



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge

Draft Sport Fishing Plan

November 2019



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Sport Fishing Plan**

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex

9383 El Rancho Lane, Alamosa, CO 81101

Submitted By:
Project Leader

Signature	Date
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Concurrence:
Refuge Supervisor

Signature	Date
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Approved:
Will Meeks, Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

Signature	Date
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Draft Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge Sport Fishing Plan

I. Introduction

National wildlife refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), the purposes of an individual refuge, United States (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy, and laws and international treaties. Relevant guidance covers the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (NWRSA), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act), Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected part of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1963 and encompasses about 12,026 acres. The refuge was established under the authority of the 1929 Migratory Bird Conservation Act (45 Stat. 1222; 16 U.S. Code Section 715d) “. . . for use as inviolate sanctuaries, or for any other management purposes, for migratory birds.”

The mission of the Refuge System, as outlined by the NWRSA, 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 NWRSA 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;
- monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge.

Therefore, it is a priority of the Service to provide for wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, including hunting, when those opportunities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the Refuge System.

The purpose of this sport fishing plan is to document the locations and methods that will be conducted to provide safe, quality recreational sport fishing opportunity on a part of the refuge that reduces conflicts with other priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses (Service Manual 605 FW 2) and wildlife and habitat management objectives. This sport fishing plan precedes the overall visitor services plan for the refuges comprising the San Luis Valley NWR Complex and covers information on the following topics: (1) compatibility, (2) the effect of fishing on refuge objectives, (3) description of the sport fishing program, (4) avoidance of biological and public conflicts, and (5) the procedures that will be carried out to conduct a recreational fishing program.

In general, this plan proposes to open a part of the refuge to recreational sport fishing opportunities.

The long-term management goals of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which includes this refuge, as stated in the 2015 comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are:

- Goal 1. Conserve, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity and function of the San Luis Valley ecosystem to support healthy populations of native fish and wildlife, with an emphasis on migratory birds.
- Goal 2. As climate patterns change, we will protect, acquire, and manage surface and ground water resources to maintain and support management objectives.
- Goal 3. Provide safe, accessible, and quality wildlife-dependent recreation and perform outreach to visitors and local communities to nurture an appreciation and understanding of the unique natural and cultural resources of the refuge complex and the San Luis Valley.
- Goal 4. Secure and effectively use funding, staffing, and partnerships for the benefit of all resources in support of the refuge complex purposes and the mission of the Refuge System. Actively pursue and continue to foster partnerships with other agencies, organizations, the water community, and private landowners to conserve, manage, and provide for the long-term sustainability of working landscapes within the San Luis Valley ecosystem.
- Goal 5. Protect significant cultural resources within the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

- Goal 6. Use sound science, applied research, monitoring, and evaluation to advance the understanding of natural resource functions, changing climate conditions, and wilderness values in the management of the habitats within the San Luis Valley ecosystem.

II. Statement of Objectives

Allowing recreational sport fishing on Alamosa NWR directly supports objectives the San Luis Valley NWR Complex CCP by providing new recreational sport fishing opportunities on a part of the refuge.

The objectives of the refuge sport fishing plan directly support several of the complex's long-term management goals. In general, the objective of this sport fishing plan is to provide anglers with a safe, high quality fishing experience while: (1) supporting fish populations at optimum levels, (2) reducing negative effects to other wildlife populations, and (3) minimizing conflicts with other wildlife-dependent public uses on the refuge. For a complete review of the complex's management goals and objectives, see complex 2015 CCP and EIS. The fishing program will be conducted to meet these complex objectives, which cover providing quality recreational fishing opportunities for the public, with an emphasis on youth anglers, and increase overall visitation to the refuges. The Service believes these objectives will support healthy fish and wildlife populations and support the maintenance of the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuges.

Recreational fishing will provide the public with a wildlife-dependent recreational opportunity while promoting an appreciation and wise use of the refuge's aquatic resources. There will be opportunities to observe natural relationships and the diversity necessary for a healthy ecosystem. The public will gain valuable knowledge through brochures, maps, and interpretive literature available and distributed at the refuges. Allowing recreational sport fishing will help to further instill a conservation ethic and stewardship of natural resources. Regulation and information signs will also be available at sites open for fishing. Through these resources the public will obtain an understanding of natural resource management and of the Service's role in preserving and protecting natural resources. Visitors will also develop an appreciation and an awareness of the roles they play within the ecosystem.

This sport fishing program also supports the directive of the Improvement Act that refuges provide for priority public uses, including fishing, where compatible.

Additionally, objectives of the fishing program include:

- foster a connection, understanding, and appreciation of natural resources with anglers by providing a high-quality fishing experience;
- promote stewardship and conservation;
- place a priority on safety by prohibiting fishing near potentially dangerous infrastructure and environmental conditions, making sure that adequate spatial separation exists between fishing areas and areas open to other wildlife-dependent recreational uses, such as hunting areas, and making sure that law enforcement presence is adequate;

- pose minimal conflict with wildlife and habitat objectives;
- pose minimal conflict with other priority wildlife-dependent public use activities;
- pose minimal conflict with neighboring lands.

III. Description of the Sport Fishing Program

A. Areas to Be Opened to Fishing.

The Rio Grande flows along approximately 12 miles of Alamosa NWR's western boundary. Recreational fishing will be allowed along a section of this length upstream and downstream of the Chicago Dam and a section of the Chicago Ditch, as long as fishing activities do not interfere with the refuge's habitat and wildlife management objectives (Figure 1). An annual seasonal closure (from April 15 to September 1) will be conducted on a part of the designated fishing area to protect habitat and breeding activities for the federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher.

We plan to annually examine sport fishing activities on the refuge, and may administratively modify or close areas because of factors such as staffing; safety issues; fishing demand; effects to other refuge programs, such as other public uses or habitat management activities; adjacent landowner issues and conflicts; climate change; wildlife disease; mission change; endangered species concerns; or any other compatibility issues.

B. Species to Be Taken, Fishing Periods, Fishing Access

Species, limits, and fishing periods will, in general, be according to state regulations. Access will be allowed from existing roads and a proposed trail. If annual evaluations of the fishing activities show that the refuge must administratively enact further seasonal or area restrictions because of factors such as staffing; safety issues; fishing demand; effects to other refuge programs, such as other public uses or habitat management activities; adjacent landowner issues and conflicts; climate change; wildlife disease; mission change; endangered species concerns; or any other compatibility issues.

C. Fishing Permit Requirements

It is not expected that any special permits or applications will be needed for recreational sport fishing. Numbers of anglers, angler satisfaction, safety concerns, and potential environmental issues or conflicts with other wildlife-dependent public will be evaluated annually to decide whether access may need to be restricted in the future.

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

The refuge's sport fishing program has been developed in coordination Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) regional and area managers. This coordination was accomplished through formal and informal meetings as well as solicitation of CPW comments on the sport fishing objectives detailed in the 2015 CCP and EIS.

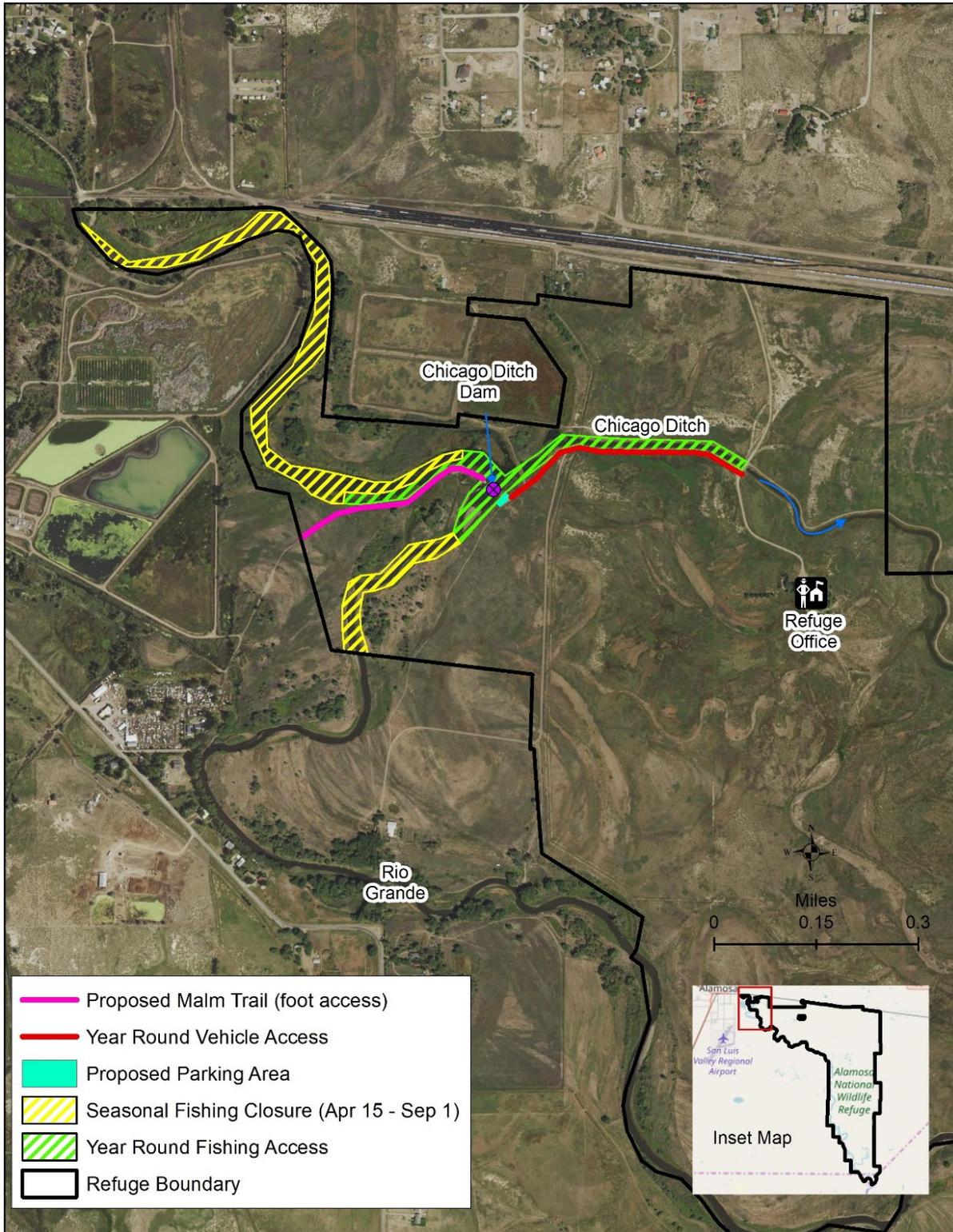


Figure 1. Sport Fishing Areas on Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado.

Following the adoption of this sport fishing plan, carrying it out will be done with consultation and coordination with CPW and will be a combination of formal and informal activities based on the nature of issues, if any, to be addressed. Refuge and CPW staff will consult on issues about law enforcement.

E. Law Enforcement

The enforcement of refuge and state fishing regulations, trespassing and other public use violations normally associated with management of a national wildlife refuge is the responsibility of commissioned Service law enforcement officers. Officers cooperate with, and are aided by, state and county police officers as well as CPW conservation officers. The procedures used for obtaining law enforcement help are based on the legal jurisdiction where incidents occur. The refuge regularly meets with the various state and county law enforcement agencies to develop agreements and strategies to make sure law enforcement operations are performed as safely and efficiently as possible.

The following methods will be used to control and enforce fishing regulations.

- Refuge and fishing areas will be clearly posted.
- The refuge will provide a brochure that shows fishing areas and describes refuge-specific rules and regulations.
- Information and fishing area maps will be made available on the complex's website, at the refuge offices, parking areas, and other access points.
- The Service will conduct law enforcement patrols on a regular basis to make sure of compliance with state and federal fishing regulations as well as refuge-specific regulations pertinent to fishing on the refuge.
- Service law enforcement staff will coordinate with CPW conservation officers and other law enforcement agencies.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Administering the fishing program will annually require staff time from the refuge managers, senior biologist, maintenance workers, administrative assistant, and law enforcement officers to coordinate with CPW staff; develop an informational publication with regulations; produce news releases; respond to angler inquiries; conduct angler and visitor outreach; reduce conflicts among users; conduct law enforcement; maintain boundary posting and parking areas; monitor effects to wildlife, habitat, and visitor use; and make sure public safety. The annual cost of the refuge's proposed sport fishing program is estimated to be \$10,000 (0.77 percent) of the overall complex operating budget of approximately \$1,300,000. This cost covers staff and operating expenses for refuge law enforcement, refuge staff activities associated with evaluating potential adverse effects to other refuge resources, as well as preparing annual publications and special signage, managing habitat conditions and access, and monitoring recreational fishing activities.

The proposed sport fishing program will require more signage, potential new infrastructure, such as parking area development, and other start-up costs. Fully carrying out this proposed sport fishing program will become possible only with an increased budget. During the first few years, carrying out the program will be done with existing staffing, so it will redirect effort from other high-priority habitat and public use programs.

IV. Conduct of the Sport Fishing Program

A. Angler Permit Application, Selection, and Registration Procedures

It is not expected that any special permits or applications will be required for recreational sport fishing. Numbers of anglers, angler satisfaction, safety concerns, and potential environmental issues or conflicts with other wildlife-dependent public will be evaluated annually to decide whether access may need to be restricted in the future.

The regulations, as published in the CFR, are the official notification to the public. Copies of the CFR can be found in libraries and online.

B. Refuge-Specific Fishing Regulations

All fishing on Alamosa NWR will be consistent with state and federal laws and regulations and those pertaining to all Refuge System lands. Regulations specific to fishing on national wildlife refuges are found in Title 50 of the CFR Part 32.5 and are as follows:

The following provisions apply to each person while engaged in public fishing on areas of the Refuge System.

- Each person must secure and possess the required state license.
- Each person must comply with the applicable provisions of federal law and regulations.
- Each person must comply with the applicable provisions of the laws and regulations of the state wherein any area is located unless federal law or regulation further restricts it.
- Each person must comply with the terms and conditions authorizing access or use of the wildlife refuge area.
- Each person must comply with the provisions of any refuge-specific regulations governing fishing on the wildlife refuge area. Regulations, special conditions, and maps of the fishing areas for a national wildlife refuge are available at that area's headquarters.

In addition, refuge-specific sport fishing regulations appear in Sections 32.20 through 32.72.

C. Relevant State Regulations

In general, sport fishing will be consistent with state regulations about proper licensing rules, species, seasons, and method of take.

D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Sport Fishing

Listed below are refuge-specific regulations that pertain to the refuge as of the date of this plan. These regulations may be modified as conditions change or if refuge expansion occurs.

- Fishing is only allowed within the designated fishing area.
- Fires are prohibited, except portable gas stoves in established parking areas.
- The refuges are open for day use access from 1 hour before sunrise until 1 hour after sunset.
- Camping and overnight parking is prohibited.
- All personal property, including fishing line, bait containers, and other trash must be removed at the end of each day.
- Use or possession of alcohol or controlled substances on the refuge is prohibited.
- The entire designated fishing area or any part thereof may be closed to fishing for the protection of habitat and wildlife resources, management activities, or safety issues as decided by the project leader.

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Sport Fishing Program

To inform the public of new recreational sport fishing opportunities proposed on Alamosa NWR, public scoping meetings were held during the development of the San Luis Valley NWR Complex's CCP and EIS (2015). These meetings informed the public of the proposed recreational sport fishing opportunities identified in this Sport Fishing Plan.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Sport Fishing Program

The public scoping period during the development of the complex's CCP and EIS (2015) resulted in only a few written comments. Some members of the public provided input to some or all the sport fishing outlined in this Sport Fishing Plan. In general, there was little opposition to providing recreational sport fishing opportunities on the refuge. Two comments were received opposing any fishing on the refuges while one letter received supported providing sport fishing opportunities. During public meetings a few members of the public verbally expressed support for fishing opportunities. See Appendix G (Summary of Public Comment and the Service's Responses) in the 2015 CCP and EIS for more information.

Offering compatible wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities such as sport fishing, wildlife observation and photography is a refuge priority. Public input was considered, and efforts were made to design the sport fishing program to meet the Refuge System and refuge-specific goals and objectives, provide a safe and high-quality experience, reduce wildlife disturbance, provide wildlife sanctuary, reduce or avoid conflicts with other refuge users, and reduce confusion for anglers.

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

General information about sport fishing and other wildlife-dependent uses can be obtained at the complex's headquarters at 8249 Emperius Rd., Alamosa, Colorado, 81101. Anglers can also visit the Complex's website at www.fws.gov/refuge/alamosa/, call (719) 589-4021, or e-mail at alamosa@fws.gov. Refuge specific information and maps will be found on the complex's website at www.fws.gov/refuge/alamosa/. State fishing regulations are available at www.cpw.state.co.us, from CPW offices, from sporting goods stores, or wherever fishing and hunting licenses are sold.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Sport fishing and all associated program activities proposed in this plan have been found compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See the Draft Compatibility Determination for Sport Fishing on Alamosa NWR (<https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php#>).