

## **Draft Compatibility Determination for Big Game and Upland Game Hunting on Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge**

**Use:** Hunting of big game (pronghorn, mule deer, and white-tailed deer) and upland game (cottontail rabbits, ring-necked pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, wild turkey, chukar, and gray partridge)

**Refuge Name:** Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge

### **Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:**

- Migratory Bird Conservation Act, Executive Order 5782

### **Refuge Purpose(s):**

The refuge was established on January 29, 1932, by Executive Order 9321. The refuge was established with 201 acres withdrawn from the public domain in 1932, and 965 acres purchased with Migratory Bird Conservation Act funds in 1933. The primary purpose of the refuge is to provide “a refuge and breeding ground for birds and wild animals.”

### **National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:**

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States (U.S.) for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

### **Description of Use:**

*What is the use?*

Hunting is a priority public use of the Refuge System. Big game (pronghorn, mule deer, and white-tailed deer) and upland game (cottontail rabbits, ring-necked pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, wild turkey, chukar, and gray partridge) hunting opportunities will be allowed on Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), managed in accordance with federal laws and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy and in alignment with state regulations. Except, wild turkey hunting will only be permitted during the fall season.

*Where will the use be conducted?*

All units of the refuge (1,166 acres) will be open to hunting.

*When and how will the use be conducted?*

The big game and upland game hunt will follow federal and state regulations for season dates, hours, bag, and possession limits, except wild turkey will only be allowed during the fall.

**Species to be Taken:** The refuge will be open to big game (pronghorn, mule deer, and white-tailed deer) and upland game (cottontail rabbits, ring-necked pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, wild turkey, chukar, and gray partridge).

Hunting Periods: The refuge hunting season will follow the dates of the State of Wyoming hunting seasons. Except, wild turkey hunting will only be permitted during the fall hunting season.

Hunting Access: It will be the responsibility of the hunters to park safely and legally and to be aware of whose land they are on. Hunting access to the refuge is walk-in only.

*Why is this use being proposed?*

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

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

- provide wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities in accordance with federal laws and Service policy and in alignment with state regulations;
- meet the refuge establishing purposes, which includes keeping at least 60 percent of the refuge closed to hunting to provide inviolate sanctuary for migratory birds;
- provide increased opportunities for a hunting experience on refuge lands;
- provide nearby hunting access for local communities;
- assist with hunter education.

**Availability of Resources:**

The proposed action will require approximately 5 percent of the refuge's law enforcement time to enforce hunting regulations on the refuge, as well as less than 5 percent of the refuge manager's time for overseeing and implementing the hunt program on the refuge. The proposed hunt program will not have additional costs for infrastructure such as new parking lots, signs, or fencing. Refuge staff anticipate that funding will continue to be adequate to continue the hunting program at the refuge in the future.

Refuge resources are adequate to implement the hunting program on the refuge. Law enforcement is the primary tool necessary to ensure proper and safe administration of this use. Enforcement of refuge regulations normally associated with management of a national wildlife refuge is the responsibility of commissioned federal wildlife officers. Other officers, special agents, state game wardens, and the local sheriff's department may assist the refuge staff. Currently, there is no federal wildlife officer stationed at the refuge.

The following methods will be used to control and enforce hunting regulations:

- The refuge will provide a brochure that identifies hunt areas and hunting regulations.
- Refuge law enforcement staff will periodically check hunters for compliance with federal and state laws.
- Officers from within the zone will detail in to assist with enforcing hunting regulations.

**Anticipated Impacts of the Use:**

*Short-Term Impacts:*

Overall, accommodating this wildlife-dependent use likely will result in minimal effects on wildlife. Although hunting causes mortality to wildlife, season dates and bag limits are set with the long-term health of populations in mind. Wildlife will be disturbed temporarily in the vicinity of the activity. This covers temporary displacement of birds and other resident wildlife from foot traffic moving through the area and gunshots. Due to the low populations of deer and pronghorn on the refuge, and the low relative abundance of hunters expected to harvest these animals, the overall increase in risk to wildlife due to lead ammunition in the environment likely will be minor.

*Long-Term and Cumulative Impacts:*

There will be no long-term effects on wildlife resources at a population scale. By opening the refuge for hunting, new areas of Wyoming state land and Bureau of Land Management lands, that were previously only accessible via private land, also will become publicly accessible. Overall, the proposed action likely will be a minor benefit to hunters in the area by providing additional public land for hunting.

**Public Review and Comment:**

The Service prepared this compatibility determination concurrently with the draft Environmental Assessment and companion hunting plan for the refuge. Public review and comment were achieved concurrently with the public review and comment period for the draft hunting plan and Environmental Assessment. Public review and comment was solicited through public posting of notices at the refuge and notices on local newspapers.

**Determination (check one below):**

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

### **Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:**

- Hunters will be allowed to gain access to the hunting area 1 hour before legal shooting time.
- Off-road vehicles may not be used on any portion of the refuge.
- All watercraft are prohibited.
- Hunting access is walk-in only.
- Fishing, fires, and overnight camping are not permitted on the refuge.
- Portable blinds are permitted but they cannot be left unattended or overnight.
- Disturbing, cutting, gathering, manipulating, or bringing in any vegetation to create a blind is prohibited.
- Molesting, injuring, disturbing, or destroying any animal or plant is prohibited, as is the removal of animals, plants, or parts thereof.
- Artifacts and historic items are protected on refuge lands by federal law. It is unlawful to search for or remove these objects from refuge lands.
- Possession or use of other than non-toxic shot shells is prohibited.
- Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms on Refuge System lands must comply with all provisions of state and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 Code of Federal Regulations 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 Code of Federal Regulations 32).
- All pets must be leashed except for retrievers used for hunting during the appropriate hunting seasons.
- Cleaning of birds on the refuge is prohibited.
- Hunters must remove all personal trash, including spent shells.

### **Justification:**

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

The Service and the State of Wyoming consider hunting an acceptable and desirable form of public use and wildlife-dependent recreation. Hunting is considered an educational and recreational opportunity that increases the public's awareness of wise stewardship and management of wildlife resources in the public's trust. Recreational public hunting is a historic wildlife dependent use of the Refuge System and is one of the six priority public uses established by Executive Order 12996 (March 25, 1996) and legislatively authorized by the Improvement Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-57).

