

**Draft Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge
Hunting and Fishing Plan**

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge

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Draft Lee Metcalf 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 Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

The purpose of this draft hunting and fishing plan is to document the methods that will be implemented to provide for compatible, safe, quality public hunting opportunities for waterfowl, big game, and upland game and fishing on portions of Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) that will further the purposes of the refuge and reduce conflict with other priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses (Service Manual 605 FW 2). This draft hunting and fishing plan follows the comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for the refuge (USFWS 2012) and has information on the following topics: compatibility, the effect of hunting on refuge objectives, assessment of target species, description of the hunting areas, avoiding biological and public conflicts, and the procedures that will be implemented to conduct daily hunts.

In general, this plan proposes to support existing recreational hunting and fishing opportunities on the refuge and open other portions of the refuge to more hunting and fishing opportunities by expanding the species that are allowed to be hunted and the areas on the refuge where hunting and fishing can occur.

The refuge was established by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission on December 10, 1963, under the authority of the 1929 Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S. Code 715–715d, 715e, 715f–715r) (45 Stat. 1222).

The 2,800-acre refuge was established to provide a feeding and resting area for migrating waterfowl in a locality where sanctuary was needed. The legislative purposes of the refuge are as follows:

- use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds;
- as suitable for incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, the protection of natural resources, the conservation of endangered species or threatened species.

The refuge was originally established as Ravalli NWR and in 1978 was renamed to honor the late Senator Lee Metcalf, who was instrumental in establishing the refuge and to recognize his lifelong commitment to conservation. The vision of the refuge, as stated in the CCP, is that it represents the diverse native wildlife habitat once found abundantly between the Bitterroot and

Sapphire Mountains and along the ever-changing Bitterroot River, and that the refuge is a diverse mosaic of forest, grassland, and riparian habitat that provides protected lands and waters for migratory and resident wildlife.

The nine management goals of the refuge based on the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act), the purposes of the refuge, and the CCP are to:

- manage and, where appropriate, restore the natural topography, water movements, and physical integrity of surface water flow patterns across the Bitterroot River floodplain to provide healthy riparian habitats for target native species and to educate visitors about the benefits of sustaining a more natural floodplain;
- where appropriate, manage wetland impoundments to create a diversity of habitats for target waterfowl, shorebirds, and other associated native wetland-dependent species;
- create the conditions that will allow for the restoration, maintenance, and distribution of native grassland and shrubland species (such as rabbitbrush, needle and thread grass, Junegrass, and hairy golden aster) to provide healthy lands for a diverse group of target native resident and migratory wildlife species and to educate visitors about the historical plant and animal diversity of the Bitterroot Valley;
- prevent, reduce, and contain the invasion and spread of noxious, invasive, and harmful nonnative species within the refuge while working with partners to address off-refuge infestations within the surrounding landscape;
- pursue and support compatible research projects that will provide information on refuge resources and address refuge issues to assist management in making decisions based on the best available information and science;
- provide opportunities for visitors to learn about the unique glacial, Native American, and Euro-American history of the Bitterroot Valley while supporting and protecting the integrity of the refuge's cultural and historical resources;
- provide visitors of all abilities with opportunities to participate in and enjoy quality, compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation, environmental education, and interpretation programs that foster an awareness and appreciation of the importance of protecting the natural and cultural resources of the refuge, the Bitterroot Valley, and the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System);
- cultivate and support partnerships that help to achieve the vision and supporting goals and objectives of the refuge CCP and support other initiatives designed to protect and restore habitats for federal trust species within the Bitterroot River Valley;
- prioritize wildlife first and emphasize the protection of trust resources in the utilization of staff, volunteers, funding, and facilities.

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 NWRSAA mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the System to (16 U.S. Code 668dd[a][4]):

- provide for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats within the Refuge System;
- ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans;
- ensure that the mission of the Refuge System described at 16 U.S. Code 668dd(a)(2) and the purposes of each refuge are carried out;
- ensure effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with owners of land adjoining refuges and the fish and wildlife agency of the states in which the units of the Refuge System are located;
- assist in the maintenance of adequate water quantity and water quality to fulfill the mission of the Refuge System and the purposes of each refuge;
- recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority general public uses of the Refuge System through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife;
- ensure that opportunities are provided within the Refuge System for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses;
- monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge.

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

The refuge is approximately two miles north of Stevensville and 25 miles south of Missoula in Ravalli County, Montana. The refuge lies in the heart of the Bitterroot Valley, cradled between two mountain ranges: the Bitterroot Mountains to the west and the Sapphire Mountains to the east. The 2,800 acres have an elevation that ranges from approximately 3,314 mean sea level in the south to approximately 3,225 mean sea level in the north. The refuge contains upland habitat composed of floodplain and terrace grasslands, shrublands, or a combination of both. The refuge also has riparian habitat consisting of woodlands, wetlands, and wetland impoundments that have open water and persistent emergent vegetation. Other habitats include the river channel and areas of bare or sparse vegetation.

II. Conformance with Statutory Authorities

The Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S. Code 460K) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to administer refuges, hatcheries, and other conservation areas for recreational use. The Refuge

Recreation Act requires (1) that any recreational use permitted will not interfere with the primary purpose for which the area was established; and (2) that money is available for the development, operation, and maintenance of the permitted forms of recreation.

The NWRSAA (16 U.S. Code 668dd–668ee) provided a mission for the Refuge System and clear standards for its management, use, planning, and growth. The Improvement Act recognized that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible with the mission of the Refuge System and purposes of the refuge, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of the Refuge System. Compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are the priority public uses of the Refuge System.

Hunting and fishing, as specified in this plan, are wildlife-dependent recreational uses and the Improvement Act states that, as such, they “shall receive priority consideration in national wildlife refuge planning and management.” The Secretary of the Interior may permit hunting and fishing on a refuge only if it is determined that the use is compatible and that the hunting and fishing programs would not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the purposes of the refuge or the mission of the Refuge System.

This hunting and fishing plan “steps down” from the CCP by implementing the CCP’s goals, objectives, and strategies. Those goals, objectives, and strategies were developed within the context of overall visitor services. As part of the CCP, the refuge completed compatibility determinations on hunting and fishing uses. These hunting uses, which cover big game and migratory waterfowl hunting, and fishing uses were determined to be compatible with the purposes of the refuge and the mission of the Refuge System.

Currently, the refuge hosts approximately 240,000 visitors each year. Refuge visitors enjoy participating in all six wildlife-dependent recreational uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation). Most of the refuge visitors enjoy wildlife observation.

There are approximately 965 waterfowl-hunting visits and 1,030 deer-hunting visits per year. These represent approximately less than 1 percent of refuge visits each year. Currently, archery hunters enter the hunt areas from one of five designated hunt parking areas. Hunt kiosks with refuge-specific regulations and information is provided at each kiosk.

Waterfowl hunting is popular with nearly 100 hunters vying for an opportunity to draw a blind on opening weekend. After opening weekend, the spaced blind hunt is open on a first-come-first-serve basis. The waterfowl sign-in kiosk provides information on what blinds other hunters have selected, refuge-specific regulations, and the refuge and hunt program. The parking area, trails to each hunt blind, directional and blind identification signage, and a portable toilet are all maintained.

The refuge is also popular as a fishing designation with approximately 920 fishing visits annually. Fishing is allowed on the Bitterroot River and North Burnt Fork Creek, known locally as Francois Slough, as it travels through the refuge.

Currently, the hunting and fishing programs are administered by the refuge manager and maintenance worker with assistance by refuge volunteers. Hunting or fishing violations are dealt with, when possible, by the Western Montana NWR Complex (refuge complex) law enforcement officers. The cost of administering the current programs, while difficult to estimate, is at least \$90,000.

III. Statement of Objectives

The objective of this hunting and fishing plan is to provide refuge hunters and anglers a quality hunting and fishing experience while reducing impacts to refuge wildlife and other refuge visitors. For a complete review of the refuge's management goals and objectives, see the CCP: www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/lmc_ccp_all.pdf. The hunting and fishing program is designed to provide participants with an opportunity to appreciate the natural environment of the refuge and engage in a wildlife-dependent recreational opportunity, thus supporting the mandates of the Improvement Act. The objectives are to:

- support existing archery white-tailed deer hunting while opening all refuge acreage west of the Bitterroot River to more archery white-tailed deer hunting;
- allow the use of the either sex 260-20 deer B tag on the refuge;
- support existing waterfowl hunting in the spaced blind waterfowl hunt area;
- allow waterfowl hunting below the ordinary high-water line of the Bitterroot River as it passes through the refuge;
- open turkey hunting on refuge lands west of the Bitterroot River and on specific designated areas east of the Bitterroot River for limited entry special hunts developed in the future;
- allow fishing on the Bitterroot River and North Burnt Fork Creek, known locally as Francois Slough, as it travels through the refuge.

IV. Assessment

A. Are Wildlife Populations Present in Numbers Sufficient to Sustain Optimum Population Levels for Priority Refuge Objectives Other Than Hunting and Fishing?

Big Game (white-tailed deer)

White-tailed deer surveys have not been conducted on the refuge since 2011. The average winter nighttime deer counts in 2011 were 93 deer. In 1989, the average winter nighttime deer counts were 377. In the past, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP), conducted helicopter deer surveys in the Bitterroot Valley. Although not refuge specific, the survey segment that encompassed the refuge covered the north end of the refuge, between the highways, and south to the Stevensville cut-off road. Data from this helicopter survey, which was last conducted in 2005, found 409 white-tailed deer. Data from the helicopter surveys for the survey segment that covered the refuge between 1988 and 2005 averaged 260 white-tailed deer.

Typically, there are more than 1,000 deer-hunting visits per year. Archers harvested 26 white-tailed deer on the refuge in 2018 and accrued 2,862 hunt hours in 942 archery hunt visits. We, the Service, estimate that the added hunt pressure and harvest incurred by opening the areas of the refuge west of the Bitterroot River and by allowing the 260-20 tag to be used on the refuge will increase by 10 percent or less. This would be a minimal impact to the current white-tailed deer population on the refuge.

Waterfowl (including ducks, dark geese, light geese, and mergansers)

Annual assessments of waterfowl populations are based upon the distribution, abundance, and flight corridors of migratory birds. The annual Waterfowl Population Status Report published by the Service has the most current breeding population and production information available for waterfowl in North America and is a result of cooperative efforts by the Service, the Canada Wildlife Service, various state and provincial conservation agencies, and private conservation organizations. Results of these annual assessments are used by the Service and state wildlife agencies, in part, to establish season lengths and bag limits designed to support healthy, sustainable waterfowl populations.

The refuge supports a wide variety of nesting and migrating waterfowl. Twenty species of waterfowl have been documented nesting on the refuge and at least 11 more species of waterfowl use the habitats of the refuge for resting and refueling during their spring and fall migrations. When spring and fall migratory waterfowl counts were last conducted in 2015, daily waterfowl use averaged 2,445 individuals across 25 species between January and April and between August and November.

Wild Turkey

Wild turkeys are not native to Montana and were introduced at various times to support hunting opportunities. According to MFWP, no population surveys are conducted on wild turkey in the Bitterroot Valley. Population surveys of wild turkeys are also not conducted on the refuge. Turkeys group in communal flocks during the winter and typically stay on private lands south of the refuge. By late spring, the winter flock has broken up with toms searching for hens in small groups that make their way north and onto the refuge. Turkeys are also located on private lands west of the Bitterroot River. Some of these birds make their way east to the refuge lands in late spring.

The number of turkeys that will be present on the refuge each year is expected to be highly variable depending on spring weather and habitat conditions. We estimate that the annual turkey harvest on the refuge will be fewer than 20 and, in some years, may be zero. In some years, due to hunting pressure or spring conditions, turkeys may not be present on the refuge temporarily. However, given the small number of turkeys that may be harvested on the refuge, it is likely to have a negligible effect on the wild turkey population in the Bitterroot Valley, and these turkeys would be expected to repopulate the refuge in most years.

Sport Fish

The refuge is popular as a fishing designation with approximately 920 fishing visits annually. Fishing is allowed on the Bitterroot River and North Burnt Fork Creek, known locally as Francois Slough, as it travels through the refuge. Youth are provided the opportunity to successfully catch fish and are encouraged to appreciate the sport of fishing. Events focusing on capturing largemouth bass give the Service an opportunity to teach the students about the impacts of nonnative fish.

V. Description of Hunting and Fishing Program

This hunting and fishing plan proposes to support existing hunting and fishing opportunities and provide new hunting and fishing opportunities on the refuge. Archery white-tailed deer hunting from the five hunt parking lots will be maintained with the addition of opening areas west of the Bitterroot River and allowing the use of either sex hunt license 260-20. Waterfowl hunting from spaced blinds and entry from the waterfowl hunt parking area will be maintained, as well as identifying that the Bitterroot River is open to hunting. Turkey hunting will be opened on refuge lands west of the Bitterroot River and on specific designated areas east of the Bitterroot River for limited entry special hunts developed in the future.

Hunt seasons, bag limits, and method of take will follow MFWP regulations. Refuge-specific regulations will separate public uses on the refuge, provide public safety, support refuge sanctuary, and provide for a quality hunt experience.

Designated fishing sites are located in the wildlife-viewing area and include Francois Slough and the Bitterroot River shoreline. Refuge anglers must adhere to the fishing regulations designated by MFWP.

A. Areas of the Refuge that Support Populations of the Target Species

The refuge provides a rich and diverse mosaic of western mountain valley habitats, including gallery and riverfront forest, wet meadow, palustrine wetlands, upland grassland and shrubland. These habitats support a vast array of wildlife species, covering more than 235 species of birds, 37 species of mammals, and 17 species of reptiles and amphibians. Descriptions of refuge habitats and their associated plant and animal species are described in further detail in the CCP: www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/lmc_ccp_all.pdf.

White-tailed deer, waterfowl, turkey, and sport fish are found in appropriate habitats of the refuge, and their abundance and distribution vary seasonally depending on habitat conditions.

B. Areas to be Opened to Hunting and Fishing

The refuge currently provides archery white-tailed deer and waterfowl hunting on approximately 82% of the 2,871-acre refuge. These acres will remain open to hunting, and approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River will also be opened to turkey hunting, archery white-tailed deer hunting, and sport fishing. Turkey hunting will be opened on refuge lands west of the Bitterroot River and on specific designated areas east of the Bitterroot River for limited entry special hunts developed in the future (Figure 1).

Designated fishing sites are located in the wildlife-viewing area and include Francois Slough and the Bitterroot River shoreline.

C. Species to be Taken, Hunting and Fishing Periods, Hunting and Fishing Access

White-tailed deer, waterfowl, and wild turkey will be opened to hunting. Hunt periods will follow MFWP regulations. Hunt access, depending on species, will be the five designated hunt parking areas east of the Bitterroot River and the Bass Creek Fishing Access parking area, Poker Joe Fishing Access parking area, and Ruffatto Block Management parking areas west of the Bitterroot River.

Sport fish on the refuge include brook trout, brown trout, bull trout, mountain whitefish, rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, westslope cutthroat trout, largemouth bass, and northern pike. Refuge anglers must adhere to the fishing regulations designated by MFWP.

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

The Service meets annually with MFWP management staff and leadership to discuss concerns, projects of mutual interest, and hunting on NWRs and waterfowl production areas. These meetings allow the Service to get valuable feedback from MFWP regarding public interest in opportunities not currently allowed and to explain modifications and/or stipulations to make considered uses compatible with the purposes of the hunting unit.

For this plan, we discussed opening the refuge west of the Bitterroot River for archery white-tailed deer hunting and turkey hunting and expanding the refuge archery white-tailed deer hunt to include the use of hunt license 260-20, with the MFWP Region 2 Bitterroot Valley wildlife biologist and Region 2 supervisor.

E. Law Enforcement

The enforcement of refuge-specific (50 CFR 32.45) hunting and fishing regulations, trespassing, and other violations associated with the management of all NWRs is the responsibility of the manager through commissioned Service refuge law enforcement officers and in coordination with state game wardens. The refuge complex law enforcement officers are responsible for enforcing Refuge specific regulations associated with this hunting and fishing plan.



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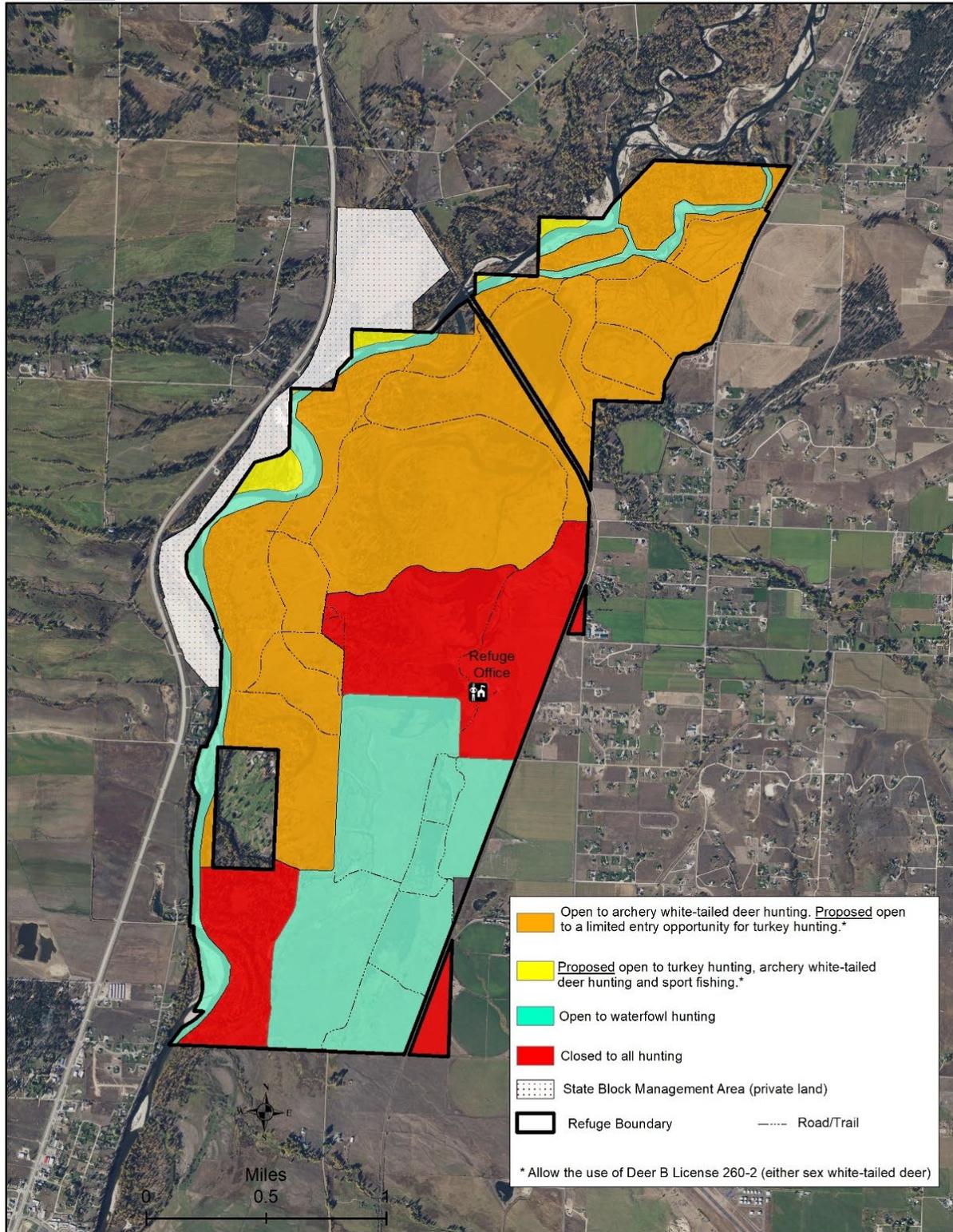


Figure 1. Hunting and Fishing Opportunities on Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge.

The following methods will be used to educate the public and enforce refuge-specific hunting and fishing regulations:

- Refuge and hunting and fishing area boundaries will be clearly posted.
- The refuge will provide a brochure that shows hunting and fishing areas and describes refuge-specific rules and regulations.
- Information and hunting and fishing area maps will be made available on the refuge's Web site, at the Refuge Visitor Contact Station, and hunt parking areas east of the Bitterroot River.
- The refuge complex law enforcement officers will patrol and observe hunting and fishing activities as often as possible.
- The refuge complex and refuge will coordinate with MFWP, Ravalli County, other agencies, and adjacent landowners.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Administering the hunting and fishing program will annually require staff time from the refuge manager, maintenance worker, administrative assistant, and refuge complex law enforcement officers to respond to hunter and angler inquiries; conduct hunter, angler and visitor outreach; reduce conflicts among users; conduct law enforcement; maintain boundary posting and parking areas; repair hunt kiosks; maintain fishing platform, parking areas, waterfowl blinds, gates, and infrastructure; mow and grade roads and trails; observe impacts to wildlife, habitat, and visitor use; and ensure public safety.

The annual cost of the refuge's proposed hunting program is estimated to be at least \$90,000. This cost covers staff and resources to provide public education, hunter assistance, enforcement, and maintenance and repair of hunting and fishing infrastructure.

VI. Measures Taken to Avoid Conflicts with Other Management Objectives

A. Biological Conflicts

The impacts addressed here are further discussed in the draft Environmental Assessment and the compatibility determination found in Appendix C of the refuge's 2012 CCP (USFWS 2012). The National Wildlife Refuge System Act of 1966, as amended, and Service policy encourage allowing hunting and fishing on NWRs when it is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established. Although white-tailed deer, waterfowl, and wild turkey populations are no longer watched on the refuge, instituting refuge-specific hunt regulations as well as enforcing state game regulations should support healthy hunted wildlife populations. Habitats on the refuge are managed to produce healthy wildlife populations that normally produce a harvestable surplus that could be considered a renewable resource.

By keeping adequate sanctuary on the refuge, wildlife learn to use the refugia and populations are sustained. Refuge signage, hunting/fishing and general brochures, informational kiosks, Web site postings, and state hunting and fishing regulations will also inform hunters and anglers of

where and how the hunting and fishing program is managed to reduce overharvest of any wildlife population segment.

B. Public Use Conflicts

Various aspects of the proposed hunting and fishing program, including temporal and spatial restrictions, will reduce the potential for conflict with other wildlife-dependent recreational users.

The refuge attempts to separate the various public uses as much as possible to reduce conflicts between user groups. Opening the areas of the refuge west of the Bitterroot River should not create conflict as much of the area near the refuge is already open to hunting and fishing. Increasing the license opportunity for archery white-tailed deer on the archery hunt area east of the river should not create any other conflict with other user groups. Opening turkey hunting may create some controversy with wildlife photographers and wildlife observers as they enjoy photographing and observing these birds, especially in the spring, when the toms are displaying. By limiting the opening to the west of the river and specifically designated areas east of the river, there should be ample opportunity for wildlife photographers and observers to still enjoy turkeys on the refuge in late spring. Expanding sport fishing to the west river area is not expected to change the current numbers of people using the refuge to access fishing areas and therefore will not have any other impacts on public use.

C. Administrative Conflicts

The hunting and fishing programs are largely self-serve from the user standpoint. The refuge has kept hunting and fishing informational kiosks up to date with current refuge-specific regulations and hunting and fishing information, covering areas open and closed to these activities. The annual cost of the refuge's proposed hunting program is estimated to be at least \$90,000.

VII. Conduct of the Hunting and Fishing Program

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

A. Hunter and Angler Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures

Information on archery white-tailed, waterfowl, and turkey hunting, as well as fishing on the refuge can be found on the refuge website: www.fws.gov/refuge/lee_metcalf.

All persons hunting and fishing on the refuge must possess the applicable state licenses, tags, and stamps required for the target species they are hunting or fishing during all seasons.

Numbers of hunters and anglers, hunter and angler satisfaction, safety concerns, and potential environmental issues or conflicts with other wildlife-dependent public users will be evaluated annually to determine whether changes need to occur.

B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

Migratory game bird hunting:

We allow hunting of duck, goose, swan, and coot on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- You must hunt from an established blind.
- Legal entry time into the hunting area is no earlier than 2 hours before legal shooting hours. All hunters must exit the hunting area no later than 2 hours after legal shooting hours.
- We prohibit wildlife observation, scouting, and loitering during waterfowl-hunting season at the waterfowl-hunting area parking lot and on the refuge road leading to the waterfowl-hunting area parking lot.
- We close the waterfowl-hunting area to waterfowl hunting on Mondays and Thursdays.
- Each hunter must set the appropriate blind selector (metal flip tag) before and after hunting.
- We prohibit attempting to “reserve” a blind for use later in the day by depositing a vehicle or other equipment on the refuge. A hunter must be physically present in the hunting area in order to use a blind. The exceptions are blinds 2 and 7, which may be reserved for hunters with disabilities.
- No more than four hunters or individuals may use a blind at one time.
- You must conduct all hunting from within the hunting blind.
- All hunters must have a visible means of retrieving waterfowl such as a float tube, waders, or a dog capable of retrieving.
- We prohibit falconry hunting.
- We allow the use of a portable ground blind within the immediate mowed area around field blind 13.

Upland game hunting:

We allow hunting of turkey on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition:

- We allow limited and targeted demographic opportunities for turkey hunting as governed by state regulations.

Big game hunting:

We allow archery hunting of white-tailed deer on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- We prohibit wildlife observation, scouting, and loitering at access points and parking areas.
- Hunters may only enter the hunt area 2 hours prior to legal hunting hours and must exit no later than 2 hours after legal hunting hours.

- We allow archery hunting in the waterfowl-hunting area in September, except during youth waterfowl hunt weekend. We allow archery hunting on Mondays and Thursdays in the waterfowl-hunting area during the waterfowl-hunting season.
- We allow the use of portable tree stands or ground blinds. You must attach a tag displaying the owner’s automated licensing system number to each tree stand and/or ground blind you place on the refuge.
- Hunters may not enter or retrieve deer from closed areas of the refuge without the consent of an authorized official.
- Hunters with a documented mobility disability may access designated locations in the hunting area to hunt from a ground blind. To access these areas, hunters must contact the refuge manager in advance to obtain a Special Use Permit (FWS Form 3-1383-G).
- We prohibit organized drives. We define a “drive” as an organized or planned effort to pursue, drive, chase, or otherwise frighten or cause game to move in the direction of any person(s) who is part of the organized or planned hunt and known to be waiting for the game.

Sport fishing:

We allow sport fishing on designated areas of the refuge.

C. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting and Fishing

- All hunting and fishing must be in accordance with refuge-specific regulations and MFWP regulations.
- License and permits: All hunters and anglers must possess a valid State of Montana hunting or fishing license and any federal or state stamps or tags required for the species they are hunting and the seasons in which they are hunting.
- Hunters with disabilities possessing an MFWP-issued permit may be granted special access and game-retrieval methods.
- Youth hunters must be of legal age set by MFWP and hunt in accordance with MFWP regulations.
- All hunters on the refuge are expected to be ethical and respect other hunters, non-consumptive users, wildlife species, and the environment while on refuge lands.

VIII. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting and Fishing Program

Information regarding refuge hunting and fishing opportunities will be posted on the refuge’s Web site, at the Refuge Visitor Contact Station, and at kiosks near the hunting parking areas. Special announcements and articles may be released via news releases (newspaper, radio) and social media.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program

Offering compatible wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography is a refuge priority. Public input was considered and efforts were made to design the hunting and fishing program to meet the System's and refuge-specific goals and objectives, provide a safe and high-quality experience, reduce wildlife disturbance, provide wildlife sanctuary, reduce or avoid conflicts with other refuge users, and decrease confusion for hunters.

Many non-consumptive refuge visitors oppose hunting on the refuge. They verbalize these concerns to refuge staff and volunteers at the Visitor Contact Station. By separating wildlife-dependent uses, the refuge attempts to reduce the impact of hunting on the nonhunting visitor. Providing non-consumptive users areas that are safe, inviting, and abundant in wildlife, away from the hunt area, is part of that management strategy. Increasingly, the refuge hosts more nonhunting, wildlife-dependent recreationalists.

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

Information regarding hunting, fishing and other wildlife-dependent opportunities is available at the Refuge Visitor Contact Station (4567 Wildfowl Lane, Stevensville, MT 59870, 406 / 777-5552), the public use area kiosks on the refuge, and at the refuge Web site. Montana hunting regulations are available at <http://fwp.mt.gov/>, from MFWP offices, and from licensing outlets.

IX. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan have been found compatible with purposes of the refuge. See Compatibility Determinations for hunting (USFWS 2020b) and fishing (Appendix C, USFWS 2012) on the refuge.

X. References

[USFWS] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, Montana. Lakewood, CO: U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 204 p. <www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/refuges/completedPlanPDFs_FL/lmc_ccp_all.pdf>.

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