

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

Wildlife Feature

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HUNTING IS POPULAR ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

One weekend last fall, between 5,000 and 6,000 archers visited Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in western Wisconsin for the refuge's annual late deer season. Some bowmen came from as far away as California and New Jersey to participate in the controlled hunt.

Necedah is one of Uncle Sam's 160 wildlife refuges that permit hunting of one type or another. There are 328 national refuges in all, operated by the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

Many species of migratory game, big game and upland game are hunted on refuges, but generally the methods are more conventional than at Necedah. Hunters made about 700,000 visits to national wildlife refuges last year. This figure has been increasing about 10 percent annually in recent years.

Yet hunting does not compare in volume with other recreational pursuits on refuges. Last year fishermen made 4,600,000 visits to these areas, and nearly 11,000,000 visits were made for swimming, boating, and other recreation.

While the primary purpose of refuges is to provide habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, the Bureau finds that public hunting fulfills two important functions: (1) a balancing of animals with available habitat (2) recreation for the sportsman.

Big game herds are inclined to increase rapidly and food shortages develop. The result is starvation and reduction of ground cover plants so that erosion of the land occurs. Managed hunting avoids these consequences while permitting a sporting use of surplus animals.

"Hunting is a management tool," says Dr. Leslie L. Glasgow, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife, Parks, and Marine Resources. "It is infinitely better than permitting forage depletion and thus starvation. The problem is that many people do not recognize that controlled hunting merely uses the available annual harvest of wildlife. Under our management the harvest is carefully balanced against the game supply to assure sustained hunting."

Shooting on refuges is a closely regulated activity, conducted within the framework of State regulations. Limits often are placed on the types of guns to be used, the time of the hunt, the area to be hunted, and the total take. Close cooperation with the State wildlife agency is an inflexible rule in setting up a refuge hunt.

Youth waterfowl hunter training programs are conducted annually at Parker River (Massachusetts), Montezuma (New York), Bombay Hook (Delaware) and Brigantine (New Jersey) Refuges. The youths, all of whom have passed State gun safety programs, are informed about the history of waterfowl management, waterfowl identification, hunting regulations, and the proper use of decoys and blinds.

"While we encourage the orderly removal through hunting of surplus animals on refuges, we realize that some controls are necessary," said Dr. Glasgow. "We strive for quality hunting, in the interest of both the sportsmen and the wildlife."

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