

Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Hunting

For more than a century, the National Wildlife Refuge System has protected vital habitats for migratory birds, threatened and endangered plants and animals, and other wildlife species native to North America. It is considered the world's most unique network of lands and waters set aside specifically for wildlife conservation. The Service manages national wildlife refuges to protect and, when necessary, restore these natural resources.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act gave hunting, and five other activities, priority over other public uses on refuges. National wildlife refuges offer opportunities for visitors to hunt, fish, watch wildlife, take photographs, and participate in environmental education and interpretive programs when these activities fit with wildlife management programs. In 2003, more than two million refuge visitors participated in regulated hunts for deer, waterfowl, and other game species.

Regulated hunting programs are also a means of managing overabundant populations of wildlife on national wildlife refuges. Populations of white-tailed deer, resident Canada geese, and other wildlife species are over-populating in certain areas. These population increases can be attributed to a variety of reasons, including large amounts of suitable habitat and few natural predators. Wildlife managers use an array of methods - including hunting programs - to control wildlife populations that have "outgrown" their habitats.



U.S.F.W.S.

White-tailed deer

Existing and Proposed Hunts at Long Island National Wildlife Refuges

White-tailed deer

At the Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex, over-abundant deer have over-browsed trees, shrubs, and other vegetation, significantly damaging important songbird and other wildlife habitats. To help address this situation and to provide a public hunting opportunity, a limited-entry, regulated hunt for white-tailed deer was held for the first time at Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge in Suffolk County, N.Y.

During the 2005/2006 season, hunters took 38 deer within established zones on the refuge. Although the refuge was closed to other users in the interest of public safety, the timing and short duration of the hunt periods were designed to have minimal effect on other visitors.

The Service for a decade has also culled deer from Seatuck National Wildlife Refuge. The proximity of residences to deer habitat and the small size of the refuge precludes a public hunt of any kind.

The Service had considered using non-lethal measures of controlling over-abundant deer, but found that these measures would prove far less effective than hunting. Live trapping and relocation can be dangerous both to deer and handlers, sterilization has been found to be expensive and impractical, and oral contraceptives can pose a risk to non-targeted wildlife species. Fencing and other physical barriers are not a practical solution for the situation on Long Island refuges.

Resident Canada geese and other waterfowl

In suburban areas throughout Long Island, a rapid increase in resident non-migratory Canada goose populations is attributed to feeding opportunities for geese on expansive lawns, turf farms, and golf courses; few natural predators; limited hunting; and supplemental feeding. High densities of geese can pollute water supplies, pose safety hazards near roads and airports, and displace other migratory birds from important habitats.

Growing numbers of resident Canada geese at Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge are degrading wetland habitat, and the Service has proposed a limited resident Canada goose hunt to reduce the population. The hunt, which would conform to State seasons and regulations, would also provide an additional hunting opportunity to the public. Limiting the goose hunt to the month of September, aligned with the traditional State season, and before the migrant geese arrive on Long Island would also limit the harvest to resident birds.

The Service has also indicated that it will work with partners to evaluate the feasibility of a regulated hunt for ducks at Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge. This will include a thorough examination of the benefits to local and regional hunters and the potential effects on the waterfowl population at the refuge. This potential hunt would offer an additional recreational hunting opportunity within the refuge complex.



U.S.F.W.S.

Resident Canada geese

“If we do not maintain our hunting and fishing traditions, there will be more people who are not familiar with the necessity of balancing wildlife populations with available habitat; who don’t understand that deer herds or snow goose populations may need to be thinned; or even worse, who just aren’t interested in wildlife and wildlife habitat.”

- Former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director, Steve Williams

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