Print Form

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District

Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

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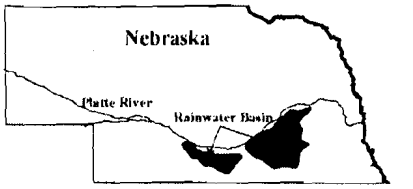

Help shape the future of your Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District!

Greetings,

We are preparing a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for the conservation of natural resources and public use of the Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District (WMD) which manages waterfowl production areas in the Rainwater Basin region of Nebraska. This region encompasses parts of Adams, Butler, Clay, Dawson, Fillmore, Franklin, Gosper, Hall, Hamilton, Harlan, Kearney, Nuckolls, Phelps, Polk, Saline, Seward, Thayer, and York Counties in southeastern Nebraska.

Sharing your ideas and concerns will help us prepare a plan that is sensitive to your needs. If you are interested in the Rainwater Basin WMD, we invite you to participate in this project.

We are asking for your input through open-house meetings in local communities during December 2005 (see next column), and through the enclosed issues workbook. The purpose is to let you know what we are doing, and to learn how you feel about this important conservation area, as well as how you think it should be managed.

Besides the open houses we have prepared to reach out and seek public input, the staff of the WMD are also available to meet with you. If you would like a presentation to your group, or would like to make an appointment to meet individually, please call the contact telephone number above to make arrangements.

We look forward to working with you throughout this most important planning process.

The Rainwater Basin WMD
CCP Planning Team

The Service

Part of the Department of the Interior, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the only Federal agency with the specific mandate to conserve the nation's fish, wildlife, and plants for the benefit of the American people.

The Service's mission is—working with others—to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

National Wildlife Refuge System

The Service manages the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS)–the largest collection of lands set aside specifically for the protection of fish and wildlife populations and habitats.

The NWRS began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated a pelican and heron rookery in Florida as the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Today, more than 540 units of the NWRS are spread from Alaska to Puerto Rico, and from Maine to Hawaii.

Wetland Management Districts and Refuges provide important habitat for native plants and many species of mammals, birds, fish, insects, amphibians, and reptiles. They also play a vital role in preserving endangered and threatened species.

All the units of the NWRS offer a wide variety of recreational opportunities and many have visitor centers, wildlife-observation trails, and environmental education programs. Nationwide, more than 30 million visitors annually hunt, fish, observe, and photograph wildlife or participate in interpretive activities on refuges.

The mission of the NWRS 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.

Four Guiding Principles of the NWRS

- *Habitat.* Fish and wildlife will not prosper without quality habitat, and without fish and wildlife, traditional uses of refuges cannot be sustained. The NWRS will continue to conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of fish and wildlife habitat within refuges.
- *Public Use.* The NWRS provides important opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.
- *Partnerships.* America's sportsmen and women were the first partners who insisted on protecting valuable wildlife habitat within wildlife refuges. Conservation partnerships with other Federal agencies, state agencies, tribes, organizations, industry, and the general public can make significant contributions to the growth and management of the NWRS.
- *Public Involvement.* The public should be given a full and open opportunity to participate in decisions regarding acquisition and management of our NWRs.

Rainwater Basin WMD Background

The Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District was established in 1963 when the Service began acquiring critical migratory waterfowl habitat in Southeastern Nebraska. Today over 60 individual tracts of land have been purchased, most of them with Duck Stamp dollars.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of ducks, geese, sandhill and whooping cranes, and other migratory birds stop-over at Rainwater Basin WMD to feed and rest. Because of the uniqueness of the habitats and the importance for migratory birds, the Rainwater Basin WMD intensively manages the wetland and upland habitats twork Site and a *Globally Important Bird Area.*

The WMD's diversity and abundance of migratory birds has achieved international recognition as one of the premiere wildlife observation and photography destinations in the entire NWRS.

The wetlands managed by the WMD are shallow basins providing resting & feeding areas for millions of birds during spring and fall migrations. In the past bison and wildfire kept wetlands open with annual plants growing during droughts and dry summer months. With bison gone and wildfires controlled management needs to maintain wetland conditions favored by geese**, ducks and other waterbirds.**

The Planning Process

The Service is required to manage all units of the NWRS in accordance with an approved CCP to:

- achieve the station's purposes,
- help fulfill the NWRS mission,
- maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each wetland management district, refuge and the NWRS,
- help achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System, and
- meet other mandates.

The CCP will guide management decisions and set goals, objectives, and strategies to accomplish these ends. Step-down management plans may also be required to provide additional details about meeting strategies and implementation schedules.

Each plan will be founded on principles of sound fish and wildlife management and available science, and be consistent with legal mandates and other Service management direction.

The Service will prepare plans that, above all else, ensure that ***wildlife comes first*** on all units of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Want to Get Involved?

To gather as much public input and to reach as many people as possible, there are several opportunities for your participation.

Open Houses

We are conducting four open houses.

- **Monday, December 5, 5-8 pm**
  Ramada Inn Hotel, Kearney, NE
- **Tuesday, December 6, 5-8 pm**
  4-H building, County Fairgrounds, York, NE
- **Wednesday, December 7, 5-8 pm**
  City Office Community Center, Clay Center, NE
- **Thursday, December 7, 5-8 pm**
  Super 8 Motel conference rm., Holdrege, NE

Issues Workbooks

You may also get involved by completing the following issues workbook.

Issues Workbook

This workbook is provided to everyone on our mailing list and anyone who attends an open house. Additional copies will be kept at the Rainwater Basin WMD headquarters for distribution, upon request.

Please read through each of the sections and jot down your thoughts. Let us know what issues you would like to see addressed in the comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and any additional thoughts or concerns you may have.

Your responses to these questions will help us better understand our constituents and public opinion, and help guide the planning process.

All of the comments we receive, by whatever means, will be considered in the preparation of the CCP; however, to be most helpful, please provide your comments by January 15, 2006.

After you have completed the workbook, simply fold it in half (with the pre-addressed return mailer on the outside), tape it together (do not staple), affix proper postage, and drop it in the mail.

If you have any questions or would like more information about this project, please call the Rainwater Basin WMD headquarters at 308/236-5015.

Thanks for your help—we really appreciate it!

1. What makes the Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District and all its waterfowl production areas (WPAs) special or unique for you? What do you like about them?

2. For what reasons have you visited the Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District? What was of most interest to you?

3. Are there any issues you would like to see addressed in the CCP, from either a conservation of natural resources point of view, or from a public use point of view?

4. What improvements would you recommend for the Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District?

5. Any additional thoughts, suggestions, or comments that you would like to share with us?

6. In what town and state do you reside? _____

IMPORTANT

Would you like to be on our mailing list?

To place your name and address on our CCP mailing list, we must have your written permission. This is because Federal Government mailing lists must be released to the public on request under the Freedom of Information Act.

If you wish to receive future information about the Rainwater Basin NWR CCP Project, please fill in the information requested below and return this form to the following address. [If you have already completed one of these forms, you do not need to fill out another one.]

If you are returning a completed issues workbook, you may return this form with it.

Return to: Rainwater Basin WMD CCP Project
P.O. Box 1686
Kearney, NE 68848

Yes, I wish to be on the mailing list to receive future information about the Rainwater Basin WMD CCP Project. I understand that names and addresses on Federal mailing lists must be released to the public on request, under provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

_____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____

If you are acting in an official capacity as the representative of an organization, please complete the following two items:

Organization: _____

Title: _____

Please return the issues workbook and the authorization if you would like to be on the CCP mailing list. Fold, tape the two halves together, affix postage, and drop in the mail.

----------*Fold Here*----------

_____

_____

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Place
Stamp
Here

Rainwater Basin WMD CCP Project

P.O. Box 1686

Kearney, NE 68848