

Draft Compatibility Determination for Hunting and Fishing on Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge

Use: Hunting and fishing

Refuge Names: Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):

- Establishment and Acquisition Authorities: Emergency Wetlands Resources Act (1986) 16 United States (U.S.) Code § 3901, and the Fish and Wildlife Act (1956) 16 U.S. Code §742a.

Refuge Purpose(s):

The refuge was established in 1992 to protect bottomland hardwood habitats along the Marais des Cygnes River in Linn County, Kansas. The Marais des Cygnes Basin, including threatened and endangered species will be preserved in coordination with partners. The refuge will serve as an area for wildlife-dependent environmental education, interpretation, and compatible recreational day use.

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 U.S. 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 crow, coyote, and state-defined hunted furbearers (raccoon, opossum, striped skunk, bobcat, fox, mink, badger, muskrat, and weasel).

Where is the use conducted?

The additional hunting uses will occur within the existing open hunt unit (4,995 acres) on Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The proposed hunts will not occur in the closed hunt unit (2,570 acres), since it provides sanctuary for migratory birds and to help offset potential disturbance to wildlife.

When 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 and shooting hours for coyote and furbearers will be one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset. Crow hunting will follow migratory bird hunting hours, one-half hour before sunrise until sunset.

How will the use be conducted?

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:

This alternative meets the purpose and needs of the Service as described above, but with expanded wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities. There will be an increased number of species allowed to be hunted, as well as associated seasons and methods of take to satisfy different hunting user groups. Observations from the refuge staff indicate that there are sustainable wildlife populations to support the proposed hunts. Hunting will only occur in the open unit, with 2,570 acres remaining as a sanctuary for wildlife. Although the proposed hunts could occur in the trail areas, their impact on nonconsumptive public use should be minimal. There will be a negligible effect on vegetation and threatened and endangered species. Refuge staff anticipates positive response from the hunting public and will periodically assess impacts to allow adjustments in hunting and fishing activities.

Public Review and Comment:

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

The public will have a period of 30 days for review of the hunting and fishing plan and associated Environmental Assessment. The hunting and fishing plan and associated Environmental Assessment will be available at <https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php#>. Hard copies will be available upon request.

Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with hunting seasons. Information about the hunting and fishing plan revision also will be available at the refuge or on the Marais des Cygnes NWR website.

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 and fishing can only occur under the following conditions:

- Implementation of uses as described in the refuge hunting and fishing 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 and fishing program contributes to achieving one of the refuge goals. Disturbance of wildlife will occur, but the impacts 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. Kansas 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: 2035