

Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge Hunt Plan

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge
% Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge
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HUTTON LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WATERFOWL HUNTING PLAN

I. Introduction

National wildlife refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), the purposes of an individual refuge, Service policy, and laws and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

The mission of the NWRS, as outlined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (NWRSA), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.), is to:

“... to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

The NWRSA mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the System to (16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(4):

- Provide for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats within the NWRS;
- Ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the NWRS are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans;
- Ensure that the mission of the NWRS described at 16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(2) and the purposes of each refuge are carried out;
- Ensure effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with owners of land adjoining refuges and the fish and wildlife agency of the States in which the units of the NWRS are located;
- Assist in the maintenance of adequate water quantity and water quality to fulfill the mission of the NWRS and the purposes of each refuge;
- Recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority general public uses of the NWRS through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife;
- Ensure that opportunities are provided within the NWRS for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses; and
- Monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge.

Therefore, it is a priority of the Service to provide for wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, including hunting and fishing, when those opportunities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (Hutton Lake NWR or Refuge) is located approximately 10 miles southwest of Laramie, Wyoming. The Refuge was established pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 5782 dated January 28, 1932. Additional lands were added in 1933 and 1939 pursuant to the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 715d). The primary purpose of the Refuge is to serve as “as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wild animals (E.O. 5782) and “...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds (Migratory Bird Conservation Act).” Subsequent amendments to the Migratory Bird Conservation Act allow up to 40% of lands purchased under this authority to be opened for migratory bird hunting, which equates to approximately 795 acres at Hutton Lake NWR.

Hutton Lake NWR provides important resting, nesting, and foraging areas for migratory birds in the semiarid environment of the Laramie Plains basin. The most abundant species during spring and fall migration include mallard, redhead, teal, pintail, great blue heron, black-crowned night-heron, phalarope, western grebe, bittern, and black tern. Water management on the Refuge is opportunistic due to limited water rights and a closed basin system. Ponds are filled in the spring with natural runoff and maintained as high as possible during the breeding and brood-rearing seasons.

In addition to providing important habitat for migratory birds, Hutton Lake NWR has reported approximately 3,600 visitors annually (2018 Refuge Annual Performance Plan). Note though, that a newly installed car counter on the Refuge indicates that there may be as many as 20,000 visitors per year. Most visitation occurs March through October as Refuge access and recreation opportunities are limited from November through February due to frozen lakes and cold, snowy weather.

The vision for the Laramie Plains refuges (Bamforth NWR, Hutton Lake NWR, and Mortenson Lake NWR) stated in the 2007 Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is:

The wetland complexes and uplands of the Laramie Plains refuges are important resource components of this semiarid region that provide key habitat for the Wyoming toad, migratory birds, and resident wildlife.

These refuges will be evaluated to direct management decisions to provide natural and enhanced habitat, thereby maximizing the unique potential of each refuge. Wildlife-dependent recreation will be evaluated for each refuge to determine potential appropriate public use opportunities.

The CCP also established the following visitor services goal for Hutton Lake NWR:

Provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives.

Currently, Hutton Lake NWR is open to wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation. The Refuge is currently closed to hunting and fishing. It will remain closed to fishing because the amount and dependability of water precludes supporting a viable fishery.

II. Statement of Objectives

The objectives of a waterfowl hunting program on Hutton Lake NWR are to:

- Meet the Refuge establishing purposes, which includes keeping at least 60% of the Refuge closed to hunting to provide inviolate sanctuary for migratory birds.
- Provide wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities in accordance with Federal laws and Service policy and in alignment with State regulations.
- Provide increased opportunities for a hunting experience on refuge lands, especially for youth and families.
- Provide nearby hunting access for local communities.
- Assist with hunter education.

Hunting is consistent with the CCP's visitor services goal to provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives. During the 2007 CCP planning process, the decision was made to keep the Refuge closed to hunting. This was because of insufficient knowledge about Refuge resources, lack of Refuge infrastructure for administering a hunt, and availability of other nearby waterfowl hunting opportunities. Since then, changes in priorities from the Secretary of the Interior have included developing new opportunities for hunting on national wildlife refuges. Hutton Lake NWR is being considered as a new waterfowl hunting opportunity due to easy public access, significant waterfowl use on an annual basis, and close proximity to a population center.

III. Description of Hunting Program

A. Areas to be Opened to Hunting

In accordance with the Refuge's establishing legislation, the maximum area that can be opened to hunting on Hutton Lake NWR is 40%. Hutton Lake, Hoge Lake, and surrounding upland acres will be open to waterfowl hunting, as shown in Figure 1. The hunting unit is comprised of approximately 748 acres (37% of the total refuge acres). There are 268 acres of wetlands (55% of total refuge wetlands) and 480 acres of uplands (32% of total refuge uplands). Hunting areas will be identified by public hunting area boundary signs.

B. Species to be Taken, Hunting periods, Hunting Access

Species to be Taken: The Refuge will be open to waterfowl hunting, including ducks, mergansers, American coots, dark geese, and light geese.

Hunting Periods: The Refuge hunting season will follow the dates of the Wyoming Central Flyway Special Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days and the general waterfowl hunting season.

Hunting Access: With the exception of the accessible hunting blind, hunters will park their vehicles in designated parking areas and access the hunt area on foot.

C. Hunter Permit Requirements (if applicable)

N/A

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

The Refuge reviewed the operations and regulations for neighboring State wildlife management areas and refuges to find consistency where possible. In June 2018, Wyoming Fish and Game Department leadership expressed interest in having the Service evaluate opening Hutton Lake NWR for waterfowl hunting. This interest was congruent with the Department of Interior Secretarial Order 3356, “Hunting, Fishing, Recreational Shooting, and Wildlife Conservation Opportunities and Coordination with States, Tribes, and Territories.”

In the near future, we will send a letter and the draft Environmental Assessment to the State asking to coordinate with them to adjust the Hunt Plan to align, where possible, with State management goals. We will continue to consult and coordinate on specific aspects of the Hunt Plan to ensure safe and enjoyable recreational hunting opportunities.

E. Law Enforcement

Enforcement of refuge regulations normally associated with management of a national wildlife refuge is the responsibility of commissioned Federal Wildlife Officers. Other officers, Special Agents, State game wardens, and the local Sheriff’s Department assist the Refuge staff.

The following methods are used to control and enforce hunting regulations:

- Refuge and hunt area boundaries will be clearly posted.
- The Refuge will provide a brochure that identifies hunt areas and hunting regulations.
- Refuge law enforcement staff will randomly check hunters for compliance with Federal and State Laws.
- Officers from within the zone will detail in to assist with enforcing hunting regulations.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Annual hunt administration costs for Hutton Lake NWR, including salary, equipment, law enforcement, and brochures will be approximately \$12,000. Arapaho NWR funds will be used to conduct hunts on Hutton Lake NWR. Funding specific for hunting on Hutton Lake NWR has not been allocated. No hunter fees are collected. Some infrastructure improvements will be needed to support waterfowl hunting, including:

- Hunting area boundary signs purchase and installation (Estimated \$5,000)
- Access and parking improvements for accessible hunting blind (Estimated \$20,000)
- The Service will consider adding a vault toilet at Hutton Lake NWR. If this is done, it would cost approximately \$65,000.

IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program

A. Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures (if applicable)

N/A

B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

N/A

C. Relevant State Regulations

Hunters must follow all Special Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days and general waterfowl hunting regulations for the State of Wyoming.

D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting

- The Refuge is open to waterfowl hunting; no other hunting is allowed on the Refuge.
- Hunters will be allowed to access the hunting area 1 hour before legal shooting time.
- Motor vehicles are permitted on existing Refuge roads only. Vehicles are not permitted on roads marked “Authorized Vehicles Only” or roads closed by gates.
- Parking is permitted only in designated parking areas.
- Off-road vehicles may not be used on any portion of the Refuge.
- All watercraft are prohibited.
- Hunting access is walk-in only.
- Fishing, fires, and overnight camping are not permitted on the Refuge.
- Portable blinds are permitted but they cannot be left unattended or overnight.
- Disturbing, cutting, gathering, manipulating, or bringing in any vegetation to create a blind is prohibited.
- Molesting, injuring, disturbing, or destroying any animal or plant is prohibited, as is the removal of animals, plants, or parts thereof.
- Artifacts and historic items are protected on refuge lands by Federal law. It is unlawful to search for or remove these objects from refuge lands.
- Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms on National Wildlife Refuge

System lands must comply with all provisions of State and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 CFR 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32).

- Dogs are to be restrained except while engaged in hunting activity.
- All pets must be leashed.
- Retrieving birds from “Closed to Hunting” zones is prohibited.
- Cleaning of birds on the Refuge is prohibited.
- Hunters must remove all personal trash, including spent shells.

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program

The Refuge maintains a mailing list comprised of local newspapers, radio stations, and websites for communication purposes. Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with hunting seasons. In addition, information about the hunt will be available at Arapaho NWR headquarters and on the Hutton Lake NWR website.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program

Hunting is an important economic and recreational use of Wyoming’s natural resources; however, Hutton Lake NWR has been closed to hunting for reasons previously identified in the 2007 CCP. Some individuals and local user groups have already voiced their concern with waterfowl hunting on the Refuge; it is expected that they will voice their concerns during the public comment period.

C. How Hunters Will Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations

General information regarding hunting and other wildlife-dependent public uses can be obtained at Arapaho NWR headquarters at 953 Jackson County Road 32, Walden, CO 80480, by mail at 28111 State Highway 125, Walden, CO 80480 or by calling (970) 723-8202. Dates, forms, hunting unit directions, maps, and other information about the hunt will be available on the station website at https://www.fws.gov/refuge/hutton_lake/.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the Refuge. See Compatibility Determination for Waterfowl Hunting on Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (attached).

Figure 1. Hutton Lake NWR proposed hunt area, parking areas, and access for Alternative B and C.

