

Final Compatibility Determination for Hunting on Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge

Use: Recreational hunting

Refuge Name: Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):

- Migratory Bird Conservation Act, Executive Order 7425

Refuge Purpose(s):

Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established “as a refuge and breeding ground for birds and other wildlife” (Executive Order 7425, dated August 1, 1936).

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 United States (U.S.) for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Description of Use:

What is the use?

Hunting is a priority public use of the Refuge System. The use will be a recreational hunting program, which covers migratory birds (ducks, coots, mergansers, dark and light geese, mourning doves), big game (mule deer, white-tailed deer, and pronghorns), and upland gamebird and small game (grouse, rabbits, and hares), in accordance with regulations established by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD). This compatibility determination is an update to the previous compatibility determination developed in 2008 to include the addition of mourning doves. Hunting is one of the six wildlife-dependent, priority public uses specified in the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. It can be allowed at the refuge without interfering with the migratory bird resource.

Where is the use conducted?

The use will be conducted over the entire refuge.

When is the use conducted?

Hunting will occur in accordance with dates established by the WGFD with the following exceptions: late-season upland gamebird hunting and small game hunting will open on the day following the deer gun season. The upland gamebird hunting season will close when the state season closes. The small game hunting season will close on March 31 to reduce disturbance to waterfowl and other migratory birds.

How is the use conducted?

A state-issued unit permit will be required to hunt deer. All hunters must follow state regulations for hunted species. The refuge is closed to all other hunting activities.

Why is the use being proposed?

Hunting is a priority general public use of the Refuge System and is also an important wildlife management tool. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) recognizes hunting as a healthy, traditional, outdoor pastime, deeply rooted in the American heritage. Hunting can instill a unique understanding and appreciation of wildlife, their behavior, and their habitat needs. Hunting programs can promote understanding and appreciation of natural resources and their management on lands and waters in the Refuge System. In addition, the WFGD leadership expressed interest in having the Service evaluate opening the refuge for mourning dove hunting. This interest is congruent with the Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3356, "Hunting, Fishing, Recreational Shooting, and Wildlife Conservation Opportunities and Coordination with States, Tribes, and Territories."

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

- 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;
- assist with hunter education.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use: None.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use: None.

Maintenance costs: None.

Monitoring costs: None.

Offsetting revenues: None.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short and Long-Term Impacts:

There may be temporary disturbance to nontarget wildlife near the activity. Animal surplus to populations will be removed by hunting, which may help ensure populations remain beneath the carrying capacity of available habitats. Higher quality habitats capable of supporting healthy populations of wildlife will result if animal populations (especially deer) remain beneath carrying capacity.

Indirect and Cumulative Impacts:

There will be no indirect and cumulative impacts anticipated with this use.

Public Review and Comment:

This compatibility determination was prepared concurrently with the environmental assessment and companion hunting plan for the refuge. Public review and comment were achieved concurrently with the public review and comment period for the draft hunting plan and environmental assessment. Public review and comment was solicited through public posting of notices at the refuge and notices on the refuge website.

Determination:

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

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

- Hunters will be allowed to access the hunting area one hour before legal shooting time.
- Off-road vehicles may not be used on any portion of the refuge.
- The use of boats and canoes is only allowed on Pathfinder Reservoir.
- Hunting access is walk-in only.
- Camping is prohibited anywhere on the refuge, except at the Bishops Point Campground administered by the Natrona County Roads, Bridges, and Parks Department. All visitors must leave the refuge at the end of each day.
- Fires are not permitted on the refuge.
- Portable blinds are permitted but 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.
- 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 32).
- Possession or use of other than nontoxic shot shells is prohibited.
- All pets must be leashed, except for retrievers used for hunting during the appropriate hunting seasons.

