

Planning Update

San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex: Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Baca National Wildlife Refuges

Issue 1, March 2011



Dave Menke/USFWS

Sandhill cranes can often be heard during their spring migration through the San Luis Valley.

The sandhill cranes are echoing the call!

As winter slowly lets go of its grip on the San Luis Valley, thousands of greater and lesser sandhill cranes are descending on the valley to refuel as they continue their annual trek north. Joining these valley visitors are abundant waterfowl, shorebirds, and birds of prey. The San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (refuge complex) plays host to this majestic event every spring and fall.

Like the birds, many of us are anxious to be on the move, whether it is to work in the fields or to celebrate warmer weather. We would like to invite our stakeholders, whether you are a government official, a member of an organization, a member of a Native American tribe, or an interested citizen, to take a little time away from your busy schedules to voice your ideas about the future of three remarkable

places: Baca National Wildlife Refuge, Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge, and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge.

The public involvement phase of the comprehensive planning process for the refuge complex has begun. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has formed a planning team consisting of Service staff along with representatives from state, federal, and tribal agencies to begin work on a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental impact statement. At the same time, we will be studying the potential for a landscape-level strategic habitat conservation initiative consisting primarily of conservation easements in the San Luis Valley. When completed, this plan will provide guidance on the direction of the three refuges for 15 years. Whether you decide to send us comments by letter or fax or you choose to join us at an upcoming public meeting, we look forward to hearing your views about the important qualities

of these refuges and what issues you think should be addressed during the planning process.

Mike Blenden
Project Leader

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Scoping the Issues

One of the early phases in the planning process is to determine the significant issues that need to be addressed in the CCP. Over the next few months, we will gather information about the concerns of our stakeholders. One way we learn about stakeholders' ideas and concerns is by holding public meetings. In late March, we will be hosting three public meetings in the San Luis Valley, in Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Moffat, Colorado. The locations and times for each meeting can be found in the box to the right.

The format for the public meetings will include a short presentation followed by an opportunity for meeting attendees to ask questions. Those who wish to offer comments publicly will be allowed to make brief remarks after all the questions have been answered. We will allow time in the meetings for one-on-one conversations, and we encourage you to engage with the refuge staff as that is the best way to learn about the planning process. An optional questionnaire about refuge issues will be available at the meetings or can be found on our website at <http://www.fws.gov/alamosa/planning>. We will also accept comments by letter, email, phone, or one-on-one conversations.

The following questions may assist you in providing input.

1. What do you value most about the refuge complex?
2. What problems or issues do you want to see addressed in the CCP?
3. What changes, if any, would you like to see in the management of the three refuges?

More information about our public involvement process, including scoping, can be found in the Public Involvement Summary, January 2011, which is available on our website.

Comment Deadline

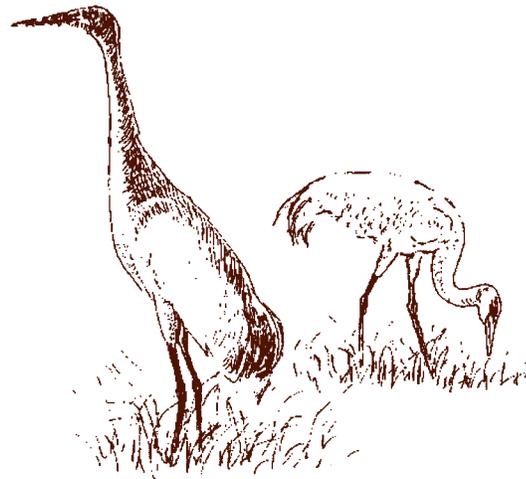
Scoping comments are due by April 29, 2011. See the back page of this update for more information about submitting your ideas and concerns.



The annual crane festival is a great way to learn about the refuges.

2011 Public Scoping Meetings

- Alamosa, Colorado
March 29, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Alamosa County Building
8900 Independence Way,
Room 108
719/589 4848
- Monte Vista, Colorado
March 30, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Monte Vista COOP
Community Room
1901 E. Hwy 160
719/852 5181
- Moffat, Colorado
March 31, 2:00–4:00 p.m.
Moffat School District
School Cafeteria
501 Garfield Avenue
719/256 4710



The upcoming public meetings will be held March 29, 30, and 31, 2011.

A Vision for the Future

During December 2010, refuge staff began thinking about the important qualities of the refuge complex and how the three refuges that make up the complex should look in the future. The refuge staff developed a draft vision, which is a compelling, future-oriented expression of what the refuges should be or what

the Service hopes to do, based primarily on the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) and the legislative purposes of each refuge. Goals are descriptive, open-ended, and often broad statements that provide direction on how best to achieve the vision. During the public meetings and scoping process, the public will be asked to review the statements and offer suggestions for refinement.

Draft Vision

The San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex, set in a high expansive desert valley, is cradled between the snowcapped peaks of the San Juan and Sangre De Cristo ranges. Mountain snowmelt feeds the Rio Grande, numerous streams, and a dynamic groundwater system, creating a mix of playas, wet meadows, and willow and cottonwood riparian corridors, which are in stark contrast with the surrounding arid landscape. This valley and its wildlife have attracted many peoples, as reflected by 12,000 years of human history. Visitors experience the ancient song of the sandhill crane, witness evening flights of thousands of waterfowl, and listen to bugling elk. The refuges support and foster a collaborative spirit between their neighbors and partners to conserve the valley's treasured resources.

"The San Luis Valley, including the refuges, encompasses large, unfragmented expanses of wet meadows and riparian areas that provide habitat for the life cycle needs of a high diversity of wildlife and plant species."

-Refuge employee at the draft vision and goals workshop



Willow Creek meadow, San Luis Valley, Colorado

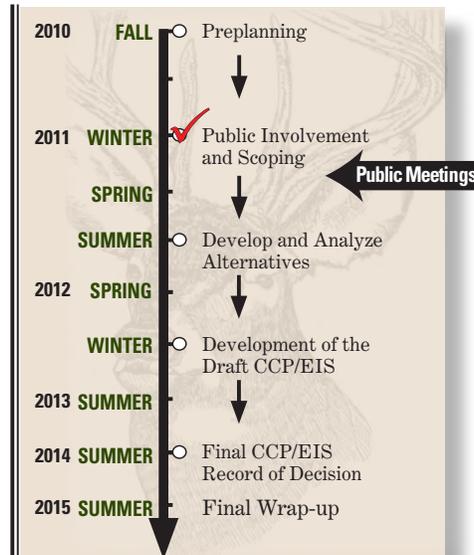
Draft Goals

- **Habitat and Wildlife:** Conserve, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity and function of the San Luis Valley ecosystem to support healthy populations of native fish and wildlife, with an emphasis on migratory birds.
- **Water:** Protect, acquire, and manage surface and groundwater resources to maintain and support management objectives.
- **Visitor Services:** Provide safe, accessible, and high-quality wildlife-dependent recreation and perform outreach to visitors and local communities to nurture an appreciation and understanding of the unique natural and cultural resources of the San Luis Valley.
- **Cultural:** Protect significant cultural resources within the refuge complex.
- **Research/Science:** Use sound science, applied research, monitoring, and evaluation to advance the understanding of natural resource functions and management of the habitats within the San Luis Valley ecosystem.
- **Operation and Management:** Secure and effectively use funding, staffing, and partnerships for the benefit of all resources in support of the refuge complex purposes and the mission of the Refuge System.
- **Land Conservation/Partnership:** Actively pursue and continue to foster partnerships with other agencies, organizations, the water community, and private landowners to conserve, manage, and provide long-term sustainability of the working landscapes within the San Luis Valley ecosystem.

Refuge Facts

The refuge complex is a unique and ecologically important component of the Refuge System. Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges were established primarily to support the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Baca National Wildlife Refuge focuses not only on protecting the region's hydrology, which the unique sand dunes ecosystem depends on, but also on protecting the exceptional ecological, cultural, and wildlife resources of the area. Congress authorized acquisition of land within Baca National Wildlife Refuge with passage of the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000. This legislation received widespread support and, in 2008, Congress amended the act to establish the purposes of the refuge. This act specifies that, among other requirements, the Service is to "restore, enhance, and maintain wetland, upland, riparian, and other habitats for native wildlife, plant, and fish species in the San Luis Valley."

Project Timeline



Contact Information

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National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Attn: Laurie Shannon
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For project information, to get on the mailing list, or to send us an email:
www.fws.gov/alamosa/planning

For information about the refuges:
www.fws.gov/alamosa
Tel: 719/589 4021



Black-necked stilts



March 2011

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED