



# Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Fall 2002 – Update No. 1

## Comprehensive Conservation Planning Begins in Fall

### Greetings from the Refuge Manager



Prickly pear cactus.



Desert tortoise.

The Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex) is about to embark on an important multi-year process to develop Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs) for the four refuges in southern Nevada. These plans will help guide overall refuge management for the next 15 years. Your ideas and comments will be an important part of the process, so I'd like to invite you to participate.

Before we begin the process, I'd like to provide background about the refuges' history, operation, and goals. You'll also find some information about the National Wildlife Refuge System and how comprehensive conservation planning fits into the overall picture of refuge management.

Planning will officially begin during the fall of 2002. This first "Planning Update" describes the beginning of the planning

process and information about attending our public scoping meetings.

We will frequently refer to aspects of the background materials provided in this *Planning Update No. 1* throughout the CCP process. Please try to read it before our first meeting; this will help all of us start on the same page, so to speak, when we begin our public scoping meetings.

I hope you'll feel free to contact me or Linda Miller if you have any questions. See page 8 to learn about the CCPs and page 10 for our phone numbers and e-mail addresses.



Richard M. Birger  
Project Leader, Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex

### Table of Contents

- About the Fish & Wildlife Service ..... 1
- About the Refuge System..... 2
- Map/Refuge Boundaries ..... 3
- The Refuge Complex..... 4
- What is a CCP? ..... 8
- Refuge Purposes ..... 9
- Compatibility of Refuge Uses ..... 9
- Help Us Plan ..... 9
- How to Contact Us ..... 10

## What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Service manages the nearly 94 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System and 8,000 waterfowl production areas encompassing 1.9 million acres in the prairie pothole region of the United States.

It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices, and 78 ecological services field stations.

The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their wildlife and habitat conservation efforts.

It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies. Some of these Service programs directly benefit both species and the citizens of Nevada.



## What is the National Wildlife Refuge System?



In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt protected an island with nesting pelicans, herons, ibis, and roseate spoonbills in Florida's Indian River from feather collectors decimating their colonies. He established Pelican Island as the nation's first bird sanctuary and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his tenure. This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand, later becoming the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Today, nearly 100 years later, the four refuges that comprise the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex are spectacular examples of the diversity of the more than 535 National Wildlife Refuges encompassing nearly 94 million acres.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the largest system of lands in the world dedicated to the conservation of wildlife. It is spread across 50 states, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Johnson Atoll, Midway Atoll, and several other Pacific Islands. About 20.6 million acres in the Refuge System are managed as wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964.

In 1997 Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, the most recent legislation to provide significant new guidance for the management of the Refuge System. The act included a new statutory mission statement and directed the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to conserving wildlife and maintaining biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of ecosystems.

This law required the Service to initiate comprehensive conservation planning for each refuge. It also stated that certain wildlife-dependent recreational uses are appropriate activities on refuges and strengthened the compatibility determination process for assuring that no refuge uses conflict with refuge purposes or the Refuge System mission.

## What's in a Name?

Many people confuse state and federal fish and wildlife agencies because their names are similar. The Service is a federal agency within the Department of Interior. The Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW) is an agency within the Nevada Department of Conservation and Resources.

Our names are similar and so are our missions: Both agencies are dedicated to wildlife conservation for the benefit of present and future generations. Our jurisdictions are different. The Service is the lead agency responsible for federally-listed species and migratory birds, whether they are located on federal, state, or private lands. The NDOW has primary responsibility for resident fish and wildlife on state and private lands, and oversees state-listed species issues throughout Nevada.

*“Wild beasts and birds are by right not the property merely of people who are alive today, but the property of unknown generations whose belongings we have no right to squander.”*

*President Theodore Roosevelt*

## What is the mission of the Refuge System?



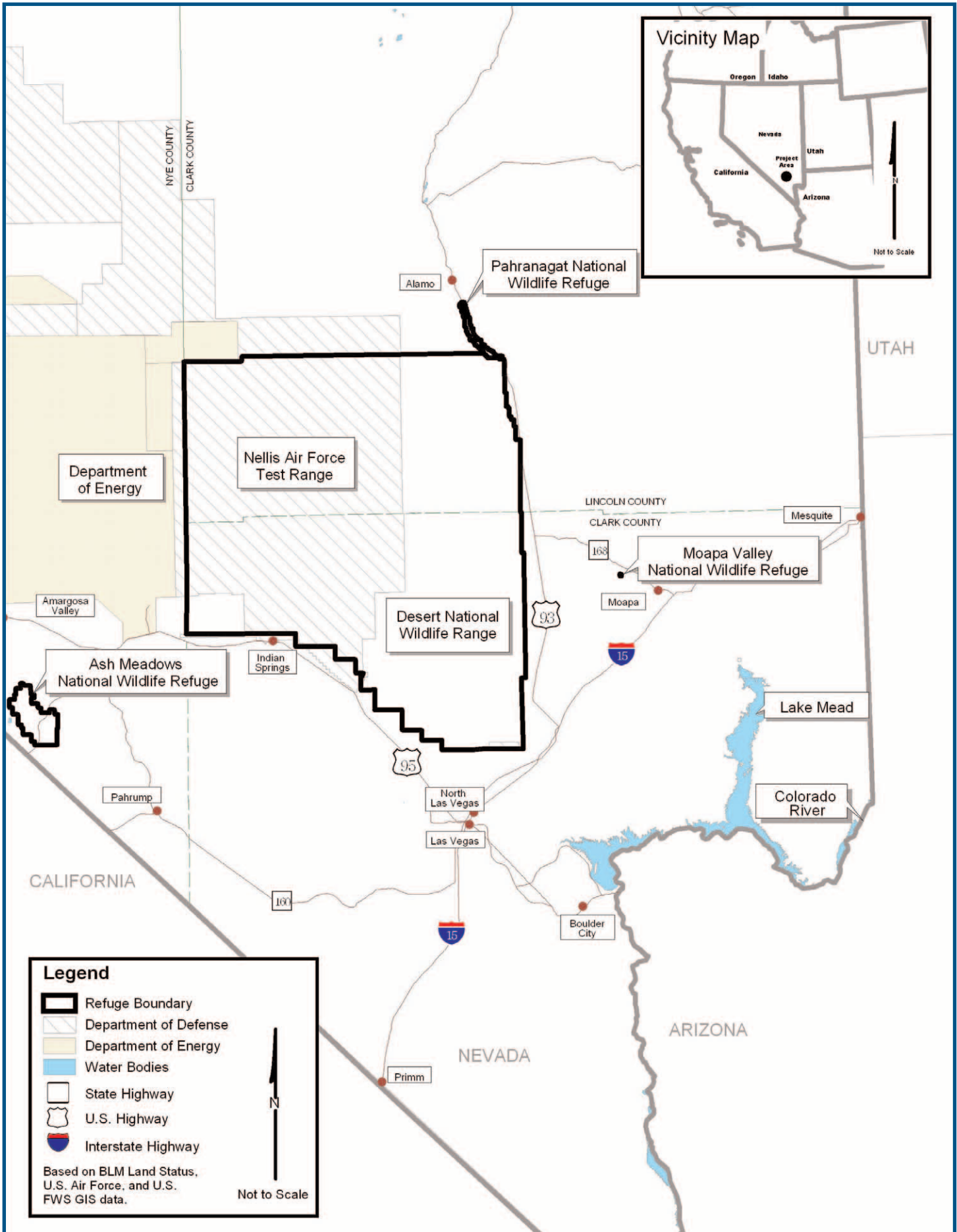
*Cub Scouts help staff to maintain the refuge visitor use areas.*

Refuges are places where wildlife comes first.

*“The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System 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.”*

Our mission differs from other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, which focuses on forest stewardship and sustainable forest uses; the Bureau of Land Management, whose efforts are directed toward the productivity and multiple use of the land; and the National Park Service, which conserves scenery, wildlife, and historic objects for people's enjoyment.





**Legend**

- Refuge Boundary
- Department of Defense
- Department of Energy
- Water Bodies
- State Highway
- U.S. Highway
- Interstate Highway

Based on BLM Land Status, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. FWS GIS data.

Not to Scale

# The Refuge Complex

## ■ REFUGE LOCATIONS

The Complex consists of four refuges in southern Nevada: Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Desert National Wildlife Range, Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Pahrnatagat National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The four refuges comprise a total 1,527,603 acres within Clark, Lincoln and Nye counties, Nevada.

*“When one tugs at a single thing in nature he finds it attached to the rest of the world ...”*

*John Muir*

Ash Meadows NWR was established on June 18, 1984, to protect Federally-listed endangered plant and animal species. It consists of 23,488 acres located in Nye County, just north of the town of Pahrump, Nevada. Ash Meadows lies within a half hour drive southeast of Death Valley National Park, California.

Desert National Wildlife Range was established on May 20, 1936, for the preservation and management of desert bighorn sheep and their habitat. It is comprised of 1.5 million acres located in Clark and Lincoln counties, Nevada. It shares its southern border with the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas and its magnificent mountain ranges can be seen throughout the Las Vegas Valley as well as in the Pahrnatagat Valley in Lincoln County.

Moapa Valley NWR was established on September 10, 1979, to secure and protect habitat for the endangered Moapa dace (a fish). It is comprised of 106 acres and is

about 60 miles from Las Vegas in northeastern Clark County, Nevada. The Refuge is part of a unique system of thermal springs that is part of the headwaters of the Muddy River which eventually flows into Lake Mead to the southeast.

Pahrnatagat NWR was established on August 16, 1963, to provide habitat for migratory birds, especially waterfowl. It is comprised of 5,380 acres of marshes meadows, lakes and upland desert habitat and is in Lincoln County, Nevada. The Refuge is an important stopping point for waterfowl and other migratory birds as well as visitors traveling on US Highway 93 to or from Las Vegas.

## ■ THE REFUGE COMPLEX

These refuges represent some of the best and the last of the Mojave Desert riparian and montane ecosystems with species of plants and animals found nowhere else on earth. The legacy of managing for wildlife first within these unique landscapes will allow for future generations to enjoy and be awed by these jewels of the desert. Thus, the Service’s challenge is to conserve plants and animals living within the refuges and to seek compatible opportunity for visitors and local communities not only to enjoy and appreciate them, but to participate in their stewardship.

Although Moapa NWR and portions of the Desert Range are currently closed to public use, a variety of public uses occur on the Ash Meadows, Desert and Pahrnatagat NWRs. These include, but are not limited to the six priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended (1997), namely hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

## ■ ASH MEADOWS

Established with the purchase of 12,654 acres of former agricultural lands from The Nature Conservancy, Ash Meadows provides habitat for at least 24 plants and animals found nowhere else in the world. These include rare fish such as the Ash Meadows speckled dace, and plant species like the Ash Meadows ivesia, the Spring-loving centaury and the Ash Meadows sunray. The Ash Meadows NWR has a



*Rugged mountain ranges and panoramic views define the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex.*

*Continued on page 5*



## The Refuge Complex

*Continued from page 4*

greater concentration of endemic life than any other local area in the United States and the second greatest in all of North America. Boasting five fish, eight plants, at least 12 aquatic snails, one mammal, and two aquatic insects that occur nowhere else in the world, Ash Meadows provides a valuable and important example of desert oases that are now extremely uncommon in the southwestern United States.

In addition to Service-managed land, the refuge boundaries also encompass 9,460 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-owned land, approximately 800 acres of privately held land, and 40 acres managed by the National Park Service (NPS). The eastern boundary of the Refuge abuts BLM lands that are designated as the Ash Meadows Area of Critical Environmental Concern and are set aside for protection of the threatened Desert tortoise.

Additionally, the Refuge supports two refugia populations of Devils Hole pupfish which are on NPS lands. These refugia or “places of protection” were established in the event of a catastrophe occurring at Devils Hole that might cause the extinction of the species.

Landscape changes that occurred prior to the establishment of the Refuge present challenging and innovative management opportunities for habitat restoration and recovery of threatened and endangered species. The Refuge is currently undergoing a reconstruction of sorts. Many of the seeps, springs, pools and streams that support both the rare fish and plant species have been destroyed or altered by human activities over the last one hundred years. Habitat alterations during agricultural, and municipal and mining development caused the extinction of one fish, at least one snail, and possibly an endemic mammal. The Refuge staff is working hard to recreate a healthy ecosystem for the protected species by reconstructing pools and streams and replanting native plant species where they once flourished.

In 1986, Ash Meadows was among the first sites in the United States to be designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Under this international treaty, 118 contracting parties agreed

to work together to develop national policies for wetland conservation, to cooperate in managing shared wetlands and their migratory species, and to devote special attention to the conservation of designated sites.

Public use at the Refuge currently includes wildlife observation, photography, horseback riding and picnicking. No camping or overnight parking is permitted. Swimming is permitted only in Crystal Reservoir. Boats without motors are allowed only on Crystal and Peterson Reservoirs. Jet skis are not permitted.

### ■ DESERT RANGE

Home to some of Nevada’s largest mammals including desert bighorn sheep, bobcat, coyote, mountain lion (puma) and mule deer, the refuge encompasses over 2,300 square miles of rugged mountain ranges and panoramic valleys. As the largest National Wildlife Refuge in the lower 48 states, the Desert Range contains six major mountain ranges rising to an elevation of almost 10,000 feet. The wide range of elevation and rainfall (4 to 15 inches annually) has created a diverse habitat suited to a wide variety of flora and fauna.



Established for the conservation of the desert bighorn sheep in their natural environment, the Desert Range forms one of the largest intact blocks of desert bighorn sheep habitat remaining in the southwest. Bighorn sheep spend their lives foraging, breeding and raising their young among the barren cliffs of the mountain ranges. Water, which is the most limiting factor for bighorn populations, is in short supply on much of the Range. For this reason 30 springs have been improved and 26 “guzzlers” or water troughs, have been developed and are maintained by Service staff with the assistance of NDOW and public use organizations such as the Fraternity of the Desert Bighorn.

*“We need the tonic of wildness – to wade sometimes in the marshes where the bittern and meadow hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest.”*

*Henry David Thoreau*



*Ear tagging the sheep in order to track their movement and use of the habitat.*

*Continued on page 6*

## The Refuge Complex

*Continued from page 5*

*Volunteers help restore the landscape.*



Birds are also a big attraction at the Desert Range, and Corn Creek Field Station, located along the southwestern edge of the Refuge, is known to be the best spot year round in southern Nevada to view migratory and native bird species. The Corn Creek Field Station has several spring-fed ponds and many types of vegetation. Consequently, this locality provides the Refuges' best opportunity to observe the greatest number of birds. Camping, backpacking, hiking and horseback riding are permitted year round with certain restrictions.

In 1975, approximately 1.3 million acres of land within Desert Range were proposed for wilderness designation under the Wilderness Act of 1964. The U.S. Congress has yet to act on this proposal and the area continues to be managed as "de facto" wilderness, in accordance with the Wilderness Act.

The Nellis Air Force Range (NAFR) overlays 846,000 acres of the western portion of the Refuge, and has been used since 1940 for testing armament and for training pilots in aerial warfare. The U.S. Air Force is authorized to have primary use of the NAFR, which is currently managed under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. Air Force and the Service. Under the MOU, the Service is the federal agency with primary responsibility for the welfare and management of the land. The U.S. Air Force controls access to the areas affected by the MOU, including the airspace above the land. Due to safety and other security concerns, this area is closed to all public entry.

### ■ MOAPA VALLEY

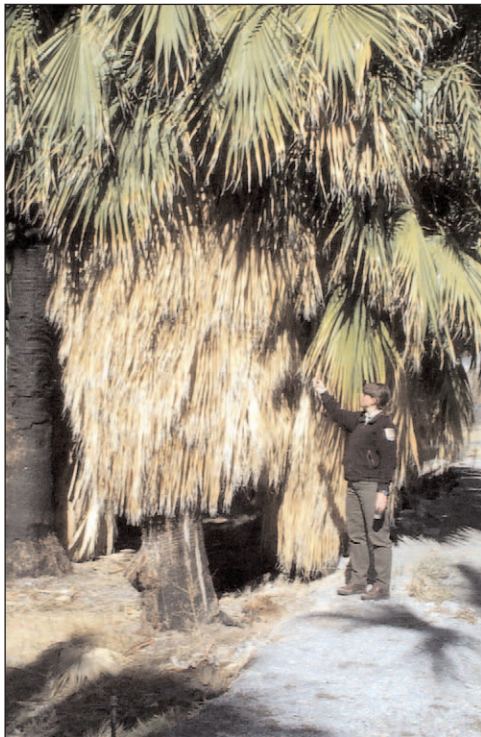
The primary management objectives at Moapa Valley are to restore the Refuge to as near a natural condition as possible and to optimize available stream habitat for recovery of the Moapa dace. This unique native fish lives out its life in the Warm Springs thermal spring complex which includes over 20 springs located within the Refuge.

Historic uses of the spring pools and the surrounding landscape for agricultural and recreational purposes have altered the habitat that the Moapa dace needs in order to survive. Prior to acquisition by the Service, the area had been developed and operated as a resort with thermal spring-fed swimming pools, bath houses, snack bar and recreational vehicle hook-ups. Restoring the pools and stream channels and planting appropriate vegetation will hedge against the loss of this rare fish species.

Moapa dace are found only in the Warm Springs area of northern Clark County, Nevada, and their outlet streams leading to the Moapa River. They are thermal endemics. That is, they originated in warm, isolated waters (79-90 degrees Fahrenheit) and are adapted to the peculiar living conditions of those regions. In the last decade, dace populations have declined due to habitat destruction and modification. During a snorkel survey conducted on February 8, 2000, on the Refuge and surrounding area, 893 Moapa dace were recorded.

Competition with introduced non-native species such as the mosquitofish, talapia and shortfin molly have also added to the dace's decline. Yet another native species and a Federally-listed candidate species, the Moapa White River springfish, compatibly coexists with the dace. Ongoing research will allow for innovative management strategies to be implemented to address species competition issues.

The Service faces another restoration and management challenge in the form of non-native palm trees which were planted by Moapa Valley settlers and the resort owners over the last century. While visually pleasing in the dry, scrubby Mojave Desert landscape, these trees are hardy drinkers consuming up to 300 gallons of water per day. Thus, the



*Palm trees compete with the native fish species for precious water resources at Moapa.*

*Continued on page 7*



## The Refuge Complex

*Continued from page 6*

native fish species must compete for life sustaining water. The palm trees also represent a real fire management hazard. Several fires over the last few decades have burned through the Refuge and wiped out significant numbers of the native fish species.

Currently, due to its small size, fragile habitats, on-going restoration work, and removal of unsafe structures, the Refuge is closed to the public. Scientists with Federal agencies such as the U.S. Geological Survey, State agencies such as NDOW, and local conservation and community organizations are working with Service staff to restore the landscape and the habitat which is critical to the survival of the Moapa dace. Thanks to these cooperative efforts, the future looks brighter for the dace.

### ■ PAHRANAGAT

This Refuge was established to provide habitat for migratory birds, especially waterfowl. Additionally, the Service aims to maintain this unique wetlands system for all migratory and native species while providing compatible, wildlife-dependent public use opportunities. These include hunting, fishing, bird-watching, and providing interpretive and educational information on the Refuge's habitat, wildlife and cultural resources.

Pahranagat is a 44-mile long valley that is part of an ancient, well-preserved river course. A remarkable feature of the Refuge is its four "lakes" which are surrounded by cattail marshes, cottonwood and willow groves, and upland desert scrub. These water features are known as the North Marsh, Upper and Lower Pahranagat Lakes, and the Middle Marsh.

Pahranagat's waters originate from large springs to the north of the Refuge and are managed to obtain the most value for wildlife. The Refuge's various wetland habitats support many plants favored as food by over 230 species of migratory birds and other resident wildlife. These unique habitats make it an ideal and important stopping point for waterfowl and other migratory birds, and thus offer spectacular bird viewing opportunities year round.



*Pahranagat's four water features are important habitat for migratory waterfowl and native wildlife.*

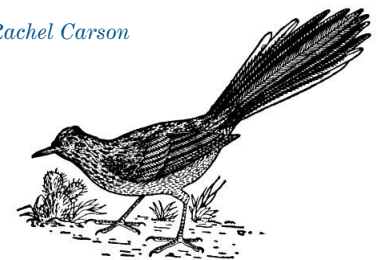
Bird abundance and diversity are highest during spring and fall migrations when large numbers of songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors are present. A variety of ducks and great blue herons can be found near the lakes, while black-necked stilts and American avocets are seen feeding in shallower waters. Greater sandhill cranes migrate through Pahranagat during the heart of winter. Red-tailed hawks, Northern harriers, Cooper's hawks, and bald and golden eagles are also winter visitors.

As water is valued and precious in the desert today, so it was for the Native Americans that made their homes and hunting camps throughout the Pahranagat Valley for thousands of years. Hundreds of cultural sites can be found within the Refuge and are managed through a cooperative partnership with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office as well as local preservation organizations. Black Canyon, a well-known cultural site containing large and unique rock art, rock shelters, and hunting/camping blinds, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Public use at the Refuge currently includes wildlife observation, hunting, camping, and picnicking. Waterfowl, dove, rabbit and quail hunting is permitted within designated areas mainly located at the Middle Pond and Lower Lake. Fishing for largemouth bass, bullheads and carp occurs at the North Marsh, Upper Lake, Middle Pond and Lower Lake. All fishing and hunting programs are managed in accordance with State and Federal regulations.

*"Those who dwell, as scientists or laymen, among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."*

*Rachel Carson*



## What is a CCP?

When Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, it included a key provision that “wildlife comes first” on refuges.

The act provides the Service with guidance for managing refuges in a way that ensures the long-term conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. Two important principles of the act are to maintain biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge system, and facilitate compatible wildlife-dependent recreation.

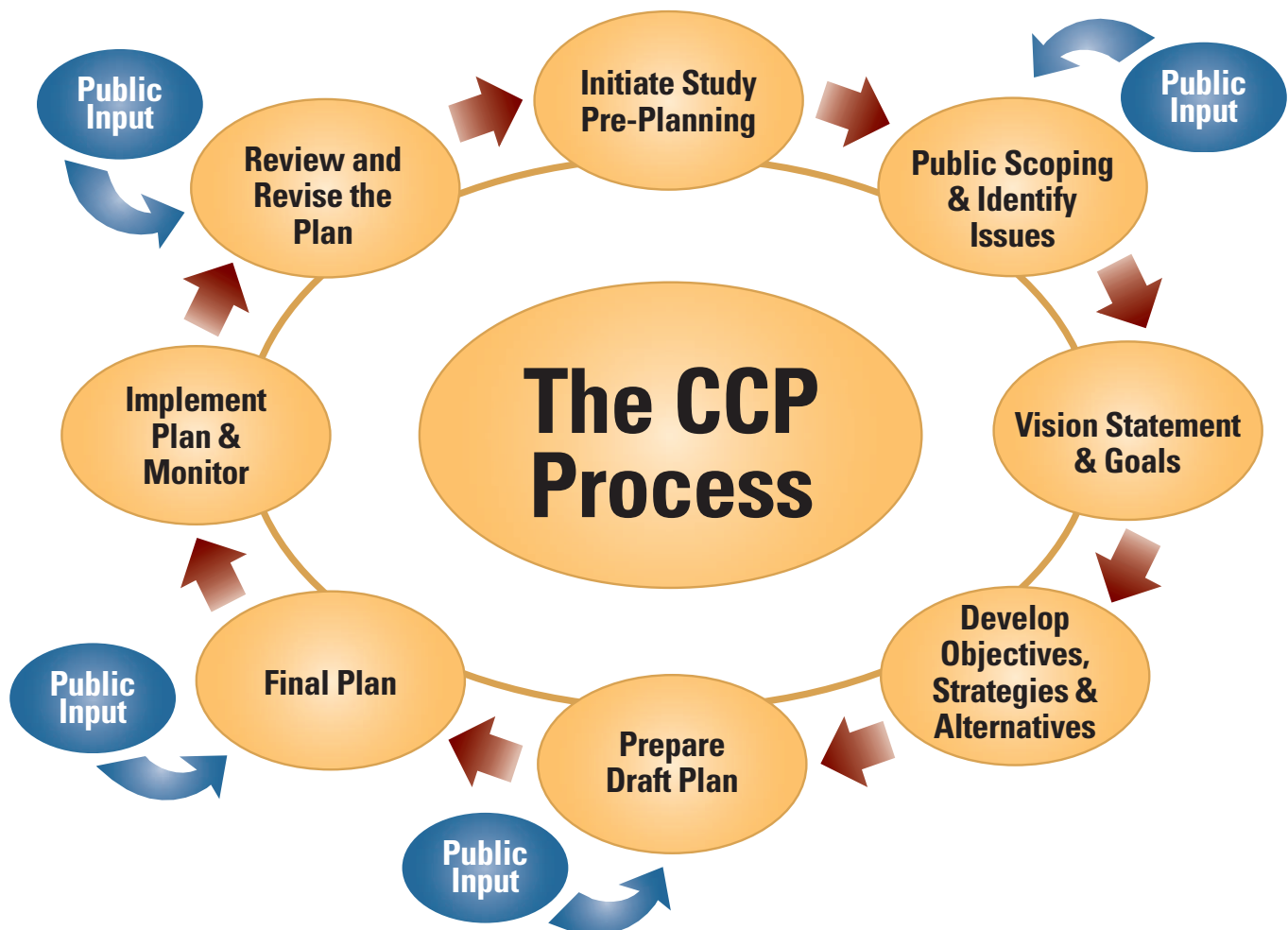
Every refuge will develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). The CCP will outline goals, objectives, and management strategies for each refuge. It will be a flexible, “living” document that will be updated every 15 years.

The CCP:

- Ensures that management of the refuge reflects the purposes of the refuge and the mission, policies, and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System;
- Provides a vision statement for the refuge;
- Provides the public with an understanding of the reasons for management actions on the refuge;
- Ensures the compatibility of current and future uses of the refuge with its purposes;
- Provides long-term continuity in refuge management; and
- Provides budget justification for operation and maintenance, and facility-development requests.

The CCPs will provide broad management direction and guidance for the refuge. The accompanying environmental document(s), per the National Environmental Policy Act, will describe the alternatives considered and their environmental effects. You will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft CCPs and environmental document(s).

During Fall 2002 we will hold our first public scoping meetings to help identify issues and gather information. The key planning steps are listed below and will be listed in future updates so you can track our progress through the planning process.





## Refuge Purposes

The purposes of the Complex are defined by language in a number of acts of Congress which grant the Service general authority to acquire land for the National Wildlife Refuges:

- **Ash Meadows** "... to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species ... or (B) plants ..." 16 U.S.C. §1534 (*Endangered Species Act of 1973*)
- **Desert Range** "... for the protection, enhancement, and maintenance of wildlife resources, including bighorn sheep ..." (*Public Land Order 4079, dated Aug. 31, 1966*)
 

"... to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species ... or (B) plants ..." 16 U.S.C. §1534 (*Endangered Species Act of 1973*)

"... suitable for (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species ..." 16 U.S.C. §460k-1

"... the Secretary ... may accept and use ... real ... property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors ..." 16 U.S.C. §460k-2 (*Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. §460k-460k-4), as amended*)
- **Moapa Valley** "... to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species ... or (B) plants ..." 16 U.S.C. §1534 (*Endangered Species Act of 1973*)
- **Pahranagat** "... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 U.S.C. §715d (*Migratory Bird Conservation Act*)



*Sunset at Gass Peak on the Desert Range.*

## Compatibility of Refuge Uses

Prior to allowing various public uses on the refuge, federal law requires that the Service first determine that these specific uses are compatible. A compatible use is a proposed or existing use of a national wildlife refuge that, based on sound professional judgement of the refuge manager, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the refuge. Compatibility determinations are used to help evaluate such uses and will be integrated into each CCP document.

The refuge will complete compatibility determinations for existing or proposed public uses on each refuge as part of the CCP process.

## Help us Plan the Future

During fall 2002 interested individuals, agencies, tribes, organizations, and other stakeholders will be invited to express their concerns and share their visions for the refuge. This will be your opportunity to help us identify issues and concerns, and for us to answer any questions you may have. Your comments and/or participation will be critical to the success of this planning effort.

Please check the CCP schedule below for the dates, times, and locations of the public scoping meetings. We look forward to seeing you there!

### CCP Schedule Meeting Dates/Locations

#### Monday, September 16, 2002

**Moapa Community Center**  
1340 E. Highway 168  
Moapa, NV  
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

#### Tuesday, September 17, 2002

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office**  
4701 N. Torrey Pines  
Las Vegas, NV  
**Interagency Conference**  
Rooms A & B  
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

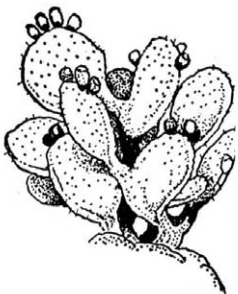
#### Wednesday, September 18, 2002

**Amargosa Valley**  
**Multi-purpose Building**  
821 East Amargosa Farm Road  
Amargosa Valley, NV  
4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

**Bob Ruud Community Center**  
150 N. Highway 160  
Pahrump, NV  
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

#### Thursday, September 19, 2002

**Alamo Annex Building**  
100 South 1st West  
Alamo, NV  
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.



*"Suffice it to say that by common consent of thinking people, there are cultural values in the sports, customs, and experiences that renew contacts with wild things."*

*Aldo Leopold*

## Please feel free to contact us!

*“Never doubt that a small, thoughtful group of concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”*

*Margaret Mead*



We are available to provide additional information about the refuges' resources, visitor services, and accomplishments to date, and to answer any questions about the planning process. Feel free to call, write, e-mail, or come to see us.

If you did not receive this Planning Update through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, please contact us.

If you would like to be removed from the list or are receiving multiple copies of these notices, please let us know.

### **Richard Birger, Project Leader**

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Mark\_Pelz@fws.gov

Or check out the following sites on the Web:  
<http://desertcomplex.fws.gov> and  
<http://pacific.fws.gov/plan>

**Please pass this Planning Update along to anyone you think might be interested in the planning process. Thank you!**



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
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Las Vegas, Nevada 89130

*Address correction requested*

