

Draft Compatibility Determination for Hunting on Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge

Use: Hunting of furbearer (badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, fox, opossum, raccoon, striped skunk, weasel) and coyote, and allowing the Extended Firearm Whitetail Antlerless Only season

Refuge Name: Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

- Establishment and Acquisition Authorities: Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (1958) 16 U.S. Code § 644, and the Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S. Code § 460-1).

Refuge Purpose(s):

To restore and maintain the hydrological system for the Neosho River drainage by managing for wetlands, control of exotic species, and management of trust responsibilities for the maintenance of plant and animal communities.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

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

Description of Use:

What is the use?

The use includes hunting opportunities in addition to the existing approved hunting and fishing uses. Additional species to be hunted include coyote, and state-defined hunted furbearers (raccoon, opossum, striped skunk, bobcat, fox, mink, badger, muskrat, and weasel). Another hunting opportunity will involve an expansion of deer hunting to include the Extended Whitetail Antlerless Only season as defined by Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism.

Where will the use be conducted?

The additional hunting uses will occur within the existing South Neosho Hunt Unit on Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge. The proposed hunts will not occur in the North 19th and South 19th hunt units, because they provide sanctuary for migratory birds and help to offset potential disturbance effects. This 9,445-acre waterfowl sanctuary prohibits access by the public, including hunters.

When and how will the use be conducted?

All new hunting opportunities will occur within the existing state hunting seasons. Hunting will not be allowed at night. Refuge shooting hours for coyote, furbearers, and deer will be one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.

The use will be conducted according to state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations. The Service limits the hunting area, season, hours, and other aspects of operations and procedures to ensure compatibility of multiple wildlife-dependent uses and with conservation priorities.

Why is this use being proposed?

Hunting is a priority general public use of the Refuge System that is also an important wildlife management tool. The Service recognizes hunting as a healthy, traditional outdoor pastime, deeply rooted in the American heritage. Hunting can instill a unique understanding and appreciation of wildlife, their behavior, and their habitat needs. Hunting programs can promote understanding and appreciation of natural resources and their management on lands and waters in the Refuge System. This interest is congruent with the Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3356, “Hunting, Fishing, Recreational Shooting, and Wildlife Conservation Opportunities and Coordination with States, Tribes, and Territories.”

Availability of Resources:

Although additional hunting opportunities will require more time and monetary resources, implementation can occur under current administrative conditions. Existing programs, such as signs, brochures, and other communications, can be updated with available resources. Maintenance of infrastructure is closely tied to the Service Asset Maintenance Management System. The refuge’s base budget will cover the cost of updates. Current law enforcement is sufficient for safety and management related to expanded hunting uses.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-Term Impacts:

Overall, accommodating this wildlife-dependent use likely will result in minimal effects on wildlife. Although hunting causes mortality to wildlife, season dates and bag limits are set with the long-term health of populations in mind. Wildlife will be disturbed temporarily near the activity. This covers temporary displacement of birds and other resident wildlife from foot traffic moving through the area and gunshots. Data collected from the refuge indicate that there are sustainable wildlife populations to support the proposed hunts. Hunting will only occur in the South Neosho Unit, with 9,445 refuge acres remaining as a sanctuary for wildlife. In addition, the proposed hunts will not occur in the Trail Areas, and thus will minimally affect nonconsumptive public use. There will be negligible effects on vegetation or threatened and endangered species. Refuge staff anticipates a positive response from the hunting public, and will periodically assess impacts to allow adjustments in hunting activities.

Long-Term and Cumulative Impacts:

There will be no long-term impacts on wildlife resources at a population scale. Overall, the proposed action is expected to benefit hunters in the area by providing additional public land for hunting.

Public Review and Comment:

This compatibility determination was prepared concurrently with the draft Environmental Assessment and companion hunting plan for the refuge. Public review and comment was achieved concurrently with the public review and comment period for the draft hunting plan and

Environmental Assessment. Public review and comment was solicited through public posting of notices at the refuge and notices on local newspapers.

Determination (check one below):

Use is not compatible.

Use is compatible with the below stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

To ensure compatibility with the Refuge System and refuge goals and objectives, hunting of furbearer (badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, fox, opossum, raccoon, striped skunk, weasel) and coyote will only occur under the follow conditions:

- Implementation of uses as described in the refuge hunting plan, and according to applicable state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations.

Justification:

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

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

Current staffing levels and funding are adequate to administer the hunting program. Wyoming state law further controls hunter activities. Hunting is a legitimate wildlife-management tool that can be used to control wildlife populations. Hunting harvests a small percentage of the renewable resources, which is in accordance with wildlife-management objectives and principles.

Signatures:

Craig Mowry, Project Leader

Date

Review:

Barbara Boyle, Refuge Supervisor

Date

Approval:

Will Meeks, Refuge Chief
Region 6

Date

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-Evaluation Date: February 2035