ROCKY FLATS STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

P.O. Box 17670 (303) 412-1200
Boulder, CO 80308-0670 (303) 412-1211 (f)
www.rockyflatssc.org

Jefferson County -- Boulder County -- City and County of Broomfield -- City of Arvada -- City of Boulder
City of Golden -- City of Northglenn -- City of Westminster -- Town of Superior
League of Women Voters -- Rocky Flats Cold War Museum -- Rocky Flats Homesteaders
Karen Imbierowicz

Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge
Briefing Paper

SUMMARY
"The Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Act of 2001" provides that following completion of the cleanup project, the vast majority of Rocky Flats would be protected as a national wildlife refuge. Cleanup was completed in October 2005 and on July 12, 2007, the Department of Energy transferred jurisdiction over 3953 acres of the former Rocky Flats buffer zone to the Department of the Interior to be managed as the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge.

The purpose of the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge is to restore and preserve native ecosystems, provide habitat for plants and wildlife, conserve threatened and endangered species, and provide opportunities for scientific research. Importantly, the Refuge Act prohibits reindustrialization of the site and annexation by local governments. The Comprehensive Conservation Plan guides site management.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission
The first national wildlife refuge was established in 1903. The refuge system, which has grown to more than 92 million acres, now includes 500 refuges (at least one in every state) and over 3000 waterfowl production areas. The Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge is one of three refuges in the Denver-metro area; the other two are The Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Commerce City) and Two Ponds NWR (Arvada).

The refuge system mission 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.

Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Act of 2001
"The Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Act of 2001" (Refuge Act) was championed by Senator Wayne Allard and Representative Mark Udall, and was broadly supported by local governments and community members surrounding the plant.

The Refuge Act identifies four uses for the Refuge:

1. Restore and preserve native ecosystems
2. Provide habitat for and populations management of native plants and migratory and resident wildlife
3. Conserve threatened and endangered species
4. Provide opportunities for compatible scientific research.

The Refuge Act also provides wildlife-dependent uses and environmental education and interpretation are priority public uses, and prohibits future development and annexation by local governments.

USFWS Planning and Management Goals

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), a program office within the Department of the Interior, manages the Rocky Flats Refuge. In 2004 USFWS developed the following goals to guide refuge planning and management:

1. Wildlife and Habitat Management: Provide a riparian community representative of historic flora and fauna in a high valley of the southern Rocky Mountains to provide habitat for migratory birds, mammals, and river-dependent species.
2. Public Use, Education and Interpretation: Provide visitors and students high quality recreational, educational and interpretive opportunities and foster an understanding and appreciation of the Refuge's xeric tallgrass prairie, upland shrub and wetland habitats; native wildlife; the history of the site; and the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS).
3. Safety: Conduct operations and manage public access in accordance with the final Rocky Flats' cleanup decision documents to ensure the safety of the Refuge visitors, staff and neighbors.
4. Effective and Open Communication: Conduct communication outreach efforts to raise public awareness about the Refuge programs, management decisions and the mission of the USFWS and the NWRS among visitors, students and nearby residents.
5. Working with Others: Foster beneficial partnerships with individuals, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and others to promote resource conservation, compatible wildlife-related research, public use, site history and infrastructure.
6. Refuge Operations: Based on available funds, provide facilities and staff to fulfill the Refuge vision and purpose.

Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP)

The Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) outlines the management direction and strategies for refuge operations, habitat restoration and visitor services. The CCP "balances wildlife and habitat management needs, compatible wildlife-dependent public uses and budgetary constraints." It was approved in April 2005 and is effective for 15 years.

Habitat Management: Habitat management will include prescribed fire, mowing and grazing to simulate and maintain native grassland communities.

Wildlife Management: USFWS will work with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to manage deer and elk populations. Management options include public hunting, culling and other means. Hunting will be limited to two weekends per year and will be solely for youth and the disabled. USFWS will also evaluate the suitability of reintroducing native species, such as the sharp-tailed grouse.

Public Use: Public use programs will include environmental education programs for high-school and college students, as well as interpretative programs. Visitor use facilities will include 12.8 miles of multi-use trails, 3.8 miles of hiking-only trails, a visitor contact station, interpretative overlooks, viewing blinds, and parking facilities.

Detailed Management Plans

The CCP describes the desired future conditions of the Refuge and provides long-range guidance and management direction. In the coming years, USFWS will conduct additional, more detailed planning for vegetation and wildlife management, fire management, visitor services (which includes interpretation, environmental education, hunting and research protocols), health and safety, and historic preservation. These plans are in addition to the 2007 plan that addressed entrance signs for the Refuge.

USFWS Priorities

USFWS has identified the following funding priorities:

- Prevent habitat degradation
- Maintain law enforcement presence
- Continue Wildlife monitoring
- Maintain migration corridors for wildlife
- Develop trails

Trails Opening

The CCP anticipates the Refuge would be open for public use starting in 5 years. USFWS also planned to have the trail to the Lindsay Ranch open within the first year after the transfer. However, there are no funds available to staff the Refuge or place safety fencing around the Lindsey house to keep visitors out of an unsafe building. USFWS now says it will likely be several years before any of the trails are open to the public.

Department of Energy at Rocky Flats

The Refuge Act provides DOE shall retain jurisdiction over lands that require ongoing management to ensure the cleanup remedies remain protective of human health and the environment. Subsequent legislation addressed active mining claims. Accordingly, DOE retained jurisdiction of the vast majority of the former Industrial Area and the settling ponds (1309 acres), as well as jurisdiction over active mining claims (929 acres).

Importantly, should contamination be found on Refuge lands that requires remediation, the Refuge Act provides cleanup trumps Refuge management.

For more information about the Refuge please go to: http://www.fws.gov/rockyflats/

May 2008