

607; fax (303) 236-4792 or Mike Blenden, Complex Manager, Alamosa/Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge Complex, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Admin. Building, 9383 El Rancho Lane, Alamosa, CO 81101; (719) 589-4021; fax (719) 587-0595.

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**Availability of Documents:** Copies of the Draft CCP/EA or Spanish version Summary may be obtained by writing to: Adam Misztal, Planning Team Leader, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 25486, Denver Federal Center, Denver, CO 80225-0486. The Draft CCP/EA will also be available for viewing and downloading online at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/planning/>.

**Background:** Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges were established under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act “\* \* \* for use as inviolate sanctuaries, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” The purpose for managing habitats on the Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge (the Complex) is to provide a biologically diverse area that complements the San Luis Valley (SLV) ecosystem.

Ten different plant communities/habitat types exist on the Complex: upland shrub, tall-emergent, short-emergent, saltgrass, short grass, shallow seasonal wetland, semipermanent wetland, riparian, riverine, and agriculture. These habitats support a variety of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds. Mammals include coyote, red fox, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, elk, mule deer, pronghorn, raccoon, mink, American badger, and other small mammals. Birds commonly seen on these Refuges include numerous waterfowl species, including 10 that nest on the Complex: mallard, gadwall, cinnamon, green-winged and blue-winged teal, northern pintail, northern shoveler, American wigeon, redheads, and ruddy ducks, and one species of goose (Canada). The Monte Vista NWR (MVNWR) has one of the highest densities of nesting waterfowl in the continent (Gilbert *et al.* 1996). On average, 15,000 ducks are produced on MVNWR annually, which constitutes a major contribution to the State's population and, subsequently, to the Central Flyway's duck population.

Other birds using the Complex include great blue heron, little blue heron, snowy and cattle egret, sandhill crane, northern harrier, Swainson's hawk, ring-necked pheasant, Ross' goose, black-bellied plover, greater yellowlegs, willet, and Wilson's phalarope. Two endangered species, the

whooping crane and southwestern willow flycatcher, and one threatened species, the bald eagle, utilize the Complex. In addition, five species of management concern to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Migratory Bird Office also use the Complex: American bittern, black tern, burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, and white-faced ibis.

The Draft CCP/EA identifies and evaluates two alternatives for managing the Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges in the San Luis Valley of southwestern Colorado. The alternatives are compared by describing how the habitat management tools, water management, rest, prescribed burning, prescribed grazing, farming, and habitat protection would be used under each alternative. Also described under each alternative are the management of public use, cultural resources, and elk.

Under the No Action (Current management) Alternative the Refuges would continue to be managed as it has been in the recent past:

**Water Management:** The Complex would continue to use its irrigation systems much like the private landowners who preceded it to produce wet meadow habitat to support wetland-dependent wildlife species. Also water management, on certain portions of the Refuges, would accommodate various situations; for example, to meet the needs of certain species, compliance with State water law, control of noxious weeds, maintenance of water control infrastructure, and specific experiments to alter vegetation.

**Rest:** Availability of dense stands of wetland vegetation during the early spring months is an important component of waterbird production on both Refuges. Successful production of waterbirds is primarily reliant upon stands of vegetation largely excluded from harvest. Because of this, both Refuges are important islands of nesting cover within the Valley and the Flyway. Stands of dense vegetation are achieved through careful water manipulation and rest from management practices that result in defoliation, such as grazing, fire, herbicide, and mowing. Although the use of rest has tremendous benefits for a wide variety of birds, it is not feasible nor desirable to maintain all of the Complex's wetlands in a constant densely vegetated state.

**Prescribed Burning:** Burning is primarily used to set back plant succession in wetlands and uplands and to provide a mosaic of vegetation composition and structure for wildlife species with a wide array of nesting and feeding requirements. Habitats are

periodically burned to remove excessive litter buildup, stimulate vegetation growth, enhance nutrient cycling, increase soil temperatures, and control weeds. Prescribed burning is also used in some cases to reduce extremely dense or weedy vegetation so that other management tools can be used in that area.

**Prescribed Grazing:** From 1996 until present, cattle grazing has only occurred on the Complex to meet the needs of research. Grazing occurs during the growing season and animals are moved every 1 to 6 days to a new site. A grazed site is then rested from 25 to 35 days before it is grazed again. Sites may be grazed two to three times during May 15 to September 1.

**Farming:** The farming program on the Monte Vista NWR is primarily used to provide high energy food for migrating cranes and waterfowl. However, the food and cover provided by farm fields also benefit resident wildlife such as deer, rodents and pheasants. No farming is conducted at Alamosa NWR due to a lack of suitable soils.

**Habitat Protection:** Acquisition of four inholdings would continue to be pursued as opportunities arise. Easements and fee-title acquisitions would continue to be acquired to prevent uses that degrade wildlife habitat and buffer critical habitats on the Refuge. These efforts would continue as opportunities arise and be concentrated on lands within one-half mile of the current boundaries of the Refuges in order to protect them from the adverse impacts of housing development.

Currently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is an active partner in the Colorado Wetlands Initiative. It is a large Statewide partnership with the goal of protecting, restoring, and enhancing wetland habitat. This initiative is a voluntary approach to wetland conservation. It is aimed at conserving all biologically significant wetlands of Colorado and associated wildlife including birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.

The Complex staff would continue to assist private landowners to create, protect, and enhance wetlands throughout the SLV through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW). Partnerships would continue to be developed with entities such as the Colorado Division of Wildlife and Ducks Unlimited to supplement Service funding of the program.

**Public Use:** Public access to the Refuges is provided and would continue. Monte Vista NWR has a larger network of roads open to the public, including several county roads which