

PUBLIC INFORMATION BULLETIN

Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge

2274 Highway 18
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Manila, AR 72442

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 28, 2022

Contact: Refuge Manager Steven Rimer, steven_rimer@fws.gov 870.564.2429

Big Lake NWR Opens Public Comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment of the Lake Drawdown Restoration Project Comments Due: March 31, 2022

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces the availability of the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge for public review and comment. The purpose of the proposed action is to compact the buildup of sediments and organic matter on the lake substrate, reduce invasive species, replace the mid-lake water control structure (WCS), and provide waterfowl with food resources to help meet refuge, state, and Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV) energy objectives for waterfowl. The refuge would contract the control of invasive species by aerial spraying of herbicide in June-July of 2022. Staff would begin to remove boards from the Spillway WCS, located on the south side of the refuge, to lower lake water levels June- July 2022. Boards will be removed to allow a gradual reduction of water level in the lake. The drawdown will take approximately 2 weeks, depending on rainfall. At the end of the drawdown period, the refuge may work with partners to aerially seed portions of the lake bottom with millet, rice, and/or milo that will provide waterfowl food and help suppress growth of invasive or other undesirable plants (e.g., cocklebur, coffeeweed, black willow). Prior to and/or during the drawdown, the Service may apply herbicides to control invasive or undesirable species and increase energetic carrying capacity for waterfowl. By mid-October, staff will place the boards back into the south WCS and open the north WCS and/or mid-lake WCS to allow water in the lake area and bring the lake gradually back to full pool by early November 2022. As the Service monitors the rehabilitation of Big Lake, further similar actions may be needed in the future on a reoccurring, as-needed basis.

The draft EA will be available for public review and comment beginning March 1, 2022, at:

- Big Lake NWR - <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/big-lake/>

Comments may be submitted to email address: steven_rimer@fws.gov or mailed to: "EA Comments" C/O Steven Rimer, Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex, P.O. Box 16, Manila, AR 72442. Only written comments will be accepted. The deadline for comments is March 31, 2021.

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>.

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