the field station and consist of three main springs. Water from the springs flows down a common channel toward the Desert NWR's main reservoir, which is about 400 feet west of the springs. Water is pumped from the reservoir to irrigate the pasture. Dense vegetation can be found along the length of the channel and surrounding the springs and pond. This vegetation consists of riparian woodlands and shrublands and mesquite bosques. The riparian woodlands consist of nonnative deciduous trees, such as black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) and Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*). Native species include honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) and willow (*Salix* spp.) and ash species. Common reed (*Phragmites australis*) and southern cattail occur in and around the springs and ponds. Numerous migratory birds and other wildlife use habitat at the Corn Creek Field Station.

At low elevations on the Refuge, grassland, steppe, and shrubland habitats dominate. The grassland habitat contains primarily perennial bunch grasses and drought-tolerant plants and occurs on dry plains and mesas. This habitat is dominated by invasive species, such as brome (*Bromus* spp.) and Mediterranean grass (*Schismus barbatus*). The steppe habitat occurs on alluvial fans and flats and consists mostly of graminoids, or grass-like plants, with an open shrub layer.

The salt desert scrub habitat consists of various saltbush species found in saline basins on valley floors and around playas. Areas with low nocturnal temperatures and very high soil salinity are common in these basins and support most of this habitat. This habitat, including playas, encompasses about 200,000 acres on the Desert NWR (Service 1977). The typical elevation range for the salt desert scrub habitat in the Mojave Desert is 3,000 to 5,600 feet, but on the Desert NWR, it is found mostly at lower elevations (DOE 2002). At the higher elevations, salt desert scrub often mixes with the creosote–white bursage alliance.







The creosote–white bursage scrub alliance occurs in broad valleys, lower bajadas, plains and low hills. This alliance is characterized by widely spaced shrubs and succulents averaging 2 to 8 feet tall, with 2 to 50 percent cover (Holland 1986; Rowlands et al. 1982; Vasek and Barbour 1977). Creosote bush and white bursage are the codominants in this habitat. Mojave yucca and Joshua tree comprise the overstory. The herbaceous layer is sparse, but seasonally abundant after rain events. The creosote–white bursage scrub alliance occupies about 600,000 acres of the Desert NWR (Service 1977).

Creosote–white bursage scrub transitions to mixed desert scrub at elevations near 4,000 feet above msl. The replacement of white bursage by blackbrush (*Coleogyne ramossissima*) typically demarcates this boundary (Holland 1986; Rowlands et al. 1982; Vasek and Barbour 1977). This habitat covers about 530,000 acres of the Desert NWR (Service 1977). Plant species found in this habitat are very similar to those in the creosote–white bursage alliance, but they typically consist of intricately branched shrubs that range from 1.5 to 3 feet tall (Holland 1986). This community often integrates with mixed sagebrush shrublands, Joshua tree woodlands, and pinyon-juniper woodlands. Mojave yucca and Joshua tree are very common throughout the mixed desert scrub habitat (BLM 1990).

Mixed sagebrush and big sagebrush shrublands occur above the mixed desert scrub habitat. Big sagebrush shrublands occur on broad basins between mountain ranges, on plains, and on foothills. The dominant species is big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*). Juniper species (*Juniperus* spp.), other sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.), small shrubs and herbaceous vegetation are also found with big sagebrush. The mixed sagebrush shrublands occur on dry flats, plains, alluvial fans, rolling hills, rocky slopes, saddles, and ridges. They are typically exposed to wind and consist primarily of shrubs with a sparse herbaceous layer of bunch grasses. The dominant species include black sagebrush (*Artemisia nova*) and little sagebrush (*A. arbuscula*).

Chaparral habitats occur on sideslopes as a transition zone from low elevations to woodlands. They consist primarily of evergreen shrubs, such as bearberry (*Arctostaphylos* spp.) and scrub oak (*Quercus* spp.).

At higher elevations, the Desert NWR consists of woodlands, coniferous forests, and alpine habitats. The pinyon-juniper woodland occurs on warm, dry sites on slopes, mesas, plateaus, and ridges, typically at elevations between 6,000 and 7,500 feet (Ackerman 2003). The dominant species on the Desert NWR are Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) and single-leaf pinyon pine (*Pinus monophylla*).

The understory consists mainly of shrubs, such as sagebrush species. Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and white fir (*Abies concolor*) are common at the upper extremes of the habitat. The pinyon-juniper woodland covers about 183,000 acres of the Desert NWR (Service 1977).

Mixed coniferous forest and woodlands occur above the pinyon-juniper habitat and exist on all aspects of the mountain ranges. Temperature, moisture, and successional stages define the composition and structure of this habitat. A Ponderosa pine–white fir alliance covers about 70,000 acres of the Desert NWR (Service 1977) and occurs between elevations of 7,500 and 9,000 feet above msl (Ackerman 2003). Ponderosa pine exists mostly in canyon bottoms and on protected slopes. White fir is more abundant at higher elevations.

The limber–bristlecone pine (*Pinus flexilis*–*P. longaeva*) alliance occurs at high elevations on ridges and rocky slopes above the coniferous forests and woodlands. Harsh conditions due to the short growing season limit plant growth, and the understory contains a sparse shrub and herbaceous layer. The alliance covers about 3,000 acres of the Desert NWR (Service 1977) and is generally restricted to the Sheep Range at elevations between 7,600 ft and 9,000 feet (Ackerman 2003).

Alpine wet meadows can be found at high elevations, primarily on the Sheep Range. The wet meadow is associated with snowmelt and occurs in flat areas, on gentle slopes, or in valleys around open water. Dominant species are graminoids, but varieties of black sagebrush may also occur at high elevations on the Refuge. It covers approximately 200 acres of the Desert NWR (Service 1977) on the south and west facing slopes of Hayford and Sheep Peaks above 9,500 feet (Ackerman 2003).

Other cover types on the Refuge include playas, cliffs and outcrops, desert pavement, dunes, and volcanic rockland. These covers are mostly unvegetated (less than 10 percent). Playas, or dry lakes, are subject to intermittent flooding and occur adjacent to the salt desert scrub habitat. Salt-tolerant species often form vegetation rings around the playas. Dry lakes include Papoose Lake, Desert Lake, Three Lake, and two other unnamed lakes. Desert pavement is found in flat basins and is coated with a “desert varnish.” Desert pavement is typically less than 2 percent vegetated with forbs.

Cliffs and rock outcrops occur on steep slopes, ridges, and cliffs in the mountain ranges at elevations between 5,000 feet and 9,000 feet. Vegetation found on cliffs and outcrops includes succulents, holly-leaved goldenbush (*Hazardia bricellioides*), desert snowberry (*Symphoricarpos longiflorus*), and mountain-mahogany (*Cercocarpus* spp.).

Dunes and sandy areas are typically a result of spring mounds and support woody species, such as woolly bursage (*Ambrosia eriocentra*), sticky-leaved rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus* ssp. *viscidiflorus*), Kearny buckwheat (*Eriogonum nummularie*), and Thurber penstemon (*Penstemon thurberi*), and annual species, which are often more productive in years with adequate moisture (Ackerman 2003).

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Desert washes also occur on the Desert NWR. These are intermittently flooded washes or arroyos associated with rapid sheet and gully flow. They often consist of linear or braided strips within desert scrub or shrublands and grassland habitats.

### Sensitive Plant Species

There are no federally listed plant species found on the Desert NWR. However, 21 sensitive species may occur on the Desert NWR (Appendix H). Halfring milkvetch (*Astragalus mohavensis* var. *hemigyus*) and Las Vegas bearpoppy (*Arctomecon californica*) are listed as critically endangered by the State of Nevada. Appendix H provides a list of sensitive plant species that may occur.

### Noxious Weeds

Desert NWR does not currently have an IPM Plan to manage the control of invasive species within its boundaries. Lincoln County and Clark County have treated some areas for the spread of tall whitetop (*Lepidium latifolium*) (Noxious Weed Action Committee 2001). On the Refuge, the Weed Sentry program surveys and treats noxious weeds near public roads and in areas of regular public use, and Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act funding provides a means to treat noxious and invasive weeds and restore sites with native vegetation.

Species common in Clark and Lincoln Counties are likely to occur on the Refuge. Appendix H provides a list of the noxious weeds that may occur or are known to occur at Desert NWR. Common invasive species known to occur on the NTTR are tumbleweed or Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), red brome (*Bromus rubens*), and cheat-grass (*Bromus tectorum*). Red brome has adapted to desert climates, but cheat-grass is more prominent in cooler steppe environments (Air Warfare Center 1999).

### *Wildlife*

The Desert NWR is home to many species of wildlife that are supported by its wide variety of habitats over a large elevation range. The various habitats provide food and/or shelter for indigenous mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. Habitat quality varies widely between locations, as do species diversity and richness. Some species are restricted to a particular habitat type, while others may occur in different habitats.

Approximately 320 bird species, 53 mammal species, 35 reptile species, and four amphibian species have been identified in the different communities on the Desert NWR (See Appendix H for a list of species). The majority of wildlife species found on the Desert NWR are non-game species.

### Amphibians and Reptiles

Amphibians are not very common on the Desert NWR because they have a high water requirement for survival, and only the Corn Creek Springs and isolated mountain springs provide suitable habitat. In the Mojave Desert–Great Basin Region, only 24 amphibian species are

known to occur (Brussard and Dobkin 1996). The more common species, such as bullfrogs and toads, are more likely to occur on the Refuge.

Reptiles found on the Desert NWR include various species of lizards and snakes, the threatened desert tortoise, and the sensitive Gilbert's skink. Populations of some reptiles potentially occurring on the Desert NWR are threatened by pet collectors, who illegally remove these species from their environment to sell as pets to the public (Brussard and Dobkin 1996). Chuckwallas (*Sauromalus obesus*) are among the most popular reptiles collected. Desert tortoise, western banded gecko (*Coleonyx variegatus*), banded Gila monster (*Heloderma suspectum cinctum*), and other reptiles known to occur in southern Nevada are also threatened with collection (NDOW 2005a).

### Birds

More than 300 different species of birds have been recorded on the Refuge. Many of these are migratory songbirds and waterfowl that are attracted to the wetland and riparian habitats at Corn Creek Field Station. Numerous raptors are also found on the Desert NWR and are most commonly viewed on the Refuge during the summer. Corn Creek is a desert oasis used by thousands of landbird migrants each year. The bald eagle (delisted on August 8, 2007) and peregrine falcon (delisted in 1999) occur on the Refuge, as well as several birds of special concern, including northern goshawk, ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl, and phainopepla.

The Sheep Range IBA provides important breeding habitat for flammulated owl, gray flycatcher, black-throated gray warbler, Grace's warbler, and other songbirds (National Audubon Society 2004). It also represents the northern limit of the Mexican whip-poor-will (McIvor 2005). Small seeps and springs provide much needed surface water for birds.

Because of the large variety of habitats present on the Refuge, a wide variety of bird species use the Refuge for breeding, foraging, resting, and during migration periods, including various high-priority management bird species (see Appendix H). Some of these species include eared grebe, western grebe, Franklin's gull, black tern, snowy egret, Bendire's thrasher (*Toxostoma bendirei*), white-throated swift, pinyon jay, Arizona Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, black-chinned sparrow (*Spizella atrogularis*), flammulated owl (*Otus flammeolus*), and western yellow-billed cuckoo (see Appendix H for additional species and the habitats they occur in on the Refuge).

Management of these birds and their habitats is considered a priority by the Nevada Working Group of Partners in Flight (1999) and the Great Basin Bird Observatory (2005). For example, bighorn sheep management would also consider pinyon jays and gray vireos because they use similar habitats. Pinyon jays require large, cone-bearing pinyon trees (75 years or older) in patches of at least 18 square kilometers (Balda and Bateman 1971) in mature pinyon-juniper woodlands or monotypic pinyon stands. Gray vireos require open,

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mature pinyon-juniper woodlands with shrubby understory on moderate, rocky slopes.

### Mammals

Bats are common on the Desert NWR, and six of the potentially occurring bat species are sensitive (BLM 2001). Bats are important to the Refuge because they help regulate insect and invertebrate populations, and some help pollinate plants. Most bats are commonly observed during evening hours. A study of bats at a desert spring (White Hot Spring) in southern Nevada revealed the presence of several species of bats throughout the year (O'Farrell and Bradley 1970). Western pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus hesperus*), California myotis (*Myotis californicus*), and pallid bat (*Antrozus pallidus*) were encountered year-round; the first two are the most active, even in winter months. Activity tends to peak during warmer periods of the day and year.

Many mammal species are found in the creosote bush scrub habitat. Rodents are very common and often make their homes at the bases of shrubs. The six mountain ranges of Desert NWR provide habitat for predatory mammals, desert bighorn sheep, and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*).

Desert bighorn sheep are a subspecies of the bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*). *O. canadensis* is a large, herbivorous ungulate that lives in open grasslands or shrub-steppe communities in mountains, foothills, or river canyons (Shackleton 1985). Figure 4.3-3 shows suitable habitat on the Refuge for the sheep. Escape terrain, such as cliffs and talus slopes, are a necessary habitat requirement for the bighorn sheep.

During winter months, as much as 86 percent of their time is spent near escape terrain. In southern Nevada, *O. canadensis nelsoni* lives at higher elevations and moves to lower elevations during the cold winter months (Air Warfare Center 1999). This vertical migration coincides with the increasing abundance of new growth and presence of snow at higher elevations. During spring and summer, new growth begins to appear and provides food for the bighorn sheep as they return to the higher elevations.

Desert bighorn sheep are adapted to survival in the desert by being able to withstand 10 days without water (Warrick and Krausman 1989). They will eat barrel cactus to satisfy their water requirements. The mating season for desert bighorns is in the fall and may encompass several months (Shackleton 1985). Lambs are born in early spring, usually March, and are weaned in four to six months. Females live with their young, and males live apart from both during most of the year.

Desert bighorn sheep use habitat within the Refuge along all of the major mountain ranges: Las Vegas, Sheep, East Desert, Desert, Pintwater, and Spotted (BLM 2001). They forage, breed, and raise young on barren cliffs along these mountain ranges. The Desert NWR is one of the largest intact blocks of habitat for the bighorn sheep in the southwestern United States. Water is a limiting resource, so 30 springs

and 26 “guzzlers,” or water troughs, have been improved to maintain a permanent water source.

Table 4.3-1 provides an estimate of the 2007 bighorn sheep populations in each of the mountain ranges on the Refuge and is based on the 2006 estimates obtained during NDOW surveys of mountain ranges throughout Nevada (NDOW 2007a). Figure 4.3-4 shows the bighorn sheep count trends, based on data collected by NDOW, for each of the subpopulations (mountain ranges) on the Refuge.

**Table 4.3-1. Desert Bighorn Sheep Population Estimates [2007]**

<i>Mountain Range</i>	<i>Sheep Count</i>
Las Vegas Range	140
Sheep Range	190
Desert Range	80
Pintwater Range	140
Spotted Range	90

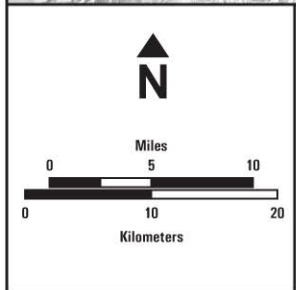
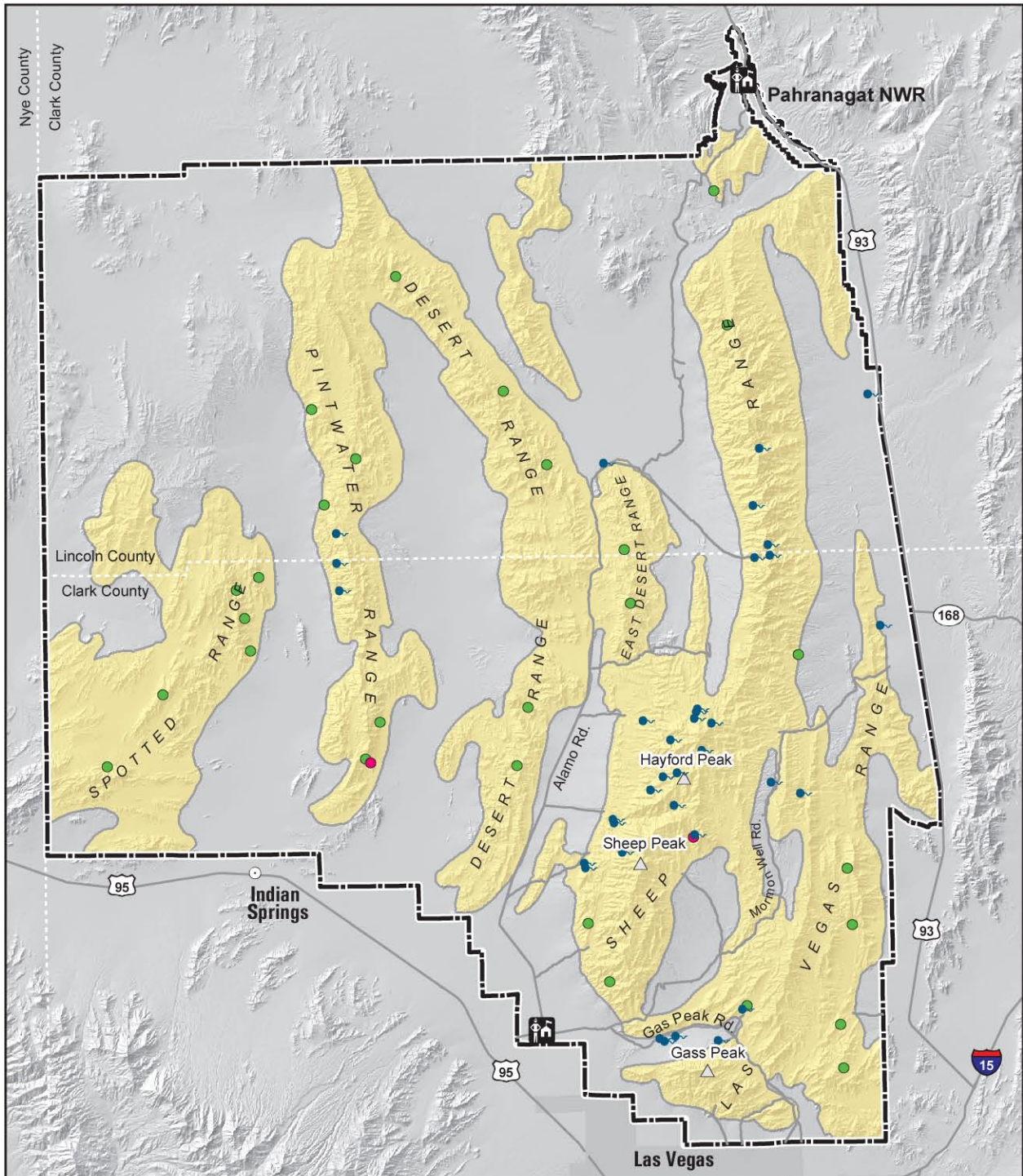
*Source: NDOW 2007a*

Bighorn sheep populations have declined since the 1980s, and the primary threats to their populations include disease, low lamb survival rates, and predation (NDOW 2005b, 2006; Appendix J). Population trends for bighorn sheep in the mountain ranges of the Desert NWR are provided in Figure 4.3-4 for the years 1974 to 2005. Data were not available for each year in all of the ranges; however, the general trend of population estimates shows the decline of sheep numbers since the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the Sheep Mountain Range.

Wild burros occasionally wander onto the Desert NWR, but they have not yet established a territory there. Wild horse and burro Herd Management Areas (HMAs) are located east and south of Desert NWR, but none have been designated on the Refuge. The closest one is located in the Spring Mountains along Wheeler Pass (BLM 2002). HMAs were created by the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act, and in Clark County they are managed by the Las Vegas BLM Field Office.

#### Aquatic Species

Springs are the primary water source on the Desert NWR. Desert NWR spring resources likely support an important and unique aquatic invertebrate (mollusk) diversity, especially spring snails. Nonnative fish species and a few species of amphibians are present primarily at Corn Creek. Introduced species include goldfish (*Carassius auratus*) and crayfish, which are the most common.

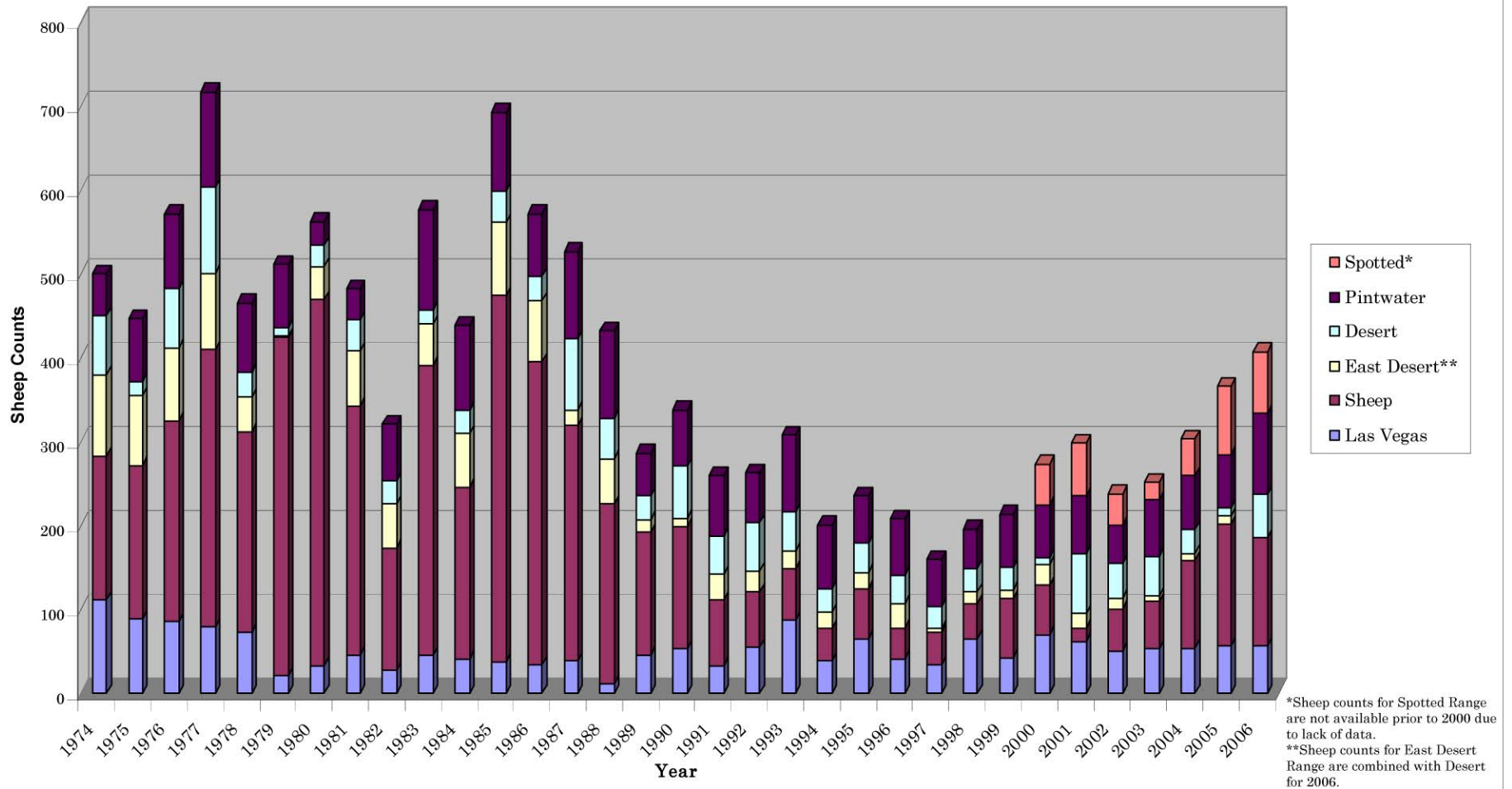


- Approved Refuge Boundary
- Visitor Contact Station
- Spring
- Man-made Water Catchment
- Natural Water Catchment
- Bighorn Sheep Habitat

**Figure 4.3-3**  
**Desert Bighorn**  
**Sheep Habitat**  
**Desert NWR**



### Desert Bighorn Sheep Counts by Mountain Range 1974-2006



**Figure 4.3-4. Desert Bighorn Sheep Counts by Mountain Range 1974-2006**

In the 1970s, Pahrump poolfish (*Empetrichthys latos*) were transplanted to three locations in Nevada, including Corn Creek Springs. At this time, the poolfish was near desiccation in its only known natural habitat at Manse Spring due to groundwater pumping. The species persisted in the ponds at Corn Creek until the late 1990s, when the population of poolfish was lost to illegally introduced nonnative crayfish. In June 2003, a refugium for the Pahrump poolfish was completed at Corn Creek, and the fish was reintroduced. This refugium is designed to provide a safer habitat for the fish, so that it can recover and become stable enough to be reintroduced into the wild. The poolfish refugium is an important recovery tool that will provide fish for introduction into the existing population in the ponds and outflow channels at Corn Creek. The poolfish population at Corn Creek is one of only three populations extant globally (Sjoberg 2006). The 2005 population estimate for the Pahrump poolfish was 180 individuals, with approximately 90 per tank at the refugium (Sprunger-Allworth 2006).

In addition to the fish at Corn Creek, the Corn Creek pyrg (*Pyrgulopsis fausta*) is an endemic snail present in the main outflow system at Corn Creek (Otis Bay 2003). Habitat modification and competition with crayfish are potential threats to the survival of the species.

### Sensitive Wildlife Species

Three federally listed wildlife species, one federal candidate species, and 34 sensitive species have the potential to occur on the Desert NWR (Appendix H). The desert tortoise is the only threatened species that is known to occur on the Refuge, and the Pahrump poolfish, an endangered species, occurs only in a refugium at Corn Creek. The desert tortoise and its habitat are threatened by trespass vehicle use along the southern boundary.

### **4.3.3 Cultural Resources**

#### *Introduction*

Approximately 47,885 acres (3.2 percent) of the Desert NWR has been investigated through archaeological reconnaissance surveys. Given the acreage of the Desert NWR, the total amount of archaeological reconnaissance conducted is small. Most archaeological work on the Desert NWR has been driven by demands of DOD undertakings.

#### *Prehistoric Archaeology*

There are approximately 450 recorded prehistoric sites on the Refuge; many of these are on lands administered by the USAF. These include sites from virtually all categories and time periods, including campsites, lithic scatters, rock shelters, rock art, quarries, special activity sites, and multi-component sites (Fergusson and DuBarton 2003). Many of these sites have not been evaluated for NRHP eligibility. Six prehistoric sites are eligible for NRHP listing, and more than 40 are located within the Sheep Mountain Archaeological District, listed on the NRHP in 1974. The large archaeological district encompasses approximately 617,788 acres. It was never intensively

surveyed, so the nomination was based on the presence of certain kinds of cultural resources known to occur within the area; however, many have not been field verified or recorded. Other kinds of sites found in the district include all sizes of lithic scatters resulting from seasonal campsites or specific task activities, rock shelters, rock art, and trails. Many other features that are tied to traditional Paiute stories and use areas are yet to be documented.

The Corn Creek Campsite National Register Archaeological District located at the field station was accepted to the NRHP in 1975 and includes roughly 800 acres of significant prehistoric and historic deposits and features. Investigations have revealed that this location has been inhabited and manipulated by humans for more than 5,000 years either on a permanent or continued reuse basis. It is an extremely important location for the Southern Paiute. Its archaeological importance is enhanced due to the discovery of evidence of a pit house village dating to the Far Western Puebloan Basketmaker Period of A.D. 530–710 (Roberts and Ahlstrom 2003) in the greater Las Vegas Valley.

### *Historic Archaeology*

Historical sites on the Refuge include sites primarily associated with historic trails, bootlegging, livestock grazing, ranching, mining, logging, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and early Refuge management of the Corn Creek Field Station. The Conservation Corps men stationed at Corn Creek from 1939 to 1941 made grazing improvements, such as water troughs, impoundments, and corrals as well as improving or constructing most of the roads on the Desert NWR. The Mormon Well Road route roughly follows an earlier American Indian trail that passed between Moapa and Las Vegas and extended further west. It was followed by early explorers and Mormon settlers. The Southern Paiute currently call this route the “Indian Honeymoon Trail,” as it was commonly used for men obtaining wives from adjacent groups (Stoffle et al. 2002). They considered this route an area important for religious and spiritual activities as well as for hunting and gathering.

The historic aspects of the Corn Creek Campsite National Register Archaeological District are primarily associated with human activities from the turn of the 19th century. These include trails and roads stopping at the springs and connecting the major valleys and springs, bootlegging, ranching, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. It also includes the historic aspects of the early Service management of the Desert NWR that was established in 1936.

## **4.3.4 Public Access and Recreation**

### *Public Access*

The eastern half of the Desert NWR is open to the public year-round, but the western half is closed to the public because access to the area is restricted by the USAF. The NTTR lands were closed to public access under PL 106–65, Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1999. The basis of access restriction is three-fold: to protect the public from injury due to

ordnance hazards, to ensure national security is not compromised, and to ensure that military programs can be conducted without disruption.

Four access roads lead to the eastern portion of the Desert NWR (Figure 1.6-2). Principal public access is from U.S. Highway 95 at a point approximately 23 miles northwest of Las Vegas. A sign on the east side of the highway marks the 4-mile gravel road to Corn Creek Field Station. From the Field Station, access to the eastern portion of the Desert NWR is via either Mormon Well Road or Alamo Road. Alamo Road travels from Corn Creek Field Station to Pahrangat NWR, while Mormon Well Road leads to U.S. Highway 93, just south of its intersection with SR 168. A portion of Alamo Road (at the dry Desert Lake) is currently off-limits to the public due to unsafe driving conditions. Access to the south end of the Refuge is via Gass Peak Road. These roads, as well as several smaller roads into the Sheep Range, are in primitive condition, and four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended. All vehicles must remain on the designated roads, and access to remote areas is only by foot or on horseback.

The Desert NWR receives visitors from the Las Vegas area as well as numerous other states and foreign countries. Visitation information is gathered in two ways at Desert NWR: a traffic counter at the entrance and a sign-in sheet at Corn Creek Field Station. Between 1998 and 2000, visitation to the Desert NWR increased from 43,086 to 47,412 (CH2M Hill 2002). From October 2000 to September 2003, records maintained by the Service show that visitation ranged from approximately 60,000 to 68,000 per year (Le'au Courtright 2006).

### *Recreation*

Corn Creek Field Station serves as the Desert NWR's visitor contact station and headquarters (Figure 4.3-5). The visitor contact station is open for a few hours Friday through Sunday and holidays, from Labor Day through Memorial Day. Several facilities are available to the public at the Field Station, including an interpretive kiosk, restrooms, shade structures, potable water, and a horse barn. An interpretive trail with signs provides access to visitors for wildlife viewing at Corn Creek Springs. Public use near springs and other sources of water is closely regulated to avoid conflicts with wildlife.

The Desert NWR offers the opportunity for a unique and solitary desert experience. Primitive camping, picnicking, backpacking, and hiking are some of the non-wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities available on the Desert NWR (Service 2006a). Wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities include wildlife observation, photography, and hunting. Fishing is not allowed on the Desert NWR, and limited environmental education and interpretation opportunities are available.

Kiosks, nature trails, and the visitor contact station are the most important facilities available to visitors on the Desert NWR. In FY 2002, 1,800 visitors stopped at the visitor contact station, more than 50,000 visitors viewed the kiosk, and more than 45,000 hiked along nature trails (Service 2006a).

### Wildlife-Dependent Recreation

Wildlife observation and photography opportunities are available throughout the Desert NWR. Corn Creek Field Station provides the best opportunity to view the widest variety of birds. A bird list is available at the Desert NWR headquarters and online.

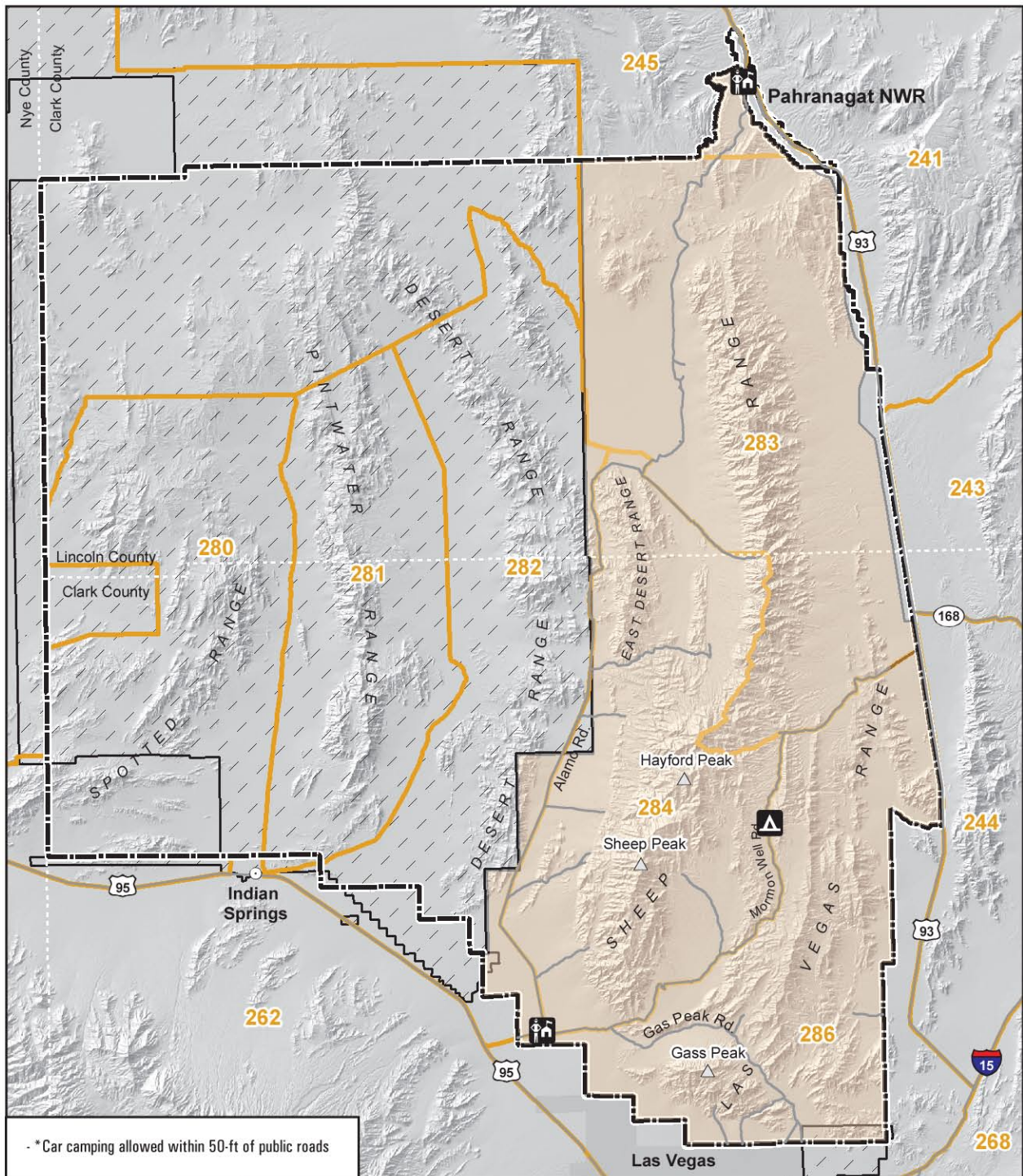
Environmental education opportunities are available on and off the Desert NWR. No staff-guided tours are conducted on the Desert NWR. During FY 2002, however, 2,160 non-staff-conducted tours occurred. Off-site educational outreach opportunities include group presentations and exhibits. Desert NWR had an estimated 700 visits to environmental education exhibits and 210 visits to interpretation exhibits during FY 2005. Other special events to promote the Desert NWR included news releases, radio or television spots, and other special events. Educational outreach and environmental education for the Desert NWR have increased in the past three years as a result of increased interest from the public (Service 2006a).

An active volunteer program provides additional opportunities for the public to enjoy the Desert NWR, and students may be able to earn college credits through internships. The Service works with the other public land agencies in southern Nevada to coordinate volunteer work through the Southern Nevada Interagency Volunteer Program—Get Outdoors Nevada. Volunteers help staff the visitor contact station.

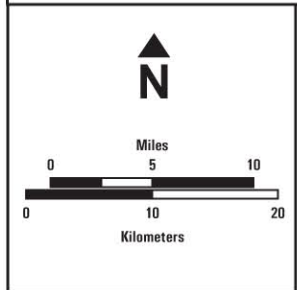
The Desert Complex hosts events for National Wildlife Refuge Week and Migratory Bird Day. In FY 2004, the staff hosted events for National Wildlife Refuge Week. Other attended events include the Clark County Fair, Clark County ECOJAM (Earth Day event), Gran Fiesta (September 2002), and Boy Scout Day Camp (May 2003). Refuge staff or Desert Complex staff also attended the Governor's Conference on Tourism, Dia de los Niños, Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Preview, depending on staff availability and funding.

The hunt program on Desert NWR is administered by NDOW. The majority of the Refuge is contained within six hunt units (280, 281, 282, 283, 284, and 286). Permits for hunting bighorn sheep are issued on an annual basis depending on the size of the herd; when sheep counts are low, no permits are issued. NDOW is responsible for determining how many permits can be issued. Hunting is permitted for a 15-day period on the co-managed lands in hunt units 280, 281, and 282. During the 14-year period between 1992 and 2005, a total of 182 tags were issued for these units with an average of 13 per year. The average success over the same period was 61 percent. The tags issued on the Desert NWR hunt units represent about 10 percent of the 128 issued on average statewide each year.





- \* Car camping allowed within 50-ft of public roads



- Approved Refuge Boundary
- Campground
- Visitor Contact Station/  
Interpretive Trails
- Open Back Country\*
- Hunt Unit
- Nevada Test and  
Training Range

**Figure 4.3-5**  
**Visitor Services**  
**Desert NWR**

May 27, 2008  
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Figure 4.3-5-desert\_visitor\_services.mxd

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### Non-Wildlife-Dependent Recreation

Camping, backpacking, hiking, and horseback riding are permitted with certain restrictions year-round (Service 2006a). Picnicking is permitted along designated roads and in picnic areas. The primitive Desert Pass Campground also contains picnic tables, fire pits, and pit toilets for public use. Car camping is allowed within 50 feet of existing roads, and back country camping is allowed throughout the backcountry (outside of the NTTR). Horseback riding is allowed east of Alamo Road (outside the NTTR) in support of other uses.

Illegal off-highway recreational vehicle use along the southern, northern, and eastern boundaries has become a concern because it destroys habitat and disturbs wildlife. The proximity of the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas increases this threat along the southern boundary.

An increasing nonpermitted activity is geocaching. This activity is similar to treasure hunting and involves use of geographic positioning systems (GPS) to locate specific points on the Desert NWR. At these points, people leave either coordinates for a new point or a small treasure, and the treasure hunter replaces the treasure with something new at the end of the search. Fossil hunting and pine nut gathering for Native American use also occur on the Desert NWR.

### **4.3.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

#### *Refuge Management Economics*

The current Refuge staff consists of six permanent full-time employees, and one vacant part-time seasonal employee position. The refuge operations budget for FY 2005 was \$210,000. The maintenance budget for the Refuge was \$58,175.50.

NWRs contribute funds to local counties through revenue-sharing programs that are intended to cover costs for either lands purchased in fee title or lands reserved from the public domain. For FY 2003, Clark County received payment in the amount of \$19,095 from the federal government under this revenue-sharing program.

#### *Environmental Justice*

The Desert NWR is located in closest proximity to Las Vegas, Indian Springs, and North Las Vegas. These cities are predominantly white (70–88 percent). Las Vegas and North Las Vegas have median family incomes that are comparable to the state and county estimates at around \$50,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000); however, Indian Springs is below the state and county average at close to \$40,000. The Las Vegas Paiute Tribe also has approximately 3,850 acres of tribal land south of the Refuge on U.S. Highway 95 in Clark County. The population of the tribe reported on tribal lands in 2000 was 108 people, which represents a minority (Native American) population. The median family income for the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe was generally above \$57,000 in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).



### *Land Use*

Desert NWR is bounded on the north and west by the NTTR, a complex assemblage of lands managed or regulated by several federal, state, and local agencies, including the DOD and the DOE (Figure 1.7-2). It also shares portions of its northern, eastern, southern, and western borders with BLM-managed lands that are interspersed with county- and city-managed lands as well as private property. Adjacent land uses include military activities on the NTTR overlay, encroaching (within the 15-year life of the CCP) commercial and residential development along the southern and eastern boundaries, industrial development (mineral extraction/processing and power development/transmission) along the southeast border at Apex, and resort/tourism facilities development at the Las Vegas Paiute Indian Reservation along the southwestern boundary.

The NTTR overlay consists of 846,000 acres on the western portion of the Refuge and has been used since 1940 for testing armament and for training pilots in aerial warfare. PL 106-65 authorizes the USAF to use the NTTR (A) as an armament and high hazard testing area; (B) for training for aerial gunnery, rocketry, electronic warfare, and tactical maneuvering and air support; (C) for equipment and tactics development and testing; and (D) for other defense-related purposes consistent with the purposes specified above. Use of this area is subject to the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of the Air Force. The first MOU was signed in 1949. Under the MOU, the Service is the federal agency with primary responsibility for the welfare and management of the land. The USAF controls access to the areas affected by the MOU, including the airspace. In 1986 and 1999, certain military lands were withdrawn to be co-managed by the Service and USAF.

In 1974, approximately 1,323,000 acres of land within Desert NWR were proposed for wilderness designation under the Wilderness Act of 1964. Since that time, those portions of the Refuge have been managed as de facto wilderness (Service 2006a; see Appendix I). Also, five Research Natural Areas (RNAs) have been designated within the Desert NWR, but these are not currently managed as RNAs due to lack of staff and funding. The purpose of an RNA is to provide baseline information to compare with actively managed areas, such as areas burned for habitat enhancement. Management actions are not typically implemented in RNAs, but surveys of resources are conducted and compared with surveys of managed areas to document long-term trends and effects on the resources. The RNAs on the Desert NWR include Basin, Hayford Peak, Deadhorse, Pinyon-Juniper, and Papoose Lake.

As part of the Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002 (PL 107-282), approximately 26,433 acres of BLM-managed land have been transferred to the Service for inclusion in the Desert NWR. The Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2004 (House of Representatives 4593) also modified the lands managed by the Service. As part of the act, approximately 8,382 acres of land managed by the Service were transferred to the BLM. This land is located along the west side of U.S.

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Highway 93 and forms the eastern boundary of the Desert NWR. In addition, 8,503 acres of land managed by the BLM were transferred to the Service to be managed as part of the Desert NWR. This land is located at the northern boundary of the Desert NWR and encompasses a large block of land that also abuts the western boundary of Pahranaagat NWR.

### *Aesthetics*

The Desert NWR contains six major mountain ranges, the highest rising to nearly 10,000 feet above msl, and multiple intervening valleys, with the lowest elevation on the Refuge at 2,500 feet above msl. The Refuge is populated with a diversity of wildlife and plants; bighorn sheep and numerous other wildlife species are found throughout. Plant communities and wildlife vary with altitude and climate. Most of the plant species can be seen while driving the Mormon Well Road. The desert shrub community occurs in the hottest, lowest elevations of Desert NWR. Above the valley floor, Mojave yucca and cactus become abundant. At the upper edge of the desert shrub communities, blackbrush and Joshua tree become dominant. Beyond the blackbrush community, forests become predominant.

From many areas within the Refuge, the background views are of the many mountain ranges that dominate the area, along with the valleys. The diversity of the ranges in terms of elevation and vegetation provides a character that is diverse and largely unobstructed. On the southern portion of the Refuge, lights from the Las Vegas area may obstruct viewing of the night sky.

## **4.4 Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge**

### **4.4.1 Physical Environment**

#### *Physiography*

Moapa Valley NWR occupies approximately 116 acres in the upper Moapa Valley, upstream from the town of Moapa (Figure 1.7-3). The Refuge is bordered to the north and east by the Muddy River, to the south by the Dry Lake Valley, and to the west by the foothills of the Arrow Canyon Range. Several springs are located along the eastern half of the Refuge, and several east-flowing ephemeral washes bisect the Refuge. The ephemeral washes convey runoff from the Arrow Canyon Range to the Muddy River.

Moapa Valley NWR is located on the Muddy River floodplain at elevations ranging from approximately 1,700 feet above msl near the eastern boundary to approximately 1,800 feet above msl to the western boundary (USGS 1983). The Muddy River drains from the northwest to southeast and receives its flows from the Muddy River springs, which discharge perennially (NRCS 1980).

### *Geology and Minerals*

Moapa Valley NWR is underlain by thick deposits of Pleistocene (1.8 mya to present) alluvium that consists of silt, sand, and gravel. A small section of the Pennsylvanian to Permian (350 to 248 mya) Bird Spring Formation outcrops along the extreme southeastern end of the Refuge (Hess and Johnson 2000; Tschanz and Pameyan 1970).

A review of Tingley (1998) and Tschanz and Pameyan (1970) indicates that there is no recorded history of mining at the Refuge. Although the Refuge probably contains large amounts of material that would be suitable for construction aggregate, under current market conditions, aggregate production is not economically competitive due to high transportation costs.

### *Paleontological Resources*

The county geologic map shows two geologic units within the Refuge: Quaternary (1.8 mya to present)/Tertiary (65 to 1.8 mya) alluvium and the Bird Spring Formation (Hess and Johnson 2000). The marine Bird Spring Formation typically contains abundant fossils and is considered to have high fossil-containing potential. Typical fossils are marine and consist of algae, echinoderm, and fusulinid (Longwell et al. 1965 and Service 2002a).

### *Soils*

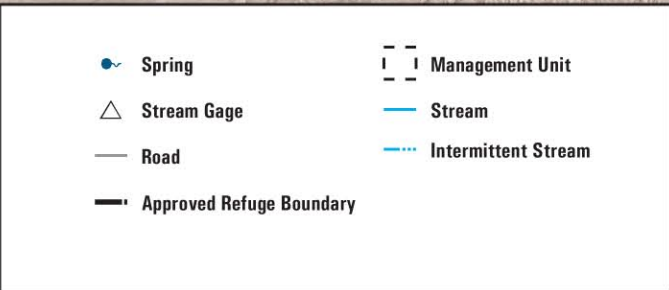
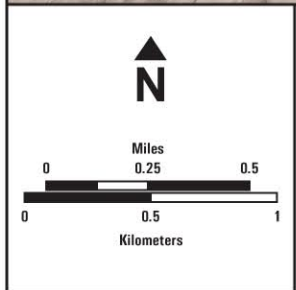
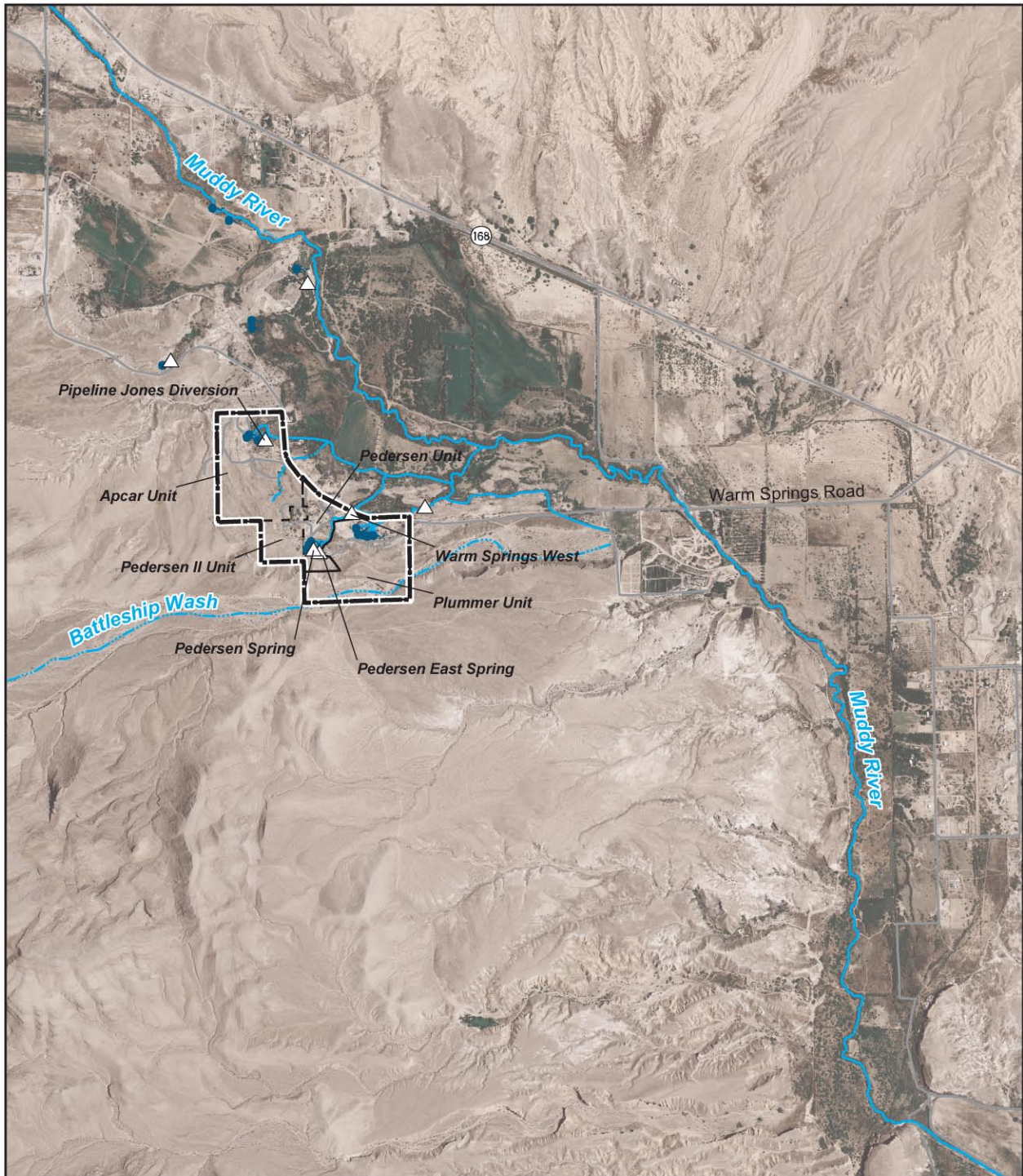
The Moapa Valley NWR is located on the floodplain of the Muddy River and is flanked by a series of low alluvial fans, terraces, and benches that grade into higher alluvial fans (NRCS 2003b). A total of six soil-mapping units are present on the Refuge, and the soils generally range from gravelly fine sand to silty clay. The gravelly fine sand soil types are derived from or occur near the proximal edges of alluvial fans. The silty clay soil types are derived from or occur near lake deposits or floodplains.

### *Water Resources*

#### Surface Water

The Moapa Valley NWR is composed of a portion of the Muddy River Springs, a series of springs that arise alongside and feed the Muddy River. More than 20 spring orifices occur within the Refuge, including the Plummer and Apcar stream/spring systems (Figure 4.4-1). Flow from the combined springs forms a network of pools and small streams that flows northward beyond the property boundaries.

Just downstream from the Refuge, but within the hydrographic basin, USGS operates the Moapa stream gauge on the main stem of the Muddy River. Flow in the Muddy River has been declining since the early 1960s (Mayer and Van Liew 2003; LVVWD 2001). The decline is attributed to surface water diversions and nearby groundwater pumping. The direct relationship is unclear, as is whether pumping from regional carbonate aquifers or from the local alluvial aquifers has the primary effect on the springs.



**Figure 4.4-1**  
**Hydrology**  
**Moapa Valley**  
**NWR**

The USGS, in cooperation with the SNWA, currently collects data from a number of gauges on streams fed by spring complexes. Jones and Baldwin Springs are monitored by the Moapa Valley Water District (MVWD). Since 1998, Pedersen Spring has exhibited a downward trend, and from 1998 to 2004, a gauge at Warm Springs West, which measures collective discharge from the Pedersen spring complex, has shown a significant declining trend. In addition to questions over what pumping might be responsible for this decline, some controversy exists whether pumping or some other factor has been affecting spring flow.

### Groundwater

Underground flow through the carbonate-rock aquifer in southern Nevada provides the primary source of water for the Muddy River Springs. The source of the underground flow is unknown, but is expected to come from the Sheep Range, the White River Flow System, the Meadow Valley Flow System, or a combination of these sources (Thomas et al. 1996). Predevelopment spring discharge from the Muddy River Springs was relatively constant at 36,000 afy (Eakin and Moore 1964). Water levels appear to be declining slightly in the alluvial and carbonate aquifers in the vicinity of the Refuge. Based on monitoring data, this declining trend began in the late 1990s, approximately the same time that groundwater withdrawals began rising in the vicinity of the Refuge.

### Water Quality

Little water quality information exists within the Refuge. Based on available information, water discharged from the Muddy River Springs is similar in nature to that derived from the regional carbonate aquifers, with dissolved solids concentrations of about 550 mg/L (Service 1984a).

### Water Use

Water from the local alluvial aquifer has been developed in the Muddy River Springs area for some time, for both irrigation and domestic uses and later by Nevada Power Company by the late 1940s. Water from the regional carbonate aquifer was developed by the MVWD beginning in 1986. The MVWD and SNWA have developed and plan to develop within the next five years several groundwater monitoring and extraction wells to the northwest of the Refuge.

Primary use of water in the Muddy River Springs area is for power production and municipal supplies to areas downstream. Local irrigation and domestic uses account for a small portion of water consumption. Groundwater production has increased over time, with a significant increase in the 1980s and 1990s and the largest increase in recent years (beginning in 1999).

Records for surface water diversions are not as complete as those for groundwater pumping. In general, since 1990, Nevada Power Company has diverted 2,300 to 3,600 afy from the Muddy River downstream of the Refuge (NDWR 2003). Within the Refuge, MVWD diverts water from Jones Springs, with annual diversions ranging from 687 to 1,509 acre-feet (Buqo 2002).

Within the Refuge, historic uses of the spring pools and the surrounding landscape included recreation and agriculture. Prior to acquisition by the Service, the area was developed and operated as a resort with thermal spring-fed swimming pools, waterslides, bathhouses, a snack bar, and recreational vehicle hook-ups. A number of nonnative palm trees were planted by Moapa Valley settlers and resort owners over the last century. These trees can each consume up to 300 gallons of water per day during summer months.

### Water Rights

In the Muddy Springs area, most of the water rights are actively developed and in use in varying amounts. However, most of the water rights in Coyote Spring Valley, hydraulically upgradient in the flow system, are permitted but as yet are undeveloped (NDWR 2003). Issuance of additional groundwater rights from the regional carbonate aquifer in the southern portions of the White River Flow System were being held in abeyance for five years (2002–2007) while aquifer studies are conducted (NDWR 2002).

The Service has two water rights for the Refuge that have been certified by the Nevada State Engineer. One of these is for approximately 2,500 afy of spring flow. The other is for approximately 1.4 afy of well water. Water from the springs is also adjudicated to downstream landowners.

### *Hazardous Materials*

Moapa Valley NWR was formerly developed as a recreational resort. No mining activity is known to have been conducted at the Refuge. A review of Lovering (1954), Garside (1979), and Singer (1996) indicates that neither metal nor radioactive deposits are present on the Refuge.

### *Fire History and Management*

The historic role of fire at Moapa Valley is generally unknown. Fire likely had a minor to limited role in the Refuge's ecosystems (Service 2004a). Before the area was developed into a resort setting, the area most likely saw long fire return intervals typical of desert vegetation. Due to the lack of continuity of fuels in a desert setting, fire probably did not reach significant size.

Fire season is generally from April through October in the desert fuel types (Service 2004a). The Warm Springs riparian area has a palm tree component fuel type that can burn in any month. These fuels have a history of burning about every 10 years. It is unknown when fire suppression and exclusion began in the area.

Records from the BLM for the Moapa-Overton Fire Management Unit, which covers about 89,000 acres, indicate an average of one ignition per year between 1980 and 2002, with an average of 8 acres burned per year (Service 2004a). Fires ranged in size from 0.1 to 140 acres, and 96 percent were less than 100 acres in size. An average of approximately 80 acres burned per decade. Fires generally occur in late spring through September, but can occur year-round. Human causes accounted for 73 percent of all fires, with the remaining 27



percent attributed to lightning. Most wildfires in this FMU occur in the tamarisk-infested portions of the Muddy River riparian corridor. Typically, these fires are wind driven and are of moderate to high intensity. Small, low-intensity wildfires in tamarisk are less common but do occur.

The Refuge has experienced two larger fires. In 1994 a lightning-caused fire of 40 acres began on the Refuge and minimally spread to private lands. In 2003, a human-caused fire of 47 acres burned adjacent to the Refuge and threatened residences in the area.

No prescribed fires or pile burns have occurred on the Refuge.

### *Air Quality*

Ambient air quality is not currently measured at Moapa Valley NWR. It is expected that low ambient concentrations of criteria pollutants would occur for this area. The nearest sources of emissions are in the Las Vegas area, approximately 20 to 30 miles to the southwest and the Apex industrial complex, located approximately 10 miles to the southwest. Due to the variation in airshed basins for the three regions, it is anticipated that emissions from the Las Vegas and Apex regions would not affect the Moapa Valley NWR (CCDAQM 2003b).

## **4.4.2 Biological Resources**

### *Vegetation*

#### Habitat Types

Moapa Valley, located in northeastern Clark County, Nevada, is one of the few areas of the Mojave Desert with a perennial river. The Muddy River, which is also known as the Moapa River, originates at the Muddy River Springs. These springs are a part of the Warm Springs thermal springs complex in which the Moapa Valley NWR occurs (Service 1983). Moapa Valley NWR encompasses more than 20 springs from this complex. These springs provide high-quality habitat for numerous wildlife species. They also support a variety of vegetation within a narrow elevation range of 1,700 to 1,800 feet above msl (Figure 4.4-2).

Riparian and aquatic habitats on the Refuge consist of three adjacent, but visually distinct units: Plummer, Pedersen, and Apcar (Figure 4.4-2). Each unit has a separate stream system supported by the steady and uninterrupted flow of several springs that come to the surface at various points throughout the Refuge.

Historically, willow (*Salix* spp.) and screwbean mesquite were the dominant riparian species along the streams in the area. Due to habitat alteration and modification, the riparian habitat is now dominated by invasive palm trees (*Washingtonia filifera*). These palm trees can be detrimental to aquatic wildlife and habitats. The palm trees out-compete native species, and although it is used by some species, it does not generally provide high-quality habitat for wildlife. In comparison to native plants, palm trees use much more water, use more nutrients that would otherwise be available for fish, and accumulate salt at its base.



Following a fire on the Pedersen Unit in 1994, several hundred palm trees were removed from riparian habitats, allowing many native species to become reestablished in the riparian and aquatic habitats within this unit (Service 2006a). Aquatic plants, such as muskgrass (*Chara* spp.), spike rush (*Eleocharis* spp.), water nymph (*Najas* spp.), and watercress (*Rorippa* spp.), are abundant in the spring pools and other slack water areas.

The presence of salt grass as ground cover has provided suitable conditions for the reestablishment of native trees, such as ash, cottonwood, willow, and mesquite.

Riparian habitat on the Plummer and Apcar Units continues to bear the scars of the 1994 fire and is still dominated by palm trees. Nonnative tape grass (*Vallisneria americana*) is also present on the Plummer Unit (Service 2006a).

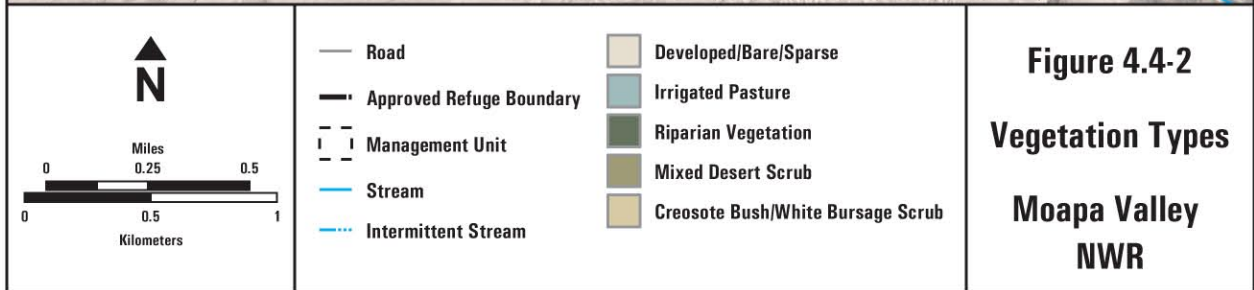
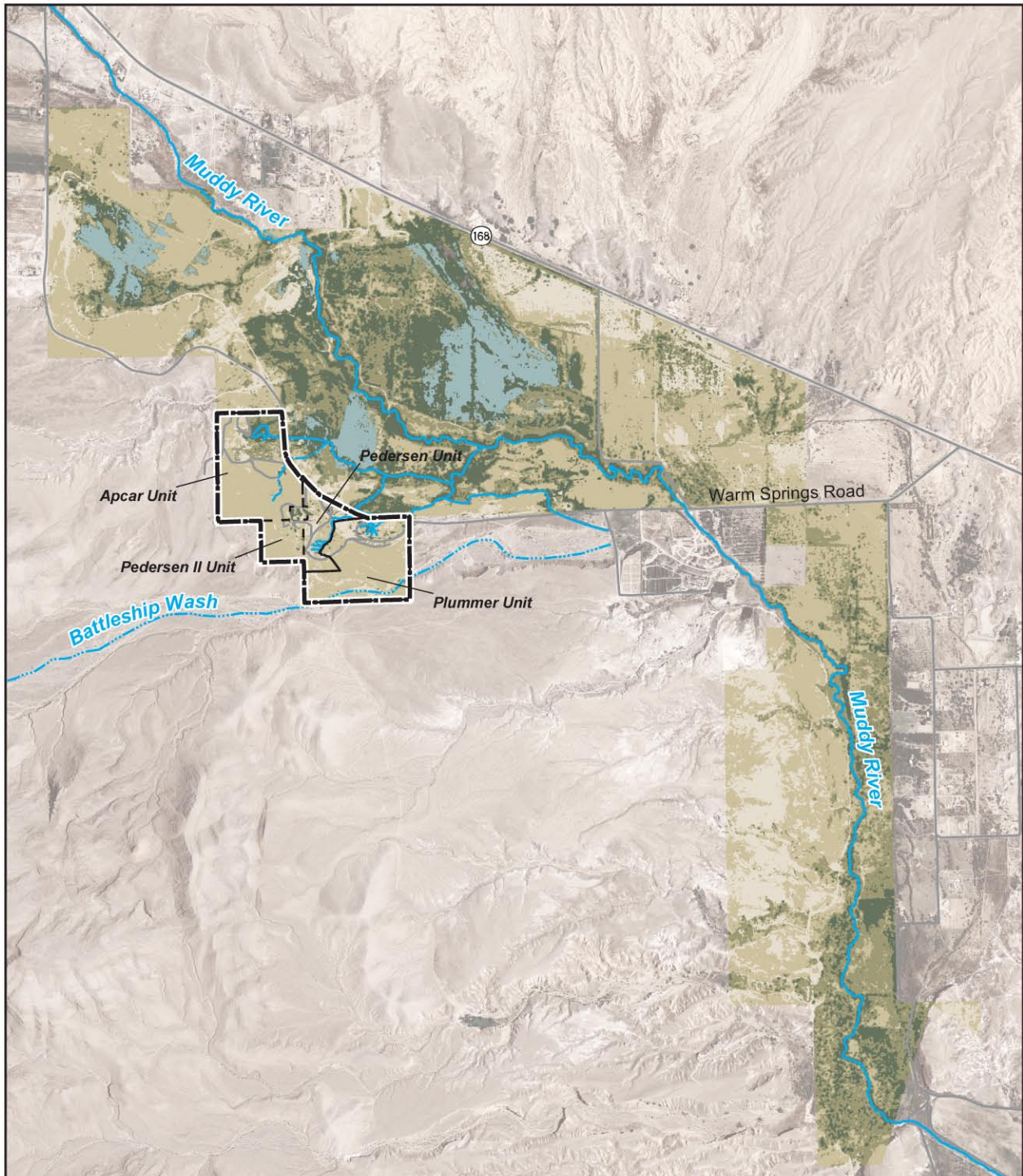
The salt desert scrub and creosote–white bursage scrub habitats dominate the surrounding Mojave Desert and occur primarily on the western and southern portions of the Refuge. The salt desert scrub habitat consists of various saltbush species, such as fourwing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*) and big saltbush (*A. lentiformis*), found in saline basins on valley floors and around playas. Areas with low nocturnal temperatures and very high soil salinity are common in these basins and support most of this habitat.

The creosote–white bursage scrub alliance occurs in lower bajadas, plains, and low hills. This alliance is characterized by widely spaced shrubs and succulents averaging 2 to 8 feet tall, with 2 to 50 percent cover (Holland 1986; Rowlands et al. 1982; Vasek and Barbour 1977). Creosote bush and white bursage are the codominants in this habitat. Mojave yucca and Joshua tree comprise the overstory. The herbaceous layer is sparse, but seasonally abundant after rain events.

#### Sensitive Plant Species

Parts of the Moapa Valley have been ranked by the NNHP as the highest-priority conservation sites in Nevada (NNHP 2000). Highest-priority conservation sites may need new actions to prevent the loss of one or more extremely sensitive species, which could happen within the immediate future if no species-specific management actions are implemented. Moapa Valley NWR is a part of the Moapa Valley macrosite, which includes Logandale, Overton, Moapa, and the Moapa Valley springs.

Although the Moapa Valley is a sensitive area, there are no federally listed plant species that potentially occur at Moapa Valley NWR. There is, however, one sensitive plant that may occur at the Refuge: the Virgin River thistle (*Cirsium virginense*).



### Invasive Species and Noxious Weeds

Invasive species are common at Moapa Valley NWR due to the Refuge's extremely moist habitat and disturbed conditions. The construction of recreational facilities in the past removed much of the native vegetation and destroyed suitable habitat for their reestablishment. The lack of competition with native species set the stage for several invasive species to dominate the area. Some of these species include palm trees, Russian thistle, eel grass, salt cedar, oleander and pampas grass. Many of these species were introduced to the area as ornamentals and have become well-established on the Refuge, especially in areas where the old resort/recreational facilities have been removed. Tape grass, an invasive aquatic weed, is significantly affecting aquatic habitats on or adjacent to the Refuge.

Although several invasive species are present, only three noxious weeds, as defined by the State of Nevada, are known to occur at Moapa Valley NWR (L. Miller 2003). These are Russian knapweed, salt cedar, and Malta starthistle. Tall whitetop also potentially occurs at Moapa Valley NWR. Appendix H provides a list of the noxious weeds that may occur or are known to occur at Moapa Valley NWR.

### *Wildlife*

Although the Moapa Valley NWR encompasses only 116 acres, there is an abundance of wildlife that uses the area on a seasonal basis or year-round (see Appendix H for a list of species). These species are adapted to the desert riparian and upland communities, and many are drawn to the area by the abundant water supply.

### Amphibians and Reptiles

Native amphibians inhabiting riparian and aquatic areas of the Warm Springs area include the California tree frog (*Hyla regilla*) and the red-spotted toad (*Bufo punctatus*). Nonnative species include the bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*) and the spiny soft-shelled turtle (*Trionyx spiniferus*).

Common native reptiles of the Warm Springs area include yellow-backed spiny lizard (*Sceloporus uniformis*), side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum*), and Great Basin whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris*). The banded Gila monster and chuckwalla, sensitive species, occur in rocky upland habitat and may occur on the Refuge. The chuckwalla was observed on the Refuge in 1999 (Goodchild 2004). Desert tortoise may also use upland habitat on the Refuge. The refuge is also within the historic distribution of the relict leopard frog (*Rana onca*), and Refuge lands may play an important role in conservation for the frog (Sjoberg 2006).

### Birds

Approximately 230 bird species have been identified along or adjacent to the Muddy River (Lund 2002). Of these, 162 may be categorized as year-round residents. The others are mostly migratory birds passing through along the Pacific Flyway migration route. The Refuge is an important stop-over site for migrant landbirds. Approximately 68 of the 230 bird species have been observed infrequently or were recorded

in habitats adjacent to the Muddy River. An estimated 86 birds use woodland habitat, of which nine have been documented as using palm tree fruit as a food source. Riparian shrubland habitat is used by about 79 species, and 13 species are associated with marsh habitat.

Several residents and migrants are on the Service's list of Birds of Conservation Concern and are priorities for conservation in the Partners in Flight bird conservation plan for Nevada. Some of these species include eared grebe, western grebe, Franklin's gull, black tern, snowy egret, Bendire's thrasher, Arizona Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, western yellow-billed cuckoo, and canvasback (see Appendix H for additional species and the habitats they occur in on the Refuge).

### Mammals

Twenty-three species of bats are known to occur in Nevada, 15 of which have been documented in the Muddy River drainage (Williams 2002). Six of these bats are designated as Nevada sensitive species. Extensive studies of bat species have not been conducted along the Muddy River; however, the western yellow bat (*Lasiurus xanthinus*) has been documented as a year-round resident on the Refuge. This area is the only known Nevada location for this bat, which is a palm obligate species.

### Aquatic Species

The Moapa Valley supports four species of native fish: Moapa dace, Virgin River chub (*Gila seminuda*), Moapa White River springfish, and the Moapa speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus moapa*). In addition, thirteen nonnative species of fish have been documented in the Muddy River system.

The Moapa dace is endemic to approximately 9.5 km (6 miles) of stream habitats in five thermal headwater spring systems and on the main stem of the upper Muddy River. Moapa dace are dependent upon the link between the upper river and its tributaries (Scoppettone et al. 1992). Cooler water temperatures in the middle and lower Muddy River are likely a natural barrier to downstream movement of Moapa dace (La Rivers 1962).

The Virgin River chub is found in the middle Muddy River, and high water temperatures of the upper Muddy River system are believed to preclude adult chubs (Service 2004a). The Moapa speckled dace co-occurs with the Virgin River chub. The Moapa White River springfish is found in the upper Muddy River and spring tributaries. It is adapted to slower water than the Moapa dace and is fairly common throughout suitable habitat.

Nonnative fish present in the upper Muddy River and tributaries include blue tilapia (*Oreochromis aurea*), shortfin molly (*Poecilia mexicana*), mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*) and rarely, common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*). The Service, NDOW, and other collaborators have been conducting a program to eradicate blue tilapia from the Muddy River system and control other nonnative populations in order to

facilitate recovery of Moapa dace and restore Moapa White River springfish to historic population levels.

More than 100 species of aquatic invertebrates are known from thermal springs at the source of the Muddy River (Sada 2002). The abundance of populations along the river is believed to be seasonal, with peak populations occurring during spring and lowest populations occurring during the winter months. This diversity of species includes several endemic invertebrates, including two mollusks and four aquatic invertebrates (Service 2004a).

The Moapa pebblesnail (*Fluminicola avernalis*) occurs on pebbles, cobble, concrete, and submerged vegetation at or downstream of springs. The pebblesnail has been considered locally abundant in the Warm Springs area. The grated tryonia (*Tryonia clathrata*) occurs within algae and detritus throughout the Warm Springs system. The Moapa Warm Springs riffle beetle (*Stenelmis moapae*) occurs in the Warm Springs area in outflow streams immediately downstream of the spring source. They have also been found in the upper Muddy River and in marsh habitat connected to spring sources. The Amargosa naucorid (*Pelocoris shoshone shoshone*) occurs in the Warm Springs area on vegetation in pools or reaches of stream with lower velocities, often associated with overhanging banks near marshy habitats.

Two endemic aquatic invertebrates are also present on the Refuge: the Moapa naucorid (*Usingerina moapensis*) and a water strider (*Rhagovelia becki*) (Service 1996). Current population size, distribution, and potential threats to these two species are largely unknown. The naucorid occurs in warm stream pebble beds, and the water strider occurs in swift riffles (Usinger 1956).

### Sensitive Wildlife Species

Three federally listed wildlife species, one federal candidate species, and 36 sensitive species have the potential to occur at the Moapa Valley NWR (Appendix H). The southwestern willow flycatcher, Yuma clapper rail, and Moapa dace are the only endangered species that potentially occur on the Refuge. Both the flycatcher and the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) breed in the adjacent Muddy River drainage. In addition, the Yuma clapper rail is known to have occurred in the Muddy River area near Moapa in the past.

The Moapa Valley NWR was established to protect and secure habitat for the Moapa dace. This species' habitat is restricted to the headwaters of the Muddy River due to its narrow temperature requirements. Habitat modifications and the presence of introduced fish species make the habitat further downstream unsuitable for the dace. A species account for the dace is provided in Appendix H.

Recovery plans for the endangered and rare aquatic species of the Muddy River ecosystem have been approved and are being implemented by the Service (Service 1983, 1996). A recovery plan for the southwestern willow flycatcher has also been approved and implemented (Service 2002b). The recovery plans describe each

species, its habitat needs, and specific recovery goals for the de-listing or downlisting of the species.

### **4.4.3 Cultural Resources**

Because most of the area making up the Moapa Valley NWR was privately held until recently, considerable alteration to the character of the landscape has occurred and any sites that may have been present are likely buried or destroyed as part of resort development.

Approximately 17 acres or about 16 percent of the Moapa Valley NWR has been investigated through archaeological reconnaissance surveys.

#### *Prehistoric Archaeology*

While numerous sites have been recorded in the surrounding region, only one site has thus far been recorded within the boundaries of the Moapa Valley NWR (Fergusson and DuBarton 2003). It was a small lithic scatter that was recorded in 1979 by a non-professional archaeologist. No surface evidence remains due to land disturbances in the area of the spring. Sites in the immediate vicinity of the Refuge include pit houses and surface structures of Far Western Puebloan design, rock shelters, and large open sites with lithics and both Far Western Puebloan and Numic ceramics. Local tradition suggests other sites exist in the region, but many have never been formally recorded.

#### *Historic Archaeology*

No historic sites have yet been recorded within the Moapa Valley NWR.

### **4.4.4 Public Access and Recreation**

#### *Public Access*

Moapa Valley NWR is located on 116 acres in northeastern Clark County and is approximately 60 miles north of Las Vegas, Nevada. Currently, due to its small size, fragile habitats, ongoing restoration work, and construction activities related to the removal of unsafe structures, the Refuge is closed to the general public. It is anticipated that the Refuge will be open to the public in the future to provide recreational opportunities once the restoration work is complete. Staff-conducted tours are currently being offered for interpretation and nature observation. In FY 2002, 65 visitors participated in staff-conducted tours (Service 2006a).

Access to the Refuge is via SR 168, which can be reached from I-15 or from U.S. Highway 93. From SR 168, access is via Warm Springs Road, which runs along the northeast boundary of the Refuge. Average daily traffic counts on SR 168 were 1,200 per day in 2004 (Nevada Department of Transportation [NDOT] 2004). Several unpaved roads on the Refuge are currently used for restoration efforts and administrative access.

### *Recreation*

Recreational opportunities at Moapa Valley NWR include wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and outreach. These activities are very limited because the Refuge is currently closed to the public, except through special arrangement (Figure 4.4-3).

The Service does not currently have an environmental education program for the Refuge; however, environmental education opportunities have been provided by TNC in the past. Schools may also visit the Refuge if they schedule a tour in advance with the Refuge Manager. During FYs 2000 and 2001, 78 and 45 people, respectively, visited the Refuge for educational activities (Service 2006a). All of these were staff-conducted tours for teachers and/or students.

The Service works with the other public land agencies in southern Nevada to coordinate volunteer work through the Southern Nevada Interagency Volunteer Program–Get Outdoors Nevada. Volunteers and student interns receive environmental education and provide much-needed assistance with Refuge projects. They are often able to complete work that Refuge staff would otherwise be unable to do. The hours and work assignments are tailored to meet the needs of both the Refuge staff and the volunteer or intern. Volunteer projects may include conducting biological surveys, providing clerical assistance in the office, general maintenance of facilities and equipment, photography and artwork, habitat restoration activities, and visitor interaction. College students may be able to earn college credits while gaining valuable work experience as an intern at the Refuge. Internships are available year-round.

Educational outreach currently consists of exhibits only, but in 2000 and 2001, exhibits and group presentations were offered to the public. News releases about the Refuge were also used to inform the public about the Refuge in 2002.

The Desert Complex hosts events for National Wildlife Refuge Week and Migratory Bird Day. In FY 2004, they hosted a few events for National Wildlife Refuge Week. Other events that Desert Complex staff have attended include the Clark County Fair, Clark County ECOJAM (Earth Day event), Gran Fiesta (September 2002), Boy Scout Day Camp (May 2003), and Moapa Day (2003). Refuge staff or Desert Complex staff also attended the Governor's Conference on Tourism, Dia de los Niños, Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Preview, and National Public Lands Day, depending on staff availability and funding.

#### **4.4.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

##### *Refuge Management Economics*

The Refuge is not currently staffed on a regular basis. The manager for the Desert NWR is also the manager for the Moapa Valley NWR. The refuge did not have a maintenance or operations budget in FY 2006.



NWRs contribute funds to local counties through revenue-sharing programs that are intended to cover costs for either lands purchased in fee title or lands reserved from the public domain. For FY 2003, Clark County received payment in the amount of \$10,310 from the federal government under this revenue-sharing program.

### *Environmental Justice*

Communities closest to the Refuge include the rural areas of Moapa Valley, the town of Moapa, and the city of North Las Vegas. These communities are predominantly white (74 percent) and have median family incomes comparable to the state and county estimates of about \$50,000 (U.S. Census 2000). These communities as a whole would not constitute low-income, minority populations.

The Moapa Valley NWR lies within the aboriginal territory of the Moapa (Mou'paw) Paiute Band (Kelly 1934; Kelly and Fowler 1986; Martineau 1992). Although comprised of a small area, the Moapa Valley NWR is culturally significant to the Moapa Paiute people. The reservation of the Moapa Paiute Band is found within the Moapa Valley, south of the Refuge. According to the 2000 Census, the population of the reservation was 206 people. The band's median family income was estimated at \$22,000 in 1999, which is substantially lower than the Clark County and Nevada estimates of about \$50,000. The Moapa Paiute Band is considered a low-income, minority population.

### *Land Use*

Moapa Valley NWR is bounded on the north and west by private land holdings, including the pending Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act lands, and to the south and east by BLM-managed lands (Figure 1.6-3). The Mormon Mesa ACEC, established for the protection of the desert tortoise, is located to the north of the Refuge. At least one currently occupied private residence is directly adjacent to the Refuge. The Moapa River Indian Reservation lies to the southeast.

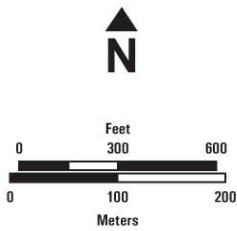
The Refuge was established September 10, 1979, to secure habitat for the endangered Moapa dace. Prior to acquisition, the Pedersen and Plummer Units had been developed and operated as resorts. The primary management objectives of the Refuge are to restore these units to as near a natural condition as possible and to optimize available stream habitat for recovery and downlisting of Moapa dace.

### *Aesthetics*

The Moapa Valley NWR consists of stream channels supported by six thermal springs emerging near the center of the Refuge. Generally, the area surrounding the Refuge consists of riparian habitat and agriculture to the north and creosote vegetation to the south. There is little change in elevation and very little light pollution that would affect viewing of the night sky.



Refuge only open to groups through special arrangement



- |                              |                               |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| —•— Approved Refuge Boundary | ❓ Education Pavillion         |
| — Road                       | 🏠 Information Kiosk           |
| - - - Management Unit        | 👁️ Moapa Dace Viewing Chamber |
| • Spring                     | P Parking Area                |
| — Stream                     | 🚻 Restroom                    |
| — Intermittent Stream        | — Trail                       |

**Figure 4.4-3**  
**Visitor Services**  
**Moapa Valley**  
**NWR**

The Refuge is comprised of three adjacent, but visually distinct units. Prior to acquisition, both the Pedersen and Plummer Units had been developed and operated as resorts. Restoration efforts are under way at the Pedersen Unit and Plummer Unit, where only native fish remain in the Pedersen stream channels and pools. However, restoration work is still required on the Apcar Unit. Until the restoration is completed, the man-made structures located on the site remain part of the visual experience.

## 4.5 Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge

### 4.5.1 Physical Environment

#### *Physiography*

Pahrnagat NWR occupies approximately 5,380 acres in the southern reach of Pahrnagat Valley, along a narrow, approximately 11-mile long corridor of the former White River (Figure 1.6-4). The Refuge is bordered to the north by Pahrnagat Valley, to the east by Delamar Valley and the Delamar Mountains, to the south by the foothills of the Sheep Range, and to the west by the East Pahrnagat Range.

Upper Pahrnagat Lake and North Marsh are located at the northern tip of the Refuge and cover approximately 450 acres, while Lower Pahrnagat Lake is located near the southern end and covers approximately 365 acres (Lincoln County Conservation District 1980). Pahrnagat NWR is a closed basin; no surface water flows from it. Surface water comes from Ash and Crystal Springs, which are located approximately 9 and 15 miles, respectively, north of the Refuge.

Elevations of Pahrnagat NWR range from approximately 3,020 feet above msl at Lower Pahrnagat Lake to approximately 3,600 feet above msl along the valley walls formed by the Sheep Range at the extreme southeast corner of the Refuge.

#### *Geology and Minerals*

Thick sections of Pleistocene (1.8 mya to present) alluvium, deposited by the ancestral White River, underlay the Pahrnagat NWR. The ancestral river channel eroded older Tertiary (65 to 1.8 mya) gravels, lakebed deposits, and volcanic sediments. Remnants of the river channel are exposed in the valley outside the ancestral floodplain. A small section of the Cambrian Highland Formation (part of the Paleozoic carbonate rocks, 543 to 490 mya) outcrops along the extreme southern end of the Pahrnagat NWR (Hess and Johnson 2000; Tschanz and Pameyan 1970). The Pahrnagat Shear Zone, which is a subparallel, northeast-striking fault, occurs at the southern edge of the Refuge (Sweetkind et al. 2004). The shear zone may provide throughflow for the groundwater flow system in the Pahrnagat Range that recharges the Tikaboo Valley (Faunt et al. 2004).

Mining production has not been recorded from locations within the Refuge (Tingley et al. 1993; Tingley 1998; Tschanz and Pameyan 1970). The East Pahrnagat Range District occurs northwest of the Refuge and contains small, isolated gold and uranium prospects. Mining production has not been recorded from this district. Although the

Refuge may contain material that would be suitable for construction aggregate, under current market conditions, aggregate production is not economically competitive due to high haulage costs.

### *Paleontological Resources*

Within the Pahrnagat NWR, the Lincoln County geologic map shows five geologic units: two volcanic units, an older gravel unit, older lake beds, and younger alluvium (Tschanz and Pameyan 1970). Volcanic rocks are not fossiliferous and have a low paleontological potential. In Lincoln County, no fossils have been found in older gravels. Reworked older alluvium and lacustrine sediments have a low potential for fossils because of the additional erosion and transportation. However, younger alluvium may overlay potentially fossiliferous geologic material.

In southern Nevada, the Panaca and Muddy Creek Formations have a high potential to contain fossils. The Muddy Creek Formation has the potential to produce significant fossils (BLM 1990). Blair and Armstrong (1979) document the occurrence of gastropods, ostracods, trace fossils, diatoms, and plant fossils in the upper member of the Muddy Creek in the Lake Mead area. In addition, in Lincoln County, the Panaca Formation has yielded extinct horse remains (*Pliohippus* sp.) (Tschanz and Pameyan 1970). The occurrence of fossils in this formation within Pahrnagat NWR is unknown, but based on observations of similar rocks in nearby areas, the potential for significant fossils is high.

### *Soils*

The ancestral White River has left an ancient, well-preserved river channel that is generally 0.25 to 0.5 mile wide in Pahrnagat Valley (NRCS 1968). The channel and its associated floodplain and adjacent terraces are cut into the alluvial fans shed from the surrounding mountain ranges of the Pahrnagat hydrographic basin. The Pahrnagat NWR occupies a part of the ancient floodplain that has been strongly modified by runoff. A total of 11 soil-mapping units are present on the Refuge, and the soils generally range from coarse sandy loam to silty loam (NRCS 2003b). Coarse sandy loam soil types have been washed from higher elevations and occur near the proximal edges of alluvial fans. The silty loam soil types are derived from or occur near lake deposits, on the distal edges of alluvial fans, or on floodplains.

### *Water Resources*

#### Surface Water

Pahrnagat NWR receives surface water solely through the White River channel north of the Refuge boundary, which is fed by springs north of Alamo (Ash and Crystal Springs) that discharge a measured 26,000 afy (Burbey and Prudic 1991). After consumptive use of spring discharge from agriculture, approximately 6,500 afy of water enters the Refuge annually into Upper Pahrnagat Lake (Service 1999b). The majority of water is received during the winter months (less than 20–30 cubic feet per second [cfs]), with only minimal flows during the summer (< 0.5 cfs).

Water is seasonally released from Upper Pahranaagat Lake to irrigate the downgradient meadows and to flood a series of small impoundments and Lower Pahranaagat Lake. During most years, Lower Pahranaagat Lake serves as the terminal lake in the Crystal and Ash Springs subbasin. However, when adequate water is available, water may be released to Maynard Lake, the southernmost wetland in Pahranaagat Valley (Service 1999b). Maynard Lake is alternately wet and dry, depending on the availability of water.

The three principal springs that feed the White River channel are Hiko, Crystal, and Ash, which are located north of the Refuge (Figure 4.5-1). These are thermal springs that flow at a fairly constant rate and are derived from regional carbonate aquifers (Lincoln County Conservation District 1980). Crystal Springs, the northernmost spring in the Crystal and Ash Springs subbasin, is located just south of Frenchy Lake, approximately 15 miles north of Pahranaagat NWR. Crystal Springs consists of at least two springs that discharge a combined volume between 4,000 and 7,000 afy.

The outflow from Crystal Springs is used mostly for pasture and crop irrigation during the irrigation season. Pastures are irrigated using flood irrigation, and a few wells have been set up with center pivot irrigation (Wurster 2007). In the off-season, surface flows from Crystal Springs merge with outflow from Ash Springs, located approximately 4 miles to the south, and forms White River. Ash Springs consists of at least seven springs that discharge a combined volume of 10,000 afy. Outflow from Ash Springs enters a remnant of the historic White River and eventually provides irrigation water to much of the agricultural land between Ash Springs and Pahranaagat NWR. Outside of the irrigation season, water also enters the historic river channel and extends to the Refuge. Pahranaagat NWR is the lowest elevation in the valley, so runoff from irrigation or storm events that is not lost to evaporation eventually reaches the Refuge.

Upper Pahranaagat Lake is actually a storage reservoir, formed in the mid-1930s by construction of a large containment levee that reaches across the valley. During irrigation season, very little water flows into the reservoir because it is diverted upstream for agricultural uses (Ducks Unlimited 2002).

### Groundwater

Groundwater flow through Pahranaagat Valley is generally from north to south, parallel to the drainage. Pahranaagat Valley is underlain by two groundwater aquifers, a large regional carbonate aquifer and a local basin-fill aquifer. Depth to groundwater in Pahranaagat Valley is at or near surface from the regional springs south to the end of the valley. Outflow from Pahranaagat Valley may enter the regional carbonate aquifer of the Ash Meadows Flow System or may partially recharge the White River Flow System in northern Coyote Spring Valley (Thomas et al. 1996 and Dettinger 1989).

Groundwater level monitoring data on the Refuge is scarce. One well has historical measurements back to 1952 (USGS 2003b and 2003c). The total depth of the well is 92 feet, so it is likely that the well monitors alluvial aquifer water levels. The water level shows much fluctuation, and until 1991, measurements were only recorded in late winter–early spring (February and March). Alluvial aquifer water levels are likely highly dependent on nearby pumping, upgradient surface water diversions, recharge from surface water and/or local precipitation, and recharge from the regional carbonate aquifer system.

There are also several smaller springs located within the boundaries of the Refuge. These include Cottonwood Spring, Cottonwood Spring North, Lone Tree Spring, L Spring, and Maynard Lake Upper and Lower Springs. Three of the spring outflows (Cottonwood Spring, Cottonwood Spring North, and Lone Tree Spring) have been dredged or trenched to varying degrees.

#### Water Quality

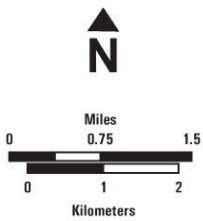
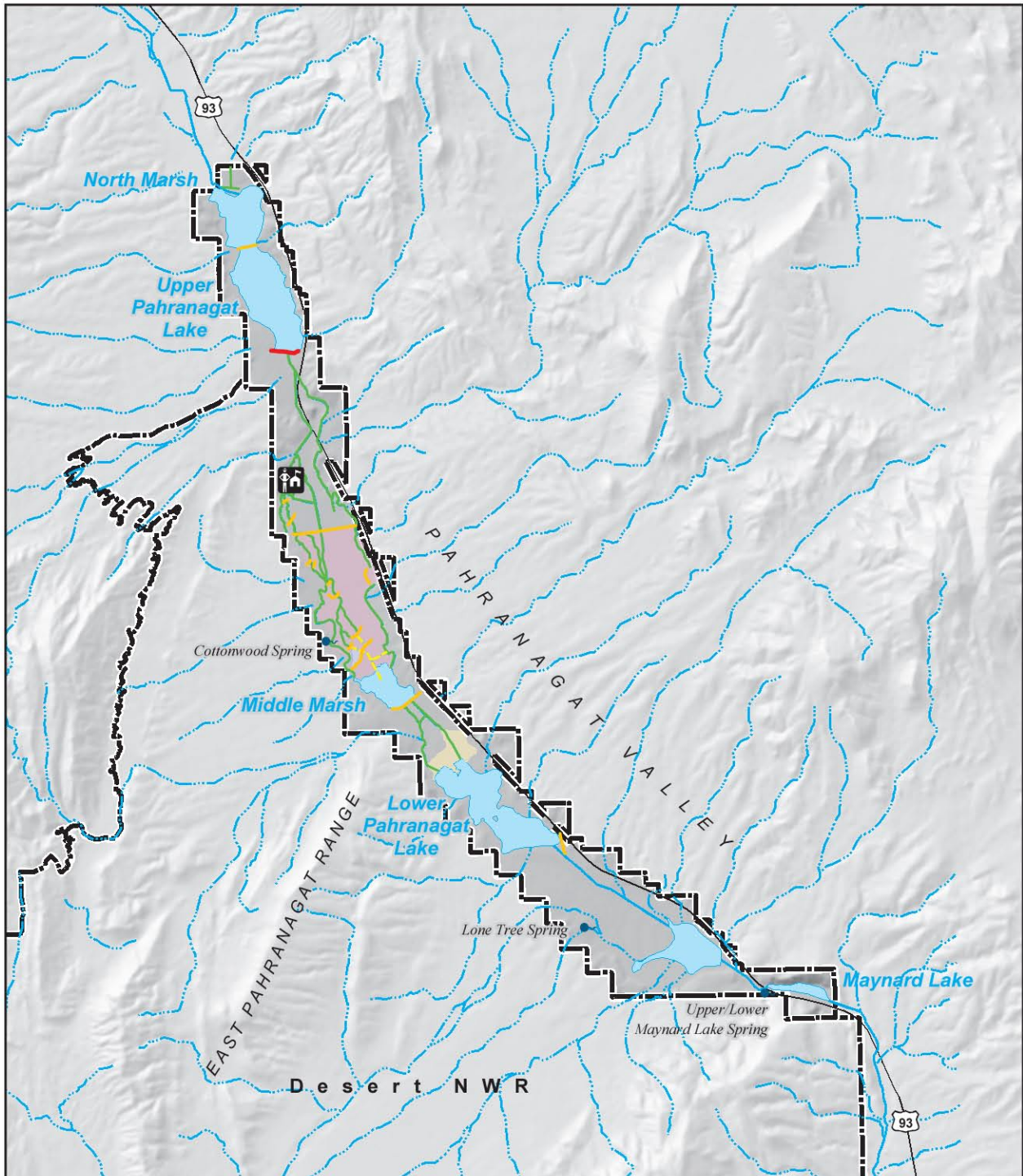
Discharge from Crystal and Ash Springs make up the bulk of surface water and therefore contribute significantly to the overall water quality of the valley. The practice of flushing salts and alkali from agricultural fields, along with evaporative concentration, contributes to an increase in dissolved solids as water flows from its source through agricultural lands to Upper Pahranaagat Lake (Service 1999b). Because of increased evaporation rates and the lack of inflow to downgradient wetlands, dissolved solids concentrations are greatest during late summer. Dissolved solids have been estimated to exceed 6,000 mg/L in terminal wetlands within the Refuge, which is 12 times the recommended potable water limit of 500 mg/L. By contrast, Crystal and Ash Springs have averaged approximately 350 mg/L dissolved solids.

#### Water Use

Water use within the Pahranaagat Hydrographic Basin is primarily for irrigation. During the irrigation season (March 15 through October 15), spring discharge is used to irrigate agricultural fields (Service 1999b). To a very minor extent, wells are used to supplement irrigation. Only one farming operation in the vicinity relies solely on well water for irrigation. That operation is a farm that irrigates 120 acres near Crystal Springs.

The flow of thermal springs during the five winter months is not used by agriculture in the valley, but is adjudicated to the Refuge. From 1991 to 1994, the USGS measured the amount of water reaching the Refuge from the regional springs. The average annual flow for the four water years was 6,500 afy. The Refuge has never had excess water or received more water than it was able to use (Service unknown date). The Refuge currently uses water to maintain reservoir levels for recreation and to maintain wildlife habitat.





- |   |                          |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
|  | Visitor Contact Station  |  | Dam                      |
|  | Approved Refuge Boundary |  | Dikes                    |
|  | Spring                   |  | Ditches                  |
|  | Open Water               |  | Intermittent Stream/Wash |

**Figure 4.5-1**  
**Hydrology**  
**Pahrnagat**  
**NWR**



The Service has had difficulties with water conveyance and distribution at the Refuge. The previous distribution system did not allow Refuge personnel to selectively convey water to various areas for habitat benefit. The Service is currently partnering with Ducks Unlimited to develop a surface water delivery system that would move water from the upper riparian areas to drier parts of the system, thus enhancing habitat and hunting opportunities. A new system was installed in 2001 to allow conveyance of water to specific areas of the Refuge. The new system was expected to have capacity to convey and/or dissipate relatively high flows without significant damage. At present, portions of the conveyance system (concrete ditch) are not functional due to faulty construction.

### Water Rights

Water in the Pahranaagat Valley is used primarily for irrigation of pasture-land, quasi-municipal purposes, and domestic water supply. Three large springs discharging from the regional carbonate aquifer are the principal sources of surface water used for irrigation in the valley. Use of these springs' water was adjudicated in the 1926 Pahranaagat Lake Decree and amended later in 1965. Water rights identified in the Decree pre-date Nevada Water Law and carry priority dates ranging from the 1880s to 1900. The Service holds some of these water rights, which allow irrigation of lands on Pahranaagat NWR using Ash and Crystal Springs water stored in Upper Pahranaagat Lake. Users upstream of the Refuge have right to use winter flows to flush salts from the agricultural fields.

In addition, the Service holds several water rights that are junior to the Pahranaagat Lake Decree for waters stored in both Upper and Lower Pahranaagat Lakes. Many of these water rights were obtained by the original owners of the Pahranaagat NWR property. The Service filed applications with the NDWR to change the Refuge's water rights to reflect the Service's ownership and adjust the purpose of water use from irrigation to wildlife purposes. In addition, the Refuge filed new applications for water from three small springs on the Refuge (Cottonwood, North Maynard, and South Maynard). The applications were submitted to the NDWR in 1996 and are currently classified as "ready-for-action but protested."

### *Hazardous Materials*

In 1995, the Service conducted a study to identify and quantify potential human-induced environmental contaminate impacts to the Pahranaagat Valley (Service 1999b). Specific objectives included:

- Identification and characterization of contaminant source areas;
- Identification and characterization of environmental contaminants on Service lands;
- Assessment of contaminant concentrations in abiotic and biotic habitat components, fish, and migratory bird eggs;
- Characterization of the toxicity of water; and
- Identification and quantification of contaminant threats to endangered species and migratory birds.

Total dissolved solids, pH, and concentrations of some soluble trace elements in water increased substantially between the spring sources and lakes on Key Pittman Wildlife Management Area and the Pahrana gat NWR. Agricultural practices appeared to contribute to the mobilization of the contaminants from agricultural soils and the transport to downgradient lakes. Reduced water inflow and high rates of evapotranspiration contributed to the concentration of dissolved solids and trace elements in one or more of these lakes, which exceeded Nevada water quality standards for applicable beneficial uses and/or concentration associated with adverse effects to aquatic invertebrates, fish, and birds. The highest concentrations were found in both the Upper and Lower Pahrana gat Lakes. Pesticides did not appear to represent a threat to fish and wildlife on the Refuge. Arsenic, mercury, and selenium were found at concentrations of concern in water, sediment, or biological tissues collected from areas occupied by endangered fish. Detection of mercury and selenium in samples collected from spring source pools suggest that these elements are, at least in part, originating from the carbonate-rock aquifer (Service 1999b).

Review of Lovering (1954) and Garside (1979) indicates that radioactive minerals have not been mapped on the Refuge.

#### *Fire History and Management*

Fire, either wild or prescribed, is a fairly infrequent event on the Pahrana gat NWR. The plant communities characteristically have adapted to a very arid climate (7 inches of annual precipitation) (Service 2001). When the communities are in good condition, shrubs are the dominant vegetative feature, and prior to Euro-American settlement, fine fuels were limited. Areas with less than about 8 inches of rainfall rarely support enough vegetation to carry a fire. Fire occurrence in areas receiving more than about 8 inches has been influenced by introduced grasses. Shrub cover is generally widely spaced with large amounts of bare ground between individuals. Most species in this plant community are either somewhat fire-resistant or are vigorous re-sprouters after disturbance. Pre-settlement fire in such a community was likely a rare event, dependent upon extreme conditions of weather and prolonged periods of drought.

Due to expanses of standing water and lack of naturally occurring ignitions, historic natural fire in the Pahrana gat NWR wetlands likely was also a rare event (Service 2001). It is quite feasible, however, that Native Americans regularly burned portions of the wetlands prior to Euro-American settlement to enhance resource availability and quality.

Historical overutilization of the shrub community through cattle and sheep grazing has led to declines in range condition and serious reduction of normally sparse native grass species, while allowing the introduction of exotic annuals (Service 2001). In recent years, exotic native annuals have invaded increasingly large areas of the salt desert community, including portions of the Pahrana gat NWR. In particular, cheat-grass has become co-dominant in some areas. This invasion can dramatically alter fire return intervals in this ecosystem from a rare

event to one in often less than 10 years. When fire is applied to the desert-shrub community with few or no perennial plants and an exotic annual component present in the understory, the post-fire community will very likely be dominated by annuals.

Prescribed burns have been used on the Refuge since 1985, based on available data (Service 2001).

### *Air Quality*

Ambient air quality is not currently measured at Pahrnagat NWR. It is expected that low ambient concentrations of criteria pollutants would occur for this area. The nearest major sources of emissions are in the Las Vegas area, approximately 80 miles to the south. Minor sources from automobile traffic and campfires on the Refuge may result in very localized increases in ambient concentrations.

## **4.5.2 Biological Resources**

### *Vegetation*

#### Habitat Types

Pahrnagat NWR contains 5,380 acres of marshes, lakes, meadows, springs, and riparian habitat (Service 2006a). Most of the Refuge landscape was used for agricultural practices in the past, so several areas still contain remnant signs of these agricultural uses. Many of the historically cultivated agricultural fields have naturally become re-vegetated and now consist of wetland or riparian vegetation (Figure 4.5-2). Management efforts are ongoing to establish native wetland and upland habitats.

Thermal springs along the flood plain provide water to the various ponds, lakes, and marshes found throughout Pahrnagat Valley (Service 2006a). The floodplain was formed by an ancient perennial stream, White River, which flowed from the north and was a tributary of the Colorado River. The flood plain it created is well-defined but very narrow. This floodplain is ancestral and has been dry for thousands of years, except for a small creek running down the center that is fed by thermal springs.

Four main water impoundments are found on the Refuge, including North Marsh, the Upper and Lower Pahrnagat Lakes, and Middle Pond/Marsh (Figure 4.5-2). Water draining from Ash and Crystal Springs (about 15 miles north of the Refuge) flows along Pahrnagat Creek and spills into Upper Pahrnagat Lake and North Marsh (Service 1998b). Open water habitat covers approximately 640 acres of the Refuge.

Upper Pahrnagat Lake and North Marsh only receive water during winter months when the upgradient agriculture fields and ranches are not using water from Pahrnagat Creek for irrigation. North Marsh and Upper Pahrnagat Lake also receive and store quantities of water from the thermal springs just north of the Refuge (Service 2006a). Water in the lake is released by Gardner Dam, on the south side of Upper Pahrnagat Lake, throughout the year to create and enhance the marsh, wetland, and grassland habitats farther south. Middle

Marsh captures the released water and creates habitat for many wildlife species.

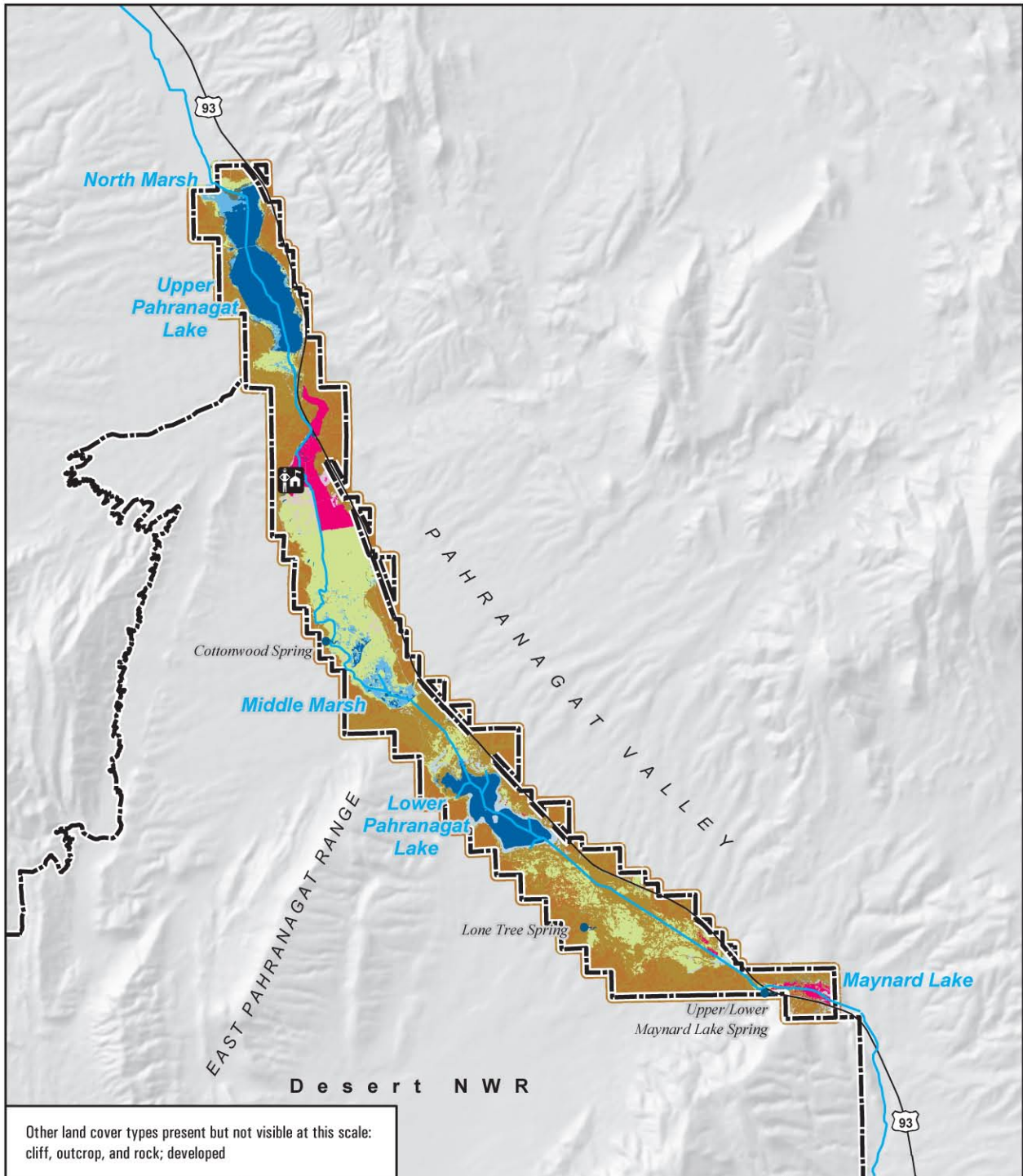
Lower Pahranaagat Lake is used to store water from Middle Marsh, and water flowing through Middle Marsh is released toward Lower Pahranaagat Lake. Lower Pahranaagat Lake is the last storage unit for the Refuge and captures all excess water from the other three impoundments. The lake, wetland, and marsh areas provide lush habitat for various species of birds, mammals, fish, and other wildlife. The southernmost lake on the Refuge and the southernmost wetland in Pahranaagat Valley is Maynard Lake. This lake receives water from the main storage impoundments only when adequate water is available. The releases of water can create habitat for many resident and migratory wildlife species.

The vegetation types at Pahranaagat Refuge range from lakes, riparian woodland, wetlands, wet meadows, and springs to uplands, alkaline playas, and rocky outcroppings. Although the riparian woodland is very limited in size, it is the rarest and most irreplaceable of the vegetation communities found at the Refuge.

The riparian woodlands consist of Gooddings willows (*Salix gooddingii*), Fremont cottonwoods (*Populus fremontii*), and coyote willows (*Salix exigua*). At the northern edge of Upper Pahranaagat Lake, the mature gallery forest of towering Gooddings willows provides critical habitat for the endangered southwestern flycatcher and other songbirds. This forest covers approximately 100 acres of the Refuge. Small stands of cottonwoods can be found around the perimeter of Upper Pahranaagat Lake. Isolated stands of cottonwoods or individual cottonwoods are also found at each spring and in patches of better soils.

Emergent wetlands grow at the margins of all permanent ponds and lakes in the Refuge. Emergent vegetation consists of tules and cattails (*Schoenoplectus maritimus* and *Typha domingensis*). Mats of floating aquatic plants (*Polygonum amphibium*) are found only at the northern end of Upper Pahranaagat Lake. The spring habitats are characterized by lush stands of American bulrush (*Schoenoplectus americanus*) and are generally dominated by massive cottonwoods. A wet meadow supporting a dense mixture of Baltic rush (*Juncus balticus*) and yerba mansa (*Anemopsis californica*) extends downstream of Lone Tree spring but Cottonwood spring currently supports only cottonwoods and a small patch of emergent American bulrush.

Middle Marsh is composed of wet meadows, grassy meadows, and scattered wetlands. In the most alkaline soils, saltgrass and alkali sacatone dominate. In the drier portions of Middle Marsh, nonnatives such as quackgrass (*Elytrigia repens*) and tall wheatgrass (*Elytrigia pontica*) are abundant and can even form monocultures, excluding all other vegetation. The wet meadows support dense stands of yerba mansa (*Anemopsis californica*) and Baltic rush (*Juncus balticus*).



  	Visitor Contact Station Approved Refuge Boundary Spring Water Playa Invasive Trees or Weeds	Emergent Vegetation Alkali/Wet Meadow Riparian Woodland Grassland Mixed Desert Shrub/Scrub Creosotebush-White Bursage Scrub	<p><b>Figure 4.5-2</b></p> <p><b>Vegetation Types</b></p> <p><b>Pahranaagat</b></p> <p><b>NWR</b></p>
	<p>May 20, 2008 5683_138\FIGURES\AD_EIS_20080501 Figure 4.5-2-pahranaagat_veg.mxd</p>		

Small patches of Indian hemp (*Apocynum cannabinum*), bulrushes (*Schoenoplectus maritimus* and *Schoenoplectus americanus*), cattails (*Typha domingensis*), spikerushes (*Eleocharis* spp.), and sedges (*Carex* spp.) are also scattered within the wet meadow complexes. Wet meadow habitat covers approximately 700 acres, and alkaline wet meadow habitat covers approximately 350 acres of the Refuge. Emergent wetland habitat at Middle Marsh covers approximately 400 acres.

Upland vegetation communities change according to subtle variations in topography and salinity. The salt desert scrub habitat consists of various saltbush species found in saline basins on valley floors and around playas. Areas with low nocturnal temperatures and very high soil salinity are common in these basins and support most of this habitat. Salt desert scrub habitat at the Refuge is dominated at the lowest elevations by green rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosus*), often mixed with saltbushes (*Atriplex* spp.). At slightly higher elevations, greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) is more abundant and is often found with four-winged or big saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*, *Atriplex lentiformis*). Traveling up the sides of Pahrnagat Valley, widely spaced creosote bushes (*Larrea tridentata*) come to dominate the upland vegetation. Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) appear among the creosote bushes as the topography continues to rise. This habitat forms the creosote–white bursage alliance.

The creosote–white bursage scrub alliance occurs in broad valleys, lower bajadas, plains, and low hills. This alliance is characterized by widely spaced shrubs and succulents averaging 2 to 8 feet tall, with 2 to 50 percent cover (Holland 1986; Rowlands et al. 1982; Vasek and Barbour 1977). The herbaceous layer is sparse, but seasonally abundant after rain events. Creosote–white bursage scrub transitions to mixed desert scrub at the highest elevations on the Refuge. The mixed desert scrub habitat is dominated by the blackbrush shrub. Plant species found in this habitat are very similar to those in the creosote–white bursage alliance, but they typically consist of intricately branched shrubs that range from 1.5 to 3 feet tall (Holland 1986). Mojave yucca and Joshua tree are very common throughout the mixed desert scrub habitat (BLM 1990).

Rocky outcroppings are also present in the upland portion of the Refuge. These areas are dominated by the invasive red brome grass (*Bromus madritensis* var. *rubens*), but various species of cactus (*Opuntia* spp.) can be found as well as woody shrubs such as Mormon tea (*Ephedra nevadensis*) and indigo bush (*Psoralea fremontii*).

Other cover types on the Refuge include playas and desert washes. Playas are mostly unvegetated (less than 10 percent) and are subject to intermittent flooding. Salt-tolerant species often form vegetation rings around the playas. Desert washes are intermittently flooded washes or arroyos associated with rapid sheet and gully flow. They often consist of linear or braided strips within desert scrub or shrublands and grassland habitats. The desert washes of Pahrnagat are characterized by dense growths of rabbitbrush, interspersed with alkali sacatone and patches of saltgrass.

### Sensitive Plant Species

No federally listed plant species are known to occur on Pahranaagat NWR. One sensitive plant, Nye milkvetch (*Astragalus nyensis*), has potential to occur on the Refuge (Appendix H).

### Noxious Weeds

The Refuge is located in Lincoln County, Nevada, which is a part of the Tri-County Weed Control Program. Lincoln County treated some areas for tall whitetop (*Lepidium latifolium*) invasions during 2001 (Noxious Weed Action Committee 2001). Many other invasive weeds have become established at the Refuge. Salt cedar forms dense thickets around the southern half of Lower Pahranaagat Lake, and Russian olive spreads rapidly in wet meadows. Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*) and various pigweeds (*Amaranthus* spp.) form monocultures in disturbed areas such as the previously cultivated fields of Black Canyon or the Maynard Lake area. The red brome invasive grass is widespread in the drier uplands, while quack grass and tall wheatgrass are locally abundant in the grassy meadows. The constructed ponds near Headquarters are home to a wide variety of weeds that colonized moist disturbed areas, such as bindweed (*Convolvus* spp.), Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*), sunflowers (*Helianthus* spp.) and foxtail barley (*Hordeum jubatum*). Appendix H provides a complete list of the noxious weeds that may occur on the Refuge.

### *Wildlife*

More than 230 species of migratory birds and other wildlife use the wetland habitats found on the Refuge (see Appendix H for a list of species). Numerous non-game migratory birds use habitat on the Refuge during the fall and spring migrations. They visit during the fall on their flight south and again in the early spring on their way back north. Some species nest in the dense riparian areas. The riparian areas, marshes, open water, croplands, and native grass meadows attract and support hundreds of species and thousands of individual birds and other wildlife annually. The majority of the wildlife species found on the Refuge are non-game species, and some of them are considered sensitive.

### Amphibians and Reptiles

The Refuge's lakes and marsh habitat provide suitable habitat for a variety of amphibians. The relict leopard frog (*Rana onca*), thought to be extirpated from most of Nevada, may occur in Maynard Lake Spring. Other amphibians that likely occur on the Refuge include bullfrog, Pacific chorus frog, western toad, plains leopard frog (*Rana blairi*), and northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*).

Reptiles are more common in Nevada than amphibians. They occur in the drier, upland communities on the Refuge. Common reptiles include Gila monster, collared lizard (*Crotaphytus collaris*), coachwhip, common kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getulus*), western shovel nose (*Chionactis occipitalis*), gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*), western rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*), and Mojave rattlesnake (*Crotalus scutulatus*). At the northern extreme of its range, the threatened



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desert tortoise occurs in desert upland habitats of the Refuge at unknown densities.

### Birds

Pahranagat NWR was established to provide habitat for migratory birds, especially waterfowl. The Refuge is located within the Pacific Flyway, as are the other refuges in the Desert Complex. Many migratory birds are found on the Refuge, including shorebirds, grebes, herons, egrets, and many other non-game birds that use wetland habitat. Many of the waterfowl species found on the Refuge are residents because of the permanent water supply in the valley. Some use the habitat for a short period of time and continue on their migration path.

Pahranagat NWR is considered to be highly important to migratory birds, waterfowl, and songbirds because of its historic geological and hydrological setting on the edge of the Mojave Desert and Great Basin physiographic regions in southern Nevada. In 1999, the American Bird Conservancy designated Pahranagat NWR as a "Continental Important Bird Area." Approximately one-half of Refuge acreage contains lakes, marshes, springs, and associated riparian habitat. These wetlands are important to the survival of migratory waterfowl and songbirds as well as resident wildlife.

Some of the management priority bird species include eared grebe, western grebe, American white pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*), Franklin's gull, black tern, snowy egret, marbled godwit, snowy plover, long-billed curlew, white-throated swift, pinyon jay, Arizona Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, black-chinned sparrow, western yellow-billed cuckoo, and canvasback (see Appendix H for more species and the habitats they occur in on the Refuge).

Surveys conducted in the past eight years have confirmed the presence of the federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher on the Refuge. They use a stand of large cottonwoods and willows at the north end of the Refuge for nesting. Yellow-billed cuckoos have been observed in similar Refuge habitat.

American peregrine falcons are known to use the Refuge for foraging and probably nest on adjacent cliffs. Small numbers of bald eagles use the Refuge for foraging and roosting during winter migration.

Approximately 2,000 of the Lower Colorado River population of greater sandhill cranes (almost 25 percent of this declining population) have used the Refuge as a migrational staging area.

Fall duck migration to the Refuge usually begins in late August with the arrival of several hundred mallards, pintails, and green-winged teal. Peak waterfowl use on the Refuge for the year usually occurs near the end of October. The average duck population on the Refuge in late October for the last five years is approximately 10,000 birds. Pintails and green-winged teal each make up about 40 percent of the population, and mallards and American wigeon share most of the remaining 20 percent. Refuge populations decrease in December as

ducks migrate farther south, leaving usually fewer than 1,000 for the remaining winter months.

The Refuge holds a wintering population of tundra swans each year averaging approximately 250 birds. They generally arrive in November and depart north in January.

The paucity of riparian and wetland habitat in Southern Nevada underscores the importance of the Refuge in providing migratory and nesting habitat for passerines. Well over 100 species of perching birds can be found on the Refuge that use both desert uplands and riparian/wetland habitats.

### Mammals

The following sensitive mammals can be found on the Refuge: Desert Valley kangaroo mouse, Pahranaagat Valley montane mole, Townsend big-eared bat, Allen's big-eared bat, small-footed myotis, long-legged myotis, and Yuma myotis.

The Pahranaagat Valley montane vole is endemic to the Pahranaagat Valley; according to refuge records, it has been captured as recently as 2007 (NDOW 2007b) and is known to be reproducing on the Refuge (Service 2001). Very little is known about this small, herbivorous mammal that inhabits moist meadow habitats. Trapping efforts have captured voles in several areas of the Refuge, all with good grass cover, and the montane vole is part of a continuing genetic study on the Refuge. These areas include east and north of the North Marsh, the northern portion of the Middle Marsh unit, and just north and west of the Middle Marsh Pond.

Bats are very common on the Refuge, and nine of the potentially occurring bat species are sensitive. Bats are important to the Refuge because they help regulate insect and invertebrate populations, and some help pollinate plants. Most bats are commonly observed during evening hours.

According to the 1992 Annual Narrative Report, cottontail rabbits, a game species, are found in low densities (Service 1992). Black-tailed jackrabbits and white-tailed antelope squirrels are also common.

Mule deer are found in low numbers on the Refuge, but they are not hunted on the Refuge. The 1992 Annual Narrative Report estimated that about 20 deer used the Refuge throughout the year; however, six of them were killed in 1992 from vehicle collisions. The current population is estimated at about 120 deer using the Refuge (Maxwell 2007). Deer crossing signs were erected in late 1992 at each end of the Refuge along U.S. Highway 93 to promote safer driving conditions and reduce the number of roadkills.

### Aquatic Species

Several fish species can be found at the Refuge. Pahranaagat speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus velifer*) is endemic to springs in Pahranaagat Valley. Three other endemic fish species are listed as endangered: Pahranaagat roundtail chub (*Gila robusta jordanii*), White River

springfish (*Crenichthys baileyi baileyi*), and Hiko White River springfish (*Crenichthys baileyi grandis*). Two other endemic fish have become extinct: desert sucker (*Catostomus clarki* ssp.) and Pahranaagat spinedace (*Lepidomeda altivelis*). Water quality of the Pahranaagat Valley has been considered a factor limiting the range of these fish (Service 1999b).

Several game fish occur in Upper Lake, North Marsh, and Middle Pond. The main sport fish are largemouth bass and bullhead catfish (*Ameiurus nebulosus*). Approximately 15,000 largemouth bass were stocked in May of 1992 from a hatchery in New Mexico (NDOW 2002). Common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) also occur on the Refuge and are detrimental to other fish populations because of the competition for limited resources. In 1996, an attempt to eradicate carp from Upper Pahranaagat Lake appeared successful, but carp were later found in North Marsh and Upper Pahranaagat Lake. The percentage of fish in Upper Pahranaagat Lake in 1999 was 39 percent bass, 28 percent bullhead, 18 percent green sunfish (*Lepomis cyanellus*), and 15 percent carp. Carp populations are expected to be continually increasing.

### Sensitive Wildlife Species

The southwestern willow flycatcher, an endangered species, is known to occur in the cottonwood-willow riparian habitat on the Refuge. In 2005, 29 southwestern willow flycatchers were recorded at the Refuge, nesting in a total of 21 territories (Koronkiewicz et al. 2006). In 2006, 29 resident, breeding flycatchers were recorded at the Refuge, nesting in a total of 15 territories (McLeod et al. 2007). All of the observed nests were found in coyote or Gooddings willows and cottonwood; no nesting was observed in salt cedar habitat. The Refuge's nesting population is considered one of the largest nesting populations in the Colorado River Basin.

The Pahranaagat roundtail chub, also an endangered species, is not known to occur on the Refuge, although it was present historically. Bald eagle (delisted), desert tortoise, and yellow-billed cuckoo have the potential to occur on the Refuge. An additional 44 sensitive species have the potential to occur on the Refuge. Appendix H provides a list of the endangered and threatened species and sensitive species that may occur at the Pahranaagat NWR.

### **4.5.3 Cultural Resources**

#### *Introduction*

The Pahranaagat NWR area is an extremely important cultural landscape to many tribal people, especially the Southern Paiute, Western Shoshone, Owens Valley Paiute, and Mohave, as it is a shared use place of sacred power and origins. The natural and cultural resources in the area are all physically and spiritually interrelated. There was extensive historic use of the area for habitation, resource gathering, hunting, fishing, agriculture, and ceremonies prior to Euro-Americans entering the area. In the late 1800s, when non-Indians began to move into the greater Pahranaagat Valley vicinity, confrontations occurred, followed by multiple accounts of Paiute and

Shoshone Indians being massacred by soldiers, miners, and settlers. No specific locales for these atrocities have been yet identified or recorded on the Refuge. In fact, very little systematic archaeological reconnaissance has been conducted in the Pahrnagat Valley. Approximately 185 acres or 3.44 percent of the Pahrnagat NWR has been investigated through archaeological reconnaissance surveys (Fergusson and DuBarton 2003).

### *Prehistoric Archaeology*

Although more exist, there are currently only 21 recorded prehistoric sites on the Refuge, and these early official site records typically contain very limited information. Cultural resources in the Pahrnagat Valley include campsites, lithic scatters, rock shelters, rock art, quarries, special activity sites, multi-component sites, and historic sites. For many of the sites, it is impossible to define temporal characteristics without further investigation. Some of the most well-known sites are rock art, which have attracted public interest.

Sites that may date to the Archaic period around 3,000 B.C. include rock art, stone rings, and lithic scatters found within the Black Canyon National Register District within the Pahrnagat NWR. Because the District has not yet been thoroughly investigated, it is impossible to determine if the sites can be assigned to this period or to earlier ones. This petroglyph complex includes several sites featuring unique anthropomorphic figures that are unique to the Pahrnagat area (Stoffle et al. 2002). A professional recordation of the complex and coordination with the Moapa Band of Paiutes and other affiliated tribes that associate with this important area would benefit the Refuge's management of the complex.

Other prehistoric resources identified within the Refuge include the Red Tail Hawk origin spot (Maynard Lake) and Coyote's Jar (Origin spot for Paiutes in the area) (Stoffle et al. 2002). Two Southern Paiute villages were also reported to occur in the area, consisting of approximately 300 people who practiced complex horticulture using an extensive network of irrigation. Rock art sites in the area also identify the area as a Water Baby site (supernatural beings who protect the water).

### *Historic Archaeology*

Historic sites are those sites that resulted from use of the region by Euro-Americans or other groups after contact with native peoples. For many portions of southern Nevada, this happened during the mid-1800s. Only four historic sites have thus far been recorded on the Pahrnagat NWR. One historic "Walden House" was nominated to the NRHP, but the process has not yet been completed. The Service has improved the house so the building could be used as part of the headquarters complex. Other historic sites on the Refuge include a historic road around Maynard Lake and features associated with historic habitations and ranching.

#### 4.5.4 Public Access and Recreation

##### *Public Access*

Pahranagat NWR is open to the public year-round. The public is encouraged to visit the “valley of many waters” to enjoy a variety of recreational opportunities and experience the desert oasis.

Principal public access to Pahranagat NWR is from U.S. Highway 93, about 71 miles north of its junction with I-15. Two unpaved roads lead to Lower Lake and Middle Marsh from the highway. A sign along the highway marks the gravel road to the Refuge headquarters. This road connects to Alamo Road and continues through the Refuge and onto the Desert NWR. About 4 miles north of the headquarters road, an unpaved road leads to the North Marsh and Upper Pahranagat Lake and provides access to the campsites. Vehicles must remain on the designated roads. All-terrain vehicles are prohibited on the Refuge.

Pahranagat NWR receives visitors from the nearby communities as well as from other states and foreign countries. Visitation numbers are gathered in two ways on the Refuge: traffic counters at the entrances and a sign-in sheet at the Refuge headquarters. Between 1999 and 2001, approximately 21,500 vehicles visited Pahranagat NWR (CH2MHill 2002). Specific data on visitation are not available; however, visitation at the Refuge is expected to increase as the nearby communities grow. Based on current estimates, the Refuge accommodates approximately 35,000 visitors per year (Le’au Courtright 2006).

##### *Recreation*

The Refuge administrative office also serves as a visitor contact station with brochures, maps, and fact sheets. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., or as the staff is available. An outside contact station with interpretive kiosk is located at the north end of the Refuge in the camping area. A dike at Upper Pahranagat Lake serves as a fishing and observation pier (Service 2006a). A hunting and observation platform is available at Middle Marsh. Campsites are available along the eastern shore of the Upper Pahranagat Lake. Picnic tables and grills are available at the campsites. Non-flush toilets and dumpsters are provided in the campground area. Parking is available in several places along designated roads.

The nature trails and fishing pier are the most common facilities used by the public. In FY 2002, more than 10,000 people visited the Refuge to fish, and more than 3,000 people hiked along the nature trails. The platform was used by more than 600 visitors, and 1,500 visitors stopped at the kiosk. The administrative office/visitor contact station was visited by 500 people in 2002. More than 20,000 people visited the Refuge for other recreational opportunities, such as camping and picnicking.

Numerous recreational opportunities are available at Pahrnagat NWR (Figure 4.5-3). Wildlife-dependent activities include wildlife observation, photography, fishing, hunting, environmental education, and interpretation. Camping, boating, and picnicking are common non-wildlife-dependent activities.

#### Wildlife-Dependent Recreation

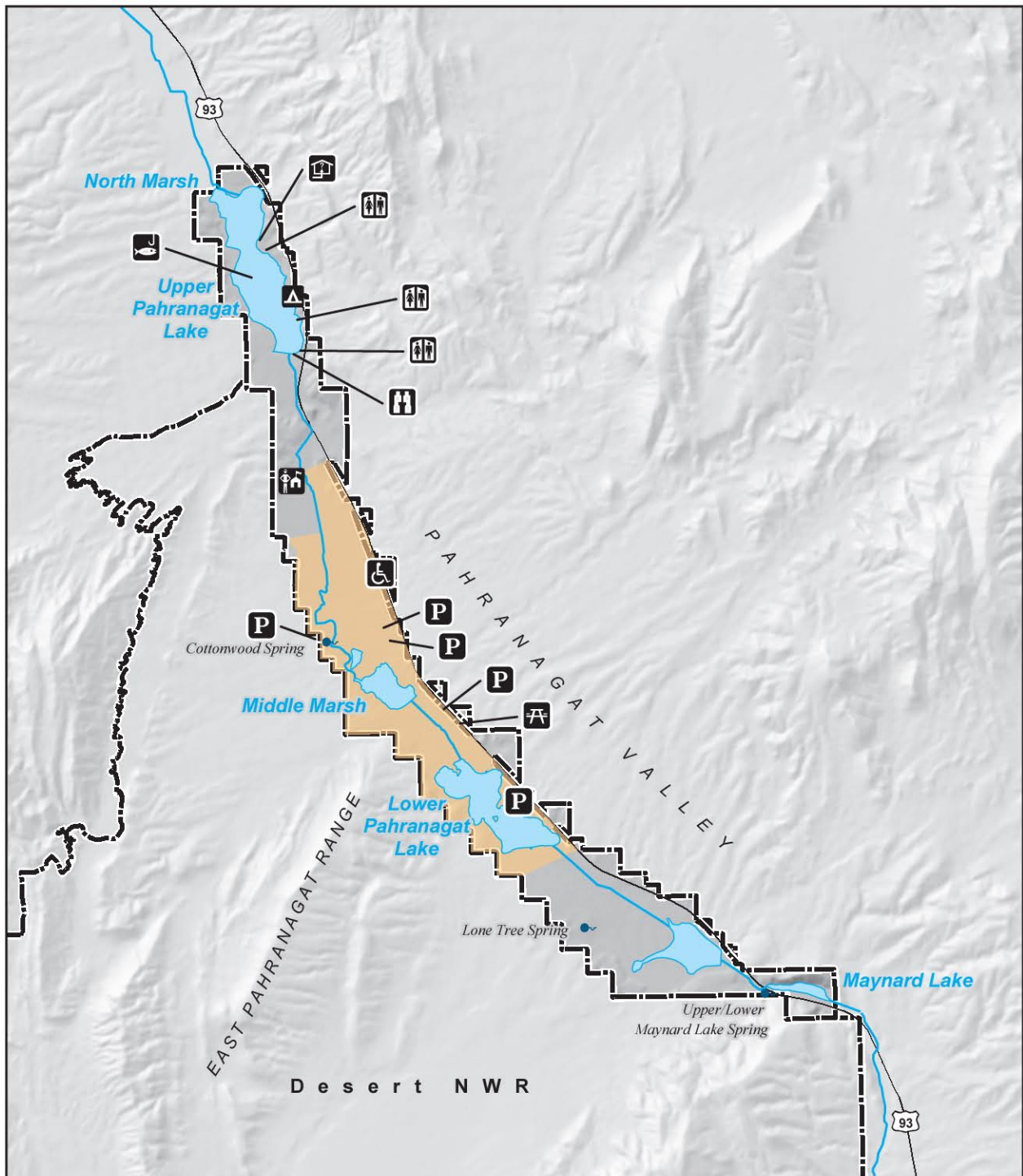
Wildlife observation, fishing, and hunting are the more popular activities enjoyed by Refuge visitors (Service 2006a). Wildlife observation is available throughout the Refuge, and a bird list is available at the Refuge or online. The large bodies of water and riparian habitat provide excellent opportunities for birders to view a variety of waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Educational opportunities about Pahrnagat NWR are available on and off the Refuge. During FY 2002, 261 visitors participated in environmental education activities (Service 2006a). Half of these (132) were staff-conducted tours for students, while the remaining half (129) were non-staff-conducted tours. Exhibits are the only off-site educational outreach opportunities offered to the public, and the Refuge had 520 visits to environmental education exhibits and 165 visits to interpretation exhibits in 2005. Other special events to promote the Refuge in 2002 included news releases and other special events.

An active volunteer program provides additional opportunities for the public to enjoy the Refuge, and student interns may be able to earn college credits through an internship at the Refuge. The Service works with the other public land agencies in southern Nevada to coordinate volunteer work through the Southern Nevada Interagency Volunteer Program—Get Outdoors Nevada. Recent research at Pahrnagat NWR has primarily centered on activities that directly support reconstruction/restoration efforts of select habitat areas, including enumeration of wildlife populations, surveying of vegetative habitats, GIS-related data gathering and analysis, and routine baseline monitoring of air and water quality.

The Desert Complex hosts events for National Wildlife Refuge Week and Migratory Bird Day. In FY 2004, they hosted a few events for National Wildlife Refuge Week. Other events that Desert Complex staff have attended include the Clark County Fair, Clark County ECOJAM (Earth Day event), Gran Fiesta (September 2002), and Boy Scout Day Camp (May 2003). Refuge staff or Desert Complex staff also attended the Governor's Conference on Tourism, Dia de los Niños, and Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Preview, depending on staff availability and funding.

Fishing opportunities are available at Upper Pahrnagat Lake. Species in the lake include largemouth bass, catfish, and carp. The NDOW and the Service signed a cooperative agreement to establish and maintain the warmwater sport fishery on the Refuge. The Service was tasked with maintaining the level of the Upper Pahrnagat Lake at 4.0 on the staff gauge at the outlet structure, and NDOW was tasked with stocking the lake, North Marsh, and Middle Pond with game fish.



	Spring	Wheelchair-Accessible Hunt Blind
	Visitor Contact Station	Observation Deck
Approved Refuge Boundary	Parking Area	Rest Area
Hunting Area	Restroom	Information Kiosk
Campground	Fishing	

**Figure 4.5-3**  
**Visitor Services**  
**Pahranaagat**  
**NWR**



Hunting is available on the Refuge south of the Refuge headquarters (Figure 4.5-3). An accessible hunting blind is available near the Refuge headquarters. During FY 2002, 1,081 hunters visited the Refuge (Service 2006a). Geese, ducks, coots, moorhens, snipe, and doves are the only migratory birds allowed to be hunted on the Refuge. Species hunted on the Refuge in 2002 included waterfowl (423 hunters), other migratory birds (516 hunters), and upland game (284 hunters). More than 10,000 people visited the Refuge to fish in 2002. Hunting and fishing are subject to all applicable state, federal, and Refuge regulations. Hunting opportunities are also available north of the Refuge at a state-managed hunting area. Hunting opportunities are offered alternately between each location to reduce stress on waterfowl.

#### Non-Wildlife-Dependent Recreation

Camping and picnicking are permitted along the eastern shoreline of Upper Pahranaagat Lake in the designated campground. Hiking is permitted on designated trails and roads. Off-highway vehicles are not permitted on the Refuge. Swimming is not allowed at any of the water bodies. Boat launching facilities are unimproved and accommodate only small craft, and only non-motorized boats, float boats, or boats with electric motors are permitted on Upper Pahranaagat Lake and Lower Pahranaagat Lake. No boats, rafts, or any other types of flotation devices are allowed at North Marsh.

### **4.5.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

#### *Refuge Management Economics*

The current Refuge staff consists of two permanent full-time employees, and one vacant part-time seasonal employee position. The Refuge Manager lives on the Refuge, with an office at the Refuge headquarters. The refuge operations budget for FY 2005 was \$160,000. The maintenance budget for the Refuge was \$44,246.

NWRs contribute funds to local counties through revenue-sharing programs that are intended to cover costs for either lands purchased in fee title or lands reserved from the public domain. For FY 2003, Lincoln County received payment in the amount of \$6,640 from the federal government under this revenue-sharing program.

#### *Environmental Justice*

The closest town to Pahranaagat NWR is the small, unincorporated town of Alamo. The population of Lincoln County is predominantly white (92 percent); Hispanics/Latinos are the largest minority group, representing about 6 percent of the population (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Lincoln County has a median family income of about \$45,000, which is slightly below the average estimate for Nevada (\$50,000). The Alamo community is not considered a low-income, minority population.

### *Land Use*

The Pahrnagat NWR is bounded on the north by privately held and BLM-managed lands, to the east and west by BLM-managed lands, and to the south by the Desert NWR (Figure 1.7-4). The NTTR is approximately 12 miles to the west.

Present-day commercial/industrial activities include open ditch irrigation development and management, operation of a landing strip/airfield by Lincoln County, basic tourist facilities, and a wastewater treatment plant. Radio and cell towers can be seen on the slopes of the east Pahrnagat Range (BLM-managed) to the west of the Refuge. Future proposed uses in the vicinity include industrial park development, residential development at Alamo and Coyote Springs, and groundwater development in neighboring valleys (Delamar and Dry Lake), which could affect management of the Refuge.

### *Aesthetics*

The Refuge encompasses a 10-mile stretch of Pahrnagat Valley and associated desert uplands at an elevation of slightly less than 4,000 feet above msl. The White River is dry for many miles upstream and downstream from Pahrnagat Valley, but there is water in the valley that originates from large springs to the north of the Refuge. Various types of wetland habitats exist, which support many plants that provide habitat for more than 230 species of migratory birds and other resident wildlife.

The Refuge is located along U.S. Highway 93 in a rural area. The road is a major man-made feature and is a major travel route. The surrounding area consists primarily of creosote bush scrub and some blackbrush in the distance. There is little elevation variation in the vicinity of the site, but mountain ranges to the west and east provide a natural background for visitors. Light pollution is scarce in the vicinity of the Refuge due to a lack of large cities.

*Chapter 5.  
Environmental  
Consequences*



Moapa dace viewing chamber at Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge

# Chapter 5. *Environmental Consequences*

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the effects of each of the alternatives on physical, natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources at the refuges in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex). The analysis focuses on a programmatic-level approach to evaluate the effects of plans, projects, and management actions within each alternative. Where a higher level of detail is known for some actions, the analysis provides a more thorough analysis of the anticipated impacts. Most components included in the alternatives' management actions have not been developed at a project-specific level of detail; for those components, this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will serve as the first-tier National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document for future project-specific NEPA documents. The need for project-specific NEPA documents is identified in the evaluation of each impact; for potentially significant, adverse impacts, a more detailed analysis will be required at the project-specific level. In addition, mitigation measures will need to be refined during the preparation of project-specific NEPA documents.

Each refuge has a No Action Alternative, Alternative A, that would continue current management practices with implementation of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP); a brief discussion of this alternative is included for comparison purposes. Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and Moapa Valley NWR each have two action alternatives; Desert NWR and Pahrnagat NWR have three action alternatives. Mitigation measures are included for resources with potentially significant adverse impacts to reduce the intensity of the impact.

This chapter is organized by refuge and then by resource, following the same order as Chapter 4 (Affected Environment). Impacts of the alternatives on each resource topic are compared to show the similarities and differences between alternatives and the range of impacts. Summary tables of the impacts for each refuge are provided at the end of each refuge discussion.

The following resources would not be affected by the Proposed Action:

- Physiography
- Geology and Minerals
- Paleontological Resources
- Hazardous Materials

These resources are not further discussed in this chapter.

Criteria were established to determine if a particular impact would represent a significant or potentially significant adverse effect. These criteria are listed below for each resource.

## 5.1.1 Physical Environment

### *Soils*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would trigger or accelerate erosion, subsidence, or slope instability and affect other resources or on-site or adjacent facilities, or if an action would result in substantial loss of topsoil.

### *Water Resources*

#### Surface Water

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would:

- Alter the existing drainage pattern of the area in a manner that causes substantial erosion or siltation;
- Create runoff water that exceeds the capacity of downstream drainage systems;
- Impede or redirect 100-year flood flows; or
- Expose people or structures to a significant impact involving flooding.

#### Groundwater

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would substantially deplete groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that there would be a net deficit in aquifer volume or lowering of the local groundwater table.

#### Water Quality

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would violate water quality standards or substantially alter water quality.

### *Air Quality*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would:

- Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan;
- Violate any air quality standard or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation; or
- Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations.

## 5.1.2 Biological Resources

### *Vegetation*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would:

- Substantially reduce or degrade habitats, especially riparian or wetland habitats;
- Result in an increase of nonnative species such that they become the dominant species in the habitat;
- Fragment or isolate habitats, particularly specialized habitat for sensitive species;

- Cause severe degradation of a habitat such that it is no longer suitable for native or endemic species;
- Result in direct mortality of sensitive species; or
- Alter suitable habitat conditions of sensitive species.

### *Wildlife*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would:

- Significantly affect habitats as described above;
- Result in mortality or forced emigration of a substantial portion of a species' population (non-sensitive);
- Allow invasive species access to areas previously restricted (e.g., aquatic habitats); or
- Reduce, through direct or indirect means, the likelihood of both the survival and recovery of a sensitive species in the wild by reducing reproductive success, numbers, or distribution of that species.

### **5.1.3 Cultural Resources**

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would:

- Cause physical destruction of or damage to all or part of a historic or prehistoric site;
- Alter a property, including restoration, rehabilitation, repair, maintenance, stabilization, hazardous material remediation, and provision of handicapped access, that is not consistent with the Secretary's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (36 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] part 68) and applicable guidelines;
- Remove the property from its historic location;
- Change the character of the property's use or any physical features within the property's setting that contribute to its historic significance;
- Introduce visual, atmospheric, or audible elements that diminish the integrity of the property's significant historic features; or
- Neglect a property, which causes its deterioration, except where such neglect and deterioration are recognized qualities of a property of religious and cultural significance to an affiliated Native American tribe or Native Hawaiian organization.

### **5.1.4 Public Access and Recreation Opportunities**

#### *Public Access*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would:

- Substantially reduce existing public or emergency access;
- Cause traffic on the refuges to exceed accepted increases in roadway volume to capacity ratios as established by affected jurisdictions;
- Cause road capacities to be exceeded;

- Create inadequate sight distance at ingress/egress points; or
- Substantially increase the demand for on- and/or off-road parking spaces.

#### *Recreation*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would:

- Substantially displace public recreation opportunities; or
- Increase the use of existing recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated.

### **5.1.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

#### *Refuge Management and Local Economics*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would result in substantial adverse impacts to local or regional economic conditions.

#### *Environmental Justice*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would result in disproportionate adverse human health impacts or environmental effects to low-income or minority populations.

#### *Land Use*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would:

- Result in substantial incompatibility between proposed uses or activities and adjacent existing uses;
- Create a conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the resources;
- Cause substantial changes in use or the intensity of use, where the resulting activity or use pattern would create significant noise, traffic, public safety, or similar environment impacts that would adversely affect the existing or future use of adjacent areas; or
- Result in direct or indirect damage to utilities or other public facilities, cause utilities or other public facilities to be relocated, either permanently or temporarily, or disrupt access to a public utility or other facility or temporarily obstruct an easement.

#### *Aesthetics*

An adverse impact is considered significant if an action would:

- Substantially alter the natural landform or construct facilities that would obstruct views to a public resource from public use areas (e.g., trails, observation blinds);
- Cause a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Cause substantial damage to scenic resources, including, but not limited to, mountains, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings;



- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

## 5.2 Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

This section describes the potential impacts associated with the No Action Alternative and two action alternatives for Ash Meadows NWR. Impacts are judged for significance using the thresholds described in the introduction of this chapter. Mitigation measures are included for resources with significant impacts.

The two action alternatives involve monitoring, inventory, and research actions that would not result in adverse environmental impacts. These actions would provide the Refuge staff with an improved knowledge of the Refuge, which would later allow them to better assess the effects of their actions. These actions are not further evaluated in this section.

### 5.2.1 Physical Environment

#### *Soils*

##### Impacts

Restoration activities under each of the alternatives would disturb soils and expose them to wind and water erosion until native vegetation is restored. Areas that would be affected under each alternative include Upper Point of Rocks, Jackrabbit Springs, the Warm Springs (North and South Indian Springs and School Springs) Management Units, Crystal Springs Unit, and Carson Slough. Additional soil disturbance under Alternative B would occur in the Warm Springs, Jackrabbit/Big Springs, Crystal Springs, and Upper Carson Slough Management Units, where additional restoration is planned, and at Lower Point of Rocks, Lower Kings Pool, and Marsh, Big, and Fairbanks Springs, where restoration plans would be implemented. Under Alternative C, restoration activities would also occur at a larger scale in each of the management units and at Tubbs, Bradford, Crystal, Forest, and North and South Scruggs Springs as well as at Longstreet and Rogers Springs. Soil disturbance would increase under the two action alternatives and would result in a temporary increase in erosion, which would be significant where large areas of soil are exposed. Impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities. Establishment of native vegetation and restoration of the areas would provide long-term protection against erosion.

Removal of invasive plants under each alternative (more extensive under Alternatives B and C, specifically including salt cedar) and planting native vegetation would improve soil conditions by stabilizing soils and reducing salt and mineral concentrations that accumulate at the base of salt cedar.

In addition to the restoration activities, road maintenance and construction of visitor use facilities would result in temporary soil disturbance under each of the alternatives. Additional impacts would occur under Alternative C due to construction of a research facility and implementation of a Resurfacing Plan for Refuge roads. These impacts would not be significant where minor amounts of soil are disturbed and topsoil loss is minimal. Impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the facility improvements and construction.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce soil impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Native vegetation would be planted in areas where nonnative vegetation is removed and soils are exposed to improve soil conditions and stabilize soils. Appropriate best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented during restoration and construction activities to minimize indirect effects of soil disturbance, including dust, erosion, and sedimentation. These measures would include pre-watering and maintaining surface soils in stabilized conditions where support equipment and vehicles will operate; applying water or dust palliative during clearing and grubbing or earth-moving activity to keep soils moist throughout the process; watering disturbed soils immediately following clearing and grubbing activities; and stabilizing sloping surfaces using soil binders until vegetation or desert pavement (ground cover) can effectively stabilize the slope.

### *Water Resources*

#### Impacts

Each of the alternatives involves restoration activities at major springs on the Refuge, invasive plant removal near open water sources, restoration of natural hydrology in various locations on the Refuge, and construction of a boardwalk and overlook near Kings Pool Stream. Additional facility improvements and construction would occur under Alternatives B and C. Ground disturbance activities associated with these activities and facility construction or maintenance near open water sources could cause erosion around the springs, along banks of streams, and at Kings Pool Stream and increase sedimentation and siltation, resulting in increased turbidity of the surface waters. These activities would result in significant, temporary impacts where large areas are restored or modified. Impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the activities. Establishment of native vegetation and restoration of historic hydrology would improve surface water conditions on the Refuge over the long term. Removal of cattails at Kings, Point of Rocks, and Crystal springs under Alternative C could improve flow from the springs into downstream drainages.

Habitat restoration increases under each alternative; therefore, impacts to hydrology and water quality would also increase. Under Alternative A, impacts would occur in the Upper Point of Rocks, Jackrabbit Spring, Warm Springs and Crystal Springs Management Units as well as at Carson Slough. Under the two action alternatives, impacts would also occur around several springs. Temporary impacts caused by removing berms, ditches, dams, and impoundments, and closing, maintaining, or modifying roads in each of these units would increase the potential for soil erosion and increased sedimentation in surface waters. Short-term impacts to water quality could be significant; therefore, impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities.

Improved wetland and riparian conditions in the management units would benefit the Refuge's surface water quality over the longer term. For example, removal of salt cedar near surface waters would improve water quality because salt cedar accumulates salt at its base, uses a larger amount of water than most native plants, and degrades aquatic habitat.

Construction of new refugia for the Devils Hole pupfish and Warm Springs pupfish under each alternative may involve ground disturbance in or near existing springs and streams or diversion of water to create the necessary habitat conditions for the pupfish. Temporary impacts may include alteration of flows downstream of the refugia, increased turbidity or other changes to water quality, and modifications of hydrology. These impacts could be significant but temporary, depending on the project-specific details of the refugia; therefore, impacts will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the refugia.

Construction of new buildings and visitor use facilities under Alternatives B and C may result in short-term impacts to surface water hydrology and water quality caused by ground disturbance near surface waters. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the buildings and facilities.

Alternative C includes implementing the plan to modify or remove Crystal Reservoir. Modifications to this reservoir would reduce open water habitat and allow for native habitat restoration, which would involve restoring historic hydrology (streams) and native habitats. The removal or modification of Crystal Reservoir would also reduce the potential for flooding downstream of the reservoir and benefit the social and natural environments. Construction activities associated with reservoir modifications may result in short-term impacts to surface water hydrology and water quality as a result of ground disturbance near surface waters. Over the long term, water resources on the Refuge would likely be improved through removal or modification of Crystal Reservoir because historic hydrology and native habitats would be restored, improving water conditions as described above for other restoration activities. These impacts will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the Crystal Reservoir modification plan.

Use of herbicides to control invasive plants under each alternative could potentially affect surface water quality in the reservoirs, springs, and streams on the Refuge. Herbicides reaching surface water could result in indirect impacts on vegetation, fish, and wildlife that rely on the water. Impacts to water quality are expected to be minimal and less than significant because mechanical methods would be used near surface water, and herbicides would be used only when necessary and in accordance with the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce water quality impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Implementation of BMPs during ground-disturbing activities would reduce the effects of erosion, siltation, and sedimentation on water quality of the Refuge waters. These measures would include constructing small sediment collection pools downstream of work areas to trap sediment and reduce sediment movement through the aquatic system; using turbidity barriers in areas where sediment collection pools cannot be used; directing flows where feasible around the work area and temporarily detaining flows to reduce potential entrainment of sediment; and limiting the size of the area of disturbance where flows cannot be directed around the work area or detained, so that minimal sediment is added to stream flows.

### *Air Quality*

#### Impacts

Habitat restoration activities under each of the alternatives would require the use of construction equipment to remove vegetation; plant new vegetation; remove dams, berms, and other facilities; and modify stream channels. Construction of buildings and visitor use facilities under Alternatives B and C would also require construction equipment that would disturb the ground and clear vegetation. The equipment and ground-disturbing activities would cause short-term, minor emissions (engine exhaust and fugitive dust) that may be noticeable on the Refuge. Depending on the extent of activities, an increase in emissions could violate ambient air quality standards and could be significant. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities and facility construction and improvement.

Increased traffic on and through the Refuge would result in a minor increase in traffic-related emissions and an increase in dust. Traffic would not result in violations of the ambient air quality standards for particulates because the amount of Refuge traffic at one time is expected to be small, and traffic would be limited to the main roads and parking areas. Through traffic would not remain on the Refuge for an extended period of time; thus, emissions would be minimal. Impacts associated with dust would also be minimal because under each alternative, the Refuge roads would be improved and maintained or closed to public access (more improvements would occur under the

action alternatives). Increased traffic-related emissions on the Refuge would not violate ambient air quality standards and would not be significant with respect to ambient air quality because of the minimal amount of traffic at one time and improved road conditions.

Wildfires can affect air quality through the release of smoke and gases. Fuel breaks and fuel reduction projects to reduce the risk of wildfire would be implemented under each alternative. These measures would reduce the potential for and intensity of air pollutant emissions from wildfires. However, prescribed burns under Alternatives B and C would result in a temporary increase in smoke over the Refuge, which would adversely affect air quality. This would be a less-than-significant impact because small areas would be burned at one time, and the smoke would be temporary, resulting in minimal adverse effects on ambient air quality.

Ground-disturbance, construction, and fire management (particularly fuels reduction) activities under any of the alternatives would result in direct emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) (temporary emissions) from construction equipment. Fire management would help prevent catastrophic wildfire over the long term and reduce long-term GHG emissions. Indirect, long-term emissions of GHG would occur due to increased visitation by the public and increased employee vehicle trips (as staff grows). An increase in GHG emissions would contribute to regional impacts on climate change and could result in significant impacts. Climate change impacts will be further analyzed in project-specific NEPA documents, as appropriate.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce air quality impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Application of dust retardants on main roads, watering roads, and regularly maintaining main roads would minimize dust generation. BMPs would be implemented during construction activities that disturb the soil to reduce particulate emissions. These measures would include the BMPs identified for mitigating soil and water resources impacts as well as the following: maintaining effective cover over stockpiled fill or debris materials; limiting vehicle speeds to 15 mph in staging areas and on all unpaved access routes; and cleaning mud, silt, and soil tracked out onto paved surfaces immediately. In addition, use of low or zero-emission construction vehicles and limiting idling time for construction vehicles could reduce GHG emissions during construction.

## 5.2.2 Biological Resources

### *Vegetation*

#### Impacts

Ground disturbance associated with construction of the boardwalk near Kings Pool Stream and road modifications under each alternative would result in a loss of vegetation in affected areas, increased potential for invasive plants, and potential impacts to sensitive plants. Construction of additional visitor use facilities under Alternatives B and C would also result in similar types of impacts. Habitat impacts associated with boardwalk construction, road modifications, and visitor facility construction would be less than significant because of the small amount of habitat affected by each facility. Invasive plants could establish in the disturbed areas following construction activities, but this impact would not be significant because the Service would implement measures to control invasive plants as part of the IPM Plan and would restore native vegetation to disturbed areas. Due to the sensitivity of many endemic plants on the Refuge, impacts to sensitive plants could be significant, depending on the project-specific details of the facilities; therefore, impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for these facilities.

Habitat restoration increases under each alternative; therefore, short-term impacts and long-term benefits to vegetation and habitats would also increase. Under Alternative A, approximately 70 acres of alkali wet meadow, 30 acres of mesquite bosques/lowland riparian habitat, and 30 acres of native upland habitat would be restored in the Warm Springs and Jackrabbit Springs Units. Additional restoration would also occur in the Upper Point of Rocks, Carson Slough, and Crystal Springs Units, and old agricultural fields would be rehabilitated. Alternative B would involve restoring 520 acres of alkali wet meadow, 220 acres of mesquite bosque/lowland riparian habitat, and 150 acres of emergent marsh as well as rehabilitating a larger percent of agricultural fields and implementing additional restoration to maintain alkaline meadow/wet meadow, native upland desert, and mesquite bosque. Alternative C would involve restoring 650 acres of alkali wet meadow, 550 acres of mesquite bosque/lowland riparian habitat, and 150 acres of emergent marsh as well as the additional restoration/rehabilitation under Alternative B.

Temporary disturbance during habitat restoration activities could result in impacts to sensitive species populations and sensitive habitats (i.e., wetlands), which could be significant. Sensitive plants may experience short-term, adverse impacts during construction activities (direct take or loss or modification of suitable habitat conditions) in areas where habitat restoration is proposed under each alternative. Threatened and endangered species that are more likely to be affected due to their presence in wetland/riparian habitats include spring-loving centaury, Ash Meadows gumplant, and Amargosa niterwort. Threatened and endangered species that occur in upland areas include Ash Meadows milkvetch, Ash Meadows sunray, Ash Meadows ivesia, and Ash Meadows blazing star. These impacts could be significant, depending on the project-specific details of the restoration activities; therefore, impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA

documents to be prepared for restoration of the habitats in each management unit.

Over the long term, restoration would provide improved habitat conditions throughout the Refuge for sensitive plants. Additional transplanting efforts for sensitive plants under Alternatives B and C would expand and benefit sensitive plant populations on the Refuge. Removal or modification of Crystal Reservoir under Alternative C would also improve habitat conditions on the Refuge, specifically for Amargosa niterwort.

Each of the alternatives involves restoration actions at major spring locations to improve native habitat. As part of these restoration actions, nonnative and invasive plants would be removed or controlled around the springs, and native plants would be planted in their place. These actions would benefit the habitats around the springs by encouraging native plant growth and reducing undesirable species. Native habitat is more desirable and suitable for most wildlife species and improves conditions of the springs by helping control water quality and temperature.

Each alternative involves removing invasive plants at restoration sites and in burned areas using physical and chemical means, in compliance with the IPM Plan, to benefit native habitats and improve conditions for native plants to reestablish. A more active invasive species removal program would be implemented under Alternatives B and C to control nonnative and invasive plants throughout the Refuge. Specifically, the Service would remove 50 to 75 percent of salt cedar and Russian knapweed populations (based on 2006 estimates) under Alternative B and 75 to 95 percent of their populations under Alternative C. Additional efforts under Alternative C would include evaluating alternative pest control strategies and expanding efforts to include all aquatic systems on the Refuge.

Invasive plant removal efforts could adversely affect sensitive plants through incidental take or habitat modification, which could affect their populations and result in significant impacts. Under Alternatives B and C, the Service would adjust its efforts based on the responses of sensitive plants to ensure minimal impacts to their populations. Ongoing monitoring of the species would allow the Service to determine where management activities should be modified.

Control and removal of invasive plants would allow native plants to establish, and establishment of native plants in moist areas would provide additional protection against invasive species over the long term. Removal of salt cedar under Alternatives B and C would also improve soil conditions and reduce the risk for high-intensity fires associated with salt cedar stands.

A variety of measures under each alternative, including law enforcement, fuel reduction projects, road closures, fixing and installing barriers, and expanding Service-managed lands within the Refuge boundary, would protect habitats and sensitive plants from unnecessary disturbance. Increased law enforcement and road gates



under Alternatives B and C would further protect habitat and sensitive plants.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce vegetation (primarily sensitive species) impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 7 consultation process, as appropriate.

Standard construction practices would be implemented to prevent invasive plant species from establishing in the disturbed areas around the facilities, such as cleaning vehicles and equipment used on the Refuge with high-pressure sprayers to dislodge seeds prior to accessing the area. Facilities would be designed to avoid sensitive habitats and sensitive species populations and impact the least amount of vegetation (based on pre-construction surveys and mapping). For activities that would result in take of sensitive plants, the Service would implement transplanting or restoration plans for affected plants to transplant or plant sensitive plants in suitable habitats on the Refuge.

### *Wildlife*

#### Impacts

Temporary construction activities associated with visitor use facilities, roads, and fencing would disturb fish and wildlife species in the vicinity of the activity. Amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, fish, and invertebrates that use the affected habitats have the potential to be directly affected by construction equipment and vegetation removal activities. These species would be forced to temporarily relocate to other areas of the Refuge or off-site until the disturbance is removed. Because only minimal road improvements would occur under Alternative A, short-term adverse impacts to fish and wildlife species would be limited to small areas of the Refuge and would not be significant. More facilities would be constructed or improved under Alternatives B and C; thus, short-term adverse impacts would be greater and could be significant if sensitive fish or wildlife species are harmed or if breeding, nesting, and spawning activities are disturbed. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for facility construction and road improvements.

Habitat improvements under each alternative would benefit most wildlife species by restoring native conditions, although temporary construction activities would result in short-term disturbance to fish and wildlife. Temporary impacts would be similar to those described above for facility construction, and potentially significant impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the habitat restoration activities.

Riparian and wetland species, such as waterfowl, song birds, southwestern willow flycatcher, and amphibians, would benefit from restoration of alkali wet meadow and mesquite bosque/lowland riparian habitat under each alternative, with greater benefits occurring under

Alternatives B and C because larger amounts of habitat would be restored. Management priority species that would benefit from wet meadow and riparian restoration include eared grebe, western grebe, Franklin's gull, black tern, snowy egret, marbled godwit, snowy plover, long-billed curlew, Arizona Bell's vireo, and western yellow-billed cuckoo.

Restoration of emergent marsh under Alternatives B and C would benefit migratory birds, fish, amphibians, and invertebrates. Specifically, eared grebe, western grebe, Franklin's gull, black tern, snowy egret, and canvasback would benefit from emergent marsh restoration. Control of cattails around open water sources under Alternatives B and C would expand open water habitat for migratory birds, waterfowl, and fish and may attract more birds to the Refuge. Improvements to springs and streams on the Refuge under each alternative would benefit the sensitive species occupying those habitats and could aid in their recovery.

Restoration of native upland habitat under each alternative would benefit migratory birds, burrowing owls, chuckwalla, and other reptiles, mammals, and birds that use the habitat. Specifically, white-throated swift would benefit from upland restoration. Restoration activities throughout the Refuge would benefit native, endemic, and migratory wildlife over the long term.

Habitat restoration, particularly in and around springs, continued restoration of spring outflow systems, and control of nonnative species in those systems would also benefit the Warm Springs pupfish and other fish species on the Refuge. Specific restoration activities in streams to provide flowing streams with riffles would benefit the Ash Meadows speckled dace under Alternatives B and C. Additional restoration activities under Alternative C, such as removal of cattails from Kings, Point of Rocks, and Crystal Springs, would benefit the native, endemic fish species present on the Refuge. In addition, eared grebe and snowy egret would benefit from spring and channel restoration.

Temporary disturbance during stream modifications and installation of temporary fish barriers would disturb fish directly, restrict movement, or affect water quality. These impacts could be significant, depending on the project-specific details of the restoration activities; therefore, impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for restoration of the spring habitats. Improved habitat conditions, specifically through removal of pest species as discussed below, would improve reproductive success and increase populations of sensitive fish on the Refuge to aid in their recovery.

The threatened Ash Meadows naucorid population would benefit from habitat improvements under Alternatives B and C. The Point of Rocks spring outflow channel would be restored to provide flowing streams with substrate. This would encourage the naucorid population to expand its range into the suitable habitat and aid in recovering the species' population.

Crystal Reservoir provides habitat primarily for nonnative or introduced fish species. These species adversely affect native species through predation and competition for resources, although efforts are ongoing to control their populations. The removal or modification plan for the reservoir would be implemented under Alternative C. Changes to the reservoir, in particular its removal, would substantially reduce or possibly eliminate nonnative predatory fish in the reservoir system, which would benefit native fish populations. Native fish occurring on the Refuge can survive in the stream and spring habitats; thus, reservoir removal would not be detrimental to native species. Temporary impacts during reservoir removal or modification would be reduced through relocating any native fish that are found in waters anticipated to be affected by reservoir removal or modification activities to suitable habitat outside the disturbance area during restoration activities. These impacts will be further analyzed in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the reservoir modification plan.

Restoration of the native habitat and hydrology in the Crystal Reservoir area would benefit aquatic and avian species over the long term and could improve populations of sensitive and endemic fish by removing the nonnative fish.

Crayfish and bullfrogs compete with and prey on native, endemic fish and invertebrates. Under Alternatives B and C, the Service would actively remove crayfish from the spring habitats. These efforts would benefit fish and invertebrates by reducing predators and competition.

Under each alternative, the Point of Rocks refugium would be discontinued once a new refugium is established for the Devils Hole pupfish, or sooner. Construction and operation of new refugia for the endangered Devils Hole pupfish and Warm Springs pupfish under each alternative and refugia for other endemic species under Alternative C would benefit native fish species by providing a population base for reintroduction to the springs and streams on the Refuge, following restoration activities. The refugia would also ensure the continued survival of the species by providing a safe haven for the species. Temporary impacts on habitats and fish species during construction of the refugia will be analyzed in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the refugia.

#### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce wildlife impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 7 consultation process, as appropriate.

Standard construction measures would be implemented to minimize impacts on native wildlife, such as avoiding unnecessary disturbance to habitats by driving on existing roads and working only in the required area, minimizing direct disturbance to streams and open water sources, and throwing away all trash and other construction debris in approved disposal areas. Construction activities and restoration would be

implemented during the non-breeding/nesting season and outside of the spawning period for fish, to the extent feasible. Disturbance during the breeding/nesting season would require pre-construction surveys to locate active nests and establish barriers around the nest site until a qualified biologist determines the nest site is abandoned. Activities in or near waterways would be avoided during the spawning period to minimize impacts on sensitive fish.

### **5.2.3 Cultural Resources**

#### Impacts

In addition to restoration activities, improvements and modifications to roads would result in ground disturbance under each of the alternatives. Additional ground disturbance would occur under Alternatives B and C because of the larger areas of restoration and construction of visitor use facilities. Cultural resources may be adversely affected by ground disturbance activities associated with construction and restoration activities. Impacts associated with each alternative have the potential to be significant, depending on the project-specific details of restoration, road construction, and visitor facilities, if important known or unknown cultural resources on the Refuge are destroyed or damaged. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for these activities.

Cultural resources are currently being adversely affected by vandalism, degradation, and, on occasion, fire. Alternative A involves minimal actions to reduce these impacts, and National Register-eligible cultural resource sites could be damaged, destroyed, or otherwise significantly affected. Several historic cabins on the Refuge have been destroyed by wildfires, which are carried by the salt cedars in the old farm canals. Alternatives B and C involve removing salt cedar and constructing fences, signs, and other barriers, which would provide some protection for cultural resources. Indirect adverse effects related to increased visitor use may include disturbance and destruction of sites and removal of artifacts. Impacts to cultural resources would be significant under the action alternatives if eligible sites lose their integrity through destruction, damage, or removal. Indirect impacts on cultural resources will be further analyzed in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for Refuge activities.

Because other aspects of the environment are important to tribes and can be considered cultural resources, adverse impacts to other resources could also be considered impacts to cultural resources. These impacts are not specifically discussed as cultural resource impacts; however, they may be of concern to culturally affiliated tribes if the resources are important to them. Examples include native plants that may be collected and used for various purposes, water resources, or geologic features.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce cultural resource impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 106 consultation process, as appropriate.

In order to prevent adverse impacts on cultural resources during restoration and construction activities, professional archaeologists would survey the project areas for cultural resources and record the information and locations prior to project implementation. Staff members would use their knowledge of site locations to design and construct facilities to avoid eligible resources. All ground disturbance activities would be monitored by an archaeologist and a tribal monitor in areas where known cultural resources are located and in areas with high potential for buried cultural deposits. If cultural resources are inadvertently exposed during activities, activities would immediately cease and a qualified archaeologist would be consulted to implement appropriate measures for mitigation or preservation. If eligible sites or portions thereof cannot be protected and would be adversely affected, other mitigation or data recovery methods would be conducted in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.

## **5.2.4 Public Access and Recreation**

### *Public Access*

#### Impacts

Public access would be temporarily affected during construction and restoration activities under each alternative. More activities are proposed under Alternatives B and C; therefore, access to larger areas of the Refuge would be temporarily affected for longer periods. These activities would result in incidental traffic from construction vehicles over a short-term period that would result in a relatively small increase in traffic in the immediate vicinity of the Refuge. Some congestion on roadways and longer stop times at intersections would be expected during the construction period. Areas under construction or being restored would be temporarily off-limits to the public for their safety.

Impacts to public access during restoration and construction could be significant depending on the locations and extent of activities implemented at one time. With the small number of visitors on the Refuge at one time, most activities would have minimal effects on traffic. Visitors would continue to have access to other areas of the Refuge during construction activities. Project-specific NEPA documents will include further analysis of public access impacts of Refuge actions.

Long-term public access on the Refuge would continue to be generally unrestricted under Alternative A, with some nonessential roads being closed and minimal law enforcement patrols. Visitors would be allowed to access the Refuge at any time and use multiple routes or points along the Refuge boundary. Primary access is from the south on Spring Meadows Road and is often a result of through traffic. There are also a number of other points of access to the Refuge that, along

with limited law enforcement patrols under current management, impair the ability of the Service to properly manage and protect resources on the Refuge.

Additional measures under Alternatives B and C would limit and control access on the Refuge by increasing law enforcement patrols and adding road gates to block access to non-public roads. These measures would restrict public access to certain areas, but visitors would continue to have access to open areas of the Refuge for recreational purposes, and private landowners would continue to have access to their lands. Access control measures would improve Refuge management by protecting resources on the Refuge and preventing or minimizing significant impacts to sensitive resources, which would improve the quality of the visitor's experience.

Under all alternatives, improvements to existing roadways and parking areas would have a beneficial effect on public access throughout the Refuge. Additional improvements to roads as part of the Resurfacing Plan under Alternative C would also benefit public access and improve Refuge road conditions. Improved road conditions would also encourage visitors to stay on designated roads and provide direction to public access points.

The various visitor use projects under Alternatives B and C would improve recreational opportunities for visitors and could attract more visitors to the Refuge. This increase would result in increased traffic on Highway 373/127 and increased traffic on the Refuge. The traffic impacts would be more noticeable on peak days, primarily weekends, when vehicle trips to the Refuge are highest. The increase in visitors and some additional road construction-related traffic would have a minor impact due to the relatively low number of visitors at one time and the low amount of traffic currently occurring on Highway 373/127 and the Refuge.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce public access impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Areas under construction or being restored would be temporarily off-limits to the public for their safety. These areas would be adequately marked, and detours or alternative routes would be identified. Refuge staff would schedule construction for slower times of visitation during the week and slower seasons to minimize the impacts of construction traffic on public access.

## *Recreation*

### Impacts

Temporary construction activities associated with road improvements and restoration under each alternative would restrict access to affected areas of the Refuge for recreational purposes. Construction of visitor facilities under Alternatives B and C would also restrict public use of small areas of the Refuge where construction occurs. Recreational opportunities would continue to be available in other areas of the Refuge. Depending on the locations and extent of activities implemented at one time, impacts to recreational opportunities could be significant. With the small number of visitors on the Refuge at one time, most activities would have minimal effects on recreation. Project-specific NEPA documents will include further analysis of recreational impacts of Refuge actions.

A variety of recreational opportunities would be available to the public under each alternative, such as wildlife observation, hiking, and picnicking. These activities are supported by trails, kiosks, picnic areas, and restrooms at several locations on the Refuge. Under each alternative, recreational opportunities would be improved to provide more services for visitors. The most improvements would occur under Alternatives B and C with development of a Visitor Services Plan, an Outreach Plan, an Environmental Education Plan, and a Hunt Plan. The Visitor Services Plan and Hunt Plan would address potential public use conflicts associated with change in Refuge users and dynamics from a predominantly hunter use to school and international visitation.

Restoration activities and construction of visitor use facilities (i.e., the boardwalk at Kings Pool Stream) under each alternative would enhance visitor experiences and benefit recreational opportunities. Interpretive and education materials would also improve visitor experience and expand recreational opportunities on the Refuge. Implementation of the plan to remove or modify Crystal Reservoir under Alternative C would eliminate unauthorized fishing by removing the source of game fish. Habitat conditions for sensitive fish would be improved, but game fishing would be eliminated. The availability of other recreational opportunities on the Refuge would reduce adverse effects of eliminating unauthorized fishing.

The Refuge would continue its limited participation in community events and other forms of environmental education under Alternative A, including its partnership with Death Valley National Park to educate the public on Death Valley and the Devils Hole pupfish. Expanded outreach efforts would occur under Alternatives B and C to encourage the public to visit the Refuge and experience the opportunities available to them.

Alternatives B and C include the construction of a new visitor contact station and interpretive facilities and an expanded emphasis on educational activities and outreach to local groups. These actions would benefit environmental education and outreach opportunities for the Refuge.



### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce recreation impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Areas under construction or being restored would be temporarily off-limits to the public for their safety. These areas would be adequately marked, and information on other recreational areas would be provided to the public. Refuge staff would schedule construction for slower times of visitation during the week and slower seasons when feasible, to minimize the impacts of construction traffic on public access.

## **5.2.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

### *Refuge Management and Local Economics*

#### Impacts

Under Alternative A, the annual Refuge budget, which includes operations, capital projects, and four full-time staff members, would remain comparable to current funding and staffing levels, resulting in continued limitations on management of the Refuge and opportunities for public interaction.

Under each alternative, the Service would continue to pursue acquisition of the remaining lands within the approved boundary from willing sellers. Lands acquired would be removed from the tax rolls, so state and local government income would be slightly reduced. However, this loss in property taxes would be at least partially offset by Refuge revenue-sharing payments, so this impact would not be significant.

Under each alternative, restoration projects, road improvements, and boardwalk construction would provide employment to qualified local citizens, including tribal individuals, for a short term. Under Alternatives B and C, new interpretive facilities, a visitor contact station, and Refuge headquarters would be constructed, along with other physical improvements. These actions would also require use of private contractors, which would have a minor beneficial effect in terms of providing short-term jobs to qualified local citizens, including tribal individuals. Additional activities related to environmental education would require increased expenditures to meet those needs. These actions would require increases in the Refuge management and operations budget and staffing.

An increase in the number of visitors to the Refuge would increase retail trade, lodging, and food service for the nearby local economy. Additional indirect employment as a result of the increased activity would also be expected.

#### Mitigation

Impacts to refuge management economics and local economies would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

### *Environmental Justice*

#### Impacts

Minority or low-income populations would not be affected by the continuation of existing operations of the Refuge under Alternative A.

Increased educational and outreach activities, both on-site and off-site, under Alternatives B and C would provide benefits to school children and tribal communities, including minority and low-income populations. Adverse effects on low-income or minority populations are not expected under the action alternatives.

Development of cultural resources interpretive and environmental education materials in coordination with affiliated Native American tribes under Alternatives B and C would address topics that would be of interest to the Native American population.

#### Mitigation

Impacts related to environmental justice would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

### *Land Use*

#### Impacts

With the Refuge continuing to operate at the current level of activities under Alternative A, new land use conflicts to existing or planned uses in the proximity of the Refuge are not anticipated.

Acquisition of existing private parcels within the Refuge would occur under each alternative. Any additional acquisitions of private land would allow greater public access to areas on the Refuge and would allow the Refuge to be managed as a whole with less fragmentation. Private land would only be purchased from landowners who wish to sell. Private landowners who do not want to sell would continue to have access to their property for private use.

#### Mitigation

Impacts to land use would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

### *Aesthetics*

#### Impacts

Restoration and protection efforts for native habitats under each alternative would improve visual character of the Refuge by restoring the habitats to native and historic conditions. Greater improvements to visual character would occur under Alternatives B and C because of the larger areas being affected. Temporary impacts would occur during restoration activities when vegetation is removed, and soils are exposed, adversely affecting views of the area for visitors; these impacts are not considered significant due to their short duration. These views would immediately improve upon establishment of native vegetation and restoration of historic hydrology.

Construction of a boardwalk under each alternative would affect views of the Refuge during and following construction. Additional visitor use facilities would be constructed under Alternatives B and C, including a visitor contact station and Refuge headquarters, which would result in greater temporary effects on aesthetics. Temporary dust, exposed soils, and construction activities would adversely affect views of the disturbed areas during construction; however, these impacts are not considered significant due to their short duration.

New visitor facilities could have a long-term impact on the natural features and vegetation currently on the Refuge, depending upon the siting of the facilities and integration into the Refuge's natural setting. The new Refuge headquarters, visitor contact station, and boardwalks would be constructed to improve the visual quality of the Refuge, specifically at the current administrative site, which consists of a variety of trailers and old metal structures. Impacts to aesthetics could be significant, depending on the project-specific details of the facilities; therefore, impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the facilities.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce aesthetics impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Visual impacts during construction of interpretive facilities and other physical improvements would be temporary and addressed through screening, ongoing construction site maintenance, and cleanup during construction. Refuge staff would schedule construction for slower times during the week and slower seasons, when feasible, to minimize these impacts. Impacts of new facilities on the long-term visual quality of the Refuge would be addressed through site-sensitive design standards that ensure compatibility with the Refuge environment.

## **5.2.6 Summary of Effects**

Table 5.2-1 summarizes the potential effects for each of the three alternatives. Alternative A continues current management practices with little changes or improvements. Alternative A would involve restoration of 70 acres of alkali wet meadow, 30 acres of mesquite bosques/lowland riparian, and 30 acres of native upland habitat.

Compared with Alternative A, Alternative B would improve Refuge habitats to benefit native and sensitive plant and wildlife species, accommodate an increase in visitors, and enhance visitor experience. Alternative B would involve restoration of 520 acres of alkali wet meadow, 220 acres of mesquite bosque/lowland riparian, 30 acres of native upland habitat, and 150 acres of emergent marsh. Alternative B would, however, result in short-term, mitigable adverse impacts from restoration projects and facility and road construction.

Compared with Alternative B, Alternative C would provide greater biological and visitor benefits, but result in greater short-term mitigable adverse construction impacts. Alternative C would involve restoration of 650 acres of alkali wet meadow, 550 acres of mesquite bosques/lowland riparian, 30 acres of native upland habitat, and 150 acres of emergent marsh.

Impacts and mitigation measures of restoration actions, visitor facility construction and improvement, and other actions noted throughout this section will be further analyzed and refined in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for each action. The Service will use the analysis presented in this EIS to focus on key issues that need to be further evaluated in second-tier NEPA documents.

**Table 5.2-1. Ash Meadows NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Physical Environment</b>			
Soil Conditions	EC <sup>1</sup> : Minimal long-term improvements; some temporary disturbance	SH: Improved long-term conditions through restoration; some temporary disturbance during construction and restoration	MH: Improved long-term conditions through restoration; some temporary disturbance during construction and restoration
Surface Water	EC: Some hydrology restored (long-term)	SH: Hydrology restored on portions of Refuge (long-term)	MH: Hydrology restored throughout Refuge (long-term)
Water Quality	EC: Improved with restoration over the long term in some areas; some temporary impacts	SH: Improved with restoration over the long term on portions of the Refuge; temporary impacts	MH: Improved with restoration over the long term throughout Refuge; temporary impacts
Air Quality	EC: Some emissions and dust (temporary and long-term)	SL: Minor emissions and dust from temporary construction activities and increased temporary and long-term traffic; temporary smoke from prescribed burns	SL: Minor emissions and dust from temporary construction activities and increased temporary and long-term traffic; temporary smoke from prescribed burns
<b>Biological Resources</b>			
Alkali Wet Meadow	EC: Restore 70 acres of habitat over the long term	CH: Restore 520 acres of habitat over the long term	CH: Restore 650 acres of habitat over the long term
Mesquite Bosque/Lowland Riparian	EC: Restore 30 acres of habitat over the long term	MH: Restore 220 acres of habitat over the long term	CH: Restore 550 acres of habitat over the long term
Emergent Marsh	EC: Maintain 132 acres of habitat over the long term	SH: Restore 150 acres of habitat over the long term	SH: Restore 150 acres of habitat over the long term
Upland Habitat	EC: Restore 30 acres of desert upland habitat over the long term	SH: Rehabilitate agricultural fields; maintain desert upland habitat over the long term	SH: Rehabilitate agricultural fields; maintain desert upland habitat over the long term
Sensitive Plants	EC: Improved habitat in some areas over the long term; minor temporary disturbance	MH: Population expansion over the long term; improved habitat on portions of the Refuge over the long term; potential for temporary impacts during restoration and facility construction activities	CH: Population expansion over the long term; improved habitat throughout the Refuge over the long term; potential for temporary impacts during restoration and facility construction activities in a larger area
Invasive Plants	EC: Minimal removal efforts over the long term	SH: Removal of invasive plants in restored areas over the long term	MH: Removal of invasive plants in restored areas over the long term

<sup>1</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH= moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH= considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL= slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML= moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL= considerably lower than existing conditions.

**Table 5.2-1. Ash Meadows NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Biological Resources, continued</b>			
Common Wildlife Species	EC <sup>2</sup> : Some improved habitat over the long term; minimal temporary disturbance	SH: Improved habitat on portions of the Refuge over the long term but potential for impacts during construction	MH: Improved habitat throughout Refuge over the long term but potential for impacts during construction
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher	EC: Some improved habitat over the long term	SH: Improved habitat on portions of the Refuge over the long term	MH: Improved habitat throughout Refuge over the long term
Management Priority Birds	EC: Some improved habitat over the long term	MH: Improved and increased habitat on portions of the Refuge over the long term	CH: Improved and increased habitat throughout the Refuge over the long term
Sensitive Fish	EC: Some improved habitat over the long term; minimal temporary disturbance	MH: Improved habitat on portions of the Refuge over the long term; potential for impacts during construction	CH: Improved habitat throughout the Refuge over the long term; potential for impacts during construction
Invasive Fish	EC: Minimal removal efforts over the long term	SH: Removal of some invasive fish over the long term	MH: Removal of most invasive fish over the long term
<b>Cultural Resources</b>			
Cultural Resources	EC: Some impacts possible during construction and restoration activities	SL: Potential for impacts during construction and restoration activities	SL: Potential for impacts during construction and restoration activities
<b>Public Access</b>			
Roads	EC: Minor improvements to roads over the long term	SH: Improved roads and recreation facilities improve access over the long term; closures and barriers control access over the long term	SH: Improved roads and recreation facilities improve access over the long term; closures and barriers control access over the long term
Traffic	EC: Current traffic	SL: Increase in visitors would increase traffic on and to the Refuge over the long term	ML: Increase in visitors would increase traffic on and to the Refuge over the long term
<b>Recreation</b>			
Visitor Use Facilities	EC: Some facilities available	SH: More facilities constructed over the long term	SH: More facilities constructed over the long term
Recreational Opportunities	EC: Variety of opportunities available	SH: Improved opportunities and services over the long term; some temporary impacts	SH: Improved opportunities and services over the long term; some temporary impacts
Environmental Education/Interpretation	EC: Limited materials available	SH: More materials available over the long term	SH: More materials available over the long term
Outreach	EC: Limited outreach	SH: Increased outreach over the long term	SH: Increased outreach over the long term
<b>Refuge Management and Local Economics</b>			
Refuge Budget and Staffing	EC: Current budget and staffing	MH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions over the long term	CH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions over the long term

<sup>2</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH = moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH = considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL = slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML = moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL = considerably lower than existing conditions.

**Table 5.2-1. Ash Meadows NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Refuge Management and Local Economics, continued</b>			
Local Economy	EC <sup>3</sup> : Current economy	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors over the long term	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors over the long term
<b>Land Use</b>			
Service-managed Lands within Boundary	EC: Current conditions	SH: Expand Service-managed lands within Refuge boundary over the long term; maintain access for private landowners	SH: Expand Service-managed lands within Refuge boundary over the long term; maintain access for private landowners
<b>Aesthetics</b>			
Restoration Activities	EC: Some improvements over the long term	SH: Improved visual character from restoration activities over the long term	MH: Improved visual character from restoration activities over the long term
Visitor Use Facilities	EC: Minimal changes over the long term	SH: Improved visual character over the long term; temporary disturbance	SH: Improved visual character over the long term; temporary disturbance

<sup>3</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH= moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH= considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL= slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML= moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL= considerably lower than existing conditions.



## 5.3 Desert National Wildlife Refuge

This section describes the potential impacts associated with each of the action alternatives for Desert NWR. Impacts are judged for significance using the thresholds described in the introduction of this chapter. Mitigation measures are included for resources with significant impacts. This section also summarizes the results of an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the visitor facilities at Corn Creek Field Station (Service 2007).

Each of the action alternatives involves monitoring, inventory, and research actions that would not result in adverse environmental impacts. These management actions would provide the Refuge staff with an improved knowledge of the Refuge, which would later allow them to better assess the effects of their actions. These actions are not further evaluated in this section.

### 5.3.1 Physical Environment

#### *Soils*

##### Impacts

Construction of visitor use facilities and road improvements under Alternatives B and C would result in disturbance to soil, potentially causing erosion in the small affected areas. These activities would result in less-than-significant impacts on soils due to the small areas being affected.

Construction of an auto tour route under Alternative B and boundary fences under Alternatives B, C, and D would result in substantial soil disturbance due to the lengths of the route and fencing. These impacts could be significant and will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the auto tour route and boundary fences.

Prescribed burns and naturally ignited fires would be used to restore vegetation characteristics representative of a natural fire regime under Alternatives C and D; however, the use of fire would also increase the potential for erosion immediately following the burn and before new plants become established. Because of the potentially large amount of soil exposed under these alternatives, temporary impacts could be significant. These impacts will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the revised Fire Management Plan. Under Alternatives C and D, highly flammable vegetation would be removed from around water catchments to protect bighorn sheep. This would also result in a temporary increase in erosion potential until new vegetation is established.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), construction and rehabilitation activities at Corn Creek Field Station would disturb soil and expose it to wind and water erosion. Establishment of native vegetation around springs and along streams would stabilize the soils and reduce further erosion potential.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce soil impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Appropriate dust control measures and BMPs would be implemented during restoration and construction to reduce dust, erosion, and sedimentation. Mitigation measures would be implemented during prescribed burns to reduce the potential for erosion. These measures would include pre-watering and maintaining surface soils in stabilized conditions where support equipment and vehicles will operate, applying water or dust palliative during clearing and grubbing or earth-moving activity to keep soils moist throughout the process, watering disturbed soils immediately following clearing and grubbing activities, and stabilizing sloping surfaces using soil binders until vegetation or desert pavement (ground cover) can effectively stabilize the slope.

### *Water Resources*

#### Impacts

None of the alternatives involves management actions that would adversely affect hydrology.

Vegetation removal around water catchments under Alternatives C and D would expose soils to wind and water erosion and could result in increased sedimentation and other pollutants in the water. Water quality impacts would be minimal, however, due to the small size of the affected area and minor amount of affected soil around the catchments.

Road improvements, fence construction, and construction of visitor use facilities under Alternatives B, C, and D (more construction under Alternative B) would have minimal direct impacts on surface water quality on the Refuge because of the lack of surface waters in the vicinity. Under Alternative B, construction of the auto tour route would result in substantial soil disturbance and could adversely affect downstream water quality. These impacts will be further analyzed in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the auto tour route.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), construction and rehabilitation activities at Corn Creek Field Station would result in soil disturbance and could discharge sediment and pollutants into the surface waters at Corn Creek. Operation of the visitor facilities would result in a negligible amount of runoff due to permeable surfaces and recycling of rain water in the visitor center gutters. Removal of the two lower ponds would alter downstream hydrology at Corn Creek, but would not affect spring discharge.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce water quality impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

The Service would implement BMPs during all construction activities near surface waters, including ephemeral washes, to ensure minimal discharge of pollutants and to control erosion and runoff.

### *Air Quality*

#### Impacts

Construction activities under Alternatives B, C, and D, such as for visitor facilities, trails (B), an auto tour route (B), and fencing (C and D), would require construction equipment that would disturb the ground and clear vegetation. This equipment would cause short-term, minor emissions (engine exhaust and fugitive dust) that may be noticeable on the Refuge. Depending on the extent of activities, an increase in emissions could violate ambient air quality standards and could be significant. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the facilities.

Increased traffic on the Refuge would result in a minor increase in traffic-related emissions. These emissions would not result in violations of the ambient air quality standards because the amount of Refuge traffic at any one time is expected to be small, and traffic would be limited to the main roads and parking areas. Therefore, traffic-related impacts to ambient air quality would not be significant.

Prescribed burns and naturally ignited fires allowed to burn under Alternatives C and D would affect air quality on the Refuge. Although the burns would generate smoke, which may be noticeable off the Refuge, impacts would not be significant because the burns would be temporary and would not be expected to violate ambient air quality standards. All burns would be completed in compliance with requirements from the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Air Pollution Control. Specifics of air quality management will be further analyzed in a revised Fire Management Plan that will be subject to further public and regulatory review and NEPA compliance.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), construction activities, including building demolition, would generate dust and air pollutants and affect air quality. Increased vehicle emissions from increased visitor use would have a minor effect on air quality.

Ground-disturbance, construction, and fire management (particularly fuels reduction) activities under any of the alternatives would result in direct emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) (temporary emissions) from construction equipment. Fire management would help prevent catastrophic wildfire over the long term and reduce long-term GHG emissions. Indirect, long-term emissions of GHG would occur due to increased visitation by the public and increased employee vehicle trips (as staff grows). An increase in GHG emissions would contribute to

regional impacts on climate change and could result in significant impacts. Climate change impacts will be further analyzed in project-specific NEPA documents, as appropriate.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce air quality impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

BMPs would be implemented during construction activities that disturb the soil to reduce particulate emissions. These measures would include the BMPs identified for mitigating soil and water resources impacts as well as the following: maintaining effective cover over stockpiled fill or debris materials; limiting vehicle speeds to 15 mph in staging areas and on all unpaved access routes; and cleaning mud, silt, and soil tracked out onto paved surfaces immediately. In addition, use of low or zero-emission construction vehicles and limiting idling time for construction vehicles could reduce GHG emissions during construction.

Prescribed burns would be implemented only during favorable meteorological conditions to minimize substantial impacts to air quality.

## **5.3.2 Biological Resources**

### *Vegetation*

#### Impacts

Under each alternative, public facility and road improvements would result in minimal impacts to habitat. Construction of additional visitor use facilities and road improvements under Alternatives B and C and construction of boundary fences under each action alternative would result in additional habitat impacts, resulting in minor losses of vegetation in the small affected areas. These activities would result in less-than-significant impacts on habitats due to the small areas being affected.

Establishment of an auto tour route and construction of wildlife viewing trails under Alternative B could result in substantial impacts to vegetation, including sensitive species, depending on the specific alignment of the route and trails. These impacts could be significant, depending on the project-specific details of the tour route and trails; therefore, impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for these activities.

In addition, construction of boundary fences under Alternatives C and D could result in adverse impacts to sensitive plants, if present, along the eastern and northern boundaries. Impacts to sensitive plants under Alternative B are not anticipated because sensitive plants are not expected to occur along the southern boundary. If sensitive plant populations are affected by fence construction, impacts would be significant and would be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the boundary fence(s).

Prescribed burns and naturally ignited fires allowed to burn under Alternatives C and D would improve habitat conditions for wildlife and help return the vegetation communities to their natural fire regime. Temporary vegetation disturbance would occur during the fires, but herbaceous vegetation would return soon after the fire, and the habitat would restore over the long term; therefore, vegetation impacts from prescribed burns would be less than significant.

A variety of measures under each alternative, including maintaining or installing fences, signs, and barriers; maintaining or improving roads; designating wilderness; increasing law enforcement; and suppressing wildfires, would protect habitats from unnecessary disturbance. In addition, rehabilitation of habitat along the southern boundary under Alternatives C and D would remove man-made disturbances and improve desert scrub habitat.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), construction and rehabilitation activities would result in temporary disturbance to habitats at Corn Creek Field Station. Construction of the visitor facilities would result in a minor loss of habitat. Habitat rehabilitation would improve habitat for native species by replacing native plants with nonnative and invasive plants.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce vegetation (specifically sensitive plants) impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 7 consultation process, as appropriate.

Standard construction practices would be implemented to prevent invasive species from establishing in the disturbed areas around the facilities, such as cleaning vehicles and equipment used on the Refuge with high-pressure sprayers to dislodge seeds prior to accessing the area. Facilities would be designed to avoid sensitive habitats and impact the least amount of vegetation, based on prior surveys and mapping. The Service would coordinate with the Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office on pre-construction surveys and mitigation measures for ground-disturbing activities that would adversely affect rare or endemic plants, such as boundary fences construction, road improvements, or trail construction.

### *Wildlife*

#### Impacts

Individuals of some wildlife species may be adversely affected by construction of visitor use facilities, roads, and fencing under Alternatives B, C, and D. Amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, and invertebrates that use the affected habitats have the potential to be directly affected during vegetation removal activities. These species would be forced to relocate to less disturbed areas of the Refuge where suitable habitat is available. Adverse impacts to wildlife species would be localized and dependent on the specific activity. For more common wildlife, impacts would be less than significant because of the localized

nature of the disturbance and minimal effects to their population. For resident and migratory birds, impacts could be significant if disturbance occurs during the breeding or nesting periods and would affect nesting species. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for these activities.

Desert tortoise, a threatened species, and Gila monster may potentially be disturbed or injured during construction of visitor facilities or fencing in desert scrub habitats under Alternatives B, C, and D. Additional impacts could occur under Alternative B during construction of the auto tour route. Construction activities could adversely affect the tortoise and Gila monster populations and their habitat. Impacts to these species could be significant, depending on the project-specific details of the fence and auto tour route alignments and visitor facility locations. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the activities.

The desert tortoise is currently being adversely affected by illegal off-road activities along the southern boundary. Implementation of habitat protection efforts (e.g., fencing the boundaries and restricting access) would reduce the potential for this impact under Alternatives B, C, and D, and rehabilitation of habitat along the southern boundary under Alternatives C and D would improve habitat for the tortoise. These activities would also improve habitat for Bendire's thrasher and white-throated swift.

Habitat above 5,000 feet used by resident birds, specifically the pinyon jay, gray vireo, black-chinned sparrow, flammulated owl, and Gilbert's skink, a Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) sensitive species, would be modified by prescribed burns and naturally ignited fires allowed to burn under Alternatives C and D. The prescribed burns and natural fire would result in a temporary loss of habitat and could harm individuals of these species, but the burns would improve habitat diversity over the long term for these species as well as others, including the bighorn sheep. Although minor impacts would occur over the short term, long-term effects of the burns would be beneficial.

Management actions under the action alternatives to improve bighorn sheep populations include translocating sheep to increase populations, developing a sheep management plan (Alternatives C and D), construction additional water catchments (Alternatives C and D), and removing highly flammable vegetation around water catchments to reduce potential for fire (Alternatives C and D). Desert bighorn sheep would benefit from these actions because their subpopulations would increase to more stable levels. Temporary disturbance would occur during activities in bighorn sheep habitat, but the sheep would be able to return to the affected areas following the disturbance. Temporary impacts will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for sheep management.

Reestablishment of the Pahrump poolfish into streams, ponds, or springs at Corn Creek could benefit the regional poolfish population and contribute to its recovery. However, adverse effects from public use of the Corn Creek area could adversely affect the Refuge poolfish

population by introducing pest species (i.e., bullfrog, crayfish) and disturbing the habitat. Law enforcement patrols and close monitoring of the poolfish after reintroduction would be necessary to ensure minimal impacts to the reestablished population. If the habitat is determined to be unsuitable for poolfish, such as due to human disturbance, the Service would not reestablish a population at Corn Creek. These impacts will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the activities.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), construction and rehabilitation activities would result in temporary disturbance to fish and wildlife at Corn Creek Field Station. Construction of the visitor facilities would result in a minor loss of habitat and could affect desert tortoise. Habitat rehabilitation would improve habitat for native species, including native fish and avian species, such as the eared grebe, western grebe, snowy egret, Arizona Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, and western yellow-billed cuckoo.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce wildlife impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 7 consultation process, as appropriate.

Standard construction measures would be implemented to minimize impacts on native wildlife, such as avoiding unnecessary disturbance to habitats by driving on existing roads and working only in the required area, minimizing direct disturbance to streams and open water sources, and throwing away all trash and other construction debris in approved disposal areas. Construction activities, restoration, and prescribed burns would be implemented during the non-breeding/nesting season for resident and migratory birds to the extent feasible. Disturbance during the breeding/nesting season would require pre-construction surveys in suitable habitats to locate active nests and establish barriers around the nest site until a qualified biologist determines the nest site is abandoned.

Prior to construction activities in desert scrub habitat, desert tortoise and Gila monster surveys would be conducted to determine the presence/absence of these species. If present, appropriate measures would be implemented to minimize adverse impacts, such as relocating tortoises or Gila monsters away from the construction area, using tortoise fencing, and monitoring by a qualified biologist to remove tortoises and Gila monsters during construction.

Prescribed burns would be implemented during portions of the year when the bighorn sheep are not present in or near the affected area. If burns must be conducted in an area where bighorn sheep are present, appropriate measures would be implemented to keep sheep out of the burned area.



### 5.3.3 Cultural Resources

#### Impacts

Under Alternatives B, C, and D, known and unknown cultural deposits may be adversely affected by ground disturbance activities associated with construction or modification of visitor use facilities, roads, water catchments, and boundary fences. Additional impacts may occur under Alternative B during establishment of the auto tour route. Prescribed burns around water developments under Alternatives C and D also have the potential to expose and affect cultural resources. Due to the presence of important cultural resources on the Refuge, including a variety of resources located in the Sheep Range Archaeological District, impacts associated with the action alternatives have the potential to be significant if known or unknown resources are destroyed or damaged. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the activities.

Cultural resources are currently being affected by vandalism and degradation. Actions under Alternative A have minimal effects on reducing these impacts, and eligible cultural resource sites could be damaged, destroyed, or otherwise significantly affected. Alternatives B, C, and D involve constructing fences, signs, and other barriers and expanding law enforcement patrols on the Refuge, which would provide increased protection for cultural resources. Impacts to cultural resources would still have the potential to be significant under the action alternatives if eligible sites lose their integrity through destruction, damage, or removal. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for Refuge activities.

Because other aspects of the environment are important to tribes and can be considered cultural resources, adverse impacts to other resources could also be considered impacts to cultural resources. These impacts are not specifically discussed as cultural resource impacts; however, they may be of concern to culturally affiliated tribes if the resources are important to them. Examples include native plants that may be collected and used for various purposes, water resources, or geologic features.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), construction and rehabilitation activities would affect portions of the Corn Creek National Register District. The carpenter's shop, a contributing element of the district, would be removed, and other resources could be adversely affected by trail construction and operation. In addition, buried cultural resources are likely present at Corn Creek Field Station and could be affected by construction of the visitor center, restoration activities, and removal of the two lower ponds.

#### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce cultural resource impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 106 consultation process, as appropriate.

In order to prevent significant adverse impacts to cultural resources during construction or ground-disturbing activities, professional archaeologists would survey the project areas for cultural resources information and locations prior to project implementation. Staff members would use their knowledge of site locations to construct facilities to avoid eligible resources. All ground disturbance activities would be monitored by an archaeologist and a tribal monitor in areas where known cultural resources are located and in areas with high potential for buried cultural deposits. If cultural resources are inadvertently exposed during activities, activities would immediately cease and a qualified archaeologist would be consulted to implement appropriate measures for mitigation or preservation. If eligible sites or portions thereof cannot be protected and would be adversely affected, other mitigation or data recovery methods would be conducted in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.

### **5.3.4 Public Access and Recreation**

#### *Public Access*

##### Impacts

Construction activities under the action alternatives would result in incidental traffic over a short-term period that would result in a relatively small increase in traffic in the immediate vicinity of the Refuge. Some congestion on roadways and longer stop times at intersections would be expected during the construction period. Impacts to public access during construction could be significant depending on the locations and extent of activities implemented at one time. With the small number of visitors on the Refuge at one time, most activities would have minimal effects on traffic. Visitors would continue to have access to other areas of the Refuge during construction activities. Project-specific NEPA documents will include further analysis of public access impacts of Refuge actions.

The public would continue to have minimally restricted access to the Refuge under Alternative A, with the exception of the western half of the Refuge, which is part of the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) and is closed to the public. Visitors would be allowed to access the eastern portion of the Refuge at any time and using any routes. The southern and eastern boundaries are being monitored by law enforcement patrols, but the generally unrestricted access impairs the ability of the Service to properly manage and protect resources on the Refuge.

Additional measures under Alternatives B, C, and D would control access on and to the Refuge. Boundary fences under each action alternative would guide public access to designated roads and prevent unauthorized off-road vehicle access. Road improvements to Mormon Well and Alamo Roads (not under Alternative D) and parking turnouts along Alamo, Mormon Well, and Gass Peak Roads would improve the public's ability to access remote areas of the Refuge while following designated routes. An auto tour route under Alternative B would also improve public access on the Refuge and would allow visitors from the Las Vegas area to easily access remote areas for recreational purposes.

Access control measures would improve Refuge management by protecting resources on the Refuge and preventing or minimizing significant impacts to sensitive resources, which would improve the quality of the visitor's experience.

Access to recreational opportunities would also be improved through increased information on trails, roads, and the Refuge. Additional signs and a kiosk at the Mormon Well Road entrance under Alternatives B, C, and D would enhance public access by directing visitors to the Refuge and providing them with information on trails and accessible roads on the Refuge. Trail guides would also be available for visitors to direct them to specific areas for recreation (Alternatives B and C).

The various visitor use projects under Alternatives B, C, and D would improve visitor services and could attract more visitors to the Refuge. An increase in visitors and construction-related activity would result in increased traffic on the Refuge and on the access roads. Traffic impacts would be more noticeable on peak days, primarily weekends, when vehicle trips to the Refuge are highest. The increase in visitors and some additional construction-related traffic would have a minor impact due to the relatively low number of visitors at one time and low amount of traffic currently on the Refuge.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), construction and rehabilitation activities would temporarily restrict public access to portions of the Corn Creek Field Station. The new visitor facilities would improve visitor services and could attract more visitors to the Refuge.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce public access impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Areas under construction or being restored would be temporarily off-limits to the public for their safety. These areas would be adequately marked, and detours or alternative routes would be identified. Refuge staff would schedule construction for slower times of visitation during the week and slower seasons, when feasible, to minimize the impacts of construction traffic on public access.

### *Recreation*

#### Impacts

Under Alternative A, current activities would continue. The Corn Creek Field Station is open on a limited basis. Camping, picnicking, and hiking, along with wildlife observation and hunting in designated areas, are the most popular recreational activities on the Refuge.

Wildlife viewing trails would be evaluated and developed in the Gass Peak and Sheep Range in Alternative B. Wildlife observation and photography would be enhanced in Alternatives B, C, and D with construction of photography blinds. An auto tour route on Gass Peak

Road is proposed in Alternative B. These facilities would enhance visitor experiences and benefit recreational opportunities, with the most improvements occurring under Alternative B and fewer improvements under Alternatives C and D. Areas under construction would be temporarily off-limits to visitors for public safety; however, other areas of the Refuge would continue to be open to the public during that time. Depending on the locations and extent of activities implemented at one time, impacts to recreational opportunities could be significant. With the small number of visitors on the Refuge at one time, most activities would have minimal effects on recreation. Project-specific NEPA documents will include further analysis of recreational impacts of Refuge actions.

Under Alternative A, the Refuge would continue its limited participation in community events and other forms of environmental education. Volunteers are currently used to provide interpretation and guidance to visitors at the field station, and signs are replaced and updated, as needed. Participation in community events is limited to two per year.

An expanded environmental education program would be implemented in Alternatives B, C, and D, including installation of interpretive panels and signs at entrances, increased participation in community events, an annual open house, and a display at a public venue in Las Vegas. An expanded emphasis on educational activities and outreach to local groups and other constituencies and displays on and off the Refuge would benefit environmental education under Alternatives B, C, and D.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), the new visitor facilities would improve recreational opportunities on the Refuge, specifically at Corn Creek Field Station, and would provide visitors with a central location to learn more about the Refuge and its resources.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce recreation impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Areas under construction or being restored would be temporarily off-limits to the public for their safety. These areas would be adequately marked, and information on other recreational areas would be provided to the public. Refuge staff would schedule construction for slower times of visitation during the week and slower seasons, when feasible, to minimize the impacts of construction traffic on public access.

### **5.3.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

#### *Refuge Management and Local Economics*

##### Impacts

Under Alternative A, the annual Refuge budget, which includes operations, capital projects, six full-time staff members, and one vacant part-time seasonal employee position, would expect to remain comparable to current limited funding and staffing levels. The continued level of restoration and management activities, recreation, and visitor services would be available.

New visitor facilities, road improvements, and other physical improvements under the action alternatives would require the use of private contractors, which would have a minor beneficial effect in terms of providing short-term jobs. Additional activities related to outreach and environmental education would require increased Refuge expenditures to meet those needs. These actions would require increases in the Refuge management and operations budget. Implementation of a recreation-fee program under Alternatives B, C, and D could help offset the costs of facility maintenance and improvements and improve the Refuge operations budget.

Alternatives B, C, and D would expand bighorn sheep habitat management, population management, and public use of the Refuge. These actions would result in increased staffing at the Refuge in order to accommodate visitor needs. Additional staff and salaries would have a beneficial effect by adding employment and income to the local economy.

An increase in the number of visitors to the Refuge would increase retail trade, lodging, and food service for the nearby local economy. Additional indirect employment as a result of the increased activity would also be expected.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), construction of the new visitor facilities and habitat rehabilitation would not require funding from the Refuge budget (they would be funded through the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act). The activities would generate short-term employment opportunities for construction.

##### Mitigation

Impacts to refuge management economics would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

#### *Environmental Justice*

##### Impacts

There would be no adverse impacts to minority or low-income populations as a result of the continuing operations of the Refuge under Alternative A.

Development of cultural resources interpretive and environmental education materials in coordination with affiliated Native American tribes under Alternatives B, C, and D would address topics that would be of interest to the Native American population.

### Mitigation

Impacts related to environmental justice would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

### *Land Use*

### Impacts

With the Refuge continuing to operate at the current level under Alternative A, potential land use conflicts to existing or planned uses in the proximity of the Refuge are not anticipated. Growth continues to move toward the Refuge boundaries from the south, which is increasing unauthorized off-road vehicle use on the Refuge and creates concerns regarding further unrestricted access to the Refuge from the southern boundary, as discussed under the Public Access section.

Alternatives C and D would result in the de-designation of Papoose Lake Research Natural Area (RNA). The impact of this action would be minimal because this RNA is inaccessible and has never been used for research. Under each alternative, the Service would continue to manage the 1.3 million acres of proposed wilderness to protect its wilderness values. The proposed wilderness status would remain unchanged until Congress acts on the proposal.

Under Alternatives B, C, and D, the Refuge would coordinate with local jurisdictions to ensure that development adjacent to the Refuge is compatible with refuge land uses. Given the potential growth that may occur adjacent to the Refuge in the future, this coordination may have a beneficial effect on land uses both on and adjacent to the Refuge by protecting resources on the Refuge and controlling access. Construction of boundary fences would provide some protection against residential or urban uses along the southern boundary.

### Mitigation

Impacts related to land use would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

### *Aesthetics*

### Impacts

New visitor facilities to accommodate increased visitor use under each of the alternatives would have a temporary impact during construction and a long-term impact on the natural features and vegetation around the affected area, depending upon the siting of the facilities and integration into the Refuge's natural setting. Because these facilities would be small (e.g., information kiosk, signs, trails), impacts to visual character would be minimal and would not adversely affect views of the Refuge.

Habitat protection activities under each alternative, such as litter removal and general control of public access, would benefit the visual character of the Refuge for visitors by creating a more natural, native setting on the Refuge.

As discussed in the visitor facilities EA (Service 2007), temporary construction activities would have a short-term adverse effect on the visual setting of Corn Creek Field Station. Long-term visual resources would be improved through habitat rehabilitation; however, the new visitor center would create a permanent change in the visual setting of Corn Creek. The building would blend into the surrounding environment through use of earthen materials for construction, and vegetation would be used to mask views from sensitive locations, such as cultural resource sites.

#### Mitigation

Impacts related to aesthetics would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

### **5.3.6 Summary of Effects**

Table 5.3-1 summarizes the potential effects for each of the four alternatives. Alternative A continues current management practices with little changes or improvements.

Compared with Alternative A, Alternative B would accommodate an increase in visitors and enhance visitor experience with some beneficial effects on wildlife habitat. Alternative B would, however, result in short-term, mitigable adverse impacts from restoration projects and facility and road construction.

Compared with Alternative B, Alternative C would provide greater biological benefits and fewer visitor benefits, but result in greater short-term mitigable adverse construction impacts.

Compared with Alternative C, Alternative D would provide greater biological benefits with fewer benefits to visitors, but result in greater short-term mitigable adverse construction impacts.

Impacts and mitigation measures of bighorn sheep management, visitor facility construction and improvement, and other actions noted throughout this section will be further analyzed and refined in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for each action. The Service will use the analysis presented in this EIS to focus on key issues that need to be further evaluated in second-tier NEPA documents.



**Table 5.3-1. Desert NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>	<i>Alternative D</i>
<b>Physical Environment</b>				
Soil Conditions	EC <sup>4</sup> : Minimal temporary disturbance	ML: Some temporary disturbance during facility construction	ML: Temporary disturbance during facility construction and burns	ML: Temporary disturbance during facility construction and burns
Water Quality	EC: No effects	ML: Temporary downstream water quality impacts during construction	ML: Temporary downstream water quality impacts during construction and burns	ML: Temporary downstream water quality impacts during construction and burns
Air Quality	EC: Minor emissions and dust; smoke from wildfires	SL: Some emissions and dust from temporary construction activities and increased traffic; smoke from wildfires	ML: Some emissions and dust from temporary construction activities and increased traffic; increased smoke from burns	ML: Some emissions and dust from temporary construction activities and increased traffic; increased smoke from burns
<b>Biological Resources</b>				
Upland Habitat	EC: Minimal disturbance	SL: Some temporary disturbance from construction	SL: Some temporary disturbance from construction	SL: Some temporary disturbance from construction
Common Wildlife Species and Management Priority Birds	EC: Minimal disturbance	SL: Some temporary disturbance from construction	SL: Some temporary disturbance from construction	SL: Some temporary disturbance from construction
Desert Tortoise and Gila Monster	EC: Some protection and reduction of potential for take	SH: Improved protection over the long term but potential for temporary disturbance during actions in upland habitat	MH: Improved protection over the long term but potential for temporary disturbance during actions in upland habitat	MH: Improved protection over the long term but potential for temporary disturbance during actions in upland habitat
Pinyon Jay and Gray Vireo	EC: Minimal disturbance	SL: Some disturbance	SH: Temporary disturbance; some benefits from burns	SH: Temporary disturbance; some benefits from burns
Gilbert's Skink	EC: Minimal disturbance	SL: Some disturbance	SH: Temporary disturbance; some benefits from burns	SH: Temporary disturbance; some benefits from burns
Desert Bighorn Sheep	EC: Existing conditions	SH: Improved foraging habitat; increased subpopulations	MH: Improved foraging habitat; improved management; increased subpopulations	CH: Improved foraging habitat; improved management; increased subpopulations

<sup>4</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH = moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH = considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL = slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML = moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL = considerably lower than existing conditions.

**Table 5.3-1. Desert NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>	<i>Alternative D</i>
<b>Cultural Resources</b>				
Cultural Resources	EC: Some protection of resources; some impacts	SL: Increased protection of resources but potential for impacts during construction	SL: Increased protection of resources but potential for impacts during construction	SL: Increased protection of resources but potential for impacts during construction
<b>Public Access</b>				
Access	EC <sup>5</sup> : Generally unrestricted	SL: Some restrictions but roads and recreation facilities would improve access	ML: More restrictions but roads and recreation facilities would improve access	ML: More restrictions but roads and recreation facilities would improve access
Traffic	EC: Some traffic	SL: Increase in visitors would increase traffic on and to the Refuge	SL: Increase in visitors would increase traffic on and to the Refuge	SL: Increase in visitors would increase traffic on and to the Refuge
<b>Recreation</b>				
Visitor Use Facilities	EC: Some facilities available	MH: More facilities constructed	SH: More facilities constructed	SH: More facilities constructed
Recreational Opportunities	EC: Variety of opportunities available	MH: Improved opportunities and services over the long term; some temporary impacts	SH: Improved opportunities and services over the long term; some temporary impacts	SH: Improved opportunities and services over the long term; some temporary impacts
Outreach	EC: Limited outreach	SH: Increased outreach	SH: Increased outreach	SH: Increased outreach
<b>Refuge Management and Local Economics</b>				
Refuge Budget and Staffing	EC: Current budget and staffing	SH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions	MH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions	MH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions
Local Economy	EC: Current economy	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors
<b>Land Use</b>				
Wilderness Recommendation	EC: 1.3 million acres proposed	EC: 1.3 million acres proposed	EC: 1.3 million acres proposed	EC: 1.3 million acres proposed
RNAs	EC: No management	MH: Improve RNA use	SH: Improve RNA use but de-designate one RNA	SH: Improve RNA use but de-designate one RNA
<b>Aesthetics</b>				
Visitor Use Facilities	EC: Current views	SL: Minor impacts on visual quality	SL: Minor impacts on visual quality	SL: Minor impacts on visual quality
Habitat Protection	EC: Minimal protection	SH: Increased protection	SH: Increased protection	SH: Increased protection

<sup>5</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH= moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH= considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL= slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML= moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL= considerably lower than existing conditions.

## 5.4 Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge

This section describes the potential impacts associated with each of the action alternatives for the Moapa Valley NWR. Impacts are judged for significance using the thresholds described in the introduction of this chapter. Mitigation measures are included for resources with significant impacts.

Each of the action alternatives involves monitoring and inventory actions that would not result in adverse environmental impacts. These management actions would provide the Refuge staff with an improved knowledge of the Refuge, which would later allow them to better assess the effects of their actions. These actions are not further evaluated in this section.

### 5.4.1 Physical Environment

#### *Soils*

##### Impacts

Construction of visitor facilities (e.g., trails, parking areas, shade structures, restrooms) under Alternatives B and C would expose soils to erosion during construction and result in a minor loss of topsoil. These activities would disturb small amounts of soil, and impacts would be limited to the facility site. Erosion would be minimal in upland areas, but would be more noticeable along streams or in riparian areas. Most of the facilities would be constructed in upland areas, and the amount of disturbance would be small. For activities near streams and riparian areas, erosion impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the facilities.

Habitat restoration activities would result in minor disturbance to topsoil on the Refuge. Most of the springheads, channels, and associated riparian habitat on the Refuge would be restored under Alternative C (approximately 10 acres in the Plummer, Pedersen, and Aparcar Units), and about half that area would be restored under Alternative B (Plummer and Pedersen Units). Alternative A would continue restoration activities on the Plummer Unit (less than 3.5 acres). Removal of palm trees and other invasive plants could also require removal of the topsoil to remove the seedbank. Topsoil impacts would be most intense under Alternative C and less intense under Alternative B due to the size of the affected area. In addition, removal of vegetation along the streams during restoration activities under each alternative and prescribed burns under Alternatives B and C would temporarily expose the soils to wind and water erosion until native plants establish. Although small areas of the Refuge would be affected by restoration, soils would be exposed to erosion, and impacts could be significant. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities. The establishment of native vegetation would stabilize soils along the banks of surface waters, improving vegetative diversity and wildlife habitat.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce soil impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Native vegetation would be planted in areas where nonnative vegetation is removed and soils are exposed to improve soil conditions and stabilize soils. Appropriate BMPs would be implemented during restoration and construction activities to minimize indirect effects of soil disturbance, including dust, erosion, and sedimentation. These measures would include pre-watering and maintaining surface soils in stabilized conditions where support equipment and vehicles will operate; applying water or dust palliative during clearing and grubbing or earth-moving activity to keep soils moist throughout the process; watering disturbed soils immediately following clearing and grubbing activities; and stabilizing sloping surfaces using soil binders until vegetation or desert pavement (ground cover) can effectively stabilize the slope.

### *Water Resources*

#### Impacts

Habitat restoration activities under each of the alternatives could increase turbidity in some or all of the streams on the Refuge and have a temporary adverse effect on surface water quality. Alternative A activities would be limited to surface water on the Plummer Unit and downstream, and Alternative B activities would be expanded to surface waters on the Plummer and Pedersen Units and downstream. Alternative C activities would encompass all streams on the Refuge and downstream of the Refuge. Turbidity of affected surface waters could increase as vegetation is removed along the streams, and soils are discharged into the water. Soils along the banks may also erode and reach surface waters prior to establishment of new vegetation. In addition, ash and other sediment could be discharged into surface waters during prescribed burns under Alternatives B and C. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities.

Establishment of native plants along the banks would benefit streams on the Refuge by stabilizing stream banks and reducing the quantity of water needed for plant growth. Native species that are adapted to the desert environment require less water than invasive plants, such as palm trees.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce water quality impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Implementation of BMPs during ground-disturbing activities would reduce the effects of erosion, siltation, and sedimentation on water quality of the Refuge waters. These measures would include constructing small sediment collection pools downstream of work areas to trap sediment and reduce sediment movement through the aquatic system; using turbidity barriers in areas where sediment collection pools cannot be used; directing flows where feasible around the work area and temporarily detaining flows to reduce potential entrainment of sediment; and limiting the size of the area of disturbance where flows cannot be directed around the work area or detained, so that minimal sediment is added to stream flows.

### *Air Quality*

#### Impacts

Habitat restoration activities under each of the alternatives would require the use of construction equipment to remove trees and plant new trees. Construction activities for visitor facilities under Alternatives B and C would also require construction equipment that would disturb the ground and clear vegetation. This equipment would cause short-term, minor emissions (engine exhaust and fugitive dust) that may be noticeable on the Refuge. In addition, smoke would be visible from prescribed burns under Alternatives B and C and could adversely affect air quality. Depending on the extent of activities, an increase in emissions and smoke could violate ambient air quality standards and could be significant. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities and facilities.

Increased traffic on the Refuge under Alternatives B and C would result in a minor increase in traffic-related emissions. These emissions would not result in violations of the ambient air quality standards because the amount of Refuge traffic at one time is expected to be small, and traffic would be limited to the main roads and parking areas. Therefore, traffic-related impacts to ambient air quality would not be significant.

Ground-disturbance, construction, and fire management (particularly fuels reduction) activities under any of the alternatives would result in direct emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) (temporary emissions) from construction equipment. Fire management would help prevent catastrophic wildfire over the long term and reduce long-term GHG emissions. Indirect, long-term emissions of GHG would occur due to increased visitation by the public and increased employee vehicle trips (as staff grows). An increase in GHG emissions would contribute to regional impacts on climate change and could result in significant impacts. Climate change impacts will be further analyzed in project-specific NEPA documents, as appropriate.

#### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce air quality impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

BMPs would be implemented during construction activities that disturb the soil to reduce particulate emissions. These measures would include the BMPs identified for mitigating soil and water resources impacts as well as the following: maintaining effective cover over stockpiled fill or debris materials; limiting vehicle speeds to 15 mph in staging areas and on all unpaved access routes; and cleaning mud, silt, and soil tracked out onto paved surfaces immediately. In addition, use of low or zero-emission construction vehicles and limiting idling time for construction vehicles could reduce GHG emissions during construction.

## **5.4.2 Biological Resources**

### *Vegetation*

#### Impacts

Construction of visitor use facilities under Alternatives B and C would result in a loss of some vegetation within the proposed footprint of the facilities and an increase in the potential for invasive plants. Most of the facilities would likely be constructed in previously disturbed areas along existing roads. These actions would require ground disturbance, which would create suitable conditions for the reestablishment of invasive plants; however, measures would be implemented to minimize invasive plant establishment. Impacts to vegetation would be less than significant because of the small amount of vegetation that would be affected. Sensitive plant species are not expected to be affected by these activities because none are known to occur on the Refuge.

As part of restoration under each alternative, invasive plants would be removed along streams, and native plants or seeds would be planted in their place. Temporary disturbance during restoration would create desirable conditions for invasive and nonnative plants because these plants prefer disturbed, moist areas and often invade these areas immediately following ground disturbance activities. These species reduce the quality of native habitats and adversely affect native species by creating uniform stands that prevent other species from establishing. Under Alternative A, habitat in the Plummer Unit would be exposed to disturbance; under Alternative B, habitats in the Plummer and Pedersen Units would be exposed; and under Alternative C, habitats in all three Refuge units would be exposed. Implementation of an IPM Plan under the action alternatives would also reduce the potential for invasive plants to spread and become established in disturbed areas of the Refuge. Once the native species become established in the disturbed areas, the potential for invasive species would be lower. Temporary impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities.

Immediately following restoration activities, the riparian community would experience a temporary loss of overstory vegetation as palm trees and other invasive plants are removed. Restoration would occur in phases and would be limited to small portions of the Refuge at one time to maintain some habitat. Native plants would be planted in the disturbed areas to provide interim habitat for wildlife species until the

entire community is restored. These plantings would also encourage native plant establishment by improving the soil conditions and ensuring the availability of water and nutrients for new plant growth. Palm trees require more water and nutrients than native species, and they accumulate salt at their bases, which creates undesirable habitat conditions for native plants. Their removal would benefit native plants, as well as native fish and wildlife, by reducing unsuitable conditions and creating more desirable habitat conditions for the native species, which would increase native, desirable habitat over the long term. Temporary impacts associated with interim habitat loss will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for restoration activities.

Habitat restoration and protection actions under each of the alternatives would benefit riparian habitat throughout the Refuge by restoring native vegetation and protecting sensitive areas. Habitat restoration actions would affect the smallest area (less than 3.5 acres) under Alternative A. Alternatives B and C would affect about 5 and 10 acres, respectively.

Fire management actions under each of the alternatives would benefit the habitats and infrastructure on the Refuge by reducing the risk of catastrophic fire, which could destroy habitats and adversely affect streams and wildlife. This risk would be lowest under Alternatives B and C, which involve the most fire management actions. These actions involve removal of palm trees and their fronds and thinning out of undergrowth.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce vegetation (specifically sensitive plants) impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 7 consultation process, as appropriate.

Invasive plant removal efforts would be implemented on a regular basis to prevent invasive species from establishing in the future. These measures would be identified in an IPM Plan and may include spraying herbicides; laying topsoil with native seedbed; mechanical removal of young invasive plants; or controlled, prescribed burns in areas where invasive plants begin to grow. Because of the presence of invasive plant seeds in the topsoil, topsoil with a native seedbed could be used to replace the existing topsoil in the restored areas. This topsoil could be obtained from off-site areas where construction activities are proposed that would require removal of topsoil (e.g., detention basins, residential development). This effort would be coordinated with local agencies and/or the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Standard construction practices would be implemented to prevent invasive species from establishing in the disturbed areas around the facilities, such as cleaning vehicles and equipment used on the Refuge with high-pressure sprayers to dislodge seeds prior to accessing the area. Facilities would be designed to avoid sensitive habitats and

impact the least amount of vegetation (based on pre-construction surveys and mapping).

### *Wildlife*

#### Impacts

Individuals of some wildlife species may be adversely affected by restoration activities under each of the alternatives and by construction of visitor use facilities and prescribed burns under Alternatives B and C. Amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, and invertebrates that use the riparian community and the streams have the potential to be directly affected during vegetation removal activities. These species would be forced to temporarily relocate, likely to nearby suitable habitat, until new habitat establishes along the streams. Some species may return once suitable habitat becomes established in the restored areas, but palm tree-dependent species, such as the western yellow bat, may not return to restored areas of the Refuge under Alternative C due to removal of a large number of palm trees. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for restoration activities, facilities, and fire management.

Activities in upland habitats, such as visitor facility construction under Alternatives B and C, could temporarily disturb or harm individual desert tortoises or Gila monsters, if present. These activities would be adverse; however, the Service would implement measures to avoid direct impacts to these species. Protective measures such as habitat restoration, invasive plant management, and controlling public access under the action alternatives would benefit these species. These impacts and measures will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for facilities.

For common wildlife species, the impact would not be significant because a minor portion of the population would be affected in comparison to the regional population. For sensitive species with low population densities in southern Nevada, such as Moapa dace, these impacts could be significant because the proportion of species affected on the Refuge compared to their regional populations would be higher.

Habitat restoration actions under each alternative would benefit most fish and wildlife species. Alternative A would provide minor benefits on a small portion of the Refuge, and Alternative B would provide moderate benefits. Alternative C would provide the most benefits because the largest amount of native habitat would be restored, and restoration would target a larger number of sensitive species (including fish and invertebrates). Establishment of riparian vegetation along the streams would provide suitable habitat for a variety of bird and mammal species, including resident and migratory birds, and could attract new species to the Refuge, such as the yellow-billed cuckoo and southwestern willow flycatcher. Several riparian-dependent bird species that are also conservation priorities within the Service, Nevada Department of Wildlife, and Partners in Flight, such as eared grebe, western grebe, snowy egret, and Arizona Bell's vireo, would likely experience an increase in suitable nesting sites and increase in abundance on and near the Refuge.



Native fish species would benefit from improved stream habitat, which could increase invertebrates and provide more suitable spawning habitat. Improved stream and riparian habitats may also benefit amphibians by increasing the amount of available habitat and providing suitable conditions for reproduction. Spring and channel restoration would also benefit eared grebe.

Although the southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo are not currently known to occur on the Refuge, improved habitat conditions may benefit these species by providing suitable habitat for breeding, foraging, or nesting because they have been detected in areas near the Refuge. Because the flycatcher is endangered, and the cuckoo is a candidate species for listing, the availability of suitable habitat on the Refuge could potentially aid in their recovery.

The western yellow bat, which is a palm-obligate species, would be adversely affected by the removal of palm trees on the Refuge. Individuals may be harmed during palm tree removal, and habitat on the Refuge would be decreased. Additional suitable habitat is available on lands adjacent to the Refuge and along the Muddy River corridor, so the species would likely be able to relocate. The population of the yellow bat on the Refuge would experience a decline as individuals are harmed or relocate to suitable habitat off the Refuge. These actions are not expected to significantly affect the yellow bat's regional population, although they would affect the local population on the Refuge. More of the local population would be affected under Alternatives B and C than Alternative A due to the amounts of riparian habitat restored. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for restoration activities.

The Moapa dace population on the Refuge would substantially benefit from improved riparian and stream habitat conditions and removal of nonnative fish from the streams on the Refuge. These actions would improve the aquatic habitat and could potentially increase the reproductive success of the dace, as well as other native fish, on the Refuge. Alternative C actions would benefit this species the most.

In addition, expansion of the Refuge boundary under Alternative C would increase Service-managed habitat for wildlife species. Similar types of habitat present on the Refuge would be managed by the Service under step-down habitat management plans. Future management actions would likely benefit native plants and wildlife over the long term, with temporary adverse impacts from disturbance. Specifically, management priority bird species, such as eared grebe, western grebe, Franklin's gull, black tern, snowy egret, Bendire's thrasher, Arizona Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, western yellow-billed cuckoo, and canvasback, would benefit from the Refuge expansion. Subsequent plans and actions would be evaluated in separate NEPA documents.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce wildlife impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 7 consultation process, as appropriate.

Standard construction measures would be implemented to minimize impacts on native wildlife, such as avoiding unnecessary disturbance to habitats by driving on existing roads and working only in the required area, minimizing direct disturbance to streams and open water sources, and throwing away all trash and other construction debris in approved disposal areas. Construction activities and restoration would be implemented during the non-breeding/nesting season and outside of the spawning period for fish to the extent feasible. Disturbance during the breeding/nesting season would require pre-construction surveys to locate active nests and establish barriers around the nest site until a qualified biologist determines the nest site is abandoned. Activities in or near waterways should be avoided during the spawning period to minimize impacts on sensitive fish. The Service would also avoid discharging sediment during the spring spawning period for Moapa dace. Bats would be flushed from palm trees prior to removal to minimize harm of individuals. Pre-construction surveys for sensitive reptiles and other species would be conducted prior to activities in uplands to avoid direct impacts to the species.

### **5.4.3 Cultural Resources**

#### Impacts

Although no significant cultural resources have yet been identified on the Refuge, ground disturbance activities associated with habitat restoration have the potential to disturb unknown cultural artifacts and sites that may be buried. Impacts to cultural resources would be significant under the action alternatives if eligible sites or resources lose their integrity through destruction, damage, or removal. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for Refuge actions.

Because other aspects of the environment are important to tribes and can be considered cultural resources, adverse impacts to other resources could also be considered impacts to cultural resources. These impacts are not specifically discussed as cultural resource impacts; however, they may be of concern to culturally affiliated tribes if the resources are important to them. Examples include native plants that may be collected and used for various purposes, water resources, or geologic features.

#### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce cultural resource impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 106 consultation process, as appropriate.

Pre-construction archaeological surveys of the restoration areas would allow Refuge archaeologists to identify significant cultural resources and mitigate potential impacts. If cultural resources are inadvertently exposed during activities, activities would immediately cease and a qualified archaeologist would be consulted to implement appropriate measures for mitigation or preservation. As appropriate, monitoring would occur by a qualified archaeologist and tribal monitor.

#### **5.4.4 Public Access and Recreation**

##### *Public Access*

##### Impacts

Construction of visitor use facilities under Alternatives B and C would not likely affect public access on or to the Refuge. Those facilities would be constructed prior to opening the Refuge to the public in order to provide future visitors with information on the Refuge.

Public access on the Refuge would continue to be restricted under Alternative A, with the Refuge closed to the general public.

Opening the Refuge to the public on weekends and school groups during the week in Alternative B and on a daily basis in Alternative C would benefit public access to the Refuge. Proposed directional signs on Interstate 15 (I-15), U.S. Highway 93, and on Warm Springs Road under Alternatives B and C would also benefit public access by increasing awareness of the Refuge to travelers and providing improved directions for those visiting the Refuge.

Visitor service opportunities on the Refuge would improve under Alternatives B and C and would increase visitation to the Refuge, resulting in a minor increase in traffic on U.S. Highway 93 and State Route (SR) 168 and on the Refuge. Average daily traffic counts on SR 168, the primary major road to the Refuge, were 1,200 per day in 2004 (Nevada Department of Transportation [NDOT] 2004). An increase in traffic would be most noticeable on weekends during peak visitor use. The increase in visits would have a minor impact, due to the relatively low number of visits at one time and small amount of traffic currently using the access roads.

##### Mitigation

Impacts to public access would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

##### *Recreation*

##### Impacts

Recreational activities would continue to be restricted under Alternative A, with the Refuge closed to the general public.

Construction of facilities and other actions to support recreational activities under Alternatives B and C would benefit recreational opportunities by providing interpretive and educational signs, brochures, a self-guided trail system, a basic trail, shade structures (Alternative C), restrooms (Alternative C), water lines (Alternative C),

and parking areas. An increase in days and hours of operation would also benefit visitor services and recreational opportunities associated with the Refuge.

Public outreach and environmental education would continue to be very limited under Alternative A, with limited participation in community events and exhibits.

An increase in days and hours of operation under Alternatives B and C would allow the public to experience the Refuge and participate in environmental activities. Development of interpretive and educational materials, expanded emphasis on educational activities and outreach to local groups, and displays on and off the Refuge would occur under Alternatives B and C, resulting in expanded environmental education opportunities.

#### Mitigation

Impacts to recreation would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

### **5.4.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

#### *Refuge Management and Local Economics*

##### Impacts

Under Alternative A, the annual Refuge budget, which includes operations and capital projects, would be expected to remain comparable to past funding and staffing levels. There is currently no staff located at the Refuge, so the continued limited level of restoration and management activities would be available primarily through volunteer efforts.

Under Alternatives B and C, new facilities would be constructed, including trails and parking areas, possibly requiring use of private contractors, which would have a beneficial impact in terms of providing short-term jobs. Additional activities related to outreach and environmental education would require increased expenditures by the Refuge to meet those needs. These actions would require increases in the Refuge management and operations budget.

Alternatives B and C would also see expansion of public use, resulting in increased staffing at the Refuge to accommodate visitor needs due to the opening of the Refuge to the public. Additional staff and salaries would have a beneficial impact by adding employment and income to the local economy.

An increase in the number of visits to the Refuge would increase retail trade, lodging, and food service for the nearby local economy. Additional indirect employment as a result of the increased activity would also be expected.

##### Mitigation

Impacts to refuge management economics would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

## *Environmental Justice*

### Impacts

There would be no adverse impacts to minority or low-income populations as a result of the continuing operations of the Refuge under Alternative A, as the Refuge would remain closed to the general public.

Increased educational and outreach activities under Alternatives B and C would provide benefits to school children and affiliated tribes, including minority and low-income populations in the surrounding Clark County area, such as Moapa and the Moapa River Reservation. Conferring with the Moapa Band of Paiutes to incorporate their history and native plant and animal species as part of the interpretive program in Alternative C would address several topics that would be of interest to the Native American population.

Development of a water resources management plan and expanded monitoring of water quality parameters in Alternatives B and C would provide a benefit to nearby communities and residents of Clark County, including the community of Moapa and the Moapa River Reservation that may be affected by water resources in the area.

### Mitigation

Impacts related to environmental justice would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

## *Land Use*

### Impacts

Alternatives A and B would not result in changes to land use on the Refuge. Alternative C would result in the expansion of the Refuge boundary through acquisition of an adjacent 1,500-acre property. Specific management actions for this expansion area would be developed as part of a step-down habitat management plan, which would require subsequent NEPA compliance. This expansion would improve management of the habitats and land adjacent to the Refuge and would not have an adverse effect on land use.

### Mitigation

Impacts related to land use would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

## *Aesthetics*

### Impacts

Alternatives B and C include construction of visitor facilities that would have a minor impact on aesthetics for visitors to the Refuge. New parking lots, trails, and structures to accommodate increased visitor use would have a temporary impact on visual quality during construction and a potential long-term impact on the natural features and vegetation viewed from locations on the Refuge, depending upon the siting of the facilities and integration into the Refuge's natural

setting. Temporary impacts would be minimal because the Refuge would not be open to the public during construction activities.

Habitat protection and restoration actions under Alternative A, such as removal of invasive plants, cutting of dead palm fronds, removal of palm trees from riparian areas, and general control of public access would continue to occur. Most of these activities would occur in the Plummer Unit and would benefit views from on and off the Refuge by enhancing the existing riparian community and restoring it to native conditions.

Alternatives B and C would continue the actions in Alternative A on the Pedersen and Apcar Units of the Refuge. Restoration of all of the riparian areas under Alternative C would create a more aesthetically pleasing and natural environment for Refuge visitors when walking along trails, and for the general public as they drive along the highway.

The proposed restoration activities, along with additional trails and visitor facilities, would enhance visitor views of the natural habitat and setting of the area, providing a beneficial effect.

#### Mitigation

Impacts related to aesthetics would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

### **5.4.6 Summary of Effects**

Table 5.4-1 summarizes the potential effects for each of the three alternatives. Alternative A continues current management practices with little changes or improvements. Alternative A restoration would disturb and restore less than 3.5 acres of habitats.

Compared with Alternative A, Alternative B would improve Refuge habitats to benefit native and sensitive fish and wildlife species, accommodate an increase in visitors, and enhance visitor experience. Alternative B restoration would disturb and restore approximately 5 acres of habitats. Alternative B would, however, result in short-term, mitigable adverse impacts from restoration projects and facility and road construction.

Compared with Alternative B, Alternative C would provide greater biological and visitor benefits, but result in greater short-term mitigable adverse construction impacts. Alternative C would disturb and restore approximately 10 acres of habitats and expand the Refuge boundary by approximately 1,500 acres to management and protect additional riparian, stream, spring, and associated habitats.

Impacts and mitigation measures of restoration actions, visitor facility construction, and other actions noted throughout this section will be further analyzed and refined in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for each action. The Service will use the analysis presented in this EIS to focus on key issues that need to be further evaluated in second-tier NEPA documents.

**Table 5.4-1. Moapa Valley NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Physical Environment</b>			
Soil Conditions	EC <sup>6</sup> : Some temporary disturbance; improved conditions in some areas over the long term	SH: Minor temporary disturbance; improved conditions in portions of Refuge over the long term	MH: Minor temporary disturbance; improved conditions on Refuge over the long term
Water Quality	EC: Some temporary impacts; improved water quality in some areas over the long term	SH: Minor temporary impacts; improved water quality in portions of Refuge over the long term	MH: Minor temporary impacts; improved water quality on Refuge over the long term
Air Quality	EC: Minimal emissions	SL: Minor emissions from construction activities (temporary) and increased traffic; temporary smoke from burns	SL: Minor emissions from construction activities (temporary) and increased traffic; temporary smoke from burns
<b>Biological Resources</b>			
Riparian/Wetland Habitat	EC: Some improved habitat on Plummer Unit and decreased potential for fire, but increased potential for invasive plants to reestablish and temporary loss of riparian habitat; less than 3.5 acres restored	MH: Improved habitat on Plummer and Pedersen Units and decreased potential for fire, but increased potential for invasive plants to reestablish and temporary loss of riparian habitat; approximately 5 acres restored	CH: Improved habitat on Plummer, Apar, and Pedersen Units and decreased potential for fire and decreased potential for invasive plants to reestablish, but temporary loss of riparian habitat; approximately 10 acres restored
Upland Habitat	EC: Minimal disturbance	SL: Some disturbance during construction activities	SL: Some disturbance during construction activities
Desert Tortoise and Gila Monster	EC: Minimal protect or disturbance	SH: Improved protection; temporary disturbance	SH: Improved protection; temporary disturbance
Riparian Community Wildlife	EC: Some improved habitat conditions but temporary loss of riparian habitat and potential for adverse impacts during restoration activities	MH: Improved habitat conditions but temporary loss of riparian habitat and potential for adverse impacts during restoration activities	CH: Improved habitat conditions but temporary loss of riparian habitat and potential for adverse impacts during restoration activities
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and Yellow-billed Cuckoo	EC: Some available habitat on Refuge	SH: Increased availability of habitat on Refuge	MH: Increased availability of habitat on Refuge
Management Priority Birds	EC: Some native habitat on Refuge	MH: Increased native habitat on Refuge	CH: Increased native habitat on Refuge
Western Yellow Bat	EC: Minor loss of palm tree habitat on Refuge	SL: Loss of palm tree habitat on refuge	ML: Loss of palm tree habitat on refuge
Native Aquatic Species	EC: Some improved habitat on refuge	MH: Improved habitat on Refuge	CH: Improved habitat on Refuge
Moapa Dace	EC: Some improved habitat and potentially improved reproductive success; minor temporary disturbance	MH: Improved habitat and potentially improved reproductive success; some temporary disturbance	CH: Improved habitat and potentially improved reproductive success; some temporary disturbance

<sup>6</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH= moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH= considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL= slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML= moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL= considerably lower than existing conditions.

**Table 5.4-1. Moapa Valley NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Cultural Resources</b>			
Cultural Resources	EC <sup>7</sup> : Minimal impacts	SL: Potential for impacts during construction and restoration activities	SL: Potential for impacts during construction and restoration activities
<b>Public Access</b>			
Access	EC: Minimal access for volunteers	SH: Increased access	MH: Increased access
Traffic	EC: Minimal traffic	SL: Increase in visitors would increase traffic on and to the Refuge	SL: Increase in visitors would increase traffic on and to the Refuge
<b>Recreation</b>			
Visitor Use Facilities	EC: Minimal facilities available	SH: More facilities constructed	SH: More facilities constructed
Recreational Opportunities	EC: Minimal opportunities	SH: Improved recreation	SH: Improved recreation
Outreach	EC: Limited efforts	SH: Increased outreach	SH: Increased outreach
<b>Refuge Management and Local Economics</b>			
Refuge Budget and Staffing	EC: Current budget and staffing	SH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions	SH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions
Local Economy	EC: Current economy	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors
<b>Aesthetics</b>			
Restoration Activities	EC: Some improvements to visual quality from restoration activities	MH: Improved visual quality from restoration activities	CH: Improved visual quality from restoration activities
Visitor Use Facilities	EC: Minimal facilities	SL: Minor decreased visual quality from visitor use facilities	SL: Minor decreased visual quality from visitor use facilities

<sup>7</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH= moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH= considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL= slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML= moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL= considerably lower than existing conditions.



## 5.5 Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge

This section describes the potential impacts associated with each of the action alternatives for the Pahrnagat NWR. Impacts are judged for significance using the thresholds described in the introduction of this chapter. Mitigation measures are included for resources with significant impacts.

Each of the action alternatives involves monitoring and inventory actions that would not result in adverse environmental impacts. These management actions would provide the Refuge staff with an improved knowledge of the Refuge, which would later allow them to better assess the effects of their actions. These actions are not further evaluated in this section.

None of the action alternatives would involve changes to land use; this topic is not further discussed in this section.

### 5.5.1 Physical Environment

#### *Soils*

##### Impacts

Alternative A would involve some soil disturbance. No new facilities would be constructed, but restoration activities could disturb soils around open water areas. These efforts would involve primarily removing and controlling invasive and nonnative plants, but may also include modifications to hydrology. Invasive plant control would involve prescribed burns in wet meadow and seasonal marsh habitats that would temporarily expose soils to erosion until vegetation is reestablished. Prescribed fire in wet meadow and chemical and mechanical clearing of plants would also be implemented under each of the action alternatives. These impacts would be minimal because of the small areas affected, and the Service would implement measures to minimize soil erosion.

Construction of visitor use facilities under each of the action alternatives would result in temporary soil disturbance, increased potential for erosion, and minor loss of topsoil. Installation of gauges and data-logging equipment in or near springs under Alternatives C and D would also increase the potential for erosion near affected open water sources. These impacts would not be significant where minor amounts of soil are disturbed and topsoil loss is minimal. Impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the facilities.

Restoration activities around springs under each of the action alternatives would disturb soils and expose them to wind and water erosion until native vegetation is restored. Under Alternatives C and D, additional restoration activities would be implemented in riparian habitat to remove salt cedar and plant native vegetation. Additional soil disturbance would occur under Alternative D as part of the restoration of the historic stream channel through Black Canyon. Temporary soil disturbance could be significant, depending on the project-specific details of the restoration; therefore, impacts will be analyzed further in

a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the restoration activities. Establishment of native vegetation and restoration of the areas would provide long-term protection against erosion. Removal of salt cedar and planting native vegetation would improve soil conditions by stabilizing soils and reducing salt and mineral concentrations.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce soil impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Visitor facilities would be sited in previously disturbed areas to the extent feasible. Appropriate BMPs would be implemented during restoration and construction activities to minimize indirect effects of soil disturbance, including dust, erosion, and sedimentation. These measures would include pre-watering and maintaining surface soils in stabilized conditions where support equipment and vehicles will operate; applying water or dust palliative during clearing and grubbing or earth-moving activity to keep soils moist throughout the process; watering disturbed soils immediately following clearing and grubbing activities; and stabilizing sloping surfaces using soil binders until vegetation or desert pavement (ground cover) can effectively stabilize the slope.

### *Water Resources*

#### Impacts

Vegetation clearing in ditches on the Refuge under each alternative would improve surface flow through the Refuge, but temporary disturbance could affect water quality. Construction of visitor facilities under Alternatives B, C, and D and installation of water monitoring equipment under Alternatives C and D could increase sedimentation in the open water areas and streams on the Refuge and adversely affect water quality. This impact would not be significant because a small amount of soil would be disturbed, and most construction activities would occur in previously disturbed areas away from the reservoirs and streams. Water quality would not substantially change as a result of the minor increase in sedimentation.

Restoration activities around springs and along channels under each alternative could adversely affect surface water quality. Erosion along the banks would increase sedimentation in the surface water. These impacts could be significant, depending on the project-specific details of the restoration; therefore, impacts will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the restoration activities.

Chemical methods to control invasive plants under Alternatives C and D could affect surface water quality in the reservoirs and streams on the Refuge. Herbicides reaching surface water would increase pollutant concentrations in the water. This impact would not be significant because water levels would be reduced during treatment to reduce the possibility of herbicide concentrations reaching water

systems; in addition, other management methods would be used near open water areas, such as burning or mechanical removal.

Hydrology on the Refuge would be modified under each alternative to improve habitat conditions throughout the Refuge. More open water habitat may be created, and hydrology of some springs would be returned to historic conditions. To supplement existing flows from Upper Pahranaagat Lake, groundwater wells on the Refuge would be pumped to increase flows to Middle Marsh. Under Alternative D, more water may be provided to the Refuge (pending acquisition of additional water rights), and the historic stream channel through Black Canyon would be restored. This would expand the amount of open water and recreate historic hydrologic conditions. These actions would increase surface water quantities on the Refuge.

The quantity of pumped groundwater would be dependent on the needs for the habitats and the seasons. More water would likely be pumped in the summer to account for the smaller quantity of available surface water. Groundwater recharge during summer months is likely to be minimal due to consumptive use by vegetation and high evaporation rates. During this time, pumping could cause the groundwater table to lower. However, pumping is not expected to adversely affect private groundwater wells in the nearby communities because they are located upgradient and far enough away that impacts are unlikely. Impacts to the groundwater table will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the water management actions.

Alternative D would also include pursuit of additional water rights to allow for increased water use on the Refuge, as well as pursuit of the 1996 application for year-round discharges, which would occur under each alternative. Changes to allocated water rights is controversial in Pahranaagat Valley, so Service staff would need to coordinate with the upstream communities to acquire additional water rights. Acquisition of additional surface water rights could reduce the need to pump large quantities of groundwater and minimize effects on the groundwater aquifer. Impacts of obtaining additional water rights are speculative because a specific water rights action has not been proposed. These impacts will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the water rights action.

New visitor use facilities under Alternatives B, C, and D would increase the water demand from the domestic well on the Refuge. As mentioned above, additional groundwater pumping is not expected to adversely affect nearby private wells. Changes in the groundwater table, however, with the additional demand, could be significant. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the facilities.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce water quality impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Implementation of BMPs during ground-disturbing activities would reduce the effects of erosion, siltation, and sedimentation on water quality of the Refuge waters. These measures would include constructing small sediment collection pools downstream of work areas to trap sediment and reduce sediment movement through the aquatic system; using turbidity barriers in areas where sediment collection pools cannot be used; directing flows where feasible around the work area and temporarily detaining flows to reduce potential entrainment of sediment; and limiting the size of the area of disturbance where flows cannot be directed around the work area or detained so that minimal sediment is added to stream flows.

Service staff would implement a monitoring plan to observe changes in the groundwater levels on and off the Refuge and modify groundwater pumping if the groundwater table appears to be adversely affected. Mitigation may include pumping groundwater during non-summer months and increasing surface storage or setting a maximum limit for groundwater pumped per day.

### *Air Quality*

#### Impacts

Habitat restoration activities under each alternative would require the use of construction equipment to remove vegetation and plant new vegetation. Construction of visitor facilities under the action alternatives would also require construction equipment that would disturb the ground and clear vegetation. This equipment would cause short-term, minor emissions (engine exhaust and fugitive dust) that may be noticeable on the Refuge. Depending on the extent of activities, an increase in emissions could violate ambient air quality standards and could be significant. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities and facility construction and improvement.

Prescribed burns under each alternative would adversely affect air quality on the Refuge. Although the burns would generate smoke, which may be noticeable off the Refuge, impacts would not be significant because the burns would be temporary and would not violate ambient air quality standards.

Increased traffic on the Refuge would result in a minor increase in traffic-related emissions. These emissions would not result in violations of the ambient air quality standards because the amount of Refuge traffic at one time is expected to be small, and traffic would be limited to the main roads and parking areas. Therefore, traffic-related impacts to ambient air quality would not be significant.

Ground-disturbance, construction, and fire management (particularly fuels reduction) activities under any of the alternatives would result in direct emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) (temporary emissions) from construction equipment. Fire management would help prevent catastrophic wildfire over the long term and reduce long-term GHG emissions. Indirect, long-term emissions of GHG would occur due to increased visitation by the public and increased employee vehicle trips (as staff grows). An increase in GHG emissions would contribute to

regional impacts on climate change and could result in significant impacts. Climate change impacts will be further analyzed in project-specific NEPA documents, as appropriate.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce air quality impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

BMPs would be implemented during construction activities that disturb the soil to reduce particulate emissions. These measures would include the BMPs identified for mitigating soil and water resources impacts as well as the following: maintaining effective cover over stockpiled fill or debris materials; limiting vehicle speeds to 15 mph in staging areas and on all unpaved access routes; and cleaning mud, silt, and soil tracked out onto paved surfaces immediately. In addition, use of low or zero-emission construction vehicles and limiting idling time for construction vehicles could reduce GHG emissions during construction.

## **5.5.2 Biological Resources**

### *Vegetation*

#### Impacts

Construction of visitor use facilities under Alternatives B, C, and D would result in minor losses of vegetation within the footprints of the facilities and an increased potential for invasive species. This impact would not be significant due to the small amount of vegetation that would be affected because facilities would be constructed, for the most part, in previously disturbed areas. Sensitive plants are not expected to be affected by construction activities because none are known to occur on the Refuge.

Each alternative would involve enhancing, restoring, or increasing wetland and riparian habitats on the Refuge. A wetland restoration plan would be implemented for open water habitat, and site Restoration Plans would be implemented for springs and channels on the Refuge. Alternatives C and D would increase the amount of cottonwood-willow habitat from the current 100 acres to 300 total acres to benefit the southwestern willow flycatcher. Alternative D would also involve restoring the historic stream channel and riparian corridor through Black Canyon. Nonnative vegetation (i.e., salt cedar and Russian olive) would be replaced with native species (i.e., cottonwood and willow), and disturbed areas would be restored with native vegetation. These activities would result in a temporary disturbance during restoration as vegetation is removed and new vegetation is planted. Temporary impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities. Long-term changes to the habitats would benefit native vegetation on the Refuge by providing a means for native plants to establish.

Invasive plants occur in riparian, wet meadow, and grassland habitats on the Refuge. These species outcompete native plants and create uniform stands that prevent establishment of native species. They also provide less desirable habitat for native wildlife. Alternative A would continue using prescribed burns in wet meadow and seasonal marsh habitats. Alternatives B, C, and D involve implementing measures to reduce or control Russian knapweed in the grassland habitat, such as through mechanical, chemical, or biological means, and removal of salt cedar and Russian olive in riparian areas. IPM efforts would be expanded under Alternatives C and D. Targeted species would include bulrush, Russian knapweed, salt cedar, Russian olive, Scotch thistle, and other invasive plants. The action alternatives would benefit native plants by reducing invasive species and providing more suitable habitat, with Alternatives C and D resulting in the greatest benefits.

Desert upland habitat is currently being adversely affected by illegal off-road uses. Despite prohibitions on off-road vehicles, these impacts would likely continue under Alternative A. The potential for impacts to desert upland habitat would be reduced under Alternatives B, C, and D through installation of barriers around closed areas and roads and additionally under Alternative D with construction of a fence along the eastern boundary.

#### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce vegetation (specifically sensitive plants) impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 7 consultation process, as appropriate.

Standard construction practices would be implemented to prevent invasive species from establishing in the disturbed areas around the facilities, such as cleaning vehicles and equipment used on the Refuge with high-pressure sprayers to dislodge seeds prior to accessing the area. Facilities would be designed to avoid sensitive habitats and affect the least amount of vegetation (based on prior surveys and mapping).

#### *Wildlife*

##### Impacts

Individuals of some wildlife species may be adversely affected by construction of visitor use facilities and other structures under Alternatives B, C, and D. Amphibians, reptiles, birds (migrant and resident), mammals, fish, and invertebrates that use the affected habitats have the potential to be directly affected during vegetation removal activities and installation of equipment in surface waters. These species would be forced to relocate to less disturbed areas of the Refuge or in nearby suitable habitats. Adverse impacts to wildlife species would be localized and dependent on the specific activity. For more common wildlife, impacts would be less than significant because of the localized nature of the disturbance and minimal effects to their populations. Impacts to sensitive wildlife will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the facilities and restoration activities.

Desert tortoise, a threatened species, may be disturbed or injured during facility construction or modification in desert scrub habitats under Alternatives B, C, and D. These actions could adversely affect the regional tortoise population depending on the amount of habitat affected and extent of impacts. The Service would implement specific conservation measures as part of each action to minimize impacts on desert tortoise. Because of potential impacts to the tortoise, the facilities will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document and Section 7 consultation.

The desert tortoise is currently being adversely affected by illegal off-road activities throughout the area. Implementation of habitat protection efforts (e.g., fencing closed areas and restricting access) would reduce the potential for this impact under Alternatives B, C, and D.

Construction of a refugium for the endangered Pahrnagat roundtail chub under Alternative B, C, and D would benefit the species by providing a safe haven for reproduction and could aid in its recovery. Construction activities would result in minor disturbance to other wildlife on the Refuge due to the localized nature of the impact and minimal amount of habitat likely affected. These impacts will be analyzed further in a project-specific NEPA document to be prepared for the refugium. A refugium may also benefit waterfowl and migratory birds by creating diverse wetland habitat.

Improvements to wetland habitats (marsh, open water, wet meadow, and alkali flat) under each alternative would benefit a variety of bird and mammal species and the few amphibians that occur on the Refuge. Specifically, eared grebe, western grebe, Franklin's gull, black tern, snowy egret, marbled godwit, snowy plover, long-billed curlew, white-throated swift, southwestern willow flycatcher, and canvasback would benefit from wetland restoration and enhancement. These species would also be temporarily affected by disturbance during the restoration activities. These impacts would force the species to temporarily relocate away from the disturbance. Impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the restoration activities.

Wetland species would experience improved nesting, foraging, and breeding habitat, which could potentially increase their populations on the Refuge. Expansion of open water habitat may attract more waterfowl and migratory birds to the Refuge, such as the bald eagle, during the migrating periods. Species that would benefit from these actions include Canada geese, mallards, gadwalls, pintails, greater sandhill cranes, shorebirds, green-wing teal, redheads, and particularly black-necked stilts.

An increase in grain crops under the action alternatives and an increase in native forage under Alternative D would benefit the sandhill crane, waterfowl, and other grassland-dependent birds by increasing foraging and resting habitat.

Enhancement and expansion of riparian habitat under Alternatives C and D would benefit the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher and could aid in its recovery. Many other migrant and resident birds that are conservation priorities within the Service, NDOW, and Partners in Flight would also benefit from increased acreage of native riparian habitat. These species include eared grebe, western grebe, snowy egret, pinyon jay, Arizona Bell's vireo, and western yellow-billed cuckoo.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce wildlife impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 7 consultation process, as appropriate.

The Service would survey upland habitats for desert tortoise prior to construction activities and implement measures to avoid impacts on the species. Tortoise fencing and relocation of individuals would reduce impacts. Habitat restoration activities and facility improvements or construction would occur outside of the breeding and nesting period for resident and migratory birds to the extent feasible.

## **5.5.3 Cultural Resources**

### Impacts

Under each alternative, cultural resources may be adversely affected by ground disturbance activities associated with construction and modification of visitor use facilities and habitat restoration activities. Due to the presence of important cultural resources on the Refuge, such as at Black Canyon, impacts have the potential to be significant if known or unknown resources are destroyed or damaged. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the activities.

Cultural resources are currently being adversely affected by vandalism and degradation. Alternative A would not involve actions that would reduce these impacts, and eligible cultural resource sites could be damaged, destroyed, or otherwise significantly affected. Alternatives B, C, and D involve constructing fencing, signs, and other barriers and educating the public, which would provide some protection for cultural resources and minimize vandalism. Indirect adverse impacts related to increased visitor use may include disturbance and destruction of sites and removal of artifacts. Impacts to cultural resources would still have the potential to be significant under the action alternatives if eligible sites lose their integrity through destruction, damage, or removal. These impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for Refuge actions.

Because other aspects of the environment are important to tribes and can be considered cultural resources, adverse impacts to other resources could also be considered impacts to cultural resources. These impacts are not specifically discussed as cultural resource impacts; however, they may be of concern to culturally affiliated tribes if the



resources are important to them. Examples include native plants that may be collected and used for various purposes, water resources, or geologic features.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce cultural resource impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities and through the Section 106 consultation process, as appropriate.

In order to prevent adverse impacts on cultural resources during restoration and construction activities, professional archaeologists would archaeologically survey the Refuge for cultural resources and record the information and locations prior to project implementation. Staff would use their knowledge of site locations to design facilities to avoid eligible resources. All ground disturbance activities would be monitored by an archaeologist and a tribal monitor in areas where known cultural resources are located and in areas with high potential for buried cultural deposits. If cultural resources are inadvertently exposed during activities, activities would immediately cease and a qualified archaeologist would be consulted to implement appropriate measures for mitigation or preservation. If eligible sites or portions thereof cannot be protected and would be adversely affected, other mitigation or data recovery methods would be conducted in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.

## **5.5.4 Public Access and Recreation**

### *Public Access*

#### Impacts

Construction activities and habitat restoration would result in incidental traffic over a short-term period in the immediate vicinity of the Refuge and temporary restrictions on access to the affected areas. Some congestion on roadways and longer stop times at intersections would be expected during the construction period. Impacts to public access during restoration and construction could be significant depending on the locations and extent of activities implemented at one time. With the small number of visitors on the Refuge at one time, most activities would have minimal effects on traffic. Project-specific NEPA documents will include further analysis of public access impacts of Refuge actions.

No adverse impacts to public access would occur under Alternative A, as no changes would occur from current operations on the Refuge. The Refuge is currently open to the public year-round with three main unpaved access roads from U.S. Highway 93. The main road to the Refuge headquarters connects to Alamo Road, which continues onto the Desert NWR. Public access is available to Lower Lake and Middle Marsh, as well as North Marsh and Upper Pahranaagat Lake.

Proposed directional signs on I-15 and U.S. Highway 93 under Alternatives C and D would benefit public access by increasing awareness of the Refuge to travelers and providing improved directions for those visiting the Refuge.

Visitor services would be improved under Alternatives B, C, and D and could result in an increase in visitation, resulting in increased traffic on U.S. Highway 93. Average daily traffic counts on U.S. Highway 93 near the Refuge were 1,600 per day in 2004 (NDOT 2004). An increase in traffic would be most noticeable on weekends during peak visitor use. Improvements to visitor facilities under each action alternative would alleviate impacts by providing the necessary facilities to accommodate an increase in use; however, traffic along the adjacent highway would be expected to increase as a result of increased visitors.

Visitors attempting to access the Refuge from northbound U.S. Highway 93 would have to yield to oncoming traffic to turn left across the highway. The highway is currently a two-lane road without a left-turn lane. The increased traffic under each action alternative could create traffic safety issues and longer stop times when yielding to traffic. Turning lanes may be needed during peak visitor periods. Under Alternatives C and D, the Service would coordinate with the NDOT to construct turn lanes along the highway to allow visitors to safely turn onto the Refuge. These turning lanes could reduce traffic impacts from increased visitation. Traffic impacts will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for Refuge actions.

Some maintenance roads would be closed to the public, as necessary, in Alternatives B, C, and D, and some historic ranch roads may be converted to trails. Barriers would be installed to prevent vehicle traffic in closed areas, including the campground (day use area) under Alternative D. These actions would reduce public access to some areas of the Refuge, but they would have a beneficial effect by protecting resources and preserving natural conditions on the Refuge.

#### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce public access impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Refuge staff would schedule construction and restoration for slower times of visitation during the week and slower seasons, when feasible, to minimize the impacts of construction traffic on public access. Signs and information would be provided to inform visitors of construction activities and areas that are temporarily off-limits to the public.

## Recreation

### Impacts

Under Alternative A, current recreational activities would continue. Recreation opportunities on the Refuge currently include fishing, hunting, and wildlife observation at Upper Pahranaagat Lake and Middle Marsh, camping at Upper Pahranaagat Lake, and hiking on nature trails throughout the Refuge.

Alternatives B, C, and D would generally increase and improve recreational opportunities on the Refuge. Wildlife observation and photography activities would be enhanced with construction of an expanded trail system and observation blinds under each of the action alternatives. Hunting opportunities would continue under all alternatives, but the hunt area would be slightly modified under Alternatives B, C, and D to reduce safety concerns near Refuge headquarters. The designated hunt area would be located south of Dove Dike. Campground use would be modified under Alternatives C and D to be a day use area only, and boat use would be restricted to car top boats (no trailer accessible boat launches) under Alternative D to reduce concerns with introduced quagga mussels. Car access to the day use area would also be restricted under Alternative D, preventing the use of boat launches.

Outreach and environmental education would continue under Alternative A. The administrative building currently serves as the Refuge administrative office and visitor contact station, with brochures, maps, and fact sheets. An outside contact station with information kiosks is located at the north end of the Refuge in the camping area. The Refuge has an active volunteer program, staff-conducted and non-staff-conducted tours, and off-site exhibits.

The visitor contact station would be expanded in Alternatives B, and a new visitor contact station would be constructed in Alternatives C and D. Each of the action alternatives would also expand educational and interpretive activities on the Refuge and outreach efforts off the Refuge. The improvements and expansions would benefit environmental education opportunities on the Refuge.

### Mitigation

Impacts to recreation would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

## **5.5.5 Social and Economic Conditions**

### *Refuge Management and Local Economics*

#### Impacts

Under Alternative A, the annual Refuge budget and staffing, which includes operations, capital projects, two full-time staff, and one part-time seasonal employee, would remain comparable to current limited funding and staffing levels. Restoration activities, management efforts, recreation opportunities, and visitor services would continue to be implemented as staffing and funding are available.

Alternatives B, C, and D would improve and expand habitats and water resources management activities, as well as visitor services and environmental education. New trails, wildlife observation blinds, a visitor contact station, and a refugium would be constructed, as well as other physical improvements, possibly requiring use of private contractors, which would have some beneficial impact in terms of providing short-term jobs. Additional activities related to outreach and environmental education would require increased expenditures to meet those needs. These actions would require increases in the Refuge management and operations budget.

Increased staffing at the Refuge under Alternatives B, C, and D would be needed in order to accommodate expanded visitor needs and management actions. Additional staff and salaries would have a beneficial impact on the area in by adding employment and income to the local economy.

An increase in the number of visitors to the Refuge would increase retail trade, lodging, and food service for the nearby local economy. Additional indirect employment as a result of the increased activity would also be expected.

#### Mitigation

Impacts to refuge management economics would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

#### *Environmental Justice*

##### Impacts

There would be no adverse impacts to minority or low-income populations as a result of the continuing operations of the Refuge under Alternative A.

Increased educational, interpretive, and outreach activities under Alternatives B, C, and D would provide benefits to minority and low-income populations in southern Lincoln County and the nearby communities, such as Alamo, that are served by off-site Refuge educational exhibits.

Development of cultural resources interpretive and environmental education materials in coordination with affiliated Native American tribes under Alternatives B, C, and D would address topics that would be of interest to the Native American population.

#### Mitigation

Impacts to environmental justice would not be significant, so specific mitigation measures are not necessary.

## *Aesthetics*

### Impacts

Habitat protection and restoration actions under Alternative A, such as limited control of invasive plants and general control of public access, would continue to occur. These activities would benefit views for visitors using the trails and wildlife observation/photo blinds by creating a more natural, native setting on the Refuge.

Alternatives B, C, and D would expand the actions in Alternative A. Construction of new parking areas and trails under the action alternatives would have a short-term adverse impact on visitor views during construction. Views from areas designated for wildlife observation locations along the highway could be affected, but these impacts are not considered significant due to their short duration. New facilities may also have a potential long-term visual impact on the natural features and vegetation currently on the Refuge, depending upon the siting of the facilities and integration into the Refuge's natural setting. These impacts could be significant, depending on the project-specific details of the facilities, and will be analyzed further in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for the facilities.

Restoration activities in each alternative would provide improved habitat that would enhance views from on and off the Refuge. These restoration activities, along with additional observation blinds and trails under the action alternatives, would enhance the visitor views of the natural habitat and setting of the area.

### Mitigation

Mitigation measures that could reduce aesthetics impacts include the measures discussed below. These measures will be refined in project-specific NEPA documents to apply specifically to the proposed activities.

Visual impacts during construction of facilities and other physical improvements would be temporary and addressed through screening and ongoing construction site maintenance and cleanup during construction. Refuge staff would schedule construction for slower times during the week and slower seasons, when feasible, to minimize these impacts. Impacts of the facilities on the long-term visual quality for the Refuge would be addressed through site-sensitive design standards and ensuring compatibility with the Refuge environment.

## **5.5.6 Summary of Effects**

Table 5.5-1 summarizes the potential effects for each of the four alternatives. Alternative A continues current management practices with little changes or improvements. Alternative A includes maintaining 100 acres of cottonwood-willow habitat.

Compared with Alternative A, Alternative B would improve Refuge habitats to benefit native and sensitive plant and wildlife species, particularly waterfowl, accommodate an increase in visitors, and enhance visitor experience. Alternative B includes maintaining and enhancing 100 acres of cottonwood-willow habitat. Alternative B would,

however, result in short-term, mitigable adverse impacts from restoration projects and facility and road construction.

Compared with Alternative B, Alternative C would provide greater biological and visitor benefits, but result in greater short-term mitigable adverse construction impacts. Alternative C includes restoration of 300 acres of cottonwood-willow habitat.

Compared with Alternative C, Alternative D would provide greater biological and visitor benefits, but result in greater short-term mitigable adverse construction impacts. Alternative D includes restoration of 300 acres of cottonwood-willow habitat.

Impacts and mitigation measures of restoration actions, visitor facility construction and improvement, and other actions noted throughout this section will be further analyzed and refined in project-specific NEPA documents to be prepared for each action. The Service will use the analysis presented in this EIS to focus on key issues that need to be further evaluated in second-tier NEPA documents.

**Table 5.5-1. Pahrnagat NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C</i>	<i>Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Physical Environment</b>				
Soil Conditions	EC <sup>8</sup> : Some temporary disturbance	SL: Increased temporary disturbance	ML: Increased temporary disturbance	ML: Increased temporary disturbance
Surface Water	EC: Some open water	SH: Increased open water over the long term	SH: Increased open water over the long term	MH: Increased open water over the long term; restored historic channel
Groundwater	EC: Current conditions	SL: Increased pumping for habitats and visitor use over the long term	SL: Increased pumping for habitats and visitor use over the long term	SL: Increased pumping for habitats and visitor use over the long term
Water Quality	EC: Some temporary impacts	SL: Increased temporary impacts	ML: Increased temporary impacts	ML: Increased temporary impacts
Water Rights	EC: Current conditions	EC: Current conditions	EC: Current conditions	SH: Increased water rights
Air Quality	EC: Minor emissions and dust from restoration; temporary smoke from burns	SL: Minor emissions from construction activities (temporary) and increased traffic; emissions and dust from restoration; temporary smoke from burns	SL: Minor emissions from construction activities (temporary) and increased traffic; emissions and dust from restoration; temporary smoke from burns	SL: Minor emissions from construction activities (temporary) and increased traffic; emissions and dust from restoration; temporary smoke from burns
<b>Biological Resources</b>				
Open Water/Marsh Habitat	EC: Some open water	SH: Improved habitat over the long term; more open water	SH: Improved habitat over the long term; more open water	MH: Improved habitat over the long term; more open water; restored historic channel
Spring Habitat	EC: Some improved habitat	SH: Improved habitat over the long term	SH: Improved habitat over the long term	SH: Improved habitat over the long term
Cottonwood-Willow Habitat	EC: 100 acres	SH: 100 acres; improved conditions over the long term	MH: 300 acres	MH: 300 acres
Upland Habitat	EC: Current conditions	SH: Increased protection; temporary disturbance	SH: Increased protection; temporary disturbance	SH: Increased protection; temporary disturbance

<sup>8</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH= moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH= considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL= slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML= moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL= considerably lower than existing conditions.

**Table 5.5-1. Pahrnagat NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C</i>	<i>Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Biological Resources, continued</b>				
Invasive Plants	EC: Some invasive plant removal efforts	SH: Increased invasive plant removal efforts	MH: Increased invasive plant removal efforts	MH: Increased invasive plant removal efforts
Common Wildlife Species	EC <sup>9</sup> : Temporary disturbance from restoration; some improved habitat over the long term	SH: Temporary disturbance; improved habitat over the long term	MH: Temporary disturbance; improved habitat over the long term	MH: Temporary disturbance; improved habitat over the long term
Management Priority Birds	EC: Temporary disturbance from restoration; some improved habitat over the long term	SH: Temporary disturbance; improved habitat over the long term	MH: Temporary disturbance; improved habitat over the long term	MH: Temporary disturbance; improved habitat over the long term
Sandhill Crane and Waterfowl	EC: No management	SH: Increased foraging habitat over the long term	MH: Improved and increased foraging habitat over the long term	CH: Improved and increased foraging habitat over the long term
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher	EC: Current conditions	SH: Temporary disturbance; improved and increased habitat over the long term	MH: Temporary disturbance; improved and increased habitat over the long term	MH: Temporary disturbance; improved and increased habitat over the long term
Desert Tortoise	EC: Current conditions	SH: Temporary disturbance; improved protection over the long term	SH: Temporary disturbance; improved protection over the long term	SH: Temporary disturbance; improved protection over the long term
Pahrnagat Roundtail Chub	EC: Not present	SH: Refugium would establish population	SH: Refugium would establish population	SH: Refugium would establish population
<b>Cultural Resources</b>				
Cultural Resources	EC: Some protection of resources; potential for impacts during restoration	SL: Potential for impacts during ground disturbance; increased protection	SL: Potential for impacts during ground disturbance; increased protection	SL: Potential for impacts during ground disturbance; increased protection
<b>Public Access</b>				
Access	EC: Current conditions	SH: Improved access	MH: Improved access	MH: Improved access
Traffic	EC: Current conditions	ML: Increased traffic on and to the Refuge	SL: Increased traffic on and to the Refuge; improved safety on highway	SL: Increased traffic on and to the Refuge; improved safety on highway

<sup>9</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH= moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH= considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL= slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML= moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL= considerably lower than existing conditions.



**Table 5.5-1. Pahranaagat NWR: Summary of Environmental Consequences**

<i>Resource Issue or Concern</i>	<i>Alternative A (No Action)</i>	<i>Alternative B</i>	<i>Alternative C</i>	<i>Alternative D (Preferred Alternative)</i>
<b>Recreation</b>				
Visitor Use Facilities	EC: Current conditions	SH: More facilities constructed	SH: More facilities constructed	SH: More facilities constructed
Recreation	EC <sup>10</sup> : Current opportunities	SH: Improved opportunities	SH: Improved opportunities	SH: Improved opportunities
Outreach	EC: Limited outreach	SH: Increased outreach	SH: Increased outreach	SH: Increased outreach
<b>Refuge Management and Local Economics</b>				
Refuge Budget and Staffing	EC: Current budget and staffing	SH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions	MH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions	MH: Increased budget and staff to implement actions
Local Economy	EC: Current economy	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors	SH: Increase in local economy from increased visitors
<b>Aesthetics</b>				
Restoration Activities	EC: Current conditions	SH: Improved visual quality from restoration activities	MH: Improved visual quality from restoration activities	MH: Improved visual quality from restoration activities
Visitor Use Facilities	EC: Current views	SL: Minor impacts on visual quality	SL: Minor impacts on visual quality	SL: Minor impacts on visual quality

<sup>10</sup> EC = existing conditions; SH = slightly higher or improved than existing conditions; MH= moderately higher or improved than existing conditions; CH= considerably higher or improved than existing conditions; SL= slightly lower or decreased than existing conditions; ML= moderately lower or decreased than existing conditions; CL= considerably lower than existing conditions.

## **5.6 Unavoidable Adverse Impacts**

The Proposed Action would not result in direct or indirect, unavoidable adverse effects on the physical, biological, cultural, or social and economic environments. During implementation of the Proposed Action, the Service would implement measures to avoid or reduce incremental adverse impacts on the various resources at the refuges.

## **5.7 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources**

Neither the Proposed Action nor other alternatives would result in an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. Management actions involving construction of facilities or modification of habitats will implement appropriate measures to preserve or relocate sensitive species and avoid cultural resources.

## **5.8 Short-Term Uses Versus Long-Term Productivity**

Implementation of the Proposed Action would result in short-term resource uses that enhance long-term productivity of the refuges. Habitat restoration and management actions that are part of each of the alternatives would benefit fish and wildlife, particularly sensitive and endemic species, over the long term. Public use of the refuges would improve over the long term as new opportunities become available and new facilities are constructed.

## **5.9 Cumulative Impacts**

A cumulative impact is the incremental impact of a Proposed Action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future federal and non-federal actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions occurring over a period of time (40 CFR 1508.7). Impacts of past and present related actions are included in the affected environment descriptions of this EIS. Therefore, this section focuses on the impacts of the Proposed Action when added to other reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### **5.9.1 Approach to Cumulative Impacts**

Implementation of the preferred alternative for each refuge in the Desert Complex would result in cumulative effects on physical, biological, cultural, and social resources in the Desert Complex and in southern Nevada. This section discusses both the cumulative effects of increased management of the four refuges in the Desert Complex and the cumulative effects of other reasonably foreseeable future projects in southern Nevada.

The following reasonably foreseeable future projects are evaluated in the cumulative impact analysis.

### *Coyote Springs 42,800-acre Development (first phases)*

The Coyote Springs project, in its entirety, contains approximately 42,800 acres located about 50 miles north of Las Vegas. It is bordered by the Delamar Mountains to the north, the Meadow Valley Mountains to the east, SR 168 to the south, and U.S. Highway 93 to the west.

The Coyote Springs development includes lands in Clark County (approximately 13,100 acres) and Lincoln County. The development would include a series of villages featuring a mix of uses with a range of unit types, lot sizes, and densities, and amenities including golf courses, clubhouse facilities, parks, and open space network linking different areas of the community. The master plan for the development encourages the effective use of natural topography, open space, and other natural and existing features and has a set of design guidelines intended to act as a guide for construction and development of the planning areas as a whole.

The development of the community is projected to be over a 40-year cycle. The developer envisions maintaining the rural character of the site by developing a series of villages with varying densities surrounded by open space and recreational opportunities. The latter phases focus on creating a self-reliant planned community with a full array of facilities and amenities.

### *City of North Las Vegas Comprehensive Master Plan*

The City of North Las Vegas completed a Draft Comprehensive Master Plan in September 2006 to update the 1999 master plan. The City encompasses an area of 82 square miles just south of the Desert NWR. The plan will provide the City with guidance for implementation of the plan over the next 20 years.

### *BLM Land Disposal in Clark County*

The Las Vegas Valley disposal boundary was created by the 1998 Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act and modified by the 2002 Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act. The BLM has identified available lands in the Las Vegas Valley that are appropriate for auction and prepared an EIS to assess the potential environmental impacts resulting from the sale of these lands. The land disposal area consists of all lands currently identified for disposal within the Las Vegas Valley, including the Las Vegas Valley disposal area, the Valley West Disposal area, and other legislatively authorized disposal areas. These lands are being transferred to the highest bidder through multiple auctions, and the lands will become available for development or other uses.

### *Nevada Test and Training Range Ongoing Actions*

Approximately 846,000 acres of the Desert NWR are managed by the Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Energy (DOE) as an aerial bombing and gunnery range (known as the NTTR). The NTTR overlay has been used since 1940 for testing armament and for training pilots in aerial warfare. Public Law 106-65 authorizes the U.S. Air Force (USAF) to use the NTTR (A) as an armament and high-

hazard testing area; (B) for training for aerial gunnery, rocketry, electronic warfare, and tactical maneuvering and air support; (C) for equipment and tactics development and testing; and (D) for other defense-related purposes consistent with the purposes specified above. Use of this area is subject to the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of the USAF.

In addition to ongoing actions, future actions may include more targets, increased sorties, more noise and sonic booms, and other improvements to the NTTR (USAF 2007).

#### *West-Side Energy Corridor*

The DOE, BLM, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and DOD are preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to evaluate issues associated with the designation of energy corridors on federal lands in 11 Western states. Based upon the information and analyses developed in this PEIS, each agency would amend its respective land use plans by designating a series of energy corridors. The purpose of and need for the Proposed Action are to implement Section 368 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 by designating corridors for the preferred location of future oil, gas, and hydrogen pipelines and electricity transmission and distribution facilities (DOE and BLM 2007). Each agency would be responsible for incorporating the designated corridors into the relevant agency land use and resource management plans.

#### *Other Development, Management Plans, and Recreational Facilities in Southern Nevada*

Southern Nevada contains several growing communities, including Las Vegas, Pahrump, and Mesquite. Within each community, various development projects are ongoing to provide more housing and commercial opportunities for existing and new residents. The various public land management agencies in southern Nevada (National Park Service, BLM, USFS, and others) are continually managing their lands and identifying strategies to improve habitat and provide recreational opportunities. Local agencies, such as Clark County and the Cities of North Las Vegas and Las Vegas, are also expanding recreational opportunities in their communities. The Clark County Wetlands Park, for example, is undergoing improvements to provide more trails for public use.

### **5.9.2 Potential Cumulative Impacts**

#### *Physical Resources*

##### Cumulative Impacts of Each Refuge's Actions

As described above, the preferred alternative for each refuge involves ground-disturbing activities that would have temporary effects on soils, water quality, and air quality. Because these impacts would be localized, they would not create cumulatively significant impacts on the Desert Complex.

Similarly, hydrology modifications on each refuge would also not contribute to cumulatively significant impacts because of the distances between each refuge and lack of surface water connectivity between the refuges.

### Cumulative Impacts of Desert Complex Actions and Other Future Actions

Actions within the NTTR overlay in combination with other ground-disturbing activities on the Desert NWR could result in a temporary increase in soil erosion and air pollutant emissions, and adverse impacts on water quality. These impacts would be localized, but could result in cumulatively significant impacts if the actions are implemented at the same time. The Service would implement mitigation measures to reduce the impacts of each action.

Development, including construction activities and increased traffic, human activities, and related effects of development, as well as other projects involving ground disturbance or increased operations in the vicinity of each refuge, would add to the cumulative effects on soil disturbances, hydrology modifications, water quality impacts, increased air pollutants, and increased GHG emissions. Major developments, such as at Coyote Springs and in North Las Vegas, would create cumulatively significant impacts because of the large amount of affected land. The combination of all activities could contribute to climate change from increases in GHG emissions throughout southern Nevada.

Groundwater in the vicinity of each refuge would also be adversely affected by expanded urban developments that use groundwater wells for water supply. The groundwater aquifer within each Refuge connects to other aquifers in southern Nevada; therefore, impacts at Coyote Springs, for example, could have adverse impacts at Ash Meadows NWR. Cumulative impacts on the groundwater aquifer would be significant because groundwater impacts could affect the entire region.

### *Biological Resources*

#### Cumulative Impacts of Each Refuge's Actions

As described above, the preferred alternative for each refuge involves ground-disturbing activities that would result in a loss of vegetation, potential impacts to sensitive plants on some refuges, and increased potential for invasive plants. Restoration activities proposed on each refuge would improve various habitats on the refuges and reduce the extent of invasive plants.

Habitat impacts would not be cumulatively significant because of the minimal amount of affected vegetation and the greater amount of habitat that would be restored at each refuge. Short-term impacts to sensitive plants would not be cumulatively significant because none of the sensitive plants are located on more than one refuge. Invasive plant removal and control efforts would be implemented on each refuge to help reduce the regional extent of invasive plant populations.

### Cumulative Impacts of Desert Complex Actions and Other Future Actions

Actions within the NTTR overlay in combination with other ground-disturbing activities on the Desert NWR could result in minor losses of wildlife habitat. The Service would implement mitigation measures to reduce the impacts of each action. Restoration activities on the Desert NWR would result in cumulatively beneficial effects on habitat.

Development and other activities in the vicinity of each refuge would add to the cumulative effects on habitat, sensitive plant, and invasive plant impacts. Major developments, such as at Coyote Springs and in North Las Vegas, would create cumulatively significant impacts because of the large amount of affected land. Sensitive plant populations in affected areas could be at risk if measures are not implemented to protect or restore them on a regional basis.

### *Cultural Resources*

#### Cumulative Impacts of Each Refuge's Actions

As described above, the preferred alternative for each refuge involves ground-disturbing activities that could result in adverse impacts on known and unknown cultural resources at each refuge. Increased visitation at each refuge also increases the potential for theft, vandalism, and other adverse impacts on the resources. These impacts would be cumulatively significant because the cultural resources in the Desert Complex provide important information on the history and prehistory of southern Nevada. Each activity would include measures to identify and avoid important resources, especially eligible resources, and protect known resources from adverse visitor impacts.

### Cumulative Impacts of Desert Complex Actions and Other Future Actions

Actions within the NTTR overlay in combination with other ground-disturbing activities on the Desert NWR could result in adverse impacts to known and unknown cultural resources on the Refuge. Cumulative impacts to cultural resources could result from individually minor, but collectively significant, actions taking place over a period of time. Cumulative effects often occur to eligible districts where several minor changes to contributing properties, their landscaping, or to the setting over time could result in a significant loss of integrity. These impacts would be cumulatively significant because the resources on the Refuge may contribute to the history and prehistory of the area and provide important information on past uses. Mitigation measures would be implemented for each action to identify, avoid, or reduce impacts on important resources.

Development in the vicinity of each refuge would add to the cumulative effects on cultural resources and could result in adverse impacts to resources that provide important information on the history and prehistory of southern Nevada. Increased residential development in rural areas also increases the potential for adverse impacts on resources from vandalism and theft. Cultural resources could be destroyed if measures are not implemented as part of each action to protect them.

## *Social Values*

### Cumulative Impacts of Each Refuge's Actions

As described above, the preferred alternative for each refuge involves actions to improve recreational opportunities on each refuge and expand visitor services. Access to some refuges would be more controlled in order to protect resources, but improvements would be made to enhance visitor experience and provide more recreational opportunities. Temporary adverse impacts on aesthetics would occur on each refuge during ground-disturbing activities. Long-term changes in visual quality would occur as a result of new visitor facilities; however, these facilities would improve visitor experience and attract more visitors to the refuges. Local and refuge management economics would be improved through an increase in visitors and increased actions on each refuge. Cumulative impacts of each refuge's actions would be beneficial to the Desert Complex.

### Cumulative Impacts of Desert Complex Actions and Other Future Actions

Development in the vicinity of each refuge would add to the cumulative effects on social values in southern Nevada. Access to recreational opportunities would be improved as new opportunities are provided on public lands and in new developments. Local and regional economics would be improved through new development and increased visitors to southern Nevada.

*Chapter 6.  
Compliance, Consultation, and  
Coordination with Others*



Wildflowers on Gass Peak at Desert National Wildlife Refuge



# *Chapter 6. Compliance, Consultation, and Coordination with Others*

This chapter describes the efforts taken to ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and federal guidance and to consult and coordinate with appropriate entities throughout the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) development process.

## **6.1 Compliance**

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 et seq.) and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500–1508). The EIS scoping process was developed in accordance with the CEQ guidance for scoping under NEPA. Implementation of a CCP for the four refuges in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex) will require the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to comply with a variety of laws, Executive Orders (EOs), regulations, and other guidance pertinent to federal actions. A list of applicable regulations is provided in Appendix E.

## **6.2 Required Permits or Approvals**

Prior to implementation of the various management actions, the Service may be required to obtain local, state, or federal permits or approvals. Typical permits or approvals that may be required include:

- Service—Ecological Services – Project level internal Section 7 consultations, as appropriate under the authorities of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), prior to the implementation of any actions that may affect federally listed endangered or threatened species.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Clean Water Act Section 404 Permits for wetland restoration projects or other actions that could discharge dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S.
- Nevada State Historic Preservation Office – Section 106 consultations under the authorities of the National Historic Preservation Act for any actions that may affect historic properties or cultural resources associated with listed properties (or those eligible for listing) on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Nevada Division of Environmental Protection – Construction Stormwater Permit for construction activities disturbing more than 1 acre; Section 401 Water Quality Certification or Waiver for projects requiring a Section 404 permit; and Air Quality Permits for various project types that result in emissions.

- Nevada Department of Transportation – Encroachment Permit for activities within state or U.S. highway rights-of-way; Sign Permit for directional signs within state or U.S. highway rights-of-way.
- State of Nevada – Air Quality Permits for ground-disturbance; Burn Permits for prescribed burns; Scientific Collection/Possession/Banding of Wildlife Permit; Conditional Permit for Disturbance or Destruction of Critically Endangered Species.
- Clark, Lincoln, and Nye Counties – Encroachment Permits for projects that encroach on county rights-of-way; Grading Permits for grading activities for facility construction.
- Clark County Department of Air Quality and Environmental Management – Dust Control Permits for construction activities in Clark County.

## **6.3 Consultation and Coordination with Others**

### **6.3.1 Public Outreach**

#### *Federal Register Notices*

The Service published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS for the Desert Complex in the Federal Register on August 21, 2002. The NOI stated that the CCP/EIS process would help to identify potential issues, management actions, and concerns; significant problems or impacts; and opportunities to resolve them. The NOI also provided dates, times, and locations for the public scoping meetings. In addition, a public notice was published in the *Las Vegas Review Journal* on September 15, 2002, to announce the public scoping meetings and the initiation of the planning process for development of a CCP and preparation of an EIS for the Desert Complex.

#### *Planning Updates*

Planning updates were published to provide an update to the public on the status of the CCP process. Updates were made available to download from the Desert Complex Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/desertcomplex/ccp.htm>. The updates were published when certain milestones were achieved during the process.

The first planning update was made available in fall of 2002 to provide the public with background information on the refuges and CCP process and invite them to attend the public scoping meetings. It was mailed to 350 public citizens on September 3 and 4, 2002. The second planning update was made available in winter 2003 and provided a summary of the results of the public scoping meetings and a list of refuge activities occurring in 2003. This update was mailed out to interested members of the public in late February 2003. The third planning update was published in January 2007 to provide an update on the process and announce the preparation of a separate Environmental Assessment for the Desert National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) visitor center. A planning update will also be distributed prior to release of the public Draft EIS/CCP to inform the public of the anticipated release date and upcoming public meetings.

### *Public Scoping Meetings*

Throughout the planning process, the public was invited to attend meetings, open houses, and workshops. The Draft EIS will be available to the public for a specified length of time (between 45 and 90 days) to allow interested individuals to comment on the document.

Prior to preparation of the EIS and CCP, a 60-day public comment period was initiated beginning August 21 and ending October 19, 2002, to identify issues important to the public. A news release was issued on September 4, 2002, to provide the public with information on the CCP. On September 15, 2002, a public notice was printed in the *Las Vegas Review Journal* with information on the dates and locations of the public scoping meetings. These meetings allowed the Service to provide the public with information on the CCP process and the refuges and allowed the public to provide input on the process and important resources or issues that should be addressed in the EIS. Five public meetings were held in 2002 in southern Nevada to solicit input from the public:

- September 16, 2002, 7–9 p.m., Moapa Community Center, Moapa Valley, Nevada
- September 17, 2002, 7–9 p.m., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office, Las Vegas, Nevada
- September 18, 2002, 4–6 p.m. Amargosa Valley Multi-Purpose Building, Amargosa Valley, Nevada
- September 18, 2002, 7–9 p.m., Bob Ruud Community Center, Pahrump, Nevada
- September 19, 2002, 7–9 p.m., Alamo Annex Building, Alamo, Nevada

The public scoping meetings started with a presentation by the Service and their consultant. The presentation discussed the Service's role in the planning process, provided a description of the Desert Complex, and explained the CCP/EIS process. An open forum followed the presentation, allowing the public to ask questions and voice comments and concerns. Public comment forms were made available, and the public was urged to complete them and return them to the Service. Attendance at the five scoping meetings included members from the public and local, state, and federal agencies.

More than 400 comments were solicited from 53 members of the public during the public meetings. All attendees were asked to sign in upon entering the meeting and were provided a packet of information that included an agenda, information on each refuge, and a blank comment sheet for written comments. A public scoping report was prepared following the meetings to describe the methodology used to solicit and analyze input and to provide a summary of the results of the meetings. This report is available on the Desert Complex Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/desertcomplex/ccp.htm>.

### **6.3.2 Agency Coordination**

The Service coordinated with several agencies to receive input on important resources that would need to be analyzed in the EIS. Two letters were mailed to federal, state, and local agencies having responsibility for, or special interest in, refuge resources and/or land use management strategies. The first letter was a notice of the Service's intention to prepare the CCP/EIS. The second letter was an invitation to the interagency scoping meeting, which was held on August 28, 2002, at the Service office in Las Vegas, Nevada. The interagency scoping meeting identified issues for each refuge as well as issues that encompass all four refuges. An additional meeting was held with staff members of the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) on September 23, 2002, at their headquarters in Reno, Nevada. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss coordination during the planning process and other topics relative to the Service's CCP efforts in Nevada.

An Interdisciplinary Team was formed among the lead and cooperating agencies, the project proponents, and the EIS preparers. The team met periodically to discuss the EIS, review interim work products, and provide guidance and direction for preparing the EIS. The team was formed with individuals from the following entities:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Air Force, Nellis Air Force Base
- Nevada Department of Wildlife, Las Vegas, Nevada

Members of the extended planning team, which provided input on the scope of the EIS and issues to be addressed, met periodically throughout the process. The planning team includes individuals from the following entities:

- U.S. National Park Service, Death Valley National Park
- U.S. National Park Service, Lake Mead National Recreation Area
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Region Three, Las Vegas, Nevada
- U.S. Department of Energy, Las Vegas, Nevada
- U.S. Forest Service, Spring Mountains National Recreation Area
- U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Central Federal Lands Division
- Nevada Division of Forestry, Las Vegas, Nevada
- Nevada State Historic Preservation Office
- Clark County Desert Conservation Program
- Clark County Federal Lands Program
- Lincoln County Commission
- Nye County
- Southern Nevada Water Authority
- City of Las Vegas
- City of North Las Vegas

### **6.3.3 Tribal Consultation/Coordination**

Under the auspices of various federal laws and other legislation, the Service, as with all other federal agencies, is mandated to consult with affiliated Native American tribes to assure that Native American tribal governments and organizations whose interests might be affected have a sufficient opportunity for productive participation in planning and resource management decision-making. The development of the Desert Complex CCP and EIS provides an excellent opportunity for the Service to promote cooperation and participation by their Native American neighbors and thus strengthen their government-to-government relationships with the affiliated tribes.

A Native American Tribal Consultation Plan was developed in August 2000 to identify strategies that would allow more in-depth opportunities for participation of interested affiliated tribes in the planning process and during the reviewing and commenting periods for the CCP and EIS. The goals of the Native American Tribal Consultation Plan are to:

- Inform and educate interested affiliated Native American tribes about the CCP and the EIS process by providing clear, easily understood, factual information;
- Invite as many interested affiliated tribes as possible to participate in both the comprehensive conversation planning and environmental review processes;
- Provide meaningful and timely opportunities for tribal input;
- Identify key resource and land use issues relative to each refuge;
- Identify and eliminate from detailed study the cultural issues that are not significant;
- Consider and evaluate issues raised by interested affiliated tribes to assist in the preparation of the CCP;
- Consider tribal comments throughout the decision-making and review process; and
- Strengthen the government-to-government relationships between the Service and the affiliated tribes.

Tribal contact during the planning process has included the mailing of an initial consultation letter on June 26, 2002, which briefly discussed the Desert Complex CCP and EIS and invited the affiliated tribes to participate in the development process. This letter was mailed out to the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe, Pahrump Band of Paiutes, Big Pine Band of Owens Valley Paiute-Shoshone Indians, Bishop Paiute Tribe, Yomba Shoshone Tribe, Kaibab Paiute Tribe, Fort Mojave Tribe, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, Paiute-Shoshone Indians of the Lone Pine Community, Las Vegas Indian Center, Duckwater Shoshone-Paiute Tribe, Benton Paiute Indian Tribe, Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, Ely Shoshone Tribe, Moapa Paiute Tribe, Paiute Indian Tribes of Utah, and the Fort Independence Indian Community. Follow-up telephone calls were also made to all of the tribal representatives.

Following the consultation letter of June 26, 2002, the Service scheduled two public information/scoping meetings: one between November and December 2002 and the other between February and March 2003. Invitations were mailed out in September for the first public scoping meeting. The tribal governments responded by requesting separate meetings outside of the scheduled general public scoping meetings. The first of these meetings was held on January 29 and 30, 2003. The primary purpose of the first Native American Tribal Scoping Meeting, as well as individual presentations at tribal council meetings, was to 1) inform the affiliated tribes about the CCP/EIS process, 2) present options to the affiliated tribes regarding opportunities for participating in the process, and 3) scope out issues relative to refuge management actions and cultural resources protection and interpretation. The meetings also included a field trip to Corn Creek Field Station, where the inventory and testing work at Corn Creek was discussed.

A second tribal consultation meeting was held on May 8, 2003, as part of the annual Consolidated Group of Tribes and Organizations (CGTO) meeting sponsored by Nellis Air Force Base and Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR). The primary purpose of the second meeting was to inform the affiliated tribes about the progress of the CCP/EIS process and other cultural resource conservation efforts and to encourage comments from tribal participants on the Draft CCP/EIS document. Another meeting was held June 22 and 23, 2006, to update the CGTO on the progress of the EIS/CCP and obtain input and recommendations on Service projects and planning efforts.

Affiliated tribes were also invited to participate at the biological and visitor services reviews. During the week of April 14–18, 2003, a biological review for Desert NWR and Ash Meadows NWR was held. The biological review for Moapa Valley NWR and Pahrangat NWR was held on May 27 and 28, 2003. A visitor services review was held on May 27 and 28, 2003. Various affiliated tribes participated in the reviews.

From July 15–17, 2003, Scott Aiken, the former regional Native American tribal liaison, met individually with various affiliated tribes. During the meetings, Mr. Aiken spoke with tribe members about the role of Native Americans in the review and editing of the Draft CCP/EIS cultural resources sections.

The CGTO's Document Review Committee participated in reviews of the Desert Complex's Cultural Resources Overview and Administrative Draft CCP/EIS. Comments received during these reviews have been addressed in the Draft CCP/EIS, as appropriate.

## **6.4 Comment/Response Process on Draft CCP/EIS**

A Notice of Availability (NOA) will be published in the Federal Register to initiate the public comment and review period for the Draft CCP/EIS. The NOA and notification of public comment meetings will be mailed to those identified on the general mailing list (see Appendix D). The purpose of the public comment meetings is to solicit feedback on the Proposed Action, alternatives analysis, and issues addressed in the Draft CCP/EIS.

## **6.5 Future Coordination with Others**

As part of implementation of the CCP, the Service will coordinate closely with other agencies, affiliated tribes, and other entities to help manage the refuges. For example, the Service will work with affiliated tribes to develop strategies or actions to protect, recover, or monitor cultural resources and wildlife, as appropriate. For projects involving wildlife, the Service will work with NDOW to use their knowledge of the resources in southern Nevada, such as bighorn sheep and fish. Per the Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Air Force (USAF) for the Desert NWR, the Service will coordinate with the USAF regarding any management activities in the portion of the Refuge within the NTTR. In addition, because the Pahranaagat NWR is under the Military Operations Area where military aircraft fly down to 100 feet above ground, the Service will coordinate with the USAF on projects that could increase bird populations higher than 100 feet above ground.