

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record and determined that the proposed Hunting and Fishing Plan for Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge in Madison and Tensas Parishes, Louisiana:

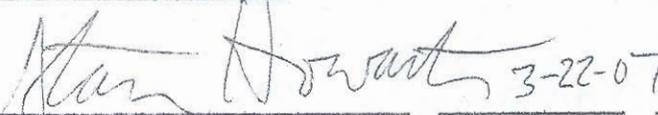
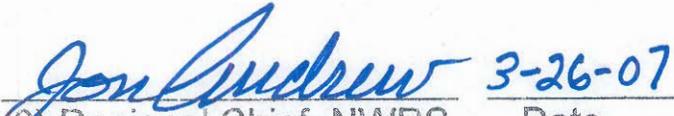
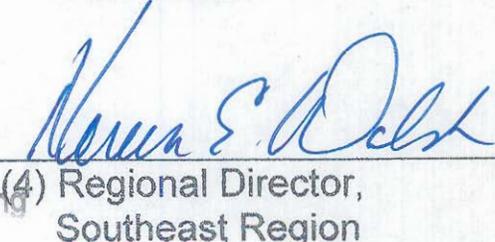
Check One:

- is a categorical exclusion as provided by 516 DM 2, Appendix 1 and 516 DM 6, Appendix 1, Section 1.4 A (4). No further NEPA documentation will therefore be made.
- is found not to have significant environmental effects as determined by the attached Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact.
- is found to have significant effects and, therefore, further consideration of this action will require a notice of intent to be published in the Federal Register announcing the decision to prepare an EIS.
- is not approved because of unacceptable environmental damage, or violation of Fish and Wildlife Service mandates, policy, regulations, or procedures.
- is an emergency action within the context of 40 CFR 1 506.1 1. Only those actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency will be taken. Other related actions remain subject to NEPA review.

Other Supporting Documents:

Endangered Species Act, Section 7 Consultation, 2007
Compatibility Determination, 2007

Signature Approval:

 _____ (1) Originator	3-22-07 _____ Date	 _____ (2) Regional Environmental Coordinator	03/26/07 _____ Date
 _____ (3) Regional Chief, NWRS, Southeast Region	3-26-07 _____ Date	 _____ (4) Regional Director, Southeast Region	4/6/07 _____ Date

Sport Hunting
Decision Document Package
for
TENSAS RIVER NWR

Contents

2. EA

Environmental Assessment

2007 Sport Hunt Plan

on

TENSAS RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
Madison, Texas, and Franklin Parishes, Louisiana

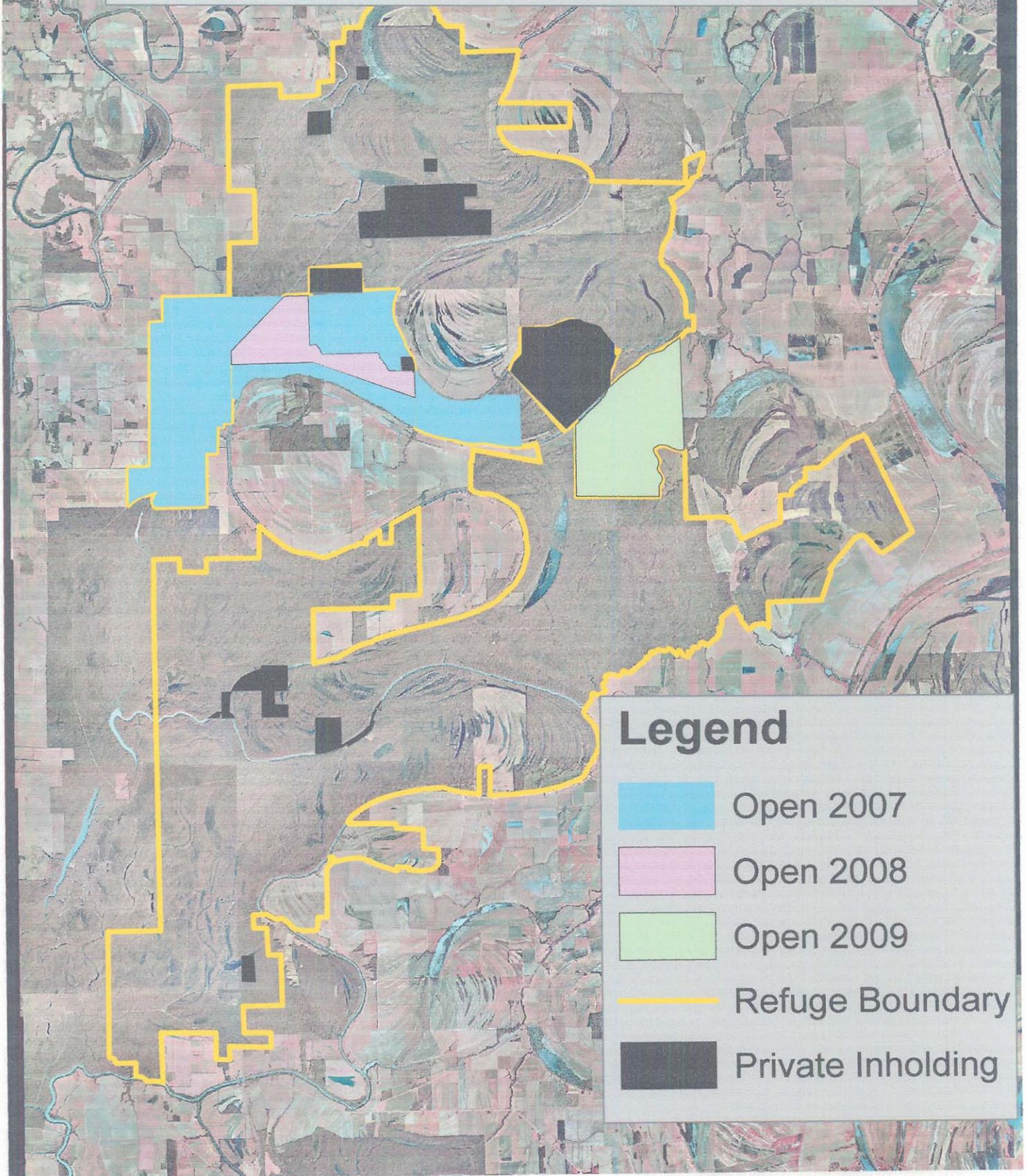
For Further Information, Contact:
Refuge Manager
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge
2312 Quebec Road
Tallulah, LA 71282

Prepared by:
U. S. Department of Interior
Tallulah, Louisiana
March 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION	3
Chapter 2	ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION	3
Chapter 3	AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT	4
Chapter 4	ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES	7
Chapter 5	CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION WITH OTHERS	21
Appendix 1	LITERATURE REFERENCES.....	22
Appendix 2	RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS.....	23

Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge Phased Expansion of Hunting



Chapter 1 Purpose and Need for Action

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.) provides authority for the Service to manage the Refuge and its wildlife populations. In addition it declares that compatible wildlife-dependent public uses are legitimate and appropriate uses of the Refuge System that are to receive priority consideration in planning and management. There are six wildlife-dependent public uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education and interpretation. It directs managers to increase recreational opportunities including hunting on National Wildlife Refuges when compatible with the purposes for which the Refuge was established and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment is to evaluate the feasibility of opening approximately 11,000 of newly acquired land to hunting according to current refuge regulations. These hunting regulations would be the same as those on currently open to hunting lands within the refuge (see 2007 Sport Hunting Plan Tensas River NWR).

The proposed action is needed to implement the 2007 Sport Hunting Plan for Tensas River NWR which would provide the public with a high quality recreational experience and provide the refuge with a wildlife management tool to promote the biological integrity of the refuge.

Chapter 2 Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

This chapter discusses the alternatives considered for hunting on Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge. These alternatives are the 1) no action which continues with current management of the hunt program and 2) proposed action which implements the Refuge's 2007 Sport Hunting Management Plan

2.1 No Action Alternative: Current Management

Under this alternative, hunting would be limited to the 67,000 acres currently open to hunting and to species currently allowed to be hunted, including deer, ducks, coots, snipe, woodcock, squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, coyote, skunk, turkey, and beaver.

2.2 Proposed Action: 2007 Sport Hunting Plan for Tensas River NWR

The proposed action would increase the number of acres open to hunting on Tensas River NWR, but would administratively limit it to those areas specified in the refuge-specific regulations. All or parts of the refuge may be closed to hunting at any time if necessary for public safety, to provide wildlife sanctuary, or for administrative reasons.

Chapter 3 Affected Environment

In an effort to preserve the largest privately owned tract of bottomland hardwoods remaining in the Mississippi Delta, Congress authorized the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge through Public Law 96-285 on June 28, 1980.

The refuge consists of 68,000 acres in fee title, and an additional 2,321 acres in other lands. It is located in the Tensas Basin on northeast Louisiana approximately 60 miles east of Monroe, LA and 25 miles west of Vicksburg, MS. The project selection area encompasses portions of Madison, Tensas, and Franklin parishes. The office/visitor center and maintenance facilities are located on the refuge approximately 12 miles southwest of Tallulah, Louisiana.

Most refuge lands were acquired from Chicago Mill and Lumber Company holdings. The project area, locally referred to as the Singer Tract, is literally an island of trees in a sea of agriculture. The refuge was acquired through a joint effort of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to mitigate the loss of fish and wildlife resources associated with six flood control projects under construction or being planned in this portion of the state. The mitigation lands were recommended by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act which calls for the wildlife resource to be considered along with other values associated with water resource development projects.

Refer to 2007 Sport Hunting Plan for Tensas River NWR for specific regulations

3.1 Physical Environment

The refuge is located on the Mississippi River Floodplain. This floodplain consists of lakes, backwater swamps, old stream channels, natural levees, and levee slopes. The predominant soils are heavy gumbo clays. Drainage is very important feature in determining the forest types in any given area of the refuge.

3.2 Vegetation

The predominant trees of the refuge are water oak, willow oak, cherrybark oak, Nuttall oak, overcup oak, sweetgum, sweet pecan, bitter pecan, honey locust, persimmon, cypress, green ash, American elm, cedar elm, willow, red maple, and hawthorns. Understory vegetation is primarily palmetto, switch cane, swamp privet, button bush, rattan, and dewberry/blackberry.

3.3 Wildlife Resources

Wildlife species found on the refuge are typical of bottomland hardwood forests, moist soils, and early successional habitat. The refuge provides habitat for thousands of

wintering ducks and year-round habitat for nesting wood ducks. Wading bird rookeries are located on the refuge, and thousands of wading and water birds, such as white ibis, herons, egrets, wood storks, cormorants, and anhingas, forage in the sloughs and bayous of the refuge. Many Neotropical migrants breed on the refuge while other species use the refuge during migration. Resident game species include fox and gray squirrels, swamp and eastern cottontail rabbits, and white-tailed deer. Furbearers present include opossum, muskrat, nutria, mink, river otter, beaver, red and gray foxes, and raccoon.

3.4 Threatened and Endangered Species

Tensas River Basin represents a core population area for the Louisiana black bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) and the bear is relatively common on the refuge and surrounding lands.

3.5 Fishery Resources

Tensas River NWR has abundant fisheries including bass, bream, crappie, catfish, bowfin, gar, buffalo, and carp in its lakes and bayous. Rainey Lake and Mower Woods ATV trails are open all year to provide access for fishing on these refuge lakes.

3.6 Cultural Resources

Each state has a historic preservation office which is responsible for nominating buildings, sites, districts, etc. to the *Register*. In Louisiana, this program is administered by the Division of Historic Preservation, which is part of the Office of Cultural Development, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism. None of the refuge sites covered by this assessment are known to be eligible for inclusion on the *National Register of Historic Places* at this time and they will not be designated as scientific sites. Official designation as scientific sites, as part of the planning process, also carries the risk of alerting illegal artifact collectors to the location of these sites. The Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 specifically prohibits making available to the general public the location of any archaeological site, if such notification may create a risk of harm to the site.

3.7 Socio Economic

Madison, Tensas, and Franklin Parishes are rural in character with an economy based on forest and agricultural products. Agriculture is dominated by cotton, rice, soybeans, and corn production.

Hunting is a traditional form of outdoor recreation for many people in Madison, Tensas, and Franklin Parishes and for some households, hunting participation provides food at a much cheaper cost. The number of licenses sold to hunters in Madison, Tensas, and Franklin Parishes during the 2004/05 hunting season was 1,113, 603 and 2,961 respectively (*LDWF, personal comm.*). After adjusting for the 15% of Louisiana hunters that are seniors over age 65 and youth under age 16 that are not required to buy licenses,

the number of hunters by parish increases to 1,247, 639 and 3,062 (*LDWF, personal comm.*). Many of the hunters who utilize the refuge come from surrounding parishes and states bringing with them a major financial boost to the local economy.

Chapter 4 Environmental Consequences

This chapter describes the foreseeable environmental consequences of implementing the two management alternatives in Chapter 2. When detailed information is available, a scientific and analytic comparison between alternatives and their anticipated consequences is presented, which is described as “impacts” or “effects.” When detailed information is not available, those comparisons are based on the professional judgment and experience of refuge staff and Service and State biologists

4.1 Effects Common to all Alternatives

4.1.1 Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations” was signed by President Bill Clinton on February 11, 1994, to focus federal attention on the environmental and human health conditions of minority and low-income populations with the goal of achieving environmental protection for all communities. The Order directed federal agencies to develop environmental justice strategies to aid in identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. The Order is also intended to promote nondiscrimination in federal programs substantially affecting human health and the environment, and to provide minority and low-income communities access to public information and participation in matters relating to human health or the environment. This assessment has not identified any adverse or beneficial effects for either alternative unique to minority or low-income populations in the affected area. Neither alternative will disproportionately place any adverse environmental, economic, social, nor health impacts on minority or low-income populations.

4.1.2 Public Health and Safety

Each alternative would have similar effects or minimal to negligible effects on human health and safety.

4.1.3 Refuge Physical Environment

Impacts of each alternative on the refuge physical environment would have similar minimal to negligible effects. Some disturbance to surface soils, topography, and vegetation would occur in areas selected for hunting; however effects would be minimal. Hunting would benefit vegetation as it is used to keep many resident wildlife populations in balance with the habitat’s carrying capacity. The refuge would also control access to minimize habitat degradation.

Impacts to the natural hydrology would have negligible effects. The refuge expects impacts to air and water quality to be minimal and only due to refuge visitors’ automobile and off-road vehicle emissions and run-off from road and trail sides. The effect of these

refuge-related activities on overall air and water quality in the region are anticipated to be relatively negligible. Existing State water quality criteria and use classifications are adequate to achieve desired on-refuge conditions; thus, implementation of the proposed action would not impact adjacent landowners or users beyond the constraints already implemented under existing State standards and laws.

Impacts associated with solitude are expected to be minimal given time and space zone management techniques, such as seasonal access and area closures, used to avoid conflicts among user groups.

4.1.4. Cultural Resources

Under each alternative, hunting, regardless of method or species targeted, is a consumptive activity that does not pose any threat to historic properties on and/or near the Refuge.

4.1.5. Facilities

Maintenance or improvement of existing facilities (i.e. parking areas, roads, trails, and boat ramps) will cause minimal short term impacts to localized soils and waters and may cause some wildlife disturbances and damage to vegetation.

4.2 Summary of Effects

4.2.1 Impacts to Habitat

No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, additional acreage would not be opened to deer, beaver and hog hunting. When deer are overpopulated, they overbrowse their habitat, which can change the structure and plant composition of a forest. The refuge has reforested approximately 20,000 acres with bottomland hardwood tree species in recent years. Young tree seedlings (1-9 years old) can be killed by overbrowsing. Bottomland hardwood forests are a threatened ecosystem. Failure to establish this forest would have negative impacts on future resident and non-resident wildlife populations as well as the purpose of the refuge. Beavers can kill thousands of acres of bottomland hardwood trees by damming sloughs and brakes. Forests inundated into the growing season quickly show signs of stress and trees eventually die. Beavers can have negative impacts on future resident and non-resident wildlife by killing large portions of the few remaining intact bottomland hardwood forests remaining in the United States.

Proposed Action Alternative

The biological integrity of the refuge would be protected under this alternative, and the refuge purpose of conserving wetlands for wildlife would be achieved. The hunting of beavers and deer would positively impact wildlife habitat by promoting plant health and

diversity, and increasing tree seedling survival. Hunting of beavers would decrease their populations and in effect, increase the health of forested wetlands.

The additional acreage would be utilized more by the public (hunters) than previously which might cause increased trampling of vegetation. Impacts to vegetation should be minor. Refuge-regulations would not permit the use of ATVs off of designated trails. Vehicles would be confined to existing roads and parking lots.

4.2.2 Impacts to Hunted Wildlife

No Action Alternative

Additional mortality of individual hunted animals would not occur under this alternative. Disturbance by hunters to hunted wildlife would not occur.

Deer, beaver, coyote, skunk, raccoon and opossum populations could increase above the habitat's carrying capacity in the area not opened to hunting. The likelihood of starvation and diseases, such as bluetongue and EHD in deer and distemper and rabies in raccoon, skunk, and opossum, would increase as would vehicle-deer collisions.

Proposed Action Alternative

Additional mortality of individual hunted animals would occur under this alternative, estimated by the refuge to be a maximum of 100 deer and 200 squirrels annually. Estimates for other hunted species (raccoon, opossum, rabbit, turkey, snipe, woodcock, skunk) would be less than 20 individuals per species. No waterfowl hunting would be permitted in the expansion area. Hunting causes some disturbance to not only the species being hunted but other game species as well. However, time and space zoning established by refuge regulations would minimize incidental disturbance.

Hunting of deer, beaver, coyote, raccoon, skunk, and opossum would help maintain their populations at or below carrying-capacity. The likelihood of starvation and diseases, such as bluetongue and EHD in deer and distemper and rabies in raccoon, skunk, and opossum, would be decreased as would deer-vehicle collisions.

4.2.3 Impacts to Non-hunted Wildlife

No Action Alternative

Ground and shrub nesting birds and turtles are subject to high egg depredation rates if raccoon, coyotes, and opossum populations are not kept in check through harvest. In North Louisiana, research conducted on one population of alligator snapping turtles has shown that raccoons are responsible for depredating 93% of turtle nests (USFWS 2002).

Proposed Action Alternative

Populations of raccoon, coyotes, skunks, and opossum would be decreased through

hunting under this alternative. Depredation rates of songbirds, turkeys, turtles and their nests would decrease.

Disturbance to non-hunted wildlife would increase slightly. However, significant disturbance would be unlikely for the following reasons. Small mammals, including bats, are inactive during winter when hunting season occurs. These species are also nocturnal. Both of these qualities make hunter interactions with small mammals very rare. Hibernation or torpor by cold-blood reptiles and amphibians also limits their activity during the hunting season when temperatures are low. Hunters would rarely encounter reptiles and amphibians during most of the hunting season. Invertebrates are also not active during cold weather and would have few interactions with hunters during the hunting season.

Whitetail deer hunters are restricted to mature forest during the lottery modern firearms hunt, thus only the wooded area around Indian Lake will be utilized during the peak days. Whitetail deer hunters using muzzleloaders will be allowed to utilize the area for three days in January. Because the entire refuge will be open during this hunt, hunter density will likely be low. During the archery season, hunter density is extremely low and has little impact on wildlife.

Refuge regulations further mitigate possible disturbance by hunters to non-hunted wildlife. Vehicles are restricted to roads and the harassment or taking of any wildlife other than the game species legal for the season is not permitted. Disturbance to the daily wintering activities, such as feeding and resting, of birds might occur, but would be transitory as hunters traverse habitat. Disturbance to birds by hunters would probably be commensurate with that caused by non-consumptive users.

4.2.4 Impacts to Endangered and Threatened Species

No Action Alternative

Because current public use levels on the refuge would remain the same, there would be no increased chance of adversely affecting threatened and endangered species.

Proposed Action Alternative

A potential disadvantage of this alternative is its effect on threatened Louisiana black bear. However, a Section 7 Evaluation associated with this assessment was conducted, and it was determined that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect these species (Refer to 2007 Section 7 Evaluation for Sport Hunting on Tensas River NWR).

4.2.5 Impacts to Refuge Facilities (roads, trails, parking lots, levees)

No Action Alternative

Additional damage to roads and ATV trails due to hunter use during wet weather periods would not occur; however, other users would still be using roads, thereby necessitating

periodic maintenance. Additionally, costs associated with an expanded hunting program in the form of road and levee maintenance, instructional sign needs, and law enforcement would be decreased but road maintenance for refuge personnel access and sign needs and law enforcement to enforce no hunting policy would still occur.

Proposed Action Alternative

Additional damage to roads and ATV trails due to hunter use during wet weather periods might occur. The current refuge hunt program on 68,000 acres for the past three decades has shown these impacts to be minimal. There would be some costs associated with a hunting program in the form of road and ATV trail maintenance, instructional sign needs, and law enforcement. These costs should be minimal relative to total refuge operations and maintenance costs and would not diminish resources dedicated to other refuge management programs.

4.2.6 Impacts to Wildlife Dependant Recreation

No Action Alternative

The public would not have the opportunity to harvest a renewable resource, participate in wildlife-oriented recreation that is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established, have an increased awareness of Tensas River NWR and the National Wildlife Refuge System; nor would the Service be meeting public use demand. Public relations would not be enhanced with the local community.

Proposed Action Alternative

As public use levels expand across time, unanticipated conflicts between user groups may occur. Experience has proven that time and space zoning (e.g., establishment of separate use areas, use periods, and restrictions on the number of users) is an effective tool in eliminating conflicts between user groups. Squirrel and rabbit hunters would not be able to use dogs until after the last deer gun hunt to ensure conflicts do not arise. Raccoon and opossum hunting (which the State allows to be open all year) would be limited to the squirrel and rabbit season during daylight hours and limited to January and December at nighttime. This would limit conflicts between raccoon/opossum hunters and deer gun hunters. This would also limit disturbance to wildlife during the spring and summer when most species reproduce. Conflicts between hunters and non-consumptive users might occur but would be mitigated by time (non-hunting season) and space zoning. The refuge would focus non-consumptive use (mainly birdwatching and other wildlife viewing) in the 1,600 acres that is closed to hunting.

The public would be allowed to harvest a renewable resource, and the refuge would be promoting a wildlife-oriented recreational opportunity that is compatible with the purpose for which the refuge was established. The public would have an increased awareness of Tensas River NWR and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public demand for more hunting would be met. The public would also have the opportunity to harvest a

renewable resource in a traditional manner, which is culturally important to the local community. This alternative would also allow the public to enjoy hunting at no or little cost in a region where private land is leased for hunting, often costing a person \$300-\$2000/year for membership. This alternative would allow youth the opportunity to experience a wildlife-dependant recreation, instill an appreciation for and understanding of wildlife, the natural world and the environment and promote a land ethic and environmental awareness.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts Analysis

4.3.1 Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of Proposed Action on Wildlife Species.

4.3.1.1 Migratory Birds

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, working with partners, annually prescribe frameworks, or outer limits, for dates and times when hunting may occur and the number of birds that may be taken and possessed. These frameworks are necessary to allow State selections of season and limits for recreation and sustenance; aid Federal, State, and tribal governments in the management of migratory game birds; and permit harvests at levels compatible with population status and habitat conditions. Because the Migratory Bird Treaty Act stipulates that all hunting seasons for migratory game birds are closed unless specifically opened by the Secretary of the Interior, the Service annually promulgates regulations (50 CFR Part 20) establishing the frameworks from which States may select season dates, bag limits, shooting hours, and other options for the each migratory bird hunting season. The frameworks are essentially permissive in that hunting of migratory birds would not be permitted without them. Thus, in effect, Federal annual regulations both allow and limit the hunting of migratory birds.

Migratory game birds are those bird species so designated in conventions between the United States and several foreign nations for the protection and management of these birds. Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C. 703-712), the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to determine when "hunting, taking, capture, killing, possession, sale, purchase, shipment, transportation, carriage, or export of any ... bird, or any part, nest, or egg" of migratory game birds can take place, and to adopt regulations for this purpose. These regulations are written after giving due regard to "the zones of temperature and to the distribution, abundance, economic value, breeding habits, and times and lines of migratory flight of such birds, and are updated annually (16 U.S.C. 704(a)). This responsibility has been delegated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as the lead federal agency for managing and conserving migratory birds in the United States. Acknowledging regional differences in hunting conditions, the Service has administratively divided the nation into four Flyways for the primary purpose of managing migratory game birds. Each Flyway (Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific) has a Flyway Council, a formal organization generally composed of one member from each State and Province in that Flyway. Tensas River NWR is within the Mississippi Flyway.

The process for adopting migratory game bird hunting regulations, located in 50 CFR part 20, is constrained by three primary factors. Legal and administrative considerations dictate how long the rule making process will last. Most importantly, however, the biological cycle of migratory game birds controls the timing of data-gathering activities and thus the dates on which these results are available for consideration and deliberation. The process of adopting migratory game bird hunting regulations includes two separate regulations-development schedules, based on "early" and "late" hunting season regulations. Early hunting seasons pertain to all migratory game bird species in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands; migratory game birds other than waterfowl (e.g. dove, woodcock, etc.); and special early waterfowl seasons, such as teal or resident Canada geese. Early hunting seasons generally begin prior to October 1. Late hunting seasons generally start on or after October 1 and include most waterfowl seasons not already established. There are basically no differences in the processes for establishing either early or late hunting seasons. For each cycle, Service biologists and others gather, analyze, and interpret biological survey data and provide this information to all those involved in the process through a series of published status reports and presentations to Flyway Councils and other interested parties (USFWS 2006).

Currently, Tensas River NWR has an average harvest of 500 ducks (primarily Mallards and Wood Ducks) over 48,000 huntable acres, per season. Under the proposed action, Tensas River NWR estimates a maximum addition of 100 ducks harvested. Waterfowl hunting is only allowed four days per week, ending at noon each day during the season. These regulations are much more restrictive than regulations set forth by Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). This harvest impact represents 0.001% of Louisiana's four-year average harvest of 921,990 ducks (USFWS 2005). Expansion of waterfowl hunting on an additional 11,000 acres should not have cumulative impacts on waterfowl populations.

Because the Service is required to take abundance of migratory birds and other factors in to consideration, the Service undertakes a number of surveys throughout the year in conjunction with the Canadian Wildlife Service, State and Provincial wildlife-management agencies, and others. To determine the appropriate frameworks for each species, the Service considers factors such as population size and trend, geographical distribution, annual breeding effort, the condition of breeding and wintering habitat, the number of hunters, and the anticipated harvest. After frameworks are established for season lengths, bag limits, and areas for migratory game bird hunting, migratory game bird management becomes a cooperative effort of State and Federal Governments. After Service establishment of final frameworks for hunting seasons, the States may select season dates, bag limits, and other regulatory options for the hunting seasons. States may always be more conservative in their selections than the Federal frameworks but never more liberal. Season dates and bag limits for National Wildlife Refuges open to hunting are never longer or larger than the State regulations. In fact, based upon the findings of an environmental assessment developed when a National Wildlife Refuge opens a new hunting activity, season dates and bag limits may be more restrictive than the State allows. At Tensas River NWR, season length is more restrictive for waterfowl and doves than the State allows.

NEPA considerations by the Service for hunted migratory game bird species are addressed by the programmatic document, "Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement: Issuance of Annual Regulations Permitting the Sport Hunting of Migratory Birds (FSES 88-14)," filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on June 9, 1988. We published Notice of Availability in the Federal Register on June 16, 1988 (53 FR 22582), and our Record of Decision on August 18, 1988 (53 FR 31341). Annual NEPA considerations for waterfowl hunting frameworks are covered under a separate Environmental Assessment, "Duck Hunting Regulations for 2006-07," and an August 24, 2006, Finding of No Significant Impact. Further, in a notice published in the September 8, 2005, Federal Register (70 FR 53376), the Service announced its intent to develop a new Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the migratory bird hunting program. Public scoping meetings were held in the spring of 2006, as announced in a March 9, 2006, Federal Register notice (71 FR 12216). More information may be obtained from: Chief, Division of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, MS MBSP-4107-ARLSQ, 1849 C Street, NWR, Washington, DC 20240.

Although woodcock are showing declines in numbers on their breeding grounds, habitat loss is considered to be the culprit, not hunting. This assertion was tested in a study conducted by the U.S. Geological Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in 2005 (McAuley *et al.* 2005). Results showed no significant differences in woodcock survival between hunted and non-hunted areas. Furthermore, the authors concluded that hunting was not having a considerable impact on woodcock numbers in the Northeast (McAuley *et al.* 2005).

An estimated 24,000 woodcock were harvested in the 2005/06 season in the state of Louisiana. Louisiana's harvest of 24,000 woodcock represented 0.5% of the estimated 4.6 million North American woodcock population. With such relatively few woodcock being currently harvested on the refuge, the opening of additional acreage to hunting as stated in the proposed action should have no cumulative effects on their local, regional or flyway populations.

4.3.1.2 Resident Big Game

4.3.1.2.1 Deer

Deer hunting does not have regional population impacts due to restricted home ranges. The average home range of a male deer in Mississippi is $1,511 \pm 571$ S.D hectares. (Mott *et al.* 1985). Therefore, only local impacts occur. The Louisiana Dept of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) recorded deer harvest rates on lands adjacent to the refuge from 1993-2003 on a 25,000-acre management area. An average of 213 deer per year was harvested during the 10-year period. Average weights of deer and lactation rates of females remained stable throughout (LDWF 2003). LDWF biologists sought to hold an extra either-sex hunt to further reduce the deer herd but were unable due to a lack of funding (LDWF, *personal comm.*).

Tensas River NWR has a large data set of deer herd health indices collected at hunter check stations since 1983. Since 1999, data from check stations have shown a decline in all the major health indicators. Browse surveys that have shown heavy utilization of preferred plant species. Deer herd health checks are conducted every 5 years on the refuge by the Southeast Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study in Georgia. In 2005, the health check found heavy parasite loads in deer examined on the refuge. All of the current data indicate a deer population at or above carrying capacity of the habitat. In order to protect the habitat from over browsing and prevent disease outbreaks, harvest is needed to keep the population in balance.

Harvest and survey data confirm that decades of deer hunting on surrounding private lands (using bait and a longer season) have not had a local cumulative adverse effect on the deer population. LDWF estimate 209,200 deer were harvested throughout the state in 2005/06. The average annual statewide harvest since 1995 is 234,000 deer. The refuge estimates an additional maximum 100 deer would be harvested under the proposed action, representing only 0.04% of the long-term average state harvest. Expansion of hunting on 11,000 acres of refuge lands for restrictive deer hunting should not have cumulative impacts on the deer herd.

4.3.1.2.2 Wild Turkey

Turkeys are non-migratory and therefore hunting only impacts the local population. State biologists with LDWF have trapped and banded turkeys in North Louisiana for the past several years. Data from banding indicate that turkey harvest rates of 15 % for north Louisiana during 2002-06 is well below the scientifically accepted threshold of 30% (Vangilder 1992). These data indicate that the local turkey population has withstood hunting on surrounding private lands for several years without cumulative effects on turkeys. Therefore the refuge should not cumulatively impact the population.

4.3.1.3 Small Game (Squirrel, Rabbit, Raccoon, Opossum, Coyote, Beaver and Skunk)

Squirrels, rabbit, raccoon, skunk, and opossum cannot be affected regionally by refuge hunting because of their limited home ranges. Only local effects will be discussed. Opossum and raccoon are hunted primarily at night. Raccoon are more sought after than opossum by the public. Hunting helps regulate opossum and raccoon populations; however, unless the popularity of this type of hunting increases, raccoons, skunks, and opossums numbers will always be higher than desired. When these species become extremely overabundant, diseases such as distemper and rabies reduce the populations. However, waiting for disease outbreak to regulate their numbers can be a human health hazard. Cumulative impacts to raccoon, skunk, and opossum are unlikely considering they reproduce quickly, are difficult to hunt due to their nocturnal habits, and are not as popular for hunting as other game species.

Studies have been conducted within and outside of Louisiana to determine the effects of hunting on the population dynamics of small game. Results from studies have

consistently shown that small game, such as rabbits and squirrels, are not affected by hunting, but rather are limited by food resources. The refuge consulted with biologists at LDWF in association with this assessment on the cumulative impacts of hunting on rabbits and squirrel. The statewide Louisiana harvest for 2005/06 was estimated at 1,253,900. On Tensas NWR, hunters harvested 1,434 squirrels in the 2005/06 season, representing 0.0011% of the state's harvest. LDWF estimated 255,200 rabbits killed by hunters in the 2005/06 season. On Tensas NWR, hunters harvested 6 rabbits in the 2005/06 season, representing <0.0001% of the state's harvest. Gray squirrels, fox squirrels, eastern cottontails, and swamp rabbits are prolific breeders and their populations have never been threatened by hunting in Louisiana even prior to the passing of hunting regulations as we know them today.

Coyotes and beaver cannot be affected regionally by refuge hunting because of their limited home ranges. Only local effects will be discussed. Coyotes and beaver reproduce rapidly, are overpopulated, and can have adverse effects on their habitats. Coyotes depredate small mammals, songbirds and their nests, turkey and quail nests and any other animal they opportunistically encounter. When coyote numbers are high, local wildlife populations can be negatively affected. Coyotes are probably the most resilient species in North America. Today regulated hunting has no negative cumulative impact on their populations. Hunting of both coyotes and beaver is beneficial in helping meet refuge objectives.

4.3.1.4 Non-hunted Wildlife

Non-hunted wildlife would include non-hunted migratory birds such as songbirds, wading birds, raptors, and woodpeckers; small mammals such as voles, moles, mice, shrews, and bats; reptiles and amphibians such as snakes, skinks, turtles, lizards, salamanders, frogs and toads; and invertebrates such as butterflies, moths, other insects and spiders. Except for migratory birds and some species of migratory bats, butterflies and moths, these species have very limited home ranges and hunting could not affect their populations regionally; thus, only local effects will be discussed.

Disturbance to non-hunted migratory birds could have regional, local, and flyway effects. Regional and flyway effects would not be applicable to species that do not migrate such as most woodpeckers, and some songbirds including cardinals, titmice, wrens, chickadees, etc. The cumulative effects of disturbance to non-hunted migratory birds under the proposed action are expected to be negligible for the following reasons. Hunting season would not coincide with the nesting season. Long-term future impacts that could occur if reproduction was reduced by hunting are not relevant for this reason. Disturbance to the daily wintering activities, such as feeding and resting, of birds might occur. Disturbance to birds by hunters would probably be commensurate with that caused by non-consumptive users.

The cumulative effects of disturbance to non-hunted migratory birds under the proposed action are expected to be negligible for the following reasons. However, disturbance would be unlikely for the following reasons. Small mammals, including bats, are inactive

during winter when hunting season occurs. These species are also nocturnal. Both of these qualities make hunter interactions with small mammals very rare. Hibernation or torpor by cold-blood reptiles and amphibians also limits their activity during the hunting season when temperatures are low. Hunters would rarely encounter reptiles and amphibians during most of the hunting season. Encounters with reptiles and amphibians in the early fall are few and should not have cumulative effects on reptile and amphibian populations. Invertebrates are also not active during cold weather and would have few interactions with hunters during the hunting season. Refuge regulations further mitigate possible disturbance by hunters to non-hunted wildlife. Vehicles are restricted to roads and the harassment or taking of any wildlife other than the game species legal for the season is not permitted.

Although ingestion of lead-shot by non-hunted wildlife could be a cumulative impact, it is not relevant to Tensas River NWR because the use of lead shot would not be permitted on the refuge for any type of hunting except turkey hunting. Turkey hunters do not shoot as often as other hunters and hunting generally occurs on the higher ridges where wildlife are not likely to ingest the shot.

Some species of bats, butterflies and moths are migratory. Cumulative effects to these species at the “flyway” level should be negligible. These species are in torpor or have completely passed through North Louisiana by peak hunting season in Nov-Jan. Some hunting occurs during September and October when these species are migrating; however, hunter interaction would be commensurate with that of non-consumptive users.

4.3.1.5 Endangered Species

The only endangered and threatened species that utilizes the refuge is the Louisiana black bear. A Section 7 Evaluation was conducted in association with this assessment for opening hunting on Tensas River NWR. It was determined that the proposed alternative would not likely affect this threatened species.

Refer to the Section 7 Evaluation for the 2007 Sport Hunting on Tensas River NWR for more information.

4.3.2 Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of Proposed Action on Refuge Programs, Facilities, and Cultural Resources.

4.3.2.1 Wildlife-Dependant Recreation

As public use levels expand across time, unanticipated conflicts between user groups may occur. The Refuge’s visitor use programs would be adjusted as needed to eliminate or minimize each problem and provide quality wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities. Experience has proven that time and space zoning (e.g., establishment of separate use areas, use periods, and restrictions on the number of users) is an effective tool in eliminating conflicts between user groups.

The level of recreation use and ground-based disturbance from visitors would be largely

concentrated at trails and the Refuge's office and maintenance areas. This, combined with the addition of increased hunting opportunity, could have a negative effect on nesting bird populations. However, the hunting season (except for turkey hunting) is during the winter and not during most birds' nesting period.

The opportunities for hunting would expand under the proposed action. High deer numbers are recognized as a problem causing crop damage, reducing some forest understory species, and reducing reforestation seedling survival. Hunting would be used to keep the deer herd and other resident wildlife in balance with the habitat's carrying capacity, resulting in long-term positive impacts on wildlife habitat.

The refuge would control access under this alternative to minimize wildlife disturbance and habitat degradation, while allowing current and proposed compatible wildlife-dependent recreation. Some areas, such as waterfowl sanctuaries, would be closed seasonally to hunting to minimize disturbance to wintering waterfowl.

4.3.2.2 Refuge Facilities

The Service defines facilities as: "Real property that serves a particular function(s) such as buildings, roads, utilities, water control structures, raceways, etc." Under the proposed action those facilities most utilized by hunters are: roads, parking lots, trails and boat launching ramps. Maintenance or improvement of existing facilities (i.e. parking areas, roads, trails, and boat ramps) will cause minimal short term impacts to localized soils and waters and may cause some wildlife disturbances and damage to vegetation. The facility maintenance and improvement activities described are periodically conducted to accommodate daily refuge management operations and general public uses such as wildlife observation and photography. These activities will be conducted at times (seasonal and/or daily) to cause the least amount of disturbance to wildlife. Siltation barriers will be used to minimize soil erosion, and all disturbed sites will be restored to as natural a condition as possible. During times when roads are impassible due to flood events or other natural causes those roads, parking lots, trails and boat ramps impacted by the event will be closed to vehicular use.

4.3.2.3 Cultural Resources

Hunting, regardless of method or species targeted, is a consumptive activity that does not pose any threat to historic properties on and/or near the Refuge. In fact, hunting meets only one of the two criteria used to identify an "undertaking" that triggers a federal agency's need to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. These criteria, which are delineated in 36 CFR Part 800, state:

- 1- an undertaking is any project, activity, or program that can alter the character or use of an archaeological or historic site located within the "area of potential effect;" and
- 2- the project, activity, or program must also be either funded, sponsored, performed, licensed, or have received assistance from the agency.

Consultation with the pertinent State Historic Preservation Office and federally recognized Tribes are, therefore, not required.

4.3.2.4 Anticipated Impacts of Proposed Hunt on Refuge Environment and Community.

The refuge expects no sizeable adverse impacts of the proposed action on the refuge environment which consists of soils, vegetation, air quality, water quality and solitude. Some disturbance to surface soils and vegetation would occur in areas selected for hunting; however impacts would be minimal. Hunting would benefit vegetation as it is used to keep many resident wildlife populations in balance with the habitat's carrying capacity. The refuge would also control access to minimize habitat degradation.

The refuge expects impacts to air and water quality to be minimal and only due to refuge visitors' automobile and off-road vehicle emissions and run-off on road and trail sides. The effect of these refuge-related activities, as well as other management activities, on overall air and water quality in the region are anticipated to be relatively negligible, compared to the contributions of industrial centers, power plants, and non-refuge vehicle traffic. Existing State water quality criteria and use classifications are adequate to achieve desired on-refuge conditions; thus, implementation of the proposed action would not impact adjacent landowners or users beyond the constraints already implemented under existing State standards and laws.

Impacts associated with solitude are expected to be minimal given time and space zone management techniques, such as seasonal access and area closures, used to avoid conflicts among user groups.

The refuge would work closely with State, Federal, and private partners to minimize impacts to adjacent lands and its associated natural resources; however, no indirect or direct impacts are anticipated. The newly opened hunts would result in a net gain of public hunting opportunities positively impacting the general public, nearby residents, and refuge visitors. The refuge expects increased visitation and tourism to bring additional revenues to local communities but not a significant increase in overall revenue in any area.

4.3.2.5 Other Past, Present, Proposed, and Reasonably Foreseeable Hunts and Anticipated Impacts

Cumulative effects on the environment result from incremental effects of a proposed action when these are added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. While cumulative effects may result from individually minor actions, they may, viewed as a whole, become substantial over time. The proposed hunt plan has been designed so as to be sustainable through time given relatively stable conditions. Changes in refuge conditions, such as sizeable increases in refuge acreage or public use, are likely

to change the anticipated impacts of the current plan and would trigger a new hunt planning and assessment process.

The implementation of any of the proposed actions described in this assessment includes actions relating to the refuge hunt program (see 2007 Sport Hunting Plan for Tensas River). These actions would have both direct and indirect effects (e.g., new site inclusion would result in increased public use, thus increasing vehicular traffic, disturbance, etc); however, the cumulative effects of these actions are not expected to be substantial.

The past refuge hunting program has been very similar to the proposed action in season lengths, species hunted, and bag limits. Changes to the hunt program in the past decade have been made to open hunting on more land within the refuge. These lands were usually those that had been recently acquired. The refuge does not foresee any changes to the proposed action in the way of increasing the intensity of hunting in the future.

4.3.2.6 Anticipated Impacts if Individual Hunts are Allowed to Accumulate

National Wildlife Refuges, including Tensas River NWR, conduct hunting programs within the framework of State and Federal regulations. Tensas River NWR is at least as restrictive as the State of Louisiana (squirrel, rabbit, woodcock) and in many cases more restrictive (deer, hog, waterfowl, raccoon, opossum, coyote, beaver). By maintaining hunting regulations that are as, or more, restrictive than the State, individual refuges ensure that they are maintaining seasons which are supportive of management on a more regional basis. The proposed hunt plan has been reviewed and is supported by the Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries. Additionally, refuges coordinate with LDWF annually to maintain regulations and programs that are consistent with the State management program.

Chapter 5 Consultation and Coordination with Others

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) concurs and fully supports the regulated consumptive public use of the natural resources associated with the Tensas River NWR (Refer to Letters of Concurrence). The Fish and Wildlife Service also provided an in depth review by the Regional Office personnel and staff biologists. Numerous contacts were made throughout the area of the refuge soliciting comments, views, and ideas into the development of the accompanying hunting plan.

Appendix 1 Literature References

- Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries. 2003. Deer harvest summary 1994-2003: Georgia Pacific Wildlife Management Area. Technical Report. District II, Monroe, Louisiana.
- Mott, S.E., R.L. Tucker, D.C. Gwynn, H.A. Jacobson. 1985. Use of Mississippi bottomland hardwoods by white-tailed deer. *Proceedings of the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies* 39: 403-411.
- McAuley, D.G, J.R. Longcore, D.A. Clugston, R. B. Allen, A. Weik, S. Staats, G.F. Sepik, Wl Halteman. 2005. Effects of hunting on survival of American woodcock in the northeast. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 69(4): 1565-1577.
- Savage, L. 2005. Wild turkey poult production survey 2005. Technical Report. Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1988. Forest Habitat Management Plan, Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge, Union and Morehouse Parishes, Louisiana.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2002. Alligator Snapping Turtle Nest Survey at Black Bayou Lake NWR, Monroe, Louisiana.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2003. Recovery plan for the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*): second revision. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Atlanta, GA. 296 pp.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2005. Waterfowl harvest and population survey data: Estimates of U.S. harvest, hunting activity, and success derived from the state-federal cooperative harvest information program. Division of Migratory Bird Management, Columbia, Missouri, 92 pp.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2006. Waterfowl population status, 2006. Division of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel, Maryland, 60 pp.
- Vangilder, L.D. 1992. Population dynamics. Pages 144-164 in J.G. Dickson, *ed.* The wild turkey: biology and management. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg.

Appendix 2 Response to Public Comments

The Service solicited public comment for the 2007 Sport Hunt Plan and associated Environmental Assessment. The 30-day review period began February 16, 2007 and ended on March 17, 2007. Copies of the document were placed in two libraries within two parishes, and news releases announcing its availability for comment were placed in the largest regional newspaper.

Nine comments by the public were received, eight of which were in favor of the Proposed Action to implement the 2007 Sport Hunt Plan which would open hunting on an additional 10,948.2 acres on the Tensas River NWR. One comment, by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) was negative. Comments by the HSUS are summarized and responded to below.

The HSUS “objects to the inadequate notice and amount of time for commenting” on the document. The Service solicited comments during the 30-day review period from February 16 through March 17, 2007. Announcements of the public review period were placed in the largest regional newspaper and copies of the document were placed in two libraries within two parishes.

The HSUS stated that the Refuge Improvement Act does not “relieve the [Service] of its obligations to consider the environmental impacts of, and alternatives to, the agency’s decisions with regard to hunting...” Comment is noted.

The HSUS states that the Service must ensure the availability of sufficient funds before approving hunting on the refuge. This comment refers to the Refuge Recreation Act. Sufficient funds are available to implement the 2007 Sport Hunt Plan for Tensas River NWR as stated within the hunt plan on pages 6 and 7.

The HSUS states they are opposed to the hunt plan and believe it violates the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comment is noted.

The HSUS states that the environmental assessment “fails to comport with the Court’s August 2006 decision”, referring to court case The Fund for Animals v. Hall. The Service notes the comment.

The HSUS states that the Service has not completed the Refuges 2003 Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Service notes the comment.

The HSUS states that the hunt plan and environmental assessment must provide a purpose and need for hunting on the refuge. The Service notes the comment.

The HSUS believes that there are adverse impacts by refuge uses for the past few decades and that an EIS is needed. The Service notes the comment.

The HSUS states that the Service must complete a Section 7 evaluation. Tensas River NWR completed a Section 7 evaluation as part of the hunt plan and assessment.

The HSUS states that the Service has compromised the biological integrity of refuges by allowing hunting and that the Service does not consider impacts of hunters on non-consumptive users. The HSUS also claims that hunting and the number of hunters is decreasing and the Service has not capitalized on potential economic gain that would come from non-consumptive users. The Service notes these comments.

The HSUS states that deer overpopulation is not a scientific term and that deer herbivory that changes plant communities is not necessarily negative. Numerous studies have been published on the negative impacts of overpopulated deer on native vegetation and plant communities. Based on the best biological information available and refuge staff expertise, the Service holds to the view that overpopulated deer have negative impacts on vegetation.

The HSUS states that woodcock, American black ducks, greater and lesser scaup, and king rails should not be hunted because their populations are declining. The Service relies on the Migratory Bird Frameworks to set hunting regulations of migratory birds annually. The Frameworks are based on the best biological information available.

The HSUS states that the environmental assessment “does not adequately address the cumulative impacts of hunting across the entire Refuge system nor even, for that matter, the region of the state in which the refuge resides”. The comment is noted for the entire refuge system. The Service revised cumulative impact analysis to ensure it was adequately addressed at the state level. The refuge fits its hunting program within the State of Louisiana’s regulations which take into consideration the cumulative impacts of hunting across the state.

The HSUS states that the environmental assessment does not adequately address the cumulative direct and indirect impacts of hunting on wildlife recreation, refuge facilities, cultural resources, the environment, and the community. The Service notes the comment.

The HSUS states that the environmental assessment does not consider temporal or monetary investments necessary to isolate consumptive and non-consumptive users on the refuge. The Service notes the comment.

The HSUS states that in the cumulative impacts analysis, the environmental assessment states in the beginning that cumulative effects “may result from individually minor action, they may, viewed as a whole, become substantial over time”, and then later, states “... the cumulative effects of these actions are not expected to be substantial.” The HSUS feels these two statements are contradictory. The Service disagrees. The first statement is the context for why a cumulative impact analysis is conducted and the

second statement is the Service's conclusion after the analysis is completed.

The HSUS states that the environmental assessment does not justify the cumulative impacts of hunting on targeted wildlife species. The Service notes the comment.

Hunting
Decision Document Package
for
TENSAS RIVER NWR

Contents

3. FONSI

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

2007 Sport Hunting Plan for Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to expand areas open to hunting by 11,029 acres on Tensas River NWR. Hunting activities will be permitted, but administratively limited to those areas specified in the refuge-specific regulations. All or parts of the refuge may be closed to hunting at any time if necessary for public safety, to provide wildlife sanctuary, or for other reasons. Alternatives considered included: proposed action and no action.

The Service has analyzed the following alternatives to the proposal in an Environmental Assessment (copy attached):

No action alternative - Under this alternative, hunting would be limited to areas currently open to hunting and to species currently allowed to be hunted. There would be no change to current public use and wildlife management programs.

Proposed action Under this alternative, hunting would be expanded on 4,762 acres on Tensas River NWR and a limited youth turkey hunt would be opened.

The preferred alternative was selected over the other alternatives because:

1. The preferred alternative would allow the refuge to manage wildlife populations, allow the public to harvest a renewable resource, promote a wildlife-oriented recreational opportunity, increase awareness of Tensas River NWR and the National Wildlife Refuge System, and meet public demand.
2. The preferred alternative is compatible with general Service policy regarding the establishment of hunting on National Wildlife Refuges.
3. The preferred alternative is compatible with the purpose for which Tensas River NWR was established.
4. This proposal does not initiate widespread controversy or litigation.
5. There are no conflicts with local, state, regional, or federal plans or policies.

Implementation of the agency's decision would be expected to result in the following environmental, social, and economic effects:

1. The refuge could better manage wildlife populations.
2. This would allow the public to harvest a renewable resource.
3. The public would have increased opportunity for wildlife-oriented recreation.
4. Local businesses would benefit from hunters visiting from surrounding parishes.

5. The Service will be perceived as a good steward of the land by continuing traditional uses of land in Louisiana and by allowing youth an opportunity to learn about hunting.

Measures to mitigate and/or minimize adverse effects have been incorporated into the proposal. These measures include:

1. Hunting will be limited to muzzleloader and archery in reforested fields.
2. Baiting will be prohibited. Attractants work to decrease the secretive nature of black bears. Controlling use of baits should nearly eliminate human-bear contacts.
3. An aggressive refuge law enforcement program and closely regulated hunting season will ensure hunt regulation compliance and will protect refuge resources.

The proposal is not expected to have any significant adverse effects on wetlands and flood plains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988 because this area has historically had a high use of recreational hunting with no detrimental long-term effect on wetlands.

The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. Parties contacted include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Ecological Services, Lafayette, LA
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Office of the Secretary, Wildlife Division

Copies of the Environmental Assessment are available by writing:

Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge
2312 Quebec Road
Tallulah, LA 71282

Therefore, it is my determination that the proposal does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the National Environment Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an environmental impact statement is not required. This determination is based on the following factors (40 CFR 1508.27):

(for each factor list the page numbers of the EA where the factor was discussed.)

1. **Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered and this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment (EA, page 7-11)**

2. The actions will not have a significant effect on public health and safety (EA, page 6).
3. The project will not significantly effect any unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historical or cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (EA, page 7, 10, 17).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, page 5).
5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, page 6, 7).
6. The actions will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (EA, pages 19).
7. There will be no cumulative significant impacts on the environment. Cumulative impacts have been analyzed with consideration of other similar activities on adjacent lands, in past action, and in foreseeable future actions (EA, pages 11-19).
8. The actions will not significantly affect any site listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places, nor will they cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (EA, pages 7, 19).
9. The actions are not likely to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, or their habitats (Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation Form attached to EA).
10. The actions will not lead to a violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pages 19).

References: Environmental Assessment of 2007 Sport Hunt Plan for Tensas River NWR, Hunting Plan, Compatibility Determination, Letters of Concurrence, Refuge-specific Regulations, Intra-Service Section 7 Evaluation

for Mark E. Walsh
Regional Director

4/6/07
Date