

**Draft Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Hunting and Fishing Plan**

March 2020

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge

**10630 Road 181
Ellsworth, NE 69340**

Submitted By:

Brian DeVries, 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..... | 3 |
| III. | Hunting Program | 5 |
| A. | Description of Hunting Program..... | 10 |
| B. | Hunter Permit Requirements..... | 11 |
| C. | Consultation and Coordination with the State | 11 |
| D. | Law Enforcement..... | 12 |
| E. | Funding and Staffing Requirements | 12 |
| IV. | Conduct of the Hunting Program | 12 |
| A. | Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and Registration Procedures | 12 |
| B. | Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations | 12 |
| C. | Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting | 13 |
| V. | Public Engagement..... | 14 |
| A. | Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program..... | 14 |
| B. | Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program..... | 14 |
| C. | How Hunters Will Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations | 14 |
| VI. | Compatibility Determination..... | 15 |
| VII. | References | 15 |

List of Figures

| | | |
|-----------|--|---|
| Figure 1. | Map of Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge..... | 7 |
|-----------|--|---|

Appendices

| | | |
|------------|---|----|
| Appendix A | Description of Refuge Management Units..... | 17 |
|------------|---|----|

Draft Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Hunting and 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 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 and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

The 45,849-acre Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established on March 16, 1931, and is located 28 miles north of Oshkosh, Nebraska in Garden County. The refuge is also located within the central flyway and lies in the southwestern corner of the Nebraska Sandhills.

The initial refuge acquisition of 36,920 acres was acquired primarily from one large ranch. More lands were acquired between 1932 and 1937. Most lands were acquired or exchanged under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (45 Stat. 1222) with another 2,566 acres acquired under the Resettlement Administration (Executive Order 7027, April 30, 1935), a drought and depression relief program.

The earliest government actions on the refuge included tree plantings and small construction projects by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Projects Administration. The Civilian Conservation Corps built several buildings still in use today at the refuge headquarters (HQ). The Works Projects Administration constructed roads, fences, and other facilities such as the fire towers and several buildings at the HQ site.

All lands around the refuge are in private ownership except for a small ranch on the southwest boundary purchased in 1984 by the Nature Conservancy for preservation of the blowout penstemon (an endangered plant). The only other public land in Garden County is Ash Hollow State Park, located 50 miles to the southeast.

Currently, the refuge consists of the following areas that require special attention when considering and implementing land management and public use activities:

Proposed Wilderness Area: The 24,502-acre proposed wilderness area, until accepted or rejected by Congress, must be managed by policy, as if it was officially designated as a wilderness area; only minimum tools may be used. As stated in the 2002 Crescent Lake NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), all authorized public uses may occur within the wilderness to the extent they can be conducted without the use of motorized vehicles. However, solitude and primitive recreation is the overriding theme. Hiking, photography, and wildlife viewing will be allowed, but trails will not be provided. Signs and interpretive facilities will be on the perimeters, outside the wilderness. Hunting is permitted; however, fishing is not available due to a lack of available lakes.

Research Natural Areas: The two officially designated research natural areas (1,076

acres) were established by Director's Order in 1955, and are to remain free of human disturbance, including habitat management and public use. Both research natural areas are located within the closed area of the refuge as identified in C below.

Closed Area: This area covers the two research natural areas and consists of approximately 4,806 acres that are closed to all public use, including hunting and fishing activities. A 2.5-mile nature trail is located within the closed area that is open to the public only for hiking, wildlife viewing, and photography (on or directly next to the trail only). The trail starts and ends at refuge HQ.

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 supported 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;
- observe 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.

II. Statement of Objectives

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. In addition, hunting is an acceptable, traditional form of wildlife-oriented recreation that is sometimes used as a management tool to effectively manipulate wildlife populations. Hunting objectives for the Refuge System are as follows:

- to provide the public with a quality wildlife-oriented recreational experience and an opportunity to utilize a renewable natural resource;
- to support wildlife populations at levels compatible with the refuge habitat.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manual, draft chapter 605 FW 2.1, defines a quality hunting experience as one that (1) considers safety for hunters and other visitors, (2) encourages the highest standards of ethical behavior, (3) is available to a broad spectrum of the hunting public, (4) contributes positively to population management of resident or migratory species, (5) reflects positively on the Refuge System, (6) provides reasonable challenge and opportunities for taking, and (7) creates minimal conflict with other priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses or refuge operations.

The mission of the Refuge System and legal purpose of the refuge are the primary references for setting refuge goals and objectives. Service ecosystem priorities are also considered. The following goals and objectives regarding the hunting program were established in the CCP process and then refined and updated based on comments from stakeholders and the review team.

The wildlife priorities for the refuge are: (1) threatened or endangered species; (2) species considered candidates for listing as threatened or endangered, and species of management concern (species which, based on scientific evidence, are or are becoming rare, or are steadily declining in numbers, and for which proper habitat occurs on the refuge); (3) migratory birds; (4) species that are dependent upon some special quality of the habitat found on the refuge; (5) fish and wildlife that people use consumptively; and (6) organisms that, because of a unique quality, are of special interest to people (USFWS 2002, p. 31).

A CPP for the refuge was approved on August 19, 2002. A hunting plan was approved in 2007 and included hunting opportunities, in accordance with state, federal, and specific-refuge regulations, for the following: deer, pheasants, grouse, waterfowl, coyotes, furbearers, and rabbits.

Hunting is permitted on all refuge lands with the exception of the closed area that covers refuge HQ, private residences, and two research natural areas. The portion of the refuge open to hunting is approximately 41,300 acres. Refuge management units, described in Appendix A, provides information about what habitats exist on the refuge.

Objectives: Expand hunting opportunities to better align with state regulations. Expand acres open for waterfowl hunting. Open new hunting opportunities for more migratory bird species, including doves, snipes, rails, and crows. Open new opportunities for hunting porcupines and prairie dogs. Reestablish opportunities for hunting pronghorn. Expand date range for the hunting of coyotes and furbearers.

The refuge is now open to hunting for sharp-tailed grouse, pheasants, and deer. Expanding

hunting to include waterfowl will provide more public enjoyment without interfering with the sense of isolation so important to many users. It will also make hunting on the refuge more consistent with two other NWRs in the state. According to the CCP, this expansion will require a compatibility determination and the development of this hunting and fishing plan with more public involvement as part of the process.

The relatively small amount of public use (about 10,000 visitors per year) is concentrated in time and space. For instance, seasonal hunting and fishing account for about 70 percent of this use. Most hunting occurs on a few opening weekends in the fall and the largest concentration occurs on opening weekend of deer season (about 80 hunters in recent years). Fishing is limited to three lakes. Aside from these concentrations, the refuge is underutilized.

Strategies: Expand the waterfowl-hunting unit from the current 5,145 acres to 15,039 acres. Open hunting opportunities for doves, snipes, rails, and crows on this same 15,039-acre unit. Open most of the refuge to pronghorn hunting. Extend all applicable hunting season ending dates from January 31 to March 15.

III. Hunting Program

Refuge hunting is permitted in accordance with applicable state and federal regulations. Open season and bag limits have been established by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) and hunting on the refuge will be in accordance with those, unless otherwise stated in this hunting and fishing plan.

Other hunting regulations established or changed with this plan specific to refuge are as follows:

- The refuge is open to hunting from September 1 through March 15, unless otherwise stipulated by a special use permit.
- Hunting is allowed on the refuge only for those species identified in this hunting and fishing plan during the state-defined open seasons that fall within the period that the refuge is open to hunting.
- All hunters may enter the refuge two hours before official sunrise and must exit the refuge two hours after official sunset. Shooting hours are consistent with state-defined shooting hours.
- Overnight camping and open fires are prohibited on the refuge.
- Target shooting is prohibited on the refuge.
- The use of wheeled carts for removing and transporting game harvested in the proposed wilderness area is prohibited.
- Nontoxic shot is required when hunting with a shotgun.
- Pets must be leashed, except dogs used for bird hunting during appropriate hunting seasons.
- Only temporary blinds and stands are allowed and must be removed at the end of each day.

- Tree stands that cause damage to the tree by penetrating the bark and tree-climbing spikes or screw-in steps that penetrate beyond the outer bark of a tree are prohibited.
- Decoys, for hunting in accordance with state regulations, are allowed but must be removed at the end of each day.
- Nonmotorized boats are allowed on all waters open to hunting and fishing. Boats with electric motors only are allowed on Island, Smith, and Crane Lakes. Internal combustion (gas-powered) boat motors are allowed only on Blue Lake and are prohibited on Island, Smith, and Crane Lakes.
- The use of gas-powered ice augers for ice fishing is allowed on lakes open to fishing.
- Vehicles and bicycles are restricted to roads that are open to the public. Hunters may not take vehicles off approved roads to set up blinds or decoys, to retrieve game, or for any other purposes other than emergencies. Parking is allowed within one vehicle length of the road.
- Commercial guiding or the use of a commercial guide to hunt is prohibited.
- Publicly organized hunts are prohibited unless authorized under a special use permit.

The following species are open to hunting on the refuge in accordance with state regulations, refuge-specific regulations, and as defined below:

Deer (White-Tailed and Mule Deer)

Deer hunting will continue to be open on the refuge. All hunters must abide by all state and refuge-specific regulations when hunting deer on the refuge. We, the Service, must closely study hunter numbers as stipulated in the CCP objectives. Limit overall hunting to fewer than 150 hunters on any one day and support the present aesthetic qualities of the hunting experience. Currently, this is not an issue, but deer hunting will be the most likely hunt to reach this saturation point and will be closely observed. If we were to consistently get that much hunting pressure, we will work with NGPC in whatever ways possible to limit the number of hunters to support this objective of our CCP.

Open Areas: All areas of the refuge open to public use (see Figure 1).

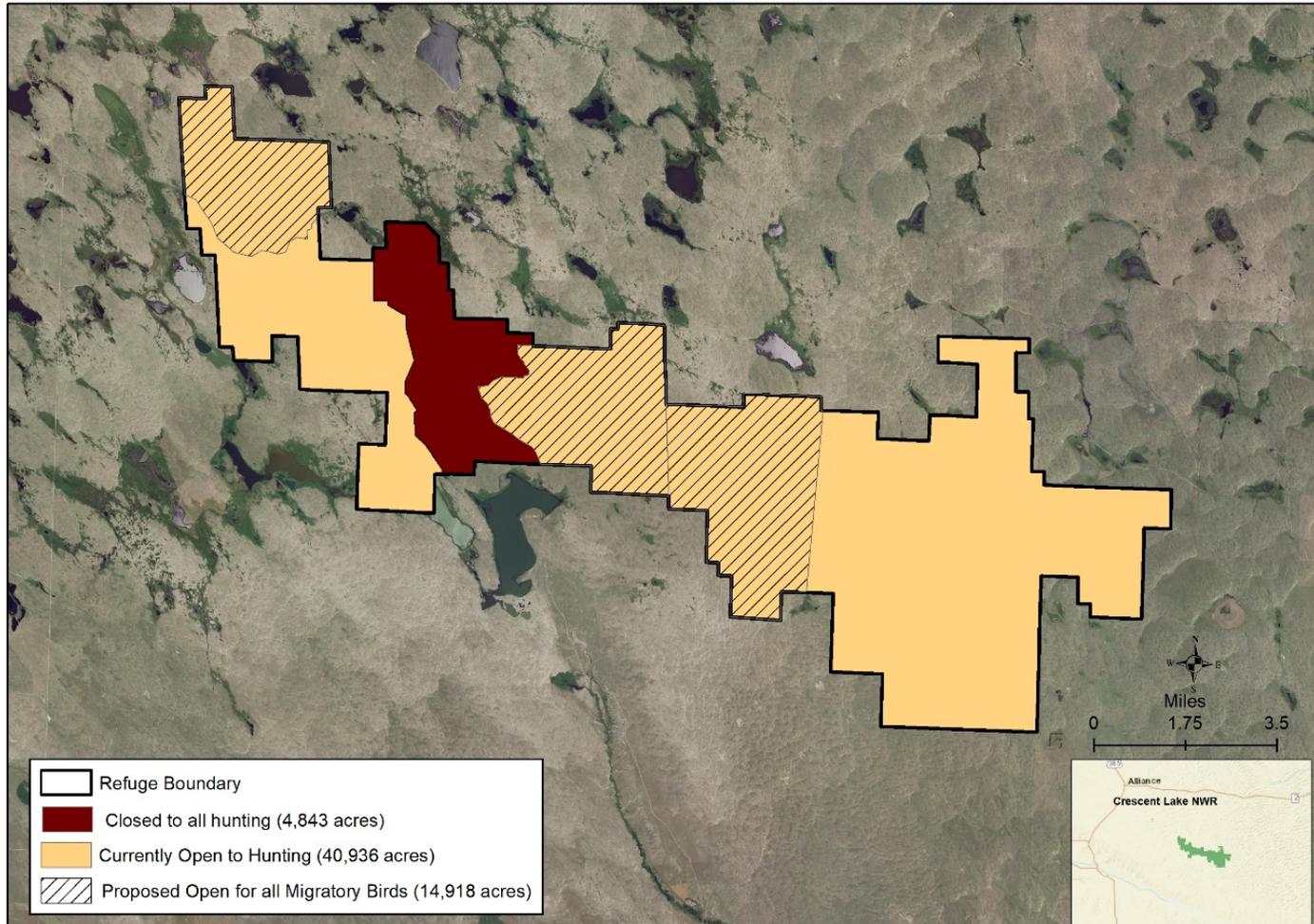


Figure 1. Map of Hunting Opportunities on Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Pheasants and Grouse

Pheasant and grouse hunting will continue to be open on the refuge. All hunters must abide by all state and refuge-specific regulations when hunting pheasant and grouse on the refuge.

Open Areas: All areas of the refuge open to public use.

Waterfowl

Upon approval of this plan, the current 5,145-acre waterfowl hunting unit will be expanded to cover 3,800 acres in the North Moore Valley and 5,900 acres of the West Wilderness. The new waterfowl hunt unit will total 15,039 acres of the refuge. All waterfowl hunting will be conducted in accordance with state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations. Waterfowl may be hunted during the state-defined open seasons that fall within the period the refuge is open to hunting (from September 1 through March 15).

Open Areas: The current 5,145-acre waterfowl hunting unit will be expanded to cover 3,800 acres in the North Moore Valley and 5,900 acres of the West Wilderness. The new waterfowl hunt unit will total 15,039 acres of the refuge. This newly formed hunting unit will be referred to as the migratory bird hunting unit.

Coyotes

Upon approval of this plan, coyote-hunting season will be extended to cover the period of September 1 through March 15 of each year. The following regulations apply specifically to coyote hunting on the refuge:

- All state and refuge-specific regulations for coyote hunting must be abided by.
- Coyote hunting is only open during those dates that fall within the defined period of September 1 through March 15.
- Hunting with the use of dogs is prohibited for coyote hunting.
- Coyote hunting will be allowed during daylight hours only, with shooting hours being one-half hour before sunrise until sunset. Coyote hunters may enter the refuge 2 hours before official sunrise and must exit the refuge 2 hours after official sunset.
- Archery and firearms are allowed for coyote hunting in accordance with state regulations. If shotguns are used, nontoxic shot is required.
- Baiting is prohibited.
- Electronic calls are allowed for coyote hunting.
- Trapping is only allowed through the use of a special use permit.
- Coyotes or their parts, if left in the field, must be left out of view of the public. Otherwise, they must be removed from the refuge and properly disposed of.

Open Areas: All areas open to public use.

Furbearers

Upon approval of this plan, hunting of furbearers will be extended to cover the period of September 1 through March 15. The following regulations apply specifically to furbearer hunting on the refuge:

- All state regulations for furbearer hunting must be abided by.
- Furbearers may be hunted during the state-defined open seasons that fall within the period September 1 through March 15.
- Hunting with the use of dogs is prohibited for furbearer hunting.
- Furbearer hunting will be allowed during daylight hours only, with shooting hours being one-half hour before sunrise until sunset. Furbearer hunters may enter the refuge 2 hours before official sunrise and must exit the refuge 2 hours after official sunset.
- Archery and firearms are allowed for furbearer hunting in accordance with state regulations. If shotguns are used, nontoxic shot is required.
- Baiting is prohibited.
- Electronic calls are allowed for furbearer hunting.
- Trapping is only allowed through the use of a special use permit.
- Furbearers or their parts, if left in the field, must be left out of view of the public. Otherwise, they must be removed from the refuge and properly disposed of.

Open Areas: All areas open to public use.

Rabbits

Upon approval of this plan, hunting of rabbits will be extended to cover the period of September 1 through March 15.

- Rabbits (both cottontail and jackrabbit) may be hunted during the state-defined open seasons that fall within the period of September 1 through March 15.
- All state regulations for rabbit hunting apply.

Open Areas: All areas open to public use.

Pronghorn

Upon approval of this plan, hunting of pronghorn will be allowed starting September 1 of each season. Pronghorn hunting is allowed on all portions of the refuge that is open to public uses. All hunters must abide by all state and refuge-specific regulations when hunting pronghorn on the refuge. Archery pronghorn hunting will begin September 1 on the refuge. All state regulations for pronghorn hunting apply.

Open Areas: All areas open to public use.

Doves, Snipes, Rails, and Crows

Upon approval of this plan, the refuge will be open to the hunting of doves, snipes, rails, and crows. Hunting of doves, snipes, rails, and crows will be allowed on the newly proposed 15,039-acre waterfowl unit. All dove, snipe, rail, and crow hunting will be conducted in accordance with state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations.

Open Areas: The current 5,145-acre waterfowl hunting unit will be expanded to cover 3,800 acres in the North Moore Valley and 5,900 acres of the West Wilderness. This newly formed hunting unit will be referred to as the migratory bird hunting unit.

Fishing

Upon approval of this plan, fishing will be allowed year-round on Island Lake, Blue Lake, Smith Lake, and Crane Lake.

- Boats with electric motors only will be allowed on Island, Blue, Smith, and Crane Lakes. Internal combustion (gas-powered) boat motors are allowed only on Blue Lake and are prohibited on Island, Smith, and Crane Lakes.
- All state regulations for fishing apply.
- Fishing will be allowed during daylight hours only. Anglers may enter the refuge 2 hours before official sunrise and must exit the refuge 2 hours after official sunset.

Open Areas: Island Lake, Blue Lake, Smith Lake, and Crane Lake.

A. Description of Hunting Program

On the refuge, populations of rabbits, pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, waterfowl, coyotes, furbearers, white-tailed deer, and mule deer are found in sufficient numbers to sustain a huntable population. Wildlife populations are closely studied through long-term annual surveys and census activities carried out by refuge staff.

- Deer populations are studied through annual spotlight surveys and harvest data.
- Coyotes are studied through spotlight surveys and winter scat count surveys.
- Rabbits, hares, and furbearers are studied through spotlight surveys and baseline data was received during small mammal surveys conducted in 2001–2002.
- Grouse are studied through spring grouse lek surveys, nest watching, and harvest data.
- Pheasant are studied through nest watching, crow counts, and harvest data.

Small game populations are cyclic in nature, with yearly fluctuations primarily related to habitat and weather conditions. Annual mortality rates are generally quite high and are only offset by a high reproductive potential. Hunting generally has no appreciable impact on small game populations as the harvest is insignificant compared to natural mortality.

Deer hunting can be an essential component for the management of deer populations wherever the predominant historic predators are missing. Due to the size of the refuge, hunting pressure on adjoining private lands is not adequate and makes little impact in keeping refuge deer herds from exceeding their carrying capacity.

Approximately 33 percent of the refuge will be now open to waterfowl hunting, which will allow the refuge to not only fulfill its mission of providing undisturbed feeding and resting areas for migrating waterfowl and other birds but, at the same time, offer a quality hunt to the public.

Coyote and furbearer hunting will provide diverse hunting opportunities for the public and assist the refuge in predator control. Predator control may contribute to migratory bird nest success as defined in the CCP objectives. To provide less impact on refuge resources and to be consistent with other refuge public uses, coyote and furbearer hunting will be limited to daylight hours only.

With the remote location of the refuge, hunting pressure is currently minimal and will not negatively affect refuge wildlife populations. Nearly 10 percent of the refuge will remain closed to all hunting. With this area located in the center of the refuge, it provides adequate sanctuary to refuge wildlife. Another 24,500 acres of the refuge is proposed wilderness area with limited access due to Wilderness Act regulations, which limit the amount of hunting pressure and provides for a more primitive hunting experience.

B. Hunter Permit Requirements

For general hunting activities, no special application or registration process is required. Special use permits allowing use of utility vehicles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) on the refuge may be required for hunters with a disability. See Section IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program, Section A, for more details.

The refuge does not require hunters to report on hunting activities or harvest separately from the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program requirement. Should another reporting program be implemented, the refuge will use appropriate forms approved by the Office of Management and Budget. Hunters must meet state permit requirements. State permit requirements are defined in state regulations guide brochures printed annually.

C. Consultation and Coordination with the State

All measures will be taken to coordinate the implementation of this hunting and fishing plan with input from NGPC and the public. Fisheries at the refuge have been cooperatively managed by NGPC under an agreement with the refuge since 1991. Throughout the revision of this plan, NGPC has been consulted on the inclusion of new species, land and water areas, and revisions to regulations. The refuge will continue to coordinate with NGPC to address annual implementation of hunting and fishing activities and ensure safe and enjoyable outdoor opportunities.

D. Law Enforcement

Law enforcement of refuge and state hunting regulations, trespass and other public use violations associated with management of the refuge is the responsibility of a commissioned refuge law enforcement officer. In absence of a full-time refuge officer, law enforcement assistance is provided by Fort Niobrara NWR officers and NGPC conservation officers. Ongoing coordination and communication are conducted throughout the year. The following methods are used to control and enforce hunting regulations:

- Refuge and hunt area boundaries will be clearly posted.
- The refuge will provide a brochure that shows hunt areas and explains refuge-specific regulations. The brochure will be made available at the refuge office, the refuge's website, and kiosks.
- Refuge law enforcement staff will randomly check hunters for compliance with federal and state laws.

E. Funding and Staffing Requirements

The hunting program is designed to be administered with minimal refuge resources. The costs of administering and enforcing the refuge hunting program comes out of the refuge's annual budget. Expenses include program management, staff resources, boundary posting, signage, brochures, parking lot construction, facility maintenance, gate installation, and other hunting-specific activities.

IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program

A. Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and Registration Procedures

For general hunting activities, no special application or registration process is required. Special use permits allowing utility vehicle and ATV use on the refuge may be required for hunters with a disability. To qualify for this program, each individual is required to show proof of a disability issued by NGPC. Once proper documentation is provided, the refuge will consider the issuance of a special use permit for one hunting season.

B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

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

Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Migratory Gamebird Hunting

We allow hunting of coots, crows, doves, ducks, geese, mergansers, rails, and snipes on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- Hunters may enter the designated hunting area 2 hours before legal sunrise and must be back to their vehicle in the process of leaving the refuge 2 hours after legal sunset.

Official shooting hours are from one-half hour before legal sunrise until one-half hour after legal sunset for deer, coyote, and furbearer hunters; and from one-half hour before legal sunrise until legal sunset for all other hunters.

- When hunting migratory gamebirds and upland game, you may only use dogs to locate, point, and retrieve.
- We open the refuge to hunting from September 1 through March 15.
- We prohibit publicly organized hunts unless authorized under a special use permit (FWS Form 3-1383-C).

Upland Game Hunting

We allow hunting of cottontail rabbit, jack rabbit, furbearer, coyote, ring-necked pheasant, prairie grouse, porcupine, and prairie dog on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- The conditions set forth at paragraphs (b)(1)(i) through (iv) of this section apply.
- We allow electronic calls for coyote and furbearer hunting.
- Coyotes and all furbearers or their parts, if left in the field, must be left at least 50 yards away from any road, trail, or building. Otherwise, hunters must remove them from the refuge (see §§ 27.93 and 27.94 of this chapter).

Big Game Hunting

We allow hunting of white-tailed deer, mule deer, and antelope on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: The conditions set forth at paragraphs (b)(1)(i) and (iv) of this section apply.

Sport Fishing

We allow sport fishing on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- Anglers may enter the refuge 1 hour before legal sunrise and remain until 1 hour after legal sunset.
- We open Island Lake, Blue Lake, Smith Lake, and Crane Lake to fishing year-round. We close all other refuge lakes to fishing.
- We prohibit leaving temporary shelters used for fishing overnight on the refuge.

C. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting

Hunting is in accordance with state regulations subject to refuge-specific regulation listed above (Section IV. B.) in addition to the following activities that are not permitted on the refuge:

- use or possession of alcoholic beverages;
- camping, overnight parking and open campfires;
- cutting vegetation (such as trees);

- target practice;
- marking trails with paint, flagging, reflectors, tacks, or other manmade materials;
- spotlighting for wildlife;
- searching for or removing any object of antiquity including arrowheads, pottery, or other artifacts;
- blocking gates or roadways with vehicles;
- inserting a screw, nail, spike, or other metal object into a tree or to hunt from any tree in which such an object has been driven
- using climbing spikes;
- using ATVs, except by disabled persons possessing a refuge special use permit. For more information on obtaining a special use permit, please visit our permits page.

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program

The refuge keeps a mailing list comprised of local newspapers, radio stations, and websites for communication purposes. Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with hunting seasons. A public notice will be sent to local newspapers in Oshkosh, Alliance, Scottsbluff, Sidney, Ogallala, and North Platte. Information will also be posted at local businesses and on the Crescent Lake NWR and North Platte NWR websites. Upon completion, this plan will be available for public review for 30 days.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program

Since refuge establishment, hunting has been an accepted and popular activity. The refuge completed the CCP process in August 2002. Through this process, working with stakeholders and the public, there was overall support for expanding the hunting program on the refuge. Additional hunting opportunities were opened with the 2007 hunting plan with favorable reaction from hunters. Overall, public hunting on the refuge is viewed as a positive and accepted use of refuge lands. All measures will be taken to coordinate the implementation of this hunting plan with input from NGPC and 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 the refuge office at 10630 Road 181, Ellsworth, NE 69340, or by calling 308 / 762-4893. Dates, forms, hunting unit directions, and maps will be available on the refuge website at: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Crescent_Lake/visit/rules_and_regulations.html.

Regulations pertaining to hunting on all NWRs are found at 50 CFR 32.2. Copies of the CFR can be found online and in area libraries; in addition, refuge-specific regulations are available on the refuge's website.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See the compatibility determination for more information: www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php#.

VII. References

Burgett, G., Nickel, R. 1999. Archeological Overview and Assessment for Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Nebraska. 30-32 p.

Dubovsky, J. A. 2019. Central flyway harvest and population survey data book 2019. Lakewood CO: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 97 p.

[NGPC] Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. 2007. Unpublished furbearer and small game harvest data. Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

———. 2018–2019. Hunter Success Survey Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Project W-15-R-75. 32 p.

———. 2019. Big Game Guide. State of Nebraska.

———. 2019. Small Game and Waterfowl Guide. State of Nebraska.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2000. Demographic Profile for Garden County, Nebraska. <www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/gardencountynebraska/PST045218>.

[USFWS] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1986. Sandhills Wetlands – A Special Investigation. Unpublished document. 20 p.

———. 2002. Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan. 21–28 p.

———. 2003. Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge Hunting Plan.

———. 2006. Central Flyway harvest and population survey data book.

U.S. Department of the Interior. 2007. Environmental Assessment, Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

———. 2002. Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive

Conservation Plan. U.S. Dept. of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6

———. 2002. Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge Habitat Management Plan. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

———. 2007 Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge Hunting Plan. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Region 6.

Wilson Sam; Nawrocki, Julia. 2018. Fur Harvest Survey 2017–2018 Season. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. 2 p.

APPENDIX A DESCRIPTION OF REFUGE MANAGEMENT UNITS

Management of hunting on refuge is divided into three separate units. These individual units are described briefly below.

Hunt Unit

This unit makes up most of the refuge and contains approximately 41,000 acres, excluding only the 4,500-acre closed area. Migratory bird hunting is only allowed in that portion designated as the migratory bird hunt area.

Migratory Bird Hunt Unit

This unit covers approximately 15,039 acres. It covers the 2007 waterfowl unit (5,145 acres), the North Moore Valley bounded on the south by the West Mail Road (3,832 acres), and approximately 6,000 acres of the western portion of the proposed wilderness area. The unit contains many named lakes, including Island, Crane, Christ, Shafer, Deer, Smith, Ramelli, Martin, and Lost Lakes. The unit also has many wetlands and wet meadows. The unit is open to the hunting of all species that are allowed on the refuge, not just migratory birds.

Closed Unit

This area consists of approximately 4,806 acres that are closed to all public use, including hunting and fishing activities. The closed area covers the refuge HQ area, including the office, maintenance shops, bunkhouse, and private residences. A 2.5-mile nature trail is located within the closed area that is open to the public only for hiking, wildlife viewing, and photography (on or directly next to the trail only). The trail starts and ends at refuge HQ. The closed area also has two research natural areas (1,076 acres) established by Director's Order in 1955 that are to remain free of human disturbance, including habitat management and public use.