



BACA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Baca National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) will consist of approximately 92,500 acres of wetlands, sagebrush, and riparian lands located in Saguache and Alamosa Counties, Colorado. Other land features included within the Refuge are sand dunes and several thousand acres of irrigated wetlands.

The Baca NWR was established in April 2003 with transferal of the 3,300-acre White Ranch from the Bureau of Reclamation. Another 97,036 acres of land, known as the Baca Ranch, are currently being negotiated for purchase by The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

A portion of the Baca Ranch land being acquired by TNC (approximately 53,500 acres) will, upon the payment of Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF), be conveyed to the United States as a part of the refuge. Of the remaining 36,000 acres of land to be acquired for the Refuge, 20,000 acres are managed by the State of Colorado and the balance of approximately 16,000 acres is privately-owned.

The Refuge boundary abuts lands managed by other conservation entities including TNC, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Colorado Land Board of Commissioners. The San Luis Valley is within the Intermountain West Joint Venture and contains Colorado's largest and most important wetlands for migratory birds.

The Baca Ranch

The 97,036-acre Baca Ranch is located in the San Luis Valley which has the oldest settlements in Colorado. The San Luis Valley is approximately 122 miles long and about 74 miles wide and has historically been dominated by ranching, farming, timber extraction, and mining. Farming and ranching still persist in the valley, but more lands are being taken out of agricultural production and are being developed for rural recreational lands and residential home sites.

Approximately 12,000 acres of the ranch are irrigated from snow melt from the Sangre de Cristo Range. About 8,000 acres of saline, playa acres occur on the west side of the ranch.

Legislative Authority

On November 22, 2000, Congress authorized the establishment of the Baca National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) located in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. Authorization for establishment of the Refuge was included in Public Law 106-530 under Section 6 of the Act entitled, "The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000." In addition to the Refuge, the Act authorized the Federal acquisition of lands adjacent to the Great Sand Dunes National Monument for the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve.

In approving The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000, Congress determined that the lands to be acquired under the Act offered unique hydrological, educational, wildlife, recreational, and other diverse resources deserving preservation for the enjoyment of future generations. Total estimated acreage of lands included in the Act is approximately 203,632 acres.