

Final Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge Hunting Plan

July 2020

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Central Sage Steppe Complex
P.O. Box 700, Green River, Wyoming 82935

Submitted By:

Tom Koerner, Project Leader

Tom Koerner

07/27/2020

Signature

Date

Concurrence:

Lisa Talcott, Refuge Supervisor

Lisa Talcott

7/29/20

Signature

Date

Approved:

Maureen Gallagher, Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

Signature

Date

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Final Hutton Lake 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 an individual refuge, United States (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy, and laws and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (NWRSA), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act), Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is approximately 10 miles southwest of Laramie, Wyoming. The refuge was established pursuant to Executive Order 5782 dated January 28, 1932. More lands were added in 1933 and 1939 pursuant to the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S. Code 715d). The primary purpose of the refuge is to serve as “as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wild animals (Executive Order 5782) and “. . . for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds (Migratory Bird Conservation Act).” Subsequent amendments to the Migratory Bird Conservation Act allow up to 40 percent of lands purchased under this authority to be opened for migratory bird hunting, which equates to approximately 795 acres at Hutton Lake NWR.

The refuge provides important resting, nesting, and foraging areas for migratory birds in the semiarid environment of the Laramie Plains basin. The most abundant species during spring and fall migration include mallard, redhead, teal, pintail, great blue heron, black-crowned night-heron, phalarope, western grebe, bittern, and black tern. Water management on the refuge is opportunistic due to limited water rights and a closed basin system. Ponds are filled in the spring with natural runoff and maintained as high as possible during the breeding and brood-rearing seasons.

Besides to providing important habitat for migratory birds, the refuge has reported approximately 3,600 visitors annually (2018 Refuge Annual Performance Plan). Note, however, that a newly installed car counter on the refuge reports that it may have as many as 20,000 visitors per year. Most visitation occurs from March to October because refuge access and recreation opportunities are limited from November to February due to frozen lakes and cold, snowy weather.

The mission of the Refuge System, as outlined by the NWRSA, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (16 U.S Code 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 NWRSAA mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the System to (16 U.S. Code 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. Code 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.

The vision for the Laramie Plains refuges (Bamforth NWR, Hutton Lake NWR, and Mortenson Lake NWR) stated in the 2007 comprehensive conservation plan (CCP; USFWS 2007), as amended (Appendix A) is:

“The wetland complexes and uplands of the Laramie Plains refuges are important resource components of this semiarid region that provide key habitat for the Wyoming toad, migratory birds, and resident wildlife.”

“These refuges will be evaluated to direct management decisions to provide natural and enhanced habitat, thereby maximizing the unique potential of each refuge. Wildlife-dependent recreation will be evaluated for each refuge to determine potential appropriate public use opportunities.”

The CCP also established the following visitor services goal for the refuge (USFWS 2007):

“Provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives.”

II. Statement of Objectives

The objectives of a hunting program on the refuge are to:

- meet the refuge establishing purposes, which includes keeping at least 60 percent of the refuge closed to waterfowl hunting to provide inviolate sanctuary for migratory birds;
- provide wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities in accordance with federal laws and Service policy and in alignment with state regulations;
- provide increased opportunities for a hunting experience on refuge lands, especially for youth and families;
- provide nearby hunting access for local communities; and
- assist with hunter education.

Hunting is consistent with the CCP's visitor services goal to provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives.

III. Description of Hunting Program

A. Areas to Be Opened to Hunting

Waterfowl Hunting

The refuge is open for youth waterfowl hunting in alignment with all Special Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days and general waterfowl hunting regulations for the State of Wyoming. In accordance with the refuge's establishing legislation, the maximum area that can be opened to hunting on the refuge is 40 percent. Hutton Lake, Hoge Lake, and surrounding upland acres will be open to waterfowl hunting, as shown in Figure 1. The hunting unit is composed of approximately 748 acres (37 percent of the total refuge acres). There are 268 acres of wetlands (55 percent of total refuge wetlands) and 480 acres of uplands (32 percent of total refuge uplands). Hunting areas will be identified by public hunting area boundary signs.

Big Game and Upland Game Hunting

All the refuge will be open to big game and upland game hunting, except for a "no hunting safety zone" (1,648 acres open/341 acres closed) around the road and walking trails (see Figure 1).

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

Species to be Taken: The refuge will be open to waterfowl hunting (ducks, mergansers, American coots, dark geese, and light geese), big game (pronghorn and white-tailed deer), and upland game (cottontail rabbits, ring-necked pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, wild turkey, chukar, and gray partridge).

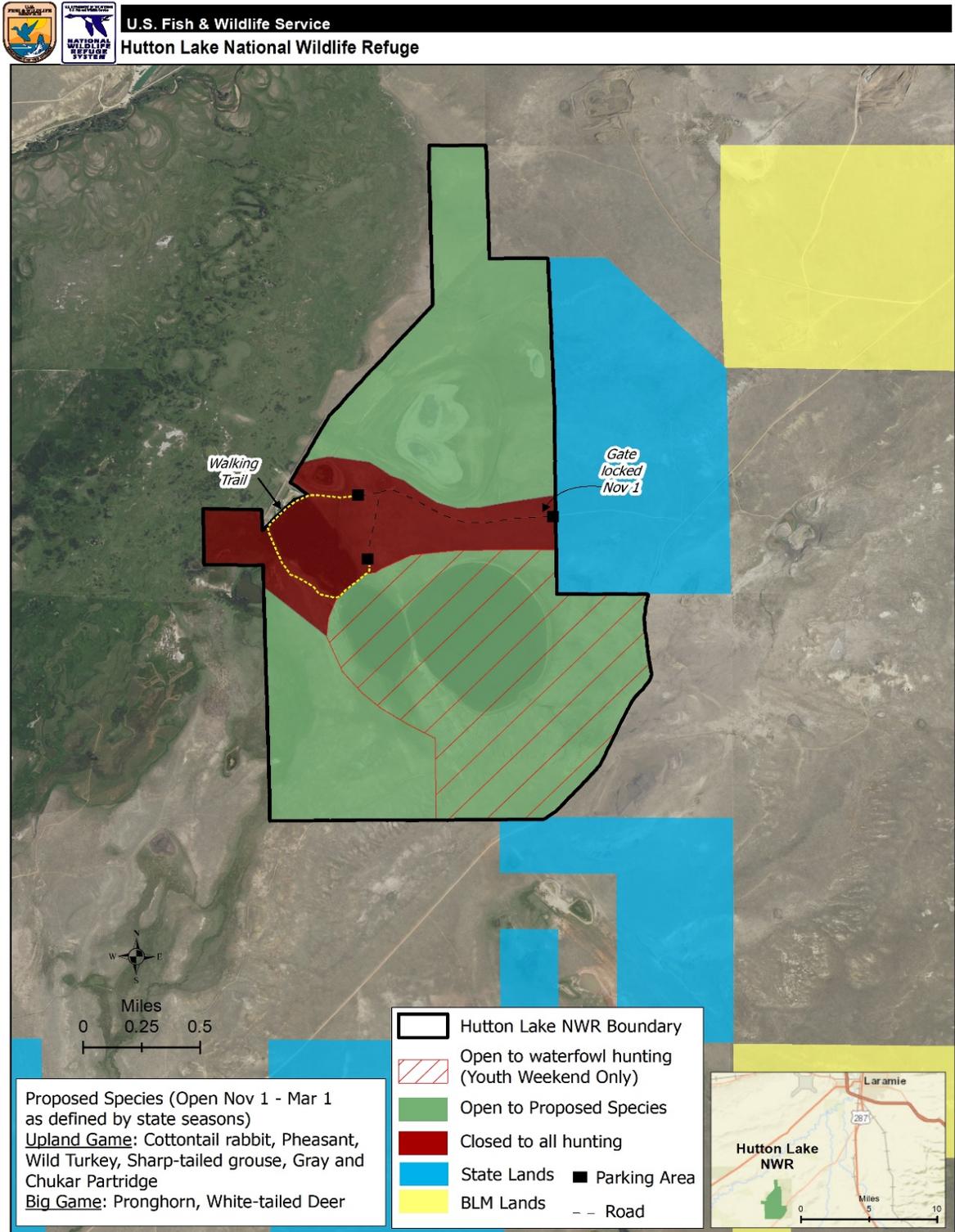


Figure 1. Map of Hunting Areas on Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Hunting Periods: For waterfowl, the refuge hunting season will follow the dates of the Wyoming Central Flyway Special Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days. Big game and upland game hunting will align with Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) regulations, except for season dates. For some big game and upland game species, hunting on the refuge will be for a shorter period, from November 1 to March 1. Season dates have been shortened to accommodate significant non-consumptive public use that occurs in the fall and spring and minimize disturbance to migratory birds during peak migration.

Hunting Access: Except for the accessible hunting blind, hunters will park their vehicles in designated parking areas and access the hunt area on foot.

C. Hunter Permit Requirements

No permits are required.

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

The refuge reviewed the operations and regulations for neighboring state wildlife management areas and refuges to find consistency, where possible. WGFD leadership expressed interest in having the Service evaluate opening the refuge for waterfowl, big game, and upland game hunting. This interest was congruent with the Department of Interior Secretarial Order 3356, “Hunting, Fishing, Recreational Shooting, and Wildlife Conservation Opportunities and Coordination with States, Tribes, and Territories.”

WGFD reviewed the draft environmental assessment, draft hunting plan, and draft compatibility determination during the 30-day comment period. WGFD expressed their support for the proposed action to open Hutton Lake NWR to big game and upland game hunting. We, the Service, will continue to consult and coordinate on specific aspects of the hunting plan with WGFD to ensure safe and enjoyable recreational hunting opportunities.

E. Law Enforcement

Enforcement of refuge regulations normally associated with management of a national wildlife refuge is the responsibility of commissioned federal wildlife officers. Other officers, special agents, state game wardens, and the local sheriff’s department assist the refuge staff.

The following methods are used to control and enforce hunting regulations:

- Refuge and hunt area boundaries will be clearly posted.
- The refuge will provide a brochure that identifies hunt areas and hunting regulations.
- Refuge law enforcement staff will randomly check hunters for compliance with federal and state laws.
- Officers from within the zone will detail in to assist with enforcing hunting regulations.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Annual hunt administration costs for Hutton Lake NWR, including salary, equipment, law

enforcement, and brochures will be approximately \$2,000. Central Sage Steppe NWR Complex funds will be used to conduct hunts on the refuge. Funding specific for hunting on Hutton Lake NWR has not been allocated. No hunter fees are collected. Some infrastructure improvements will be needed to support hunting, including hunting area boundary signs purchase and installation (estimated \$5,000).

IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program

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

Not applicable.

B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

- Big game and upland game bird hunting will be open from November 1 to March 1.
- Non-toxic shot is required for waterfowl and upland game hunting.

C. Relevant State Regulations

Hunters must follow all Special Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days and general waterfowl, big game, and upland game hunting regulations for the State of Wyoming.

D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting

- Hunters will be allowed to access the hunting area 1 hour before legal shooting time.
- Motor vehicles are permitted on existing refuge roads only. Vehicles are not permitted on roads marked “Authorized Vehicles Only” or roads closed by gates.
- Parking is permitted only in designated parking areas.
- Off-road vehicles may not be used on any portion of the refuge.
- All watercraft are prohibited.
- Hunting access is walk-in only.
- Fishing, fires, and overnight camping are not permitted on the refuge.
- Portable blinds are permitted, but they cannot be left unattended or overnight.
- Disturbing, cutting, gathering, manipulating, or bringing in any vegetation to create a blind is prohibited.
- Molesting, injuring, disturbing, or destroying any animal or plant is prohibited, as is the removal of animals, plants, or parts thereof.
- Artifacts and historic items are protected on refuge lands by federal law. It is unlawful to search for or remove these objects from refuge lands.
- Possession or use of other than non-toxic shot shells is prohibited.

- Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms on Refuge System lands must comply with all provisions of state and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 Code of Federal Regulations 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 Code of Federal Regulations Part 32).
- Dogs are to be restrained except while engaged in hunting activity.
- Cleaning of birds on the refuge is prohibited.
- Hunters must remove all personal trash, including spent shells.

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program

The refuge keeps a mailing list composed of local newspapers, radio stations, and websites for communication purposes. Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with hunting seasons. In addition, information about the hunt will be available at Arapaho NWR headquarters and on the refuge website.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program

Hunting is an important economic and recreational use of Wyoming's natural resources. The refuge was opened in 2019 for the first time to a youth waterfowl hunt. Some individuals and local user groups have already voiced their concern with waterfowl hunting on the refuge; it is possible that the public will also voice concerns about big game and upland game hunting during the public comment period.

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

General information regarding hunting and other wildlife-dependent public uses can be obtained at Arapaho NWR headquarters at 953 Jackson County Road 32, Walden, CO 80480, by mail at 28111 State Highway 125, Walden, CO 80480, or by calling (970) 723-8202. Dates, forms, hunting unit directions, maps, and other information about the hunt will be available on the station website at www.fws.gov/refuge/hutton_lake/.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See the Final Compatibility Determination for Hunting on Hutton Lake NWR (www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php#).

VII. References

[USFWS] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2007. Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge, Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuge. September 2007. 107 p. <www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/refuges/completedPlanPDFs_A-E/bmf_htl_mrl_2007_ccpfinal_all.pdf>

**APPENDIX A. LARAMIE PLAINS COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN
REVISION**



In Reply Refer to:
FWS/IR05/IR07

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
P.O. Box 700
Green River, Wyoming 82935



FEB 28 2020

Memorandum

To: Assistant Regional Director, Refuges
Through: Refuge Supervisor, Mountain Zone
From: Project Leader, Central Sage-Steppe Complex
Subject: Request for Minor Revision to 2007 Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Bamforth, Hutton Lake and Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuges

The Service is currently drafting a Hunting Plan and associated Environmental Assessment for hunting on Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge). We are also drafting a Hunting Plan and associated Environmental Assessment for hunting on Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge. In 2007, the Service completed a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for Hutton Lake, Bamforth and Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuges. Although the CCP covered all three refuges, separate goals and objectives were developed within the CCP for each refuge.

For Hutton Lake NWR, the Visitor Services Goal in the CCP is "Provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives". I am proposing minor revisions to the CCP that will allow hunting on Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Bamforth National Wildlife Refuges. Specifically, I am proposing to add the Visitor Services Goal for Hutton Lake refuge to the goals for Bamforth NWR. In addition, I am proposing to add the following objective under the Visitor Services Goal for Hutton Lake and Bamforth National Wildlife Refuges: "Where compatible, allow hunting opportunities that foster an appreciation and understanding of the management and resources of the Refuge and the System". These changes will provide additional potential hunting opportunities to the public, as referenced in Secretarial Order 3356. These revisions would not apply to Mortenson Lake NWR because of concerns that opening this refuge to hunting may negatively impact the federally endangered Wyoming toad population on the refuge.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 and Service policy (Fish and Wildlife Service Manual chapters 602 FW 1 and 3) identify the need to periodically review and revise Comprehensive Conservation Plans. Specifically the Service Manual chapter 602 FW 3, (Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process) Section 3.2 states "We will revise the CCP

**INTERIOR REGION 5
MISSOURI BASIN**

KANSAS, MONTANA*, NEBRASKA, NORTH DAKOTA,
SOUTH DAKOTA

*PARTIAL

**INTERIOR REGION 7
UPPER COLORADO RIVER BASIN**

COLORADO, NEW MEXICO, UTAH, WYOMING

every 15 years ... or earlier if monitoring and evaluation determine that we need changes to achieve planning unit purpose(s), vision, goals, or objectives” 2

The addition of the Visitor Services Goal to Bamforth NWR and the addition of an objective to Bamforth and Hutton Lake refuges are considered a minor CCP revision because they do not significantly change the management direction of the refuges. The addition of an objective under the Visitor Services Goal for Hutton Lake and Bamforth NWRs does not change the overall intent of the CCP objectives. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), meets the criteria for the following categorical exclusion: 516 DM 8.5 B (9) “Minor changes in existing master plans, comprehensive conservation plans, or operations, when no or minor effects are anticipated. Examples include minor changes in the type and location of compatible public use activities and land management practices.”

This memorandum complies with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, which states that the “Secretary shall ... revise the plan at any time if the Secretary determines that conditions that affect the refuge or planning unit have changed significantly.” Examples of new information or changed conditions include but are not limited to the following: 1) changes in the acreage of a specific habitat type; 2) changes in water management or availability; 3) changes in the status of a listed species; 4) the need for changes to wildlife management or public use programs; 5) changes to Service policy; 6) the need to construct new facilities, and/or 7) changes in sea level or other climate related changes.

Submitted By

Project Leader: Tom Koerner Tom Koerner 02/27/2020
(Signature) (Date)

Concurrence:

Refuge Supervisor: Lisa Jalcott 2/28/20
(Signature) (Date)

Approval:

~~hkf~~ Assistant Regional Director, Refuges: Neil Hoya 2/28/20
(Signature) (Date)