

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARSENAL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE Commerce City, CO 80022-1748**

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For Immediate Release

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### **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TO ESTABLISH PILOT BISON PROJECT AT ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARSENAL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced it will establish a pilot bison project at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge early this spring. As part of a larger, ongoing effort to better conserve and protect wild bison within the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Service will move approximately 15 bison from the National Bison Range in northwestern Montana to the Arsenal.

The pilot bison herd will be located on refuge land and enable the Service to monitor and evaluate the effects bison have on native short-grass prairie ecology at the Arsenal and determine the role of bison in the management of the site. In hosting the pilot herd, the Arsenal will also play a key part in advancing the Service's bison conservation program.

The Service will make available to the public a bison management plan for review and comment prior to the arrival of the bison, and will hold a public meeting to provide additional information about bison at the Arsenal, including potential public use opportunities, on Saturday, Feb. 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007, from 5:00 - 6:30 pm at the Arsenal's Administrative Records Facility (Building 129).

"Bison were once a key species on the landscape here," said Steve Berendzen, the new Project Leader for the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which includes the Arsenal, Two Ponds National Wildlife Refuge in Arvada, and the eventual Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge in Jefferson, Boulder and Broomfield Counties. "This pilot project gives us an excellent opportunity to determine, in a controlled manner, the ecological response of habitat and wildlife at the Arsenal to bison."

"The Service's vision for the Arsenal has always included bison reintroduction, and was articulated in the 1996 Comprehensive Management Plan for the refuge" added Dean Rundle, former Project Leader for the Complex and now regional supervisor for all national wildlife refuges in Colorado, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. "Establishing a small pilot herd brings that vision a step closer to reality, and helps support the Service's work to enhance bison conservation throughout the National Wildlife Refuge System."

The Service is coordinating with its Army and Shell partners at the Arsenal, and with regulatory

agencies, local governments and other entities involved with the Arsenal, to ensure plans to reintroduce bison fully comply with all applicable laws, regulations and policies related to the ongoing clean-up at the Arsenal and the transformation of the site to a national wildlife refuge.

The bison identified for movement from the Bison Range to the Arsenal contain valuable and unique genetic characteristics that the Service, using the best available scientific information, has determined important to the long-term conservation of wild bison. The Service is undertaking a series of bison transfers among and between national wildlife refuges in Montana, North Dakota, Colorado, Nebraska and Iowa aimed at insuring against a catastrophic loss of key genetic material. These transfers are also intended to serve as an initial step toward establishing a more holistic management approach that recognizes and includes bison as a functional part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and for wild bison in North America.

Bison were historically an integral component of the North American prairie ecosystem. Migrating bison provided essential functions, such as grazing and other disturbances that, together with fire, drove key ecological processes on the prairie. The decimation of the historic bison herds across the continent in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century removed this component from the prairie ecosystem. As the Service works to restore and conserve prairie habitats throughout the National Wildlife Refuge System, the agency has identified wild bison as a species that can and will play a vital role in this effort.

The majority of bison in the United States currently exist in private herds, which have higher rates of hybridization from domestic cattle. This makes the Service bison herds, especially those without detectable hybridization or with low levels of detectable hybridization especially valuable for the long-term conservation of wild bison.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 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 and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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