



## Wildlife refuge receives stimulus funding

By JEFF GEARINO Casper Star-Tribune | Posted: Sunday, December 20, 2009 12:00 am

GREEN RIVER — For more than four decades, the wildlife refuge the Shoshone Indians called “sisk-a-dee-agie,” or “river of the prairie chicken,” has quietly gone about its business of providing wetland habitat for a variety of migratory birds and other wildlife.

Like other national parks and refuges, managers have struggled at the Seedskafee National Wildlife Refuge in recent years to keep pace with dwindling budgets, increased visitor use and deteriorating facilities.

Federal help is on the way.

The refuge is set to receive an infusion of federal stimulus money for a housing project, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced Friday that the agency has awarded approximately \$2.3 million for the construction of three residential buildings and a new bunkhouse at the refuge.

The new buildings will replace several rodent-infested structures and should be substantially safer and more energy-efficient, according to plans.

Fish and Wildlife Service Mountain-Prairie Regional Director Stephen Guertin said the project is being funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

“This is a great example of how Recovery Act funding can benefit the economy and the environment,” Guertin said.

Nestled in a remote corner of southwest Wyoming about 30 miles north of Green River, the 27,230-acre Seedskafee National Wildlife Refuge protects a mosaic of riparian, wetland and upland shrub habitats along a 36-mile stretch of the Green River.

About 220 species of birds visit the refuge or call it home. The area is also home to pronghorns, mule deer, elk, moose, fox, bats and other wildlife.

Seedskafee has also played a major role in recent years in the re-establishment of nesting populations of trumpeter swans through a reintroduction and transplant program that began in the early 1990s.

### Temporary housing

The refuge was established in 1965 as a mitigation measure for the loss of habitat when the Flaming Gorge and Fontenelle dams were constructed under the Colorado River Storage Act.

The Bureau of Reclamation built the existing structures as temporary housing for workers constructing the two dams in the early 1960s.

The houses were moved to the Seedskafee refuge after completion of the project, and workers placed them on existing concrete foundations.

Over the years, however, the houses became mouse-infested, making them unsafe to occupy. The agency attempted several pest mitigation projects, with little success. Two of the buildings have since been condemned.

Guertin said the housing is used by Seedskafee employees and their families. The bunkhouse is used by temporary workers, volunteers, firefighters and visitors.

The new houses will have solar heating and radiant floor heating systems that should be up to 80 percent more energy efficient.

The houses will also be equipped with electrical backups for the frequent power outages the refuge faces during thunderstorms.

McMillen LLC, of Boise, Idaho, is the project contractor.

Owner Mara McMillen said in a media release the project would employ dozens of local workers, including plumbers, electricians and suppliers.

Construction on the Seedskafee project will begin this spring.

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