

Draft Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge Hunting Plan

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge
1318 CO-318, Maybell, CO 81640**

Submitted By:

Robert Bundy, Project Leader

Signature _____ Date _____

Concurrence:

Lisa Talcott, Refuge Supervisor

Signature _____ Date _____

Approved:

Will Meeks, Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

Signature _____ Date _____

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Draft Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge

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 covers the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (NWRSA), as amended by the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act), Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected parts of the Code of Federal Regulations and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

The Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1965 and expanded significantly on December 11, 1970 through the issuance of Public Land Order 4973. The primary purpose of the refuge is to (1) provide sanctuary for migratory birds, (2) provide for suitable fish and wildlife dependent recreation, (3) protection of natural resources, and (4) conservation of endangered and threatened species.

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) refuge uplands provide critical winter habitat for large mammals such as mule deer, elk, and pronghorn. The refuge also provides unique and important values for people. Wildlife, solitude, scenery, and cultural history combine to make the refuge a national treasure

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 System to (16 U.S. Code 668dd(a)(4)):

- provide for the conservation of fish, wildlife and plants, and their habitats within the Refuge System;
- ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans;
- ensure that the mission of the Refuge System described at 16 U.S. Code 668dd(a)(2) and the purposes of each refuge are carried out;
- ensure effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with owners of land adjoining refuges and the fish and wildlife agency of the states in which the units of the Refuge System are located;

- assist in the maintenance of adequate water quantity and water quality to fulfill the mission of the Refuge System and the purposes of each refuge;
- recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority public uses of the Refuge System through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife;
- ensure that opportunities are provided within the Refuge System for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses;
- monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge.

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

The first hunting plan for the refuge was drafted in 1968 and included language to allow hunting of migratory waterfowl, mule deer, and cottontail rabbits. The plan was updated in 1991 to include elk hunting, to provide better information on refuge big game populations, and to provide wildlife objectives for the refuge. This recent update is to include information for pronghorn and moose to allow new big game hunts on the refuge.

II. Statement of Objectives

The objectives of a big game (mule deer, elk, pronghorn, and moose), migratory bird (ducks, geese, coots, and mourning dove), and small game (cottontail rabbits) hunting program on the refuge are to 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 mourning dove, and allowing waterfowl and coot hunting on no more than two marshes and the Green River corridor during any one season.”

Adding moose and pronghorn hunting will allow for an expansion of this objective included in the Browns Park NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (1999).

III. Description of Hunting Program

A. Areas to Be Opened to Hunting

Big game hunting (moose, mule deer, elk, and pronghorn), cottontail rabbit, and mourning dove hunting will be open on Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) Hunt Units 1 and 201. These areas include the Grimes, Nelson, Spitzie, and Warren Units as well as other areas identified as open on the refuges hunting map (Figure 1). All species will be open during any state designated season using all legal methods of take.

Migratory waterfowl (ducks, geese, and coots) are open on the Butch Cassidy wetland, Hog Lake, and the Green River corridor.



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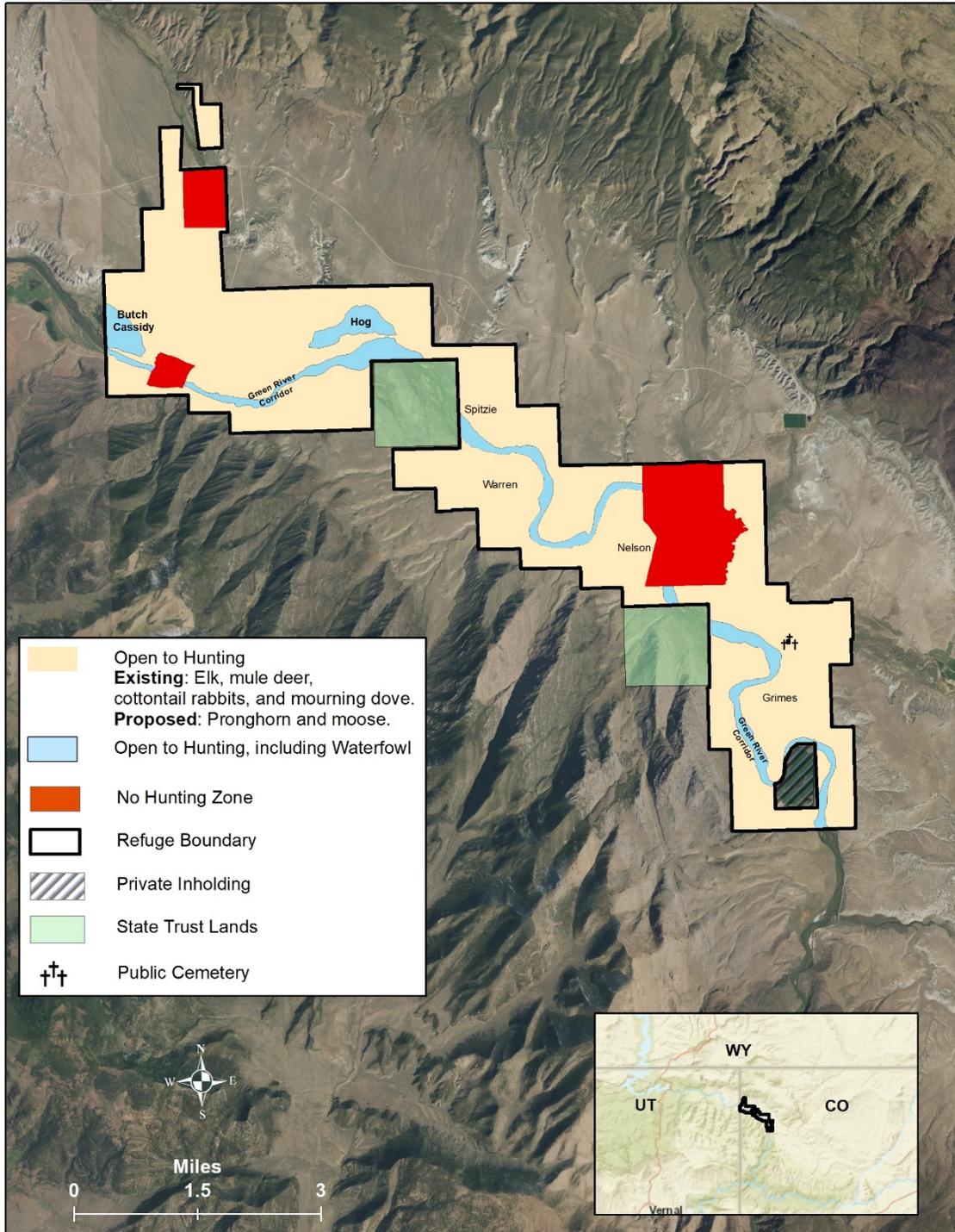


Figure 1. Hunting Opportunities on Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge.

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

Big game (moose, pronghorn, mule deer, and elk) hunting will be allowed on all refuge units except administrative and camping areas marked on the hunt map as per state regulation (Figure 1). These areas include the Grimes, Nelson, Spitzie, and Warren Units as well as other areas identified as open on Figure 1. These areas are divided between CPW Hunt Units 1 and 201. All hunts will be administered as per state regulation, including weapon and annual season dates set by CPW. Cottontail rabbits and mourning dove will be open on this area as well.

Waterfowl (ducks, geese, and coots) hunting is allowed in Butch Cassidy Wetland, Hog Lake, and the Green River corridor per state season and regulation. Hunters are required to use non-toxic shot for all migratory waterfowl, and hunters must first obtain a Federal Duck Stamp before hunting on the refuge. Non-toxic shot is being proposed for mourning dove and cottontail rabbit.

C. Hunter Permit Requirements

All hunters will be required to obtain big game permits and licenses issued by CPW. Waterfowl hunters are required to obtain a Federal Duck Stamp before hunting on the refuge as well as following all state requirements.

D. Consultation and Coordination With the State

To more closely align with State of Colorado hunting regulations, a letter was sent to the Director of CPW, requesting their assessment of the refuge hunting program and feedback on hunting opportunities the state would like the Service to consider. Refuge staff met on December 3, 2018 to discuss the state's response and to make recommendations on where the refuge could come closer to aligning with the state. During this period, Refuge Manager Daryl Magnuson had periodic discussion with local CPW law enforcement and management staff to keep them informed on the refuge's progress. The state is supportive of the proposed new moose and pronghorn hunts.

E. Law Enforcement

Enforcement of refuge violations normally associated with management of a national wildlife refuge is the responsibility of commissioned refuge law enforcement officers. Other refuge officers, special agents, and CPW game wardens often aid the Lower Green River Refuge Complex full-time law enforcement officer. The following methods are used to control and enforce hunting regulations: (1) refuge and hunt area boundaries will be clearly posted, (2) the refuge will provide a brochure that shows hunt areas, and (3) the Lower Green River Refuge Complex law enforcement staff will randomly check hunters for compliance with federal and state laws.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Annual hunt administration costs for the refuge including salary, equipment, law enforcement, brochures, signs, collection of hunt data, and analysis of biological information totals approximately \$5,000. Lower Green River Refuge Complex funds are used to conduct all refuge hunts. Money specifically for hunts has not been allocated so station funding must be used to

cover incidental expenses. Even with new hunts for moose and pronghorn, it is anticipated that funding will continue to be sufficient to continue the hunting program at the refuge into the future.

IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program

A. Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and Registration Procedures

All big game hunters will be required to apply for CPW big game permits in either Hunt Unit 1 or 201 for mule deer, elk, moose and pronghorn. Most permits are allocated by a competitive draw administered by CPW. CPW does offer over-the-counter licenses for archery pronghorn in Unit 1. There are no refuge specific permitting requirements; however, it is expected that all hunters will obtain a refuge brochure and familiarize themselves with refuge specific regulations and hunt areas.

G. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

Listed below are refuge-specific regulations that pertain to hunting at Browns Park NWR as of the date of this plan. These regulations may be modified as conditions change or if refuge expansion continues/occurs.

Migratory game bird hunting: We, the Service, allow hunting of geese, ducks, coots, and mourning doves on designated areas of the refuge.

Upland game hunting: We allow hunting of cottontail rabbit on designated areas of the refuge.

Big game hunting: We allow hunting of pronghorn, moose, mule deer, and elk on designated areas of the refuge.

Sport fishing: We allow sport fishing on designated areas of the refuge.

H. Relevant State Regulations

All hunts will be administered following CPW rules and regulations. Hunters should obtain a copy of the Colorado state hunting proclamation for any species they intend to hunt at the refuge.

B. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting

Camping and camp fires are allowed only in designated areas. Overnight horse camping is allowed only in the designated area at the swinging bridge corrals. Please contact the refuge manager for any other rules and regulations.

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program

Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with hunting seasons. In addition, information about the hunt, particularly the new moose and pronghorn hunts, will be available at Browns Park NWR headquarters or on the refuge's website.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program

Hunting has been allowed on the refuge since establishment in 1970 and little negative public reaction is expected. Hunting is an important economic and recreational use of Colorado's natural resources and is a priority, wildlife-dependent use of the Refuge System. Some individuals may have concerns with moose hunting because the refuge represents one of the best areas in northwest Colorado to see moose.

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

General information about hunting and other wildlife-dependent public uses can be obtained on the station website at https://www.fws.gov/refuge/browns_park/, at the refuge headquarters at 1318 Hwy 318, Maybell, CO 81640, and kiosks, or by calling 970-365-3613. Dates, forms, hunting unit directions, maps, applications, and permit requirements about the hunt are available at CPW offices and website.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the refuge (see the 2020 Compatibility Determination for Hunting and Fishing on Browns Park NWR).