

**U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT FOR
CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION**

The Service is proposing to expand the hunting season for coyote on 70,549 acres at Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, Nebraska, a species already hunted on the Refuge, from November 13 -- March 15 to September 1 -- March 31, in accordance with the Refuge's 1999 CCP and associated EA.

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 following proposed action is categorically excluded from NEPA documentation requirements consistent with 40 CFR 1508.4, 43 CFR 46.205, and 516 DM 8.5.

The Service has fully satisfied the other requirements for expanding these opportunities on the refuge, including:

- determining that the opportunities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (see attached Compatibility Determination);
- ensuring the opportunities are consistent with existing State, local, and refuge-specific regulations (50 CFR 32.46);
 - *Use of signs and brochures may supplement the refuge-specific regulations
- complying with the National Environmental Policy Act (see attached);
- complying with the Endangered Species Act section 7 evaluation (see attached Consultation documentation);
 - OR N/A because there are no candidate, threatened or endangered species present;
- complying with the National Historic Preservation Act section 106 consultation (see attached Consultation documentation);
 - OR N/A because there are no cultural or historic resources present;

The Service is, therefore, waiving the requirement to prepare an opening package in compliance with Service policy (605 FW 2.9A).

Signature

Stevan A. Gesta

Date:

5-16-19

Title

Project Leader

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION CHECKLIST FOR NEPA COMPLIANCE

Proposed Action: [Brief description of the proposed action (4-5 sentences)].

The Service is proposing to expand the hunting season for coyote on 70,000 acres at Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, Nebraska, a species already hunted on the Refuge, from the Saturday closest to November 13- March 15 to September 1 – March 31, in accordance with the Refuge's 1999 CCP, associated EA and with existing refuge-specific regulations (50 CFR 32.46), and to further align with existing State, and/or local regulations, such as the September 1 opening for archery deer season. This expanded hunt season would continue to avoid adverse effects on the migratory bird nesting season, and would come closer to aligning with state coyote regulations (coyotes are not a protected species in Nebraska, and the hunting season is year-round).

This proposed action is covered by the following categorical exclusion: 516 DM 8.5 B (7) *(Review proposed activities. An appropriate categorical exclusion must be identified and cited above before completing the remainder of the Checklist. If a categorical exclusion cannot be identified, or the proposal cannot meet the qualifying criteria in the categorical exclusion, an EA/EIS must be prepared.)*

An action by the Service that only results in "minor changes in the amounts or types of public use on Service or State managed lands, in accordance with existing regulations, management plans, and procedures" is categorically excluded from further NEPA analyses, because it has been determined to be a class of action which does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment (516 DM 8.5 B (7)).

[Brief description (1-3 sentences) of why the action fits the categorical exclusion. For example, "This action will only result in a minor change in the amount/type of hunting on the refuge, because [list basis for argument here, the more quantitative the better (e.g. % increase in possible mortality of the species)].

This action fits the categorical exclusion in that it only results minor changes in the amounts of public use on the Refuge, and would have only minor impacts to the human environment. As noted in the Refuge's 1999 CCP, one of the Refuge's primary goals is "providing quality hunting opportunities for ... coyote on portions of the Refuge." Per the CCP, coyote numbers either maintained or increased over the years despite the presence of hunting. Similarly, the 1988 hunt plan also determined that "public hunting of coyotes on the [Refuge] would be appropriate." In that this proposed action neither opens up additional acreage nor a new species to hunting, and that the proposed coyote hunting season extension avoids the migratory bird breeding season, this categorical exclusion is warranted, and no Extraordinary Circumstances are triggered.

Extraordinary Circumstances (43 CFR 46.215) :

Could This Proposed Action (check (✓) yes or no for each item below):

Yes No

- a. Have significant adverse effects on public health or safety?
- b. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (EO 11990); floodplains (EO 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas?
- c. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA section 102(2)(E)]?
- d. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?
- e. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?
- f. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?
- g. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau?
- h. Have adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species?
- i. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment?
- j. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (EO 12898).
- k. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007).
- l. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and EO 13112).
- m. Have material adverse effects on resources requiring compliance with Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management), Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), or the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act?

(If any of the above exceptions receive a "Yes" check (✓), an EA/EIS must be prepared.)

Within the spirit and intent of the Council of 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 have determined:

- The proposed action is covered by a categorical exclusion as provided by 43 CFR §46.210 or 516 DM 8.5. No further NEPA documentation will therefore be made.**
- An Extraordinary Circumstance (43 CFR 46.215) could exist for the proposed action and, so an EA/EIS must be prepared.**

Service signature approval:

Signature *Stevan Beck*

Date: 5-16-19

Title Project Leader

Signature _____

Date: _____

Title _____