



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Washington D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:  
FWS/ANRS/DCN 079870

Mr. Colin O'Mara, Chair  
Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council  
c/o Mr. Doug Hobbs, Designated Federal Officer  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
5275 Leesburg Pike, MS: OC  
Falls Church, Virginia 22041

Dear Mr. O'Mara:

Thank you for your letter dated September 19, 2023, providing recommendations for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) efforts to improve hunting opportunities in the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) by providing additional options for hunter and angler input on refuge hunting and fishing programs.

The Service recognizes that the foundation of our current commitments to protecting and sustainably managing fish and wildlife populations for all Americans were laid by the nation's sportsmen and women. As a hunter and angler, I fully appreciate past and current contributions of sportsmen and women, and I share their passion for the outdoors and their commitment to ensuring a future with abundant wildlife populations. The Service is committed to providing the public with access to quality hunting and fishing opportunities throughout the Refuge System. Consistent with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, we prioritize hunting and fishing as recreational uses. We aim to allow hunting and fishing on refuges wherever feasible, and whenever compatible with a refuge's conservation mission and other priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses.

As you noted, the Service currently provides opportunities for hunter and angler input. In addition to the periodic meetings or comment cards provided by some stations, the Service receives input through public listening sessions and meetings, public comments on our National Environmental Policy Act documentation for hunting and fishing plans, public comments on the annual hunting and fishing rulemaking, dialogue with sporting associations, harvest report forms, and other informal sources. The Service also administers, in partnership with The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (Survey) roughly every five years. The Survey, the [latest of which was published on October 13, 2023](#), is the country's longest running and most comprehensive survey of hunters and other wildlife-dependent recreational users of public lands. Together, these sources of input

have provided valuable feedback and ideas for the management of the Refuge System for years and will continue to do so.

Each year, I ask all National Wildlife Refuges to consider developing opportunities for new openings and expansions, to identify potential opportunities for increased access, and to promote greater alignment with state hunting and sport regulations. We welcome the input from sportsmen and women and sporting advocacy organizations and work to prioritize providing access and opportunities. In the future, I will also encourage more frequent opportunities for hunter and angler input on hunting and fishing programs at each refuge. I would also encourage individuals to reach out to refuge managers to discuss proposed changes. As you are aware, the timing to affect changes can vary. Changes made through a rule-making process can require over a year.

Thank you for your efforts to provide the Service with thoughtful recommendations and to help shape America's conservation future through the work of the Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council. We look forward to providing an update at a future Council meeting. If you have questions or need more information regarding this matter please contact Cynthia Martinez, Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System, at [Cynthia\\_Martinez@fws.gov](mailto:Cynthia_Martinez@fws.gov).

Sincerely,

Martha Williams  
Director