



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain-Prairie Region

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JUL 21 1995

Robert G. Dreher, Esq.
Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund
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Dear Mr. Dreher:

I wish to inform you as Attorney for the plaintiffs, and on their behalf in the National Audubon Society et al. v. Babbitt, of the actions being taken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to resolve concerns regarding habitat management practices at the Alamosa/Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Alamosa, Colorado, and to comply with (1) NEPA, (2) the compatibility requirements of the Refuge Administration Act for permitted uses at the Refuge, (3) the requirements of the Endangered Species Act, and (4) terms of the settlement of the National Audubon Society et al. v. Babbitt.

As discussed in a meeting on April 18, 1995, in Denver, attended by Deputy Regional Director Dr. Terry Terrell, Assistant Regional Director (Refuges and Wildlife) Skip Ladd, and other Region 6 personnel; Pam Eaton, Assistant Regional Director of the Wilderness Society; Bob Turner, Regional Vice President of the National Audubon Society, and others, the Service desires to resolve the compatibility determination requirements regarding livestock grazing on the Refuge while addressing the broader management needs of both units of the Refuge and their relationship to the overall San Luis Valley ecosystem.

The Service shall take the following actions:

1. The Alamosa Unit of the Refuge Complex--the Service will permit grazing within the Refuge during 1995 within such terms as were in place from 1987-1994. Grazing in the Refuge shall not exceed 3,824 AUMs (1994 levels).
2. The Monte Vista Unit of the Refuge Complex--the Service will not permit grazing in 1995.
3. The Service agrees to implement a process leading to a "Comprehensive Management Plan," with appropriate NEPA compliance for the Refuge Complex. The CMP will describe the purposes and management objectives of the Refuge Complex. The Service agrees to begin the CMP process by October 1, 1995.

4. As soon as practicable in the CMP process, the Service will initiate a scientifically credible study to determine which management practices may be most effective in achieving the purposes and objectives of the Refuge. Such management practices may include, but not be limited to, various livestock grazing strategies, prescribed fire, water management, integrated pest management, and haying. The Service will consult with the plaintiffs and others in selecting a person to lead the study. Grazing may be conducted in appropriate locations within the Refuge in accordance with the experimental prescriptions described in the study beginning in 1996.
5. Except within the terms of the above study, the Service shall not issue grazing permits or otherwise authorize grazing within the Refuge Complex after 1995, unless the Service makes a written determination, with appropriate NEPA compliance, that grazing is compatible with the primary purposes of the Refuge, and that within the framework of existing Service policy, grazing is a practical, effective, and ecologically sound tool for achieving management objectives for the Refuge. If grazing is determined to be compatible, the Service shall implement a monitoring program to evaluate the efficacy of grazing treatments in meeting Refuge management objectives.
6. The Service will defer completion of the NEPA process begun with Draft Environmental Assessments for the grazing programs at the units of the Refuge Complex to the CMP/EA/EIS process described above.

The Service plans to have in place by October 1, 1995: (1) a schedule of events to achieve successful completion of all phases, (2) an agreement with a university or other research organization to conduct the research project, (3) NEPA compliance to conduct the research project, (4) interim Refuge objectives to guide the research project, (5) a list of potential contributors to help finance research project, (6) a description of the comprehensive management planning process and an outline of the plan, (7) a peer group to review the research project proposal, and (8) a core working group with representatives of the plaintiffs to assist the Service in achieving the action items.

The Service will proceed to have a final research study proposal in place by December 1, 1995. The field research will be initiated early in the spring of 1996.

Sincerely,


Ralph O. Morgenweck
Regional Director

cc: see enclosed list

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