



**FORT NIOBRARA/ VALENTINE
NATIONAL WILDLIFE
REFUGE COMPLEX
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PRESS RELEASE
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FORT NIOBRARA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE RELEASES DRAFT NIOBRARA RIVER RECREATION MANAGEMENT PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced completion of the *Draft* Niobrara River Recreation Management Plan and Environmental Assessment for that portion of the Niobrara National Wild and Scenic River that flows within boundaries of the Ft. Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge near Valentine, Nebraska.

The need for a comprehensive river management plan was identified in the 1999 Fort Niobrara Comprehensive Management Plan. Since that time, the Service has worked with cooperating agencies and researchers to gather and analyze scientific data for use in the development of the plan. The Service's draft plan and assessment presents multiple alternatives for management of recreational use on the River in the future. The alternative chosen in the final plan must be compatible with the purposes for which the Refuge was established, with National Wildlife Refuge System goals and policies, and with other federal laws including the Wilderness Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Accordingly, pursuant to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, the Service will complete a compatibility determination for proposed actions in the management plan.

The final plan must also protect the natural resources of the Refuge and preserve the wilderness character of the Fort Niobrara Wilderness Area that is adjacent to the River while promoting public understanding of and appreciation for Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge's wildlife and recreational values.

In announcing the completion of the Draft Plan and Assessment, Royce Huber, Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge Complex Manager, thanked "all who had participated in the planning process, assisted the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in identifying concerns, and presented options for future management of river recreational use of the Niobrara River on the Refuge". Huber also encouraged all interested persons and parties to review the alternatives presented and participate in the next phase of this process by providing their comments.

The Draft Plan will be available for public review and comment for sixty days, ending on October 25, 2004, at the following locations: the Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge Complex Office, Valentine, NE; on the internet at <http://fortniobrara.fws.gov/riverea>; and at the Sawyer Memorial Library in Valentine. Copies may also be obtained by contacting the refuge

at: Fort Niobrara NWR, HC 14 Box 67, Valentine, NE 69201, or at: (402) 376-3789. All comments must be submitted in writing to Fort Niobrara NWR at the above address, or by e-mailing bernie_petersen@fws.gov or kathy_mcpeak@fws.gov by October 25th.