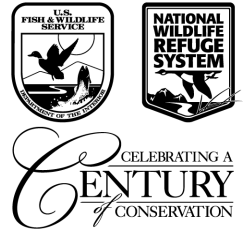


Public Information Bulletin

National Wildlife Refuge System



Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge

23734 US Highway 1

McBee, SC 29101

carolinasandhills@fws.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 1, 2023

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Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge

Cooperative Agriculture Program

Attention Farmers and Growers

Refuge Seeks Agricultural Producers for Cooperative Agriculture Program

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is seeking an agricultural producer (Cooperator) for a Cooperative Agricultural Agreement (CAA) at Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in McBee, South Carolina. The Refuge is administered by the Service, an agency within the Department of the Interior. The Cooperator will have use of 54.2 acres of existing cooperative agriculture fields and an additional 23 acres of refuge farm land for a period of five years as a Cooperator with the Service (Figure 1). Applicants must complete applicable portions of FWS Form 3-1383-C and supplemental application questions, FWS Form 3-1384. The Cooperator must address in their application how they will meet the criteria outlined in the announcement.

Background

Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge was established in March 1939 as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. Ninety-eight percent of the refuge's 46,000 acres is forested, thus managing refuge fields provides important habitat and forage in the fall and winter, which improves overall health and survival of migratory birds.

The purposes of farming on the Refuge are:

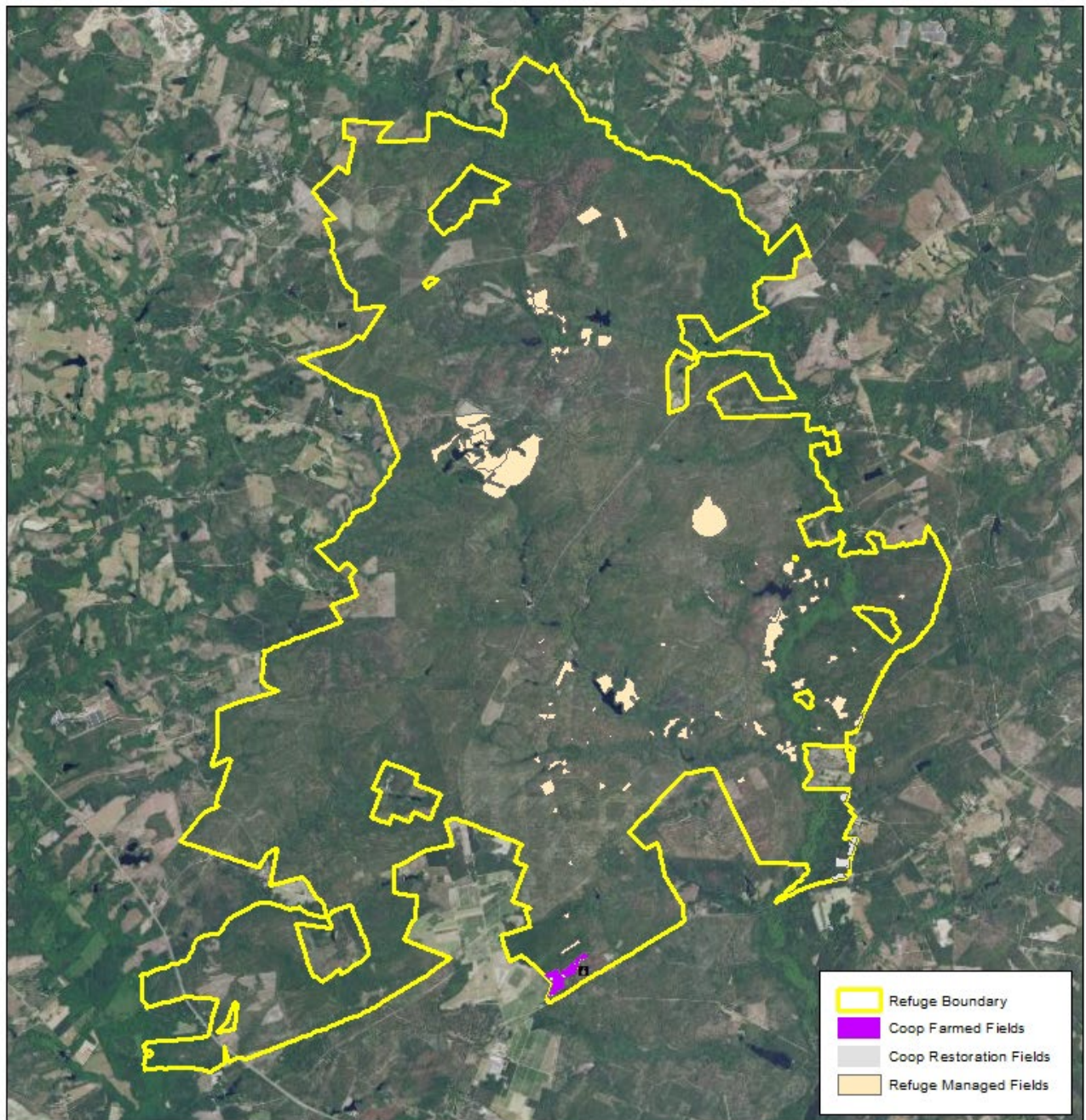
- Provide habitat for migratory birds,
- Manage habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, and
- Enhance wildlife dependent recreational opportunities (wildlife observation and hunting).



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Carolina Sandhills NWR Managed Fields

Figure 1. All Fields



Produced at Carolina Sandhills NWR
McBee, SC
Produced: October 2022
Base map: NAIP_CONUS_5_1_2021
File: FWS_Map_D-Size_Portrait_93.mxd

0 1 2
Miles



The USFWS makes no warranty for use of this map and cannot be held liable for actions or decisions based on map content.

This map is intended to show all fields managed on CSNWR.

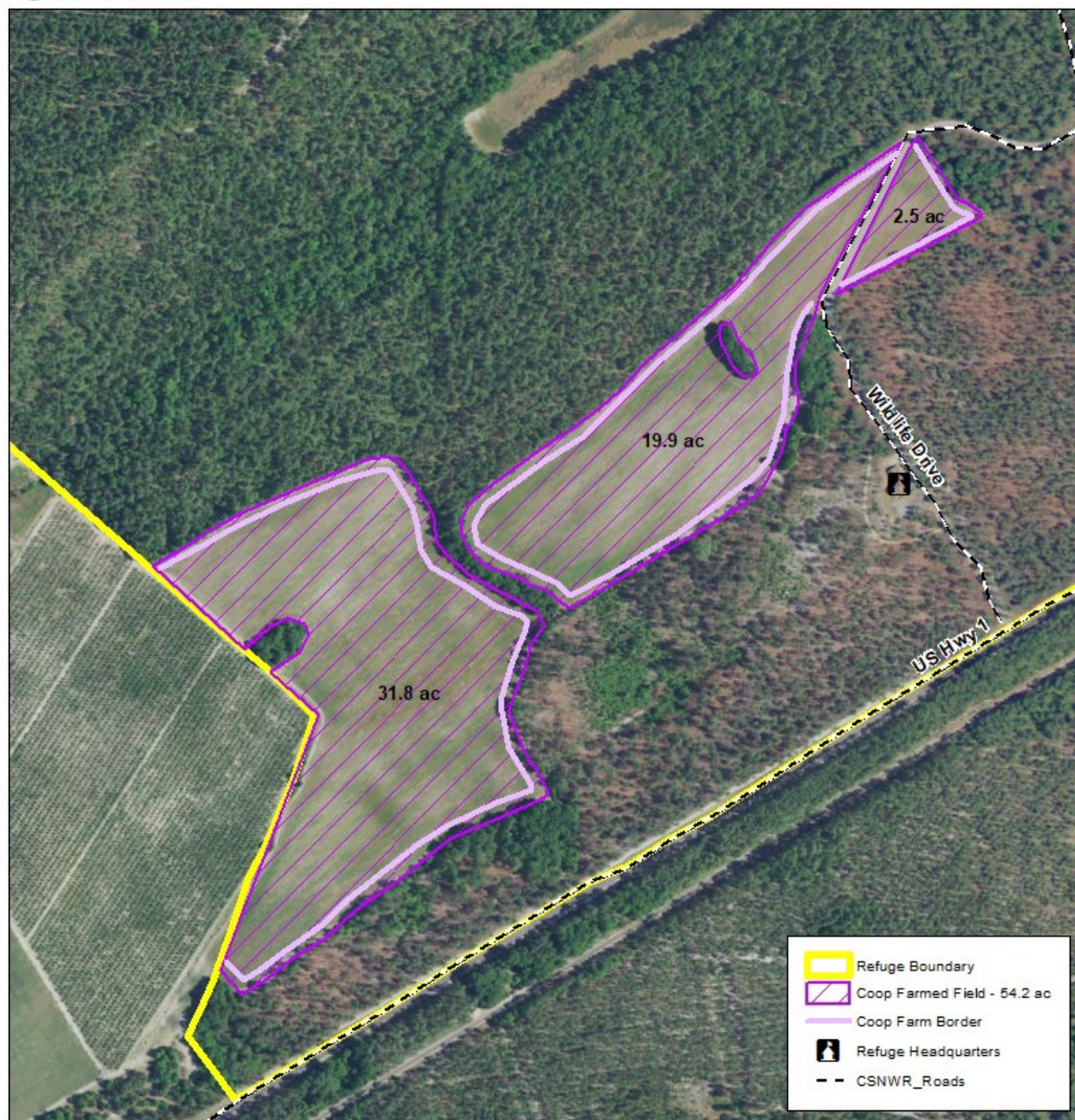
Currently, the refuge has one field (Field 18.1, 54.2 acres) in cooperative agriculture, which historically has been planted in brown top millet. When harvested, 20% of the crop is left for wildlife using a 50 foot field border as standing cover for wildlife (Figure 2).



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Carolina Sandhills NWR Cooperatively Managed Fields

Figure 2. Field 18.1



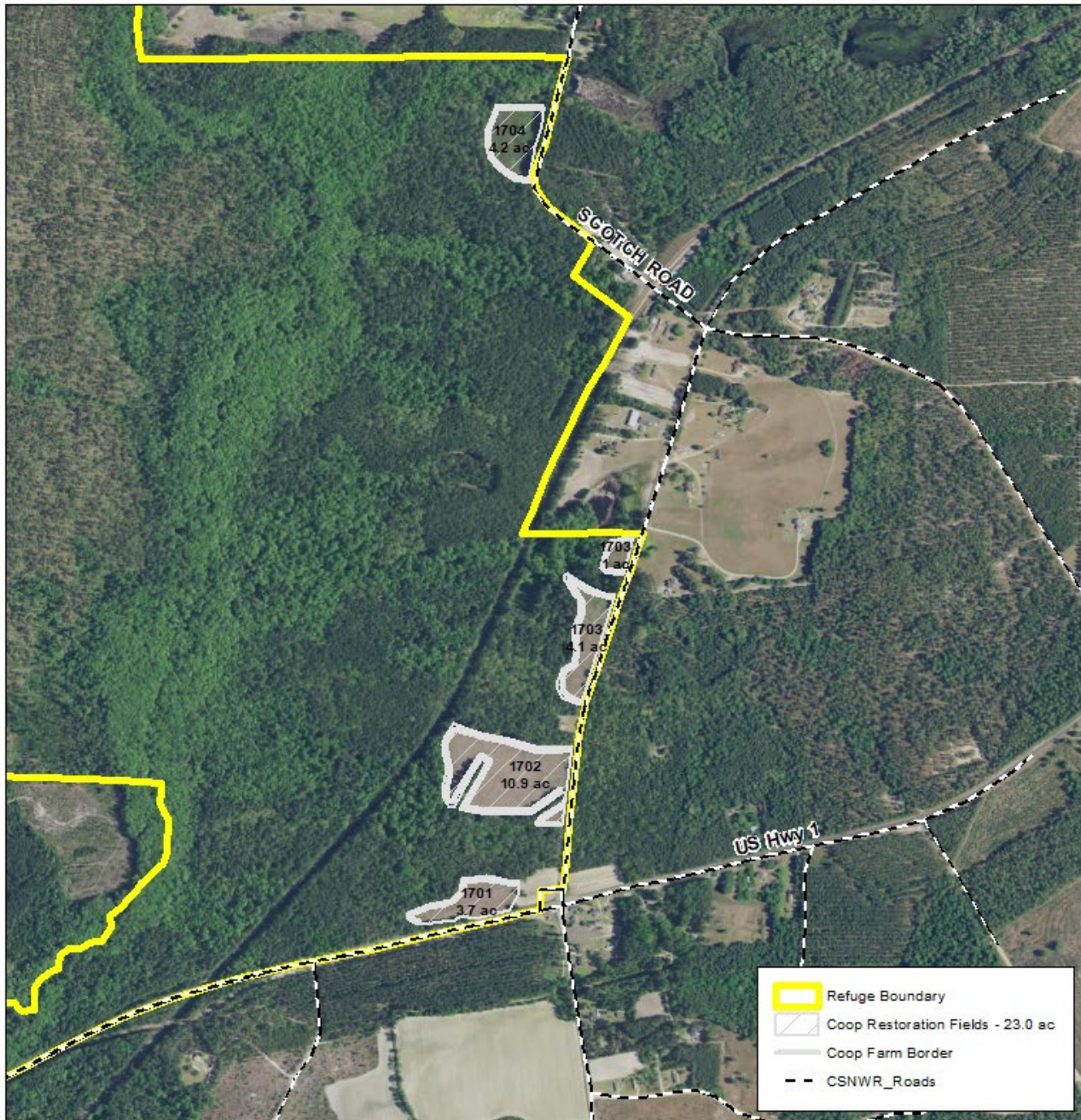
Additional fields (17.1, 17.2, 17.3, 17.4; 23 acres total) will be available to the Cooperator (Figure 3).



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Carolina Sandhills NWR Cooperatively Restoration Fields

Figure 3. Fields 17.1, 17.2, 17.3, 17.4



Produced at Carolina Sandhills NWR
McBee, SC
Produced: October 2022
Base map: NAIP_CONUS_5_1_2021
File: FWS_Map_D-Size_Portrait_93.mxd

0 1,000 2,000
Feet



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This map is intended to show new cooperatively farmed fields in need of restoration on CSNWR.

In the "Middendorf" fields, the Cooperator will remove existing nonnative *Bicolor Lespedeza* and replace with a refuge-designated annual or perennial cover crop. Cooperator shares for these fields will be 95% due to the complexity of the restoration process that will be borne by the Cooperator; yields are not anticipated until year three of the contract. This share will be a 10ft. field border around each field that provides standing cover for wildlife. The Cooperator will meet annually with Refuge staff to review progress and adapt plans as conditions require.

The Cooperator will practice refuge approved Integrated Pest Management techniques to control invasive weeds or pests that compete with planted crops. Techniques may include mechanical/physical, chemical, biological, and cultural means to control competition.

Service personnel completed a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for managing the Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge in 2010, which included the use of refuge conducted and cooperative agriculture to meet wildlife habitat goals and objectives. The positive and negative effects of our farming programs were explored in depth in the CCP.

Under this CAA, current management practices will continue per CCP management direction, as well as the restoration of fields through the removal of nonnative plants and the establishment of a sustainable cover crop in these fields.

The Proposed Cooperative Agricultural Agreement

The selected applicant will operate under a CAA as a "Cooperator" with the Service. Under the CAA, the Service is proposing that the Cooperator will be responsible for:

- Managing 54.2 acres (Field 18.1) of farm field in wildlife forage. When harvested in the fall, 20% of the crop will be left for wildlife as a 50 ft. border around the field as standing wildlife cover.
- Removing and treating 23 acres of *Bicolor Lespedeza* (fields 17.1, 17.2, 17.3, 17.4) which will take two growing seasons and establishing a wildlife forage crop for years three through five. In years three through five, the Cooperator will retain 95% of the crop, leaving a 10ft. field border around each field that provides standing cover for wildlife.

General Operating Requirements:

- Crop type agreed on per discussion with refuge manager (or designee).
- All field prep work Cooperator's responsibility.
- Planting and harvest as required by crop selected and dictated by weather conditions.

- Equipment must meet all safety regulations and must be in good working condition.
- Farming privileges may not be sold, transferred, or sublet, except by transfer to heirs in the event of the death of the Cooperator.
- All farming equipment to be removed from the refuge daily when in use, unless specifically authorized by the refuge manager.
- An Annual Work Plan will be developed by the refuge manager and the Cooperator prior to the period of operations.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service policy prohibits the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and neonicotinoids. **All pesticides must be pre-approved under a Pesticide Use Permit (PUP) for the Refuge.** The Cooperator is required to provide the refuge manager a pesticide use report by December 1 each year documenting any herbicide applications made on the Refuge. Herbicides previously approved include:

1. Glyphosate in the Rodeo® (Dow) or Aquamaster® (Monsanto) type formulation (no surfactant included) with LI-700® (Loveland Products) added as the surfactant.
2. Triclopyr (triethylamine salt, or TEA). A trade name for triclopyr is Renovate® 3. The TEA formation of triclopyr is registered for use in aquatic or riparian environments.
3. 2,4-D aquatic liquid formulation containing the dimethylamine salt of 2,4-D (Trade names include DMA® 4 IVM).

All pesticides regardless of prior approval status must be pre-approved annually and listed on the Annual Work Plan.

Applications

The Cooperator(s) will be selected through an open and competitive process where applications will be scored and ranked by refuge staff using the following criteria:

- Experience in cultivating farm land, especially personal experience on refuge lands or comparable conservation land, including in-depth knowledge of soil composition, chemistry, moisture, fertility, water needs, and pest problems.
- Demonstrated ability to successfully manage farm land under the operational period and chemical restrictions listed above (e.g. non-GMO crops, non-neonicotinoid pesticides, restricted timing of harvest).
- Knowledge of local conditions and weather parameters.
- Other objective criteria including record keeping and reporting, effective communication, and response time to address issues or management concerns to

ensure the Cooperative Agricultural program meets the resource management objectives prescribed for refuge lands.

To apply: complete FWS Form 3-1383-C and supplemental application questions, FWS Form 3-1384. The proposals must be for planting and harvesting on 54.2 acre field and restoring 23 acres in four fields by eliminating Bicolor Lespedeza and planting and harvesting a wildlife forage in its place. The FWS Form 3-1383-C, supplemental application questions and instructions, maps of the proposed Cooperative Agriculture area, and examples of a Cooperative Agricultural Agreement are available for review at the refuge office.

Bids for a contract farming will be received at the office of the Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge, 23734 US Highway 1, McBee, SC until **close of business February 28, 2023**. Our business hours are 7:00a.m. until 3:30p.m. Monday through Friday (closed Federal Holidays) and other times by appointment (843/335-6024).

Bidding:

Bids may be submitted electronically by completing the FWS Form 3-1383C and 1384. Please print, sign and scan the documents to return by email to: Clifford_berger@fws.gov Alternatively, the documents may be returned by fax to: 843-335-8406, mail or hand delivery to: 23734 US Hwy 1, McBee, SC 29101. All submitted bids will receive a confirmation email. The Government reserves the right to reject any and all bids received.

Special Use Permit (SUP) and Conditions Applicable to Farming Operations:

The successful bidder(s) will be issued a SUP that includes an Annual Work Plan prior to initiating annual farming operations.

Length of Contract:

This Farming Contract will be issued for a five year period.

Site Visits:

You may visit the site during daylight hours. Field 18.1 is located behind the refuge main office on Wildlife Drive (Figures 1 and 2). Fields 17.1-17.4 are located along Highway 1 and Middendorf Road as depicted in Figures 1 and 3.

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 <http://www.fws.gov>.

End of Release