

Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council

September 19, 2023

Martha Williams
Director
U.S Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Williams:

The Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council is writing you to recommend that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service direct National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) managers whose lands offer public hunting to provide an opportunity each year for licensed hunters to provide feedback and input, utilizing a range of options for receiving public input, on hunting programs on their respective Refuges.

Currently, some NWRs provide local hunters the opportunity to comment on the public hunt programs for those lands. This is typically accomplished via an on-person or virtual meeting where the refuge manager discusses the hunting results from the previous season, expected habitat and water conditions for the upcoming season and any proposed changes to the hunt program. The hunters provide their feedback and suggestions, but the final call on any modifications to the hunt program appropriately remains with the refuge manager. However, not all refuge managers who administer a hunt program offer these hunter input meetings. And of those who do, the meetings are not always held on an annual basis.

In California, for example, state law requires the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to annually give licensed hunters the chance to provide feedback on hunt programs and habitat conditions on the Department's waterfowl management areas. This is typically done through a public meeting (which may include discussion of several waterfowl management areas), but can also be accomplished through hunter surveys, comment cards at check stations/kiosks or other formal input.

Hunter participation in the meetings is generally good, and the information exchange has not only helped to improve the quality of the public hunt programs, but allowed the Department to educate hunters about budgetary, operations and other challenges it faces in managing its lands. The presentations provided at the meetings are also posted on-line so that hunters who were not able to attend can have access to the information provided.

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Requiring refuge managers to similarly host a public hunt program meeting or provide other opportunities for formal input each year would help to proactively answer hunter inquiries prior to hunting season, and not substantially increase refuge manager workload. This outreach may reduce workload by decreasing hunter inquiries and information requests during the hunting season.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations. Should you have questions or need more information regarding this matter, please contact Doug Hobbs, the Council's Designated Federal Officer, at doug_hobbs@fws.gov or (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,



Collin O'Mara
Chair



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Vice Chair

Cc: HWCC members
Matt Strickler, Deputy Assistant Secretary Fish and Wildlife and Parks
Cynthia Martinez, Chief - NWRS, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Matthew Huggler, Acting AD - Office of Communications, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service