

ENGAGED PUBLIC OVERWHELMINGLY OPPOSES PUBLIC ACCESS
TO THE ROCKY FLATS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
An Analysis of the Record of Public Comments
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Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center (May 9, 2006)

The most contentious issue regarding the future Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge is whether or not the refuge should be opened to the public for recreational activities. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), which will operate the refuge on most of the site of the former Rocky Flats nuclear bomb factory, announced in February 2005 that hiking, biking, horseback riding and limited hunting will be allowed at the refuge. Does this decision square with the expressed will of the public?

The Draft Environment Impact Statement (EIS) released by FWS in February 2004 sought public comment on four alternatives for the refuge:

- A. No action (essentially no change from the present)
- B. Wildlife Habitat and Public Use (the option preferred and eventually selected by FWS)
- C. Ecological Restoration (most restrictive option)
- D. Public Use (least restrictive option)

Options B and D would permit public access for the aforementioned recreational activities, options A and C would not. In commenting on the EIS, those in favor of public access selected either option B or D, while those opposed selected A or C, or, in some cases, simply told FWS “no access” or “keep Rocky Flats closed” (responding perhaps to FWS’ intent to allow guided tours even under options A and C). People opposed public access because of the risk of exposure to plutonium and other contaminants remaining in the environment and/or because the refuge should be truly a refuge for wildlife, not a playground for humans.

My analysis of FWS’s book length “Appendix H: Comments and Responses on the Draft EIS” (September 2004) is limited solely to the question of whether or not public access to the refuge should be allowed. Appendix H groups comments and responses into four sections: (a) letters from various parties; (b) individual comments; (c) petitions and form letters; and (d) testimony given at four public meetings held by FWS.

Appendix H identifies commenting parties by name only in the (a) letters and (d) public meeting sections. The following analysis of these two sections excludes comments from the agencies responsible for the cleanup (DOE and the regulators). It also eliminates duplicate comments from other parties. For example, Broomfield City and County, like the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center, is counted only once, though both commented several times, not only with letters but also in the public hearings. Parties that commented more than once are counted only once. Certain individuals, like Hank Stovall, former Broomfield City Council member, and Lisa Morzel, former Council member in Boulder, are counted as individuals, separate from their former affiliations.

Here is the resultant breakdown of comments received either via (a) letters or as (d) testimony in the public meetings:

Comments from	Letters	Meetings	Duplicates	Totals
A/C (No access)	9	42	-3	48 (60% no access)
B/D (Access)	13	18	-8	23 (29% access)
Other*	<u>3</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>-4</u>	<u>9 (11%)</u>
	25	70	-15	80 (100%)

Thus, taking only comments expressed in letters and in public meetings, 60% of the parties commenting rejected public access to the future wildlife refuge, and only 29% favored access. Local governments were divided on the question.

*No preference is expressed on the question of access; most of these commenters either opposed hunting or said the EIS violates the National Environment Policy Act.

What about the other two sets of comments received by FWS, those identified above as from (b) individuals or from (c) petitions and form letters?

Individual comments:

A/C (No access)	174 (65% no access)
B/D (Access)	88 (33% access)
Other*	<u>5 (2%)</u>
	267 (100%)

*Commenters advocated fencing off the refuge and paving it over (no access?).

Results of combining comments from letters, meetings, and individuals:

A/C (No access)	222 (64% no access)
B/D (Access)	111 (32% access)
Other	<u>14 (4%)</u>
	347 (100%)

Form letters and petitions:

A/C (No access)*	819 (88% no access)
B (Access)	25 (3% access)
Other (No hunting petition)	<u>89 (9%)</u>
	933 (100%)

*FWS received 815 copies of a form letter with this message: "I am writing to express my opposition to allowing recreation at Rocky Flats. Just clean it up, fence it off and keep Rocky Flats closed." FWS says 178 of these had incomplete or illegible names. If these 178 are deducted from the numbers above, the result is 85% saying no access.

Finally, what are the results if all comments are combined?

	Letters & Meetings	Individuals	Petitions & Form letters	Totals
A/C (No access)	48	174	819	1041 (81% no access)
B/D (Access)	23	88	25	136 (11% access)
Other	<u>9</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>103 (8%)</u>
	80	267	933	1280 (100%)

CONCLUSION: The totals of all comments show 81% were opposed to public access to the refuge, with only 11% favoring it. Even if FWS prefers to exclude petitions and form letters and to include only those who wrote letters, spoke in meetings, or sent individual messages, the record (see box above) shows that twice as many rejected public access (64%) as favored it (32%). In sum, the engaged public overwhelmingly rejected FWS' plan to allow public access for recreation at the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge. This is reminiscent of the "cleanup" recently completed at Rocky Flats, where 86% opposed what was done.