

ATTENTION FARMERS

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 Agriculture Agreement at **William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge** (Refuge) in Corvallis, Oregon. The producer will farm land on the refuge for a period of five years as a Cooperator with the Service.

Applicants must fill out applicable portions of FWS Form 3-1383-C and supplemental application questions. The applicants must address in their application how the applicant will meet the criteria outlined in the announcement.

Background

The 5,706 acre Refuge was established in 1964, in part, to provide habitat for migratory birds, especially dusky Canada geese. Dusky Canada geese are one of the rarest sub-species of waterfowl in North America with a population of approximately 12,000 to 15,000 birds. Refuge farmlands receive sustained waterfowl use from fall through spring and provide quality forage, which improves waterfowl health and survival. Refuge farmlands principally supply grass forage for grazing Canada and cackling geese in the form of forage varieties of tall fescue, perennial ryegrass, and annual ryegrass. The refuge's goal is to provide high quality winter forage and sanctuary to migratory and wintering waterfowl to sustain their populations. The effects of the farming program are explored in depth in the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP; USFWS 2011).

Our goal is to provide agricultural crops for Canada geese, especially dusky geese, which, together with wetland management and sanctuary, contributes towards a healthy, viable wintering goose population in support of Pacific Flyway management and depredation control plans. The cooperative farmer will provide planted grasses including annual ryegrass, perennial ryegrass, and tall fescue to produce green forage for wintering Canada geese from October through April. There will be a fairly even distribution of the three grass crops and the farmer may produce small grains (e.g. oats, wheat, barley) or clover on up to 10% of the acreage in the agreement.

Approximately **870 acres** will be farmed under this cooperative agreement. There are 19 farm fields that average 48 acres and vary in size between 15 and 182 acres. The fields are currently predominantly hay (tall fescue, forage) and tall fescue. There are no water rights for irrigation associated with these fields. All farming equipment must be provided by the Cooperator. The Refuge's share is 100% wintertime goose browse and the Cooperator's share is 100% of the seed

crop and straw or hay. The Cooperator must provide green browse over the entire seven month wintering period for geese and minimal human or farming disturbance is allowed through the wintering period. Refuge croplands will be tested periodically to determine soil condition and fertilizer needs to ensure proper growth and health of desired plant species. In addition, invasive plant species are controlled using appropriate Integrated Pest Management techniques including mechanical/physical, chemical, biological, and cultural means.

The Cooperative Agriculture Program for the Refuge is guided by the CCP and the Cooperative Farming Special Conditions, which states all of the rules and regulations that all cooperative farmers must abide. The Cooperative Agriculture Program has been deemed an appropriate, compatible use and has undergone an Environmental Assessment for the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex). These plans provide guidance to employ farming as habitat management tool on the Refuge, which may be used to meet resource management objectives on units of the National Wildlife Refuge System, consistent with the Service's Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health policy. The Refuge is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service within the Department of the Interior.

The Proposed Cooperative Agriculture Agreement

The selected Cooperator will enter into a Cooperative Agricultural Agreement (CAA) with the Refuge, which will include a Plan of Operations that defines the process by which the farming program will be administered and further delineates the requirements and restrictions of the Cooperator. The Cooperator will develop a 5-year crop plan with the Refuge Manager for each assigned field. This plan will be renewed annually via a signed addendum that may incorporate modest changes. Primary crops include annual ryegrass, perennial ryegrass, and tall fescue. There can be a fairly even distribution of the three grass crops and the farmer may produce small grains (e.g. oats, wheat, barley) or clover on up to 10% of the acreage in the agreement.

General Operating Requirements:

- Crop plans may be altered through consensus by both the Refuge Manager and Cooperators annually during the 5-year agreement.
- The 5-year agreement will renew annually on April 1 each year.
- The farmer shall provide all necessary work, materials, and equipment to produce the stated crops.
- Cooperators may be required to replant failed crops at their own expense.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service policy prohibits the use of GMOs and neonicotinoids. All pesticides must be pre-approved under a pesticide use permit (PUP) for the refuge. A list of currently approved pesticides is available. No restricted use chemicals will be permitted for use on the Refuge. The Cooperator is required to provide the Refuge Manager a pesticide and fertilizer use report by January 15 of each year documenting any herbicide applications made on the refuge.

- All liability relating to farming and crop management to include all persons working for the Cooperator, whether related, hired, or as a partner is strictly that of the Cooperator as listed on the CAA.
- The Cooperator must have or acquire liability insurance that covers the equipment used on Service lands. A copy of the liability insurance must be provided to the Refuge Manager (or designee).
- All equipment for farming, including tractors, trucks, ATVs, and UTVs, must be clean and free of invasive species plant material including seeds before entering any Refuge or Service easement. The Refuge Manager (or designee) reserves the right to inspect and deny the use of any equipment/vehicle/horse etc. that appears to contain invasive species plant material or seeds. 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.
- Non-use of farm lands, in whole or in part, shall be cause for cancellation of a Cooperator's privileges at the discretion of the Refuge Manager unless non-use has previously been approved.
- A five year plan for crop rotation and annual work plans will be developed by the Refuge Manager and the Cooperator prior to the period of operations.

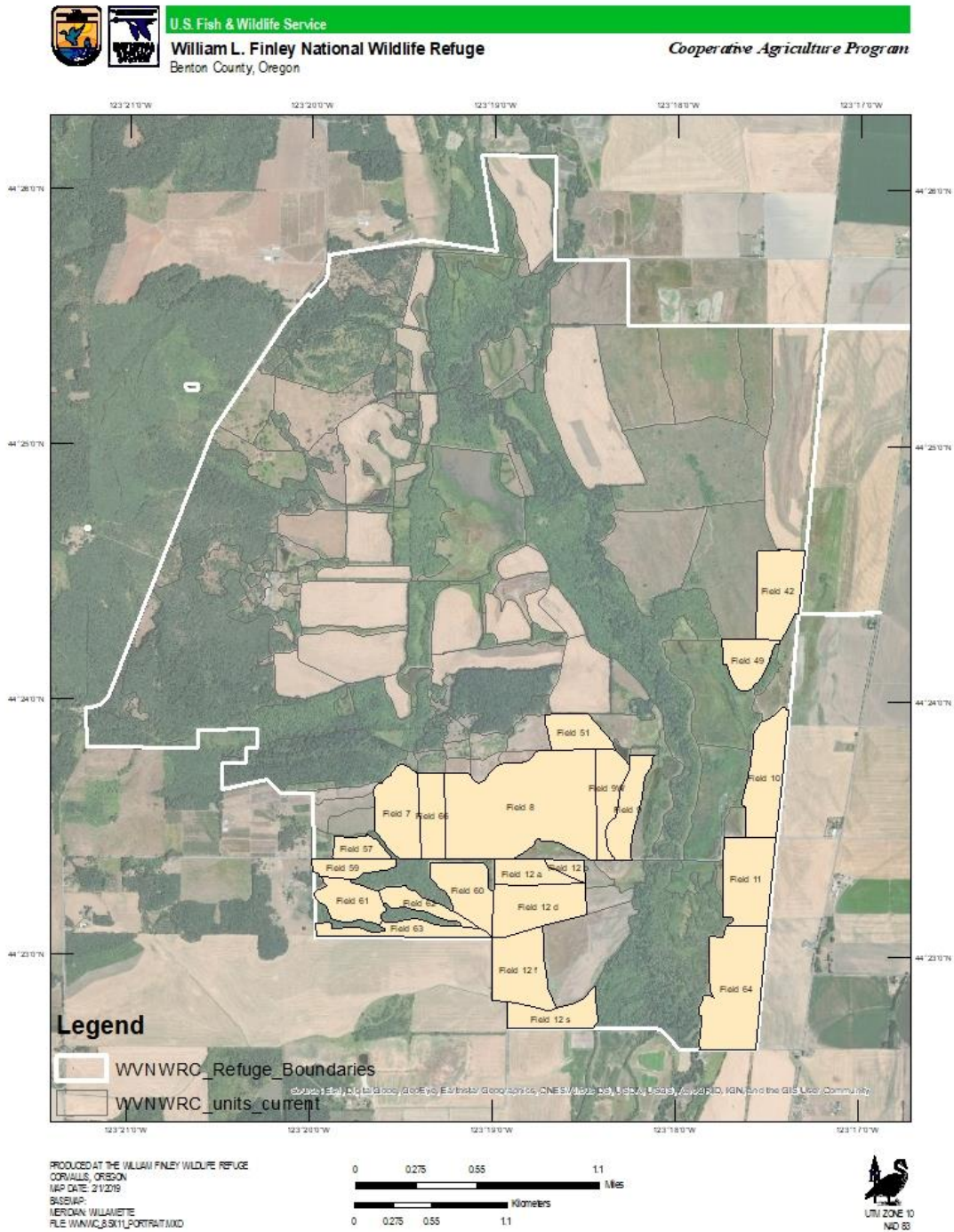
Cooperator Selection

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

- Experience in cultivation of grains and green forage, especially personal experience on NWRS lands or comparable conservation land, including knowledge of soil composition, chemistry, moisture, and fertility, water needs, and pest problems.
- Demonstrated ability to successfully cultivate crops under restrictions listed above (e.g. non-GMO crops, non-neonicotinoid pesticides, restricted timing of harvest, and limitations on pesticides).
- Ownership or access to the proper equipment, materials, labor, or other resources to participate in the Cooperative Agriculture Agreement (equipment and personnel).
- Proximity of personnel to monitor crops and respond to crop failures or crop health issues.
- Positive references regarding past performance, experience, and abilities related to crop cultivation.

Parcels Available

Approximately 870 acres will be farmed under this cooperative agreement. There are 19 farm fields that average 48 acres and vary in size between 15 and 182 acres. More details on the fields included in each parcel are available. See map below.



Applications

To apply, complete FWS Form 3-1383-C (Download at <https://www.fws.gov/forms/3-1383-C.pdf>) and supplemental application questions (included in this document). Hard copies can be requested by calling Eddy Pausch, Refuge Manager, at 541-223-2881 or emailing him at eddy_pausch@fws.gov. Hard copies can also be picked up at Complex Headquarters located at William L. Finley NWR at 26208 Finley Refuge Rd., Corvallis, OR 97333. Mail completed applications to Eddy Pausch, 26208 Finley Refuge Rd., Corvallis, OR 97333 or email them to eddy_pausch@fws.gov.

The Cooperator will be selected through an open and competitive process where applications will be scored and ranked by a panel of Refuge Complex staff.

Proposals are to be submitted to the Refuge Headquarters in a sealed envelope marked Cooperative Farming Proposal FIN-870, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 26208 Finley Refuge Rd., Corvallis, OR 97333. The envelopes may be submitted either by mail or hand delivery to the refuge office. Proposals may also be emailed to the Refuge Manager at eddy_pausch@fws.gov. In either case, proposals will only be accepted between March 1 and April 1, 2024. Proposal envelopes must be received in the refuge office by April 1, 2024 at 5:00 pm. All proposals will be opened and evaluated by April 5, 2024 and the individual with the highest ranked proposal will be notified within 2 weeks of their selection. Unsuccessful applicants will also be notified.