



**External Affairs
Mountain-Prairie Region
3-5 Year
STRATEGIC
PLAN**



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Front Cover Photos: Waterfowl on the Platte River (background), Deer at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Group hiking at Des Lacs NWR, Northern oriole

Back Cover Photos: Bull elk, Bull trout underwater / Joel Sartore (National Geographic) and Wade Fredenberg, Marais de Cygnes NWR

current communications
CLIMATE





The worlds of both communication and conservation are changing.

A massive global communications network (the Internet) has proliferated around us. Communications technology and culture has changed dramatically in the past decade, changing how people engage with each other and share the things they care about. Though the fundamentals of communications are still relevant, the new mechanisms and styles of public engagement are nothing short of revolutionary.

Americans' relationship with nature, and their participation in conservation, is also transforming. And, issues once considered "regional" in scope, such as the recovery of the gray wolf, have evolved into issues of national interest.

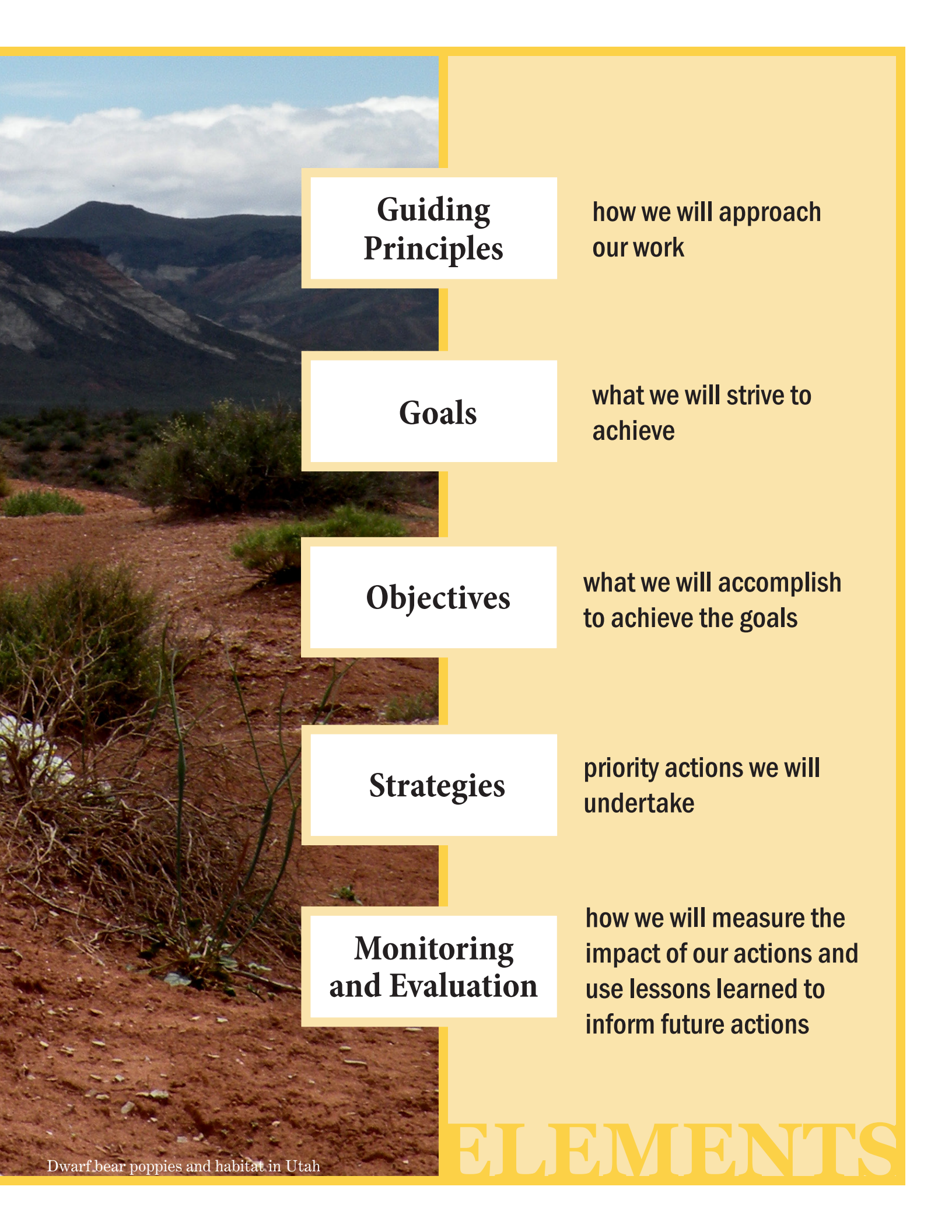
Nowhere more than in the American West and the geography embodied by the Mountain-Prairie Region are these changes more pronounced. The profile of the Region, with its growing population, increasing political relevance and cutting-edge natural resources challenges (notably energy development and water management, both of which must be considered in the context of climate change), has elevated significantly and with it, the Service's visibility and role in issues central to national conservation policy.



BUSINESS model

The importance of communications in shaping public perspectives on, and in support for the Service and our work, cannot be overstated. In today's dynamic information landscape – an environment rapidly trending toward a decentralized, mobile and participatory model – the Service, and especially the Mountain-Prairie Region, must develop and deploy the appropriate communications strategies and tactics to engage our publics in meaningful ways and to effectively promote the Service's mission. External Affairs is on the front lines of helping the Service navigate this changing world. For us to be effective will require a new business model, one driven by:

- **Being strategic**
- **Communicating proactively**
- **Celebrating our success stories**



Guiding Principles

how we will approach our work

Goals

what we will strive to achieve

Objectives

what we will accomplish to achieve the goals

Strategies

priority actions we will undertake

Monitoring and Evaluation

how we will measure the impact of our actions and use lessons learned to inform future actions

GUIDING principles

how we will approach our work



Black-footed ferret



Hiking at Des Laes NWR

communicate proactively

External Affairs must help the Service identify and take action on issues proactively. The more proactive we can be the less time and energy we will have to expend in reactive mode. At the same time, we will embrace the reality of “crisis management” as a central part of what we do. External Affairs staff are critical players in virtually every emergency or crisis that occurs in the Region – staff priorities can quickly shift for days, weeks or even months. External Affairs embraces the important role we play and will design and manage our work and processes accordingly.

Bald eagle at the National Elk Refuge



address our capacity

External Affairs is in a unique situation: we are a small, centralized program serving a large, decentralized customer base (both internal and external) distributed across the largest administrative region of the Service, one characterized by major media markets, an active Congressional delegation, and a large Native American constituency with a significant conservation land base. Unlike other Service regions, there are no dedicated communications assets in field offices in the Mountain-Prairie Region.

celebrate our success stories

The Service has many success stories to tell. We will highlight social benefits of the Service’s mission and operations (healthy wildlife populations, clean water, positive economic impacts, climate change mitigation, etc.). In other words, we will develop opportunities to sell the “everyday good news stories” about the Service in action. This will help promote Regional programs while broadening the public’s understanding of who we are and what we do.

Sunset at Quivira NWR



GOALS





goal 1

Anticipate and respond to emerging issues and policies

goal 2

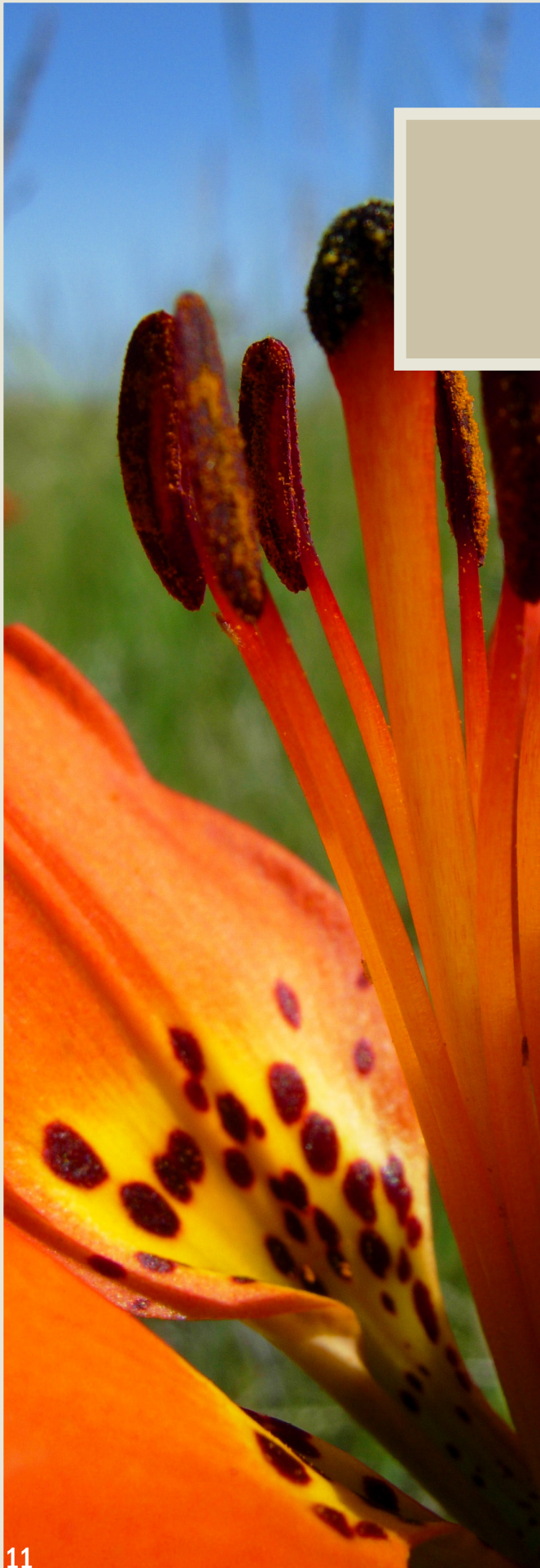
Develop strategic, proactive approaches and campaigns to increase acceptance of the Service mission and actions

goal 3

Establish and maintain mutually beneficial communications partnerships with stakeholders (internal and external), critical to Service mission success

goal 4

Evaluate the effectiveness of External Affairs activities



Prairie lily

Create early warning detection systems to monitor trends, issues and activities of interest to the Service in the Mountain-Prairie Region

Develop and implement an integrated, tiered system for issue management

Anticipate and respond to emerging issues and policies



strategies

- Develop, as necessary and appropriate, comprehensive communications plans and strategies
- Implement customer service request and workload management process
- Develop a system to maintain real-time awareness of ongoing and upcoming External Affairs operations and activities
- Identify and pursue opportunities for strategic engagement with specific external audiences (i.e., Congress, Native American tribes)



strategies

- Develop social media platforms for specific issues relevant to Service activities
- Develop a state-by-state monitoring system for conventional media
- Improve coordination with resource management programs to identify conservation actions with significant communications potential, programmatic activity and pending actions
- Improve collaboration with partner agencies and organizations to combine and leverage communications resources
- Deploy new tools to enhance communications with key regional stakeholders (i.e., Congressional offices, Native American tribes, and conservation NGOs)



Nesting Western grebe

Deliver strategic campaigns to promote and support key Service issues and activities

Deliver campaigns aimed at broadening awareness of and support for the Service among all audiences

objective C

Brand and market the Service to all audiences



strategies

- Identify opportunities to partner internally and externally on campaigns
- Build campaigns on and around Regional Director's annual priorities
- Launch campaigns to proactively address emergent, actionable trends and issues
- Develop campaigns to strengthen relationships with key stakeholders such as members of Congress and Native American tribes



strategies

- Enhance social media capabilities to better engage constituents via various platforms
- Promote public awareness of specific trust resources through targeted campaigns
- Build understanding of Service mission and programs through targeted campaigns



strategies

- Ensure common look and feel for all official Service communications products
- Identify opportunities to highlight and market regional "niches"
- Maximize opportunities to effectively deliver information about the Service to the public



objective A

Leverage existing and emerging communications initiatives led by other agencies and organizations



strategies

- Enhance coordination with core partners (i.e., state and federal natural resources agencies, conservation organizations, and Native American tribes)
- Broaden and deepen working relationships with educational institutions
- Cultivate partnerships with non-traditional entities

Establish and maintain mutually beneficial communications partnerships with stakeholders (internal and external), critical to Service mission success





Red Cliffs Desert Tortoise Reserve in Utah

objective A

Research, design, and implement systems to measure the effectiveness of External Affairs activities

objective B

Strategically invest in high value and high return evaluation actions

goal 4



strategies

- Develop and apply survey tools to assess effect of External Affairs work on Service mission delivery
- Develop and employ analytics to gauge the reach and impact of External Affairs activities



strategies

- Seek efficiencies by identifying and utilizing existing research about conservation communications conducted by universities, NGOs, and other agencies and conservation entities
- Conduct after-action reviews with affected programs



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