

Draft Compatibility Determination

Title

Draft Compatibility Determination for Interpretation, San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Use Category

Environmental Education and Interpretation

Refuge Use Type(s)

Interpretation (NWRS staff and authorized agents)

Interpretation (not conducted by NWRS staff or authorized agents)

Refuge

San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Purpose(s) and Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies)

The primary role of San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge is the recovery of native fishes of the Río Yaqui watershed (Service 1995).

The refuge was established in 1982 under authorization of the Fish and Wildlife Act, which provides “...for the development, advancement, management, conservation and protection of fish and wildlife resources...for the benefit of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services...” (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended [16 U.S.C. 742a-742j, not including 742d-1]), and of the Endangered Species Act, “...to conserve (a) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species...or (b) plants...” Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended [16 U.S.C. 1531-1544]).

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, otherwise known as Refuge System, is 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 (Pub. L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1252).

Description of Use

Is this an existing use?

No

What is the use?

We propose to allow interpretation at San Bernardino NWR. Interpretation includes on-refuge activities for refuge visitors conducted by NWRS staff, authorized agents, or others, that are designed to foster an understanding and appreciation for natural and cultural resources, and associated management. Specific interpretive activities may include personal communication occurring through informal contacts and formal programs or non-personal interpretation via visitor use of interpretive exhibits, panels, brochures, and self-guided programs.

Is the use a priority public use?

Yes

Where would the use be conducted?

Interpretation occurs throughout the refuge but is most likely to occur outside of sensitive areas and habitat, focused within the vicinity of trails, roads, parking lots and overlooks. San Bernardino NWR is proposing to reopen public motorized vehicle use onto a portion of the refuge in 2024 (addressed in a separate compatibility determination). Black Draw Trail is a designated trail which utilizes administrative/service roads and parking lots.

When would the use be conducted?

Interpretation occurs from 1 hour before sunrise to 1 hour after sunset, throughout the year and whenever a visitor attends an interpretive program, uses self-guiding interpretive media, reads an interpretive panel or brochure, or interacts with an interpretive exhibit.

How would the use be conducted?

The refuge interpretive program engages refuge visitors, partners and staff by providing products and services that use a mission-based communication process to forge emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent to the natural and cultural resources. Interpretive products include displays, exhibits, guides, brochures, website content, and social media posts.

Why is this use being proposed or reevaluated?

Interpretation is a priority public use on National Wildlife Refuge System lands as identified in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. Allowing access to the refuge for interpretation is consistent with goals of the refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Availability of Resources

Some costs will be required for interpretation to remain a high-quality refuge use. One-time costs may include development and purchase of interpretational materials and displays. Over time, these materials may need to be replaced or updated. Added cost to the refuge for this use is not anticipated to include substantial reoccurring expenses. Primary reoccurring expenses will be represented in the form of staff salaries and time, volunteer program support, fuel and wear on vehicles. Additionally, the refuge must maintain service roads, parking lots, designated trails, and restrooms used by the public.

Availability of refuge resources is dependent upon refuge staffing and budget allocations. This use is scalable such that at any given time, interpretation can be done to a degree that would not detract from fulfillment of the refuge purpose to support the recovery of native fishes of the Río Yaqui watershed.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use

Potential impacts of a proposed use on the refuge's purpose(s) and the Refuge System mission

The effects and impacts of the proposed use to refuge resources, whether adverse or beneficial, are those that are reasonably foreseeable and have a reasonably close causal relationship to the proposed use. This CD includes the written analyses of the environmental consequences on a resource only when the impacts on that resource could be more than negligible and therefore considered an "affected resource." Resources not discussed below will not be more than negligibly impacted by the action and have been dismissed from further analyses.

Short-term impacts

Short-term impacts may include noise disturbance resulting from installation of interpretation displays or when visitors linger in an area to interact with such displays. Resources that could be impacted by noise disturbance would primarily include federally listed species. Impacts to these species are considered negligible however because fixed displays will typically be installed outside of associated habitat.

Long-term impacts

Long term beneficial impacts to visitor use and experience are anticipated to occur as a result of this use. This use targets increasing the visitors understanding and appreciation of wildlife and their habitat needs as well as the role of the National Wildlife Refuge System in resource conservation.

Public Review and Comment

The draft compatibility determination will be available for public review and comment for 14 days. The public will be made aware of this comment opportunity via the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge website. A copy of this document will be made available electronically on the refuge website (<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/san-bernardino>). Additionally, a hard copy of this document will be posted at the refuge headquarters office (7628 N HWY 191, Douglas, AZ 85608). Please let us know if you need the documents in an alternative format. All comments should be submitted via email to r2_plancomments@fws.gov. Concerns expressed during the public comment period will be addressed in the final Compatibility Determination.

Is the use compatible?

Yes

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

1. The service will allow interpretation in areas open to the public during daylight hours only.
2. The Service will regulate times, areas, and conditions for interpretation. This can also include short-term or long-term closure of areas open to interpretation due to unusual or critical conditions affecting land, water, habitat, wildlife populations, the quality of the visitor experience or visitor safety.
3. The Service will not allow harassment or feeding of wildlife.
4. The Service will require that all pets be handled in accordance with the refuge pet policy.
5. Over the 15-year life of this determination, the Service will assess the carrying capacity of the interpretation program and determine the optimal management that will provide visitors with high quality interpretational opportunities while minimizing impacts to resources.

Justification

The stipulations outlined above would help ensure that the use is compatible at San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge. Interpretation, as outlined in this compatibility determination, would not conflict with the national policy to maintain the biological diversity, integrity, and environmental health of the refuge. Based on available science and best professional judgement, the Service has determined that interpretation at San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge in accordance with the stipulations provided here, would not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purpose of San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge. Rather, appropriate and compatible interpretation would be a use of refuge through which the public can develop an appreciation for wildlife and wild lands.

Signature of Determination

Refuge Manager Signature and Date

Signature of Concurrence

Assistant Regional Director Signature and Date

Mandatory Reevaluation Date

April 2039