

**Draft Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
Hunting Plan**

March 2020

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
Lincoln County, Wyoming**

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Draft Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

Hunting Plan

I. Introduction

Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is in southwestern Wyoming in Lincoln County, near the Utah and Idaho borders. The refuge is within the Bear River Watershed, which has a drainage area of about 4.8 million acres in three states, Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho. The Bear River, which flows through the length of the refuge, originates in the Uinta Mountains of Utah, moving north through western Wyoming, then west into Idaho, and back south into Utah to its terminus at Great Salt Lake for a total length of over 500 miles. The refuge elevation is around 6,300 feet above mean sea level. Temperatures are often below 0 degrees Fahrenheit in winter and can exceed 90 degrees in midsummer. Annual mean temperature is 38 degrees Fahrenheit.

The valley south of the town of Cokeville, Wyoming, has been described as the largest wetland complex in Wyoming. The unique wetland value and importance to migratory birds of the Bear River floodplain near Cokeville was recognized for many years. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the United States (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) reviewed the area with the idea of protecting the habitat. In July 1987, the Service gained conditional support for a refuge proposal from the WGFD.

The refuge was established in 1993 to preserve and protect wetland habitat for migratory, summer breeding, and resident birds. Examples include canvasbacks, redhead, and other dabbling ducks, white-faced Ibis, long-billed curlew, sandhill crane, greater sage-grouse, and numerous conservation-priority non-game species (Nicholoff 2003; USFWS 1992; WGFD 2005). The refuge now consists of 6,134 acres fee title. Total authorized acquisition boundary consists of 26,657 acres in Lincoln County, Wyoming. The refuge is administered by the Service, which is part of the Department of the Interior (Figure 1). The purpose of the refuge is to preserve and protect wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl and other migratory species values; resident big game, small game, furbearers, and upland game birds; public education and interpretation values, and public recreation values (USFWS 1992).

A hunting plan and Environmental Assessment for select species was completed in 2013 (USFWS 2013). This allowed for hunting of select species in select areas of the refuge. At that time, hunting of light geese (Ross's and snow geese) was not allowed in the Pacific Flyway by the WGFD, so these species were not included in the 2013 hunting plan. Since that time, hunting for light geese is now authorized in the Pacific Flyway according to WGFD regulations. This hunting plan is being prepared to allow hunting of light geese (Ross's and snow geese) in addition to species approved in 2013 hunting plan.

II. Conformance with Statutory Authorities

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), as outlined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (NWRSA), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (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 administration, management, and growth of the Refuge System is guided by the following goals:

- to preserve, restore, and enhance in their natural ecosystems all species of animals and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered;
- to perpetuate the migratory bird resource;
- to preserve a *natural* diversity and abundance of fauna and flora on refuge lands;
- to provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and man’s role in his environment, and provide visitors with high-quality, safe, wholesome, and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife to the extent that these activities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

The statutory authority for Service management and associated habitat/wildlife management planning on units of the Refuge System is derived from the NWRSA, as amended by the Improvement Act (16 U.S. Code 668dd-668ee). The Improvement Act provided a mission for the Refuge System and clear standards for its management, use, planning, and growth. The Improvement Act (P.L. 105–57) recognizes that wildlife-dependent recreational uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible with the mission of the Refuge System and the purposes of the refuge, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of national wildlife refuges. Sections 5(c) and (d) of the Improvement Act state that “compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are the priority general public uses of the [the refuge] and shall receive priority consideration in planning and management; and when the Secretary [of the Interior] determines that a proposed wildlife-dependent recreational use is a compatible use within a refuge, that activity should be facilitated, subject to such restrictions or regulations as may be necessary, reasonable, and appropriate.”

The Improvement Act further states, “In providing priority public uses, refuges shall emphasize opportunities for families to experience compatible wildlife-dependent recreation, particularly opportunities for parents and their children to safely engage in traditional outdoor activities, such as fishing and hunting.” Compatible use is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the Refuge System or the purposes of the refuge. The Service’s Final Compatibility Policy (603 FW 2) pursuant to the act, delegates the responsibility of determining compatibility to the refuge manager with concurrence by the regional chief of the Refuge System.

The Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, 16 U.S. Code 460k (Recreation Act), authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to “. . . administer such areas [of the System] or parts thereof for public recreation when in his judgment public recreation can be an appropriate incidental or secondary use.” While the Recreation Act authorizes us to allow public recreation in areas of the Refuge System when the use is an “appropriate incidental or secondary use,” the Improvement Act

provides the Refuge System mission and has specific directives and a clear hierarchy of public uses on the Refuge System.

In the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 50, Chapter I, Subchapter C, Section 31.15 states that the privilege of hunting and fishing may be extended to the general public. Section 31.2(e) lists hunting as a method of surplus wildlife population control. Section 32.1 states that the opening of a wildlife refuge area to hunting will be dependent upon the provisions of law applicable to the area and upon a determination by the Secretary of the Interior that the opening of the area to the hunting of migratory game birds, upland game, or big game will be compatible with the principles of sound wildlife management and will otherwise be in the public interest. Section 32.2 of Title 50 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) has provisions applicable to each person engaged in public hunting on a wildlife refuge area. Section 32.3 of Title 50 CFR explains the procedure for publication of special regulations.

III. Statement of Objectives

A. Refuge Purpose

Cokeville Meadows NWR was officially established in 1993 for the following purposes:

- “to preserve and protect wetland riparian habitat for its migratory waterfowl and other migratory bird values; for resident big game, small game, furbearers and upland game birds; for public educational and interpretive values; and for public recreational values.”
- “. . . the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions” 16 U.S. Code Section 3901(b) (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986).
- “for conservation purposes . . .” 7 U.S. Code Section 2002 (Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act).
- “. . . for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds” 16 U.S. Code Section 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act).

B. Goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System

- Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats, including species that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
- Develop and maintain a network of habitats for migratory birds, anadromous and interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations that is strategically distributed and carefully managed to meet important life history needs of these species across their ranges.
- Conserve those ecosystems, plant communities, wetlands of national or international significance, and landscapes and seascapes that are unique, rare, declining, or underrepresented in existing protection efforts.
- Provide and enhance opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation).

- Foster understanding and instill appreciation of the diversity and interconnectedness of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.

C. Objectives of Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

The following are objectives of the refuge:

- Riparian and Riverine Habitats: Maintain, and where appropriate, restore the processes necessary to sustain the biological diversity and integrity of riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats for breeding birds, native fishes, reptiles, and amphibians.
- Wet Meadows Habitat: Using the best scientific practices to manage and preserve critical wet meadow habitat, the refuge will provide quality feeding, loafing, and breeding opportunities for a diversity of migratory birds and resident wildlife.
- Upland Habitats: Manage and restore the diversity and composition of grassland and shrub-steppe habitats within the range of historic conditions for sagebrush-dependent species, upland nesting migratory birds, and other resident species.
- Visitor Services and Cultural Resources: Provide appropriate public access to refuge lands where visitors can safely enjoy compatible wildlife-dependent recreation, such as hunting, fishing, environmental education and interpretation, and wildlife observation and photography. The refuge will seek partnerships to help protect on-site cultural resources.
- Refuge Development and Operations: The refuge will effectively utilize all available resources to develop, enhance, and support refuge facilities and operations that support wildlife, habitat, and public use programs. The Service will pursue easements and other land protection opportunities, with willing sellers, within the approved refuge acquisition boundary.
- Partnerships: Engage in mutually beneficial partnerships to promote wildlife and habitat conservation, and public enjoyment of wildlife resources in the upper Bear River watershed that are consistent with historic land uses, refuge purposes, and goals.

D. Hunting Program Objectives

The Service policy on hunting, as stated in the *Refuge Manual* (8RM 5.1):

“ . . . to permit hunting on any refuge within the Refuge System upon a determination that hunting is compatible with the major purposes for which such areas are established.” In addition to a compatibility determination, the Refuge Recreation Act requires verification that funds are available for the development, operation, and maintenance of the hunting program.”

The Service has long recognized that hunting is an integral part of a comprehensive wildlife management program and that significant positive benefits can be attributed to a well-managed hunt. Hunting is also recognized as an acceptable, traditional form of wildlife-oriented recreation that can be, and sometimes is, used as a management tool to effectively manipulate wildlife population levels.

The objectives for the hunting program are to:

- provide quality recreational hunting opportunities consistent with refuge goals and objectives;
- 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;
- foster support from the general public, the WGFD, and other government and private agencies for professional management of wildlife and habitat by the Service and the refuge;
- provide the general public with quality, wildlife-oriented recreational experience and an opportunity to use a renewable resource;
- provide participants with reasonable harvest opportunities, uncrowded conditions, minimal conflicts with other users, and an opportunity to use various hunting techniques;
- support wildlife populations at levels compatible with the refuge habitat.

Hunting on the refuge will be in accordance with state, federal, and refuge regulations. The refuge will institute safety zones, no hunting zones, areas closed to migratory bird hunting and similar special conditions for safety, wildlife management, and other reasons. Posted signs and the hunting and fishing regulations brochure will inform the public of the different zones (see Figure 1). The hunting and fishing brochure for the refuge will be available to the public at brochure boxes in the designated parking areas and at headquarters and posted on the Cokeville Meadows NWR webpage.

E. Relationship of Hunting Program for Light Geese to Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives of the refuge that align with the hunting program include:

- Provide quality recreational hunting opportunities consistent with refuge goals and objectives.
- Foster support from the general public, the WGFD, and other government and private agencies for professional management of wildlife and habitat by the Service and the refuge.

As it is proposed for light geese hunting, including cumulative effects of neighboring hunts on surrounding public lands, this hunting plan will not conflict with the stated objectives of the refuge.

IV. Description of Hunting Program

The hunting plan is proposed for migratory game birds. Currently, all target species are considered to be at harvestable population levels throughout the refuge.

A. Migratory Game Birds (Light Geese, Including Ross and Snow Geese)

In 2013, a hunting plan and Environmental Assessment were approved for the refuge (USFWS 2013). They covered hunting for migratory game birds, such as ducks, dark geese, coots, mergansers, snipe, Virginia rail, sora rail, sandhill crane, and mourning dove, within established federal and state approved regulations within the Pacific Flyway. At that time, hunting of light

geese (Ross's and snow geese) was not allowed in the Pacific Flyway by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, so these species were not included. Since that time, hunting for light geese is now authorized in the Pacific Flyway according to Wyoming Game and Fish Department regulations. This hunting plan is being prepared to allow hunting of light geese (Ross's and Snow Geese) and to species approved in 2013 hunting plan (Figure 1).



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

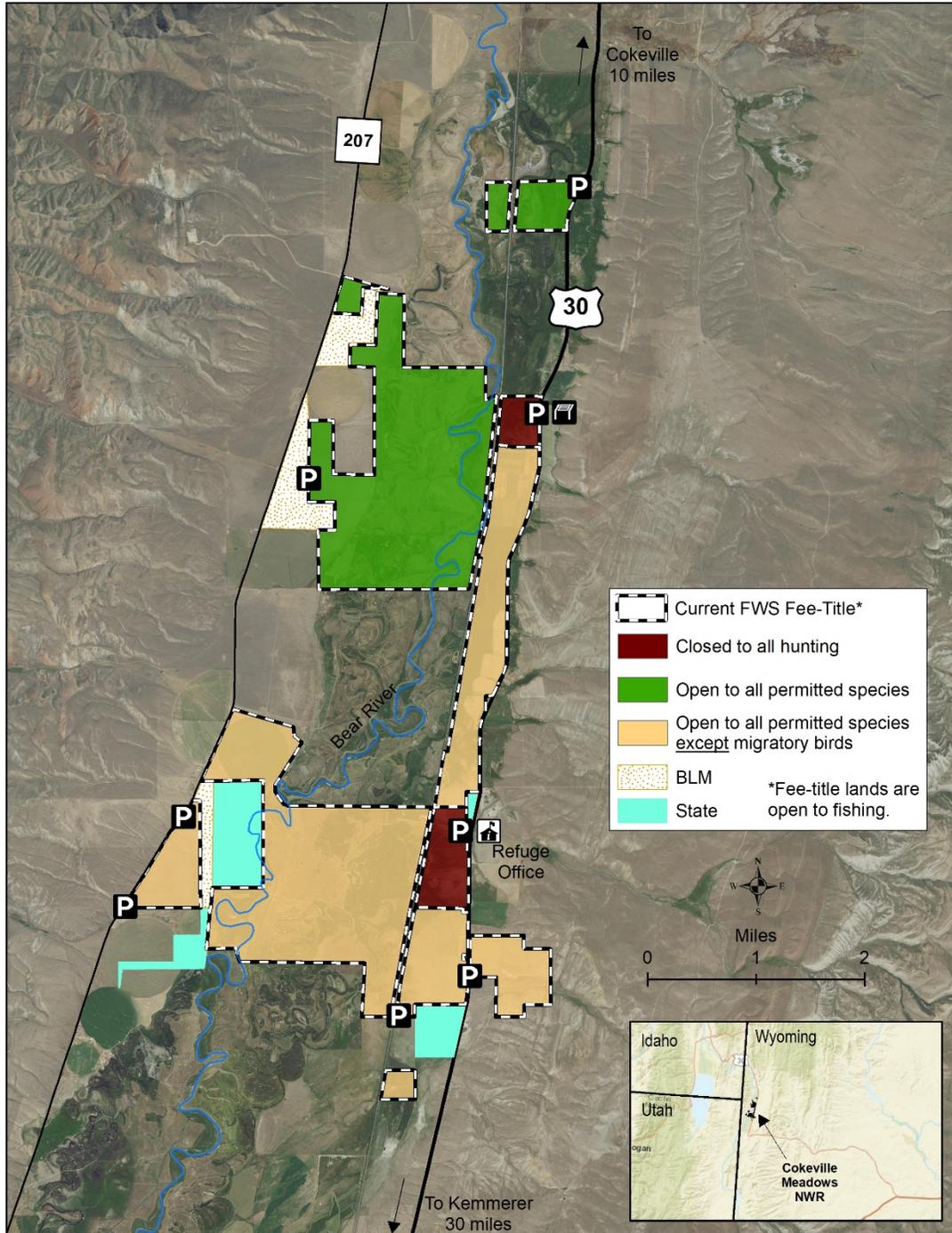


Figure 1. Hunting Opportunities on Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge.

Waterfowl are present throughout the river, wet meadows, wetlands, and oxbows of the refuge. Light geese will only be present during migratory periods in the spring and fall. The waterfowl and game bird population levels fluctuate with changes in vegetation and the water levels in the wet meadows and wetlands. Typically, the shallow wetlands freeze up by late October, causing an early migration of waterfowl, while the Bear River remains open a little later in the winter. This results in a relatively narrow window of opportunity to hunt migratory game birds in the area. The refuge currently supports a huntable population of waterfowl and other migratory game birds. Presence of light geese is unpredictable, because primary migration routes are to the east and west of the refuge. Waterfowl hunters likely will not be targeting light geese, but instead hunting for other duck and goose species that more regularly migrate through. It will provide the opportunity for these hunters to harvest light geese that are mixed in with flocks of dark geese and small flocks of light geese that are migrating through. The continued harvest of migratory game birds on the refuge is not expected to reduce population levels below acceptable levels. Monitoring of the population, coordination with the WGFD, hunter participation, and WGFD-established bag limits, will ensure that the population will not be adversely affected by managed hunting

Migratory game bird populations are managed, and seasons/bag limits set on a flyway-wide basis, and it is reasonably assumed that a limited harvest of light geese on the refuge will not have significantly affect species population goals within the Pacific Flyway. Monitoring of migratory bird populations and harvests are not appropriately conducted at the refuge level, and are done at the flyway level across state and international boundaries.

In summary, the addition of light geese to the hunting program will not result in unacceptable impacts on the refuge resources. Regulations for harvest of all species, and population objectives, are set at the flyway level for migratory birds. Refuge harvest levels are incorporated in the population and harvest management strategies at the flyway and will be a small percentage of total harvest. Harvest on the refuge will not significantly affect attainment of flyway or state population goals and harvest objectives. Impacts associated with hunting light geese on the refuge will not materially detract from or interfere with the purposes for the which the refuge was established or the Refuge System mission.

B. Guidelines for Hunting Program

The following administrative procedures for refuge hunting programs can be found in the *Service Refuge Manual* (8 RM 5.5):

“Refuge hunting programs should be planned, supervised, conducted, and evaluated to promote positive hunting values and hunter ethics such as fair chase and sportsmanship. In general, hunting on refuges should be superior to that available on other public or private lands and should provide participants with reasonable harvest opportunities, uncrowded conditions, limited interference from or dependence on mechanized aspects of the sport. This may require zoning the hunt unit and limiting the number of participants. Good planning will minimize the controls and regimentation needed to achieve hunting objectives.”

C. Areas Open to Hunting

The refuge currently consists of 6,134 acres of fee title land owned by the Service. The Service will continue to acquire more land, and as each tract is acquired, it will be considered for

inclusion in the refuge hunting program. As new tracts are added to the refuge, they will be listed in the annual refuge hunting regulations leaflet. Certain tracts may be closed to hunting based on safety factors, size of tract, legal restrictions, access, and compatibility with refuge objectives.

The Daimond and Etcheverry tracts (see attached map indicated in dark green), were opened to migratory gamebird bird, big game, upland game bird, and small game hunting in 2014. The remainder of the refuge (see attached map indicated in tan) will be opened to listed big game species along with upland/small game species and will remain closed to migratory game bird hunting. Light geese will be included in the area open to migratory game bird hunting. Two areas (see attached map indicated in red) will remain closed to hunting for a safety zone for visitors to a kiosk on the highway and staff around the headquarters location. The south closed area is around refuge headquarters, and the north closed area has a developed interpretive site.

D. Species to Be Taken

As discussed above, the refuge was opened to select species in select areas in 2014. Light geese are considered migratory game birds.

E. Migratory Game Birds

The take of migratory game birds will be permitted on those refuge tracts, as indicated in the refuge hunting regulations brochure. This will include the take of migratory birds, ducks, dark geese, coots, mergansers, snipe, sora rail, Virginia rail, sandhill cranes, and mourning dove opened in 2014. In addition, light geese (Ross's and snow geese) hunting will be allowed within established federal and state-approved regulations within the Pacific Flyway. The take of all other migratory birds not listed will be prohibited.

The season and bag limits for light geese will coincide with the appropriate state regulations. The use of retrieving and/or pointing dogs for migratory and upland game bird hunting will be permitted; however, the dogs must be under the hunter's control at all times. Only federally approved nontoxic ammunition could be used.

F. Staffing and Funding

Refuge staff will prepare the annual refuge hunting regulations brochure, make changes to the hunting plan and regulations as needed, edit the hunting leaflet annually, post and replace appropriate signage, respond to public inquiries about the hunting program, and conduct hunter use surveys.

Currently, the refuge has one full-time complex law enforcement officer. The refuge may occasionally request Service law enforcement staff to be brought in from other field stations.

In addition to staff expenses, the refuge will incur costs for signs, vehicle maintenance, road repair and maintenance, leaflet printing, and miscellaneous supplies.

G. Measures Taken to Avoid Conflicts with Other Management Objectives

Biological Conflicts

The proposed hunting will cause few biological conflicts with other wildlife species. Some disturbance of other animals is unavoidable when people are on the refuge and when they are using firearms. However, most of the current and potential refuge lands were, or are, open for private or public hunting, and are open to the public for hiking, bird watching, and similar activities now. Public hunting on refuge lands will not change the situation very much unless hunting pressure increased markedly. If that happened, the refuge will take measures—such as having a permit or lottery system or allowing hunting only on certain days of the week—to reduce the number of hunters. Refuge staff will make every effort to increase protection of endangered species and other non-target wildlife. High-visibility law enforcement activities and covert operations will be conducted to dissuade hunters from affecting wildlife other than the target species. Special refuge regulations will be in effect to reduce disturbance and protect flora and fauna in the area.

Public Use Conflicts

Minimal conflicts are expected between hunters. Overlap of hunting area usage between migratory bird hunters and big game hunters may occur, but is expected to be minimal due to the dissimilar nature of these activities and the areas of the refuge where these activities may be expected to occur.

The demand for nonconsumptive, wildlife-oriented use on the refuge continues to grow. Conflicts between hunters and nonconsumptive users may occur as future uses are allowed. Providing nonconsumptive users with access to wildlife viewing areas as described in this plan, notifications of when users are entering a hunting area, and even closing a hunting area to nonconsumptive users, if appropriate, will reduce conflicts. Also, restrictions on hunting methods and restrictions on hunting near designated public use facilities and trails should aid in reducing potential conflicts between hunters and nonconsumptive users. Should serious conflicts arise, considerations will be given to changes in time and space scheduling and/or zoning. Decisions will be based on reducing impacts on various user groups, and best management practices for wildlife.

The refuge area has been a popular hunting area since the establishment of the refuge. The refuge hunting program is designed to provide for the use of refuge lands within a framework designed to protect wildlife populations and provide for public safety. The continuance of these traditional uses was widely supported by the public before the establishment of the refuge and has been ever since. It is expected that this support will continue.

Administrative Conflicts

At this time, few administrative conflicts will be anticipated. Existing refuge staff will be used to administer the hunting program. The refuge manager will set station priorities to assure that required support staff numbers are adequate. As this hunting program evolves over the years, refuge-specific regulations, systems of control to limit number of hunters, and fee costs may occur or change at the refuge manager's discretion.

Some research activities may extend into the fall and will be separated from hunting areas, when possible.

Fall maintenance activities that occur during hunting seasons may include prescribed burns and support of fences, gates, signs, water control structures, and roads. These activities could be managed to not interfere with hunting opportunity while allowing needed work to be accomplished.

Waterfowl surveys, water-level monitoring, and other habitat surveys may occur during hunting seasons.

Safety briefings for staff and researchers working in hunting areas will make them aware of hunting times and locations. Haying and grazing practices do occur on the refuge and in the hunting area for management purposes. Permittees will be made aware of the conflicts that may occur during the hunting season.

V. Conduct of the Hunting Program

A. Federal Regulations

Hunting on the refuge will be contingent on specific regulations enacted by the federal agency for refuges in general and Cokeville NWR in particular. These will be in addition to state regulations and will take precedence where they are more restrictive than the state regulations.

General stipulations for refuge hunting as contained in the CFR (50 CFR Part 32) require the following of each person while engaged in public hunting on areas of the Refuge System:

- Each person shall secure and possess the required state license(s).
- Each person 16 years of age and older shall secure and possess a migratory bird hunting stamp while hunting migratory waterfowl.
- Each person must comply with the provisions of any refuge-specific regulations governing hunting on the wildlife refuge area. Regulations, special conditions, and maps of the hunting areas for a particular wildlife refuge are available at that area's headquarters. In addition, refuge-specific hunting regulations for migratory game bird, upland game, and big game hunting appear in Title 50 of the CFR Part 32 Subpart B 32.70 for the refuge.
- The use of any drug on any arrow for bow hunting on national wildlife refuges is prohibited. Archers may not have arrows employing such drugs in their possession on any national wildlife refuge.
- The unauthorized distribution of bait and the hunting over bait is prohibited on national wildlife refuges.
- The use of nails, wire, screws, or bolts to attach a stand to a tree, or hunting from a tree into which a metal object has been driven to support a hunter is prohibited on national wildlife refuges.
- The use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting is prohibited.

- You may possess only approved nontoxic shot while in the field, which we identify in 50 CFR 20.21(j).

B. State Regulations

All state regulations will apply to hunting on the refuge, and all state licenses, tags, permits, and stamps will be required.

C. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations (subject to change annually)

Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge—

A. Migratory Game Bird Hunting. We allow hunting of ducks, light geese, dark geese, coots, mergansers, snipe, Virginia rail, sora rail, sandhill crane, and mourning dove in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

- 1. We prohibit hunting of migratory game birds in areas of the refuge indicated on the Cokeville Meadows NWR Hunting Brochure and signed as closed to all hunting or closed to migratory bird hunting.*
- 2. You may only possess approved nontoxic shot while in the field (see §32.2(k)).*
- 3. We prohibit pits and permanent blinds.*
- 4. You may use portable blinds or blinds constructed of natural dead vegetation (see §27.51 of this chapter).*
- 5. You must remove all decoys, shell casings, portable and temporary blinds, and other personal equipment (see §§27.93 and 27.94 of this chapter) from the Refuge at the end of each day.*
- 6. We prohibit possession or consumption of any alcoholic beverage while hunting (see §32.2(j)).*
- 7. Hunters may not enter closed areas to retrieve animals legally shot in an open area unless authorization has been given by a Refuge employee or State Conservation Officer. Permission must be obtained from private landowners before attempting to retrieve game on private land.*
- 8. Dogs must be leashed and/or under the direct control of a handler. The use of dogs to find and retrieve legally harvested migratory game birds is allowed and encouraged.*
- 9. Hunters must park in a Designated Hunter Parking Area, as identified and signed.*
- 10. Hunters are required to access and exit the hunting areas from a Designated Hunter Parking Area only. It is prohibited to drop off or pick up hunters except at Hunter Designated Parking Areas.*
- 11. Hunters may only access the Refuge 1 hour before legal sunrise until 1 hour after legal sunset.*

B. Upland Game Hunting. We allow hunting of blue grouse, ruffed grouse, chuckar partridge, gray partridge, cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, squirrels (red, gray, fox), red fox, raccoon, and striped skunk in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. *Conditions A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A9, A10, A11 apply.*
2. *We prohibit hunting of upland game species in areas of the refuge indicated on the Cokeville Meadows NWR Hunting Brochure and signed as closed to all hunting.*
3. *Dogs must be leashed and/or under the direct control of a handler. The use of dogs to find and retrieve legally harvested upland game birds, cottontail rabbits, and squirrels is allowed and encouraged. Dogs may not be used to chase red fox, raccoon, striped skunk or any other species not specifically listed in A8 or B3 is prohibited.*
4. *Red fox, raccoon, and striped skunk may be taken on the refuge by licensed migratory bird, big game, or upland/small game hunters from September 1st annually until the end of the last open big game, upland bird or small game season. Red fox, raccoon, or striped skunk that are harvested must be taken into possession and removed from the refuge.*
5. *We prohibit hunting of sage grouse.*

C. Big Game Hunting. We allow hunting of elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, and moose in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. *Conditions A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A9, A10, A11 apply.*
2. *We prohibit hunting of Big game in areas of the refuge indicated on the Cokeville Meadows NWR Hunting Brochure and signed as closed to all hunting.*
3. *You may hunt with the aid of a temporary tree stand that does not require drilling or nailing into the tree. All personal property, including temporary tree stands, must be removed at the end of each day.*

D. Anticipated Public Reaction

The refuge did not allow hunting from establishment in 1993 to 2014. Public contacts and scoping completed indicated general support for opening the refuge to hunting of select wildlife species. Since hunting was opened in 2014, appreciation has been expressed by the WGFD and hunters for the opportunities to hunt. Although hunting for light geese is expected to be light, reaction is expected to be similar appreciation for an additional opportunity. All of our hunts are according to state regulations and therefore, should the state determine a change is needed, then the refuge will follow that ruling unless it violates a federal regulation or refuge objective.

E. Hunter Application and Registration Procedures

All persons hunting on the refuge will be required to obtain the necessary state licenses, tags, and stamps. Migratory game bird hunters will be required to have a federal migratory bird hunting and conservation stamp (“Duck Stamp”) and be registered in the Harvest Information Program. No refuge-specific application or registration will be required.

F. Description of Hunter Selection Process

Refuge hunting regulations leaflets will be available at kiosks on refuge tracts, at the refuge headquarters, or upon request from the refuge manager. No limits on hunter numbers will be established, so there will be no need for a hunter selection process. Hunter numbers may be

limited in the future, if necessary, to promote safety, relieve hunter congestion or public use conflicts, or ensure compatibility with other refuge objectives.

G. Media Selection for Announcing and Publicizing Hunts

The public will be informed of refuge hunting regulations through news releases and refuge hunting regulations leaflets. An annual program update will be filed each year, as required, outlining any changes in the current hunting program. Rules and regulations will be published in the Federal Register, as required.

VI. Compatibility Determination

A draft Compatibility Determination has been prepared for this hunting plan (USFWS 2020). The refuge hunting program complies with the requirements and provisions of each of the aforementioned applicable authorities. In keeping with the mission of the Refuge System and the Improvement Act, hunting on the refuge provides recreational hunting opportunities for present and future generations of Americans, while providing a management tool to maintain population levels and sustain quality habitat of endangered species and other native wildlife. This activity does not compromise the refuge's ability to fulfill its purpose for establishment or primary objectives—providing a resting and feeding area for migratory waterfowl and habitat for other native species.

VII. References

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