

**Washita National Wildlife Refuge
Wild Turkey Hunt Plan**

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Washita National Wildlife Refuge
20834 E 0940 Rd
Butler, OK 73625**

September 2015

Wild Turkey Hunt Plan
Washita National Wildlife Refuge

Prepared by: _____ Date: _____
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Approved by: _____ Date: _____
Aaron Archibeque, Regional Chief, Region 2

SIGNED COPY ON FILE AT REFUGE HEADQUARTERS

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to provide public hunting opportunities for Rio Grande wild turkey on Washita National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). This Hunt Plan precedes the overall Visitor Services Plan for Washita NWR.

Washita NWR was established in 1961 as an overlay refuge on BOR lands and waters of Foss Reservoir and “....shall be administered by him [Secretary of Interior] directly or in accordance with cooperative agreements....and in accordance with such rules and regulations for the conservation, maintenance, and management of wildlife, resources, thereof, and its habitat thereon...” 16 U.S.C. § 664 (Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act), and “...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds” 16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act). Washita NWR is located in Custer County, OK.

The Washita NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) was completed in September 2009. The CCP and supporting documents outline a vision for the future of the refuge and describe how the area can be managed to meet refuge establishment purposes.

During the past several years, requests to allow turkey hunting have been steadily increasing. The hunt addressed in this plan is a spring turkey hunt. Washita NWR is divided into five turkey hunt areas (which encompass the entire refuge with the exception of the area around the headquarters), established such that up to 2 hunters may hunt each area at a time with a high probability of a successful turkey harvest. The area surrounding the refuge headquarters is not included in a hunt area and will be posted as “Area Closed to Hunting” for safety purposes.

Diverse refuge habitats support a wide variety of resident and migratory wildlife including 271 species of birds, 46 species of mammals, 39 species of reptiles, and 11 species of amphibians. In addition to being a wintering area for thousands of waterfowl, Washita NWR also provides habitat for numerous resident wildlife species.

The refuge covers 8,075 acres and includes the following habitats:

- 4,190 acres of uplands
- 1,800 acres of open water
- 85 acres of wetlands
- 2,000 acres of croplands

The refuge currently receives approximately 40,000 visitors per year. These visitors take part in a variety of public use activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and wildlife photography. Current hunting opportunities on Washita NWR include deer, quail, rabbit, goose, and sandhill crane hunting. White-tailed deer hunts are conducted through the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation’s Controlled Hunts Program. Quail and rabbit hunting are permitted in areas generally open to the public during the state season. Goose and sandhill crane hunts are conducted through a controlled hunt draw conducted by the refuge. Washita NWR is one of the top hunting refuges in the Southwest Region, with approximately 300 hunting visits per year. With the exception of

a few special refuge regulations, hunts are in accordance with State regulations established by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC).

Rio Grande Wild Turkey

Oklahoma hosts two sub-species of wild turkey: the Eastern, and Rio Grande. The species found on Washita NWR is the Rio Grande wild turkey, which has an estimated population of 112,000 birds statewide in Oklahoma (ODWC communication – Rod Smith, Southwest Region Supervisor, 2014). Historically, Rio Grande wild turkeys were found throughout western Oklahoma. However, due to loss of habitat and over hunting, this species was almost extirpated from the state by the mid-20th century. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation worked with landowners and conducted restocking activities, successfully restoring the Rio Grande wild turkey in Oklahoma more than a decade ago.

Observations made by refuge staff, volunteers, and visitors indicate the refuge wild turkey population has increased greatly in the last decade. Turkeys are now commonly seen in areas which formerly held few, if any, birds. Turkey Roost Surveys were initiated in February 2015, and these data will be used to inform refuge management of the turkey hunt. Based on turkey survey data, a limited recreational hunt can be sustained.

II. Conformance with Statutory Authority

The Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S.C. 460K) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to administer refuges, hatcheries, and other conservation areas for recreational use. The Refuge Recreation Act requires 1) that any recreational use permitted will not interfere with the primary purpose for which the area was established; and 2) that funds are available for the development, operation, and maintenance of the permitted forms of recreation.

Fundamental to the management of lands within the National Wildlife Refuge System (System) is the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-57), an amendment to the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 provided a mission for the System and clear standards for its management, use, planning, and growth. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 recognized that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible with the mission of the System and purposes of the Refuge, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of the System. Compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are the priority general public uses of the System and shall receive priority consideration in planning and management. Hunting as specified in this plan is a wildlife-dependent recreational use and the law states that as such, it “shall receive priority consideration in national wildlife refuge planning and management.” The Secretary of Interior may permit hunting on a refuge if it is determined that the use is compatible. The hunting program would not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the purposes of the refuge or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Recreational hunting authorized by the regulations should not interfere with the primary purpose for which Washita NWR was established. This determination is based upon the completion of a Compatibility Determination.

III. Statement of Objectives

The main objective of implementing a wild turkey hunting program on Washita NWR is to provide the general public an opportunity to participate in priority, wildlife-dependent recreation. The proposed hunt will provide a high quality wildlife-dependent recreational hunting experience in western Oklahoma by offering an uncrowded, highly individualistic experience.

IV. Assessment

A. Are wildlife populations present in numbers sufficient to sustain optimum population levels for priority refuge objectives other than hunting?

Regional Analysis

Wild turkeys have been a common sight at Washita NWR for over a decade. There has been no legal hunting of turkey on the refuge since establishment, though adjacent private lands are hunted. Changes in area farming practices have occurred, including switching from cotton to more palatable crops such as alfalfa, grain sorghum, and wheat. Turkey populations on the refuge, as well as throughout most of its range, have increased dramatically due to restocking efforts and habitat improvements. The following distribution map (Figure 1) indicates that the density of the local Wild Turkey population in western Oklahoma is among the highest recorded in the country. Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) are conducted annually near the refuge.

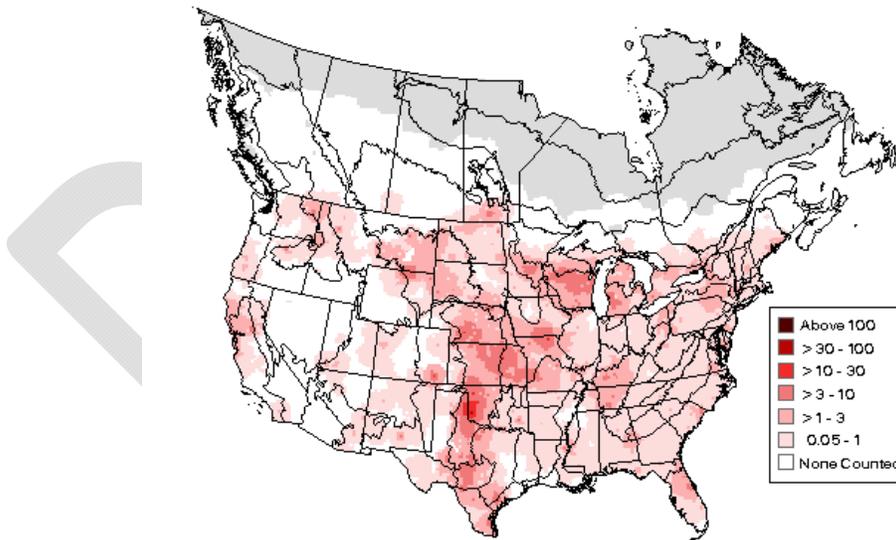


Figure 1. BBS Distribution Map for Wild Turkey, 2007-2013.

Limiting the number of hunters and the number of birds allowed for harvest according to population survey data will minimize impacts to the overall population. The hunting of wild turkey is not likely to create conflict with other public uses and is within the wildlife dependent public uses to be given priority consideration.

Local Analysis:

Rio Grande turkeys have been a common sight at Washita NWR for over a decade. There has been no legal hunting of turkey on the refuge since establishment, though adjacent private lands are hunted. Changes in area farming practices have occurred, including switching from cotton to more palatable crops such as alfalfa, grain sorghum, and wheat. Turkey populations on the refuge, as well as throughout most of its range, have increased dramatically due to restocking efforts and habitat improvements. Turkeys are now considered common on the Refuge. Turkeys have been seen in winter flocks of 100+ birds. The initial roost survey conducted in 2015 found 157 wild turkeys roosting on the refuge.

B. Is there competition for habitat between target species and other wildlife?

Competition for habitat is not a limiting factor for the wild turkey population on the refuge. In general, wild turkeys inhabit most of the same habitat types as do other native wildlife, including white-tailed deer, and non-native species including feral hogs. Prime turkey foods fit into a few general categories: mast (oaks and acorns); fruits (grape, juniper); seeds (native grasses, wheat, milo, weeds); and greens (grass and grass-like plants as well as selected annual and perennial forbs). Variety is not only in the plant species, but also in the plant parts consumed (i.e., fruits, seeds, seed-heads, roots, tubers, bulbs, stems, buds, leaves, flowers, pods, and capsules). Turkeys also eat insects, including grasshoppers, beetles, caterpillars, ants, flies, and crickets, which are an especially important source of protein for poults. Turkeys have been documented to eat small snakes, lizards, and salamanders (Stevens 2010), but are not considered to be a major predator.

C. Are there unacceptable levels of predation by target species on other wildlife?

It is highly unlikely that an unacceptable level of predation by wild turkeys exists.

V. Description of Hunting Program

The Washita NWR hunting program is designed to provide compatible hunting opportunities, while minimizing conflicts with non-hunting user groups.

A. Areas of the Refuge that support targeted species.

With the exception of open water, all upland and wetland areas of the refuge support wild turkeys. Vegetation typically found adjacent to the major drainages include: soapberry (*Sapindus* spp.), elm (*Ulmus* spp.), cottonwood (*Populus deltoids*), and black willow (*Salix nigra*). Bur oaks (*Quercus macrocarpa*) can also be found along many of the drainages. When moving away from the drainages, the vegetation changes to eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*), continuing to the grasslands which include little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), side-oats gramma (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), indiagrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), and big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*). Many of these vegetative species provide food and cover to wild turkeys.

Turkeys are now considered common on the refuge. Turkeys have been seen in winter flocks of 100+ birds. The initial roost survey conducted in 2015 found 157 wild turkeys roosting on the refuge. Refuge turkey distribution is seasonally variable, but birds can typically be found in wooded areas along

the major drainages on the refuge. Turkeys are also often seen in refuge farm fields. Flocks begin to break apart in the spring when the breeding season begins. The male birds move away from females at this time, but come together throughout the day to mate.

B. Areas to be opened to hunting.

Turkey hunting will be allowed on the entire refuge with the exception of the portion inundated by Foss Reservoir and the areas immediately surrounding the refuge headquarters. This area will be posted as “Area Closed to Hunting” (see No Hunting Zone on Figure 2). Approximately 5,797 acres of suitable habitat for turkey are provided within the turkey hunt areas.

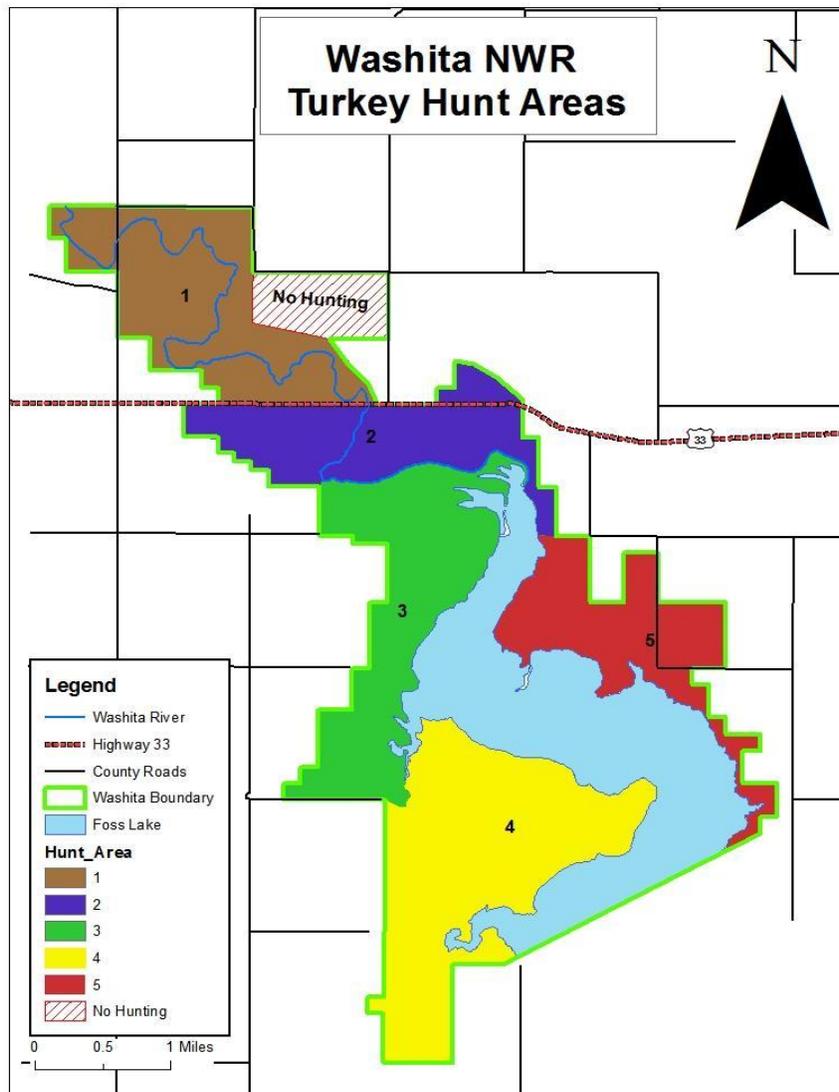


Figure 2. Washita NWR Hunt Areas

C. Species to be taken, hunting periods, hunting access, fees

A limited wild turkey hunt will be held during the Spring Turkey Season. Hunts will be conducted through the ODWC Controlled Hunts Program. Up to 20 permits will be issued as determined by assessment of local turkey population numbers. Hunt Areas will be assigned during hunter selection. Legal weapons will be shotgun (no shot larger than BB) and bow and arrow. Bag limit is one gobbler per hunt. Only federally approved lead-free, non-toxic shot may be possessed if using a shotgun while hunting turkeys on the refuge. All hunts will be in accordance with State regulations and refuge specific regulations. Baiting is prohibited. Shooting turkeys in roost trees is prohibited. Hunter check-in/out will be required. Washita NWR will monitor the turkey population and hunter success to allow for adaptive management and reduce or increase the number of permits offered as needed to ensure sound management. During the 3 day hunts, general public use of the areas will be closed.

Access

The entire refuge except for the area described in section V.B. above will be open to wild turkey hunting. During the 3 day hunts, general public use of areas open to hunting will be closed. Hunters will be provided maps showing access points/entrances to each unit and allowed to drive personal vehicles to a gate at their respective units. Foot access will be required from the gate to their final hunting destinations.

Refuge officials will work with hunters with mobility-impairments to arrange feasible hunting access. Hunters requiring special access should contact refuge officials for additional details. Examples of special provisions include the opening/closure of gated roads to allow the hunter to drive a vehicle closer to the hunt area; the use of an off-road motor vehicle; or assistance by a non-hunting adult who is not otherwise authorized to participate in the hunt. If a public hunt participant informs refuge staff in advance that he/she has special needs or limitations, every reasonable effort will be made to address those concerns so the person may fully participate and have an enjoyable experience.

Pre-Hunt Scouting will be allowed year around for the turkey hunts in areas that are open to public access, and can be permitted in areas closed to public access upon request. Areas generally on the west side of Foss Lake and the west or south side of the Washita River are designated as closed to public access except as allowed by permit or for specific hunts.

The table below lists all species that will be open to hunting on Washita NWR. This list is based on current ODWC wildlife species that have established hunting seasons and harvest limits. The list also considers the specific wildlife species and refuge surveys and sightings information that indicates the population is capable of withstanding the continuation/implementation of a hunting program. Adjustments to the bag limits for each particular species will be based on survey/sighting information.

Table 1. Wildlife Species Open to Hunting on Washita NWR.

Species	General Dates of Hunt
White-tailed deer & Feral hog: Controlled Hunts Only Rifle	Three 2-day hunts in October/November/December. Hunters are assigned blinds/areas.
Turkey: Controlled Hunts Only Shotgun (federally approved lead-free non-toxic shot only); Archery	Two 3-day hunts during Spring Turkey Season (April/May). Hunters assigned areas.
Upland/Small Game: Shotgun (federally approved non-toxic shot only)	<i>Rabbit</i> – Same as Statewide season, except closed during the first 9 days of deer gun season. <i>Quail</i> – Same as statewide season. Open in designated areas.

Turkey hunts would be managed through the ODWC Controlled Hunts Program. Applicants are required to pay a \$5.00 application fee to ODWC to enter the Controlled Hunts drawing. This fee is non-refundable and retained by the state. Successful applicants who are drawn for the Controlled Hunt for turkey at Washita NWR will be required to pay a \$20.00 federal user fee, which is collected by the ODWC and transferred to Washita NWR. The federal user fee will be waived for all youth hunt participants (less than 18 years of age).

Fees generated through the recreation fee program are not intended to offset the total costs of the hunts. All fee money received at Washita NWR is used in support of our hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation programs.

D. Justification for the permit, if one is required.

A State permit will be required to participate in the wild turkey hunt. The primary reason for requiring a permit is to ensure a safe, high-quality hunt by limiting the number of hunters allowed in the field during any specific hunt. Without requiring a permit and limiting the number of participants allowed, the high demand and participation would result in over-crowded and unsafe hunting conditions. Each hunter must sign and carry their permit letter while hunting on the refuge.

E. Consultation and Coordination with the State

A letter describing the proposed new hunts and requesting input and feedback was sent to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Parks and Wildlife Department in May 2015. A response in support of the proposal was received May 18, 2015 (see Appendix A).

F. Law Enforcement

Washita NWR currently has no Law Enforcement Officers on staff. The Zone Officer along with the Custer County Game Warden will enforce state/federal regulations and refuge specific laws and rules.

All applicable State and Federal regulations will be enforced, along with refuge specific regulations. Law enforcement efforts will include field compliance checks for licenses, permits, legal means and methods, and legal equipment. Officers will also frequent the hunter check station.

G. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Total annual expenses include staffing check stations on weekends (6 days total), additional law enforcement patrols, early gate opening/closures, maintenance of boundary posting and gates, putting up and taking down signs, and fuel are estimated to be about \$2,100.

Summary of Costs for the Turkey Hunt Program:

Staff Salaries for weekend check stations	\$ 2,000
Fuel and miscellaneous expenses	\$ 100
	<hr/>
	\$ 2,100

Fees from turkey hunting will result in an estimated \$200-\$400 being collected annually. Though this amount is not sufficient to cover the cost of managing the hunt program, the relatively low cost of this program can easily be covered using station funds. Some costs may be defrayed by cooperating with partners; for example ODWC may provide personnel to staff check stations and Game Wardens to provide for law enforcement patrols during hunts.

VI. Measures Taken to Avoid Conflicts with Other Management Objectives

A. Biological Conflicts

Endangered/Threatened Species: Washita NWR has no documented resident endangered or threatened species. Least tern and snowy plover rarely use the refuge shorelines during migrations or as nesting/wintering grounds. Existing and new hunting opportunities pose a negligible threat to the least tern and snowy plover as these species are sometimes seen during migration and may be found in April and September, but prefer sandy beaches and exposed sandy sites along the lakeshore. The turkey season occurs in April, but turkeys inhabit wooded areas away from the lake so impacts to these species should be non-existent.

Migratory Birds: The primary purpose of Washita NWR is to provide habitat for wintering and migrating waterfowl and sandhill cranes. The hunting of wild turkey in April should pose no threat to these target species because the majority of the waterfowl and cranes have started their northward migration by mid-March.

Prescribed Burning: Washita NWR has an aggressive prescribed burning program. While spring burning has occurred at Washita in the past, most fire efforts are completed before April. Burn units vary in size from 60 to 1,000 acres. Turkey hunts during spring months will not result in conflicts with prescribed burning efforts.

Mowing/Farming: Washita NWR has an extensive agriculture for wildlife program. Mowing and farming activities are usually completed by November and resume in May. Most of the access lanes in the hunt units are mowed during summer and fall. Scheduled mowing events are flexible and can be adjusted according to activities and weather patterns as needed. There will be no mowing/farming activities conducted in units while hunts are in progress. As a result there will be no conflicts with the turkey hunts.

B. Public Use Conflicts

Washita NWR is a destination for birders and wildlife photographers, however, neither complaints from non-hunters nor conflicts between hunters and non-hunters have been noted. This is likely due to the fact that most non-consumptive users tend to remain on the Auto Tour Route while hunters are further afield, or that non-hunters avoid visiting the refuge on hunt days.

The units open for turkey hunting will be closed to public access during each of the hunts to prevent non-hunters from interfering with hunters and reduce the possibility of hunting accidents. Area entrance gates are posted with "Hunt in Progress" signs to notify the general public. Public notifications of hunting activities are also made well in advance via websites, local newspapers, and brochure updates. Combined with the closure of hunt areas annually for white-tailed deer hunting, portions of the refuge will be closed for up to 18 days per year between early October and late April. The remaining 347 days are open to all public use and recreation during daylight hours. The portion of the refuge that contains the Visitor Center will be closed to hunting and available to non-hunters. The Centennial Trail, Riverside Trail, and walking trail at Owl Cove would be closed for up to 12 days per year during the new hunts.

Goose and Sandhill Crane Hunt – Goose and sandhill crane hunts are held on select weekends and Wednesdays in November through January. As a result, there will be no overlap that will result in conflicts.

Deer Hunt - The controlled deer hunts normally begin in mid-October and are concluded by early January. Wild turkey hunts will occur in April, and as a result there will be no overlap that could cause conflicts.

Upland Game Hunt - Rabbit and quail seasons extend from October 1 through March 15 and mid-November through mid-February respectively. Wild turkey hunts will occur in April. This results in no conflicts with upland game hunts.

Fishing - Bank fishing occurs throughout the Refuge year-round. Boating is permitted from March 15 to October 14 annually. Anglers wishing to access Foss Reservoir or the Washita River on foot will be unable to do so during turkey hunts. However, fishing from watercraft will remain available, and conflicts due to the hunts are expected to be minor and short in duration.

C. Administrative Conflicts

The Service intends to manage the turkey hunts through the ODWC's Controlled Hunts Program. If this does not meet the needs of the program, the permits will be processed by refuge personnel. Although the

workload required to process the permits would increase if it is completed at the refuge, actual administrative conflicts due to the hunts are not expected. Educating the public, responding to inquiries, placing and removing boundary hunt signs, and adjusting work schedules to monitor hunts will be required. The workload will not significantly impact required staff duties.

VII. Conduct of the Hunt

Listed below are refuge-specific regulations that pertain to Washita NWR as of the date of this plan. These regulations may be modified as conditions change.

A. Refuge Specific Hunting Regulations

C. Big Game Hunting. We allow hunting of white-tailed deer, feral hog and turkey on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

1. We allow deer and hog hunting during the special refuge season in accordance with the refuge hunt information sheet. Turkey hunts will be held during the State spring turkey season.
2. We allow shotguns and lawful archery equipment for turkey hunting.
3. You must obtain a refuge hunt permit and pay a fee (fee waived for Youth Hunt participants).
4. You must check in and out of hunt areas daily at the refuge office or check station.
5. You must take bagged deer, hog, and/or turkey to the refuge check station.
6. We will determine bag limits on deer and turkey annually.
7. We prohibit the use of bait.
8. A non-hunting mentor of 21 years of age or older must accompany, and be in the immediate presence of, participants in Youth Hunts, who must be less than 18 years of age. Hunters and mentors must BOTH wear hunter orange clothing meeting or exceeding the minimum State requirements.
9. We prohibit handguns.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to Hunting Program

Based on the comments received during the CCP, hunting was generally favorable with numerous requests for a spring turkey hunt. It is anticipated that the new hunting opportunities will be highly desirable and appreciated by our consumptive users.

C. Hunter Application and Registration Procedures

Applicants must provide all required information as specified by the ODWC through the ODWC's Controlled Hunts Program. All applications, required information, fees, and correspondence will be coordinated by the ODWC.

Washita NWR will monitor the turkey population and hunter success to allow for adaptive management and reduce or increase the number of permits offered as needed for sound management. The number of permits issued in the future may increase if the turkey population increases or remains stable and hunter demand is high. The maximum number of permits that will be issued annually will not exceed 20.

D. Description of Hunter Selection Process

Hunters will be selected through the ODWC's Controlled Hunts Program. A total of 10 hunters will be selected during the initial season, and no more than 20 hunters will be allowed in subsequent seasons as indicated by turkey survey data. All applications, required information, fees, and correspondence will be coordinated with the ODWC.

Up to 20 permitted hunters per season are allowed.

- Each permitted hunter will be assigned a hunt unit.
- Only federally-approved non-toxic shot is allowed.
- Scouting is permitted in open areas, and may be conducted in closed areas with a permit from the Refuge.
- Parking is permitted only in designated parking lots and along roadsides as long as road access is not restricted.
- Hunters are required to check-in and check-out daily at the check station.

E. Media Selection for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunt

The Refuge has a list of local media contacts for all news releases. Hunting information and/or a link to the permitting site can be found on the Washita NWR website. A news release announcing all limited hunts, including the process and deadlines, will be sent to local newspapers. All updates or changes to the Washita NWR hunting program will be published in the Federal Register.

F. General Requirements

General information regarding turkey hunting and other public uses can be obtained at the Refuge Headquarters at 20834 E 940 Rd, Butler, OK 73625, by calling (580) 664-2205, or via email at washita@fws.gov.

G. Hunter Requirements

1. Generally, all hunting will be in accordance with State regulations. Additional Refuge specific regulations will be provided to each hunter when selected for a hunt.
2. Equipment - Legal weapons for wild turkeys will be shotgun (no shot larger than BB) and legal archery equipment (bow and arrow or crossbow per ODWC regulations). Only federally approved non-toxic shot may be used and possessed while hunting on the Refuge.
4. License and Permits - All hunters must possess a valid State of Oklahoma hunting license (or proof of exemption) and any State required stamps or tags. Drawn hunters will receive an official letter and permit stating that they have been drawn to participate in this hunt.
5. Reporting Harvest - Hunters will be required to check in and out of the hunt at the refuge hunt check station. Harvested game will be inspected by Refuge staff.

6. Hunter Education Certification - Every hunter (including out-of-state hunters) must comply with current ODWC Hunter Education Certification law. Proof of certification, exemption, or possession of an apprentice license is required to be carried by the hunter while in the field.

7. Youth hunters must be accompanied by, and in the immediate presence of, a non-hunting mentor 21 years of age or older during the entirety of their hunt.

VIII. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and all associated program activities in this plan have been found compatible with purposes of the refuge. A Compatibility Determination for these hunts was prepared and is available upon request.

DRAFT

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United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Washita National Wildlife Refuge
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Butler, Oklahoma 73625
580/664 2205, Fax 580/664 2206
E-mail washita@fws.gov

May 4, 2015

Richard Hatcher
Director, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
PO Box 53465
Oklahoma City, OK 73152

Dear Mr. Hatcher:

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service would like to increase public hunting opportunities on Washita National Wildlife Refuge and requests the input of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation regarding our proposal to host a public turkey hunt. Our goal is to offer high quality hunting opportunities while ensuring both public safety and sound wildlife management practices are achieved.

Expansion of hunting programs on Washita NWR was discussed in the 2009 Comprehensive Conservation Plan under Public and Recreational Uses. As you are aware, hunting and fishing are compatible, traditional public uses permitted on many National Wildlife Refuges. At the present time, Washita NWR offers deer hunts through the ODWC's Controlled Hunts Program. Feral hogs can also be taken during deer hunts. Washita NWR is open to upland game hunting (quail and rabbit) and offers draw hunts for geese and sandhill cranes.

Washita NWR would like to host a hunt for wild turkey through the ODWC Controlled Hunt program. In the last decade, the turkey population has increased on and around the Refuge, mirroring trends throughout western Oklahoma. Washita NWR has conducted surveys to assess the turkey population and determined that sufficient numbers are present to allow for a recreational turkey hunt. Shotgun or archery equipment would be legal weapons. Only federally approved non-toxic shot may be possessed while hunting turkeys on the Refuge. All hunts would be in accordance with State regulations. Washita NWR will monitor the turkey population and hunter success to allow for adaptive management and reduce or increase the number of permits offered as needed for sound management. General public use of the areas open to hunting would be closed during hunts.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service respectfully requests a written response from ODWC regarding the proposed hunt to be filed with our required documents. Please send any correspondence on this matter to the address listed above. If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact me at (580) 664-2205 or via email at washita@fws.gov. Thank you for your time in consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Amber Zimmerman
Refuge Manager

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

John P. Zelbst CHAIRMAN	Mike Bloodworth MEMBER
John D. Graendyke VICE CHAIRMAN	Leigh Gaddis MEMBER
Danny Robbins SECRETARY	Robert S. Hughes II MEMBER
Ed Abel MEMBER	Bruce Mabrey MEMBER



MARY FALLIN, GOVERNOR
RICHARD T. HATCHER, DIRECTOR
wildlifedepartment.com

May 11, 2015

United States Dept. of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Washita National Wildlife Refuge
Attn: Amber Zimmerman
20834 E 940 Rd
Butler, OK 73625

MAY 18 2015

Dear Ms. Zimmerman,

We are pleased that you are going to allow turkey hunting on Washita NWR. Scott Parry has prepared a rule change proposal that will establish controlled turkey hunting on the refuge. The rule change process should be complete in time for spring turkey hunting in 2017.

If you have any questions about the process, feel free to call Scott at (580) 515-2030.

Respectfully,

Richard T. Hatcher
Director

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation is the state agency responsible for managing fish and wildlife. The Wildlife Department receives no general tax appropriations and is supported by hunting and fishing license fees and federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment.