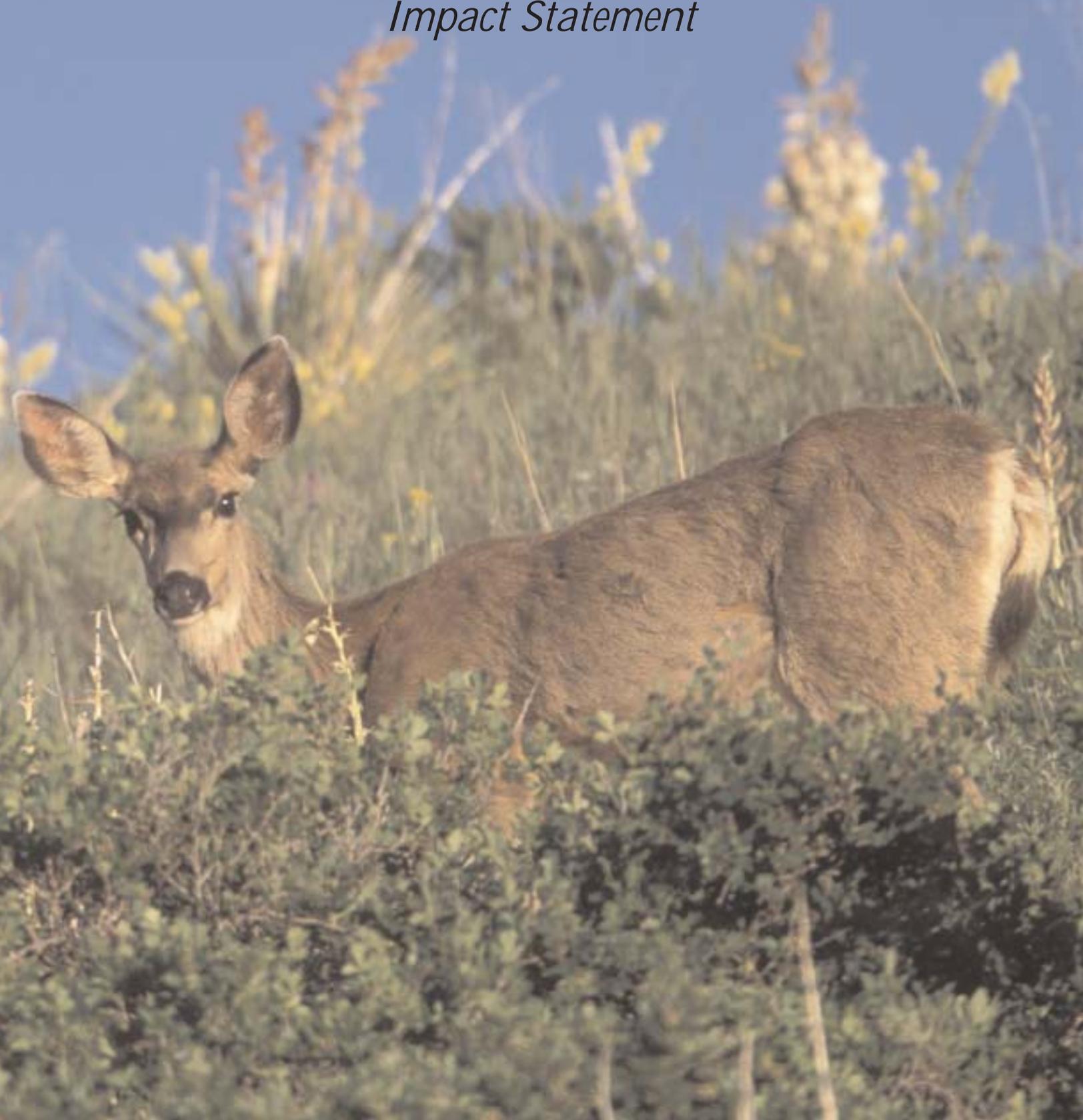


Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge

*Summary of DRAFT Comprehensive
Conservation Plan & Environmental
Impact Statement*



Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge

Summary of Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

February 2004

Prepared for:
U.S Fish & Wildlife Service
Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge
Rocky Mountain Arsenal – Building 121
Commerce City, CO 80022

Prepared by:
ERO Resources Corp.
1842 Clarkson Street
Denver, CO 80218

And:
Shapins Associates
1738 Pearl Street, Ste. 220
Boulder, CO 80302

THE ROCKY FLATS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

This document is a Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge (Rocky Flats NWR). Once finalized, the CCP will guide management of Refuge operations, habitat restoration and visitor services for the next 15 years. The Draft EIS evaluates and compares four alternatives to managing wildlife, habitats and human use of the proposed Refuge. It also discloses effects of restoration and visitor use on important physical, biological, social and cultural resources.

Under the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Act of 2001 (Refuge Act), the 6,240-acre Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site will become the Rocky Flats NWR following certification from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that cleanup and closure have been completed. At that time, the U.S Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) will assume management responsibility for the site.

REFUGE SIGNIFICANCE

In the Refuge Act, Congress identified the following significant qualities about the Rocky Flats site:

- The majority of the site has generally remained undisturbed since its acquisition by the government.
- The site preserves valuable open space and striking vistas of the Front Range mountain backdrop.
- The site provides habitat for many wildlife species, including a number of threatened and endangered species and is marked by the presence of rare xeric tallgrass prairie plant communities.

Big Bluestem in the xeric tallgrass prairie.



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The Refuge provides habitat for elk.

REFUGE PURPOSE

The Refuge Act identified four purposes of the Rocky Flats NWR:

- Restoring and preserving native ecosystems.
- Providing habitat for and population management of native plants and migratory and resident wildlife.
- Conserving threatened and endangered species.
- Providing opportunities for compatible scientific research.

The Refuge Act also provided some direction for managing the Refuge. The Service is to manage the Refuge to ensure that wildlife-dependent public uses and environmental education and interpretation are the priority public uses of the Refuge.

VISION

During the initial planning process, the Service developed the following vision statement to describe what will be different in the future as a result of the CCP and to capture the essence of what the Service is trying to accomplish at the Refuge:

Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge is a healthy expanse of grasslands, shrublands and wetlands, including rare xeric tallgrass prairie, where natural processes support a broad range of native wildlife. The Refuge provides striking mountain and prairie views and opportunities to appreciate the Refuge resources in an urbanized area through compatible wildlife-dependent public uses and education. Working with others, the Refuge conserves the unique biotic communities and sustains wildlife populations at the interface of mountains and prairies on Colorado's Front Range.



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GOALS

The Service also developed a set of goals to guide the planning effort and Refuge management:

Wildlife and Habitat Management

Conserve, restore and sustain biological diversity of the native flora and fauna of the mountain/prairie interface with particular consideration given to threatened and endangered species.

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).

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.

Effective and Open Communication

Conduct a variety of communication outreach efforts to raise public awareness about the Refuge programs, management decisions and the mission of the Service and the NWRS.

Working with Others

Foster beneficial partnerships with individuals, government agencies and non-governmental organizations and others that promote resource conservation, compatible wildlife-related research, public use, site history and infrastructure.

Refuge Operations

Based on available funds, provide facilities and staff to fulfill the Refuge vision and purpose.

The Service would conserve biological diversity of native fauna.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Throughout the CCP/EIS development process, the Service has solicited input from the public. Public involvement in the planning process ensured that interested and affected individuals, organizations, agencies and governmental entities were consulted and provided opportunities to participate. Public involvement has served the following functions:

- Informed the public about Rocky Flats NWR (planning updates, website, public meetings, presentations).
- Provided public input on key issues.
- Provided help in determining management direction of Rocky Flats NWR.

THE REFUGE'S RESOURCES

The Rocky Flats site is located at the interface of the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. The western half of the site is characterized by the relatively level Rocky Flats pediment, which gives way to several finger-like drainages that slope down to the rolling plains in the eastern portion of the site.

A diverse mosaic of vegetation communities is found at Rocky Flats. Two of these vegetation communities, the xeric tallgrass prairie and the tall upland shrubland, are considered to be rare in the region. Other vegetation communities include riparian woodland, riparian shrubland, wetlands, mesic mixed grassland, xeric needle and thread grassland, reclaimed mixed grassland and ponderosa pine woodland.

Many areas of the Rocky Flats site have remained relatively undisturbed for the last 30 to 50 years, allowing them to retain diverse habitat and associated wildlife. These wildlife communities are supported by the regional network of protected open space that surrounds Rocky Flats on three sides and buffers wildlife habitat from the surrounding urban development. Preble's meadow jumping mouse, a threatened species, occurs in every major drainage on the Refuge, as well as wetlands and shrubland communities adjacent to the Rock Creek and Woman Creek drainages. A resident herd of about 160 deer inhabit the site and elk are occasionally present.

Cultural resource surveys have identified and recorded 45 cultural sites or isolated artifacts at Rocky Flats. None of the identified cultural resources are recommended as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, the Lindsay Ranch within the Rock Creek drainage provides opportunities to interpret the early history of settlement and ranching on the prairie.



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Goldfinch and a variety of bird species present opportunities for wildlife observation.

The Rocky Flats site is located at the intersection of Jefferson, Boulder and Broomfield counties. The site is surrounded by open space to the north, east and west and urban development to the northeast and southeast. Other nearby land uses include mining operations, wind energy research and water collection and storage facilities.

ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THIS EIS

The legislation establishing Rocky Flats NWR requires that the Department of Energy (DOE) retain jurisdiction, authority and control over portions of the Rocky Flats site necessary for cleanup response actions. DOE anticipates that it will need to retain land in and around the current Industrial Area in order to maintain institutional controls and protect cleanup and monitoring systems.

Management alternatives for the DOE-retained lands are not considered in this CCP because the lands will not be part of the Refuge and the Service will not have authority to decide how those lands should be managed. However, it is a goal of both the Service and DOE that Rocky Flats will be a seamless property, to the extent possible, with no or few obvious visual differences between Refuge and retained lands.

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

Four alternatives were developed following the public scoping process and a workshop involving the planning team and Service staff. The alternatives are analyzed in detail in this CCP/EIS and summarized briefly below.

Interpretive programs would build on themes such as "Wildlife Comes First."



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A field of sunflowers.

ALTERNATIVE A: NO ACTION

In the No Action Alternative, the Service would not develop any public use facilities and would not implement any new management, restoration, or education programs at Rocky Flats. In this alternative, the Service would continue to manage the 1,800-acre Rock Creek Reserve in accordance with the Rock Creek Reserve Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (DOE 2001).

Management activities within the Rock Creek Reserve would include ongoing resource inventories and monitoring, habitat restoration, weed control and road removal and revegetation. Public use opportunities would be limited to guided tours.

ALTERNATIVE B: WILDLIFE, HABITAT AND PUBLIC USE (PROPOSED ACTION)

Alternative B, the Service's Proposed Action, emphasizes both wildlife and habitat conservation along with a moderate level of wildlife-dependent public use. Refuge-wide habitat conservation would include management of native plant communities, removal and revegetation of unused roads and stream crossings, management of deer and elk populations and protection of Preble's meadow jumping mouse habitat. Restoration would strive to replicate pre-settlement conditions.

Visitor use facilities would include about 16 miles of trails, a seasonally staffed visitor contact station, trailheads with parking and developed overlooks. One trail down to the Lindsay Ranch would be open soon after Refuge establishment, while the remainder of the public use facilities would open after 5 years, when restoration is well underway. Most of the trails would use existing roads. Public access would be by foot, bicycle, horse, or car. A limited public hunting program would be developed in collaboration with Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW).

On- and off-site environmental education programs would focus on the prairie ecosystem and would primarily target high school and college students.

The Service would provide compatible scientific research opportunities that focus on wildlife habitat and interactions between wildlife and human use. Partnerships would be sought from federal, state and municipal agencies and private entities to help achieve Refuge goals and to conserve contiguous lands.

ALTERNATIVE C: ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

Alternative C emphasizes Refuge-wide conservation and restoration of large areas of wildlife habitat. Restoration and management activities would strive to replicate pre-settlement conditions. Restoration efforts would focus on disturbed areas such as road corridors, stream crossings, cultivated fields and developed areas.

Limited public use and minimal facility development would occur in this alternative. Any facilities on the Refuge would be built for specific resource protection and management purposes. A single, 3,700-foot long trail would provide access to the Rock Creek drainage, but access would be limited to guided tours only. Environmental education programs would be limited to local distribution of educational materials about the Refuge and its ecological resources.

In Alternative C, the Service would facilitate increased opportunities for applied research relating to long-term habitat changes and species of special concern. Partnerships would be expanded with governmental agencies, educational institutions and others to assist in

wildlife and habitat protection, resource stewardship and the preservation of contiguous lands.

ALTERNATIVE D: PUBLIC USE

In Alternative D, the Service would emphasize wildlife-dependent public uses. Wildlife and habitat management would focus on the restoration of select plant communities and ongoing conservation and management of existing native plant and wildlife species. Certain roads and other disturbed areas not used for trails or public use facilities would be restored with native vegetation.

A broad range of public use opportunities would be provided, including wildlife observation and photography, interpretation, environmental education and a limited hunting program. Access through the Refuge would be provided by a 19-mile trail system that would accommodate hiking, bicycling and equestrian use. Most of the trails would be constructed along existing roads. A visitor center would be constructed at the Refuge. Environmental education efforts would include on- and off-site programs for kindergarten through college age students.

Research opportunities would focus on the integration of public use into the Refuge environment and interactions between wildlife and visitors. Partnerships would be sought with various public agencies to help sustain Refuge goals and preserve contiguous lands. The Service also would work with local communities and tourism organizations to promote wildlife-dependent public uses on the Refuge.

The Lindsay Ranch barn would be stabilized in most alternatives.



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OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The Service developed objectives and strategies for each alternative. An objective is a general statement about what the Service wants to achieve on the Refuge, while a strategy is a specific action, tool, technique or combination of the above used to meet objectives. Because each alternative has a different emphasis, the objectives and strategies vary by alternative. The following summarizes key objective topics addressed for each alternative in the CCP/EIS:

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT

- Preble's habitat management
- Xeric tallgrass management
- Mixed grassland prairie management
- Road restoration and revegetation
- Weed management
- Deer and elk management
- Prairie dog management
- Species reintroduction

PUBLIC USE, EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION:

- Public access
- Visitor experience
- Interpretation
- Environmental education
- Hunting
- Recreation facilities

Resident deer populations are found at the Refuge.



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SAFETY

- Staff safety
- Visitor safety

OPEN AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Outreach efforts

WORKING WITH OTHERS

- Emergency response partnerships
- Conservation partnerships
- Research partnerships
- Volunteer partnerships

REFUGE OPERATIONS

- Staffing
- Operations and management facilities
- Cultural resource management

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The proposed Refuge management alternatives would pose a variety of benefits and impacts to resources at Rocky Flats. Some of the greatest benefits would come from road removal and revegetation, weed management and Preble's habitat management activities. The greatest impacts to refuge resources would be the result of reduced resource management in Alternative A and visitor use in Alternatives B and D. These and other effects are summarized below and described in detail in the CCP/EIS.

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Sharp-tailed grouse is a likely candidate for reintroduction.

PREBLE'S HABITAT MANAGEMENT. All of the alternatives include protection and maintenance of the Refuge's Preble's habitat. This would result in moderate, long-term benefits to Preble's and other species that depend on riparian habitat.

POND RESTORATION. Alternative C would remove the Lindsay Ponds and restore those areas to a native wetland. This would result in a major impact to existing native fish populations that use the ponds and also would impact future fish reintroductions.

GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT. Tallgrass and mixed grassland management strategies, along with weed and fire management and road removal and revegetation in all alternatives, would benefit grassland communities on the Refuge. However, many of the benefits would be limited to the Rock Creek Reserve in Alternative A and would be reduced overall in Alternatives A and D because prescribed fire and grazing would not be available as Refuge-wide grassland restoration tools.

In Alternatives B and C, the planned restoration of non-native grasses in the hay meadow and other areas to native prairie would benefit the overall quality and diversity of mixed grassland habitat on the Refuge.

ROAD RESTORATION AND REVEGETATION. In all of the alternatives, the removal and revegetation of unused roads and stream crossings would provide a major long-term benefit to a variety of vegetation communities and related wildlife species. These benefits would be greatest in Alternative C and the least in Alternative A.

WEED MANAGEMENT. In all of the alternatives, the implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices would benefit a variety of wildlife habitat types on the Refuge. These benefits, however, would be greatly reduced in Alternative A where proactive weed control would only be applied to the Rock Creek Reserve and an IPM plan would not be completed.

DEER AND ELK MANAGEMENT. The establishment and achievement of population targets for deer and elk in Alternatives B, C and D would both benefit those species and the habitat that they depend on. However, proposed monitoring levels in Alternatives A and D may not be sufficient to develop effective population targets. Conversely, the expanded monitoring activities proposed in Alternative C may be overly intrusive and could impact fawn survival.

In Alternative A, the Service would not actively pursue population targets, which could result in long-term impacts to ungulate populations and their habitat and adverse impacts on habitat quality for Preble's and other species due to overbrowsing or overgrazing.

TRAIL DEVELOPMENT AND USE. While the impacts of new trail construction in Alternatives B and D would be negligible, public use of some trails could result in moderate long-term adverse impacts to some wildlife species due to an increased human presence that may alter movement and foraging patterns. These impacts would be more pronounced in Alternative D, where several trails run adjacent to riparian areas and could disturb potential raptor nesting habitat. The combination of trails in the Rock Creek drainage in Alternative D could result in a moderate to major impact to wildlife and habitat in that area. Some trail impacts could be reduced by the enforcement of seasonal trail closures.



Lupine and many other wildflowers can be found on the Refuge.

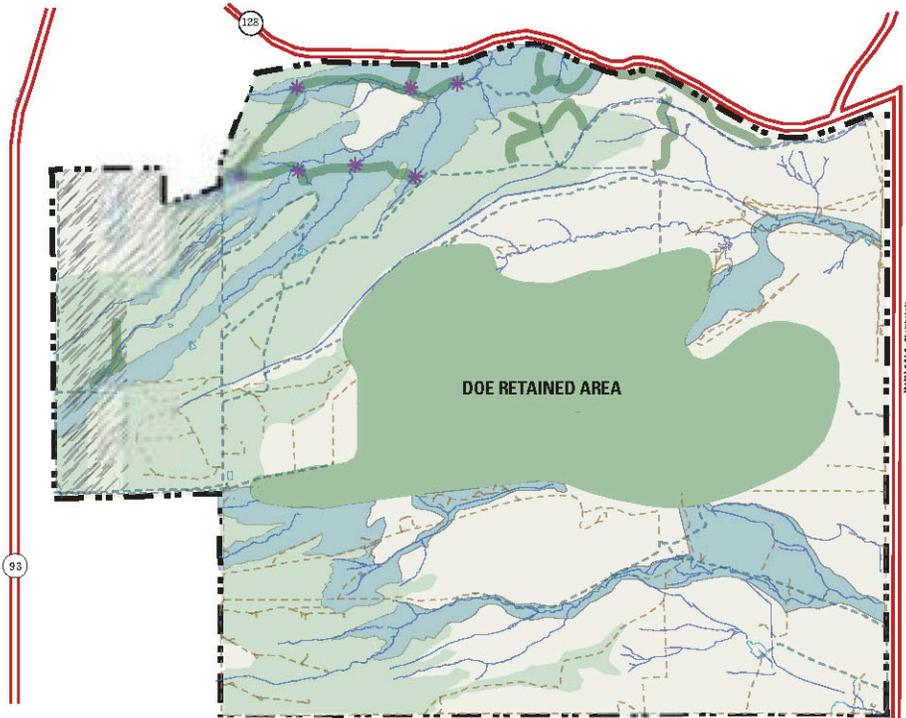
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

ALTERNATIVE A / "No Action"

Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge



Restoration Map

Resource Management Zones

- Xeric Tallgrass Prairie
- Riparian Corridor and Wetlands
- Mixed Prairie Grasslands

Targeted Restoration Areas

- Removed & Revegetated Road*
- * Restored Stream Crossing

Other Areas

- DOE Retained Area
- ▨ Permitted Mining Use
- - - Unpaved Maintenance Road (retained for administrative, easement & fire access)
- - - Existing Road (not maintained or actively restored)

*Only primary road corridors within the Rock Creek Reserve would be removed and revegetated



Visitor Use Map

Public Uses

Public access is by arrangement only and limited to guided tours

Public Use Facilities

No public use facility development

Other Facilities

- * Refuge Entrance
- Service Refuge Lands
- Area Retained by DOE
- - - Rock Creek Reserve (established by DOE in 1999 to recognize its biological significance. It was later expanded to 1,800 acres)

Figure no. 1



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
***ALTERNATIVE B / "Wildlife, Habitat & Public Use"**
Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge

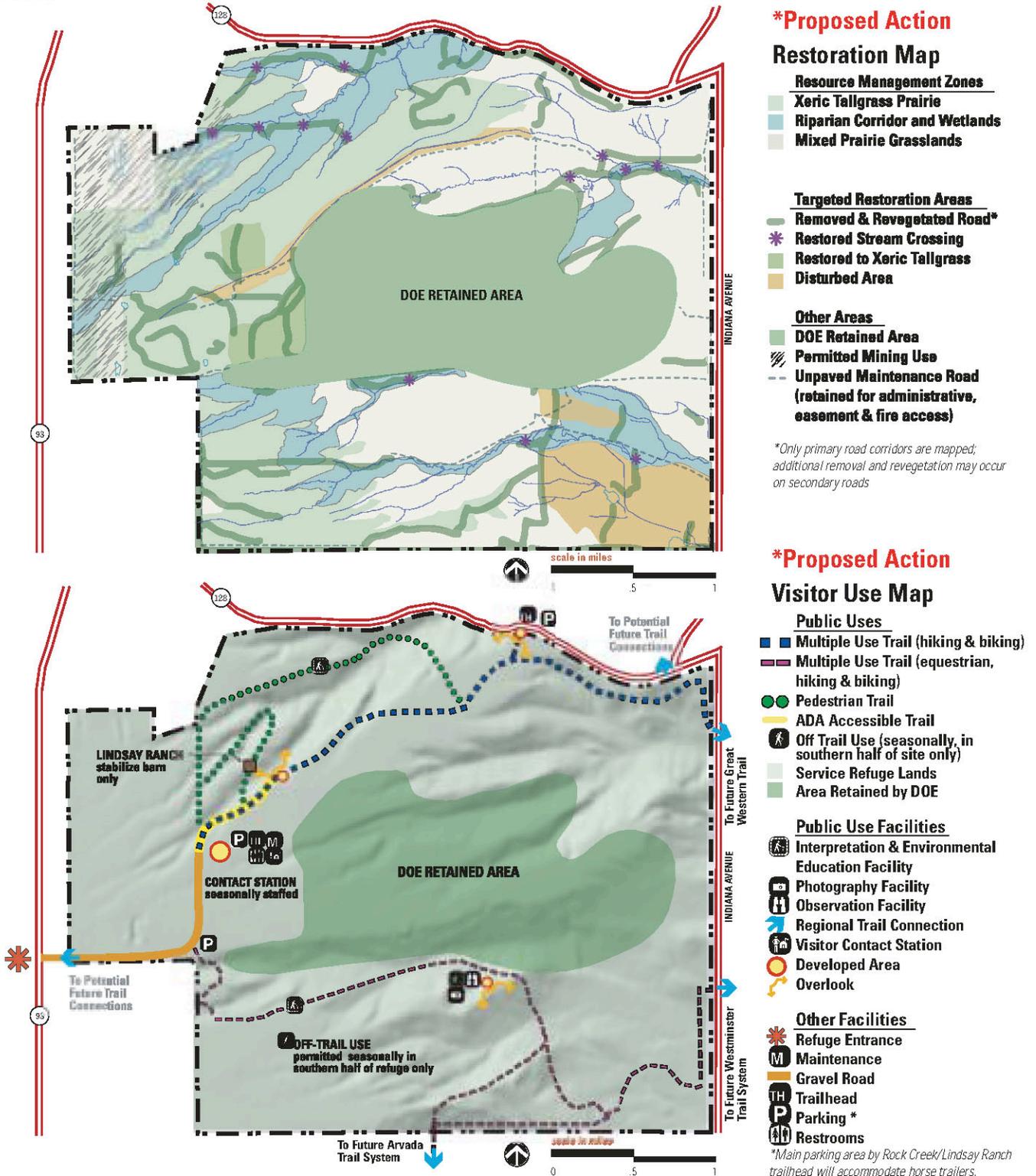
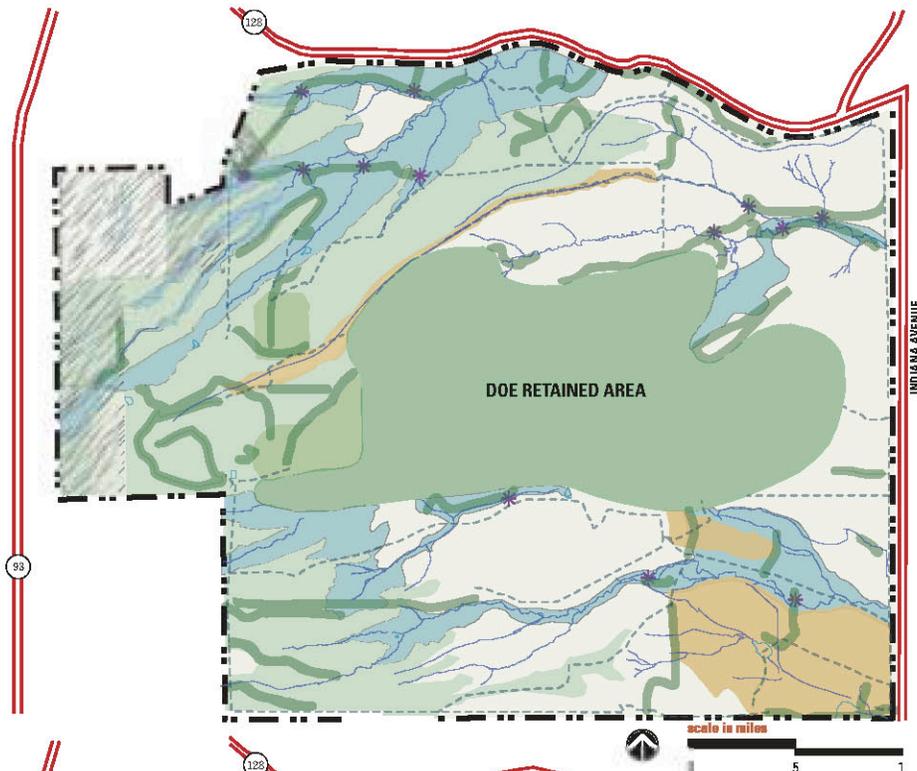


Figure no. 2



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service ALTERNATIVE C / "Ecological Restoration" Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge



Restoration Map

Resource Management Zones

- Xeric Tallgrass Prairie
- Riparian Corridor and Wetlands
- Mixed Prairie Grasslands

Targeted Restoration Areas

- Removed & Revegetated Road*
- ✱ Restored Stream Crossing
- Restored to Xeric Tallgrass
- Disturbed Area (planted with mixed grasses)

Other Areas

- DOE Retained Area
- ▨ Permitted Mining Use
- Unpaved Maintenance Road (retained for administrative, easement & fire access)

*Only primary road corridors are mapped; additional removal and revegetation may occur on secondary roads



Visitor Use Map

Public Uses

Public access is by arrangement only and limited to guided tours

- ADA Pedestrian Trail
- Service Refuge Lands
- Area Retained by DOE

Public Use Facilities

- Developed Area
- ➔ Overlook

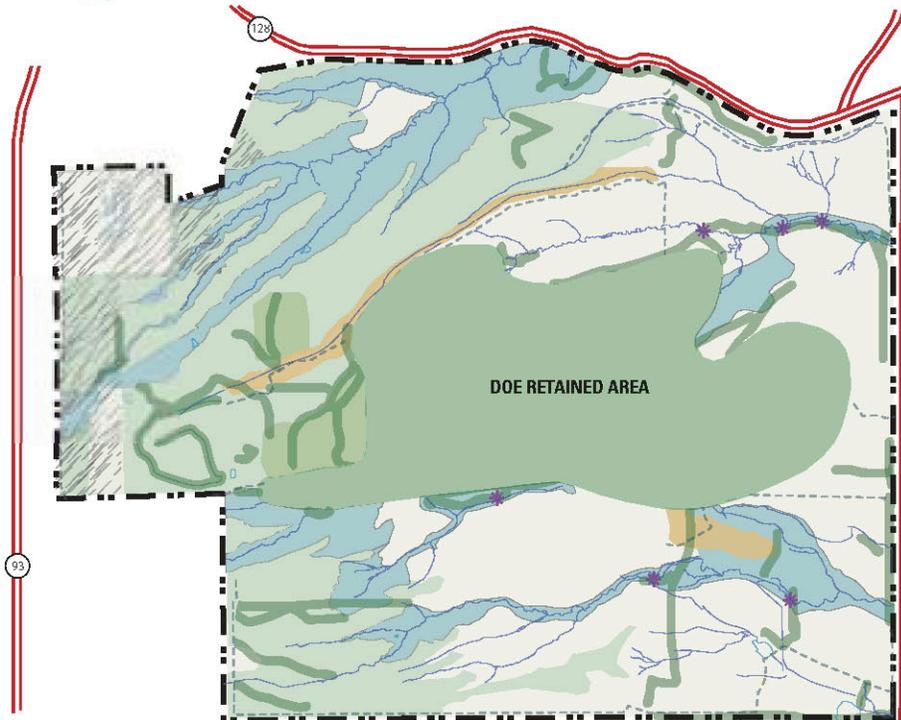
Other Facilities

- ✱ Refuge Entrance
- M Maintenance
- R Restrooms
- Gravel Road

Figure no. 3



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service ALTERNATIVE D / "Public Use" Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge



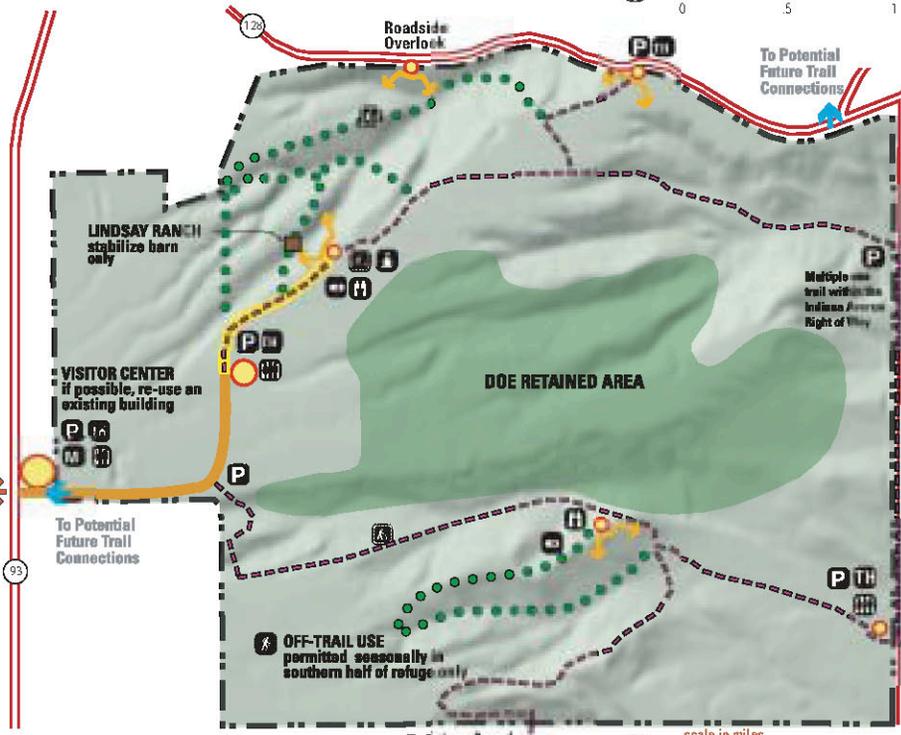
Restoration Map

- Resource Management Zones**
- Xeric Tallgrass Prairie
 - Riparian Corridor and Wetlands
 - Mixed Prairie Grasslands

- Targeted Restoration Areas**
- Removed & Revegetated Road*
 - Restored Stream Crossing
 - Restored to Xeric Tallgrass
 - Disturbed Area (planted with mixed grasses)

- Other Areas**
- DOE Retained Area
 - Permitted Mining Use
 - Unpaved Maintenance Road (retained for administrative, easement & fire access)

*Only primary road corridors are mapped; additional removal and revegetation may occur on secondary roads



Visitor Use Map

- Public Uses**
- Multiple Use Trail (equestrian, hiking & biking)
 - Pedestrian Trail
 - ADA Accessible Trail
 - Off Trail Use (seasonally, in southern half of site only)
 - Service Refuge Lands
 - Area Retained by DOE

- Public Use Facilities**
- Interpretation & Environmental Education Facility
 - Photography Facility
 - Observation Facility
 - Outdoor Education Center
 - Regional Trail Connection
 - Visitor Center
 - Developed Area
 - Overlook

- Other Facilities**
- Refuge Entrance
 - Maintenance
 - Gravel Road
 - Trailhead
 - Parking *
 - Restrooms

*Main parking area by Rock Creek/Lindsay Ranch trailhead will accommodate horse trailers.

Figure no. 4



CELEBRATING A
CENTURY
of CONSERVATION

Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge
Comprehensive Conservation Plan
Building 121
Commerce City, CO 80022
303/289 0980
rockyflats@fws.gov

<http://rockyflats.fws.gov>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>
<http://www.r6.fws.gov/larp>

For Refuge Information
1 800/344 WILD

February 2004

