

Draft Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge Hunting Plan

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge

Central Sage Steppe Complex

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Draft Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge

Hunting 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 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 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, when those opportunities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the Refuge System.

The origins of the present-day Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) can be traced to June 17, 1902 when Congress authorized the Bureau of Reclamation to build the Pathfinder Dam and Reservoir in central Wyoming. When dam construction was completed in 1909, the refuge was established on the reservoir as an overlay refuge on Reclamation lands. As stated in Executive Order 7425, the purpose of the refuge is “as a refuge and breeding ground for birds and other wildlife” (Executive Order 7425, 1936). Wildlife management must be compatible with those uses for which Reclamation acquired the land. For more information on refuge establishment, acquisition, and management history, please see the refuge’s 2008 comprehensive conservation plan (CCP): https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/refuges/completedPlanPDFs_M-S/ptf_2008_ccpfinal_all.pdf.

The vision for the refuge from the 2008 CCP:

“Pathfinder Reservoir and surrounding public lands supply life-cycle needs for a multitude of wildlife adapted to this semiarid region of central Wyoming. The wetland complexes, upland sagebrush habitats, and open waters of the reservoir provide feeding, breeding, staging, resting, and nesting areas for migratory birds and resident wildlife. Management decisions will be directed toward maintaining or improving wildlife habitat values. Appropriate public use opportunities will be identified and provided where possible.”

The CCP also established the following visitor services goal(s) for the refuge:

“Provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives.”

“Enhance hunting program to manage wildlife and provide hunting opportunities consistent with refuge goals and objectives, while promoting ethical hunting practices.”

II. Statement of Objectives

The objectives of a hunting program on Pathfinder NWR are to:

- meet the refuge-establishing purposes;
- provide wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities in accordance with federal laws and Service policy and in alignment with state regulations;
- provide increased opportunities for a hunting experience on refuge lands;
- provide nearby hunting access for local communities;
- assist with hunter education.

III. Description of Hunting Program

Hunting is consistent with the CCP’s visitor services goal to provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives.

A. Areas to be Opened to Migratory Gamebird (Mourning Dove) Hunting

The entire refuge will be open to mourning dove hunting (Figure 1).

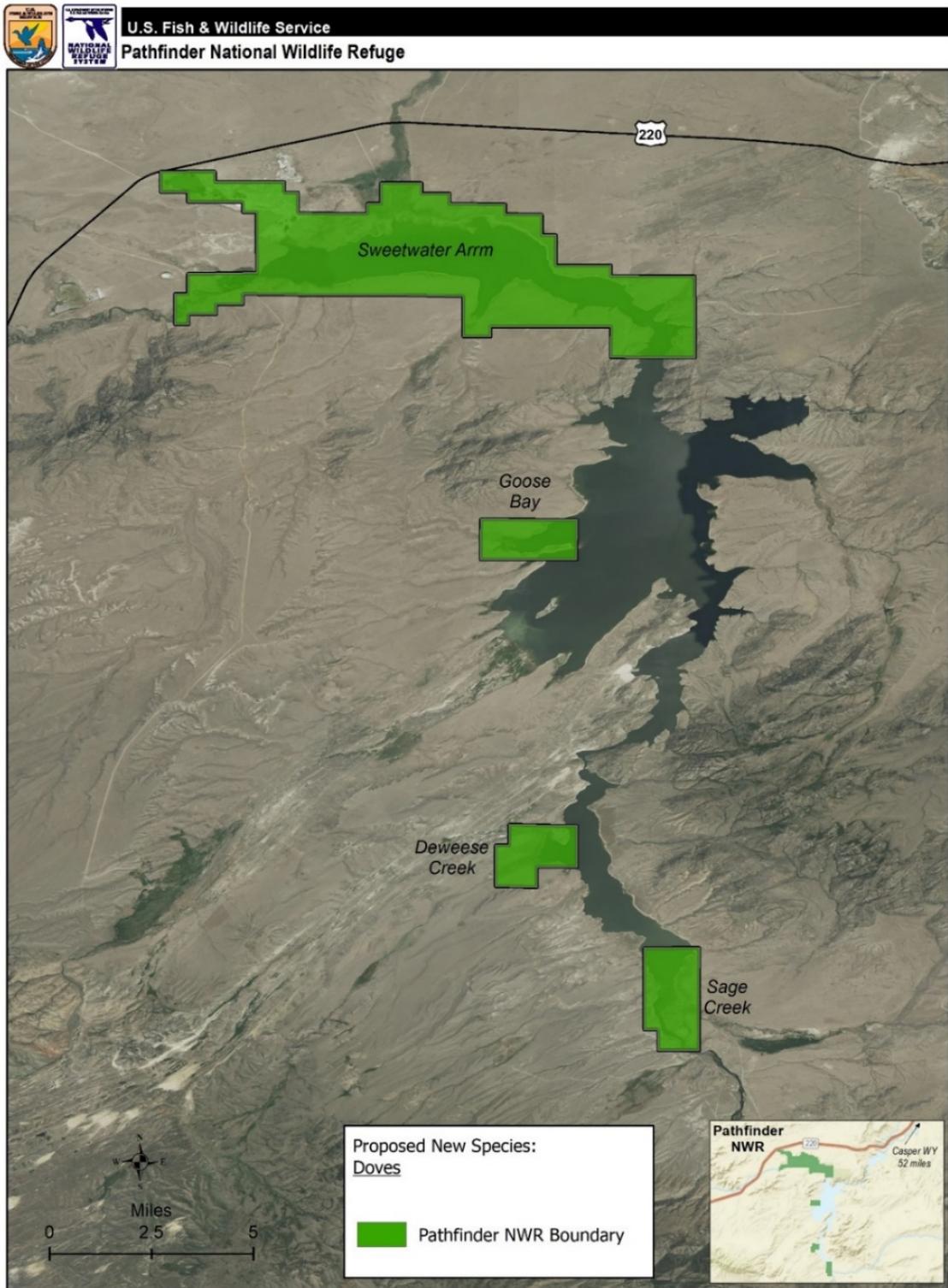


Figure 1. Map of Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge.

B. Species to be Taken, Hunting Periods, Hunting Access

Species to be Taken: The refuge will be open to hunting of mourning dove.

Hunting Periods: The refuge hunting season will be in alignment with seasons established by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) for hunting of mourning doves.

Hunting Access: Limited direct access is available on foot from a parking area off State Highway 220 in the Sweetwater Arm unit. The Sage Creek, Goose Bay, and Deweese Creek units are smaller and more remote units surrounded primarily by Bureau of Land Management lands with no direct access to these units across refuge lands. It is the hunter's responsibility to ensure legal access to these three remote units of the refuge.

C. Hunter Permit Requirements (if applicable)

Hunters must obtain all licenses and permits required by the WGFD to hunt mourning doves in Wyoming. No other refuge permits are needed to hunt mourning doves on the refuge.

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

Refuge and regional staff have coordinated with the WGFD to review the hunting programs on national wildlife refuges in Wyoming to look for other hunting opportunities that were found compatible with the establishing purposes of these refuges. Hunting of mourning doves on the refuge was an added and compatible hunting opportunity.

E. Law Enforcement

Enforcement of refuge regulations normally associated with management of a national wildlife refuge is the responsibility of commissioned federal wildlife officers. Other officers, special agents, state game wardens, and the local sheriff's department assist the refuge staff.

The following methods are used to control and enforce hunting regulations:

- The refuge will provide a brochure available to the public that describes hunting regulations for the refuge.
- Refuge law enforcement officers will conduct overt and covert law enforcement patrols periodically to check for compliance with federal and state laws.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Annual mourning dove hunt administration costs for the refuge, including salary, equipment, law enforcement, and brochures, will be approximately \$1,000. Funding specific for hunting on the refuge has not been allocated. No hunter fees are collected.

IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program

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

Hunting of mourning doves on the refuge is expected to be very light, so no limits will be placed on the number of hunters.

B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

The use or possession of other than nontoxic shot while hunting mourning doves is prohibited.

C. Relevant State Regulations

Hunters must follow all applicable regulations for hunting mourning doves established by the WGFD.

D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting

- Off-road vehicles may not be used on any portion of the refuge.
- Hunting access is walk-in only.
- Open fires and overnight camping are not permitted on the refuge.
- Portable blinds are permitted but cannot be left overnight.
- Cleaning of birds on the refuge is prohibited.
- Possession or use of other than nontoxic shot shells is prohibited
- Hunters must remove all personal trash, including spent shells.

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program

Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with hunting seasons. In addition, information about the hunt will be available at Arapaho NWR headquarters and on the refuge website: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Pathfinder/visit/rules_and_regulations.html.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program

Hunting is an important economic and recreational use of Wyoming's natural resources, and some form of hunting on the refuge has been available for many decades. Some individuals and local user groups have voiced their concern with allowing any hunting on national wildlife refuges.

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 Arapaho NWR headquarters at 953 Jackson County Road 32, Walden, CO 80480, by mail at 28111 State Highway 125, Walden, CO 80480, or by calling 970 / 723-8202. Dates, forms, hunting unit directions, maps, and other information about the hunt will be available on the Pathfinder NWR website at:

https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Pathfinder/visit/rules_and_regulations.html.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See the Draft Compatibility Determination for Recreational Hunting on Pathfinder NWR (<https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php#>).