

## Guiding Policies and Laws

- The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to “administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”
- The Deer Flat NWR purpose is to provide “a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.”
- The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act as amended by the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (“Improvement Act”) specifies that refuges will be managed for wildlife first, with public uses being allowed if they are appropriate and compatible with the needs of wildlife.
- The Improvement Act defines six priority wildlife-dependent public uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation) as appropriate uses of refuge lands. These six uses are to receive equal consideration and have priority over all other uses.
- The Appropriate Refuge Uses Policy requires the Service to evaluate the appropriateness of all uses on a National Wildlife Refuge. The six priority wildlife-dependent uses are considered appropriate by policy. Appropriate uses must:
  - Contribute to the public’s understanding and appreciation of the refuge’s natural or cultural resources, or must be beneficial to the refuge’s natural or cultural resources.
  - Not impair existing wildlife-dependent recreational uses or reduce the potential to provide quality, compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation into the future.
- All appropriate uses must also be evaluated for compatibility with the wildlife first mission. To be compatible, a use must not materially interfere with or detract from the purpose of the Refuge or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission.
- The Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health policy provides for the consideration and protection of the broad spectrum of fish, wildlife, and habitat resources found on refuges and associated ecosystems. According to this policy, “the highest measure of biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health is viewed as those intact and self-sustaining habitats and wildlife populations that existed during historic conditions.” The policy directs refuge managers to prevent additional degradation of environmental conditions and, where appropriate, to restore lost or severely degraded components.”

# Surface Water Recreation

**Goal:** Lake Lowell surface water users will participate in recreational activities that are appropriate and compatible with the purpose of Deer Flat NWR, with an emphasis on wildlife-dependent activities.

## Questions to consider:

- 1) How can non-wildlife-dependent surface water uses of Lake Lowell be managed to benefit and/or increase the understanding of the natural and cultural resources of the refuge?
- 2) How can all surface water uses of Lake Lowell be managed to assure that they do not interfere with or detract from providing a refuge and breeding grounds for migratory birds and other wildlife.
- 3) How can non-wildlife-dependent surface-water uses be accommodated without impairing existing or future wildlife-dependent uses (i.e. minimize conflicts between user groups)?

## Background:

### Current Wildlife-Dependent Surface Water Uses

Fishing

Hunting

Wildlife Observation

Wildlife Photography

### Current Non-Wildlife-Dependent Surface Water Uses\*\*

Boating while not engaged in a wildlife-dependent activity; including

- Waterskiing
- Wakeboarding
- Tubing
- Windsurfing
- Non-motorized boating (e.g., kayaking, canoeing, etc.)
- Motorized boating
- Sailing
- Personal Watercraft (e.g. jet ski)

Kite boarding

Swimming

\*\*Please add any additional activities to the Ideas Tables provided in your packets

## Refuge Visitation

- During FY09, total Refuge visitation was estimated at about 167,000.
- Refuge visitors are primarily local. In FY09, 95% of surveyed vehicles had Idaho license plates. Of those:
  - 63% had plates issued in Canyon County
  - 15% had plates issued in neighboring Ada County

## **Regulations and Facilities**

- The lake is closed to most boating from October 1 through April 14 for wintering waterfowl, however:
  - Human-powered boats are allowed within 200 yards of the Upper and Lower Dams.
  - Waterfowl hunters in the South Side Recreation Area may use human or electrically-powered boats up to 200 yards from the shore.
- Between April 15 and September 30, motorized and non-motorized boats are allowed on the entire Lake. Non-wildlife-dependent boating (including use of personal watercraft) is highest in June and July.
- There is a no wake zone on the east side of the Lake that encompasses about 12% of the Lake (based on 2518 feet water level).
- The following boat ramps are available:
  - Improved boat ramps are located at the Lower Dam Recreation Area and the east and west ends of the Upper Dam.
  - Unimproved ramps are available at Parking Lots 1 and 7.
  - All ramps are subject to closure due to low water levels.
- The only designated swimming beach is just east of the east upper dam boat launch, marked with docks and buoys. Swimming also occurs along the shoreline, including areas accessed via the Iowa curves parking lots, at the Lower Dam Recreation Area, and occasionally in other areas.

## **Fishing**

- In FY09, it is estimated that 21% (35,600) of visitors fished at the Refuge. Of those, 69% (24,725) fished from boats.
- General state seasons and limits apply, with the exception that bass is catch-and-release from January 1 through June 30 and a 12" to 16" slot limit for bass is in place for the rest of the year.
- The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and Idaho Department of Health and Welfare have issued fish consumption advisories at both Lake Lowell and in the Snake River.
- Bass fishing organizations have held fishing tournaments on the Lake for many years.
  - Fishing tournaments are not currently allowed between May 14 and July 9 to reduce disturbance to breeding and nesting birds.
  - Fishing tournaments are held at the Lower Dam Recreation Area.

## **Waterfowl Hunting**

- In FY09, it is estimated that 4% (6,271) of visitors hunted (including upland game and waterfowl hunting) at the Refuge.
- Waterfowl (excluding goose) hunting is permitted on both the East Side and South Side Recreation Areas
  - In the South Side Recreation Area, human or electrically-powered boats can be used up to 200 yards from the shore.
  - Hunting in the East Side Recreation Area is by walk-in only.

## **Non-Wildlife-Dependent Recreation**

- In FY09, it is estimated that 37 % (61,972) of Refuge visitors participated in non-wildlife-dependent water-based activities, including waterskiing, jetskiing, and swimming.

## **Wildlife and Habitat**

- The optimal timing for bass fishing on the Lake is early spring and fall (September). Early spring and fall fishing coincide with times of high migratory bird use on the Lake.
- During most years, approximately 5-10,000 resident and migratory Canada geese begin to use the Lake by mid-September.
- Geese primarily use the shallow water, smartweed beds, and other emergent cover of the Lake for sanctuary and loafing during the spring and summer and croplands on and off the Refuge for foraging during the fall and winter.
- Western and Clark's grebes nest in the emergent vegetation along the lake shoreline from approximately early April through mid-July. Colonies were documented in the south side of the lake in the narrows and the no wake zone in 2010 and have occurred in these locations historically. Grebes require deep open water habitat to forage and raise their young.
- Recreating in and adjacent to shallow water habitats potentially creates disturbance to wildlife.
- Wading birds (e.g., great blue herons and great egrets) nest in the riparian habitat in the narrows and historically near the New York Canal. The rookery at the New York Canal no longer exists and the rookery at the narrows has declined in size over time.
- Two pairs of bald eagles nest in the riparian habitat at Lake Lowell: one on the north side of the narrows, and the second at the far east end of the lake adjacent to the no wake zone.
- Waterfowl populations nationwide in 2009 show a 25% increase compared to the 1955 - 2008 average. In contrast, waterfowl numbers at Lake Lowell have decreased significantly since 1974 (706,000 to 27,179 in 2009). Possible reasons for this decline include, but are not limited to:
  - The Lake's location is wedged between two major flyways which may result in inconsistent numbers of waterfowl both annually and when considering generation cycles.
  - As housing developments increase and agricultural land decreases, the amount of available resources for waterfowl is diminished.
  - Increased efficiency in farming practices that produce higher yield reduce the amount of food left for wildlife to consume.
  - If the increase in the Treasure Valley's overall population has led to an increase in hunting, waterfowl may have been pushed to areas with less hunting pressure.
  - An increase in recreational use of Lake Lowell may have resulted in additional pressure pushing waterfowl to other areas.

## **Water Quality**

- Lake Lowell has had a number of water quality issues that may affect the health of lake recreationists. Water quality issues include blue-green algal blooms, mercury and possibly fecal coliform bacteria.
- Refuge staff have received complaints from recreationists about swimmer's itch, ear infections and giardia.
- Water quality is not routinely monitored (by the Service or the local health agencies) for swimming-related health risks.

**Nearby Facilities Offering Fishing, Hunting, Boating, and Swimming**

<b>Reservoir</b>	<b>Approximate Driving Distance From Lake Lowell</b>	<b>Managing Agency(ies)</b>
Lucky Peak	36 miles	Army Corps of Engineers, Idaho Department of Parks & Rec, IDFG
Black Canyon	45 miles	Reclamation & IDFG
Arrow Rock	56 miles	Reclamation & Boise National Forest
C.J. Strike	73 miles	Idaho Power, BLM, & IDFG
Owyhee	78 miles	Oregon State Parks & Recreation
Brownlee	98 miles	Idaho Power
Cascade	104 miles	Reclamation
Anderson Ranch	106 miles	Reclamation & Boise National Forest

# Upland Recreation

**Goal:** Lake Lowell Unit upland users will participate in recreational activities that are appropriate and compatible with the purpose of Deer Flat NWR, with an emphasis on wildlife-dependent activities.

**Questions to consider:**

- 1) How can non-wildlife-dependent land uses of the Lake Lowell unit be managed to benefit and/or increase the understanding of the natural and cultural resources of the refuge?
- 2) How can all land uses of Lake Lowell unit be managed to assure that they do not interfere with or detract from providing a refuge and breeding grounds for migratory birds and other wildlife?
- 3) How can non-wildlife-dependent land uses of the Lake Lowell unit be accommodated without impairing existing or future wildlife-dependent recreational uses (i.e. minimize conflicts between user groups)?

**Background:**

**Current Wildlife-Dependent Upland Uses**

Fishing

Hunting

Wildlife Observation

Wildlife Photography

Environmental Education

Interpretation

**Current Non-Wildlife-Dependent Upland Uses\*\***

Dog walking

Jogging/walking; including

- Individuals
- Cross-country/track meets
- Cross-country/track team training

Horseback riding

Ice skating

Cross country skiing

Bicycling

Picnicking

Group Events (e.g. weddings, birthdays, reunions, etc.)

Beach Use

\*\*Please add any additional activities to the Ideas Tables provided in your packets

## **Refuge Visitation**

- During FY09 total Refuge visitation was estimated at about 167,000.
- Refuge visitors are primarily local. In FY09, 95% of surveyed vehicles had Idaho license plates. Of those:
  - 63% had plates issued in Canyon County
  - 15% had plates issued in neighboring Ada County

## **Facilities and Regulations**

### Fishing:

- During the boating season, there is a fishing dock accessible to mobility-impaired visitors at the west upper dam boat ramp.
- Fishing is not allowed from the swimming and boat launching docks.
- In many areas, fishing access to the Lake is through social trails (i.e unauthorized trails) that may impact habitat quality

### Swimming:

- The only designated swimming beach is just east of the east upper dam boat launch, marked with docks and buoys managed by Canyon County Parks, Recreation, and Waterways. Swimming also occurs along the shoreline, including areas accessed via the Iowa curves parking lots, at the Lower Dam Recreation Area, and occasionally in other areas.

### Jogging:

- Walking and jogging (for non-competitive purposes) are allowed on maintained roads, trails, and firebreaks.
- Use of social trails tramples vegetation and encourages public use in formerly undisturbed areas.

### Picnicking:

- A picnic shelter and tables are available at the Lower Dam Recreation Area;
- Picnic tables are available at the east end of the upper dam and at the visitor center.
- There are county owned picnic facilities adjacent to the Upper Dam East access area.

### Gotts Point:

- Gotts Point is closed to all entry from October 1-January 31 for wintering waterfowl.
- Due to excessive vandalism and other law enforcement issues, the two most westerly parking areas at Gotts Point have been closed to vehicle access since 2007.
- The Gotts Point shoreline is not accessible to mobility-impaired visitors.

### Lower Dam Recreation Area

- Manicured areas are currently maintained through partnership with Canyon County.

### Wildlife Observation and Photography

- Wildlife-watching and photography facilities are all in the North Side Recreation Area and include the Visitor Center viewing room and spotting scope, two wildlife-viewing platforms accessible to mobility-impaired visitors, and a wildlife-viewing blind.

## **Fishing**

- In FY09, it is estimated that 21% (35,600) of visitors fished at the Refuge. Of those, 69% (24,725) fished from boats.

- General state seasons and limits apply, with the exception that bass is catch-and-release from January 1 through June 30 and a 12" to 16" slot limit for bass is in place for the rest of the year.
- The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and Idaho Department of Health and Welfare have issued fish consumption advisories at both Lake Lowell and in the Snake River.
- Bass fishing organizations have held fishing tournaments on the Lake for many years.
  - Fishing tournaments are not currently allowed between May 14 and July 9 to reduce disturbance to breeding and nesting birds.
  - Fishing tournaments are held at the lower dam recreation area

### **Hunting**

- In FY09, it is estimated that 4% (6,271) of visitors hunted (including upland game and waterfowl hunting) at the Refuge.
- Waterfowl (excluding geese) and upland game bird hunting are permitted on both the East Side and South Side Recreation Areas.
- Hunting is allowed in areas where other recreational activities are also occurring (e.g. wildlife observation, horseback riding, jogging, etc.).

### **Environmental Education**

- During FY09, about 8% (12,000) of people participated in refuge Environmental Education programs.

### **Wildlife Observation and Wildlife Photography**

- In FY09, it is estimated that 9% (14,600) of visitors participated in wildlife observation and less than 1% (250) of visitors participated in wildlife photography.

### **Non-Wildlife Dependent land-based activities**

- During FY09, it is estimated that 18 % (30,691) of visitors participated in non-wildlife-dependent land-based activities.

# Hunting

**Goal:** Visitors of all abilities will participate in a variety of quality, safe hunting experiences that will foster support for the Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and encourage ethical, sportsmanlike behavior.

## Questions to consider:

1. Should we have a deer hunt on the Refuge? If so why, and how would you provide a safe hunt that does not interfere with or detract from providing a refuge and breeding grounds for migratory birds and other wildlife.
2. How could a deer hunt be implemented without impairing other wildlife-dependent recreational uses (i.e. minimize conflicts between user groups)? Also consider potential conflicts between a proposed deer hunt and existing non-wildlife-dependent uses.
3. How would you improve the quality of the current upland game and waterfowl hunts?
4. How would you encourage ethical, sportsmanlike behavior?

## Background

### Current Non-Wildlife-Dependent Upland Uses\*\*

Dog walking

Jogging/walking; including

- Individuals
- Cross-country/track meets
- Cross-country/track team training

Horseback riding

Ice skating

Cross country skiing

Bicycling

Picnicking

Group Events (e.g. weddings, birthdays, reunions, etc.)

Beach Use

\*\*Please add any additional activities to the Ideas Tables provided in your packets

### Current Status

- In FY09, it is estimated that 4% (6,271) of visitors hunted at the refuge.
- One quarter of the Lake Lowell Unit is open to hunting for mourning dove, upland game birds, ducks and coots.
- Waterfowl (excluding geese) hunting is permitted on both the East Side and South Side Recreation Areas
  - In the South Side Recreation Area, human or electrically-powered boats can be used up to 200 yards from the shore.
  - Hunting in the East Side Recreation Area is by walk-in only.

- All of the Lake Lowell Unit is within a goose closure zone established by Idaho Fish and Game in the 1950s.
- General state seasons and limits apply.
- Hunting involves off-trail travel and off-leash hunting dogs.
- The closest public hunt area for walk-in hunters is at Fort Boise Wildlife Management Area, about 30 miles west.
- Hunting is allowed in areas where other recreational activities are also occurring (e.g. horseback riding, jogging, wildlife observing, etc.)

### **Facilities**

- Boat launches are available at Parking Lots 1 and 7 when water conditions permit. There are no blinds or designated hunting spots.
- Portable blinds are allowed if they are removed at the end of each day. Temporary blinds may be constructed from natural vegetation less than 3 inches in diameter and are available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- There are currently no ADA-compliant hunting facilities, but hunters have been issued special use permits to drive to hunting sites otherwise available only by walking.

### **Concerns**

- Over-crowding
- Sky busting (i.e. pass shooting)
- Some hunters set up and stay all day, reducing the hunting opportunity for others.
- Hunters often leave spent shells.
- Lake Lowell neighbors have voiced concern about noise and safety issues associated with hunting.

### **Deer Hunting**

- There is currently a deer hunt on the Snake River Islands Unit, but not on the Lake Lowell Unit.
- There have been complaints about depredation on nearby agricultural lands, but the extent of the impact is unknown.
- The Refuge does not know the size, age/sex ratio, and health of the mule deer population.
- The Refuge does not know the impact, or lack thereof, of mule deer on refuge habitat.
- Deer hunting is allowed on private land directly adjacent to the refuge.
- Deer hunting seasons overlap with upland game and waterfowl hunting seasons.