

Clark's grebe/USFWS

Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 2, December 2010

Thanks for Participating!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Lake Lowell and Snake River Islands Units of Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The CCP will guide Refuge management for the next 15 years.

As part of the planning process, we have been seeking

public input on future Refuge management. This planning update provides information on the status of the planning process and what we have heard from people so far. We thank everyone who has provided comments and we invite you to continue sharing your ideas with us. Your participation remains critical to the success of this planning effort.

Your Comments Covered Many Issues

During public scoping, we received almost 1,000 comments describing your concerns and providing suggestions for managing the Refuge. In addition, we received two petitions and one form letter. One petition, "Keep Lake Lowell Open," was signed by 103 people. The other petition, "I support recreation on Lake Lowell," was signed by 566 people. A form letter, signed by 54 people, requested no change in motorized boating and allowance of on-trail team practices. Thank you for engaging in our refuge planning process. Here is a small sample of your comments:

"I believe that a healthy wildlife population and recreational boating can co-exist: Extend the "no wake area" farther up the lake to Gotts Point. Exclude motorized boats from the "no wake area" until after the nesting season..."

"What a pleasure to take a child fishing or boating and to point out the various types of birds flying overhead. Educating your family about nature is a true joy and unforgettable to the whole family. Picnicking and swimming enter into the whole experience. Please do not take away an opportunity that costs our citizens very little and makes wonderful memories."

"If it is truly the intent of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife to improve habitat in the management area for the fish and wildlife a much wiser approach would be to fully implement the Lake Lowell TMDL recently drafted. If it were possible reduce the amount of nutrients discharged into the lake from surrounding agriculture lands via the various drains flowing into the lake the impacts would be very beneficial."

"Boating in this area is a way of life, we fish, hunt, and enjoy recreation with friends and family. Removing boating on Lake Lowell is a start to remove our way of life as we see it."

"...the noxious weeds, mosquitos, and diseases that lie in the unmanaged areas are far more dangerous to our wildlife and community than boating."

"We need to limit the use of this once great refuge by allowing only certain types of boats on it, and the number allowed on the lake at one time. If it is to be a refuge, then let's respect it as such. There are other places not too far off where people can take their large boats to accommodate speed and noise. If it is indeed a wildlife habitat refuge, then let's get back to the basics and respect it as such."

Public Involvement Steps Taken to Date

- A Notice of Intent (NOI) to begin the CCP for Deer Flat NWR was published in the Federal Register July 15, 2010. The NOI invited comments until September 10, 2010.
- We distributed approximately 1,300 copies of Planning Update #1 to a variety of entities with interest in the Refuge and planning process: local citizens; Refuge visitors; non-governmental organizations; local, state, and federal government agencies; Tribes; elected officials; and refuge neighbors. It was also posted on our website. The first Planning Update described the CCP process, Refuge purposes, preliminary goals, and preliminary issues to be considered in the CCP.
- A variety of additional information was posted on the Refuge website.
- We contacted over 40 non-governmental organizations and state and county agencies to offer CCP question-and-answer sessions. We met with 23 groups, reaching over 400 people.
- We contacted visitors at public access points at the Lake Lowell Unit on 8 days in July and August, talking with over 150 people and distributing nearly 600 informational flyers.
- We held public open houses, attended by 49 people, on July 28, August 20, and August 21.
- We held two Work Sessions



Open house attendees talk with a Refuge staff member/USFWS

on September 23-25 to involve stakeholders in brainstorming possible solutions to key management issues.

What Happened at the Work Sessions?

Approximately 50 people joined us for the work sessions, including elected officials, representatives from local groups with Refuge interests, and citizens who had commented during scoping. Citizens who had offered solution-oriented comments and who had differing viewpoints on the selected issues were invited. The sessions were open to the public (a notice was posted in the Idaho Press-Tribune and on the Refuge web site) and six members of the public viewed the work sessions at some point during the three days.

Participants met for a total of six hours. At the outset, the participants introduced themselves and explained their interest in Deer Flat NWR. Next, Refuge staff provided an overview of the Refuge and of the CCP process. An open question-and-answer period followed.

During the second half of each session, the participants worked in

small “breakout” groups. Asked to “play Refuge manager for the day,” participants brainstormed solutions to specific management issues, including surface water recreation, upland recreation, and hunting. A list of the questions provided to the breakout groups, as well as the ideas each group came up with, can be found on our website: www.fws.gov/deerflat.

Planning Schedule

Spring 2010.....Preplanning
 Summer 2010..... Public involvement and scoping
 Spring 2011.....Release draft alternatives
 Spring 2012..... Release draft CCP and EIS
 Winter 2012Complete final CCP and EIS

Additional opportunities for the public to comment and provide input will be announced in future planning updates and on the website.



A work session participant presents brainstormed ideas / USFWS

What Were Your Concerns?

Non-Wildlife-Dependent

Recreational Opportunities. Non-wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities at the Lake Lowell Unit generated more comments than all other topics combined. A majority of these comments centered on perceived changes to water-based recreation such as motorized boating, water skiing, and jet skiing. Kiteboarding, sailing, nonmotorized boating, picnicking, horseback riding, dog walking and jogging were also the subjects of many comments.

Respondents offered a variety of reasons for continuing existing recreational activities in their current form, such as: people do not have money to travel to other reservoirs in the valley; changes would severely impact the economy of Canyon County; people would have fewer opportunities for environmental education; a reduction in recreational opportunities at Lake Lowell would increase visitor impacts to other reservoirs; people and wildlife have been coexisting for 100 years, “so if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”; the reservoir was bought and paid for with taxpayer dollars, so taxpayers should have access; the Refuge is a local and safe place for family activities and changes will reduce Canyon County residents’ quality of life.

Not all comments received were in favor of leaving management as is. Comments also suggested eliminating all motorized boating opportunities on Lake Lowell; allowing only non-motorized boats; allowing motorized boats but eliminating water skiing,

jet skiing, and other similar activities. Many people offered solutions for allowing mixed use, a theme also commonly heard in the work sessions. Suggestions included buffer zones, closed areas, boat size restrictions, horsepower restrictions, emissions requirements, seasonal restrictions, partition of uses, time restrictions and the implementation of a permit and/or fee program.

Hunting. Hunting comments were varied. Some people requested that no hunting be conducted on the Refuge because refuges should provide sanctuary for wildlife. Others requested additional hunting opportunities, including deer and Canada goose hunts on the Lake Lowell Unit and fox squirrel and predator hunts on both Refuge units.

Reasons suggested for opening a deer hunt included reducing roadkill and crop depredation. Some people felt that implementing a deer hunt on the Refuge is not necessary as the current population appears healthy and the quantity of traffic and nearby homes make it impossible to safely implement a hunt. People who requested predator hunting felt it would increase the production of nesting birds.

Comments on duck hunting primarily concerned improving hunt quality, with suggestions including a daily shotgun shell limit, limiting hunting to three or four days a week, increasing access by unlocking gates, and prohibiting electronic calling and decoys.

Habitat and Wildlife Management.

Some people urged the Service to improve Refuge habitats. Several comments were received on the need to curtail dumping on the Refuge and to pick up trash and litter. Noxious weeds were identified as a significant problem by several respondents. A variety of concerns over Lake Lowell water quality were expressed, such as irrigation and chemical runoff into the lake, silt that is filling the lake, water pollution by ducks and geese, mercury levels, and boating impacts to water quality. Other habitat- and wildlife-related comments suggested removal of dead trees around the lake, elimination or reduction of the carp population in the lake, restoring pheasant populations, and implementation of measures to reduce wildlife depredation on surrounding farms. Many people urged the Service to maintain, expand, and improve native habitats. Invasive species were also mentioned as a problem. Other suggestions were made in the area of wetlands management and water quality. Several people urged attention to climate change.

Facilities. A number of respondents suggested improvements to Refuge facilities, particularly installing new trails and more parking spaces. The condition and availability of restroom facilities and wildlife-viewing facilities also generated several suggestions. Increased access to the south side of the lake and additional dock and/or bank fishing opportunities were requested several times.

For a comprehensive look at all the comments we received, visit www.fws.gov/deerflat.

Common Misconceptions

The Refuge received comments of varying length and content over the scoping period. As we received and reviewed the comments, it became clear that many people had misconceptions about the planning process. The questions and answers below should help to clarify some of the misinformation.

Is the Refuge being closed to all recreational activities?

A majority of commenters discussed the many non-priority uses at the Refuge (e.g., non-wildlife-dependent uses such as boating, swimming, picnicking, jogging) and requested their continuation.

The goal in developing the CCP is not to eliminate recreational opportunities but to comply with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act and the policies of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Two of the primary policies guiding recreational uses on a Refuge are appropriateness and compatibility.

National Wildlife Refuges may provide non-priority public uses if they are determined appropriate and compatible. A use is appropriate if, among other considerations, it contributes to the public's understanding and appreciation of, or is beneficial to, a refuge's natural or cultural resources. They also must not impair existing wildlife-dependent recreational uses or reduce the potential to provide quality, compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation into the future. If deemed to be appropriate, a use must then be determined compatible, which means it will not interfere with, or detract from, the purpose of

the Refuge or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Refuge prepares a written compatibility determination for each use proposed under the CCP. The determination explores questions such as:

- How much impact will the use have on wildlife and what level of impact is acceptable?
- Can the use be managed in such a way as to diminish any negative impacts?
- Does the Refuge expect to have the resources to manage the use (e.g., funding for staff, facilities, and maintenance)?
- How does the use affect the “Big Six” uses (wildlife observation and photography, interpretation and environmental education, hunting and fishing)?

Written compatibility determinations are part of the CCP and will be available for public review when the draft CCP is released in the Spring of 2012.

Can I vote on Refuge Issues?

Many commenters “voted” to keep the lake open to particular recreational opportunities, but the planning process is not a vote. Because the plan must comply with relevant law and policy, if an idea proposed by many commenters violates law or policy, it cannot be included in the plan. On the other hand, a suggestion made by just one commenter that complies with law and policy might be included.



Mule deer fawn/USFWS

Isn't recreation a designated purpose for Lake Lowell?

Lake Lowell was built as an irrigation reservoir and the Bureau of Reclamation has jurisdiction over irrigation uses of the water. However, Reclamation does not have administrative jurisdiction over other reservoir uses, such as recreation. The only secondary purpose for Lake Lowell, as established by President Theodore Roosevelt 101 years ago, is to provide a refuge and breeding grounds for migratory birds and other wildlife.

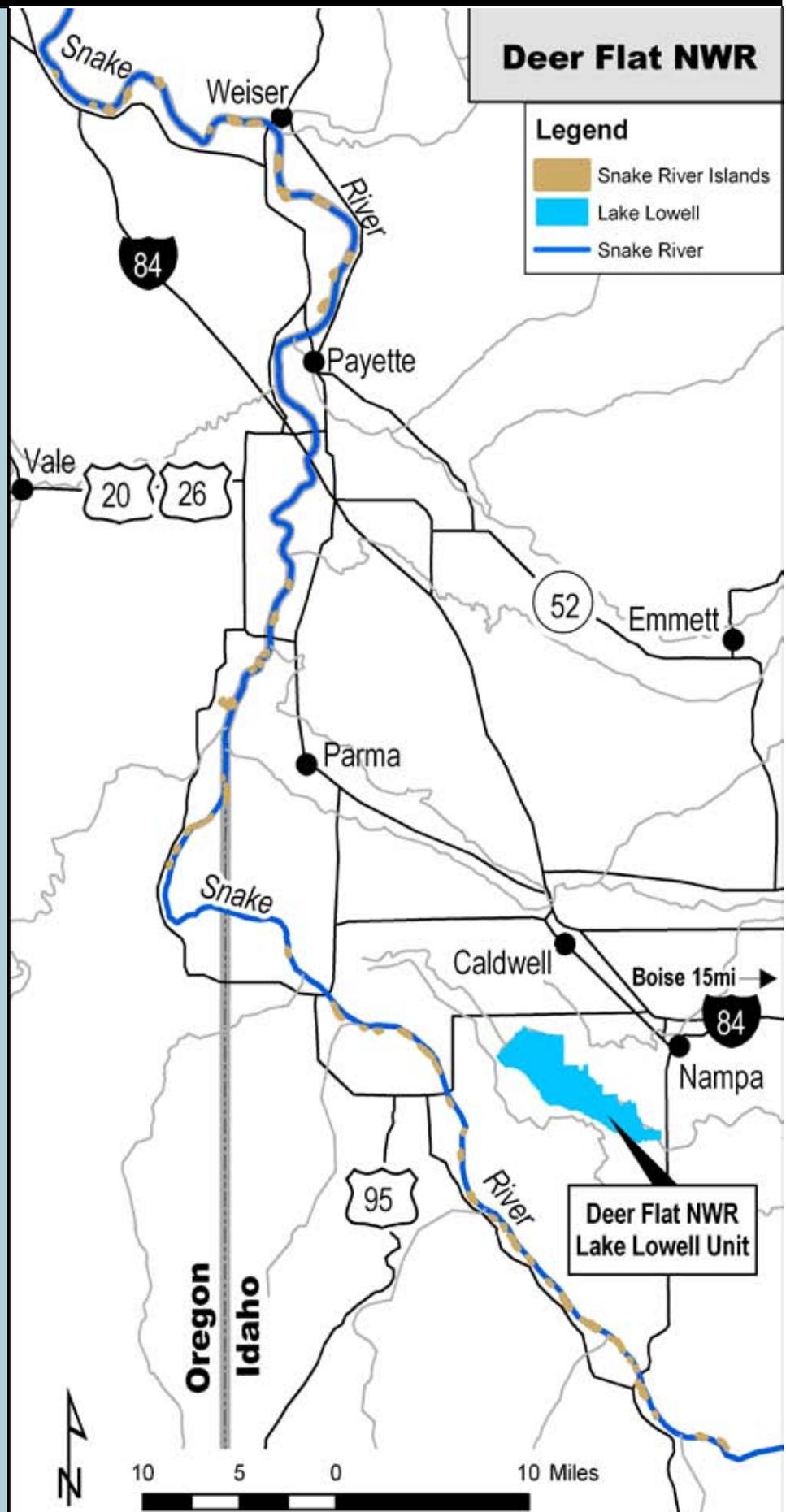
Are our boat registration fees provided to the Refuge?

Both the Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are managed by the Department of the Interior and funding is appropriated for the two agencies to support our respective missions. Local boater registration fees are not given to the Refuge. We use Refuge funds to manage for wildlife. Reclamation uses its funds to provide irrigation.

Draft Refuge Vision Statement

The vision statement is a descriptive picture of how the Refuge will look and be in the future. Vision statements are future-oriented, concise, clear, and compelling. We welcome your input on this draft vision statement. The final vision statement will help guide implementation of the Refuge CCP.

Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge is appreciated, protected, and treasured as a place where wildlife comes first. The public actively supports and advocates for the Refuge purpose and programs. Residents of the Treasure Valley realize that a shimmering oasis of wildlife habitat exists in their backyard, both at Lake Lowell and the Snake River Islands. The clean, clear waters and lush riparian landscapes of Lake Lowell and the Snake River Islands provide nesting, resting, and feeding habitat for spectacular concentrations of migratory birds and other wildlife. Areas of protected shoreline vegetation and open waters provide opportunities for grebes to successfully nest and raise their young. The shrub steppe habitat provides an exemplary model of what historically existed in the Treasure Valley and is utilized as a living classroom by children and adults. The islands of the Snake River provide habitats where songbirds, nesting geese, and colonial waterbirds thrive. The Refuge is a place for people to enjoy and connect with nature and realize the value of wildlife and habitats. Public use opportunities maintain the integrity of the wildlife resources, instill in visitors the importance of wild places, and provide memorable outdoor experiences for present and future generations of Americans.



Next Steps for the CCP

Currently the planning team is working on preliminary draft alternatives for public review in the spring of 2011. The alternatives will provide a range of different approaches to Refuge management that help resolve issues, achieve the refuge purpose and vision, and help fulfill the Refuge System mission.

If you have questions regarding the CCP, or want additional information please:

- Visit the refuge website at <http://www.fws.gov/deerflat/>
- Call 208-467-9278
- E-mail deerflat@fws.gov
- Write Deer Flat NWR, 13751 Upper Embankment Road, Nampa, ID 83686.

Releasing a Final CCP and EIS: Winter 2012.

Any Questions or Concerns?

Contact Us!

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American kestrel/© Dick McKee



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Visit Our Website: <http://www.fws.gov/deerflat/refugeplanning.html>

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your updated address. Thank You*

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