

Final Compatibility Determination for Hunting and Fishing on Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

Use: Hunting and fishing

Refuge Name: Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

- Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 United States [U.S.] Code Section 715d), Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S. Code Section 742f[a][4]), and Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S. Code Section 742f[b][1])

Refuge Purpose(s):

For use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds; for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources; and for the benefit of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in performing its activities and services.

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.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the Refuge 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 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.

Description of Use:

What is the use?

The use covers hunting opportunities besides the existing approved hunting and fishing uses. Other species to be hunted include deer, turkey, coyote, crow, and state-defined hunted furbearers (raccoon, opossum, striped skunk, bobcat, fox, mink, badger, muskrat, and weasel). Deer and turkey hunting were approved uses as part of the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) (USFWS 2013), but a step-down hunting and fishing plan has not since been proposed or approved. New methods of take allowed will include muzzleloader rifle and musket.

Where is the use conducted?

The added hunting uses will occur within the existing hunt unit boundaries (greater than 8,000 acres) on the refuge, as shown by the refuge hunt area map provided in the hunting plan, brochures, and other forms of communication.

When is the use conducted?

All new hunting opportunities will occur within the existing hunt season on the refuge, from September through February (all hunting closed March through August). Hunting will not be allowed at night. Refuge and shooting hours will remain the same as the current regulations. While specifics are described in the proposed hunting and fishing plan, closures will occur for the protection of species and the public. For example, closures could be started for the protection of whooping crane during migration. Deer hunting will occur in September and January, but not from October through December to accommodate a balance of consumptive and non-consumptive uses and wildlife-habitat conservation on the refuge. For example, public concerns exist about deer hunting effects on existing deer observation and photography opportunities, as well as bird and birding activities.

How is the use conducted?

The use is conducted according to state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations. Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism publishes hunting regulations annually at <https://ksoutdoors.com/Hunting>. Regulations pertaining to hunting on all national wildlife refuges are available in 50 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 32.2, and can be found at <https://ecfr.io/>. Refuge-specific regulations are available on the refuge's website at www.fws.gov/refuge/quivira/, as well as in brochures provided at refuge headquarters and kiosks.

The Service limits hunt area, season, hours, and other aspects of operations and procedures to make sure of compatibility of multiple wildlife-dependent uses and with conservation priorities as described in the refuge CCP (USFWS 2013).

Why is the use being proposed?

The use is conducted according to state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations. The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism publishes hunting regulations annually at www.ksoutdoors.com/Hunting. Regulations pertaining to hunting on all national wildlife refuges are available in the 50 CFR 32.2, which can be found at www.ecfr.io/. Refuge-specific regulations are available on the refuge's website, at www.fws.gov/refuge/quivira/, as well as in brochures provided at refuge headquarters and kiosks.

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Availability of Resources:

While added hunting opportunities will require more time and monetary resources, carrying out the hunting and fishing plan can occur under current administrative conditions. Existing programs, such as signs, brochures, and other communications, can be updated with available resources. Maintenance of infrastructure is closely tied to the Service Asset Maintenance Management System. The refuge's base budget will cover the cost of updates. Current law enforcement is enough for safety and management related to expanded hunting uses. Monitoring will heavily rely on state surveys and research information, such as that found at www.ksoutdoors.com/Services/Research-Publications/Wildlife-Research-Surveys. However, some refuge-specific activities will occur, such as whooping crane sight reporting.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

For a more in-depth evaluation of effects, refer to the environmental assessment associated with the refuge hunting and fishing plan.

The action meets the purpose and needs of the Service as described above, but with expanded wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities. There will be increased number of species allowed to be hunted, as well as associated seasons and methods of take to satisfy different hunting user groups. The refuge will allow opportunities to hunt deer, turkey, coyote, state-defined hunted furbearers, and crow with no appreciably adverse effects in context of regional or statewide populations. New hunting experiences will include use of a muzzleloader rifle and musket, where regulations allow; opportunities for muzzleloader and archery only seasons; and a youth and disabled season for deer. The challenge of balancing multiple consumptive and non-consumptive uses, all while supporting the conservation of natural resources, will persist. Hunting, fishing, and other public use activities have short-term disturbance effects. Refuge public use mitigation measures, such as area and temporal closures and the use of state-issued refuge access permits, and periodic assessments will allow adjustments in activities. In the years since CCP approval (2013), current conditions have offered hunting and fishing opportunities as whooping cranes continue to safely increase use of the refuge. This trend is expected to continue.

There are no foreseen long-term effects on sensitive non-target species, but periodic assessments may lead to necessary changes in public use activities.

Hunt and fish seasons and limits are established within frameworks set by Service for migratory birds and states for Kansas game species. Restrictions are adjusted with consideration of species population trends, supporting long-term conservation of natural resources.

Activities as part of the refuge hunting and fishing plan may negligibly affect other hunting and recreational uses and refuge administration. Adherence and enforcement of state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations are intended to facilitate public safety, multiple-use interests, and wildlife-habitat conservation. With respect to indirect or cumulative effects, there are no anticipated adverse effects to area land use, Indian Trust Resources, cultural resources, environmental justice, listed threatened and endangered species, or other biological community resources.

Public Review and Comment:

The draft compatibility determination was available for public review and comment along with the associated draft hunting and fishing plan and environmental assessment. Detailed summaries of comments received and responses to comments are included in the environmental assessment.

Determination:

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

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

To ensure compatibility with the Refuge System and refuge goals and objectives, hunting and fishing can only occur under the following conditions:

- Carrying out uses as described in the Quivira NWR Hunting and Fishing Plan, in accordance with applicable state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations.

Justification:

In view of the above and with the stipulations described before, hunting will not materially interfere with or detract from the Refuge System mission or purposes of the refuge. Hunting is a priority public use of the Refuge System and providing a hunting program contributes to achieving one of the refuge goals. Disturbance of wildlife will occur, but the effects are expected to be temporary and minimal. Hunting is not expected to adversely affect the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge or the Refuge System.

The Service and the State of Kansas consider hunting an acceptable and desirable form of public use and wildlife-dependent recreation. Hunting is considered an educational and recreational opportunity that increases the public's awareness of wise stewardship and management of wildlife resources in the public's trust. Recreational public hunting is a historic wildlife-dependent use of the Refuge System and is one of the six priority public uses established by

Executive Order 12996 (March 25, 1996) and legislatively authorized by the Improvement Act (Public Law 105-57).

Current staff and monetary levels are adequate to administer the hunting program. Kansas state law further controls hunter activities. Hunting is a legitimate wildlife management tool that can be used to control wildlife populations. Hunting harvests a small percentage of the renewable resources, which is in accordance with wildlife-management objectives and principles. Hunting is identified as a priority public use in the Improvement Act and will help meet Refuge System goals with only minimal conflicts. Wildlife-based recreation can instill a greater appreciation of natural resources. The refuge will continue to provide sanctuary habitat for birds and other wildlife throughout the year.

Signatures:

_____	_____
Craig Mowry, Project Leader	Date

Review:

_____	_____
Barbara Boyle, Refuge Supervisor	Date

Approval:

_____	_____
Maureen Gallagher, ARD, NWRS	Date

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