

Draft Environmental Assessment

for Sandhill Crane and Pronghorn Hunting on Ouray National Wildlife Refuge

April 2021

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This environmental assessment (EA) is being prepared to evaluate the effects associated with this proposed action and to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1509) and Department of the Interior (43 CFR 46; 516 DM 8), and United States (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) (550 FW 3) regulations and policies. NEPA requires examination of the effects of proposed actions on the natural and human environment. For additional compliance information, see Appendix A: list of relevant laws and executive orders. Appendix A outlines all law and executive orders evaluated through this EA.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Proposed Action

The Service is proposing to expand hunting opportunity on Ouray National Wildlife Refuge (Ouray NWR, refuge) to include sandhill crane and pronghorn as huntable species.

The Service is proposing to allow sandhill crane hunting on the Leota Bottom waterfowl hunting area concurrently with state regulation and season. Sandhill crane hunting occurs during three, 2-week periods in which 15 tags are allowed through competitive drawing implemented by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR). Sandhill crane seasons run concurrently with the state waterfowl hunting season.

Pronghorn hunting would be allowed on areas of the refuge already open to mule deer and elk. Elk and mule deer tags are issued by the UDWR and permit numbers are determined annually through UDWR monitoring.

A proposed action may evolve during the NEPA process as the agency refines its proposal and gathers feedback from the public, tribes, and other agencies. Therefore, the final proposed action may be different from the original. The proposed action will be finalized at the conclusion of the public comment period for the EA.

1.2 Background

National wildlife refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), the purposes of an individual refuge, Service policy, and laws and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (NWRSAA), 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.

The refuge was originally established on May 25, 1960, as a prime waterfowl production area that would also provide needed resting and feeding areas for migratory birds traveling along the Green River corridor. The current management strategy of the refuge accounts for new biological information and insight into the importance of western riparian and floodplain systems to a variety of fish and wildlife species. The most vital contribution Ouray National Wildlife Refuge

can make to the Upper Colorado River Ecosystem is to restore and enhance riparian woodlands and seasonal wetlands along its 12 river miles. The 11,987-acre refuge will be managed for a variety of native plants and wildlife with emphasis on migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and compatible wildlife-dependent public uses.

The mission of the Refuge System, as outlined by the NWRSAA, as amended by the 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 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 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.

The refuge possesses three key wildlife values: (1) its wetlands provide important migration and breeding habitat for waterfowl and waterbirds, (2) riparian habitat provides important migration and breeding habitat for songbirds, and (3) riparian wetlands provide critical nursery habitat for larval razorback suckers and other Colorado River endangered fish species. The refuge also provides unique and important values for people. Wildlife, solitude, scenery, and cultural history combine to make Ouray NWR a national treasure.

1.3 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of this proposed action is to provide compatible wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities on Ouray NWR. The need of the proposed action is to meet the Service’s priorities and mandates as outlined by the NWRSAA to “recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority general uses of the NWRS,” and “ensure that opportunities are

provided within the NWRS for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses” (16 U.S. Code 668dd[a][4]). One objective in the refuge’s comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) states that “the refuge staff will provide quality hunting and fishing opportunities that will not adversely affect local or regional populations of game.” Strategies to achieve this objective include “allow[ing] limited hunting of mule deer, elk, cottontail rabbit, and ring-necked pheasant, and allowing waterfowl and coot hunting on Leota Bottom.

2.0 Alternatives

2.1 Alternatives Considered

Alternative A – Allow Hunting for Sandhill Crane and Pronghorn on Areas Open to Big Game and Waterfowl Hunting per State Regulation – Proposed Action Alternative

The refuge has prepared a revised hunting plan (USFWS 2021a), which is presented in this document as the Proposed Action Alternative.

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, sandhill crane and pronghorn hunting would be allowed on all areas now open to big game and/or waterfowl hunting per state regulation. All hunting would be administered per state regulation, including weapons and annual season dates set by the UDWR.

Mitigation Measures to Avoid Conflicts:

- Administrative sites have been closed to hunting to reduce potential conflicts with refuge staff and visitors.

Implementation of the proposed alternative would help meet the CCP-defined objective to provide quality hunting and fishing opportunities that would not adversely affect local or regional populations of game species. While the refuge is currently open to big game and waterfowl hunting, adding pronghorn and sandhill crane would provide more opportunities for the hunting public. Pronghorn are found in limited numbers on the refuge, and UDWR biologists monitor the population to determine proper harvest levels. Because they occur in limited numbers, it is assumed that the station’s refuge officer and UDWR game wardens would be able to easily monitor hunting pressure and enforce both refuge-specific and state regulations concurrently with their responsibilities to monitor mule deer, elk, cottontail, ring-necked pheasant, and waterfowl hunters. Sandhill crane are seasonally abundant on the refuge; allowing crane hunting on Leota Bottom where waterfowl hunting already occurs should have little additional impact on what is occurring presently. Costs to administer the hunt are anticipated to be minimal.

This alternative offers increased opportunities for public hunting and fulfills the Service’s mandate under the Improvement Act. The Service has determined that the hunting plan is compatible with the purposes of the refuge and the mission of the Refuge System (USFWS 2021b).

Alternative B – No New Hunting Opportunities – No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, hunting for mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit would continue as visitor opportunities on the refuge. No new hunting opportunities would be offered.

3.0 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

This section is organized by affected resource categories and for each affected resource discusses both (1) the existing environmental and socioeconomic baseline in the action area for each resource and (2) the effects of the proposed action and any alternatives on each resource. The effects of the proposed action considered here are changes to the human environment, whether adverse or beneficial, that are reasonably foreseeable and have a reasonably close causal relationship with the proposed action or alternatives. This EA includes the written analyses of the environmental consequences on a resource only when the impacts on that resource could be more than negligible and therefore considered an “affected resource.” Any resources that would not be more than negligibly affected by the action have been dismissed from further analyses.

The refuge consists of approximately 11,987 acres along 12 miles of the Green River in Uintah County, Utah. (See map in Appendix B).

The refuge is primarily bottomland riparian habitat along the Green River corridor, and the proposed action is located in the northern part of the refuge in upland and riparian areas currently open to big game hunting and in the Leota marsh. (See map of the general area and proposed project site on the refuge in Appendix B).

For more information regarding the general characteristics of the refuge’s environment, please see the “Summary Refuge and Resource Description” section of the refuge’s CCP, which can be found here: <https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/refuges/ory.php>.

For more information on the environmental consequences of the proposed action, see the Ouray NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan EA. This EA tiers from that programmatic EA and provides additional specific analysis of the proposed action.

The resources in Table 1 below either (1) do not exist within the project area or (2) would either not be affected or only negligibly affected by the proposed action or (3) would experience greater than negligible impacts and are analyzed in this EA.

Table 1. Potential for Adverse Impacts from Proposed Action and Alternatives.

Resources	Not Applicable: Resource does not exist in project area	No/Negligible Impacts: Exists but no or negligible impacts	Greater than Negligible Impacts: Impacts analyzed in this EA
Species to Be Hunted/Fished	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Non-Target Wildlife and Aquatic Species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Threatened and Endangered Species and Other Special Status Species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Habitat and Vegetation (including vegetation of special management concern)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Resources	Not Applicable: Resource does not exist in project area	No/Negligible Impacts: Exists but no or negligible impacts	Greater than Negligible Impacts: Impacts analyzed in this EA
Geology and Soils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Air Quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Water Quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Floodplains	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wilderness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visitor Use and Experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Cultural Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Land Use Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Refuge Management and Operations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Socioeconomics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Tables 2–5 provide the following for each resource of the refuge:

- a brief description of the relevant general features of the affected environment;
- a description of relevant environmental trends and planned actions;
- brief description of the affected resources in the proposed action area; and
- impacts of the proposed action and any alternatives on those resources, including direct and indirect effects.

Table 2. Affected Natural Resources and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives.

Affected Resources	<p align="center"><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p><i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i></p>	<p align="center"><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p><i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i></p>
Species to be Hunted/Fished		
<p>Pronghorn roam throughout the refuge but primarily utilize the upland habitat. This species moves in and out of the refuge frequently and uses adjacent lands. On any given day, pronghorn can normally be found somewhere on or near the refuge, but the herds fluctuate in size. The refuge has observed more pronghorn using the area from the time when the boundary fences were altered to allow pronghorn to more easily cross under and move throughout the refuge. Pronghorn exist throughout the Uintah Basin and are managed as one herd in the South Slope Vernal unit. The UDWR data illustrates a healthy population and therefore allows a certain number of this species to be harvested.</p> <p>The refuge proposes to allow the hunting of this species. This species is hunted all around the refuge, and thus far the population appears to be healthy and propagating. Currently, the refuge does not have any formal surveys dedicated to this species simply because of their large home range, and because adequate data is available from the UDWR. If the future biological data illustrates that this species needs additional population management in the form of hunting on the refuge, we would evaluate the circumstances at that time.</p>	<p>The refuge encompasses a small percentage of the acreage open to both pronghorn and sandhill crane hunting within the south slope units and the area designated open to crane hunting. Therefore, only a small percent of hunters pursuing these species would be expected to hunt on the refuge. The refuge would provide sandhill crane hunting in close proximity to migration staging areas, thus a few more crane hunters than pronghorn hunters would be anticipated.</p> <p>Estimated Hunter Numbers: pronghorn – 5–10 hunters between combined units and seasons; sandhill crane 10–15 hunters in combination with current waterfowl hunter numbers.</p> <p>Estimated Take:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pronghorn – 1–2 animals; • sandhill crane – 5 or fewer cranes. <p>Pronghorn: Big game hunting (mule deer and elk) currently occurs on all refuge lands open to hunting on the north end of the refuge; thus, it is anticipated that the estimated 5–10 pronghorn hunters would have little additional impact on hunted species discounting direct take of pronghorn. Elk are typically found along the riparian corridor on either side of the Green River, while mule deer can be found in the riparian corridor, in wetlands, and in the adjacent upland plateaus where most pronghorn hunting is expected to occur. Mule deer and pronghorn seasons occur at different times, so allowing pronghorn hunting may result in increased disturbance of hunted species over what is occurring presently.</p>	<p>Estimated Hunter Numbers: 200–250 hunter visits divided among waterfowl (150 visits), upland game (30 visits); and big game (45 visits) annually. Hunter use estimates are derived from the refuge’s annual reporting data for public use activities. Hunter numbers vary annually and are highly dependent on water availability (waterfowl hunting) and big game populations.</p> <p>Estimated Take:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • waterfowl (300–450 birds; 2–3 birds/hunter/visit); • upland game – 1–2 ring-necked pheasant, 5–10 rabbits, and 3–5 turkey; • big game – 3–5 mule deer, 1–3 elk. <p>Current hunter numbers are considered low compared to those in other areas of the state (e.g., Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge on the Wasatch Front) and do result in seasonal disturbance of currently hunted wildlife and nonhunted species.</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i>
<p><i>Sandhill Crane:</i> The refuge supports a high number of migrating sandhill cranes. Utah currently allows the take of sandhill cranes during a specified season. The refuge would allow hunting of sandhill cranes in the future to provide waterfowl hunters with the opportunity to harvest cranes when hunting in the waterfowl hunt units. The effects would be minimal since these areas are already being hunted for waterfowl. By allowing hunting of cranes on the refuge within specified areas, we would be providing a unique hunting opportunity that the public has been requesting. Currently, the only area near the refuge that allows sandhill crane hunting is on adjacent private land and some public lands. Hunters line up along the refuge boundary to shoot at the cranes as they leave the refuge to visit nearby croplands. This has created law enforcement issues for the refuge over the past years.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>The UDWR estimates that there are 15,695 pronghorn within the state, 1100 of which can be found in the south slope, buckskin hills/diamond mountain unit (east of the Green River), and south slope Vernal unit on the west side of the refuge. The UDWR closely regulates tag availability and currently allows ten archery, 31 general rifle, and ten muzzleloader tags in the Vernal unit and eight archery, 32 general rifle, and no muzzleloader tags in the buckskin hills unit. The statewide population, including both south slope units, is considered stable at present; however, there are concerns regarding habitat degradation and loss, primarily related to urban encroachment, energy</p>	<p>Considering that other activities, including wildlife observation and photography, are simultaneously occurring, the minimal impact of 5–10 pronghorn hunters is expected to result in a negligible to minimal impact.</p> <p>Rifle and muzzleloader hunting are currently allowed for youth elk, mule deer, and late-season cow elk hunting; all other big game hunting allows archery only. Nontoxic shot is not required in rifles or muzzleloaders while nontoxic shot is required for all shotgun hunting, including rabbit, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and sandhill crane. There is a slight possibility of lead poisoning related to rifle and muzzleloader hunting, associated with unrecovered animal carcasses and gut piles, which hunters are not required to remove from the refuge. In discussion with the UDWR, the refuge would initiate an education program to inform hunters about the danger of lead poisoning and its associated effects on non-target wildlife, such as raptors and corvids, which scavenge animal remains during fall and winter. The UDWR is currently utilizing a hunter education program in areas where endangered species such as California condors occur. The staff would work with the UDWR to adopt and implement an education program at the refuge to encourage the use of nontoxic forms of shot for rifles and muzzleloaders.</p> <p><i>Sandhill Crane:</i> Sandhill crane hunting would only be allowed in Leota Bottom, which is currently open to waterfowl, mule deer, elk, and ring-necked pheasant hunting. Therefore, the estimated 10–15 crane hunters are not expected to result in more than a minimal additional disturbance impact. The three 2-day crane hunts happen concurrently with the UDWR-established waterfowl hunting seasons, and it is anticipated that many, if not most, of the sandhill crane hunters would be waterfowl hunters with sandhill crane permits opportunistically hunting for cranes while attempting to harvest waterfowl. Nontoxic shot would be</p>	<p>During high water years, 3–5 waterfowl hunting parties can be found on the Leota Bottom hunting area, but hunters are typically widely distributed, allowing for undisturbed areas where birds can forage.</p> <p>While there is temporal displacement, especially as hunter numbers increase, there are other times during the week when no waterfowl hunters are observed in the hunting area. As big game populations increase, so does hunting pressure for mule deer and elk. The refuge originally introduced elk hunting at the state’s request to control a large population that was causing excessive depredation damage to local farm operations. During the initial period, both recreational and depredation harvest was allowed to regulate the elk population to levels that the Green River riparian corridor could accommodate. Subsequent harvests resulted in a population decrease that left an estimated average of 15–25 elk on the refuge.</p> <p>The refuge has a large wild turkey population, which is appreciated by both hunters and wildlife observers on the refuge. To minimize disturbance of the turkey population, as well as other migrant and resident wildlife during the spring, turkey hunting has been offered to youth hunters only. This not only</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i>
<p>development, invasive plants, and persistent livestock grazing. Sandhill crane numbers continue to increase in the Green River drainage with an estimated 4000 observed in the Green River near Ouray NWR during peak fall migration. Development of center pivot irrigation for corn production has increased availability of fall forage and has resulted in short stopping cranes on their southward migration to the San Luis Valley, Colorado. Cranes tend to stay until snow covers available crops, and depredation complaints from local farmers have increased in conjunction with the growth of crane numbers. Crane harvest is closely regulated by the UDWR, and at present, only three, 2-week seasons are allowed. Only 15 tags are allowed for each season, but depredation tags issued to local farmers have been increasing over the last few years.</p>	<p>required for waterfowl and crane hunting to prevent lead shot from being deposited in the wetlands due to crane hunting. Because cranes are not currently hunted, crane hunting may slightly alter their behavior and could temporarily result in displacement of crane roosting areas along the Green River next to Leota Bottom. Hunting is not allowed in the river, and a 100-yard no-hunting zone has been established between the river and Leota Bottom hunting area to minimize this impact.</p>	<p>provides an excellent opportunity for first-time hunters to harvest a bird, but also minimizes disturbance of other wildlife during critical breeding periods in riparian and wetland habitat.</p> <p>While ring-necked pheasant hunting was once popular on Ouray NWR, shifts in agricultural practices from small grain to alfalfa and corn have minimized the population on the refuge and throughout the Uintah Basin. Very few ring-necked pheasant and rabbit hunters are seen on the refuge, so disturbance impacts are negligible.</p> <p>Nontoxic shot is required for all shotgun hunting, including spring turkey, while lead shot is currently allowed for big game and muzzleloader hunting. Under current conditions, residual lead resulting from recreational hunting is considered minimal, and no current effort to implement a nontoxic use or education program is in place.</p>
Other Species to be Hunted/Fished		
<p>At present, hunting of migratory game birds (ducks, geese, coots, and mergansers), big game (mule deer and elk), wild turkey, and upland game (ring-necked pheasant and cottontail rabbit) are allowed on the refuge. The following is a brief discussion of huntable species and their numbers on the refuge.</p>	<p>Estimated Hunter Numbers: pronghorn – 5–10 hunters throughout all scheduled hunting (rifle, muzzleloader, and bow); sandhill crane – 10–15 hunters over the three two-week seasons (most crane hunters are assumed to be waterfowl hunters that opportunistically obtained a crane permit).</p>	<p>Estimated Hunter Numbers: 225</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i>
<p><i>Migratory Game Birds:</i> Over the past several years, national waterfowl populations have allowed for moderate to liberal hunting seasons (guidance provided by the Service). Based on this biological data, it is viable to allow a waterfowl hunting season on the refuge concurrently with the state waterfowl season annually established by the UDWR. The refuge maintains a sanctuary area (Sheppard Bottom, Johnson Bottom, and Green River within the refuge boundary) for waterfowl that is closed to waterfowl hunting. This area allows waterfowl to rest and gain the necessary energy to continue migration. Having adequate resting areas for waterfowl is crucial to their success and to avoiding, or at least minimizing, negative impacts (harassment) posed by hunting. Currently, the refuge only allows the hunting of ducks, mergansers, coots, and geese. Swan and common snipe hunting is prohibited. The refuge does not support a large migrant swan population. Common snipe closely resembles other migrant shore birds, so to reduce the potential of incidental take, the refuge prohibits snipe hunting at this time. With education, common snipe hunting could be allowed and would be evaluated in the future.</p> <p><i>Big Game (Deer):</i> Mule deer range throughout the refuge and the Uintah Basin. Besides elk, mule deer are the other highly sought-after big game species in the basin. The refuge in the early 1990s had high numbers of mule deer, and the refuge was hunted extensively by the public. Since that time, refuge deer numbers have declined for reasons unknown, but the refuge still supports a healthy population of mule deer.</p>	<p>Estimated Take:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pronghorn – 1–2 animals; • sandhill cranes – 5 or fewer <p>Both pronghorn and sandhill crane hunting would occur in areas and during periods when hunting for other species is already occurring. The one exception is archery pronghorn hunting, which very few hunters are anticipated to participate in during the late August season. This would result in extending the period of disturbance for other hunted species including big game and upland game, but based on the small number of hunters expected, the impact would be assumed to be minimal.</p> <p>Wildlife observation tends to peak in late-summer/early-fall, so vehicle traffic and associated disturbance impacts would already be occurring. While foot traffic during this time period would slightly increase, disturbance would still be considered minimal.</p> <p>Sandhill crane hunting would occur concurrently with the state-established waterfowl hunting season, so disturbance impacts to other waterbirds would be considered minimal.</p> <p>Overall, it is anticipated that pronghorn and sandhill crane hunting would result in minimal impacts to other hunted species on the refuge due to the low number of hunters expected and the small increase in the overall hunting period during the late August archery season.</p>	<p>Estimated Take:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • waterfowl – 300–450 ducks/geese (2–3 birds per hunter/150 hunters annually); • big game – mule deer and elk (1–2 each, annually); • upland game – (5–10 rabbits, 2–3 turkeys, 0–1 ring-necked pheasant). <p>The numbers above come from refuge annual reporting and are estimates based on law enforcement and manager observations. Based on this level of hunting pressure, game and other wildlife species have become accustomed to seasonal pressure, and no notable disturbance pressures have been noted beyond obvious direct impacts associated with species hunted. The estimated 225 hunters are spread over a four-month period in a 4,000-acre hunting area, so in comparison to other areas of the state, hunting pressure and associated impacts are considered minimal. Vehicle disturbance appears to actually be higher from wildlife observers, which outnumber hunters during the early part of the season. There would be no direct hunting impacts on sandhill crane or pronghorn under this alternative.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Affected Resources</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i></p>
<p>Mule deer move up and down the Green River; hence, decreased visibility may be due to movement rather than to a reduction in population. The Uintah Basin suffered an extended drought period in the mid-2000s that may have caused a reduction in the herd size due to a lack of adequate food supply or reduced nutritional value of the preferred food supply. Either way, the population of mule deer in the basin is still high enough to withstand the hunting pressure. Moreover, the refuge has observed that when mule deer populations are high, the number of hunters increases, whereas when the refuge population decreases, so does the hunting pressure.</p> <p>Big Game (Elk): In the early 2000s, elk began showing up in Ouray agricultural fields and on the refuge. This elk herd has taken up residence on the refuge and is expanding into neighboring riparian areas. The UDWR has responded to numerous animal damage complaints by neighboring private landowners due to the refuge herd feeding at night in croplands and on haystacks. For these reasons, the UDWR requested that the refuge allow hunting of this herd. Currently, the population of elk is around 15–20 animals that appear to be in great condition. This population has the potential to rapidly expand given its condition and the surrounding habitat. The refuge and UDWR feel it is important to implement a hunting program on this herd to regulate population growth. Allowing hunting would ease the depredation impacts on local agricultural operations, and avoid a potentially dangerous chronic wasting disease (CWD) outbreak, which would not only affect the elk but also</p>		

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<p>the resident mule deer herd. The refuge will continue to work closely with the UDWR and the public to manage this population.</p> <p><i>Upland Game (Turkey):</i> Rio Grande turkeys exist throughout the Uintah Basin near flowing streams and rivers. The population of turkeys in the basin has reached a historic high, and because of this, the UDWR has proposed to liberalize the hunting season.</p> <p>Their presence on the refuge fluctuates from numerous to absent. The reason for this is not a population decline but merely an illustration of how far turkeys will wander along the Green River. Based on the survey data collected by UDWR and refuge staff, the Rio Grande turkey population is high enough to support hunting. The refuge will continue to work with the UDWR to manage turkeys to ensure future opportunity and the existence of a healthy turkey population.</p> <p>Turkey hunting on the refuge is currently managed to allow limited opportunities for youth and, potentially, persons with disabilities in specific areas. The refuge may consider general hunting in future years.</p> <p>Turkey hunting is currently permitted according to state regulations with one exception: To avoid lead poisoning of waterfowl and secondary poisoning of other wildlife, nontoxic shot is required when hunting on the refuge.</p> <p><i>Upland/Small Game (Cottontail Rabbits, Ring-necked Pheasants):</i> Cottontail rabbits exist throughout the refuge. Their populations fluctuate or cycle because of disease and predator populations.</p>		

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<p>Cottontails are abundant on the refuge but are currently hunted to a limited extent.</p> <p>Ring-necked pheasants are not native to North America but were introduced into the basin years ago. The ring-necked pheasant population has decreased considerably over the years on the refuge, but a few still exist. The refuge does not actively manage for this species, nor will we try to enhance habitat to support them.</p> <p>If this species continues to exist on the refuge, it will do so by adapting to management changes. We will continue to allow the harvest of this species according to state regulations, unless management of another native species calls for a regulation change that would prohibit ring-necked pheasant hunting.</p> <p>The take of ring-necked pheasants is currently permitted in accordance with state regulations with several exceptions. The use of dogs for ring-necked pheasant hunting is permitted, but dogs must be under the hunter's control at all times. When hunting with shotguns, nontoxic ammunition is required.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>Waterfowl populations fluctuate with both the continental population and annual water conditions on Ouray NWR. Seasons are established annually by the UDWR in combination with the federal frameworks and reflect population increase/declines. At present, the UDWR has set a bag limit of six ducks and four geese over a season that extends from early October</p>		

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<p>through December. Freeze-up on the refuge tends to occur around mid-late November, and harvest remains low compared with other locations in Utah.</p> <p>The state mule deer population remains stable, and the refuge population appears to be largely unaffected by annual harvest. Sheppard Bottom, on the south half of the refuge, is in sanctuary status, and large bucks are observed in this area during the various hunting seasons. Elk numbers have dispersed since the early concentrations observed in the early 2000s. Largely due to the UDWR's efforts to reduce the herd through recreational hunting and depredation control, the refuge population appears to have stabilized at around 15–25 animals. The herd is highly mobile and spends considerable time on the adjacent Duchesne and White River drainages as well. This dispersal appears to have reduced the number of depredation complaints, but still retains a huntable population on the refuge and nearby drainages.</p> <p>The Rio Grande turkey population appears to be stable on the refuge, with nesting success highly dependent on refuge water conditions. Broods observed following the 2019 floods were considerably fewer and smaller in number than those observed during the previous drought period; however, the population appears to be adequate to support annual youth hunting opportunities.</p> <p>Cottontail rabbits are plentiful on the refuge, but few hunters appear to be pursuing them. A recent outbreak of rabbit hemorrhagic fever has affected Uintah and Duchesne Counties; however, it does not appear to have reached the refuge. Refuge personnel are in close</p>		

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<p>contact with UDWR biologists and will adjust hunting as the UDWR recommends.</p> <p>Ring-necked pheasant numbers have steadily declined over the past several decades, presumably because of a shift from small grain production to irrigated corn and alfalfa. The original Uintah Basin population is now supplemented by artificial planting to allow for recreational harvest, and few birds are seen on the refuge in any given year. Ring-necked pheasant are non-native, and no effort to stock ring-necked pheasant on Ouray NWR would be allowed.</p>		
Non-Target Wildlife and Aquatic Species		
<p>Habitats for numerous wildlife species, including small mammals, various species of rodents and bats, migratory birds, raptors, herptiles, and aquatic species, occur on Ouray NWR. These species occupy the area on a year-round or seasonal basis. Species' occurrences are typically dependent on habitat availability, carrying capacities, and the degree of existing habitat quality.</p> <p>Small mammals found in Ouray NWR include the white-tailed jackrabbit, black-tailed jackrabbit, coyote, badger, striped skunk, northern river otter, American beaver, and various species of rodents, foxes, and bats. Large non-game mammals that are occasionally observed on the refuge include moose, black bear, and mountain lion. Bird species that may be present include the black-throated sparrow, Say's phoebe, ferruginous hawk, Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, and horned lark.</p>	<p>As previously described for game species, light visitor pressure on a 4,000-acre hunt unit has resulted in little disturbance impact on nonhunted species on the refuge. While it is possible that lead shot used for big game rifle hunting could result in negligible amounts of residual lead shot that could potentially be consumed by birds feeding on rifle-killed carcasses, there are few carcasses anticipated on an annual basis; thus, lead poisoning potential would be minimal. Spring turkey hunting has the potential to disturb nesting migratory bird species; however, turkey hunting is the only hunting allowed during spring, and it is currently limited to youth hunters only.</p> <p>To minimize these impacts, the refuge would visually monitor hunting pressure and, if effects were observed, would work with the UDWR to develop appropriate mitigation measures to minimize the impact. In the case of hunting pressure, this could involve limiting the number of permits allowed for certain species. In the case of potential lead poisoning, the refuge would work with the UDWR to develop and implement an education program to help persuade hunters to use nontoxic shot.</p>	<p>Current disturbance effects do not appear to be having any deleterious impacts on non-target wildlife beyond the previously described disturbance impacts and slight potential for lead ingestion. Monitoring would continue to determine if changes need to be made to the current hunting program. Under this alternative, there would not be additional hunting pressure associated with sandhill crane or pronghorn hunting.</p>

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<p>Herptiles potentially found in the region include the wandering garter snake, Great Basin gopher snake, western rattlesnake, northern leopard frog, western whiptail, sagebrush lizard, and short-horned lizard.</p> <p>Some 237 species of migratory birds have been documented to visit Ouray NWR as seasonal residents or migrants, 114 of which are known to nest within the refuge. Potential occurrence is based on habitat (vegetation) types and the bird species that tend to use these habitat types. (Note: Most species use more than one habitat). Migrating birds often have special habitat needs.</p> <p>Twenty-two species of raptors are known to occur within the project area and surrounding region year-round or on a seasonal basis. These include the bald eagle, golden eagle, ferruginous hawk, red-tailed hawk, Swainson’s hawk, Cooper’s hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, osprey, northern goshawk, northern harrier, prairie falcon, merlin, peregrine falcon, turkey vulture, American kestrel, great-horned owl, burrowing owl, short-eared owl, long-eared owl, western screech-owl, northern saw-whet owl, and rough-legged hawk. Most raptor species using the area migrate each fall and return to the region again the following spring. Exceptions include the golden eagle, bald eagle, rough-legged hawk, and great horned owl, which are year-round residents.</p> <p>The Green River, immediately upstream and downstream of the project area, is host to approximately 10 fish species: roundtail chub, bonytail chub, Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, speckled dace, bluehead sucker, flannelmouth sucker,</p>	<p>Pronghorn hunting could result in more residual lead shot than the amount that is occurring at present; however, it is anticipated that no more than 1–2 pronghorn would be harvested annually, so potential ingestion of lead shot by scavenging birds would be considered minimal. Sandhill crane hunting would be conducted in the same area and time as waterfowl hunting, so no additional disturbance impact over what is occurring at present would be anticipated.</p>	

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<p>razorback sucker, mottled sculpin, and brook stickleback. Representative non-native species in the Green River in the vicinity of the project area include the green sunfish, smallmouth bass, walleye, channel catfish, black bullhead, northern pike, fathead minnow, common carp, and red shiner.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>Short-stopping of sandhill cranes in the Uintah Basin, and associated increases in seasonal waterfowl populations, appear to have resulted in an increase in avian predator species that either directly prey on or scavenge waterfowl carcasses. Based on staff observation, bald eagle numbers appear to be increasing. For example, during 2019, over 100 bald and several golden eagles were observed at one time during fall migration.</p> <p>The refuge is also beginning to evaluate, and in some instances, implement components of a Habitat Management Plan (HMP). While most restoration efforts are designed to benefit Colorado endangered fish species utilizing backwater, riparian habitats for larval nurseries, late spring/summer flooding results in significantly higher summer water levels when floods occur, and more residual migratory bird migration habitat during fall hunting season. The Service is working with the Bureau of Reclamation to conduct facilitated releases from Flaming Gorge Dam during late spring, to allow passage of larval razorback suckers into refuge wetland units, which has increased flooding frequency and associated habitat for migration and waterfowl hunting during fall.</p>		

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<p>Threatened and Endangered Species and Other Special Status Species</p>		
<p>Federally endangered or threatened species that occur or have occurred on the refuge include the bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, razorback sucker, yellow-billed cuckoo and Uintah Basin hookless cactus. State-listed species and species of management concern include peregrine falcon, southwestern willow flycatcher, ferruginous hawk, bald eagle, and roundtail chub. Seven of these species are regularly encountered on the refuge throughout different seasons of the year.</p> <p>Sightings of the peregrine falcons on the refuge are increasing. During spring and fall, peregrines can often be observed hunting for waterbirds over wetlands and bottomlands. Bald eagles have become a common sight particularly during fall and winter, when more than 30 individuals have been observed in one day. Eagles watch for prey from large standing cottonwood trees along the river's edge or along some of the bottomlands. Another relative of the falcon and eagle, the ferruginous hawk, can be seen occasionally hunting over the expanse of the semidesert shrubland on the refuge during summer. The federally listed yellow-billed cuckoo feeds, rests, and nests in cottonwood galleries in the riparian areas of the refuge.</p> <p>The federally endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker, and the state-threatened roundtail chub, can be found within the refuge's stretch of the Green River. Ouray National Fish Hatchery is</p>	<p>Section 7 consultation would be initiated to evaluate effects on Uintah Basin hookless cactus, the four Colorado River fish (bonytail, humpback chub, Colorado pikeminnow, and razorback sucker), yellow-billed cuckoo, and other federally listed species that have not been found on the refuge but whose range extends into the boundary of the refuge (e.g., black-footed ferret, Ute ladies-tresses orchid, and others). While it is anticipated that there would be no effects to the fish species associated with the proposed hunting, there is a possibility of negative effects from increased foot traffic associated with pronghorn hunting in areas where the cactus and the cuckoo occur. Cactus occurs in gravel terraces next to upland areas while the cuckoo occurs on riparian corridors where pronghorn hunting may take place, and it is possible that hunters could unknowingly venture into occupied habitats. While the number of hunters would be few, without some level of education, impacts are possible. The refuge currently has an interpretive sign that briefly discusses location and cactus life history strategy; however, if observation suggests that hunters are beginning to encroach on occupied habitat, it would be possible to either install signs in areas of known occurrence or provide additional guidance in the refuge's hunting brochure. The Service may take further action (such as temporary closures within habitats occupied by these listed species) if signs and education are not sufficient to avoid impacts to this cactus and cuckoo species.</p> <p>There would be potential for foot traffic to occur within areas occupied by Uintah Basin hookless cactus and yellow-billed cuckoo. Only 10–15 hunters are anticipated throughout the season, so foot traffic throughout the uplands and occupied</p>	<p>No additional pressure on endangered or threatened species would occur other than minimal disturbance of yellow-billed cuckoo habitat from youth turkey hunting during the early spring, before cuckoos are expected to arrive. Only 3–5 youth turkey hunters would be expected annually, and the activity would occur in April before cuckoos would be expected to arrive.</p> <p>No additional impact on Uintah Basin hookless cactus would occur as a result of current hunting.</p>

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<p>augmenting the extant populations of these fish that occur on the refuge and next to the refuge.</p> <p>In addition, efforts are being coordinated through the Recovery Program and other agencies to mimic natural river flows that may aid in the recovery of these species that are on the brink of extinction.</p> <p>Surveys conducted in 1997 revealed that the Uintah Basin hookless cactus is more common on the refuge than once believed. A survey undertaken in 1988 revealed the existence of 1,260 individual plants, while a count in 1997 led to the discovery of an additional 846 plants, bringing the known total of the Uintah Basin hookless cactus on the refuge to 2,106 individuals. This cactus is typically found toward the top of gravel-covered terraces.</p> <p>The refuge has the potential to serve as a good learning ground on the biology of this species because this habitat is not presently manipulated for habitat management in any manner.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>Oil and gas development continue throughout the Uintah Basin, and several active projects are occurring on or next to areas of the refuge where the proposed hunting would occur. State minerals managed by the State Institutional Land Trust Administration (SITLA) are under development in state section 36 immediately adjacent to the Leota Bottom Unit where the proposed sandhill crane hunt would occur. Additional development in section 36 would overlap with habitat where the Uintah Basin hookless cactus occurs and where much of the pronghorn hunting would occur.</p>	<p>habitat would be considered low. Foot traffic could potentially trample hookless cactus plants or otherwise disturb associated habitat and may also cause disturbance to birds utilizing the riparian corridor; however, these impacts would be minimal considering the low number of hunters expected to participate in the hunting.</p>	

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<p>The refuge leases the surface from SITLA and manages the section as part of the Refuge System; however, under current lease agreement, SITLA retains the right to develop subsurface minerals such as oil and gas. This could result in adverse impacts on hookless cactus and would require monitoring to ensure that impacts do not occur as a result of the proposed hunting.</p>		
Habitat and Vegetation (including vegetation of special management concern)		
<p>On the refuge, three general habitat categories occur: riverine, riparian, and uplands. The following defines and describes these general habitat categories, including improvements or developments within riparian areas.</p> <p>Riverine</p> <p>Riverine is any wetland or deep-water habitat contained within a channel, with the exception of wetlands dominated by trees, shrubs, persistent emergents, emergent mosses, or lichens. Within the refuge boundary, 12 miles of the Green River meet this definition, which equates to approximately 1,180 acres.</p> <p>The Green River watershed encompasses 45,000 square-miles, originating in Wyoming's Wind River Range, and stretching 730 miles through Colorado and finally connecting to the Colorado River in Canyonlands National Park, Utah. The northern refuge boundary begins approximately 120 river-miles downstream from Flaming Gorge Dam. The Green</p>	<p>While anticipated overall low-hunter density would have negligible trampling or other disturbance-related impacts on vegetation, some trampling would occur relative to pronghorn and sandhill crane hunting. Hunters' impacts would barely be noticeable in most habitats, with the exception of the possible impact on Uintah Basin hookless cactus described in the last section. The estimated 10–15 hunters would not be expected to have more than a negligible impact. If hunting activities result were to have more than negligible impacts, the Service would take measures to negate and/or ameliorate those impacts (see previous sections addressing this cactus species).</p> <p>There would be a slight increase in vegetation disturbance associated with the estimated 10–15 additional hunters in riparian habitat associated with sandhill crane hunting. The improvements provided through HMP implementation should offset any increase in hunter density and thus, impacts would be negligible to nonexistent through the implementation of this hunt. It is possible that the estimated 5–10 pronghorn hunters could potentially trample or otherwise disturb habitat in areas occupied by Uintah Basin hookless cactus. As previously described, if this type of disturbance is observed and deemed</p>	<p>No additional trampling of riparian or sensitive upland habitat would occur, nor would an increased opportunity for invasive species transport from vehicles. Current levels of activity associated with other hunting and other visitor use activities would occur but are considered minimal compared to the numbers of individuals participating in these activities.</p>

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<p>River receives additional flows from the unregulated Yampa River that lies between the dam and the refuge, with an average of two flow peaks per year.</p> <p>At different times of year, the Green River is a primary roost area for Canada and snow geese, mallard, gadwall, northern pintail, American wigeon, green-winged teal, and common merganser. Shorebirds, such as greater and lesser yellowlegs, willet, and killdeer benefit from the shallow water margins next to riverbanks and sandbars. Mule deer, elk, moose, and black bear use the Green River as a watering source. Other mammals that are Green River or water obligate species include beaver and northern river otter. Several non-native fish species exist in the river and likely displace the state and federally endangered bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, and razorback sucker.</p> <p>Riparian</p> <p>Riparian areas have one or both of the following characteristics: (1) distinctively different vegetative species than adjacent areas, and (2) species similar to adjacent areas but exhibiting more vigorous or robust growth forms. Riparian areas are usually transitional between wetland and upland. Besides the continuous transition between riverine and upland habitat occurring along the length of the Green River, there are five distinct riparian management units on the refuge. The following provides a brief description of each area.</p>	<p>detrimental to hookless cactus, further education elements, such as signage, or inclusion of life history information in the refuge hunting brochure could be implemented. Temporary closures may also be instituted to negate or ameliorate further impacts. Low hunter numbers are expected to result in negligible trampling damage.</p> <p>It is possible that increased traffic to transport the estimated 10–15 additional sandhill crane hunters and 5-10 pronghorn hunters could result in further distribution of invasive species over what occurs at present. While vehicle transport of invasive species seeds is possible, the low level of vehicle increase compared to what occurs through other hunting and visitor use activities would be considered minimal.</p>	

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<p>Brennan Bottom is the northernmost (upstream) bottomland on the refuge. Most of the bottomland is privately owned, but it falls within the executive boundary of the refuge. All inventoried wetlands (ca. 154 acres) in Brennan are classified as palustrine.</p> <p>Approximately 77 acres of seasonally flooded emergent wetlands comprise 50 percent of the classified wetlands. Other temporarily flooded wetlands are forested (51 acres), scrub/shrub (24 acres), and impounded unconsolidated shore (2 acres). The approximately 160 acres in refuge ownership are associated uplands (i.e., areas that are not wetlands). Uplands are discussed in a later section. Because most of the classified wetlands in Brennan are in private ownership, the refuge has no active water management capabilities.</p> <p>Johnson Bottom: Approximately 250 acres of inventoried wetlands exist in Johnson Bottom. In 1983, 73 percent (182 acres) of the wetlands were classified as lacustrine. The lacustrine wetland is an impounded, intermittently exposed, artificially flooded aquatic bed. Presently, this represents the bulk of Johnson Bottom units J-1 through J-4. The remaining acreage (68 acres) is classified as palustrine. Specifically, three acres are artificially/temporarily impounded emergent wetlands, 21 acres are temporarily flooded forest, and 44 acres are scrub/shrub wetlands.</p> <p>The four units within Johnson Bottom provide deep, open-water habitat. Aquatic submergent vegetation is currently nonexistent due to water turbidity caused by common carp. The vegetation that does occur on the</p>		

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<p>outer edges consists primarily of cattail and hardstem bulrush. Although the dominance of these species is not known, other vegetation specific to the forested and scrub/shrub classifications include cottonwoods, willow species, Russian olive, Tamarix, greasewood, and sagebrush.</p> <p>Leota Bottom: More than 1,250 acres of wetlands classified as palustrine occur in Leota Bottom. According to 1983 aerial photography, temporarily flooded wetlands in Leota are emergent (40 acres), scrub/shrub (158 acres), and forested (220 acres). Other classified wetlands in Leota are excavated, semipermanently flooded unconsolidated bottom (0.47 acres), seasonally flooded emergent (4 acres), and impounded artificially/seasonally flooded scrub/shrub (24 acres). However, the bulk of palustrine wetlands in Leota are composed of impounded artificially/semipermanently flooded emergent wetlands (808 acres) (USFWS 1999), which approximates the area in Leota units L-1 through L-10, including L-7A.</p> <p>The 11 units within Leota Bottom provide an array of habitat gradients from pockets of deep to shallow open-water and areas of open-water interspersed with aquatic emergents. Cattail and hardstem bulrush are also the dominant plant species within these impoundments. Similar to Johnson Bottom, the dominant species are not known, but other vegetation specific to the forested and scrub/shrub classifications includes cottonwoods, willow species, Russian olive, Tamarix, squaw bush, greasewood, and sagebrush. Of</p>		

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<p>all the wetland sites on the refuge, Leota has been the most intensively developed. Water sources for the Leota impoundments are the Green River and Pelican Lake.</p> <p><i>Wyasket Bottom:</i> Of the 1,373 acres of inventoried wetlands that exist in Wyasket Bottom, 67 percent (924 acres) are lacustrine and 33 percent (449 acres) are palustrine. Relatively speaking, these acreages correspond to what has been managed as Wyasket Lake and Wyasket Pond within this bottom. Of the lacustrine wetlands, 39 acres are temporarily flooded, 868 acres are seasonally flooded, and 17 acres are semipermanently flooded.</p> <p>When flooded, Wyasket Lake functions as a natural moist-soil unit producing an abundance of foods in the form of seeds and invertebrates for waterfowl, shorebirds, and other waterbirds. The predominant emergent plant species are dock and smartweeds, with some fringes of reed canarygrass. Sago pondweed is the dominant submergent vegetation in Wyasket Lake.</p> <p><i>Sheppard Bottom:</i> All 967 acres of inventoried wetlands in Sheppard are temporarily, seasonally, and semipermanently flooded palustrine wetlands. Further modifiers and classification of temporarily flooded palustrine wetlands are forested (84 acres), scrub/shrub (78 acres), emergent (6 acres), and impounded, artificially flooded scrub/shrub (0.61 acres). Two acres of unconsolidated shore temporarily flooded wetlands exist in this Bottom. Additional classification of semipermanently flooded palustrine wetlands include excavated, artificially flooded</p>		

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<p>emergent (770 acres), impounded, artificially flooded aquatic bed (20 acres), and emergent (7 acres).</p> <p>Uplands</p> <p>For the purposes of this document, uplands are defined as those areas that are neither riverine nor riparian. However, on the refuge and from a management perspective, uplands are further divided into three categories: semi-desert shrubland, grasslands, and clay bluffs.</p> <p>Uplands have received little attention and, therefore, habitat and wildlife information is lacking. The following discussions are in general terms. Acreage figures are estimates and may not be accurate.</p> <p>Semidesert Shrubland: Approximately 2,669 acres of semi-desert shrubland cover the refuge. Greasewood, rubber and low rabbitbrush, spiny hopsage, shadscale, fourwing saltbush, winterfat, big sagebrush, bud sagebrush, black sagebrush, Indian ricegrass, needle-and-thread, sand dropseed, and non-native cheatgrass occur on this upland habitat type. This habitat also supports the state and federally threatened Uintah Basin hookless cactus. Semi-desert shrubland habitat is scattered within the boundary of the refuge, but generally occurs in the transition zone between riparian areas and the clay bluffs.</p> <p>Grassland: Alkali sacaton, inland saltgrass, western wheatgrass, Great Basin wildrye, desert paintbrush, and Nelson and scarlet globemallow can be found in the 1,520 acres of grassland that occur on the refuge. This habitat, like semi-desert shrublands, is scattered within the boundary of the refuge, but generally occurs</p>		

<p align="center">Affected Resources</p>	<p align="center"><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p align="center"><i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i></p>	<p align="center"><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p align="center"><i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i></p>
<p>above the clay bluffs on what is locally referred to as a bench.</p> <p><i>Clay Bluffs:</i> Little is known about the relative importance of the 1,935 acres of barren clay bluffs that occur on the refuge. These clay bluffs make up part of the geological Morrison Formation formed during the Jurassic period of the Mesozoic era. Although this upland is practically devoid of vegetation on the surface, it is believed to be rich in dinosaur artifacts.</p> <p>As previously stated, less is known about upland habitats on the refuge. Before reasonable objectives for management of this habitat can be developed, a better understanding of the existing flora and fauna is needed. This must be accomplished through baseline biological inventories, determining the potential natural communities for uplands, gleaning information from other scientific sources as they become available, etc.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>Restoration actions through implementation of the refuge's HMP would enhance hydrologic periodicity of backwater flooding into riparian and associated wetland habitat in the Leota Bottom waterfowl hunting area. This action is anticipated to increase the duration and area of wetland flooded, which would be expected to increase utilization by fall migratory waterfowl. While the action was designed to improve nursery habitat for larval razorback sucker, it would incidentally enhance vegetative growth and subsequent habitat quality for migratory waterfowl, which could increase the number of hunters participating in waterfowl hunting. While the numbers</p>		

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<p>could increase, the available habitat would also increase, potentially resulting in no measurable change in hunter density. Direct trampling would be the only anticipated impact on riparian vegetation, and additional acreage produced through enhanced flooding should spread out hunters and reduce the intensity of trampling on any given area.</p>		

Key: CWD = chronic wasting disease; HMP = Habitat Management Plan; NWR = National Wildlife Refuge; SITLA = State Institutional Land Trust Administration; UDWR = Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

Table 3. Affected Visitor Use and Experience and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives.

<p>Affected Resources</p>	<p><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i></p>	<p><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i></p>
<p>No accurate counts of refuge visitors are available, but current estimates are 10,000 visitors per year. Visitation includes school tours and programs, teacher workshops, senior citizen tours, boy scouts, and hunters and anglers. Most public use occurs from April through November.</p> <p>Wildlife observation is the major public use activity on the refuge. The refuge’s 12-mile auto tour route is enjoyed by many throughout the year. From spring wild flowers and broods of ducklings to large numbers of mule deer in the fall and winter, viewers are drawn from the local communities and throughout the area. Bird watching is rapidly becoming a popular activity on the refuge.</p> <p>Additional wildlife-dependent public uses include wildlife photography, interpretation, and environmental education. Compatible activities that support some or all of these uses also include canoeing and rafting on the Green River; sightseeing, bicycling, and horseback riding on designated roads; and hiking.</p> <p>Current public-use facilities include an informational kiosk with a nearby picnic table and outhouses, an auto tour route with observation tower, a visitor center, and parking areas for hunters, anglers, observers, and photographers. The kiosk contains general refuge information, a changeable panel, a cork board for posting hunting regulations, fishing regulations, and refuge hours, and leaflet dispensers.</p>	<p>As described above, even though there would be an additional 5-10 pronghorn hunters and 10–15 sandhill crane hunters, it is anticipated that completion of the Federal Highways Administration project would actually result in the same number or fewer vehicles driving in the hunting area, which would reduce disturbance effects during hunting season. There could be more vehicles in the Sheppard sanctuary unit; however, wildlife acclimation to vehicle traffic versus pedestrian and hunter traffic would be expected to be less disturbing. More hunters would mean more disturbance in the hunting area during the hunting seasons, but restoration of hydrologic function and enhanced flooding for fish habitat would mean less hunter density during years in which flooding occurred. Waterfowl hunters tend to self-regulate during both high- and low-water years, with adequate space between parties during high-water years and fewer hunters during low-water years. Overall, impacts associated with visitor use and experience would not be anticipated to be appreciably different than they are at present due to implementation of the proposed hunting, considering other projects including the tour loop improvement and ongoing habitat improvement in Leota Bottom.</p> <p>The addition of 10–15 sandhill crane hunters and 5-10 pronghorn hunters would lead to additional hunter disturbance in the area open to big game hunting and Leota Bottom, respectively. Increased disturbance would be seasonal and limited to the hunting areas, but this could result in a minimal increase in wildlife disturbance, which could affect some visitors’ wildlife observation and photography experiences.</p>	<p>We do not anticipate any impacts on other visitors under this alternative.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Affected Resources</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p><i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p><i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i></p>
<p>The tour route displays and information leaflet need updating to reflect changes in the landscape and management practices. Some informational and directional signs on the refuge have recently been updated.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>The refuge worked with the Federal Highways Administration in 2020 to develop an auto tour loop improvement project. This project provided additional pullout areas, improved the surface, and provided parking areas for visitors to use during flood periods when the refuge would periodically be required to close the loop to the public for safety reasons. The project was completed in November 2020 and provides a better cross-seasonal location wildlife observation and photography, which is expected to further disperse visitors between the area sanctuary around the Sheppard Unit and the Leota Bottom hunting unit.</p>	<p>As previously discussed, enhancements to the auto tour loop should help mitigate these effects, providing year-round access to undisturbed wildlife in the Sheppard sanctuary unit. Refuge personnel would continue to monitor hunter use, and if displacement or undue impacts on other visitors occur because of the proposed hunting, we could consider restructuring hunting areas or timing to further minimize impacts. At present, we do not anticipate any effects on other visitors other than minimal increase in seasonal wildlife disturbance in the areas open to hunting.</p>	

Table 4. Affected Cultural Resources and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives.

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u>
<p>Limited cultural resource studies have been conducted on lands included in the refuge. Information on the cultural history of the Uintah Basin is sketchy and difficult to compile. Much of the refuge was disturbed many years ago during construction of dikes, levees, and roads, so few intact sites remain to be surveyed. In recent years, seven project-specific cultural and paleontological resource surveys and inventories were conducted in Brennan Basin, the Ouray L-9/10 borrow site, for a powerline for the refuge, the Pelican Lake Pipeline, and the Ouray National Fish Hatchery and water pipeline sites. Five prehistoric sites (one of which may be the site previously identified) and four isolated finds of prehistoric material (mostly lithic acquisition materials) were located. Reports of these surveys are on file at the refuge office. In 1998, three projects sites for Leota Bottom levee and spillway construction were surveyed with no materials found. A thorough inventory of potential cultural and paleontological resource sites is needed for the majority of refuge lands. Other than an interpretive sign on Leota Bluff describing explorations by John Wesley Powell, no cultural or paleontology exhibits or materials have been developed for the refuge.</p> <p>The earliest archaeological work done in the refuge vicinity was by John Wesley Powell in 1869 and 1871. No prehistoric sites were reported by Powell from his explorations along the Green River through the refuge.</p> <p>In the early 1940s, Harvard University collected a large sample of fossil mammal specimens dating to the Late</p>	<p><i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i></p> <p>Hunters typically walk to locations where they hunt, so it is possible that some hunters could come into contact with cultural resource sites. Most known sites on the refuge occur in the clay bluff areas where few hunters would likely walk; however, it is possible that a hunter could unknowingly come across a cultural site and potentially disturb artifacts. Considering location (clay bluffs) and activity (pronghorn hunting), this is unlikely to occur.</p> <p>Sandhill crane hunting would occur within the Leota Bottom hunting area, so no waterfowl hunters would be exposed to know cultural sites. Pronghorn hunting does take place in upland areas where cultural resources are known to occur. However, the estimated 5-10 new pronghorn hunters are unlikely to hunt where specific cultural sites are located. It is possible that pronghorn hunters may identify new areas previously unknown to refuge staff allowing archaeologists to catalog the new sites, which is a potential beneficial impact from the proposed hunting. If refuge personnel observe hunters entering sensitive cultural areas during the proposed pronghorn hunting, the refuge may consider signage or some other form of education format to exclude future entry. It is not anticipated that there would be any detrimental effects on cultural resources through implementation of the proposed new hunting.</p>	<p><i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i></p> <p>While opportunities to hunt deer, elk, and upland game currently exist in the refuge’s hunting areas, where cultural resources occur, there are no known cultural resources conflicts at present.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Affected Resources</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i></p>
<p>Eocene (38 to 56 million years ago) Uinta Formation from a site they called Leota Quarry. It has been determined that this site falls within the boundaries of the refuge. The University of Utah Department of Anthropology conducted a survey of the proposed refuge in 1961. One surface site on the bank of the Green River in Leota Bottom and scattered artifacts on the river terraces were identified. The researchers determined that it was not necessary to salvage the little prehistorical material on refuge lands. In 1978, the Smithsonian Institute also conducted a paleontological study on this site. Several skulls of small sheep-like artiodactyls were found. Judging from the quantity as well as the quality of specimens, they felt that additional collecting is definitely warranted, but none has been done to date.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>Oil and gas development on State section 36 (which the refuge leases from SITLA) could result in further disturbance of cultural resources next to Leota Bottom and in upland areas where pronghorn hunting would occur. The companies working on this development are working with the State of Utah (Department of Oil, Gas, and Minerals; DOGM) to complete compliance documents to ensure adequate cultural resource protection. The refuge is not involved in the environmental compliance associated with mineral extraction activities on state-owned properties. Because the proposed hunting would generally not occur on areas where known cultural resource sites are located, the proposed hunting is not anticipated to have only negligible impacts on cultural resources.</p>		

Key: DOGM = Department of Oil, Gas, and Minerals; SITLA = State Institutional Land Trust Administration.

Table 5. Affected Refuge Management and Operations and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives

<p>Affected Resources</p>	<p><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p><i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i></p>	<p><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p><i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i></p>
<p>Land Use and Management</p>		
<p>The present acreage of the Ouray NWR totals 11,987. Refuge acreage is made up of 2,692 acres of leased Ute Tribal lands, 1,153 acres of land leased from the State of Utah, 3,110 acres transferred from the Bureau of Land Management, and 5,032 acres of land purchased in fee title. The Executive Order boundary of the refuge includes 13,984 acres. It is the desire of the Service to purchase all lands within the Executive Order boundary, including all leased lands, when they become available from willing sellers.</p> <p>No refuge lands meet Wilderness criteria (at least 5,000 contiguous, roadless acres), so Wilderness has not been designated. The Green River in the region of the refuge is not currently being considered for Wild and Scenic River designation because it does not meet two basic designation criteria. The river is not free-flowing, and the majority is altered by protective levees and diking.</p> <p>Fire management on Ouray NWR presently consists of prescribed fire, hazardous fuels reduction, and wildfire suppression preparedness. The refuge is a partner in the Uintah Basin Interagency Fire Center in Vernal, for wildland and prescribed fire activities. Prescribed fire at Ouray has been primarily used as a vegetation management tool in wetlands to control cattail and other emergent vegetation. Fire was also used experimentally to control non-native plants such as perennial pepperweed in upland areas with mixed results.</p>	<p>While it is possible that increased vehicle traffic associated with the 5-10 new pronghorn hunters and the 10–15 anticipated sandhill crane hunters could introduce invasive species into new areas of the refuge from vehicle traffic, this effect would be negligible when compared to already-occurring vehicle transport vectors from other public uses and oil and gas development. Land use activities typically occur outside of the proposed hunting seasons so little to no effect would be anticipated regarding refuge management activities.</p> <p>Increased vehicle traffic from proposed new hunting (5-10 for pronghorn and sandhill crane hunting, respectively) has the potential to transport invasive plant seeds into the refuge. This effect would be anticipated to be minimal to negligible.</p>	<p>There would be no new effects on refuge land use associated with implementation of the proposed pronghorn and sandhill crane hunting. At present, approximately 10,000 people annually visit Ouray NWR for wildlife observation, photography, outdoor education, hunting, and fishing; the effects associated with invasive species transport under current conditions would continue. Current levels of invasive species control appear adequate to control further spread.</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i>
<p>The challenge in utilizing prescribed fire to manage refuge wetlands comes in preventing the spread of the fire into neighboring cottonwood and willow stands which results in injury or mortality of many trees. Fire damage and windthrow have contributed to the degradation of the refuge's riparian corridor. Prescribed burning of wetlands next to the riparian corridor is an appropriate tool used to manage this ecotype because fire is a naturally occurring event for these plant communities. The use of fire requires a thorough understanding of fire behavior and use of wide fire breaks to protect sensitive habitats.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>There are no planned land use actions where the proposed action would have any positive or negative effects.</p>		
Administration		
<p>There are currently five personnel on station, including the project leader, station manager, maintenance worker, administrative support assistant, and fish and wildlife officer (FWO).</p> <p>Current Personnel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Leader, GS-13 • Refuge Manager, GS-12 • Maintenance Worker, WG-8 • Vacant • Administrative Support Assistant, GS-7 • Fish and Wildlife Officer, GS-9 	<p>Current staffing is adequate to administer the proposed new hunting for sandhill crane and pronghorn.</p> <p>While there would be slightly more time required from the project leader and station manager to prepare opening documents and accomplish outreach, and more time required by the FWO to enforce the new hunting, there would be no additional administrative burden or maintenance workload to administer the proposed hunting other than answering questions from the public. Current staff is adequate to administer the program.</p>	<p>Current staff is adequate to administer the current hunting program. No additional responsibilities would be required.</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i>
<p>Personnel Needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Leader, GS-13 • Refuge Manager, GS-12 • Maintenance Worker, WG-8 • Wildlife Biologist, GS-12 • Administrative Support Assistant, GS-7 • Fish and Wildlife Officer, GS-9 <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>Current staffing is adequate to administer the proposed new hunting for sandhill crane and pronghorn.</p>		

Key: FWO = Fish and Wildlife Officer; NWR = National Wildlife Refuge.

Table 6. Affected Socioeconomics and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives

<p>Affected Resources</p>	<p><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i></p>	<p><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i></p>
<p>Local and Regional Economics</p>		
<p>The economy of Uintah County, Utah, centers around the extraction of natural resources including oil and gas, phosphate, and gilsonite, which employs approximately 20 percent of the county population. Agriculture (primarily related to cattle and sheep production but including forestry, fishing, and hunting), construction, and retail round out the primary sources of revenue. As of 2010, there were approximately 33,000 residents, with 77 percent under the age of 44.</p> <p>A survey of refuge visitor contributions to local economies (Caudill and Carver 2019) suggests that hunters annually contribute about \$894,000 annually to the local economy near Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. This is primarily from resident hunters (\$596,000), which would be similar at Ouray NWR based on use demographics. Total visitor expenditures account for \$4.1 million annually when total economic output, jobs, and state and local tax revenue are considered. There are no specific estimates for Ouray NWR, but when compared to the estimated 158,000 recreational visits at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, this would equate to \$265,800 contributed to the local economy annually.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>The local economy is highly dependent on oil and gas, and further growth and expansion would be highly correlated with expansion of this industry. Recently, county leaders have explored the possibility of constructing a railroad capable of transporting oil to refineries located on the Wasatch Front, Utah.</p>	<p>Increases in the Uintah County population could result in additional visitors to the refuge. If visitation increases, effects associated with visitor activities, such as wildlife disturbance and vehicle traffic, would be expected to increase. At present, visitor impacts do not appear to have more than a minimal effect on refuge resources.</p> <p>There would be an additional 10–15 pronghorn hunting visits and the potential of up to 10–15 visits by sandhill crane hunters. As previously discussed, because most sandhill crane hunters are current Ouray NWR waterfowl hunters, little additional economic benefit would be accrued from these activities. However, two new hunts would be allowed, thereby increasing opportunities for Uintah County residents.</p>	<p>Pronghorn and sandhill crane hunting would not be allowed, and no additional revenue or activities would be provided to Uintah County.</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting of sandhill cranes and pronghorn would be permitted in areas currently opened to big game and/or waterfowl hunting.</i>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>No new hunting opportunities would be offered. The refuge would remain opened to mule deer, elk, waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant, and cottontail rabbit hunting.</i>
<p>If constructed, the railroad would accommodate twice the capacity of trucking, which is the current method to transport oil to refineries. An additional effort to provide air shuttle transport to the Wasatch Front is also underway. This would facilitate access of Uintah County residents to job markets in the Salt Lake City area, thereby increasing the number of Uintah County residents if successful.</p>		
Environmental Justice		
<p>Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, requires all federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their missions by identifying and addressing disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs and policies on minorities and low-income populations and communities.</p> <p>The Ute Tribe owns considerable acreage in Uintah County, and the refuge leases approximately 4,000 acres from the tribe, primarily located on the east side of the Green River. The tribe administers its own hunting program and provides permits as well as administrative and law enforcement support on lands it manages.</p> <p><i>Environmental Trends and Planned Actions</i></p> <p>The refuge has developed an annual agreement with the Ute Tribe that allows for refuge management of all activities other than hunting and fishing. This agreement is renewed every 10 years and was most recently updated in 2018.</p>	<p>The proposed hunting would have no known effects on the Ute Tribe or environmental justice.</p>	<p>No effect.</p>

Key: NWR = National Wildlife Refuge.

3.1 Monitoring

The refuge administers the hunting program as per state regulation (UDWR); thus, the state is responsible for population survey and associated allotment of permits allowed in the units that correspond to the refuge. Refuge monitoring consists of refuge staff observations, and implementation of the proposed new hunting would require observation of pronghorn hunter effects on identified Uintah Basin hookless cactus habitat, invasive species transport, and disturbance effects from the estimated 5-10 pronghorn hunters and 10–15 sandhill crane hunters. Any observed impacts would be discussed with UDWR staff, and appropriate modification may be made with their recommendation and endorsement.

3.2 Summary of Analysis

The purpose of this EA is to briefly provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) or a finding of no significant impact (FONSI).

Alternative A – Allow Hunting for Sandhill Crane and Pronghorn on Areas Open to Big Game and Waterfowl Hunting per State Regulation – Proposed Action Alternative

As described above, the proposed action would result in an additional 5–10 pronghorn and 10–15 sandhill crane hunters and would result in the harvest of 1–2 pronghorn and fewer than 5 sandhill cranes. Pronghorn hunting would occur earlier in the season than other big game opportunities, and would extend the period of disturbance for pronghorn and other species into mid-late August. Sanctuary would be maintained on the southern portion of the refuge to help mitigate hunting-related disturbance effects. It is possible that lead shot would be introduced through rifle hunting for big game, but the addition through pronghorn hunting would be negligible. If identified as a problem, the refuge would work with the UDWR to promote the use of nontoxic shot in the future. Pronghorn hunting would also occur in areas where Uintah Basin hookless cactus is currently present. While direct disturbance of these sites is unlikely, refuge staff would monitor activity to determine if additional education or hunting area closures are necessary. Invasive species could be transported based on the addition of vehicles to transport new hunters, but the 20–30 new hunting visits would be considered minimal when compared with current visitor, and oil and gas, traffic.

This alternative also meets the purpose and needs of the Service as described above because it would provide additional wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities while contributing to activities provided and revenue generated in Uintah County.

Alternative B – No New Hunting Opportunities – No Action Alternative

As described above, there are currently 225 hunters divided among waterfowl (150), big game (50) and upland game (25), resulting in direct harvest of 300–450 waterfowl; 1–2 mule deer and 1–2 elk; and 5–10 rabbits, 2–3 turkey's, and 0–1 ring-necked pheasant, annually. Current hunter use encompasses only 2.5 percent of annual visitor use, resulting in minimal disturbance when compared to other uses. Lead shot is introduced through deer and elk hunting now; however, the majority of deer and elk hunting is accomplished using a bow as opposed to a rifle or muzzleloader. Current levels of rifle use (youth and specific rifle seasons) have not resulted in observable levels of lead poisoning up until now.

The No Action Alternative would not result in new hunting on the refuge and would not contribute to new recreational activities in Uintah County or the generation of new revenue. This alternative would not help meet the CCP-defined objective to provide quality hunting and fishing opportunities that would not adversely affect local or regional populations of game species.

3.3 List of Sources, Agencies, and Persons Consulted

Refuge staff met with personnel from other Utah NWRs (4/21/19), local government personnel (Uintah County Commission; 1/19/19, 3/13/19, and others), representatives from state lands, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the Duchesne County Commission concurrently with Uintah County Commission Meetings, and the UDWR (detailed below).

3.4 List of Preparers

Name	Position	Work Unit
Rob Bundy	Project Leader	Lower Green River NWR Complex

3.5 State Coordination

Following receipt of a letter from the UDWR Director’s office on 11/26/2018, discussing current restrictions, closures, and species hunted, refuge staff begin considering the proposed new hunting included in this EA. Refuge personnel continued to consult with the UDWR in informal conversations during Uintah County Commission Meetings (1/19/19, 3/13/19), during personal conversations (5/15/19), culminating with a video briefing for all UDWR regional staff and outreach personnel on 12/17/20.

3.6 Tribal Consultation

The Service mailed an invitation for comments in late April 2021 to all Tribes potentially impacted by initiating an EA to expand hunting opportunities at Ouray NWR. The Service extended an invitation to engage in government-to-government consultation in accordance with Executive Order 13175.

3.7 Public Outreach

The public will have a period of 30 days for review of the Draft Ouray Hunting Plan 2021 and associated EA. The draft hunting plan and associated EA will be available at www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php.

3.8 Determination

This section would be filled out upon completion of the public comment period and at the time of finalization of the EA.

- The Service’s action would not result in a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. See the attached **“Finding of No Significant Impact.”**
- The Service’s action **may significantly affect** the quality of the human environment and the Service would prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

3.9 Signatures

Submitted By:

Preparer Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name/Title/Organization: Rob Bundy, Project Leader, Lower Green River NWR Complex

Concurrence:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Regional Historic Preservation Officer

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Refuge Supervisor

Approved:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

4.0 References

Caudill, James and Erin Carver. 2019. Banking on Nature 2017: The Economic Contributions of National Wildlife Refuge Recreational Visitation to Local Communities. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Falls Church, Virginia.

[USFWS]. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2021a. Draft Ouray National Wildlife Refuge Hunting Plan. Ouray National Wildlife Refuge, Randlett, UT. 13pp. <<https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php>>

— 2021b. Draft Compatibility Determination for Hunting on Ouray National Wildlife Refuge. Ouray National Wildlife Refuge, Randlett, UT. 6pp. <<https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php>>

— 2000. Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Ouray National Wildlife Refuge. 61 p. plus appendices.

— 1999. National Wetlands Inventory. Brennan Basin, Utah. September 1983, 1:5,000, Color Infra Red (CIR).

APPENDIX A OTHER APPLICABLE STATUTES, EXECUTIVE ORDERS, AND REGULATIONS

Statutes, Executive Orders, and Regulations
Cultural Resources
<p>American Indian Religious Freedom Act, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 1996 – 1996a; 43 CFR Part 7</p> <p>Antiquities Act of 1906, 16 U.S.C. 431-433; 43 CFR Part 3</p> <p>Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, 16 U.S.C. 470aa – 470mm; 18 CFR Part 1312; 32 CFR Part 229; 36 CFR Part 296; 43 CFR Part 7</p> <p>National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 470-470x-6; 36 CFR Parts 60, 63, 78, 79, 800, 801, and 810</p> <p>Paleontological Resources Protection Act, 16 U.S.C. 470aaa – 470aaa-11</p> <p>Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 25 U.S.C. 3001-3013; 43 CFR Part 10</p> <p>Executive Order 11593 – Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment, 36 Fed. Reg. 8921 (1971)</p> <p>Executive Order 13007 – Indian Sacred Sites, 61 Fed. Reg. 26771 (1996)</p>
Fish and Wildlife
<p>Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 668-668c, 50 CFR 22</p> <p>Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 1531-1544; 36 CFR Part 13; 50 CFR Parts 10, 17, 23, 81, 217, 222, 225, 402, and 450</p> <p>Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, 16 U.S.C. 742 a-m</p> <p>Lacey Act, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 3371 et seq.; 15 CFR Parts 10, 11, 12, 14, 300, and 904</p> <p>Migratory Bird Treaty Act, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 703-712; 50 CFR Parts 10, 12, 20, and 21.</p> <p>Executive Order 13186 – Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds, 66 Fed. Reg. 3853 (2001)</p>
Natural Resources
<p>Clean Air Act, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 7401-7671q; 40 CFR Parts 23, 50, 51, 52, 58, 60, 61, 82, and 93; 48 CFR Part 23</p> <p>Wilderness Act, 16 U.S.C. 1131 et seq.</p> <p>Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, 16 U.S.C. 1271 et seq.</p> <p>Executive Order 13112 – Invasive Species, 64 Fed. Reg. 6183 (1999)</p>
Water Resources
<p>Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 (commonly referred to as Clean Water Act), 33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.; 33 CFR Parts 320-330; 40 CFR Parts 110, 112, 116, 117, 230-232, 323, and 328</p> <p>Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, as amended, 33 U.S.C. 401 et seq.; 33 CFR Parts 114, 115, 116, 321, 322, and 333</p> <p>Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, 42 U.S.C. 300f et seq.; 40 CFR Parts 141-148</p> <p>Executive Order 11988 – Floodplain Management, 42 Fed. Reg. 26951 (1977)</p> <p>Executive Order 11990 – Protection of Wetlands, 42 Fed. Reg. 26961 (1977)</p>

Key: CFR = Code of Federal Regulations; U.S.C. = U.S. Code

APPENDIX B MAP OF OURAY NWR AND PROPOSED ACTION

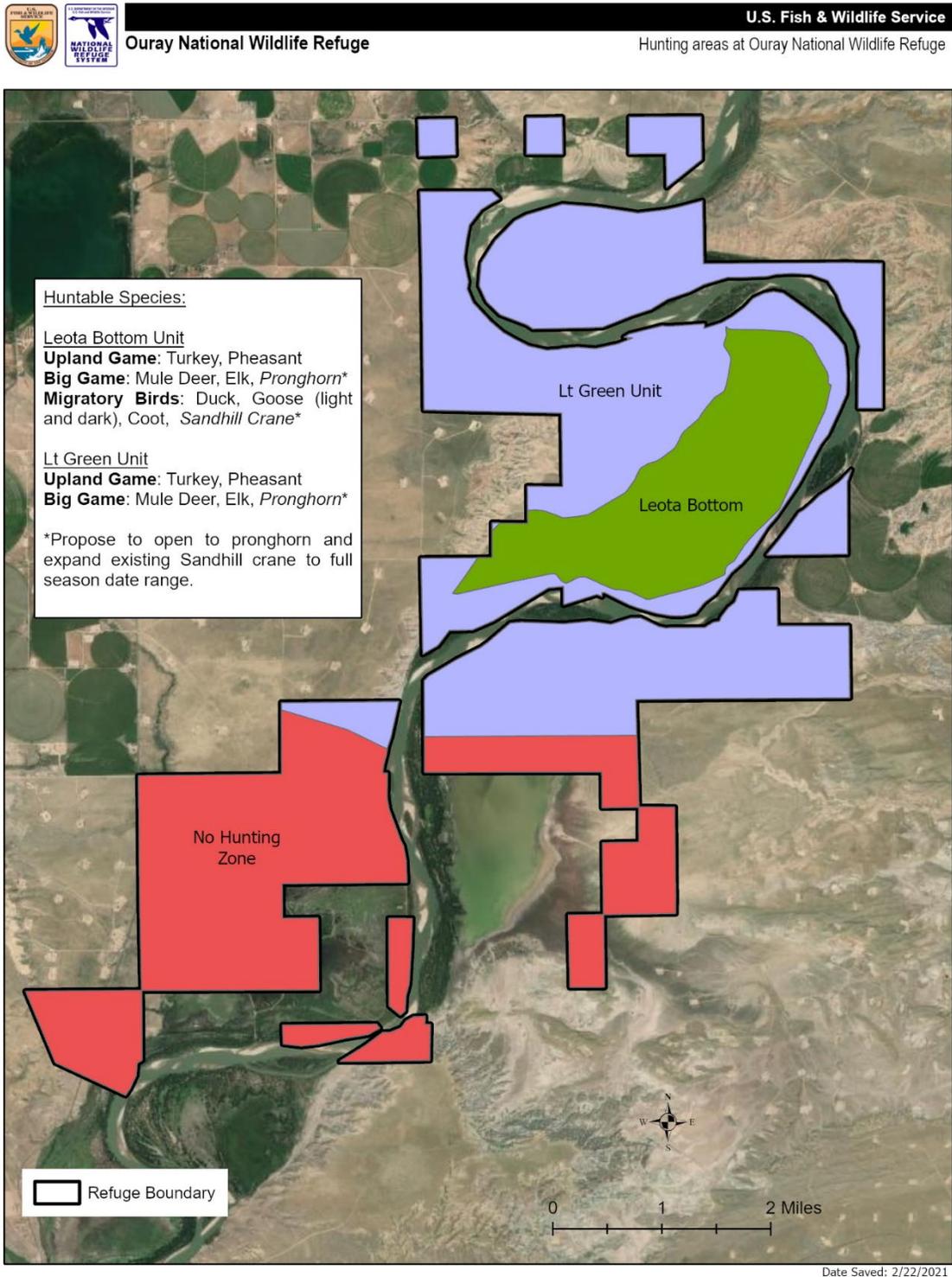


Figure 1. Map of the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge Hunting Units for Proposed Sandhill Crane and Pronghorn Hunting.