

**Draft Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge
Big Game and Upland Game Hunting Plan**

February 2020

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge
Central Sage Steppe Complex**

P.O. Box 700 Green River, Wyoming 82935

Submitted By:
Project Leader

Signature

Date

Concurrence:
Refuge Supervisor

Signature

Date

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

Signature

Date

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	2
II.	Statement of Objectives.....	4
III.	Description of Hunting Program	5
A.	Areas to Be Opened to Hunting.....	5
B.	Species to Be Taken, Hunting Periods, Hunting Access	5
C.	Hunter Permit Requirements (if applicable).....	5
D.	Consultation and Coordination with the State	5
E.	Law Enforcement.....	6
F.	Funding and Staffing Requirements	6
IV.	Conduct of the Hunting Program	6
A.	Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures (if applicable)...	6
B.	Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations	6
C.	Relevant State Regulations	6
D.	Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting	6
V.	Public Engagement.....	7
A.	Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program.....	7
B.	Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program.....	7
C.	How Hunters Would Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations	7
VI.	Compatibility Determination.....	8
VII.	References	8

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Map of Hunting Opportunities on Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge.	3
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Appendices

Appendix A.	Laramie Plains Revision of Comprehensive Conservation Plan	9
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Draft Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge

Big Game and Upland Game Hunting 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 includes 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 portions of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) 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 The refuge was established with 201 acres withdrawn from the public domain in 1932, and 965 acres purchased with Migratory Bird Conservation Act funds in 1933.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.”

The refuge includes three parcels arranged roughly in an L-shaped pattern, with the segments one-half mile apart (Figure 1). Lands next to and in between refuge parcels are owned by the State of Wyoming and private parties. The refuge is in a 4,000-acre natural depression known as the Big Basin, northwest of Laramie. The bottom of the basin is dominated by alkali flats, small ponds, and Bamforth Lake, which encompasses approximately 250 acres when full. Bamforth Lake is owned mostly by the State of Wyoming, with approximately 100 acres of the 550-acre lake located in the refuge boundary. The soils along the bottom of the basin, including the ponds when dry, are strongly saline, resulting in minimal emergent or submergent vegetative growth.

The lake basin comprises half of the refuge, while the other half is greasewood dominated upland, alkali flats, and a limited amount of grassland. Before 1950, Bamforth Lake was an important area for many wildlife species due to a dependable water supply. With the full development of the Wheatland Irrigation District, however, Bamforth Lake lost its major water supply due to junior refuge water rights. The fragmented parcels, closed basin hydrology, and minimal water rights have contributed to the lack of active management of this refuge.

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. ”



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge

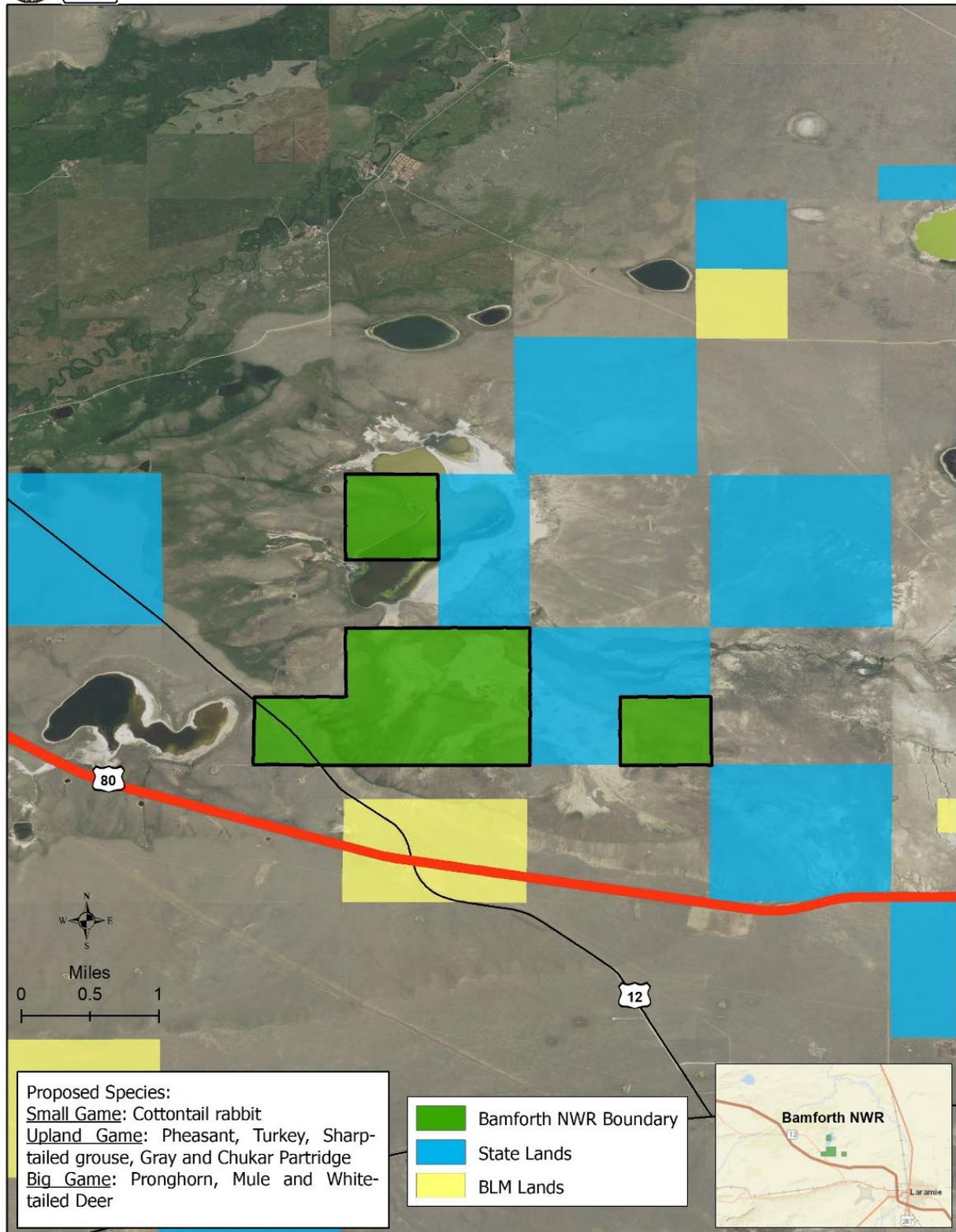


Figure 1. Map of Hunting Opportunities on Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge.

The NWRSAA mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the 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 refuge has not previously been open to hunting or any other public use. The hunting opportunities described in this plan will be the first allowed on the refuge.

II. Statement of Objectives

The objectives of a big game and upland game 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.

Hunting is consistent with the comprehensive conservation plan's (CCP) Visitor Services goal to provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives. During the 2007 CCP planning process, the decision was made to keep the refuge closed to hunting. Since then, changes in priorities from the Secretary of the Interior have included developing new opportunities for hunting on national wildlife refuges (USFWS 2007, Appendix A).

III. Description of Hunting Program

A. Areas to Be Opened to Hunting

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

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

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. Hunter access to the refuge is walk-in only.

C. Hunter Permit Requirements (if applicable)

Not applicable.

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

The refuge reviewed the operations and regulations for neighboring state wildlife management areas and refuges to find consistency, where possible. Wyoming Fish and Game Department leadership expressed interest in having the Service evaluate opening the refuge for hunting. This interest was congruent with the Department of Interior Secretarial Order 3356, "Hunting, Fishing, Recreational Shooting, and Wildlife Conservation Opportunities and Coordination with States, Tribes, and Territories."

Soon, we, the Service, will send a letter and the draft Environmental Assessment to the state asking to coordinate with it to adjust the hunting plan to align, where possible, with state management goals. We will continue to consult and coordinate on specific aspects of the hunting plan to ensure safe and enjoyable recreational hunting opportunities.

E. Law Enforcement

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 assist the refuge staff.

The following methods are 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 randomly check hunters for compliance with federal and state laws.
- Officers from within the zone will detail in to assist with enforcing hunting regulations.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

The estimated annual cost to run a big game and upland game hunting opportunity is approximately \$1,000 annually, with an additional one-time cost of \$500 to develop a new brochure. The proposed hunting program will not have additional costs for infrastructure such as new parking lots, signs, or fencing. 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 hunting program on the refuge. Refuge staff anticipate that funding will continue to be adequate to continue the hunting program at the refuge in the future.

IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program

A. Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures (if applicable)

Not applicable.

B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

Wild turkey hunting will only be allowed during the fall season on the refuge, in accordance with State of Wyoming seasons and regulations.

C. Relevant State Regulations

Hunters must follow all big game and upland game hunting regulations for the State of Wyoming. Hunters must also be aware of and follow all State of Wyoming hunter access laws.

D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting

- 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.
- 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 shotshells 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 CFR 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32).
- Dogs are to be restrained except while engaged in hunting activity.
- Cleaning of birds on the refuge is prohibited.
- Hunters must remove all personal trash, including spent shells.

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program

The refuge maintains a mailing list composed of local newspapers, radio stations, and websites for communication purposes. Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with hunting seasons. In addition, information about the hunt will be available at Arapaho NWR headquarters and on the Bamforth NWR website.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program

Hunting is an important economic and recreational use of Wyoming's natural resources; however, the refuge has been closed to hunting for reasons previously identified in the 2007 CCP. Some public support for opening the refuge to hunting is anticipated. Concerns or questions may also be raised by the public.

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

General information regarding hunting and other wildlife-dependent public uses can be obtained at Arapaho NWR headquarters at 953 Jackson County Road 32, Walden, CO 80480, by mail at 28111 State Highway 125, Walden, CO 80480, or by calling (970) 723-8202. Dates, forms, hunting unit directions, maps, and other information about the hunting program will be available on the station website at: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/bamforth/>.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See Draft Compatibility Determination for Big Game and Upland Game Hunting on Bamforth NWR (<https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php#>).

VII. References

[USFWS] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2007. Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge, Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuge. September 2007. 107 p. <https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/refuges/completedPlanPDFs_A-E/bmf_htl_mrl_2007_ccpfinal_all.pdf>

APPENDIX A. LARAMIE PLAINS REVISION OF COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN



In Reply Refer to:
FWS/IR05/IR07

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
P.O. Box 700
Green River, Wyoming 82935



FEB 28 2020

Memorandum

To: Assistant Regional Director, Refuges
Through: Refuge Supervisor, Mountain Zone
From: Project Leader, Central Sage-Steppe Complex
Subject: Request for Minor Revision to 2007 Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Bamforth, Hutton Lake and Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuges

The Service is currently drafting a Hunting Plan and associated Environmental Assessment for hunting on Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge). We are also drafting a Hunting Plan and associated Environmental Assessment for hunting on Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge. In 2007, the Service completed a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for Hutton Lake, Bamforth and Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuges. Although the CCP covered all three refuges, separate goals and objectives were developed within the CCP for each refuge.

For Hutton Lake NWR, the Visitor Services Goal in the CCP is "Provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives". I am proposing minor revisions to the CCP that will allow hunting on Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Bamforth National Wildlife Refuges. Specifically, I am proposing to add the Visitor Services Goal for Hutton Lake refuge to the goals for Bamforth NWR. In addition, I am proposing to add the following objective under the Visitor Services Goal for Hutton Lake and Bamforth National Wildlife Refuges: "Where compatible, allow hunting opportunities that foster an appreciation and understanding of the management and resources of the Refuge and the System". These changes will provide additional potential hunting opportunities to the public, as referenced in Secretarial Order 3356. These revisions would not apply to Mortenson Lake NWR because of concerns that opening this refuge to hunting may negatively impact the federally endangered Wyoming toad population on the refuge.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 and Service policy (Fish and Wildlife Service Manual chapters 602 FW 1 and 3) identify the need to periodically review and revise Comprehensive Conservation Plans. Specifically the Service Manual chapter 602 FW 3, (Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process) Section 3.2 states "We will revise the CCP

**INTERIOR REGION 5
MISSOURI BASIN**

KANSAS, MONTANA*, NEBRASKA, NORTH DAKOTA,
SOUTH DAKOTA

*PARTIAL

**INTERIOR REGION 7
UPPER COLORADO RIVER BASIN**

COLORADO, NEW MEXICO, UTAH, WYOMING

every 15 years ... or earlier if monitoring and evaluation determine that we need changes to achieve planning unit purpose(s), vision, goals, or objectives” 2

The addition of the Visitor Services Goal to Bamforth NWR and the addition of an objective to Bamforth and Hutton Lake refuges are considered a minor CCP revision because they do not significantly change the management direction of the refuges. The addition of an objective under the Visitor Services Goal for Hutton Lake and Bamforth NWRs does not change the overall intent of the CCP objectives. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), meets the criteria for the following categorical exclusion: 516 DM 8.5 B (9) “Minor changes in existing master plans, comprehensive conservation plans, or operations, when no or minor effects are anticipated. Examples include minor changes in the type and location of compatible public use activities and land management practices.”

This memorandum complies with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, which states that the “Secretary shall ... revise the plan at any time if the Secretary determines that conditions that affect the refuge or planning unit have changed significantly.” Examples of new information or changed conditions include but are not limited to the following: 1) changes in the acreage of a specific habitat type; 2) changes in water management or availability; 3) changes in the status of a listed species; 4) the need for changes to wildlife management or public use programs; 5) changes to Service policy; 6) the need to construct new facilities, and/or 7) changes in sea level or other climate related changes.

Submitted By

Project Leader: Tom Koerner Tom Koerner 02/27/2020
(Signature) (Date)

Concurrence:

Refuge Supervisor: Lisa Jalcott 2/28/20
(Signature) (Date)

Approval:

~~hkf~~ Assistant Regional Director, Refuges: Neil Hoya 2/28/20
(Signature) (Date)