

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Desecheo National Wildlife Refuge
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Information Bulletin



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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August 13, 2025

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking public comments on a proposed Remote Amateur Radio Expedition at Desecheo National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking comments on the Draft Compatibility Determination (CD) for conducting a remote radio amateur expedition at Desecheo National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The draft CD will be available for public review and comment for 14 calendar days following the publication of the notice.

Desecheo NWR is a small island, 360 acres in size established in 1976, located approximately 22 miles west of Aguadilla Municipality in northwestern Puerto Rico. The island is not inhabited. In 1976, the island was transferred to the US Fish and Wildlife Service to be managed as a National Wildlife Refuge. Historically, the refuge was an important habitat for seabirds in the Caribbean. The combination of factors, including disturbance from bombing and invasive mammals on the island resulted in significant habitat loss and the disappearance of five of the seven breeding seabird species. To address these issues, the Service initiated the removal of invasive mammal species from the island in 2003. These efforts took many years, and the island was declared free of invasive mammals in 2017. Following the eradication efforts, the USFWS, with some non-profit organizations established biosecurity and social attraction projects to maintain the island rat-free and to re-establish seabird colonies on Desecheo NWR.

While this activity is not classified as wildlife-dependent public use according to the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966, as amended, remote amateur radio operations serve to assist in the management of resources indirectly. The stipulations outlined in the Draft CD would help ensure that this use is compatible with Desecheo NWR. This technology would enable radio operators to achieve their goals while aligning their activities with ongoing conservation efforts on the island.

The original proposal received in June 2024 was to conduct an amateur radio expedition to Desecheo NWR, transporting a team of 12-14 people for a two-week activity. However, the scope of the activity was reduced from the original request to install a Remote Deployable Unit (RDU)

for the expedition.

- **Proposed Action:**
 - Evaluates the issuing of a Special Use Permit for a RDU to conduct remote amateur radio operations at Desecheo NWR.
 - The RDU utilize solar-powered technology, including a Starlink antenna, which will allow them to conduct the amateur radio expedition remotely.

To ensure consideration of your comments in the development of final decisions on these proposed actions, please submit comments prior to August 27, 2025.

The Draft CD are available online at the refuge's website:

<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/desecheo>. A hard copy of this document will be posted at the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats Visitor Center located at Road 301 Km 11, Cabo Rojo. Please let us know if you need the documents in an alternative format. To ensure consideration of your comments in the development of final decisions, please submit comments by one of the listed methods.

- **Email:** Email caribbeanisland@fws.gov with the subject line "Comment on Remote Radio Amateur Expedition Draft Compatibility Determination, Desecheo NWR"
- **Hard Copy:** Submit by U.S. mail (P.O. Box 510, Boquerón, PR 00622) or hand delivery (Cabo Rojo Salt Flats Visitor Center located at Road 301 Km 11, Cabo Rojo) with the subject line "Comment on Remote Radio Amateur Expedition Draft Compatibility Determination, Desecheo NWR."

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.