

CASE

Rocky Flats Site Redevelopment

Challenge:

Rocky Flats, just west of Denver, Colorado, played a key role in the U.S. nuclear weapons program, producing plutonium triggers. When the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) decided to close the facility, many in the community raised concerns about the site's cleanup and future use. Lifting the veil of national security, building trust, satisfying calls for cleanup to background radiation levels, responding to efforts to preserve jobs and meeting DOE's fiscal constraints has proved challenging given the controversial history of the site.

Result:

DOE has engaged the community to understand concerns, exchange information and develop options for resolving issues related to the site. A Future Site Use Working Group facilitated by CDR Associates recommended cleanup standards and ways to retain jobs at the site. Following a Congressional decision to turn the site into a National Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now is conducting a public involvement process to guide its Comprehensive Conservation Plan for habitat management decisions on the refuge, such as public access, fire management, plutonium exposure risks, endangered species protection and rare grassland enhancement.

Participants

ROCKY FLATS FUTURE SITE USE WORKING GROUP

Arvada, Colorado
Boulder, Colorado
Broomfield, Colorado
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
Jefferson County, Colorado
Northwest Metro Chamber of Commerce
Rocky Flats Local Impacts Initiative
Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center
Sierra Club
Superior, Colorado
U.S. Department of Energy
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Westminster, Colorado

ROCKY FLATS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE-COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN AND EIS

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of Energy
Rocky Flats Coalition of Local Governments
Rocky Flats Citizens' Advisory Board
Federal and State agencies
General public

MEDIATORS

Future Site Use Working Group: CDR Associates
Mary Margaret Golten
Mary Davis Hamlin (now with the Keystone Center)
Mike Hughes (now with RESOLVE)

National Wildlife Refuge: RESOLVE
Mike Hughes
Jody Erikson

Issues

For decades, Rocky Flats produced plutonium triggers for the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear weapons program. In 1989, the FBI and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) raided the site, setting in motion of chain of events that led, later that year, to DOE ending production at the plant and beginning a decommissioning process. The decommissioning opened up new possibilities for use of the 6,000-acre site at the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

Some of the interested stakeholders began promoting a national monument of sorts that would keep the site off limits to the public while commemorating the end of nuclear production, leaving the plutonium on site. Others promoted transfer of the production facilities to an industrial use, retaining on-site jobs. Still others supported a cleanup effort that would remove all nuclear materials, return the site to background levels of radiation and restore habitat to pre-production quality.

To guide the decommissioning and decontamination work, DOE, EPA and the Colorado Department of Health and Environment needed a plan for future site use.

Future Site Use Working Group: Given the significantly different visions for the future use of Rocky Flats, DOE chose to bring the stakeholders together in a Future Site Use Working Group, mediated by CDR Associates, with the aim of producing a consensus plan.

Through a year-long negotiation, the stakeholders reached agreement on a plan for future use that included an open space buffer that would ultimately be cleaned to background levels and an industrial core that would be transferred to companies and research institutions interested in nuclear material cleanup technology and environmental remediation techniques.

In the decade following the Future Site Use process, DOE, the regulators and stakeholders continued to refine their approach to the remediation and the future of the site. Budget limitations, changes in the regulatory focus and ongoing stakeholder work led to a DOE decision to dismantle the industrial area and led DOE and the regulators to set a cleanup and closure deadline of 2006.

National Wildlife Refuge: In 2002, the U.S. Congress passed legislation authorizing conversion of the site to a National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge legislation set a deadline of 2004 for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Refuge. With cleanup proceeding through 2006, decisions about the Refuge – habitat management strategies, for example – are being made while the cleanup decisions are still evolving.

The transition in Federal roles has prompted a shift in the focus of public participation efforts. DOE has used its Citizens' Advisory Board (CAB) as the primary venue for ongoing stakeholder consultation on cleanup and safety questions. FWS, while also working with the CAB, has looked primarily to the Rocky Flats Coalition of Local Governments, because the legislation authorizing the Refuge gives the Coalition a central role in Refuge planning. The longstanding public focus on safety, remediation and cleanup levels has been expanded to questions of public use including trail locations, visitor facilities and access points. A well-informed and engaged public are being asked new questions and are focusing on a new set of future possibilities.

The FWS retained RESOLVE to facilitate teamwork within the FWS, assist in coordination with Federal, state and local agencies and conduct public involvement activities.

Process

As required under National Environmental Policy Act, the first step in the EIS is scoping. Scoping activities conducted by the FWS Planning Team included:

- Meetings with key stakeholder groups including the Rocky Flats Coalition of Local Governments, the Citizens' Advisory Board and City Councils.
- A series of public meetings designed to draw out the fullest possible list of concerns about and ideas for how to establish the Refuge successfully.
- An agency meeting that brought together representatives of federal, state and local jurisdictions to discuss refuge-related concerns.
- Mailings and Web-based communications.
- Technical meetings with the staff members from open space organizations, government agencies and any others who might have data relevant to the EIS.
- An internal vision and goals workshop for FWS staff to build consensus on the direction that refuge planning would take.
- Topic-by-topic Focus Groups that used the early scoping meetings and delved deeper into the most significant questions.

FWS developed five working options responsive to the data collection and stakeholder input from the scoping stage and came together in a workshop to examine detailed alternatives, draft goals and objectives for each alternative and affirm a draft preferred alternative.

In 2003, the alternatives will undergo examination through a public process that mirrors the steps of a scoping process. The draft provides for priority public uses including wildlife observation while protecting endangered species and rare grassland habitat.

This effort is expected to yield a final preferred alternative, a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and a Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Results

The Future Site Use Working Group did important work in examining options for the site, working through disagreements and setting the stage for cooperative efforts to transform Rocky Flats.

The current planning process builds on that experience and, through the EIS process, provides opportunities for stakeholders to shape Refuge decisions. It is also helping to establish

interagency working relationships that will be vital to joint management of the Refuge in the future.

Based on current plans, at the end of the lengthy transition from weapons manufacturing to wildlife refuge, the public will have access to portions of the Rocky Flats site and be able to enjoy its scenic, historic and wildlife resources.

Scientific/Technical Obstacles and Actions	
O B S T A C L E	A C T I O N
Longstanding distrust between agency representatives and key stakeholders	Building personal relationships between agency officials and key stakeholders that allow trust to develop Creating a pattern of consistency, responsiveness and accountability
Confusion about which decisions are being made by DOE and which by FWS	On-going dialogue between officials in each agency; disclosure of the status of the agency discussions; reminders in every public involvement venue of who is making which decision and how the decisions fit together
Difference between risk analysis and public risk perception, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the level of radiation (plutonium) exposure from intermittent recreational use of the Rocky Flats site? • What is the real risk that stems from this exposure? • How are risks perceived? 	Future Site Use: Integrating presentations from world-renowned radiation exposure experts; finding experts that all stakeholders trusted; making long-term agreements that anticipated changes in cleanup technology Refuge: Discussing safety as part of the refuge operations; creating a safety goal; focusing attention in the early years of refuge operations on public perception, public education and ongoing public involvement