



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update Number 3, June 2010



Pronghorn antelope / USFWS

Preliminary Draft Alternatives for the Refuge

Greetings

Over the past year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has been considering your comments in the development of three management alternatives for the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, Refuge).

The purpose of this planning update is to show how your comments have been incorporated and to provide a preview of the Draft Sheldon Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) scheduled to be released later this year.

What We Heard

Comments from more than 4,800 people have been received so far. A summary of these comments was included in the April 2009 Planning Update and is available on the Service's website (<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/>). These comments were instrumental in developing a range of management objectives and strategies included in the Draft CCP and EIS alternatives.

How Key Issues Will Be Addressed

After considering the thousands of comments submitted, the Service developed three preliminary draft management alternatives.



Sage grouse / USFWS

This is a planning update. A draft EIS will be available for comment later in 2010 and we want to hear from you. Please see pages 9 and 10 for the planning schedule and how to contact us.

The No Action Alternative

While called “No Action,” this alternative is the current management plan and would continue ongoing projects and the implementation of management decisions already in place.

The Intensive Management Alternative

This is the Service’s preferred alternative. This alternative is generally the most intensive and would implement a wide range of projects and programs designed to rehabilitate and restore Sheldon Refuge to a more natural condition. In addition, a number of projects would be carried out to protect Refuge resources from future damage or further degradation and to provide additional public use opportunities. Overall, the Service believes this alternative would best fulfill the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the purposes for Sheldon Refuge.

The Low Intensity Management Alternative

This alternative is generally the least intensive and would implement fewer projects and programs involving vegetation manipulation, construction, or ground disturbances. While some actions in this alternative would involve such activities, the overall direction would be to use the least amount of rehabilitation and disturbances necessary to restore or maintain natural processes within Sheldon Refuge.

Mining and Livestock Grazing

Mining within Sheldon Refuge is a complex issue and will require additional information before informed decisions can be made. The Service will prepare a separate plan to address mining and minerals management within the Refuge.

Permits for commercial livestock grazing were purchased from willing sellers in 1994. Sheldon Refuge retired these privileges upon request from the permittee. Consequently, commercial livestock grazing will not be considered in further detail through the Refuge’s CCP.

Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System:

“...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.”

Purposes for Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge:

“...as a refuge and breeding ground for wild animals and birds...”

“...for the conservation and development of natural wildlife resources and for the protection and improvement of public grazing lands and natural forage resources...”

“...to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species...or (B) plants...”

“...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.”



Mule deer on the Refuge / USFWS

Preliminary Alternatives

| Fish and Wildlife Populations | | |
|--|---|--|
| <i>Management common to all alternatives</i> | | |
| <i>Maintain Lahontan cutthroat trout population in Catnip Reservoir.</i> | | |
| No Action Alternative | Intensive Management Alternative (preferred) | Low Intensity Management Alternative |
| Continue stocking sterile rainbow trout in Big Spring Reservoir. | Replace rainbow trout in Virgin Creek and Big Spring Reservoir with Alvord cutthroat (if possible) and Lahontan cutthroat trout populations. Maintain populations through restocking if necessary. | Replace rainbow trout in Big Spring Reservoir with Lahontan cutthroat trout. Discontinue restocking at Big Spring Reservoir. |
| Continue current fish and wildlife monitoring. | Determine population trends, distribution, and migratory patterns for priority species such as pronghorn, Greater sage grouse, and other sagebrush obligate species. Initiate baseline surveys and/or increase monitoring for bats, reptiles and amphibians, and other species and populations. | Same as the No Action Alternative. |

| Feral Horse and Burro Populations | | |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Management common to all alternatives</i> | | |
| <i>Continue to control feral horse and burro populations through gathers, adoption, sanctuary, and contraception.</i> | | |
| <i>Continue to maintain standard four-strand, wildlife-friendly fencelines along the Refuge boundary to prevent entry of wild horses or burros from surrounding Bureau of Land Management Herd Management Areas.</i> | | |
| No Action Alternative | Intensive Management Alternative (preferred) | Low Intensity Management Alternative |
| Maintain relatively stable populations of approximately 800 horses and 80 burros. | Remove all feral horses and burros within 5 years. | Remove all feral horses and burros within 15 years. |
| Populations controlled through gathers, adoption, sanctuary, and contraception. | In addition to the No Action Alternative, include the option for sale or auction if other methods of population control are ineffective. | Same as the Intensive Management Alternative, except more gradual annual population reductions. |

Management of Refuge Habitats

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Management common to all alternatives</i> | <i>Thresholds for percent vegetative cover; age class distributions, key habitat components, and other measurable criteria established as part of objectives for each major habitat type within Sheldon Refuge (details will be included in the Draft CCP).</i> | |
| | <i>Appropriate management response criteria used to determine the most efficient, safe, and cost effective suppression action for all wildfires within the Refuge.</i> | |
| | <i>Continue implementation of long-term fire effects monitoring to assess and research effectiveness of restoration efforts, fuels management techniques, and ecosystem health.</i> | |
| | <i>Except where necessary for the protection of life or property, limit the use of heavy equipment for fire suppression to existing roads and routes.</i> | |
| No Action Alternative | Intensive Management Alternative (preferred) | Low Intensity Management Alternative |
| 10-30% of habitats managed to meet standards and thresholds included in the Draft CCP. | More than 60% of habitats managed to meet standards and thresholds included in the Draft CCP - primarily through removal of feral horses and burros within five years. | 30-60% of habitats managed to meet standards and thresholds included in the Draft CCP - primarily through removal of feral horses and burros within 15 years. |
| Mechanical thinning and prescribed fire treatments commonly used to mimic and/or restore natural conditions. | Same as the No Action Alternative, and increase emphasis on removal of western juniper where encroaching upon habitats. Resume treatments for marshes and wet meadows after horse and burro population objectives are met. | Allow the use of natural fire (when appropriate) to restore natural processes. Minimal use of mechanical thinning or prescribed fire. |
| Use mechanical treatments, previously burned areas, and natural features to develop fire fuel breaks. | Same as the No Action Alternative. | Use previously burned areas, natural fire (where appropriate), and natural features to develop fire fuel breaks. |
| Control noxious weeds and other invasive plants with assistance from partners on a site-by-site basis. | Increase weed control to include road corridors. Emphasize eradication of small infestations and long-term containment and/or control of large infestations. | Emphasize early detection and rapid response to eradicate new and/or small infestations. |
| No actions to relocate primitive designated campgrounds. | Relocate up to 9 designated campgrounds to reduce impacts to riparian habitats and cultural resources. | Consolidate up to 4 campgrounds with other designated campgrounds. |
| Limited restoration activities. | Rehabilitate and restore damaged and degraded habitats including intensive management techniques (seedings, erosion control structures, recontouring, etc.). | Emphasize natural recovery of damaged and degraded habitats. |
| Use a variety of native and non-native seed in rehabilitation activities. | Use only native seed in rehabilitation activities. | Same as the No Action Alternative. |

Management of Refuge Habitats *continued*

| <i>No Action Alternative</i> | <i>Intensive Management Alternative (preferred)</i> | <i>Low Intensity Management Alternative</i> |
|---|---|---|
| Continue current plant and habitat monitoring. | Initiate baseline surveys and increase monitoring for aspen, rare plants, microbiotic crusts, and other identified plants and habitats. | Same as the No Action Alternative. |
| Assess the Virgin Creek watershed and develop a restoration plan. | Restore and rehabilitate at least one mile of Virgin Creek habitat. | Same as the No Action Alternative. |

Water Control Structures, Diversions, and other Developments

| <i>Management common to all alternatives</i> | <i>Maintain the following water control structures, diversions, and developments to fulfill Sheldon Refuge purposes and to meet management objectives for fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Swan Lake Reservoir impoundment dam - provides vital summer pronghorn antelope forage.</i> • <i>Dufurrena Ponds, McGee Ponds, and Catnip Reservoir - provide fish and wildlife habitat, and secondarily provide compatible opportunities for wildlife viewing, photography, recreational fishing, and environmental education.</i> • <i>Water control infrastructure at the former IXL Ranch - provides migratory bird stop-over habitat.</i> | |
|--|--|---|
| <i>No Action Alternative</i> | <i>Intensive Management Alternative (preferred)</i> | <i>Low Intensity Management Alternative</i> |
| Remove up to 4 spring developments. | Remove developments and completely restore at least 20 springs to more natural conditions. | Remove developments and allow at least 20 springs to naturally recover. |
| Maintain 18 existing wildlife water guzzlers. | Same as the No Action Alternative. | No guzzlers maintained. |
| Restore natural conditions to 1 playa. Continue to maintain other playa water developments through routine excavation. | Restore at least 20% of playas to natural conditions. Discontinue maintenance of playa water developments. | Allow all playas to naturally recover. |
| Remove structures and restore Pond 13 | Same as the No Action Alternative. | Do not maintain Pond 13 or Big Spring Reservoir. |

Historic Structures

| <i>No Action Alternative</i> | <i>Intensive Management Alternative (preferred)</i> | <i>Low Intensity Management Alternative</i> |
|--|--|---|
| Basic inventory of historic structures and other cultural resources as necessary for Refuge projects and activities. | Complete inventory of all historic structures (approximately 12 sites). Increase inventory for other cultural resources. | Same as the No Action Alternative. |
| Provide limited protection and interpretation for historic structures. | Convert some structures to overnight fee-use facilities. Protect and interpret remaining structures. | Allow sites to naturally deteriorate over time. |

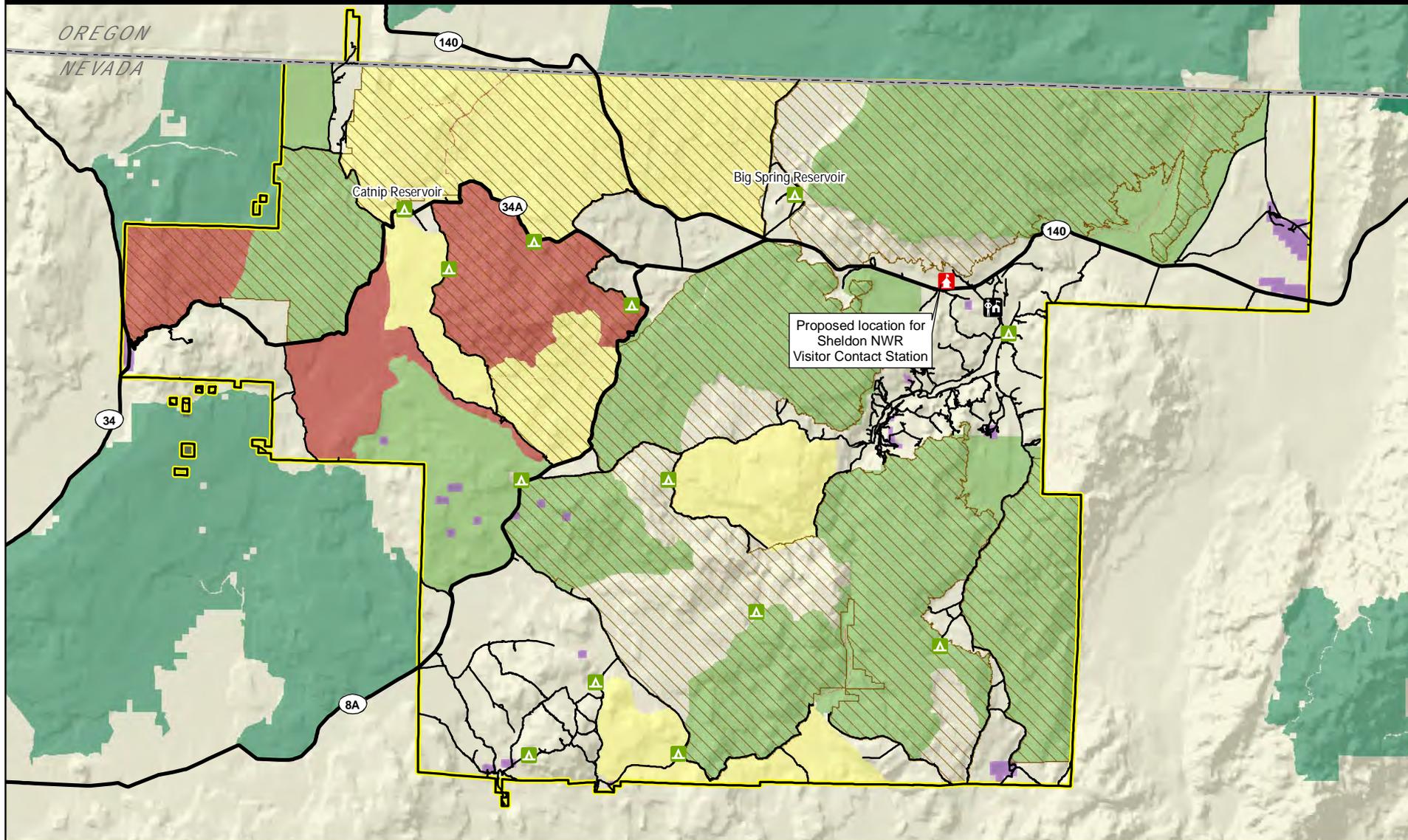
Public Use and Recreation

| <i>No Action Alternative</i> | <i>Intensive Management Alternative (preferred)</i> | <i>Low Intensity Management Alternative</i> |
|--|---|--|
| Continue to use existing facilities for public contact, visitor outreach, and environmental education. | Construct more accessible and efficient visitor facilities along Highway 140, including a visitor contact station, interpretive trail, and self-guided auto tour route. | Same as the No Action Alternative |
| Maintain designated campgrounds at the existing level of development. | Construct additional improvements at Virgin Valley, Catnip, and Big Spring campgrounds and implement campsite fees. | Same as the No Action alternative. |
| Designate 467 miles of roads and routes throughout Sheldon Refuge to allow continued public vehicle use. | Designate 551 miles of roads and routes for public vehicle use throughout Sheldon Refuge. | Designate 593 miles of roads and routes for public vehicle use throughout Sheldon Refuge. |
| Allow Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs) on Refuge roads and routes open to public use of vehicles. | Same as the No Action Alternative and require OHV operators to register their vehicles with Sheldon Refuge. | Same as the No Action Alternative |
| Continue to allow rock-hounding with collection of up to 7 pounds of rock per person per day. | Same as the No Action Alternative and increase law enforcement and education to minimize collection of artifacts and fossils. | Require Special Use Permits for rock-hounding if artifact and/or vertebrate fossil collection violations are documented. |

Wilderness Recommendations

| <i>Management common to all alternatives</i> | <i>Consider all currently proposed wilderness areas and all wilderness study areas for possible recommendation (approximately 439,200 acres).</i> | |
|--|---|--|
| <i>No Action Alternative</i> | <i>Intensive Management Alternative (preferred)</i> | <i>Low Intensity Management Alternative</i> |
| Recommend current wilderness proposal (approximately 341,500 acres). | Recommend 341,598 acres for designation as wilderness (262,745 acres correspond with current wilderness proposal). | Recommend 236,791 acres for designation as wilderness (193,966 acres correspond with current wilderness proposal). |

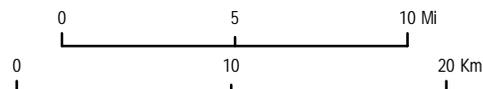
Preliminary Alternatives for Recommended Wilderness Areas at Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge



LEGEND

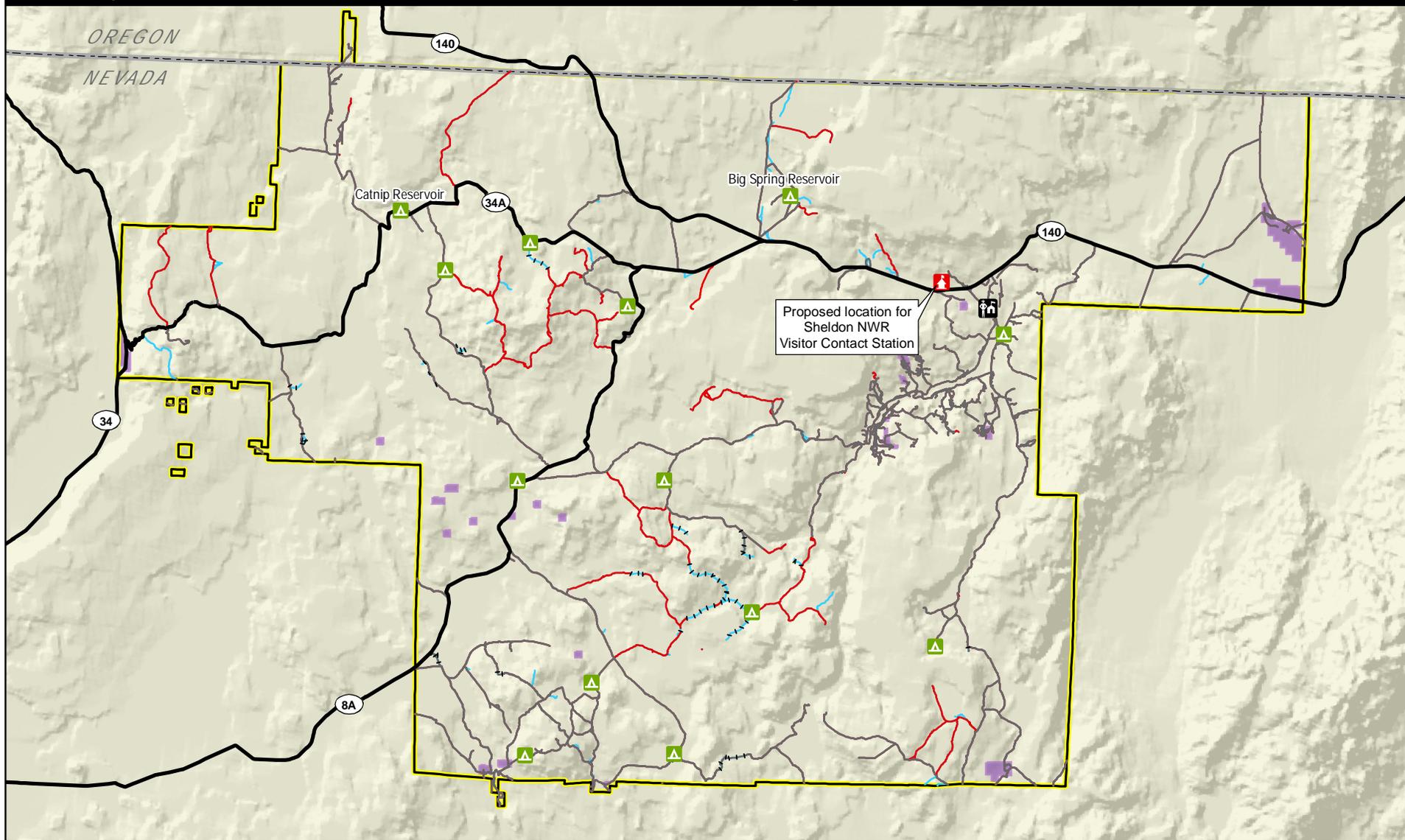
- | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Refuge Campgrounds | Approved Refuge Boundary | Proposed Wilderness Alternatives |
| Refuge Headquarters | Private Lands (Inholdings) | Proposed Wilderness Areas (No Action Alternative) |
| Proposed Visitor Contact Station | BLM Wilderness Study Areas | Not Recommended for Either Alternative |
| Vehicle Routes | | Recommended for Preferred Alternative, but not Low Intensity Management Alternative |
| | | Recommended for Both Alternatives |

Wilderness boundary setbacks:
 Hwy140 = 150ft from centerline
 All other routes = 50ft from centerline



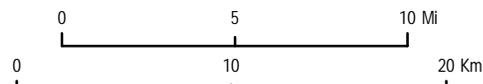
Map Date: 5/20/2010 File: 10-069-1.mxd

Preliminary Alternatives for Public Vehicle Access at Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge



LEGEND

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Proposed Visitor Contact Station | Vehicle Routes- All Alternatives |
| Refuge Campgrounds | Additional Routes- Preferred Alternative |
| Refuge Headquarters | Rehabilitate or Relocate- Preferred Alternative |
| Approved Refuge Boundary | Additional Routes- Low Intensity Management Alternative |
| Private Lands (Inholdings) | |



Map Date: 5/20/2010 File: 10-069-2.mxd

What's Next?

The Service is preparing a complete Draft CCP and EIS. When these become available in 2010, we will let you know through the next planning update, our website, and we will place a notice in the Federal Register. These sources will include the following information:

- Where you can find the Draft CCP/EIS, including full descriptions of the management alternatives and the likely environmental impacts from each.
- Where to send your comments or questions regarding the Draft CCP/EIS.
- When the comment period will start and end.
- When and where public meetings will be held.

CCP Planning Schedule

| Planning Step: | Target Date: |
|--|--|
| Planning Update 1 | May 2008 COMPLETED |
| Public Scoping Meetings..... | May/June 2008 COMPLETED |
| Planning Update 2 | April 2009 COMPLETED |
| Planning Update 3, Preliminary Alternatives | June 2010 COMPLETED |
| Public review of Draft CCP and EIS..... | Fall 2010 and distribution of Planning Update 4 |

We will keep you informed if dates change.

Comments may be submitted by going to <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/main/docs/NV/docssheldon.htm> or sent by mail to the Refuge address on page 10.

We will review and address your comments along with others received in the future during the Draft CCP/EIS comment period.



Larkspur blooming/ USFWS



Pygmy rabbit in winter/ USFWS



Sheldon-Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex
P.O. Box 111
Lakeview, OR 97630

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How Do I Contact the Refuge?

You may reach us with comments or questions by any of the following methods:

Mail

Paul Steblein, Project Leader
Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 111
Lakeview, OR 97630

Fax

541-947-4414

Websites

<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/planning/main/docs/NV/docssheldon.htm>

<http://www.fws.gov/sheldonthartmtn/Sheldon/>

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