

## **Final Compatibility Determination for Recreational Hunting on Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge**

**Use:** Recreational hunting of big game, small game, predators, and waterfowl

**Refuge Name:** Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge

**Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):**

- Executive Order 7160
- Migratory Bird Conservation Act (45 Stat 1222)
- Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (76 Stat 653)

**Refuge Purpose(s):**

“ . . . as a refuge and breeding grounds for migratory birds and other wildlife . . . ” (Executive Order 7160, dated August 26, 1935).

“ . . . for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds ” (16 United States [U.S.] Code 715 [d], Migratory Bird Conservation Act).

“ . . . the Secretary is authorized to cooperate with public and private agencies, organizations, and individuals, and he may accept and use, without further authorization, donations of funds and real and personal property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors when such covenants are deemed by the Secretary to be compatible with the purposes of the wildlife refuges . . . ” (16 U.S. Code 460k-2) (Refuge Recreation Act [16 U.S. Code 460k-460-k], as amended).

**National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:**

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (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 U.S. for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

**Description of Use:**

*What is the use?*

Recreational hunting for migratory birds, big game, predators, and small game for pleasure, leisure, or subsistence.

*Where will the use be conducted?*

Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is approximately 16,570 acres of native sandhills, sub-irrigated meadows, impounded fresh water marshes, and tall and mixed-grass prairie uplands. As of 2019, approximately 8,900 acres are open to hunting of pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, and deer. Waterfowl, including duck, goose, coot, sandhill crane, mourning dove, American crow, and snipe, can be hunted on 222 acres of the Little White River Recreation Area. The 2020

hunting plan proposes to expand by 2,700 acres within two units of the Sandhills and increase the hunted species by six species including prairie chicken, cottontail rabbit, coyote, bobcat, mountain lion, and red fox. More than 5,000 acres will remain closed to hunting.

*When will this use be conducted?*

Recreational hunting will be in accordance with the seasons and regulations established by the State of South Dakota, Game, Fish, and Parks (SD GFP). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has further restricted predator, light geese, and crow hunting seasons and times of day. Predator hunting (coyote, bobcat, mountain lion, red fox) will be allowed January 1 through February 15, from one half hour before sunrise to one half hour after sunset. American crow and light geese will be open in accordance with the SD GFP fall seasons; however, the refuge will be closed to the SD GFP established spring seasons.

*How will this use be conducted?*

Recreational hunting is permitted in accordance with SD GFP rules and regulations, refuge specific regulations, and those published in Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations.

*Why is this use being proposed?*

This compatibility determination considers hunting, which is one of the six priority wildlife-dependent recreation activities. The primary objectives of the hunting at the refuge are to:

- provide a high-quality recreational and educational experience for a diverse audience through a hunting program offering 18 huntable species;
- provide an opportunity for the youth to engage in hunting, and to instill a basic understanding of conservation measures and the role of the Service in the conservation picture, such as with specific youth deer, pheasant, and waterfowl hunts;
- foster support and knowledge of refuge goals and objectives by working in close association with the public through SD GFP's assistance with the harvest and management of resident species on the refuge while providing safe, educational, and instructive opportunities;
- provide special use permits for physically challenged hunters; and
- allow for the harvest of big game, upland game, predators, and waterfowl on the refuge to help support healthy population levels and facilitate maintenance of quality habitat for endangered species, migratory birds, and native flora and fauna.

The refuge provides opportunities for archery and muzzleloader hunting of white-tailed and mule deer, and the refuge is proposing to align with the SD GFP established youth, mentor, and apprentice deer hunt with any weapon including centerfire rifles. The refuge will expand its waterfowl hunt to nearly 5,100 acres and will be open to the youth waterfowl hunt established by the SD GFP. Predator hunting is a popular sport in southcentral SD and the refuge is proposing to open nearly 5,600 acres to predator hunting. This predator hunt is designed to be a quality hunt, providing wide open expanses for predator callers. Because the mourning dove is considered America's top game species, more people hunt doves than any other species. The refuge is proposing to open nearly 5,100 acres to mourning dove hunting.

Specific changes to the hunting program include the following.

- In accordance with SD GFP seasons, the program will open to the Youth/Apprentice/Mentored deer hunt. This special hunt allows youth between the ages of 12 to 15 and hunters of any age that have not hunted deer in South Dakota in the past 10 years to hunt antlerless deer during a 4-month period while using the weapon of their choice.
- The following six added species will be hunted at the refuge: cottontail rabbit, prairie chicken, coyote, bobcat, mountain lion, and red fox.
- Approximately 2,700 acres will be added to hunting, including acres that have not been hunted in the refuge's history.
- The migratory bird hunt will expand from 222 acres to nearly 5,100 acres.
- A predator hunt will open to approximately 5,600 acres from January 1 to February 15.
- The deer, pheasant, and sharp-tailed grouse hunt will expand by 2,700 acres.
- The refuge permit rules will be eliminated for archery deer hunters.

#### **Availability of Resources:**

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use cover staff time associated with administration and law enforcement.

No special equipment or facilities are necessary to support the uses. Maintenance costs are not directly attributable to these incidental uses on the refuge. Improvements such as a west Pool 10 access road, creation of up to 12 parking lots, and construction of a 1-mile fence will be needed to start the new hunting program.

Minimal costs are associated with these uses to monitor the consequences of the public having access to the refuge, such as degree of littering and vandalism. Plants and wildlife will be monitored to determine any effects as a result of public use.

#### **Anticipated Impacts of the Use:**

Migratory bird populations are managed across a continental landscape. The Service annually assesses populations and habitat, allowing bag limits and seasons to be set accordingly. The SD GFP manages resident game across broad landscapes and allows harvest of annual surpluses through recreational hunting. Although hunting causes mortality and temporary disturbance to waterfowl and other wildlife, harvesting populations within the carrying capacity of existing habitat allows for long-term health and survival of the species.

Hunting activities are excluded on parts of the refuge. Certain areas of the refuge are not hunted to provide areas of sanctuary for all wildlife, such as for wintering trumpeter swans and migratory waterfowl. A 235-acre area closed to hunting will be established around the pool 10 structure for protection of wintering trumpeter swans, migratory waterfowl, and wintering bald eagles.

The refuge is open during the hunting season to other priority public uses such as fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation. To

safely provide both hunting and non-hunting recreational uses, the refuge enforces a series of refuge-specific hunting regulations. Hunting is not allowed on certain units or is restricted by location, date, or methods of take.

Refuge management activities can be accomplished without conflict with hunting activities using administratively closed areas, timing of hunts, and methods of hunting.

**Public Review and Comment:**

The compatibility determination for Lacreek NWR was made available for public review and comment for 30 days beginning April 1, 2020, and ending April 30, 2020. Announcements were made in the newspapers and posted on the refuge’s website and Facebook pages.

**Determination (check one below):**

- Use is not compatible.
- Use is compatible with the below stipulations.

**Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:**

The refuge will manage the six priority public uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation) with federal and state regulations and review it annually to make sure that wildlife and habitat goals are achieved and that these programs are providing safe, high-quality experiences for participants. Stipulations for this activity are in Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations and Lacreek NWR Hunting and Fishing Regulations (annual).

**Justification:**

Suitable habitat exists on the refuge lands to support hunting as proposed. The viability of the game species populations proposed to be hunted will not be negatively affected by hunting according to state season guidelines, bag limits, and regulations. This use is permitted because it is a priority public use. It will not diminish the primary purposes for which the refuge was established. This use is supported in the refuge's comprehensive conservation plan (2006). It also meets the mission of the Refuge System by providing renewable resources for the improvement of the American public while conserving viable populations of fish, wildlife, and plant resources on these lands.

Hunting is a priority public use on nearly 11,700 acres of the refuge. By allowing this use, we provide opportunities and facilitate refuge programs in a manner and location that offer high quality, wildlife-dependent recreation and maintain the level of current wildlife values. The harvest of surplus animals is one tool used to manage wildlife populations at a level compatible with the environment, while providing wholesome recreational opportunities. Any new lands bought as part of the refuge can be open to hunting depending on the manager’s discretion using professional judgment, as long as there is no significant negative effect on natural resources or visitor services.

This activity will not materially interfere with, or detract from, the mission of the Refuge System or the purpose for which the refuge was established.

**Signatures:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Schmidt, Refuge Manager

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Review:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Refuge Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Approval:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Maureen Gallagher, Refuge Chief  
Region 6

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date:** 2035