

Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council

CHAIRMAN
Jeffrey S. Crane

VICE CHAIRMAN
Christopher Cox

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

APR 25 2019

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

The members of the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council are most appreciative of your leadership and the efforts of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) staff to increase hunting access to the National Wildlife Refuge System. As you know, many refuges have been acquired through the support of hunters, most notably through the purchase of Federal "Duck Stamps." Given this history of support and because many hunters rely extensively on public lands, we support your efforts to increase hunting access and opportunity to the Refuge system. The Council urges you to maintain the momentum and increase efforts to prioritize access for America's hunting public.

So that we can better understand and lend our support to the work accomplished and future efforts to increase hunter access, we are seeking clarity on the impact of the actions taken, to date. To that end, we request the following:

- 1) We ask the Service to maintain the momentum of the last two years and maintain an aggressive pace on efforts to increase access on refuges at levels similar or greater than those levels seen in 2018 (248,000 acres).*

The Service should prioritize efforts to significantly increase hunting access on existing Service refuges. This approach provides the most cost effective means of increasing hunter opportunities throughout the Refuge system. Efforts to increase access have been widely heralded by wildlife and conservation organizations, as well as hunters across the country. Because access consistently ranks as the most important determinant in hunter satisfaction, any and all efforts to provide increased incremental access and hunting opportunities is a high priority for the Council.

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- 2) *We ask the Service to provide a detailed report of accomplishments from the years 2017 and 2018 related to access on Refuge lands. The report should identify both newly opened lands and lands where hunting opportunities have been expanded, providing detailed explanations on the definition of terms used by the Service.*

A summary of the different actions taken by the Service will help the Council and nongovernmental partners properly convey the value of past actions as well as more fully describe the real value to hunters of these efforts and assess its impact.

- 3) *We ask the Service to provide a summary of actions taken to make Service regulations consistent with State regulations.*

The Council recognizes that the effort to align Service regulations more closely to state regulations represents an under-celebrated, but significant achievement that deserves recognition. These regulatory alignment efforts may in fact have an equal or greater impact on hunter access and opportunities than the acreage opened or expanded for hunting. While a full reporting of the 3,000 lines of regulations that have been stricken is not necessary, a working summary of high impact hunting regulations reform would be valuable to the Council and a communication output to hunters.

- 4) *We ask the Service to provide information related to the establishment of method of take rules.*

In managing hunting on Refuge lands, the Service establishes rules governing the method of take for these lands. The Council seeks to understand the methodology the Service utilizes in establishing these rules including their consistency, or lack thereof, between and among the states, and the extent to which federal law governs these federally administered lands.

The Council is most appreciative of your leadership and the continued hard work of the Department and Service leadership on these very important matters. We look forward to receiving this information, as well as a briefing on your continued progress in providing more access and opportunities for sportsmen and women at the next Council meeting. Should you have question or need more information regarding these matters, please contact Doug Hobbs, the Council Designated Federal Officer, at doug_hobbs@fws.gov or on (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey S. Crane
Chairman

Cc:

Todd Willens, Acting Chief of Staff, U.S. Department of the Interior

Andrea Travnicek, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior

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