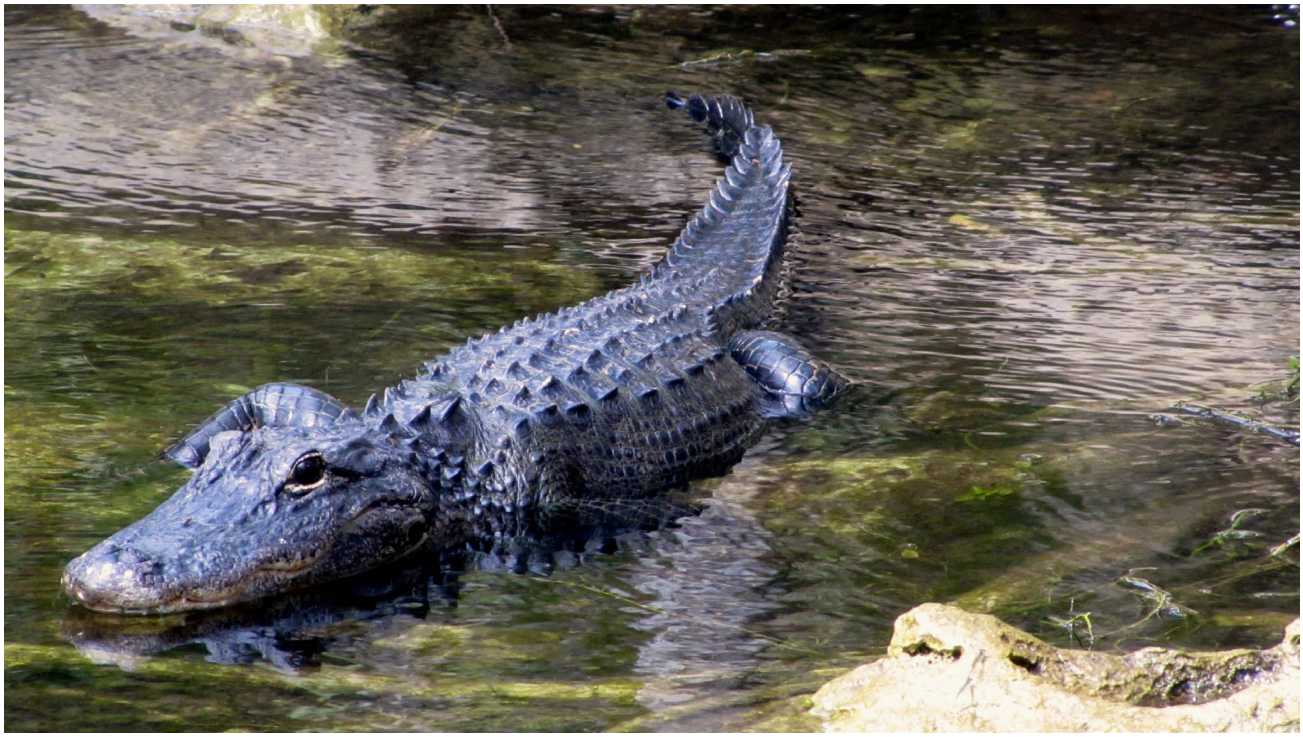
Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges

Draft Hunt Plan Amendment

November 2026



[American Alligator walking into the water – Sue Slick, USFWS]

Bayou Sauvage Urban, Big Branch Marsh, Black Bayou Lake, D'Arbonne, Delta, Tensas River, Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuges
Hunt Plan Amendment

November 2026

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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SECTION A. BAYOU SAUVAGE URBAN, BIG BRANCH MARSH, BLACK BAYOU LAKE, D'ARBONNE, DELTA, TENSAS RIVER, UPPER OUACHITA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES RECREATIONAL ALLIGATOR HUNT PLAN AMENDMENT, MADISON, MOREHOUSE, ORLEANS, OUACHITA, PLAQUEMINES, RICHLAND, ST. BERNARD, ST. TAMMANY, TENSAS, AND UNION PARISHES, LOUISIANA

I. Introduction

National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), the purposes of an individual refuge, policies of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and laws and international treaties (See Environmental Assessment Appendix B). Relevant guidance includes the NWRS Administration Act of 1966 (NWRSAA), as amended by the NWRS Improvement Act of 1997 (NWRSIA), Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and Service manual. FWS recognizes that the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is the authority in the state of Louisiana regarding the population status and sustainability of American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) that are to be hunted on Bayou Sauvage Urban, Big Branch Marsh, Black Bayou Lake, D'Arbonne, Delta, Tensas River, and Upper Ouachita NWRs (Figure 1). FWS strives to provide hunting opportunities on these refuges that are within the state and Federal season frameworks.

Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR

Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR was established in 1990 to protect one of the last remaining marsh areas adjacent to the south shores of Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne under the following authorities:

Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, 16 U.S.C. § 3901(b): "It is the purpose of this chapter to promote, in concert with other Federal and State statutes and programs, the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions with Canada, Mexico, Japan, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and with various countries in the Western Hemisphere by:

(1) intensifying cooperative efforts among private interests and local, State, and Federal governments for the management and conservation of wetlands; and
(2) intensifying efforts to protect the wetlands of the Nation through acquisition in fee, easements or other interests and methods by local, State, and Federal governments and the private sector."

North American Wetlands Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 4401(b): "The purposes of this chapter are to encourage partnership among public agencies and other interests:

(1) to protect, enhance, restore, and manage an appropriate distribution and diversity of wetland ecosystems and habitats associated with wetland ecosystems and other fish and wildlife in North America;
(2) to maintain current or improved distributions of wetland associated migratory bird populations; and
(3) to sustain an abundance of waterfowl and other wetland associated migratory birds consistent with the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the United States Shorebird Conservation Plan, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, the Partners In Flight Conservation Plans, and the international obligations contained in the migratory bird treaties and conventions and other agreements with Canada, Mexico, and other countries."

Legislation designated that the refuge should serve the following purposes:

- To enhance the populations of migratory, shore, and wading birds within the refuge;
- To encourage natural diversity of fish and wildlife species within the refuge;
- To protect the threatened and endangered species and otherwise to provide for the conservation and management of fish and wildlife within the refuge;
- To fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States respecting fish and wildlife;
- To protect the archaeological resources of the refuge; and
- To provide opportunities for fish and wildlife-dependent public uses and recreation in an urban setting.

Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR is located in Orleans Parish, Louisiana, with an approved acquisition boundary (AAB) of 33,000 acres. The Refuge currently comprises 27,657 acres and is one of the last remaining marsh areas adjacent to the south shores of Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne and contains a variety of habitats, including bottomland hardwood forest, freshwater, brackish and estuarine tidal marshes, lagoons, canals, and bayous (USFWS 2009a).

Big Branch Marsh NWR

Big Branch Marsh NWR was established in 1994 to protect the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain and buffer local communities from storm surge under the following authorities:

Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, 16 U.S.C. § 3901(b): "It is the purpose of this chapter to promote, in concert with other Federal and State statutes and programs, the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and

conventions with Canada, Mexico, Japan, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and with various countries in the Western Hemisphere by:

(1) intensifying cooperative efforts among private interests and local, State, and Federal governments for the management and conservation of wetlands; and
(2) intensifying efforts to protect the wetlands of the Nation through acquisition in fee, easements or other interests and methods by local, State, and Federal governments and the private sector."

North American Wetlands Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 4401(b): "The purposes of this chapter are to encourage partnership among public agencies and other interests:

(1) to protect, enhance, restore, and manage an appropriate distribution and diversity of wetland ecosystems and habitats associated with wetland ecosystems and other fish and wildlife in North America;
(2) to maintain current or improved distributions of wetland associated migratory bird populations; and
(3) to sustain an abundance of waterfowl and other wetland associated migratory birds consistent with the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the United States Shorebird Conservation Plan, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, the Partners In Flight Conservation Plans, and the international obligations contained in the migratory bird treaties and conventions and other agreements with Canada, Mexico, and other countries."

Big Branch Marsh NWR is located in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana, with an AAB of 24,000 acres. The Refuge currently comprises 19,463 acres of a variety of habitats, including freshwater and brackish marsh, bald cypress-tupelo forest, bayous, hardwood forest hammocks, and pine savannah (USFWS 2007).

Black Bayou Lake NWR

Black Bayou Lake NWR was established in 1997 to protect the habitats surrounding Black Bayou Lake under the following authority:

Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, 16 U.S.C. § 3901(b): "It is the purpose of this chapter to promote, in concert with other Federal and State statutes and programs, the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions with Canada, Mexico, Japan, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and with various countries in the Western Hemisphere by:

(1) intensifying cooperative efforts among private interests and local, State, and Federal governments for the management and conservation of wetlands; and

(2) intensifying efforts to protect the wetlands of the Nation through acquisition in fee, easements or other interests and methods by local, State, and Federal governments and the private sector."

Black Bayou Lake NWR is located in Ouachita Parish, Louisiana, and comprises 5,267 acres with approximately 1,500 acres of Black Bayou Lake owned by the City of Monroe. FWS has a 99-year free lease on the lake and some of its surrounding land, constituting a total of 1,620 acres. The Refuge contains a variety of habitats, including upland pine forest, bottomland hardwoods, bald cypress-tupelo swamp, freshwater marsh, and open water (USFWS 2010).

D'Arbonne NWR

D'Arbonne NWR was established in 1975 to protect bottomland hardwood forest and provide wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl under the following authority:

Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, 16 U.S.C. § 664: "Such areas as are made available to the Secretary of the Interior for the purposes of this Act, pursuant to sections 661 and 663 of this title or pursuant to any other authorization, shall be administered by him directly or in accordance with cooperative agreements entered into pursuant to the provisions of section 661 of this title and in accordance with such rules and regulations for the conservation, maintenance, and management of wildlife, resources thereof, and its habitat thereon, as may be adopted by the Secretary in accordance with general plans approved jointly by the Secretary of the Interior and the head of the department or agency exercising primary administration of such areas: Provided, That such rules and regulations shall not be inconsistent with the laws for the protection of fish and game of the States in which such area is situated: Provided, further, That lands having value to the National Migratory Bird Management Program may, pursuant to general plans, be made available without cost directly to the State agency having control over wildlife resources, if it is jointly determined by the Secretary of the Interior and such State agency that this would be in the public interest: And provided further, That the Secretary of the Interior shall have the right to assume the ".

D'Arbonne NWR is located in Ouachita and Union Parishes, Louisiana, and comprises 17,638 acres with all lands within the established AAB acquired. The Refuge contains a variety of habitats, including bottomland hardwoods, bald cypress-tupelo swamp, shrub swamp, open water, and upland forests (USFWS 2006).

Delta NWR

Delta NWR was established in 1935 to provide sanctuary and crucial wintering habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds under the following authorities:

Migratory Bird Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. §715d: "The Secretary of the Interior may:

(1) purchase or rent such areas or interests therein as have been approved for purchase or rental by the Commission at the price or prices fixed by the Commission; and

(2) acquire, by gift or devise, any area or interests therein; which he determines to be suitable for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.

The Secretary may pay, when deemed necessary by him and from moneys authorized to be appropriated for the purposes of this subchapter (A) the purchase or rental price of any such area or interest therein, and (B) the expenses incident to the location, examination, survey, and acquisition of title (including options) of any such area or interest therein. No lands acquired, held, or used by the United States for military purposes shall be subject to any provisions of this subchapter."

Executive Order 7229, dated November 19, 1935: "…as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife".

Executive Order 7383, dated June 5, 1936: "for the establishment of a quarantine station, is primarily under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department, and its reservation as a migratory waterfowl refuge is subject to the use thereof by the said Department for quarantine purposes; and the enforcement of law, regulations, and uses thereof by the Department of Agriculture shall be without interference with any existing or future uses or regulations of the Treasury Department.".

Executive Order 7538, dated January 19, 1937: " The above-described lands are under the primary jurisdiction of the War Department, and their reservation for waterfowl-refuge purposes is subject to use by the War Department in connection with the improvement of navigation in the Mississippi River and the uses thereof, and the administration of the area for wildlife conservation purposes by the Department of Agriculture shall be without interference with any existing or future uses or regulations of the War Department."

Delta NWR is located in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, and comprises 50,401 acres, with all lands within the established AAB. The Refuge contains marsh, shallow ponds, mud flats, and open water habitat. The marshes and ponds range from fresh, where influenced by the Mississippi River, to brackish closer to the shoreline with the Gulf and Breton Sound (USFWS 2008a).

Tensas River NWR

Tensas River NWR was established in 1980 to protect bottomland hardwood forests in the Mississippi Delta under the following authorities:

Public Law 96-285 on June 28, 1980: h SEC. 4. (a) IN GENERAL: The Secretary shall administer all lands and waters, and interests therein, acquired under this Act in accordance with the provisions of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. §668dd-668ee) to conserve the diversity of fish and wildlife and their habitat within the refuge; except that the Secretary may utilize such additional statutory authority as may be available to him for

the conservation and development of wildlife and natural resources, the development of outdoor recreation opportunities, and interpretative education, as he deems appropriate to carry out the purposes of the refuge. The Secretary shall give special consideration to the management of the timber on the refuge to insure continued commercial production and harvest compatible with the purposes for which the refuge is established and the needs of fish and wildlife which depend upon a dynamic and diversified hardwood forest.

(b) FLOOD CONTROL: The Secretary shall administer the refuge as part of an overall Federal management plan for the use of water and related land resources for the area. This Act shall not preclude the project, authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1944, as amended, in 58 Stat. 887. such modified configuration as may be determined by the Secretary of the Army, in consultation with the Secretary. The Secretary shall assist the Secretary of the Army in this flood control project, including the provision of all lands and rights-of-ways necessary for project construction and maintenance within the refuge area as determined by the Secretary of the Army, in consultation with the Secretary. The establishment of the refuge shall not preclude any other public or private works, determined to be in the public interest, to relieve flooding along or adjacent to the Tensas River. In addition, the Secretary of the Interior shall take such steps as may be required for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources including, but not limited to, research, development of existing facilities, and acquisition by purchase or exchange of land and water, or interests therein" (16 U.S.C. §742f(a)(4)).

"Transfer of inventory lands**:** (a) In general Subject to subsection (b), the Secretary may transfer to any Federal or State agency, for conservation purposes any real property, or interest therein, administered by the Secretary under this Act" (7 U.S.C. 2002, Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act); and

"Implementation of conservation program; authorization of Secretary and Secretary of Agriculture. The Secretary, and the Secretary of Agriculture with respect to the National Forest System, shall establish and implement a program to conserve fish, wildlife, and plants, including those which are listed as endangered species or threatened species pursuant to section 1533 of this title. To carry out such a program, the appropriate Secretary:

(1) shall utilize the land acquisition and other authority under the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended [16 U.S.C. 742a et seq.], the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, as amended [16 U.S.C. 661 et seq.], and the Migratory Bird Conservation Act [16 U.S.C. 715 et seq.], as appropriate; and

(2) is authorized to acquire by purchase, donation, or otherwise, lands, waters, or interest therein, and such authority shall be in addition to any other land acquisition authority vested in him" (16 U.S.C. §1534a(1-2), Endangered Species Act of 1973).

Tensas River NWR is located in Franklin, Madison, and Tensas Parishes, Louisiana, with an AAB of 95,725 acres. The Refuge currently comprises 77,849 acres of bottomland hardwood forests, hardwood reforestation areas, moist-soil, and open field-cropland (USFWS 2009b).

Upper Ouachita NWR

Upper Ouachita NWR was established in 1978 to conserve bottomland hardwood and upland forest habitats in the Lower Mississippi River Ecosystem under the following authorities:

Migratory Bird Conservation Act, 16 § U.S.C. 715d: "The Secretary of the Interior may - (2) acquire, by gift or devise, any area or interests therein; which he determines to be suitable for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds. The Secretary may pay, when deemed necessary by him and from moneys authorized to be appropriated for the purposes of this subchapter (A) the purchase or rental price of any such area or interest therein, and (B) the expenses incident to the location, examination, survey, and acquisition of title (including options) of any such area or interest therein. No lands acquired, held, or used by the United States for military purposes shall be subject to any provisions of this subchapter."

Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, 16 U.S.C. § 3901 (b): ""It is the purpose of this chapter to promote, in concert with other Federal and State statutes and programs, the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions with Canada, Mexico, Japan, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and with various countries in the Western Hemisphere by:

(1) intensifying cooperative efforts among private interests and local, State, and Federal governments for the management and conservation of wetlands; and
(2) intensifying efforts to protect the wetlands of the Nation through acquisition in fee, easements or other interests and methods by local, State, and Federal governments and the private sector."

Upper Ouachita NWR is located in Morehouse and Union Parishes, Louisiana, with an AAB of 82,837 acres. The refuge currently comprises 54,561 acres of bottomland hardwoods, bald cypress swamp, shrub swamp, riparian, and upland pine/hardwoods (USFWS 2008b).

Figure 1. Louisiana NWRs to Open Recreational Alligator Hunting.



The mission of the NWRS, as outlined by the NWRSAA, as amended by the NWRSIA (16 U.S.C. § 668dd(5)(a)(2)) 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 policy of the U.S. is that each refuge shall be managed to fulfill the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, as well as the specific purposes for which each refuge was established (16 U.S.C. § 668dd(a)(3)(A)). The Secretary of the Department of the Interior is further directed to:

> **(A)** provide for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats within the System;
> **(B)** ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the System are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans;
> **(D)** ensure that the mission of the System described in paragraph (2) and the purposes of each refuge are carried out, except that if a conflict exists between the purposes of a refuge and the mission of the System, the conflict shall be resolved in a manner that first protects the purposes of the refuge, and, to the extent practicable, that also achieves the mission of the System;
> **(E)** 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 System are located;
> **(H)** recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority general public uses of the System through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife;
>
> **(I)** ensure that opportunities are provided within the System for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses;
>
> **(J)** ensure that priority general public uses of the System receive enhanced consideration over other general public uses in planning and management within the System;
>
> **(K)** provide increased opportunities for families to experience compatible wildlife-dependent recreation, particularly opportunities for parents and their children to safely engage in traditional outdoor activities, such as fishing and hunting; and
>
> **(N)** monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge (16 U.S.C. § 668dd(a)(4).

Therefore, it is a priority of FWS 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 NWRS.

FWS is proposing to open recreational alligator hunting on seven NWRs in Louisiana. Only Louisiana residents aged 16 years and older may apply for the hunt, with a limited number of hunters and alligator tags allotted to each Refuge, during the LDWF-determined season dates. Method of take would be restricted to hook and line or snatch hook (i.e., anchored, tethered, or originating from immovable eligible property).

This Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Draft Hunt Plan Amendment is tiered from the refuges' Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP [USFWS 2006, 2007, 2008*a*, 2008*b*, 2009*a*, 2009*b,* 2010]) and is an amendment to the Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR Hunt Plan (USFWS 2021a), Big Branch Marsh NWR Hunt Plan (USFWS 2021b), Black Bayou Lake NWR Sport Hunting Plan (USFWS 2015), D'Arbonne NWR Hunting and Sport Fishing Plan (USFWS 2026), Delta National Wildlife Refuge Hunting Plan (USFWS 2021c), Tensas River NWR Hunt Plan (USFWS 2021d), and Upper Ouachita NWR Hunting and Sport Fishing Plan (USFWS 2026). It supports public recreation, serves as a wildlife management tool to maintain ecological integrity, and enhances environmental education related to the consumptive use of natural resources. Recreational alligator hunting, as described here and analyzed in the Environmental Assessment (EA; Appendix A), aligns with refuges' CCP goals and is expected to support management objectives. Restrictions on equipment, timing, and location are designed to minimize conflicts with nonconsumptive users and with Refuge education and interpretation programs identified in the refuges' CCPs. The associated draft hunting compatibility determinations are included in Appendix B. Following approval these documents would amend the existing Hunt Plans and hunting compatibility determinations and introduce recreational alligator hunting in the CCPs.

II. Statement of Objectives

Hunting is a documented, compatible goal within each refuge's comprehensive conservation plan (USFWS 2006, 2007, 2008*a*, 2008*b*, 2009*a*, 2009*b,* 2010). These goals reflect FWS's commitment to achieve the mandates of the NWRSIA, the mission of the NWRS, and the refuges' purposes and visions. The proposed recreational alligator hunting objectives on Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges are to provide compatible wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, as mandated by and according to FWS law and policy; provide additional hunting opportunities and greater regulation alignment with the states, as mandated by Secretarial Orders 3347 and 3356; and increase public engagement in wildlife management. Applicable CCP goals with created objectives and strategies for recreational alligator hunting are listed below.

Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR

Goal 3: Provide public use opportunities consistent with the Refuge System mission that capitalize on the unique urban proximity of Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR.

*Objective***:** Provide recreational alligator hunting outside the levee system, or areas determined suitable for alligator hunting by Refuge Management, during the State hunting season that supports population management.
*Strategy***:** Provide recreational alligator hunting opportunities based on the results of population dynamics surveys conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Big Branch Marsh NWR

Goal 3: Provide opportunities for environmental education, interpretation, and wildlife-dependent recreation in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.
Objective: Provide recreational alligator hunting on the entire Refuge during the State hunting season that supports population management except within hunt closure areas on Boy Scout Road, Lemieux Road, within 500 feet of either side of Lake Road centerline, and other areas as determined by Refuge Management.
Strategy: Provide recreational alligator hunting opportunities based on the results of population dynamics surveys conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Harvest quotas will be evaluated every 2-3 years and adjustments made based on population estimates and hunter success rates.

Black Bayou Lake NWR

Goal D. Visitor Services: Provide wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities with an emphasis on environmental education and interpretation.
Objective: Provide recreational alligator hunting on Refuge lands that align with current management direction and promotes sustainable harvests that properly manage alligator populations across Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Alligator hunting is expected to align with the State recreational alligator hunting season on open areas of Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge.
Strategy: Provide alligator hunting on open refuge lands of Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge, while basing harvest levels on the results of population dynamics surveys conducted by the Refuge and Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Harvest quotas will be evaluated every 2-3 years and adjustments made based on population estimates and hunter success rates.

D'Arbonne NWR

Public Use and Visitor Services Goal: Provide quality wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities for persons of all abilities to support the Refuge System, enjoy the outdoors in northern Louisiana and all its associated fish, wildlife, and plants, and apply ethical outdoor behavior in a safe and compatible manner.
Objective: Provide recreational alligator hunting on Refuge lands that align with current management direction and promotes sustainable harvests that properly manage alligator populations across D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge. Alligator hunting is expected to align

with the State recreational alligator hunting season on open areas of D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge.
Strategy: Provide alligator hunting on open refuge lands of D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge, while basing harvest levels on the results of population dynamics surveys conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Harvest quotas will be evaluated every 2-3 years and adjustments made based on population estimates and hunter success rates.

Delta NWR

Goal 3: Provide the public with quality recreation activities, environmental education and interpretation, and outreach opportunities that lead to enjoyment and greater understanding of and appreciation for the fish, wildlife, cultural resources, and natural systems of the Mississippi River delta system.
Objective: Provide recreational alligator hunting on the entire Refuge, or areas determined suitable for alligator hunting by Refuge Management, during the State hunting season that supports population management.
Strategy: Provide recreational alligator hunting opportunities based on the results of population dynamics surveys conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Harvest quotas will be evaluated every 2-3 years and adjustments made based on population estimates and hunter success rates.

Tensas River NWR

Goal D: Develop and implement a quality, compatible wildlife-dependent public use program that leads to a greater understanding and appreciation of the natural resources found in the Tensas River Basin.
Objective: Provide recreational alligator hunting on Refuge lands that align with current management direction and promotes sustainable harvests that properly manage alligator populations across Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge. Alligator hunting is expected to align with the State recreational alligator hunting season on open areas of Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge.
Strategy: Provide alligator hunting on open refuge lands of Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge, while basing harvest levels on the results of population dynamics surveys conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Harvest quotas will be evaluated every 2-3 years and adjustments made based on population estimates and hunter success rates.

Upper Ouachita NWR

Goal E: Provide wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities where compatible and promote an appreciation of fish and wildlife resources in the Lower Mississippi River Ecosystem.
Objective: Provide recreational alligator hunting on Refuge lands that align with current management direction and promotes sustainable harvests that properly manage alligator populations across Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge. Alligator hunting is expected to align with the State recreational alligator hunting season on open areas of Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge.

Strategy: Provide alligator hunting on open refuge lands of Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge, while basing harvest levels on the results of population dynamics surveys conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Harvest levels will be evaluated every 2-3 years and adjustments made based on population estimates and hunter success rates.

The purpose of the proposed action is to more closely align the refuges' hunting programs with the Department of the Interior's Secretarial Order 3356, which directs the FWS to enhance and expand public access to lands and waters on NWRs for hunting, fishing, recreational shooting, and other forms of outdoor recreation. Hunting is also one of the priority public uses outlined in the NWRS Improvement Act of 1997. FWS supports and encourages priority uses, when they are appropriate and compatible, on NWR lands. Hunting would also promote the stewardship of our natural resources and increase the public's appreciation and support for the refuges. Hunting is a traditional recreational use of renewable natural resources that is deeply rooted in America's heritage as well as an important wildlife management tool.

III. Description of Hunting Program

Recreational alligator hunting would be permitted in accordance with Federal regulations governing public use on NWRs as set forth in the 50 CFR 32 B. All other species open for hunting on the refuge are allowable under state regulations, subject to the special conditions as published annually in CFR and outlined in annual refuge-specific hunting brochures which are available to the public. Recreational alligator hunting season dates, methods of take, and tag allotment would follow LDWF guidelines with refuge-specific alterations proposed to ensure safe, high-quality recreation on refuges. Refuge hunt brochures will be annually updated to reflect more specific information and restrictions. FWS will coordinate annually with LDWF to ensure effective resource management and enhance visitor safety. This proposed hunt has been analyzed by FWS and the Environmental Assessment is provided in Appendix A.

A. Areas to be Opened to Hunting

The State of Louisiana has categorized the state into 8 geographic zones, A through H, for the purposes of managing recreational alligator hunting (Figure 2). Each zone has a designated quota based on tag allocation rate by acres of habitat type (e.g., swamp, fresh marsh, brackish marsh, intermediate marsh) open to hunting. The seven refuges proposed for opening to recreational alligator hunt in the plan are located in Zones B and H. Refuge staff determined area and subsequent acres of suitable habitat to be open to recreational alligator hunting per refuge.

Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge

Recreational alligator hunting will occur outside the hurricane protection levee system, which comprises 11,112 acres of emergent marsh, tidally influenced with natural levee ridges, spoil banks and shallow open water bodies (Figure 3). These habitats allow for good biological productivity and high species diversity of both terrestrial and aquatic organisms. The AAB of the refuge is 34,466 acres. Future acquisitions within the AAB may be opened to recreational

alligator hunting where alligator habitat exists, therefore this analysis considers those areas as well for a potential total recreational alligator hunting area of 17,921 acres.

Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge

Recreational alligator hunting will occur across 18,777 acres of brackish marsh and forested wetland habitats (Figure 4). These acres allow for good biological productivity and high species diversity of both terrestrial and aquatic organisms. The AAB of the refuge is 28,150 acres. Future acquisitions within the AAB may be opened to recreational alligator hunting where alligator habitat exists, therefore this analysis considers those areas as well for a potential total recreational alligator hunting area of 27,464 acres.

Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Recreational alligator hunting will occur across a maximum of 1,400 acres of open water and flooded cypress and tupelo habitats (Figure 5). The Refuge AAB is 6,688 acres. The Refuge AAB has remaining unacquired acres, however those areas do not contain alligator habitat and therefore will not be opened to this opportunity should they be acquired.

D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge

Recreational alligator hunting will occur across 14,711 acres of open water, flooded bald cypress and tupelo, swamp privet and buttonbush thickets, and flooded bottomland hardwood forest habitats (Figure 6). The Refuge has no remaining unacquired acres within the AAB.

Delta National Wildlife Refuge

Recreational alligator hunting will occur across 50,399 acres divided into Zones A, B, and C of fresh, intermediate, and brackish marsh and open water habitats (Figure 7). The Refuge has no remaining unacquired acres within the AAB.

Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge

Recreational alligator hunting will occur on a total of 75,112 acres of bottomland hardwood forests, oxbow lakes, and cypress-tupelo swamp habitats (Figure 8). The AAB of Tensas River NWR is 111,628 acres. Future acquisitions within the AAB may be opened to recreational alligator hunting where alligator habitat exists for a potential total recreational alligator hunting area of 108,891 acres.

Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge

Recreational alligator hunting will occur across 43,759 acres of open water, flooded bald cypress brakes, swamp privet and buttonbush thickets, and bottomland hardwood forest habitats (Figure 9). Upper Ouachita NWR AAB is 83,585 acres. Future acquisitions within this AAB may be opened to recreational alligator hunting where alligator habitat exists for a potential total recreational alligator hunting area of 72,783 acres.

Figure 2. Louisiana Recreational Alligator Hunt Zones and Tag Allotment.

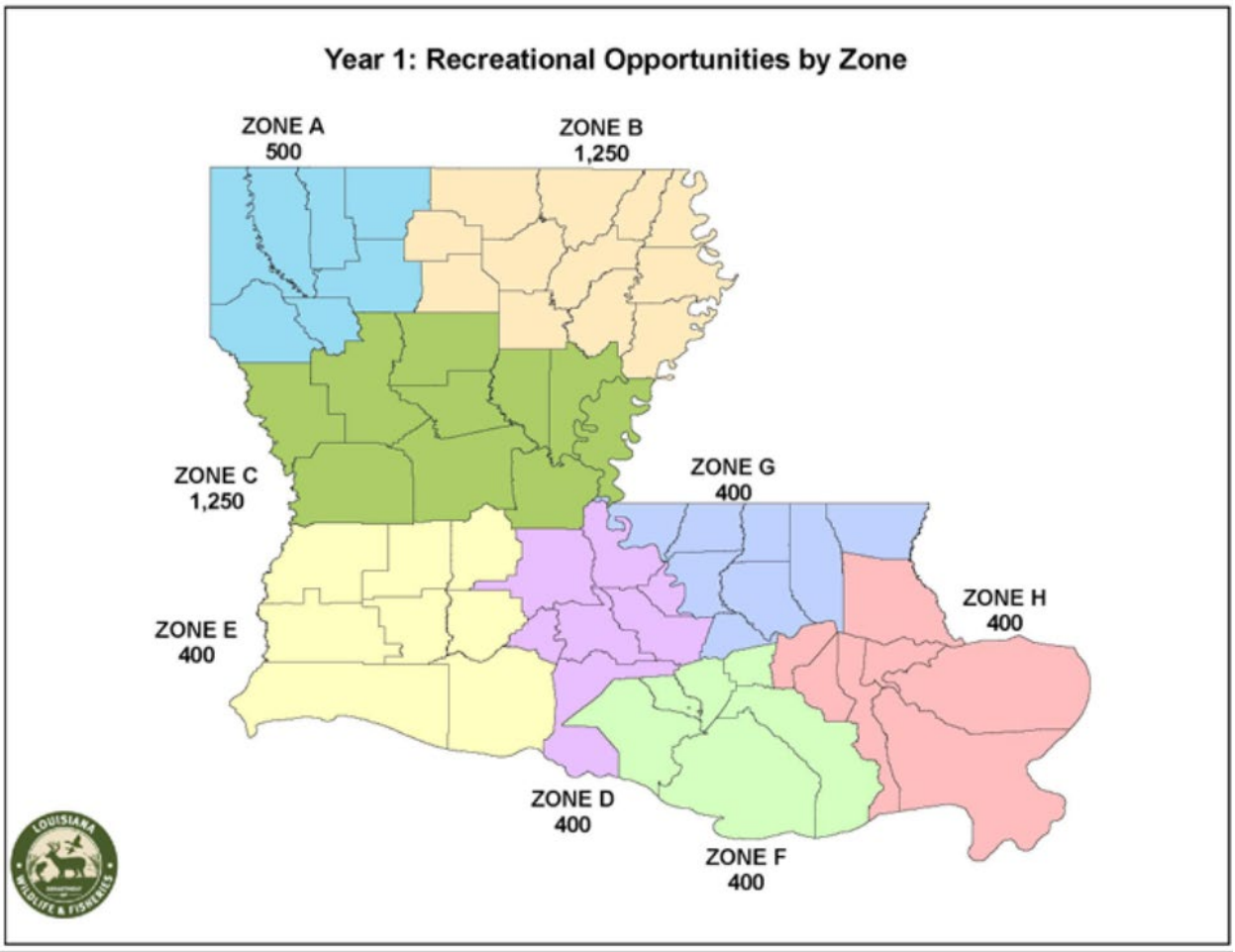


Figure 3. Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR Proposed Recreational Alligator Hunt Area.

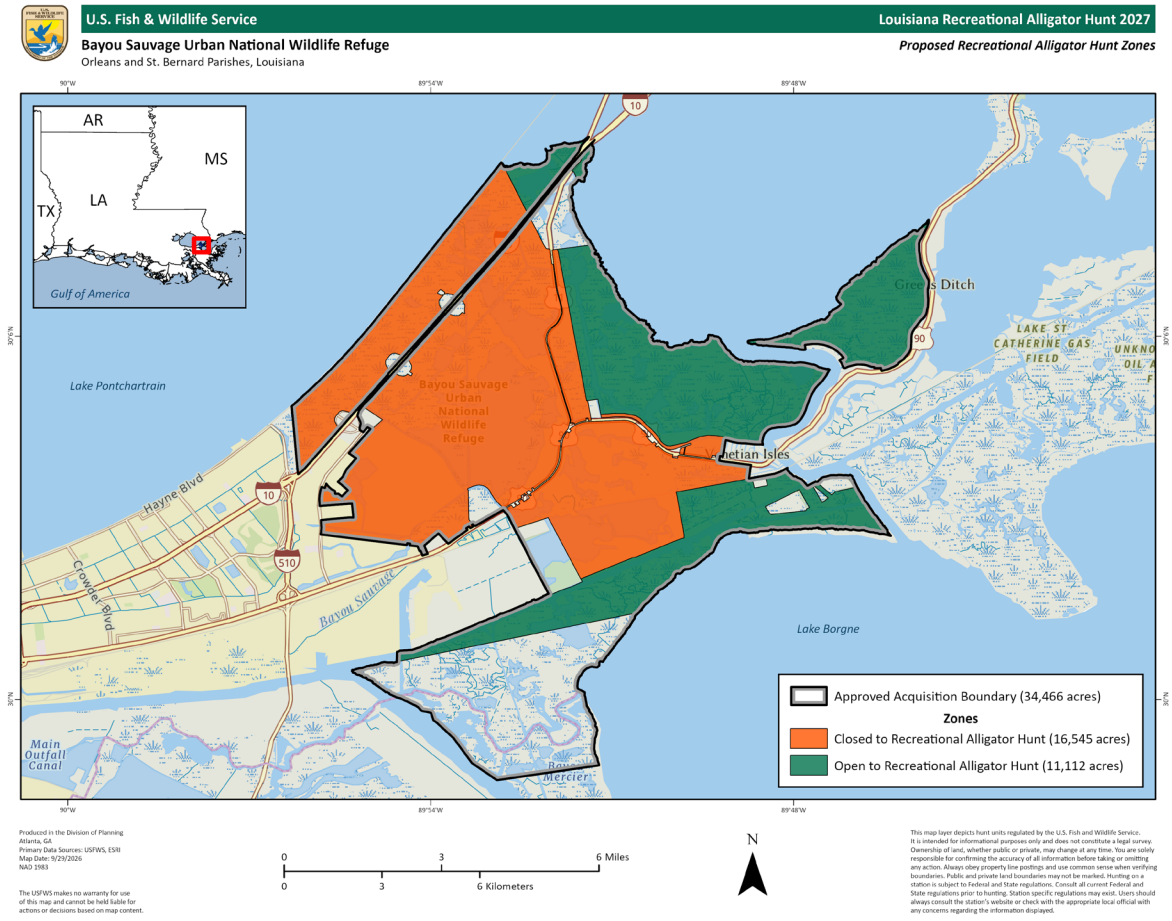


Figure 4. Big Branch Marsh NWR Proposed Recreational Alligator Hunt Area.

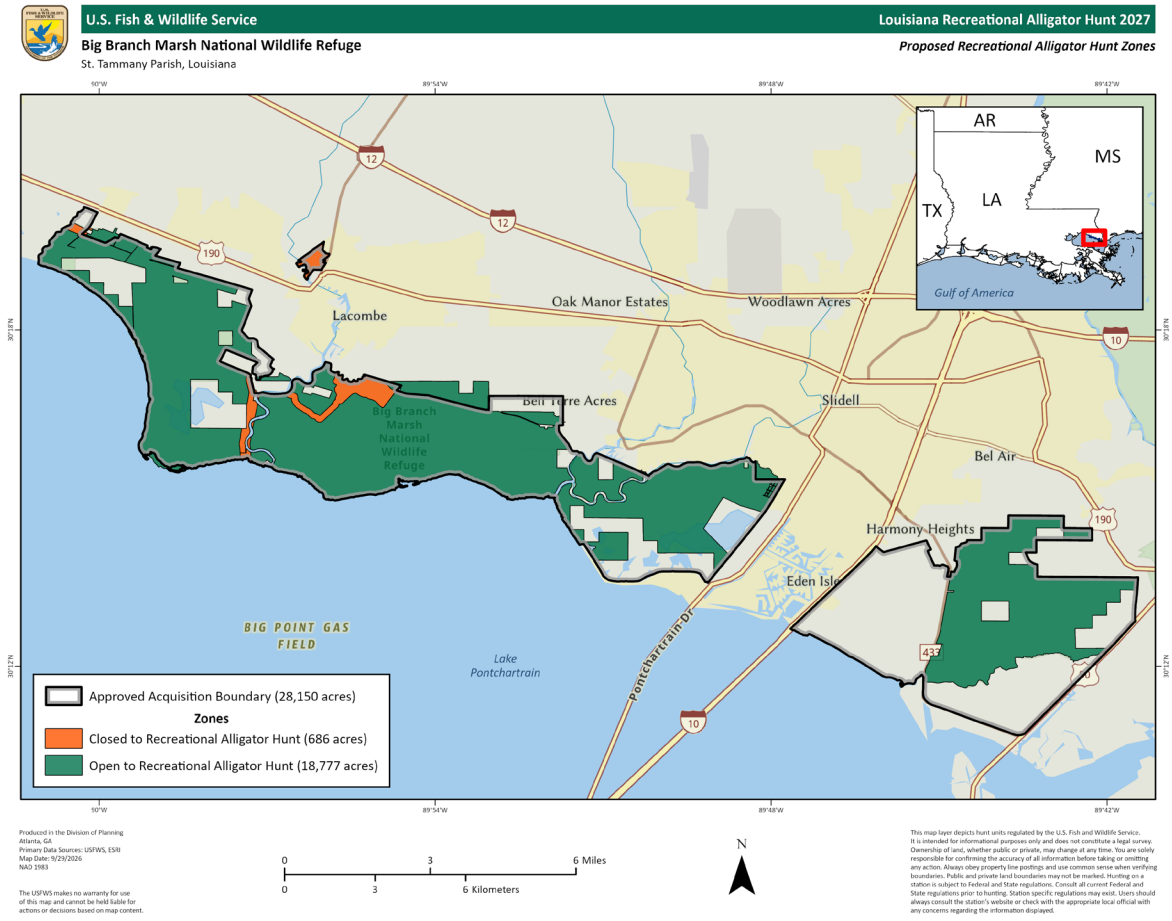


Figure 5. Black Bayou Lake NWR Proposed Recreational Alligator Hunt Area.

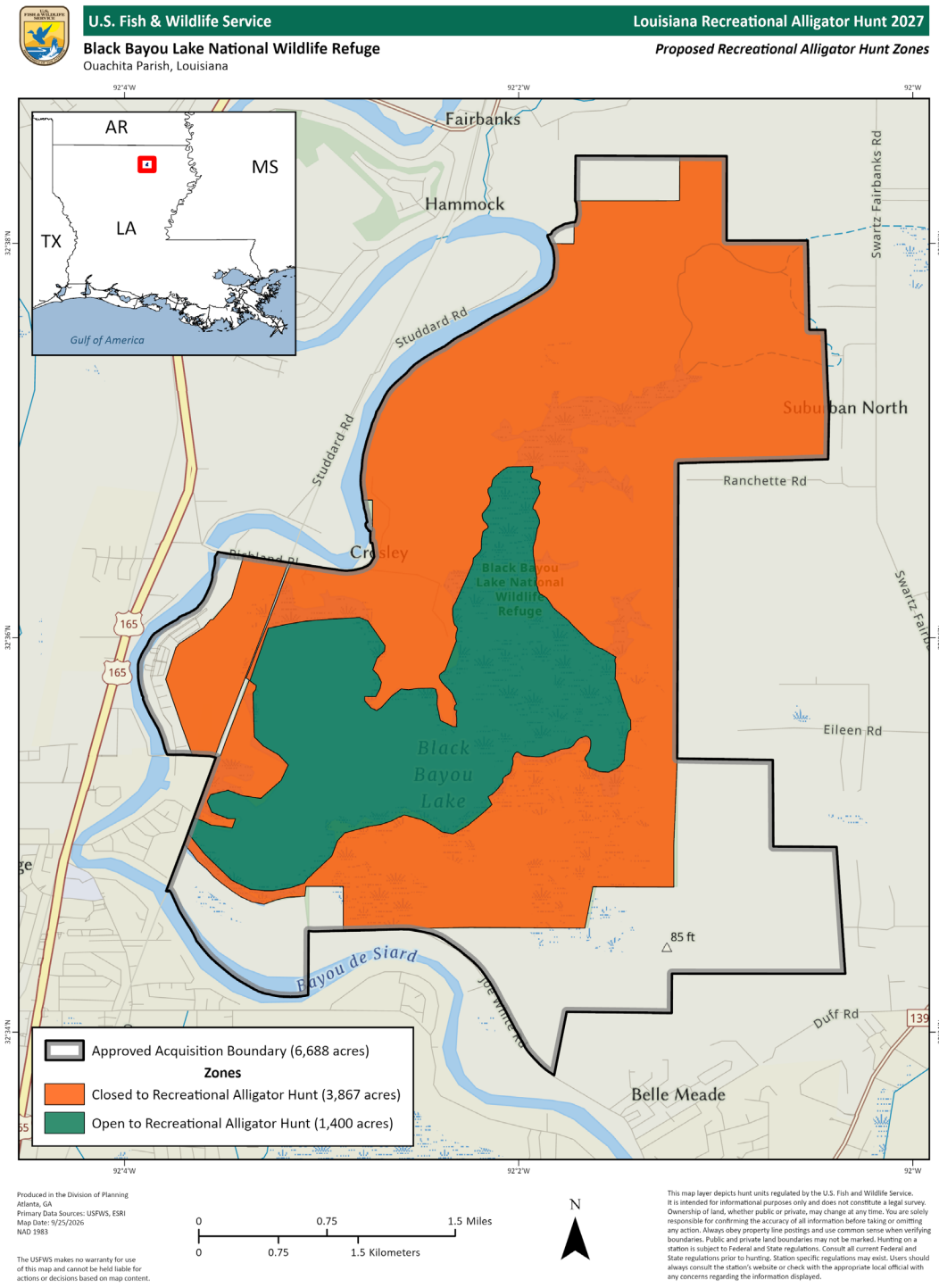


Figure 6. D’Arbonne NWR Proposed Recreational Alligator Hunt Area.

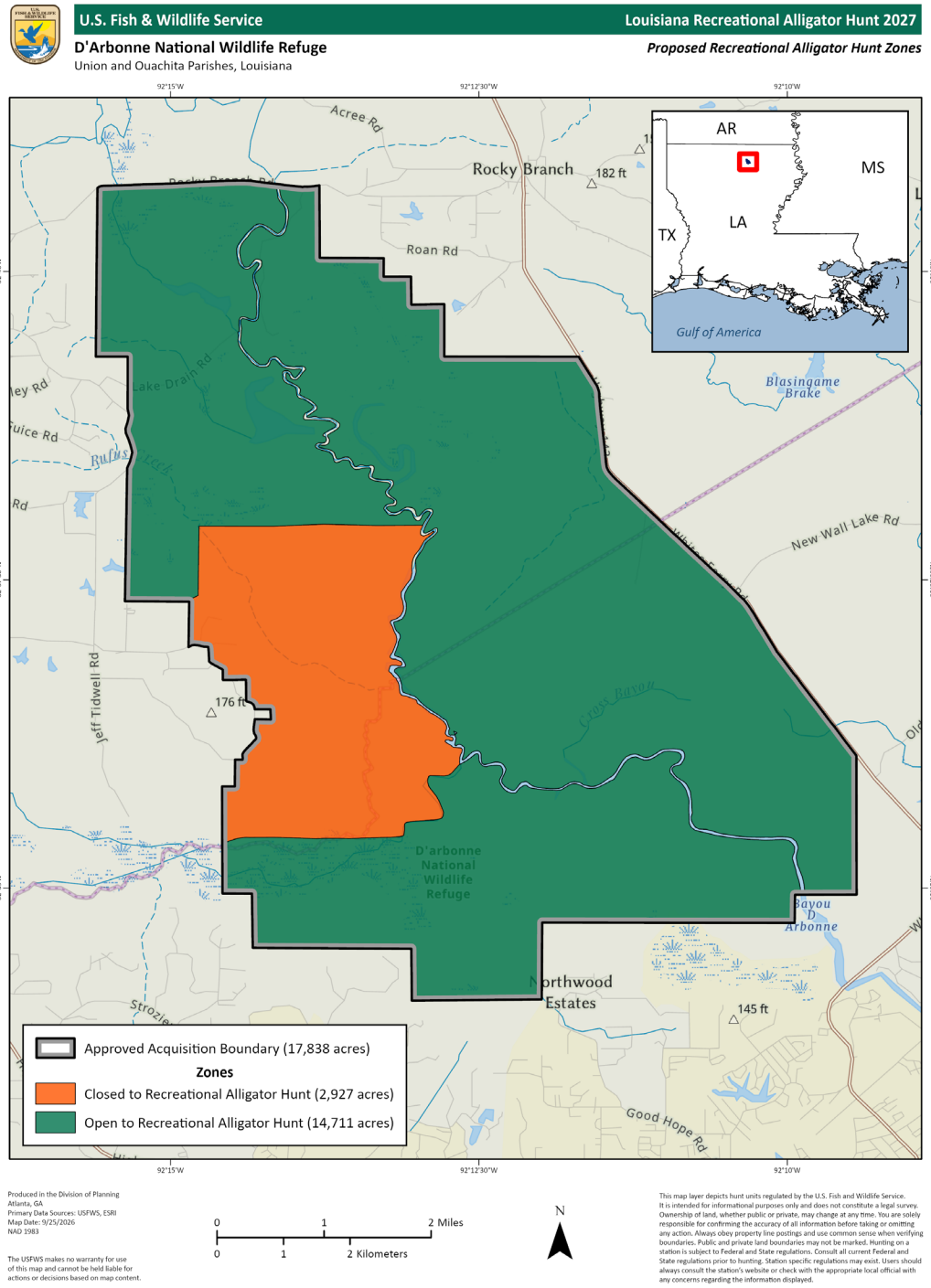


Figure 7. Delta NWR Proposed Recreational Alligator Hunt Area.

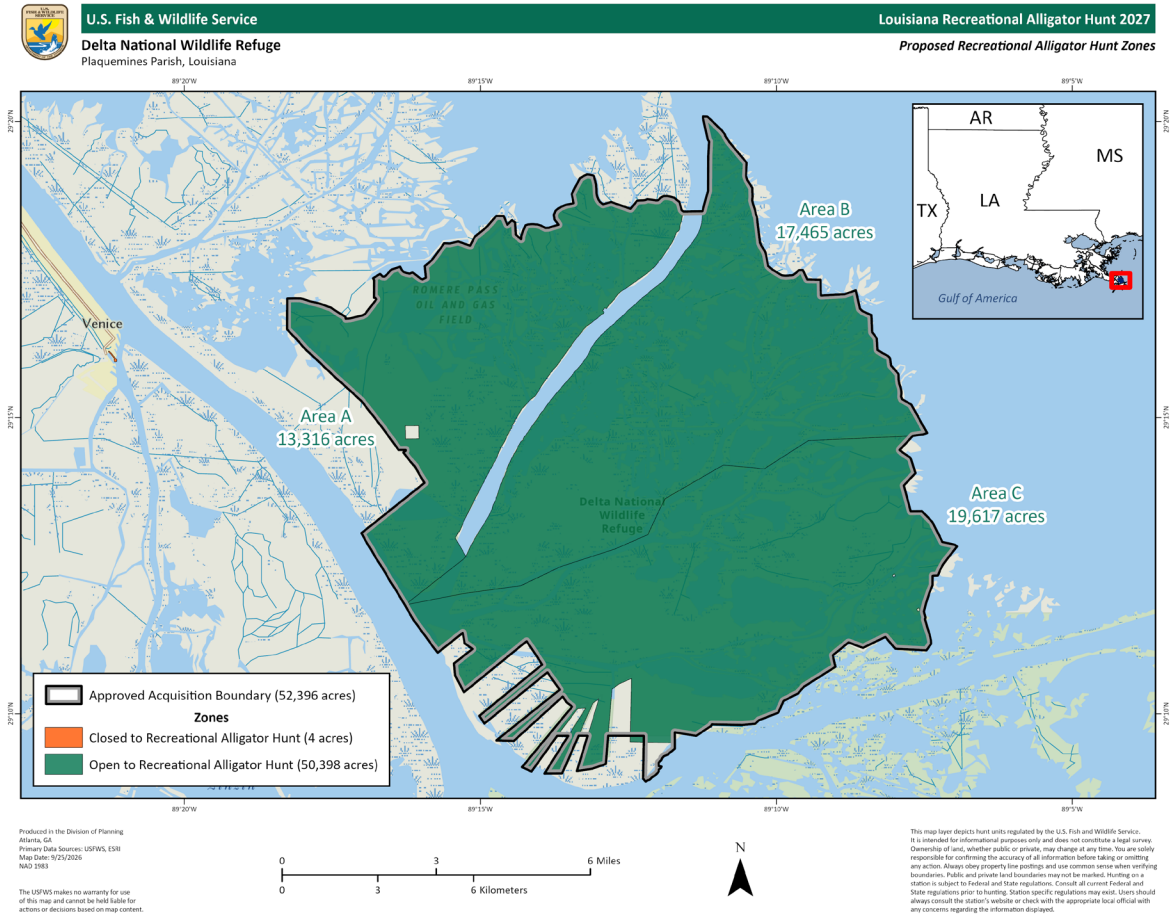


Figure 8. Tensas River NWR Proposed Recreational Alligator Hunt Area.

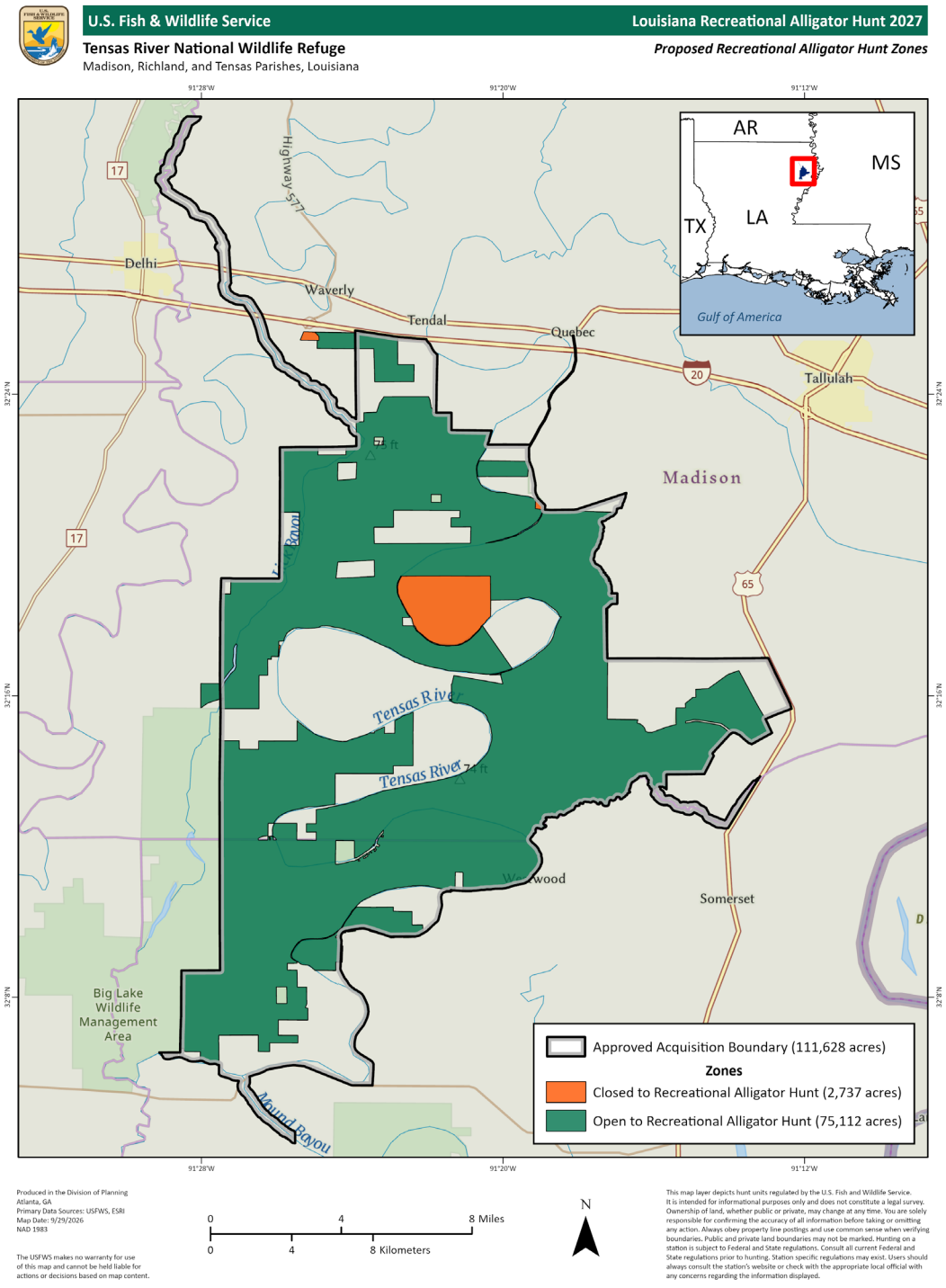
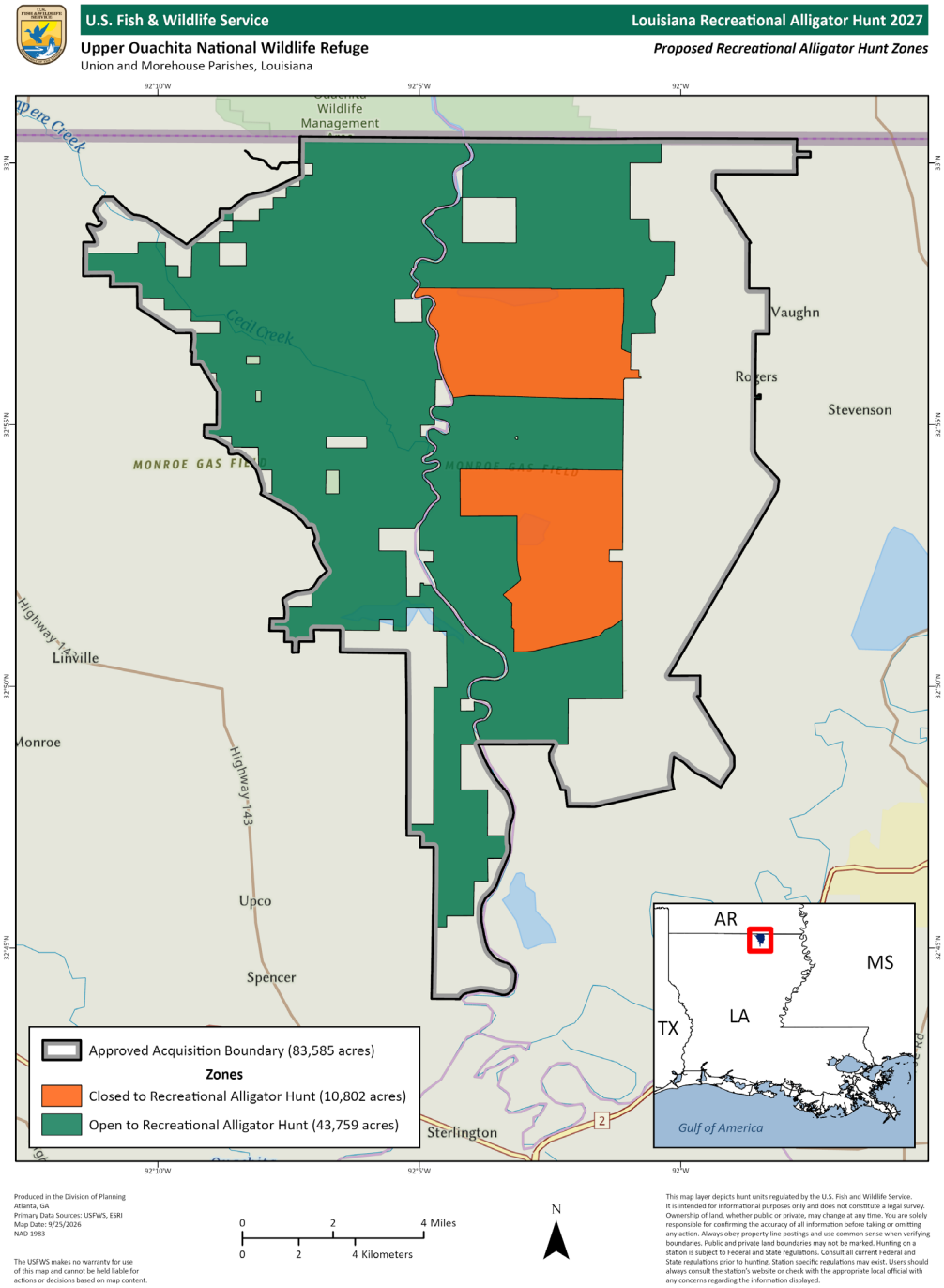


Figure 9. Upper Ouachita NWR Proposed Recreational Alligator Hunt Area.



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

This hunt plan amendment is specific to recreational alligator hunting on seven Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges and is a collaborative effort between LDWF and the FWS. The recreational alligator hunting season is determined by LDWF with access to refuge-specific areas determined by refuge staff. Hunting access on each refuge is as follows:

Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR
Hunters may access refuge hunting areas from 4:00 am until 2 hours after legal sunset, except for permitted nighttime activities. Primary access to the recreational alligator hunting areas is by boat. Boat ramps along with parking lots and public roads are available for this use. Hunting season, areas, and access points will be outlined in the annual Public Use Regulations brochure.

Big Branch Marsh NWR
Hunters may access refuge hunting areas from legal sunrise until 2 hours after legal sunset, except for permitted nighttime activities. Primary access to the recreational alligator hunting areas is by boat. Two boat ramps are available on the refuge along with many parking lots and public roads. Hunting season, areas, and access points will be outlined in the annual Public Use Regulations brochure.

Black Bayou Lake NWR
Hunters may access refuge hunting areas from 4:00 am until 1 hour after legal sunset, except for permitted nighttime activities. The only access to the recreational alligator hunting areas is by boat. One boat ramp exists on the refuge and has adequate parking. Hunting season, areas, and access points will be outlined in the annual Public Use Regulations brochure.

D'Arbonne NWR
Hunters may access refuge hunting areas from 4:00 am until 2 hours after legal sunset, except for permitted nighttime activities. Primary access to the refuge is by vehicle or boat. Three boat ramps exist on the refuge along with many parking lots and public roads. Hunting season, areas, and access points will be outlined in the annual Public Use Regulations brochure.

Delta NWR
Hunters may access refuge hunting areas from 4:00 am until 2 hours after legal sunset, except for permitted nighttime activities. Access for the recreational alligator hunting areas is by boat only. No boat ramps or parking lots exist on the refuge. Hunting season, areas, and access points will be outlined in the annual Public Use Regulations brochure.

Tensas River NWR
Hunters may access refuge hunting areas from 4 am until 2 hours after legal sunset, except for permitted nighttime activities. Primary access to the recreational alligator hunting areas is by boat. Three boat ramps exist on the refuge along with many parking lots and public roads.

Hunting season, areas, and access points will be outlined in the annual Public Use Regulations brochure.

Upper Ouachita NWR

Hunters may access refuge hunting areas from 4:00 am until 2 hours after legal sunset, except for permitted nighttime activities. Primary access to the refuge is by vehicle, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and/or boat. Three boat ramps exist on the refuge along with many parking lots and public roads. Hunting season, areas, and access points will be outlined in the annual Public Use Regulations brochure.

C. Hunter Permit Requirements

Applicants must be Louisiana residents, age 16 and older, who are hunter education certified. Selected applicants will receive recreational hide tags for refuge-specific hunts and must possess a valid general Louisiana hunting license, a recreational alligator hunting license, and email notification from LDWF of being successfully drawn when hunting. Selected applicants will also receive a refuge-specific Public Use Regulations brochure which will require signature and be used to provide information on all refuge-specific regulations applicable to recreational alligator hunting and other refuge regulations. Applicants selected to hunt on Tensas River NWR will be required to possess an Annual Public Use Permit. A nonresident may participate in a recreational alligator hunt only while in the physical presence of the lottery-winning recreational alligator hunter to whom the recreational hide tag(s) being used were issued and shall possess a valid nonresident basic hunting license (or equivalent privilege) and a nonresident recreational alligator hunting license.

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

Louisiana NWR staff will continue to collaborate with LDWF to ensure safe and enjoyable recreational hunting opportunities. Hunter education, and associated ethics and responsibilities, help ensure hunters continue to use good judgment related to fair chase. Refuge hunting opportunities are designed to align with State seasons, limits, and legal weapons. This hunt will be conducted in coordination with LDWF to ensure safe and enjoyable hunting opportunities. Hunter participation and harvest data will be shared annually. LDWF provided input and reviewed the proposed hunt plan and will be notified of proposed changes to the refuges' hunt programs and invited to review draft changes and provide input.

E. Law Enforcement

Enforcement of refuge violations normally associated with management of NWRs is the responsibility of commissioned Federal Wildlife Officers. Other officers include Special Agents, State game wardens, local police department, and local Sheriff's office who often assist the FWS's full-time federal wildlife officers.

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

- Refuge and hunt area boundaries will be clearly posted;
- Successful applicants will receive confirmation, tags, and refuge-specific Public Use Regulations brochures to cover alligator-specific hunting regulations from LDWF;
- FWS Officers and/or LDWF law enforcement staff will patrol and enforce regulations during hunts; and
- Information will be made available at Refuge offices, visitor centers, and refuge websites.

In addition, applicable reporting requirements administered by LDWF require:

- Recreational hide tag must be attached in the alligator's tail and locked with the tag's locking device immediately upon harvest. Factory-defective tags must be reported to the department.
- Report the recreational hide tag number, length of the alligator, date of harvest, and parish of harvest to LDWF within 72 hours of harvest. Reporting may be made to the LDWF web portal, LA Wallet, toll-free validation line, or www.louisianaOutdoors.com. Hunters who fail to validate harvested alligators will be prohibited from future participation in the recreational alligator hunting lottery.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Annual hunt administration costs include salaries, brochure printing, equipment, boundary maintenance, signs, paint, and access maintenance (e.g., roads, parking areas, trails). Total estimated cost for the installment of recreational alligator hunting on seven NWRs is $68,900 (Table 1). The majority of these costs are salary-related and considered administrative in nature. Each refuge compatibility determination provides more detail on specific costs. These costs are equivalent to approximately 1.0 full-time staff. Hunting is a priority refuge use and an important component of meeting refuge objectives and goals. Current staffing and funding are available to meet the requirements of a hunting program. It is anticipated that adequate funding would continue to be sufficient to maintain these standards set in future years.

LDWF will oversee the hunter application and selection process and issue the licenses and tags. Refuge staff will prepare and edit the refuge public use regulations brochure annually, provide annual public use brochures to selected hunters, make changes to the hunt plan and regulations as needed, prepare annual output reports, and respond to public inquiries about the hunt program. Refuge Zone Law Enforcement Officers will work closely with LDWF enforcement planning for and implementing the alligator hunt.

Table 1. Administrative Costs for Implementing Recreational Alligator Hunt.

Refuge	One-time Cost	Recurring Annual Expenses
Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR	$6,250	$6,500
Big Branch Marsh NWR	$6,250	$3,500
Black Bayou Lake NWR	$3,250	$3,900
D'Arbonne NWR	$2,500	$2,100
Delta NWR	$3,250	$1,500
Tensas River NWR	$3,000	$23,500
Upper Ouachita NWR	$2,500	$3,400
Total Costs	$27,000	$44,400
Offsetting Revenue (Boat Launch Fee at Tensas River NWR Only)		$2,500
Total Overall Costs		$68,900

IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program

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

The Louisiana statewide recreational alligator lottery may provide a maximum of 5,000 recreational alligator hunting opportunities and 10,000 recreational hide tags annually. Application of Louisiana NWRs recreational alligator hunting will be a separate option from the general statewide lottery for interested hunters to select. LDWF will oversee the online application, selection, and issue recreational hide tags to successful applicants. Successful recreational alligator lottery applicants will be issued recreational hide tags for each of their awarded alligator hunting zone lottery applications. LDWF will communicate to the refuge manager the name and contact information of successful applicants following selection. Each refuge will then provide Public Use Brochure or Annual Public Use Permit to each successful applicant with refuge specific hunting information.

B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

Refuge-specific recreational alligator hunting regulations season may be more restrictive than LDWF frameworks but not more expansive. Proposed differences would be communicated with and approved by LDWF prior to being applied. Refuge Public Use Regulations brochures will be updated annually to reflect refuge-specific information and restrictions, including seasons, quota, access, licenses, permits, and other Refuge-specific regulations. Recreational alligator hunting must be conducted in accordance with State and federal regulations to ensure

compatibility with the refuges' purposes and NWRS mission. Refuge-specific hunting regulations are provided in 50 CFR 32 B. Stipulations are detailed in the refuge alligator hunting compatibility determinations.

C. Relevant State Regulations

FWS conducts its hunting program within the framework of State and Federal regulations and, in some cases, may be more restrictive. Additionally, FWS coordinates with the State as needed to maintain regulations and programs that are consistent with the State's management programs. Applicable State regulations are:

a. No person shall take or possess alligators, except as provided in these regulations and Title 56.
b. No alligator shall be taken recreationally unless by a properly licensed recreational alligator hunter in possession of department-issued recreational hide tags, during open season, from eligible property with written evidence of land ownership or permission from the landowner.
c. Each alligator, alligator hide, or alligator part taken or possessed in violation of these regulations shall constitute a separate offense.
d. Alligators or hides of alligators harvested in Louisiana shall be tagged. Any deviation from those requirements shall be a violation and subject hides to confiscation. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Four violation as described in Title 56.
e. A recreational alligator hunter shall possess on his person one or more valid recreational hide tags issued for the season and alligator harvest zone in which hunting occurs, along with written evidence of land ownership or permission from the landowner. Possession of recreational hide tags for a single recreational alligator hunter may satisfy the requirement of another hunter(s) when they are engaged in a joint hunting operation.
f. Except as provided for in Subparagraph 5.h. below, no person shall release any alligator from any taking device for any purpose without first dispatching the alligator. After the alligator is removed from the taking device the recreational hide tag shall be properly attached immediately upon possession, and the alligator removed from the harvest area. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Four violation as described in Title 56.
g. Alligators, alligator hides, alligator meat, and alligator parts taken under a recreational hide tag shall not be sold, bartered, exchanged for anything of value, or otherwise entered into commercial channels, and shall not be commingled with alligators, hides, meat, or parts taken under a commercial harvest tag. Any person engaged in the tanning of hides, processing of alligator meat or receipt of alligator parts shall identify recreational hide tags by the tag format and color described in Paragraph 2 of this Section and shall not accept alligators, hides, meat, or parts taken under a recreational hide tag for sale or for entry into commerce. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Four violation as described in Title 56.
h. A recreational alligator hunter may give alligator parts to anyone for personal use. Any part of an alligator shall have affixed thereto the name, address, date, recreational hide

tag number, and the LDWF number of the person donating the alligator part(s). This information shall be legibly written and attached to the part(s) or to the container enclosing the part or parts. This information must remain affixed until the part(s) has been stored at the domicile of the possessor. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Three violation as described in Title 56.

i. Per R.S. 56:280, white or albino alligators are protected and therefore prohibited from take except as allowed by special permit from the department. It shall be a violation if any person intentionally takes from the wild any alligator that is white or albino by any means. Any person who unintentionally takes from the wild any alligator that is white or albino by hook and line shall immediately report its presence and location to the department. Department personnel of the Office of Wildlife will on a case-by-case basis determine the disposition of any such white or albino alligator which is unintentionally hooked. Violation of R.S. 56:280 shall subject the violator to a fine of not less than $10,000 and imprisonment for not less than 6 months or more than 12 months, or both.

j. Alligator hides or parts may be shipped out of state for personal tanning or taxidermy. The hide or parts to be shipped shall be accompanied with a possession tag containing the date of harvest, recreational hide tag number and the LDWF customer number of the alligator hunter. Alligator hides, meat or parts shall be prohibited from being shipped outside of the United States. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Three violation as described in Title 56.

k. Recreational hide tags are nontransferable. A recreational hide tag may be used only by the lottery-selected recreational alligator hunter to whom the tag was issued, and shall not be sold, assigned, transferred, gifted, loaned, bartered, or otherwise conveyed to any other person. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Four violation as described in Title 56.

l. No recreational alligator hunter shall conduct, advertise, offer, or participate in a guided alligator hunt utilizing a recreational hide tag. Alligators taken under a recreational hide tag shall not be harvested in connection with any guide service, outfitter service, or other service for which a fee, consideration, or anything of value is charged, paid, or received. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Three violation as described in Title 56.

m. Disposal of Alligator Carcass Remains. Any person who harvests an alligator under a recreational hide tag shall dispose of the alligator carcass remains in a sanitary manner by cremation, burial or other sanitary method recommended by LDWF, so as not to create a public nuisance. Disposal of Alligator Carcass remains in any public lands, rights-of-way, or waterbodies is strictly prohibited. LDWF shall provide educational materials on its website for licensed alligator hunters on approved disposal methods and best practices. Violations of this Subparagraph shall also be subject to penalties for littering, including but not limited to fines, restitution for cleanup costs and forfeiture of eligibility for participation in future recreational alligator season lotteries. Each improperly disposed alligator carcass shall be a separate violation. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Two violation as described in Title 56.

n. Prohibition on Wanton Waste. No person shall wantonly waste or cause to be wasted any alligator taken under the provisions of this Section. For purposes of this Subparagraph, "wanton waste" means: (i) the failure to make a reasonable effort to retrieve any alligator that has been hooked, wounded, or killed, and to retain such alligator in the hunter's possession; (ii) the intentional abandonment, discarding, or leaving to decay of the edible meat of a harvested alligator, except for inedible portions, viscera, bones, hides, and skeletal remains; or (iii) the taking of an alligator without the intent to reduce it to possession for personal use in accordance with these regulations. Each recreational alligator hunter shall take all reasonable steps to recover any alligator hooked, wounded, or killed and to care for the edible meat of any alligator harvested so as to prevent spoilage or waste. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Three violation as described in Title 56.
o. Alligators taken from the wild may be dispatched or removed from hook and line, or snatch hook, only during daylight hours between official sunrise and official sunset. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Four violation as described in Title 56.
p. There are no size restrictions on wild alligators taken during the recreational season.
q. Alligators shall only be taken via hook and line or snatch hook, provide that the hook and line or snatch hook is anchored, tethered, or originating from immovable eligible property with written evidence of land ownership or permission from the landowner to recreationally hunt alligators has been granted.
r. Pole hunting and free shooting is prohibited.
s. A firearm or bang stick shall be used to dispatch alligators after it has been taken on hook and line. An alligator that has been secured to a line anchored, tethered, or originating from immovable eligible property may be dispatched from a boat.
t. Hunters are limited to setting two lines per unused tag. All lines must be labeled with hunter's LDWF customer number on weatherproof material.
u. Hooks may be used only when a line of at least 300-pound test is securely attached to the hook in such a manner to prevent separation from the hook until the carcass is retrieved. The other end of the line must be attached to eligible immovable property. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Three violation as described in Title 56.
v. Alligator hunters shall inspect their hooks and lines and remove captured alligators daily. All hooks and lines shall be removed when an alligator hunter's quota is reached. In the event an alligator is hooked and the hunter's quota has been reached the hunter must release the alligator in the most humane method possible. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Three violation as described in Title 56.
w. Baited hooks and lines may be set no more than 24 hours prior to the open season and shall be removed no later than sunset of the last day of the open season. Violation of this Subparagraph is a Class Three violation as described in Title 56.

D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting

Bayou Sauvage Urban NWR:

1. Hunters and anglers must possess and carry a valid, signed refuge hunting and fishing brochure.
2. We prohibit hunting within 500 feet (152 meters [m]) of any residence or structure adjacent to the refuge, and we prohibit hunting within 200 feet (61 m) of any road, railroad, levee, water control structure, designated public use trail, designated parking area, or other designated public use facility.
3. We prohibit mud boats or air-cooled propulsion vessels, including "surface-drive" boats, except when traversing through the Intracoastal Waterway and the Irish Bayou Straight Canal only.
4. We only allow the incidental take of nutria with approved shot and weapons during any open youth waterfowl season on the refuge.
5. We allow the incidental take of coyote, raccoon, feral hog, armadillo, and opossum with approved shot and weapons allowed during any open season on the refuge.
6. We allow only the use of reflective tacks as marking devices.

Big Branch Marsh NWR:

1. Hunters and anglers must possess and carry a valid, signed refuge hunting and fishing brochure.
2. We prohibit hunting or discharge of firearms within 500 feet (152 meters (m)) of any residence adjacent to the refuge or oil and gas infrastructure on the refuge, or within 200 feet (61 m) from the center of any road, railroad, levee, water control structure, designated public use maintained trail, designated parking area, or other designated public use facility.
3. We allow only reflective tacks as trail markers on the refuge.
4. We prohibit hunters and anglers from utilizing air boats, air thrust boats, mud boats, aircraft, and air-cooled propulsion engines on the refuge.

Black Bayou Lake NWR:

1. Hunters and anglers must possess and carry a valid, signed refuge hunting and fishing brochure as well as carry and fill out a Visitor Check-In Permit and Report (FWS Form 3-2405) daily.
2. We prohibit boat motors greater than 50 horsepower.

D'Arbonne NWR:

1. Hunters and anglers must possess and carry a valid, signed refuge hunting and fishing brochure as well as carry and fill out a Visitor Check-In Permit and Report (FWS Form 3-2405) daily.
2. We prohibit hunting within 100 feet (30 meters (m)) of the maintained rights-of-way of roads. We prohibit hunting within 50 feet (15 m) or trespassing on aboveground oil, gas, or electrical transmission facilities.
3. We allow the incidental take of coyote, beaver, nutria and armadillo during any refuge hunt with the weapons legal for that hunt, subject to applicable State seasons and

regulations.

Delta NWR:

1. Hunters and anglers must possess and carry a valid, signed refuge hunting and fishing brochure.
2. We prohibit discharge of firearms within 500 feet (152 meters (m)) of any residence or oil and gas infrastructure, or within 200 feet (61 m) of any road, railroad, levee, water control structure, designated public use trail, designated parking area, or other designated public use facilities.
3. We prohibit hunters and anglers from utilizing air boats, air thrust boats, mud boats, aircraft, and air-cooled propulsion engines on the refuge.

Tensas River NWR:

1. Hunters and anglers, age 16 and older, must purchase an Annual Public Use Permit (FWS Form 3-2439). This permit allows individuals to participate in open, non-quota, hunting and fishing seasons.
2. All hunters and anglers must obtain a Self-Clearing Permit (FWS Form 3-2405), available at refuge entry points and at the Visitor Center, or utilize electronic check in and check out, and complete the self-clearing process when exiting the refuge at the end of each day.
3. We allow the incidental take of coyote, beaver, raccoon, opossum, feral hog, armadillo, and nutria during authorized hunts with firearms and archery equipment legal for use during the hunt.

Upper Ouachita NWR:

1. Hunters and anglers must carry a signed refuge public use brochure and must carry and fill out a Visitor Check-In Permit and Report (FWS Form 3-2405) daily.
2. Hunters may only hunt during designated refuge seasons as listed in the signed refuge public use brochure.
3. Hunters may enter the refuge no earlier than 4 a.m.
4. We prohibit hunting within 100 feet (30 meters [m]) of the maintained rights-of-way of roads and from or across ATV trails. We prohibit hunting within 50 feet (15 m) of, or trespassing on, aboveground oil, gas, or electrical transmission facilities.
5. We allow ATVs only on trails designated for their use and marked by signs. ATV trails are closed March 1 through August 31.
6. We allow the incidental take of coyote, beaver, nutria, armadillo, and feral hog during any refuge hunt with the weapons legal for that hunt, subject to applicable State seasons and regulations.

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program

Proposed changes in hunt programs on NWRs are announced to the public through the Federal Register in a draft proposed rule. Public comments are requested and received, necessary changes made, and the final changes announced again through the Federal Register in a final rule notice. In addition, FWS consults specifically with the State of Louisiana and all Native American Tribes who have interests in the areas of each refuge. The public is notified of proposed changes through notices released to the press and on refuge web sites. Comments are accepted and changes resulting from input incorporated into the final hunt plan and regulations. General refuge hunting brochures are annually revised and printed in brochures that are subsequently mailed to requesting parties and available at the refuge administrative offices and placed in boxes scattered around the refuges.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program

Hunting is a traditional public use in Louisiana and is currently permitted on Louisiana NWRs. This proposed hunt is the first recreational alligator hunting on NWRs to occur in Louisiana, following the species removal from the Endangered Species Act in 1987, and is anticipated to be received favorably.

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 each refuge office or visitor center and on refuge websites. Dates, forms, hunting unit directions, maps, applications, and permit requirements about the hunt will be available on each station's website.

Information on LDWF regulations can be obtained at Go Hunting | Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries or by calling 1-800-256-2749.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Recreational alligator hunting was found to be compatible with purposes of the refuges. This use supports public enjoyment and wildlife-dependent recreation while remaining consistent with the conservation mission of the NWRS. Refer to the compatibility determinations for additional details on determinations (Appendix B).

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Appendix A. Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Recreational Alligator Hunt Environmental Assessment

Appendix B. Recreational Alligator Hunting Compatibility Determinations