Former nuke site becomes wildlife refuge

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The U.S. government's Rocky Flats nuclear weapons production site in Colorado has been named a National Wildlife Refuge.

The land is being turned over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service after more than a decade of environmental cleanup work.

The Rocky Flats Plant, 16 miles northwest of Denver, manufactured the trigger mechanism for nearly every nuclear weapon in the United States from 1951-89. The government said the site water, air and soil was contaminated with plutonium, uranium, beryllium and hazardous chemical compounds.

A 10-year environmental cleanup of the site cost approximately $7 billion.

"With the transfer of nearly 4,000 acres from the Department of Energy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will establish the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge in order to conserve the rare and unique tallgrass prairie found along Colorado's Front Range," U.S. Department of Interior's Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service H. Dale Hall said in a release.

The Energy Department will retain approximately 1,300 acres in the center of the site for long-term surveillance and maintenance.

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