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RMA Video Available for Public Viewing

What do Native Americans, homesteaders, farmers, cleanup crews and wildlife all have in common? They are all part of RMA's rich history and exciting future! To bring life into this story, RMA has created a new video titled 'Conserving the Future...Remembering the Past: The Rocky Mountain Arsenal.' The video takes the unique approach of telling RMA's story from the perspective of the only remaining homestead still standing at RMA, the Egli house.

The gentle rolling hills that Native Americans called home are among the only remaining constants in the evolution of the 27 square miles. As the west was settled, the Egli family and others built their lives and raised families on this land. When America entered World War II, the settlers, including the Eglis, were forced to leave their homes and land behind to support the defense of the nation through the construction of RMA.

The video highlights these events plus stories of the Army's efforts after the war to maximize the use of its facilities by leasing buildings to private industry, such as Shell Chemical Company. It describes how the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service became an active partner in the site when bald eagles were discovered nesting on the land in the 1980s. It details the large-scale environmental cleanup program and the transition of the site to a national wildlife refuge. And finally, the video highlights the abundant environmental, educational and recreational opportunities at the site.

Copies of the video are available at the Commerce City and Montbello libraries and RMA's Joint Administrative Records and Design Facility. RMA staff is also taking the video on the road to public meetings and events. Staff members can answer questions and provide further information about the site and its exciting future. If you would like to schedule a presentation, please call the RMA public relations office at 303-289-0865. ■

MILESTONES

Comments are always welcome.
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Property of U.S. Army

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that RMA conducts oral history interviews to preserve the site's past? If you have a unique experience to share about RMA or were a POW, please call Laurie Shannon at 303-289-0151.

Visit our website:
www.rma.army.mil

First Land Transfer Creates RMA National Wildlife Refuge

Atremendous milestone was reached at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal (RMA) when nearly 5,000 acres of land were transferred from the U.S. Army to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Department of the Interior), signifying the official establishment of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). This milestone was the culmination of years of commitment and cooperation among the Army, Shell Oil Company, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), and the regulatory agencies toward the safe and effective cleanup of RMA.

The first land transfer at RMA was celebrated on April 17 with various dignitaries and members of the public in attendance. The audience was filled with people who contributed to the momentous occasion. Whether it was a family member who had to leave property behind when RMA was built, an elected official who drafted the Refuge legislation, a former employee who worked at the site, or a current volunteer for the Service – each person took pride in the accomplishments of the day.

The morning festivities kicked off with Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, a

Colorado native, acknowledging the tremendous effort that brought the Arsenal to this point. The speakers who followed included Geoffrey Prosch, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations and Environment; Steve Johnson, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Deputy Administrator; Ray Collins, Vice President and Global Divestments Manager for Shell Chemicals Company; Senator Wayne Allard; Congressman Bob Beauprez; and Congresswoman Diana DeGette. In addition, Doug Benevento, Executive Director for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, presented a proclamation on behalf of Governor Owens declaring April 17, 2004 Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Day. Each speaker highlighted the complexity that is the RMA and the asset it has become.

"The Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge has a rich past and a promising future," said Norton. "In celebrating this important milestone and the establishment of the Refuge, we also must remember the history of this site, its role in national defense and the valuable lessons learned here."



(L to R) Geoffrey Prosch, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations and Environment, Senator Wayne Allard, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, Steve Johnson, Environmental Protection Agency, Ray Collins, Vice President and Global Divestments Manager for Shell Chemicals Company, Congressman Bob Beauprez, and Congresswoman Diana DeGette.

Photo by Josh Barchers/DPRA, Inc.

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“Once used to protect and preserve our freedom, this parcel of land has now been transformed into a national resource and treasure by joining the National Wildlife Refuge System,” said Prosch. “The Army is very proud to turn this land over to the Department of the Interior for the public to enjoy its abundant resources for generations to come.”



Dean Rundle, Refuge Manager.

“This event, with many supporters in attendance, was a great way to announce the newest addition to the National Wildlife Refuge System,” announced Dean Rundle, Refuge Manager. “The Service looks forward to continuing this progress and to more deletions and transfers,

so the Refuge can continue to grow. The Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge is an asset to this community and we look forward to more opportunities for people to enjoy their Refuge.”

Following the morning’s event, the Refuge was open to the public. More than 300 people came to celebrate the day and check out their new wildlife refuge. They enjoyed many activities, including the opportunity to take the first walk

along the trails that are now officially part of the Refuge. The afternoon also kicked off the Refuge’s fishing season and offered free fishing for the day to children under 12.

“What an incredible feeling to finally be able to offer our Refuge to the public as a place where they can come to relax, walk the trails, fish and learn about the wildlife,” said Sherry James, supervisory park ranger. “This is truly an historic day.”

A public ceremony was held during the afternoon. Secretary Norton was joined by Commerce City Mayor Sean Ford, Commerce City Councilwoman Reba Drotar and others in congratulating RMA on its latest milestone.

Dean Rundle presented a plaque to his Army and Shell colleagues as well as former and current employees whose dedication and commitment to the site helped make the Refuge a reality. The day’s events culminated with Secretary Norton and two patients from Children’s Hospital releasing a Swainson’s Hawk that had been rehabilitated at the Service’s raptor rehabilitation center.

Councilwoman Drotar summed up the occasion when she said “Commerce City has been waiting a long time for this day to arrive. We are extremely excited and welcome this asset to our neighborhood and look forward to having more land added to this wonderful Refuge.”

By the time the cleanup is complete, which is anticipated in 2011, an additional 10,000 acres of land will have been transferred to the Service, making RMA one of the nation’s largest, urban wildlife refuges. For more information please call 303-289-0930. ■

Updated Community Involvement Plan Available

RMA’s Community Involvement Plan (CIP) was recently updated and describes how community outreach efforts will be conducted with stakeholders. The 2004 CIP is based on interview results with over 40 local business leaders, community advisory board members, citizens, elected officials and school educators.

The interviews were conducted by the Arsenal’s communications team, which includes members from both on-site and regulatory agencies. The team asked a series of questions about the Arsenal, its cleanup program, transition to a national wildlife refuge and the best means of communicating information to neighbors. The responses reflect community input, needs and concerns, and helped shape existing and new community outreach plans and programs.

“The community interviews helped us to better understand community needs and perceptions, and was a great way to receive input about the program,” said Charles Scharmann, program manager for RMA. “We want to

remain in close contact with our neighbors throughout the cleanup process and ensure they are aware of the site’s progress and future plans.”

You can read about the community interviews and outreach programs by visiting the Commerce City and Montbello libraries, RMA’s Joint Administrative Records and Design Facility, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Superfund Records Center or the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment Records Center. Request a copy of the plan by calling the Arsenal’s public relations community information line at 303-289-0136, submitting an e-mail to pao@rma.army.mil or sending a letter to Rocky Mountain Arsenal, Public Affairs Office, Building 111, Commerce City, CO 80022.

The communications team would like to extend its gratitude to all who helped contribute to this plan. If you have any questions about the CIP or RMA please call the community information line at 303-289-0136. ■

Environmental conditions at RMA have been enticing to America’s national symbol, the Bald Eagle for almost two decades. In fact, surroundings are so appealing that an adult pair has nested and successfully hatched two eaglets this spring. The same adult pair successfully hatched one eaglet last spring.

“The first one hatched the week of March 29 and the second was confirmed on April 12,” said Mindy Hetrick, biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Eagles are long-lived and begin breeding when they are about five years old. Typically a pair will stay together for life unless one is lost. In that case, the remaining bird will re-mate.

Research indicates that one eagle nest in Ohio had been used for 30 years and weighed 1.3 tons before it was destroyed in a storm. “We’ve had eagles nesting on the refuge for three years, but it took this pair about five years to make the nest before they started using it,” Hetrick added. In January, the pair began adding sticks to their nest and making other “home improvements” before this year’s nesting season.

“The last thing the adults do is add a grass cup,” said Hetrick. “It’s the center of the stick area with a small depression, so when both parents take turns sitting on the eggs to incubate them, it provides a cushioned area. The adults are able to cover the eggs with their whole body and keep them warm.” Adults continue to bring soft vegetation to the nest to tuck around their body to shield the eggs from drafts. A typical eagle’s nest measures five to six feet in diameter and is two to four feet tall. The grass cup, which protects the eggs, is generally four inches deep with a 10-inch diameter.

The local pair laid their eggs in February and began incubating by February 23. On March 30, Hetrick knew that one of the eggs had hatched even though she wasn’t able to see the chick. “Once an eaglet has hatched, its parents’ behavior changes,” she said. “Incubating adults sit low in the nest whereas when they are brooding chicks, their posture is more of a crouch with slightly cupped wings. Also, food is never present in the nest

before eaglets hatch. I saw the female standing on the nest rim tearing food.”

To feed the young, parents tear food – fish, waterfowl or small mammals – into very small pieces and dangle it over the young. It was during one of these feedings that Hetrick was able to confirm two eaglet heads in the nest through a spotting scope about a half-mile away.

“The young have gone from weighing four ounces when they hatched to about two pounds at two weeks of age,” she said. “They’ll be 10-12 weeks old and around eight pounds before they fledge, which is when they first leave the nest.”

On May 12 with the help of biologists, the eaglets took a premature flight in a duffle bag

from their treetop nest to be banded and measured on the ground. “This is the

fourth nest in Colorado this year where the young have been banded and hopefully there will be more. Uniquely banding individuals and later re-sighting a bird with a band on it helps us keep track of the eagle population on the Front Range,” she said.

The parents remain with their young after they fledge as it takes time before

the youngsters can feed themselves. Through late summer or early fall, adults will continue to teach the eaglets how to survive long after they leave the nest.

RMA visitors may be able to see the adult eagles flying to and from the tree that hosts the nest as the birds continue to care for their young. They are frequently seen flying over the visitor center or perching in trees at the lakes. The weekend tram tour passes within three-fourths of a mile from the eagle nest. For more information about weekend tours and nature programs contact the RMA National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center at 303-289-0930. ■



Photo by Gary Meinke: At five weeks old, the eaglets are replacing gray down with brown feathers. The difference in size (the one on the left is larger) can indicate which eaglet hatched first or the sex of the bird. Adult male eagles are smaller than females.

M I L E S T O N E S

All photos by DPRA, Inc./Josh Barchers with the exception of the Egli family property of US Army.

History of Perimeter Land Deletion

Long before thoughts of refuge systems and war-time manufacturing plants existed, before homesteaders migrated to the wide open spaces of the Rockies, the land that is now part of the National Wildlife Refuge System was first settled by Native Americans. Many people have come and gone since those days long ago, but most likely all would agree the views, wildlife and native plants are just a few of the charming rewards of the area.

How did this portion of RMA land become a national wildlife refuge? The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) deleted approximately 5,000 out of 17,000 acres of land, mostly located in the southern portion of the site from the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL). The deletion enabled the land to be transferred from the Army to the Service, officially creating Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

The establishment of the Refuge culminates more than six years of work by a dedicated team of individuals, called the Deletion and Transfer team. "Since late 1997 we've been working to determine exactly what land we would be deleting from the NPL," explained Roberta Ober, Deletion and Transfer team leader. "We've worked closely with the regulatory agencies to figure out what the area would look like and addressed different issues."

Following the completion of cleanup efforts on this land, the Army wrote a technical memorandum, which was finalized in July 2003. Later that month, the EPA published a Notice of Intent to Delete (NOID), which was followed by a public meeting. Public comments were received and EPA's responsiveness summary was completed in December. At that time, the State of Colorado concurred with the decision to delete and the EPA signed the final Notice of Deletion (NOD) on January 5 of this year. The NOD was published in the federal register on January 15 with the actual land transfer taking place April 2 before the establishment event on April 17.

"We've worked so hard for so long to delete the land from the EPA's NPL," Ober said, "but the icing on the cake is having the land transferred to the Service so they can establish the Refuge."

The EPA places environmental cleanup sites that need the most immediate and comprehensive work on its Superfund NPL. This way, EPA can prioritize cleanup of contaminated waste sites. "With this action," Ober added, "to date we've deleted approximately 5940 acres, which is more than nine square miles, of land from the NPL." The additional 940 acres was the Western Tier Parcel deletion, which took place in January 2003. That land is scheduled for sale to Commerce City later this year. ■

National Wildlife Refuge Ready To Gain Ground

With the perimeter lands being transferred from the Army to the Service on April 17, RMA's wildlife refuge is ready to spread its wings. Totalling approximately 5000 acres, the first lands establishing RMA National Wildlife Refuge (approximately one-third of RMA) will bring more rewarding opportunities for the public to experience wildlife in the Denver metro area.

"The Refuge provides a landscape that pre-dates modern development," said Ryan Noel, deputy manager for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region VI. "The infrastructure that the rest of the city has seen expand in every direction has skipped the Arsenal because of the Army's and Shell's existence here."

With the transfer of the perimeter land, the Refuge will offer more of what is already available, including the opportunity to drop in on weekends and hike the nine miles of trails, snap some breathtaking photographs, and enjoy wildlife observation, education and interpretation.

Noel noted that the Refuge would continue to offer its Friday night catch and release fishing program on Lakes Mary and Ladora for disabled youth. Saturdays and Sundays are prime times for anglers to participate in the catch and release fishing program from 8 a.m. to sunset on the same lakes.

"In the future, we hope to have on-site environmental education programs for school groups and an expanded hiking trail system, although we don't have a date in mind for those yet," added Noel. "In the long-term, after the cleanup is finished, we would like to have tram tours."

"The biggest benefit of the Refuge is that people can get out and experience the wildlife environment without having to drive an hour to the National Park," said Noel. "When remediation work is complete and all of the land is transferred, we'll have one of the premier wildlife refuges in the country because of our opportunity to build it from the ground up. We've worked with the Army and Shell to restore the land to short grass prairie, like it was pre-settlement. A lot of other wildlife refuges haven't been able to restore their areas like we have." Once the cleanup is complete, the Refuge will compare in size to the island of Manhattan in New York.

"We want people to come out and visit the Refuge," Noel continued. "It's truly a national treasure and we're providing opportunities for local communities to experience all we have to offer." ■

