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NEWS RELEASE



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Interim Sport Hunting Plan Released

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is releasing its Final Interim Sport Hunting Plan and Environmental Assessment, examining the impacts of existing public hunting programs on the Wahluke Unit of the Hanford Reach National Monument/Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, located in south-central Washington State. The Service has selected as its Preferred Alternative, Alternative A—No Action. This will continue hunting much as it currently is until the *Hanford Reach National Monument Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (CCP)*, currently in draft, is finalized. Any additional adjustments to hunting on the Monument, including opening additional acres to hunting, will be through the CCP.

The Sport Hunting Plan was prepared as a result of a Fund For Animals lawsuit against the Service on March 14, 2003, alleging noncompliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in opening 37 refuges to hunting during the 1997-98 through 2002-03 seasons. On August 31, 2006, the U.S. District Court Judge granted the plaintiff's motion for summary judgment, agreeing that the Service did not adequately consider the cumulative impacts of opening these refuges to hunting. In an October 5, 2006, brief the Service asked the court not to close the hunt programs while it proceeded to address the NEPA deficiencies in the original 37 hunting packages. In addition, the Service informed the court that by May 30, 2007, it would also correct NEPA deficiencies for the refuges opened to hunting since the lawsuit was filed, including the Arid Lands National Wildlife Refuge (now the Hanford Reach National Monument).

This plan addresses past decisions and is not intended to modify future hunting program decisions being considered in the Monument's CCP. Under all alternatives in the Draft CCP, the Service would seek to maintain and/or expand hunting opportunities on the Monument.

The Service evaluated the current hunting programs on the Monument's Wahluke Unit for mule and white-tailed deer; elk; and upland and migratory game birds. The environmental assessment examined two alternatives: (1) No Action which maintains the current hunting programs; and (2) No Hunting, which would have closed all hunting programs.

Copies of the Sport Hunting Plan may be viewed at the Hanford Reach National Monument website (hanfordreach.fws.gov) beginning on June 30, 2007, or be obtained by calling (509) 371-1801 and requesting a copy.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The FWS manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 547 national wildlife refuges—including two national monuments—thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices, and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid Program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.