

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



# Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge

*Hunting Plan  
July 2020*

*Appendix A – Compatibility Determination*

*Appendix B – Categorical Exclusion*

**Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge  
Hunting Plan**

**July 2020**

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

**Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge  
1101 Casey Road  
Basom, NY 14013**

**Submitted By:**  
Project Leader

23 JUL 20

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Signature

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Date

**Concurrence:**  
Refuge Supervisor

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Signature

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Date

**Approved:**  
Regional Chief,  
National Wildlife Refuge System

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Signature

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Date

# Table of Contents

<b>I. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Statement of Objectives .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>III. Description of Hunting Program .....</b>	<b>3</b>
A. Areas Open to Hunting .....	3
B. Species to be Taken, Hunting Periods, Hunting Access .....	4
C. Hunter Permit Requirements.....	7
D. Consultation and Coordination with the State .....	7
E. Law Enforcement.....	8
F. Funding and Staffing Requirements .....	8
<b>IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program .....</b>	<b>9</b>
A. Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures .....	9
B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations .....	11
C. Relevant State Regulations .....	12
D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting .....	12
<b>V. Public Engagement.....</b>	<b>14</b>
A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program.....	14
B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program.....	14
C. How Hunters Will Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations .....	14
<b>VI. Compatibility Determination .....</b>	<b>15</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Waterfowl and Other Migratory Bird Hunting.....	4
Figure 2. Big and Small Game Hunting.....	5

## List of Appendices

Appendix A. Compatibility Determination
Appendix B. Categorical Exclusion

# IROQUOIS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE HUNTING PLAN

## I. Introduction

National wildlife refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), the purposes of the individual refuge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy, national and state laws, and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (NWRSA) of 1966, as amended by the 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.

In 1958, Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge) was established “...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or any other management purposes, for migratory birds” under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act. A total of 10,828 acres of lands were acquired in the towns of Alabama and Shelby in the respective counties of Genesee and Orleans under provisions of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, Migratory Bird Hunting and Stamp Act, and other authorities.

The refuge consists of open water, emergent marsh, forested wetland, upland forest, grassland, and shrubland habitats that lie within the Oak Orchard Creek Watershed on the Lake Plains of western New York. Oak Orchard Creek enters the refuge from the east, meanders northwest, and exits to the north, eventually emptying into Lake Ontario.

Iroquois NWR, in combination with neighboring New York State Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), forms the 19,000-acre Tonawanda-Iroquois-Oak Orchard Wetland Complex. This complex is one of the largest contiguous blocks of natural habitat in western New York and includes some of the most productive inland wildlife habitat in the eastern United States. The complex was one of the first areas in New York designated as a National Audubon Society Important Bird Area. The refuge includes the 523-acre Oak Orchard Creek Marsh, which was designated in 1973 as a National Natural Landmark. This landmark also includes the 15-acre Milford Posson Research Natural Area, an excellent example of an old growth mixed hardwood/hemlock forest.

The mission of the Refuge System, as outlined by the NWRSA, as amended by the Refuge System Improvement Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.), 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.”*

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 Refuge System;
- Ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans;
- Ensure that the mission of the Refuge System 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 Refuge System are located;
- Assist in the maintenance of adequate water quantity and water quality to fulfill the mission of the Refuge System and the purposes of each refuge;
- Recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority general public uses of the Refuge System through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife;
- Ensure that opportunities are provided within the Refuge System 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 refuge system.

Iroquois NWR has been open to hunting since it was established. Deer, small game, and migratory bird hunting occurred on refuge lands under private ownership and those activities continued with additional regulations after public ownership began. In 1986, a spring turkey hunt was added to the refuge's hunt program.

## **II. Statement of Objectives**

The objectives of the multi-species hunting program on Iroquois NWR include Service and refuge-specific objectives as follows:

- Provide the public with opportunities for quality recreation and interpretive experiences consistent with criteria describing quality found in Service Manual part 605 FW 1.6.
- Encourage participation in hunting to help preserve it as a tradition deeply rooted in America's natural heritage and conservation history.

- Manage wildlife populations consistent with the Refuge System guidelines, specific management plans approved after 1997, and to the extent practicable, State fish and wildlife conservation plans.
- Promote visitor understanding of, and increase visitor appreciation for, America’s natural resources.
- Minimize conflicts with visitors participating in other compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities.

Hunting is consistent with Iroquois NWR’s 2011 Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). This plan identified strategies to expand hunting opportunities on the refuge and to better align some programs with the New York State Department of Conservation (NYDEC) hunt seasons. As a result of this planning process, the refuge has aligned its youth turkey and waterfowl hunting days with NYDEC and has expanded opportunities for waterfowl hunting.

### **III. Description of Hunting Program**

#### **A. Areas Open to Hunting**

##### ***Big Game Hunting***

Deer and turkey hunting are permitted throughout the refuge, except in areas that are closed to protect facilities and structures, or to create buffers around refuge trail systems (Figure 2). Additionally, areas adjacent to bald eagle nests are closed during the spring turkey season. “No hunting” zones include the immediate areas around refuge headquarters, refuge residences, the vicinity of Iroquois Job Corps Center, Swallow Hollow Trail, Onondaga Trail, Kanyoo Trail, and areas around private residences, farm buildings and structures, per New York State (State) regulations. Eagle nest closure areas are determined annually, based on nest locations and buffer zones.

##### ***Small Game/Upland Hunting***

Small/upland game hunting is permitted throughout the entire refuge, except in areas closed to protect facilities and structures or to create buffers around refuge trail systems (Figure 2). “No hunting” zones include the immediate area around refuge headquarters, refuge residences, the vicinity of Iroquois Job Corps Center, Swallow Hollow Trail, Onondaga Trail, Kanyoo Trail, and areas around private residences, farm buildings and structures, per State regulations.

##### ***Waterfowl Hunting***

Waterfowl hunting is permitted in Oneida, Cayuga, Mohawk West Pool, and Mohawk Northeast Pool from designated hunt markers, generally accessed on foot from associated parking areas (Figure 1). Mohawk South Pool is designated a free roam hunt area, with a limited number of permits distributed for that pool per day.

“No hunting” zones include all refuge areas not mentioned in the previous paragraph, as well as a buffer around Kanyoo and Headquarters Trail areas and the northern dike in Mohawk South Pool.

### ***All Other Migratory Bird Hunting***

The hunting of other migratory game birds is permitted east of Sour Springs Road (Figure 1). During periods when waterfowl hunting is taking place on the refuge, other migratory game bird hunting is closed in this area, but opens up in the waterfowl hunting area for permitted hunters. “No hunting” zones include Swallow Hollow trail, Onondaga trail, the vicinity of Iroquois Job Corps Center, and areas around private residences, farm buildings and structures, per State law.

## **B. Species to be Taken, Hunting Periods, Hunting Access**

Hunting is conducted in accordance with New York State hunting laws, season dates and bag limits which are set annually by the NYDEC. Additional refuge regulations listed below apply for each season.

### ***Big Game Hunting***

- **White-tailed Deer**

The refuge is open to white-tailed deer hunting during the State’s youth, bow, muzzleloader, and gun (regular) seasons. Hunters who possess a NYDEC non-ambulatory hunting license may obtain access to park and hunt off road in designated locations on the refuge.

- **Wild Turkey**

The refuge is open to turkey hunting during the State’s youth, spring, and fall seasons. The spring season is from May 1 to May 31. The refuge splits the spring season into two sessions, from May 1 to May 15 and from May 16 to May 31.

### ***Small/Upland Game Hunting***

The refuge allows for hunting of cottontail rabbit, gray squirrel, coyote, fox, opossum, raccoon, skunk, ring-necked pheasant, and ruffed grouse during their respective State seasons, except that small/upland game hunting on the refuge concludes on the last day of February. Falconry is not a permitted method of take. Night hunting is prohibited.

Figure 1

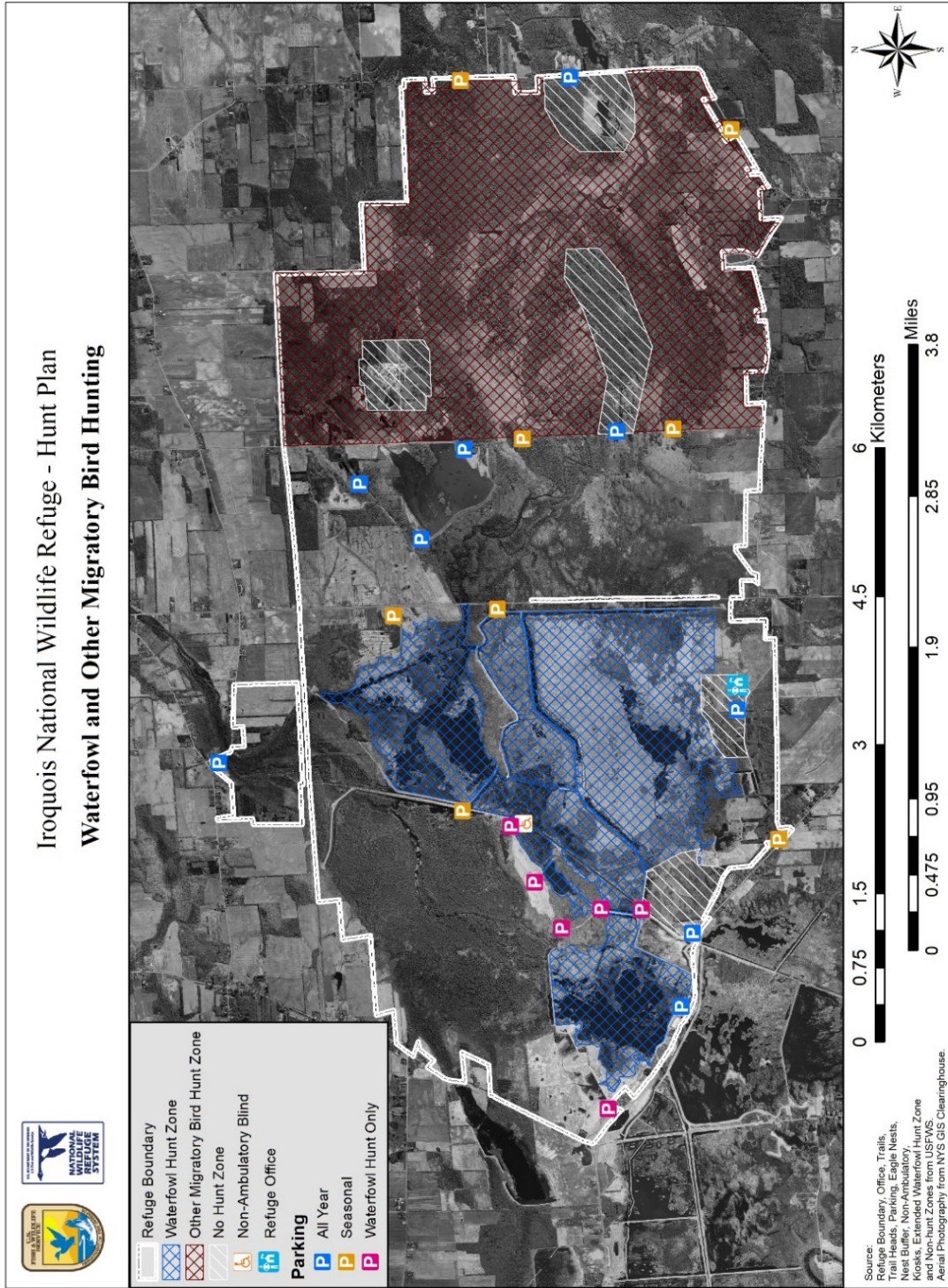
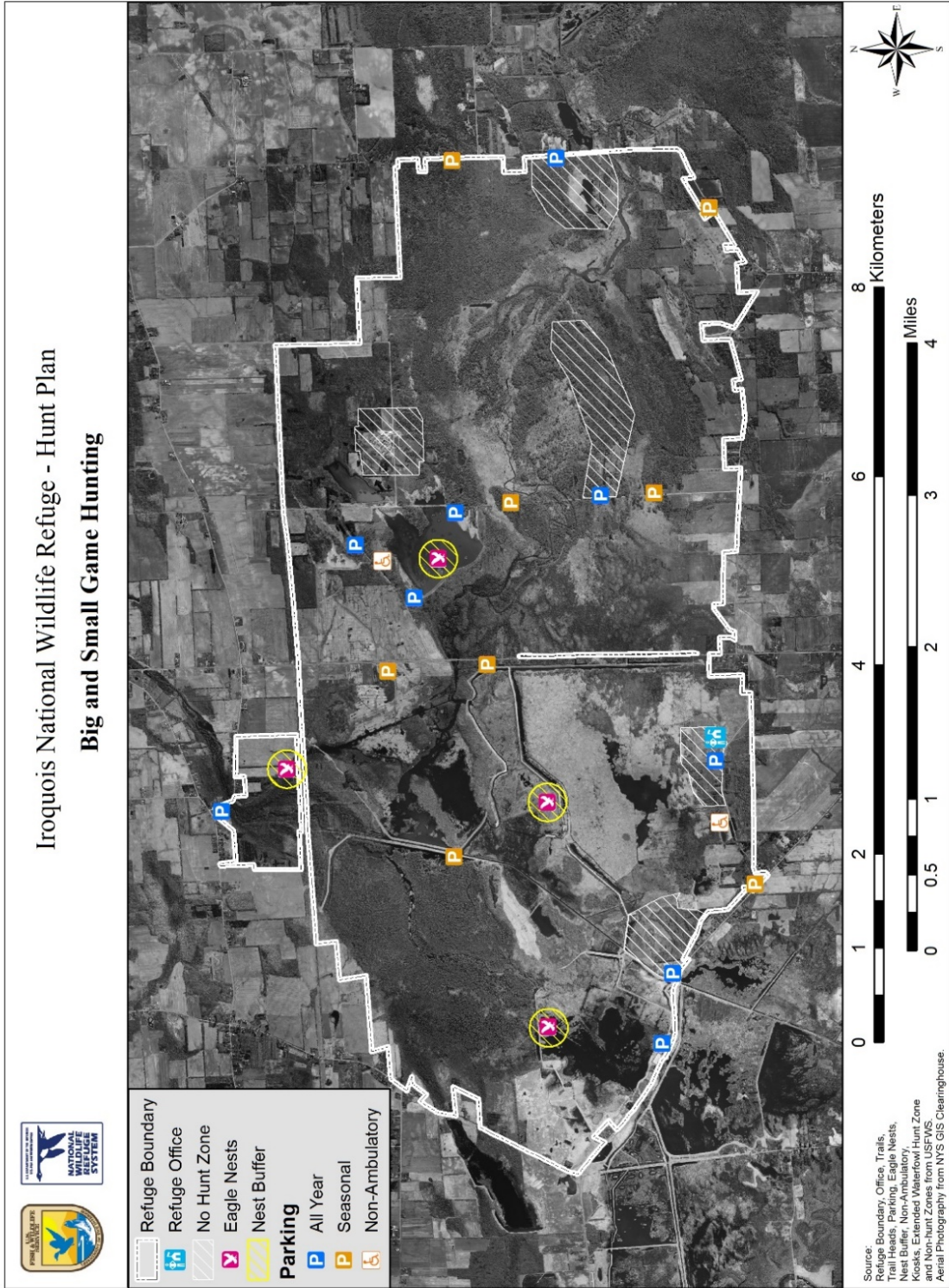




Figure 2



## ***Migratory Game Bird Hunting***

- **Waterfowl and Coot**

Hunting for waterfowl and coot is permitted on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays during the State's regular duck and Canada goose seasons. Hunting times are from one-half hour before legal sunrise to 12 p.m. Hunters must leave the marsh and turn in their harvest report no later than 1 p.m. There is no waterfowl hunting on opening day of the State's deer firearms season. Hunters should park at designated sites and access hunting areas on foot or by non-motorized boats, depending on the hunting location.

The refuge holds a Youth Waterfowl Hunt on the Saturday of New York State's Youth Waterfowl Hunt weekend.

The refuge offers one accessible blind. Mobility impaired hunters who possess an America the Beautiful Access Pass may obtain a permit to hunt from this blind.

- **Other Migratory Game Birds**

Other migratory game birds (non-waterfowl) that may be taken on the refuge include woodcock, snipe, rail, and gallinule during their respective State seasons. Since the refuge was acquired as an inviolate sanctuary, only 40 percent of refuge lands may be opened for waterfowl and other migratory bird hunting at one time. Therefore, during waterfowl hunts (see above) other migratory game bird hunting is closed, except that waterfowl hunters may take other migratory birds at their permitted hunting location.

### **C. Hunter Permit Requirements**

Hunters are required to obtain a refuge permit for spring turkey and waterfowl hunting. For deer, upland small game, and other migratory game bird species, possession of a refuge permit is not required; however, hunters are still required to know and follow all refuge specific regulations. See "Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures" below.

### **D. Consultation and Coordination with the State**

Iroquois NWR and adjacent State WMAs generally conduct hunting activities independently of one another due to differences in agency missions and site-specific hunting regulations. However, the refuge reviewed the operations and regulations for neighboring WMAs to find consistency where possible. Iroquois NWR managers consult and coordinate with NYDEC on actions that might affect NYDEC staff, facilities, or activities. Safe and successful hunting activities, conducted by both agencies, are dependent on good communication practices and information sharing.

The refuge consulted with the State extensively during the writing of our 2011 Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and received input from state biologists and administrators. Many of the changes proposed in this updated plan are a direct result of input from the State during the CCP process. More recently, the refuge consulted with the State to coordinate this alignment process and CCP implementation strategies.

## E. Law Enforcement

The enforcement of violations normally associated with the management of a national wildlife refuge is the responsibility of commissioned Federal Wildlife Officers (FWOs). Other officers, Special Agents, State Conservation Officers, and the local Sheriff's Department often assist Iroquois NWR in the enforcement of its laws and regulations.

The following methods will be used to control and enforce hunting regulations:

- Refuge area boundaries and "no hunting" zones will be clearly posted;
- The refuge will provide a brochure that shows hunt areas;
- Law enforcement officers will randomly check hunters for compliance with Federal and State Laws, as well as refuge-specific regulations pertinent to hunting; and
- Information will be made available at the Iroquois NWR visitor center and website.

Procedures for obtaining law enforcement assistance are based on legal jurisdiction, pending where the incident occurred. Currently, the refuge does not have a dedicated FWO and will work with local Environmental Conservation Officers on immediate wildlife infractions or tips received.

## F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Annual costs to administer the hunting program at Iroquois NWR, including signs, enforcement, fact sheets, and the preparation of hunt areas, totals to approximately \$26,500. Funding specifically for hunts has not been allocated, although some funds are available through hunter fees. It is anticipated funding will continue to be available for the hunting program at Iroquois NWR in the future. The following breakdown shows the estimated amount of funds needed to administer the hunt program.

Identifier	Cost
Preparation of waterfowl hunt areas, parking lots	\$5,000
Maintain roads, trails*	\$1,500
News releases, fact sheets, reports	\$2,500
Lottery systems, check station	\$6,000
Maintain hunting signs	\$6,500
Enforcement**	\$2,500
Youth hunts	\$2,500
<b>Total Annual Cost</b>	<b>\$26,500</b>

\* Refuge trails and roads are maintained for a variety of activities. Costs shown are a percentage of total costs for trail/road maintenance on the refuge and are reflective of the percentage of trail/road use for

*this activity. Volunteers account for some maintenance hours and help to reduce overall cost of the program.*

*\*\* Enforcement is non-Law Enforcement Staff ensuring area closed signs are in place, answering questions, calling NYDEC Officers, etc.*

In the event of further staff reductions, the refuge may be required to make changes to the hunt program. Programs like the waterfowl and turkey hunt, which require more staff time, may be restructured to reduce administrative burden. Streamlining these programs will help ensure the refuge's ability to meet wildlife and habitat goals while still providing for a quality hunt.

In fall of 2019, the refuge launched a pilot program to implement an online lottery and permit system operated by a third-party vendor. The initial reactions from hunters were favorable due to ease of use and accessibility. We believe this will help reduce refuge hunt costs by reducing staff time and materials associated with the current system.

#### **IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program**

##### **A. Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures**

###### ***Big Game Hunting***

- **Wild Turkey**

Spring turkey hunters (youth and regular season) may apply for a permit via a pre-season lottery. There are 25 permits available for the youth hunt. There are 75 total permits available for the regular season, with 50 allocated for session 1 and 25 allocated for session 2. Permit applications will be accepted between March 1 and March 31.

Hunters will apply for the lottery using an online application system. Applicants must list the two sessions in order of preference. A \$5 non-refundable fee will be charged for each application and/or permit. There is no fee for youth hunt permits. Successful applicants will receive notification and their permit via email.

###### ***Migratory Game Bird Hunting***

- **Waterfowl and Coot**

The refuge operates a waterfowl hunter check station during each refuge hunt day within the first session of the State duck season.

If opening day is on a Saturday, permits for the first two Saturdays of duck season are distributed via a pre-season lottery. If opening day is not on a Saturday, permits for opening day and the first Saturday are distributed via a pre-season lottery. The number of permits available each year is dependent on habitat conditions. Generally, 30 to 35 permits are available for each hunt day.

Pre-season lottery applications will be accepted from August 15 to September 15. We require refuge waterfowl hunting permits. Permit fees are \$10 on Saturday and \$5 on Tuesday and Thursday. Up to three hunters can share each permit. In order to streamline the lottery process, applications are done online at <https://IroquoisNWR.RecAccess.com>.

No paper applications will be accepted. Additionally, there is a \$5 application fee to cover administration costs.

Applicants must list the two lottery hunt days in order of preference. Successful applicants will be notified via email. Successful applicants must check in by 5 a.m. on their selected hunt day at the refuge waterfowl hunt check station. Successful applicants can bring up to two additional companions (hunters or non-hunters) with them on their permit. At 5 a.m., successful applicants will be entered into a lottery to determine hunting locations. A fee will be charged for each hunting permit distributed, and any unclaimed permits will be distributed to stand-by hunters via a lottery drawing conducted immediately after the successful pre-season applicants have completed their check-in process. A fee will be charged for each stand-by permit distributed.

For all other Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays during the first session, or split, of the State's duck season, we conduct a drawing on the morning of the hunt. Hunters must report to the refuge waterfowl check station by 5 a.m. to be entered into a daily drawing for a hunt permit. Each permit is valid for up to three hunters. A fee will be charged for each permit distributed.

During the second session of the State duck season, as well as regular goose season days that occur outside the State duck season, hunt permits will be available for Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, excluding opening day of deer firearms season. These permits will be available on a "first-come, first-served" basis. Hunters will go online prior to the hunt day to select their preferred hunt site, assuming it is still available for that day. A fee will be charged for the application and/or permit. Once hunters make their selection and pay their fee, their permit will be emailed to them for printing. Each permit is valid for up to three hunters.

The refuge offers one accessible blind. Mobility impaired hunters who possess an America the Beautiful Access Pass can obtain access to hunt from this blind. Hunters may call the refuge prior to 12 p.m. on the day before their intended hunt day to request use of the accessible blind. If more than one hunter applies for the blind, the refuge will conduct a lottery at 12 p.m. the day before the hunt day and inform the selected individual prior to close of business that day. Successful applicants for this blind can bring up to two additional hunters with them on the day of the hunt. A fee will be charged for permits issued for this blind.

The refuge offers a youth waterfowl hunt on the Saturday of the State's Youth Waterfowl Hunt Weekend. The program is free and is limited to 25 hunters with preference given to first-time participants. Hunters will be selected by lottery.

## **B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations**

Refuge-specific hunting regulations that pertain to Iroquois NWR are published in 50 CFR 32.51. These regulations are often modified annually as conditions change or if refuge expansion occurs.

### ***Big Game Hunting***

- We require a refuge permit (FWS Form 3-2439, Hunt Application – National Wildlife Refuge System) for spring turkey hunting.
- We allow the use of dogs consistent with State regulations when hunting big game.

### ***Upland Game Hunting***

- For small game hunting, we allow hunting from opening day of the State season until the last day of February.
- We allow the use of dogs consistent with State regulations when hunting upland game.
- We prohibit the use of raptors to take small game.
- For furbearer hunting, we prohibit hunting from legal sunset to legal sunrise.

### ***Migratory Game Bird Hunting***

- For hunting of duck, goose, and coot, we allow hunting on Saturday of the New York State Youth Days. We allow hunting Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays during regular waterfowl season, excluding open day of deer firearms season.
- We require proof of successful completion of State of New York waterfowl identification course, the Iroquois nonresident waterfowl identification course, or a suitable nonresident State waterfowl identification course. All hunters must show proof of successful course completion each time they hunt, in addition to showing their valid hunting license and signed Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (Federal Duck Stamp).
- We require a refuge hunt permit (FWS Form 3-2439, Hunt Application – National Wildlife Refuge System).
- We allow hunting from legal starting time until 12 p. m. (noon). We require hunters to return a completed Migratory Bird Hunt Report (FWS Form 3-2361) no later than 1 p.m. on the day of the hunt.
- We require hunters to stay in designated hunting areas, unless actively pursuing downed or crippled birds.

- We allow the use of dogs consistent with State regulations when hunting migratory game birds.
- For hunting of rail, gallinule, snipe, and woodcock, we allow hunting during the State seasons east of Sour Springs Road, except during refuge waterfowl hunt days. We allow hunting during State seasons by permitted waterfowl hunters during refuge waterfowl hunt days.

### **C. Relevant State Regulations**

Hunters may not distribute bait, or hunt over bait.

### **D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting**

The following regulations or procedures apply to all hunt programs:

- Weapons may not be discharged within, into, or across a “No Hunting Zone” or “Closed Area;” or from, on, or across any refuge road. Swallow Hollow, Kanyoo, Headquarters, and Onondaga Nature Trails are closed to hunting throughout the entire year.
- Hunting from within 500 feet of any hiking trail or from within 500 feet of any resident or refuge building is prohibited.
- Scouting for all species is restricted to dikes and upland areas. While scouting, hunters may not enter wetland areas with boats or on foot.
- Trail cameras are prohibited. Use of illuminating devices, including automobile headlights, for the purpose of spotlighting game species is prohibited.
- Vehicles are only allowed on established roads marked open for vehicular travel. Parked or stopped vehicles cannot obstruct the free movement of other vehicles.
- Vehicles must be parked off the lane of travel and clear of gates.
- All-terrain Vehicles and snowmobiles are not allowed.
- Use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting is prohibited.
- Vegetation may not be intentionally removed or altered in any way.
- Camping, overnight parking, fires, and littering are prohibited.

### ***Big Game Hunting (Deer and Turkey)***

- Scouting for deer and fall turkey is permitted from September 1 through the last day of season, and for spring turkey from April 22 to April 30, excluding the State Youth Hunt Weekend.
- Dogs are prohibited while scouting.
- Only temporary, portable tree stands and ground blinds are acceptable and must be removed at the end of each day's hunt.
- Hunters cannot use screw-in steps, nails, spikes, wire, or bolts as climbing or hanging devices to attach a stand to a tree.
- Spring turkey hunters must have their refuge permit in their possession while scouting or hunting.
- Spring turkey hunters are required to turn in a big game harvest report (FWS Form 3-2359) no later than June 7, whether or not they hunted.

### ***Small/Upland Game***

- Scouting for small/upland game is permitted from September 1 through the last day of February.
- Hunters may use only approved non-toxic shot for the shotgun hunting of all small/upland game species.
- Temporary, portable tree stands and ground blinds are acceptable and must be removed daily.

### ***Waterfowl and Coot Hunting***

- Waterfowl and coot hunters must have their refuge permit in their possession while hunting.
- Scouting for waterfowl and coot is permitted from September 1 through the last day of season.
- Temporary ground blinds are acceptable and must be removed at the end of each day's hunt. No permanent structures are allowed.
- Hunters hunting from designated stand markers must stay within 100 feet of their stand marker unless they are dispatching a crippled bird.



- Non-motorized boats and canoes are permitted in the waterfowl free roam areas as well as designated stand areas where it is deemed more appropriate to access via this method and not by foot. Hunting from canoes and non-motorized boats is permitted as per State law.
- Vegetation may not be intentionally removed or altered in any way.
- During the youth waterfowl hunt, youth hunters must be accompanied by a licensed adult hunter, as per State regulations. This adult hunter must also have taken and passed the New York State Waterfowl Identification Course.

### ***Other Migratory Game Birds***

- Hunters may use only approved non-toxic shot for the shotgun hunting of all migratory bird game species.

## **V. Public Engagement**

### **A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program**

The refuge maintains a mailing list for news release purposes, which includes local newspapers, radio, and websites. Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with hunting seasons. In addition, information about the hunt will be available at Iroquois NWR visitor center and/or on the Iroquois NWR website. We posted the draft Hunting Plan and Compatibility Determination on March 18, 2020 for public review. Comments were accepted through April 17, 2020.

### **B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program**

The outline of our hunt program was discussed in the CCP and public comments addressed at that time. Because the refuge has been open to hunting since it was established, and hunting occurred in the area for many years before the creation of the refuge, we expect no additional impacts or negative public reaction. Eight separate comments on the draft documents were received, with our responses attached to the Categorical Exclusion (Appendix B).

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

General hunting information, fact sheets, maps, application forms, and other information regarding hunting and other wildlife-dependent public uses can be obtained in person or by mail at Iroquois NWR headquarters at 1101 Casey Road, Basom, NY 14013, by email at [iroquois@fws.gov](mailto:iroquois@fws.gov), by calling the refuge at 585-948-5445, or on the refuge web site at: [www.fws.gov/refuge/iroquois/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/iroquois/).

## **VI. Compatibility Determination**

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See Hunting Compatibility Determination.