

**MOUNTAIN LONGLEAF
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

PUBLIC USE PLAN

HUNTING PLAN

COMBATIBILITY DETERMINATIONS

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

MOUNTAIN LONGLEAF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

PUBLIC USE PLAN

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION STATEMENT

“To administer a national net-work of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

MOUNTAIN LONGLEAF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE MISSION STATEMENT

“To preserve, conserve, and restore biodiversity and biological integrity of the natural landscape and in particular the longleaf pine ecosystem while providing for compatible public uses.”

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION PU-3
 Background PU-3
 Contaminants PU-3
CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITY PU-3
 Scope and Rationale..... PU-3
 Legal Mandates PU-4
 Relationship to Other Plans PU-5
STATEMENT OF REFUGE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES..... PU-7
ASSESSMENT PU-7
DESCRIPTION OF THE PUBLIC USE PROGRAM PU-8
 Compatible Public Use PU-8
 Priority Wildlife-Dependent Public Uses PU-9
 Wildlife Observation and Photography PU-9
 Hunting PU-9
 Environmental Education and Interpretation PU-11
 Other Non-priority Uses PU-12
 Wild Food Gathering PU-12
 Bicycling PU-12
 Activities Determined to Not be Compatible Uses..... PU-12
 Fishing..... PU-12
 Horseback Riding..... PU-12
MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT
ACTIVITIES..... PU-12
HOW PUBLIC USE WILL BE CONDUCTED PU-13
 Safety PU-13
 Entry Access/Procedures PU-13
 Law Enforcement..... PU-14
 Community Involvement PU-14

List of Figures

Fig. 1 Closed Area Signs PU-4
Fig. 2 Refuge Location PU-6
Fig. 3 Closed Areas of the Refuge PU-10

INTRODUCTION

Background

Fort McClellan military training installation was closed September 1999, in accordance with the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure decision. The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314, authorized the transfer, to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior, approximately 7,759 acres in order to establish Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge. P.L. No. 107-314 established that the primary purpose of Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge was to “enhance, manage, and protect the unique mountain longleaf pine ecosystem on the property.” On October 23, 2003, the Joint Powers Authority transferred an additional 1,257 acres to the Service bringing the total Refuge size to 9,016 acres.

Contaminants

Approximately 6,000 acres of Mountain Longleaf NWR are within areas closed because of unexploded ordnance (UXO), due to other environmental contaminant safety issues and/or inadequate infrastructure to support the use. The Army is currently in the process of identifying and characterizing the extent of contamination. Upon completion of these studies, the Army and the Fish and Wildlife Service will seek to reach agreement on the level of cleanup necessary to allow the Refuge to fulfill its primary purpose and allow expansion of public use into areas once contamination has been remediated. The remaining portions of the Refuge (~ 3,000 acres) are considered to have little or no UXO and environmental contaminants. These areas will be open to public use upon completion of this public use planning process.

Warning signs with the following wording, “Danger Unexploded Ordnance Keep Out” and/or “Area Beyond This Sign Closed - All Public Entry Prohibited”, identify lands within the Refuge closed to public use (Figure 1). These signs are posted around all areas suspected of containing UXO or environmental contaminants. The public is restricted from entering all areas bounded by these signs.

CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITY

Scope and Rationale

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) has developed this Public Use Plan (Plan) to guide future public uses on the Refuge in a manner that allows us to fulfill the purpose for which the Refuge was established as well as to provide a public benefit. The draft of this Plan will allow the public to comment on the proposals presented within

the Plan and to influence any future changes. Once the Plan is adopted it will be the instrument that guides future decisions on public use at the Refuge.



Fig. 1 Closed Area Signs

Legal Mandates

Guidance for authorizing public uses on National Wildlife Refuges is provided in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (the Act) of 1997. The Act states, “compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System . . . through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife.” The Act recognizes that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of the Refuge System that should receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management. Other uses not listed as priority public uses may be allowed if they are determined to be appropriate and compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

According to the Act, when a wildlife-dependent recreational use is determined to be a compatible use and is not inconsistent with public safety, that activity should be facilitated. The term “compatible use” is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the refuge. The US Fish and Wildlife Service’s Final Compatibility Policy Pursuant to the Act delegates the responsibility of determining compatibility to the Refuge Manager with concurrence by the Regional Office Supervisor.

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314, authorized the transfer, to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior, approximately 7,759 acres in order to establish Mountain Longleaf National

Wildlife Refuge. P.L. No. 107-314 established that the primary purpose of Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge was to “enhance, manage, and protect the unique mountain longleaf pine ecosystem on the property.” Additional management objectives given in P.L. No. 107-314 are to: 1) conserve and enhance populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem, 2) protect and enhance the quality of aquatic habitat in the refuge, 3) provide, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing¹, wildlife observation and photography, 4) provide opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law.

On October 23, 2003 the Joint Powers Authority transferred 1,257 acres to the Department of the Interior. This transfer increased the size of the Refuge to 9,016 acres (Fig. 2) and provided additional acreage for habitat restoration, wildlife management activities and public use.

Relationship to Other Plans

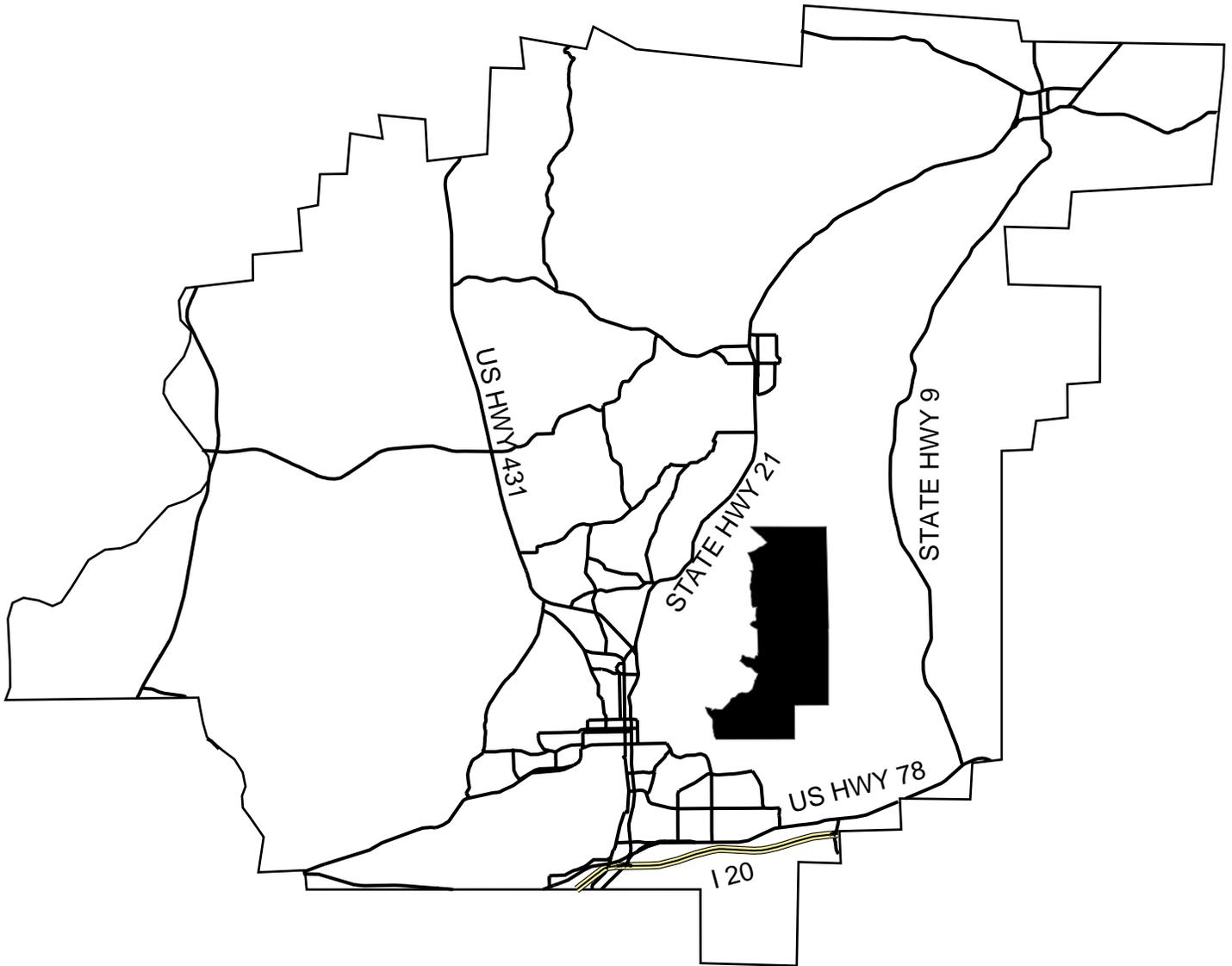
Concurrent with the development of this Public Use Plan, the Refuge is developing a Hunting Plan that will outline the Refuge’s proposed hunting program. The Hunting Plan will provide more complete guidance as to the activities, timing and location of any hunting on the Refuge.

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge completed compatibility determinations on uses proposed within this document. All uses proposed are deemed compatible with the mission of Mountain Longleaf NWR. These uses, which include hunting, wildlife viewing, photography, interpretation, and environmental education, will be presented in this Draft Public Use Plan to solicit public comments. A list and detailed description of the public uses proposed for the Refuge is provided in this document. Compatibility determinations must be prepared for all uses proposed on a refuge, therefore, any additional public uses identified during the public review of this document or any uses identified in the future will need to have compatibility determinations completed prior to any further action being taken.

The Hunting and Public Use Plans are considered interim planning documents. All refuges are required to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan that will describe the desired future conditions of a refuge and provide long-range guidance and management

¹ Providing fishing opportunities was included as a management objective within the legislation establishing Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge and was identified as a compatible public use within the Environmental Assessment prepared for the establishment of the refuge. The two lakes identified in the Environmental Assessment as being appropriate for fishing were not included within the legislated acreage that established the refuge nor are they included within the current acquisition boundaries of the refuge, therefore, fishing is no longer a compatible use on the refuge.

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge



Legend

-  Roads
-  I 20
-  Refuge
-  Calhoun County



FIG. 2 LOCATION OF THE REFUGE

direction to achieve refuge purposes; help fulfill the National Wildlife Refuge System mission; maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System and help meet other mandates. The Hunting and Public Use Plans currently being developed are considered “step-down” management plans of this future Comprehensive Conservation Plan and will be incorporated and amended as necessary as the Refuge develops its Comprehensive Conservation Plan as required within 15 years of establishment.

The Refuge consulted with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources during the drafting of this Plan. Their ideas and suggestions were incorporated into this document prior to this public review. Any proposed changes to the document that result from the public review will also be approved by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources prior to finalizing the Plan.

STATEMENT OF REFUGE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314, authorized the transfer, to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior, approximately 7,759 acres in order to establish the Refuge. P.L. No. 107-314 established that the primary purpose of Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge was to “enhance, manage, and protect the unique mountain longleaf pine ecosystem on the property.” Additional management objectives given in P.L. No. 107-314 are to: 1) conserve and enhance populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem, 2) protect and enhance the quality of aquatic habitat in the refuge, 3) provide, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, 4) provide opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law.

ASSESSMENT

The term “compatible use” is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the refuge. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is “to administer a national net-work of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.” No uses will be allowed on the Refuge that are determined to not be compatible with purpose for which the refuge was established or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PUBLIC USE PROGRAM

Most Refuge management activities (restoration, public use, monitoring and research) will provide an opportunity for public participation and to teach/encourage environmental stewardship. Programs and activities will be developed to create in our visitors:

- Awareness and ecological understanding of the Refuge and adjacent landscape.
- Knowledge of how humans affect the natural system.
- Understanding of the value of mountain longleaf pine habitat for wildlife.
- Recognition of wildlife values in general.

Compatible Public Use

As previously stated, the term “compatible use” is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the refuge. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is “to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

The Service has responsibility for the protection and management of fish, wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend. Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge is a special place where the Service will maintain and enhance the mountain longleaf pine ecosystem for wildlife. In fulfilling our resource responsibilities, however, we also will provide the public with opportunities to enjoy and learn about wildlife and opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation so long as they do not materially interfere with our habitat and wildlife conservation activities and do not pose a hazard to the public’s safety.

This section describes uses that we determined to be compatible with the goals of the Refuge and provides guidelines and plans for facilities and activities (see also attached Compatibility Determinations). Specific locations of facilities, except in a few instances, are not yet known. As funding becomes available, facilities will be developed to aid in the management of the Refuge including the support of public use.

Priority Wildlife-Dependent Public Uses

The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 (PL 105-57) states that there are 6 wildlife dependent public uses that, when determined to be compatible, are to be the priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. These uses are hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. Five of these uses have been determined to be compatible with the purposes for which the Refuge was established. Only 1 (fishing) was determined to be not compatible with the refuge and is explained in a footnote on page 4 and in the attached compatibility determination. Since these 6 uses are the priority public uses of the Refuge System they will be considered first prior to other uses that may be wildlife dependent.

Wildlife Observation and Photography

Wildlife observation generally needs few facilities. Access, observation points, and a minimum number of directional signs will be sufficient. There is an element of pleasure in discovering the environment on one's own; too many signs and labels can detract. All Refuge lands will be open to wildlife observation, unless closed for public safety or wildlife conservation reasons. If any parcels of Refuge land are closed, the Service will notify the public and clearly mark where the closed areas are. The areas of the Refuge that are currently closed to all public uses are shown in Figure 3.

Interpretive programming and special event planning will be designed to help visitors develop their observation skills. This could include bird watching classes, raptor identification, and native plant identification. These programs will be designed to also demonstrate responsible actions toward our natural resources and other users. Currently the Refuge has only 2 staff members. Staff-led interpretive programs will be limited and the Refuge will depend on volunteers and partners to accomplish these tasks.

The Service does not anticipate establishing special blinds for wildlife viewing, but if a need is identified and is compatible, blinds will be considered.

Wildlife photography will be allowed within designated public use areas of the refuge. The Service may issue special use permits to individuals who wish to set up temporary blinds for wildlife photography or to individuals who are professional photographers and wish to use photos taken on the Refuge for commercial purposes. Permit conditions will minimize wildlife and habitat disturbance that might result from this activity and may allow use of professional photographs taken on the Refuge in Refuge exhibits.

Hunting

Hunting provides the public with wildlife-oriented recreation opportunities. Refuge policies and programs will be developed to provide visitors with an high-quality hunting

MOUNTAIN LONGLEAF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

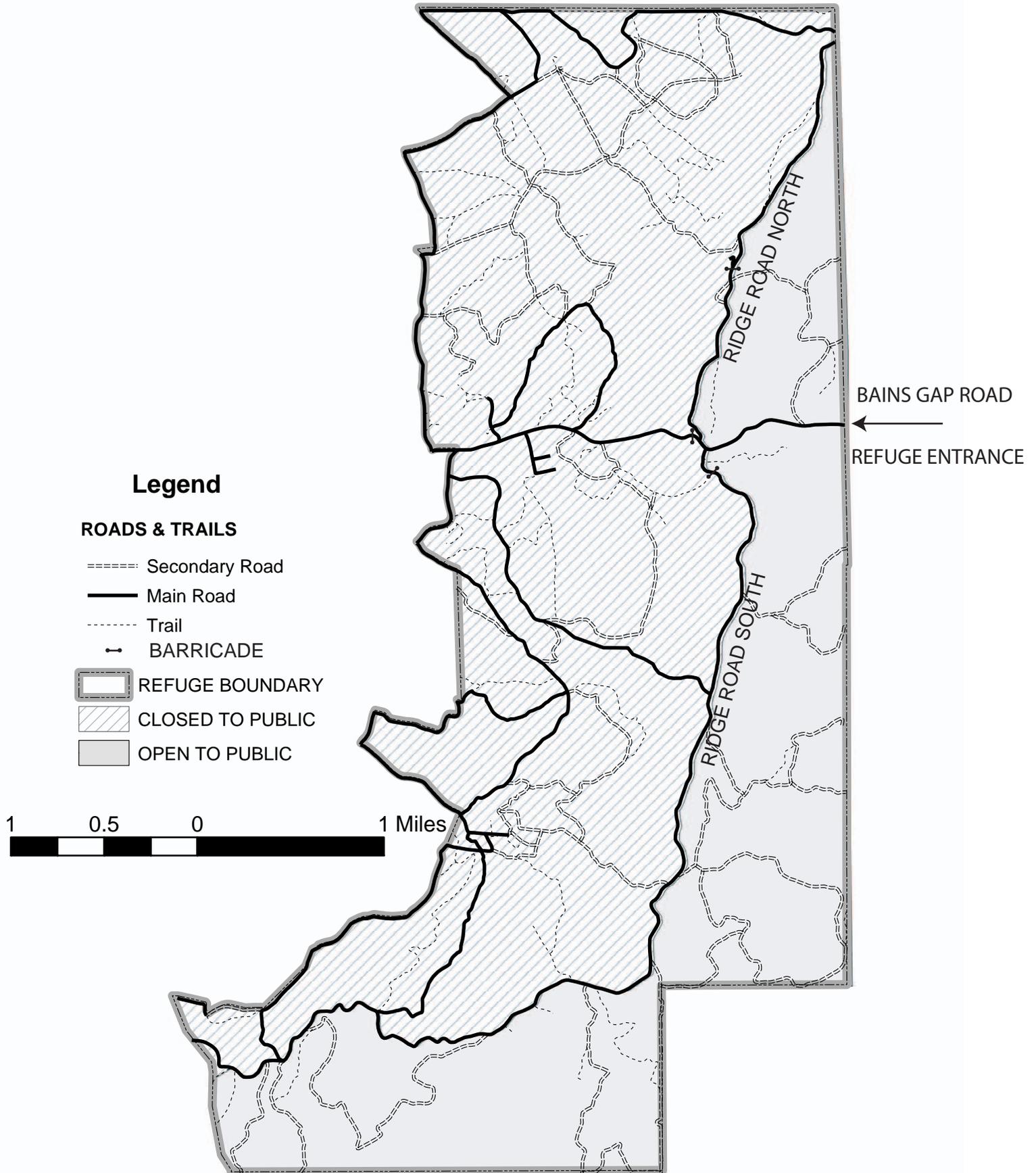


FIG. 3 PUBLIC ACCESS AREAS

experience. Concurrent with the release of this Public Use Plan the Refuge, working with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, will release a Hunting Plan for public comment. Recreation and environmental education will be joined with hunter skills education programs designed to assist the hunting public in the development of safe and effective hunting skills and environmental stewardship value. Hunters will be required to follow all Federal, State and refuge-specific laws and regulations.

Ground or elevated blinds may be used if they do not damage live vegetation and are completely removed from the property each day at the close of the hunting hours. Ground blinds may not be constructed from vegetation from on the property but must be transported to the site by the hunter.

To ensure the safety of residences and businesses adjacent to the refuge, archery-only weapon areas will be established within those areas of the refuge that are within the Anniston city limits and zoned to preclude discharge of firearms. In addition, safety zones will be established that are consistent with the State of Alabama's Wildlife Management Area regulations. Wildlife Management Area regulations prohibit the discharge of firearms within 150 yards of any dwelling and within 100 yards of any road.

Environmental Education and Interpretation

Everything the Service does in relation to the Refuge (management, restoration, public use, monitoring and research) will be viewed as an opportunity to provide public participation and teach/encourage environmental stewardship. Programs and activities will be developed to create in our visitors:

- Awareness and ecological understanding of the Refuge and adjacent landscape.
- Knowledge of how humans affect the natural system.
- Understanding of the value of habitat for fish and wildlife.
- Recognition of fish and wildlife values in general.

Environmental education and interpretation play a critical role in encouraging environmental stewardship. The future of fish and wildlife is best assured by raising the public's awareness and understanding of wildlife conservation. The Refuge can be a place where visitors can see for themselves the connections between people and wildlife, habitat, and land management. The Refuge can be a place where people learn basic outdoor skills or see first-hand how they can restore and sustain wildlife habitat on their own land. Education and interpretation programs on the Refuge, therefore, must encompass a broad range of needs and outcomes.

To move toward fulfilling this broad range of needs, the Service will seek partners and volunteers to aid the current 2-person staff to fulfill this critical function.

Other Non-priority Uses

Wild Food Gathering

Wild food gathering including the picking of berries and other natural fleshy fruits that are used by humans for sustenance will be allowed.

Bicycling

Bicycling has been determined to be compatible only if conducted on roads open to vehicle traffic. Bicycling on the refuge is meant to be used as a mode of transportation to access sites available to other vehicles.

Activities Determined to Not be Compatible Uses

The following activities have been determined to not be compatible with the purpose for which the refuge was established or insufficient resources are available to make these activities compatible. This determination is documented in the Compatibility Determinations included in Appendix A of this document. Any activities not listed within this document are considered to not be compatible until evaluated in a Compatibility Determination.

Fishing

No fishing will be allowed on the Refuge as there are no permanent bodies of water capable of supporting this use. See footnote on page 5.

Horseback Riding

Horseback riding will not be allowed on the Refuge during this plan period. The steepness of the slopes and the high erosion tendencies of the soils on the refuge make this use impracticable for the current plan period.

MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

People visiting the Refuge will expect:

- Easily understood signs, directions, and rules.
- Wildlife in natural settings.
- Safety and good access.

A clear system of welcome and orientation signs will allow visitors to know where to go, what recreation, interpretation and education opportunities are available, any limits on uses, and how to make the best use of their time while visiting the Refuge.

Visitor orientation will be provided directly on the Refuge and through the use of signs, brochures, flyers, maps, and trail guides to direct visitors. Outlets off the Refuge that would be a source of information may include local media, sporting goods stores, chamber of commerce offices, tourism offices, and the Internet.

The boundary of all lands owned by the Service will be marked with Refuge boundary signs.

HOW PUBLIC USE WILL BE CONDUCTED

Safety

To ensure visitor safety, the Service agreed to several Land Use Controls proposed by the US Army. All restrictions from these Land Use Controls were considered when drafting this document. In addition, the Army will provide safety-briefing materials that contain basic information on site history, UXO hazards, and the appropriate action to be taken if UXO items are encountered. Safety brochures describing and depicting hazards will be available at the Refuge headquarters and information kiosks on the Refuge. The Service will provide maps detailing areas of the Refuge that are closed for safety and resource management.

Entry Access/Procedures

Public entry into the Refuge initially will only be possible through the east gate (Fig. 3) on Bains Gap Road during daylight hours only. Due to ongoing UXO and contaminant remediation on the western portions of the Refuge we will not allow access through those closed areas of the Refuge until clean-up has been completed. Existing gates within the Refuge restrict access to UXO/environmental contaminated lands. The Army will remain responsible for securing, locking and maintaining these gates. As described in the MOA, the FWS will work closely with the Army in controlling visitor access and monitoring Refuge visitors. The Army will be responsible for maintaining Army-erected signage, fencing, gates and barricades necessary to ensure public safety within lands potentially or known to contain UXO/environmental contamination. The FWS will notify the Army of any damage to these safety features in a timely manner.

Law Enforcement

Enforcement of Refuge trespass and other public use violations normally associated with management of a National Wildlife Refuge will be the responsibility of commissioned Refuge Law Enforcement Officers and cooperatively by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and other city and county law enforcement agencies. General trespass, poaching, and other violations will be cooperatively enforced by these agencies. Procedures for obtaining law enforcement assistance will be based on legal jurisdiction where the incident occurs. In the City of Anniston the Anniston Police Department would be contacted if needed, while the Calhoun County Sheriff would be contacted if needed for assistance within the Refuge outside of the city limits.

The FWS will meet with local law enforcement agencies and develop coordinated law enforcement strategies. Strategies that involve restricted access lands within the Refuge will be further coordinated with the Army. Enforcement of safety restrictions related to UXO/environmental contamination remains the responsibility of the Army.

Community Involvement

The success of the Refuge will not only be measured by the ecological restoration and enhancement of the mountain longleaf pine ecosystem, but also by our effectiveness in working with other agencies and individuals to preserve and enhance the biodiversity in Alabama. The local community must view the Refuge as a positive economic benefit to the community and as a good neighbor.

Many public use activities will be done cooperatively with partners and with the use of volunteers. Activities such as outdoor skills education programs, and bird watching clinics and events are examples of public use activities that can be run cooperatively with the help of others.

Many refuges across the country have the privilege of working cooperatively with a non-profit community support group, which can support the Refuge through volunteer hours, outreach, advocacy, and funding. The Service welcomes the opportunity to continue to work with partners and other groups. Whether or not partnerships are formalized, the Service and its partners will continue to work under the principles of trust, respect, and open communications.

The Service, on Refuge lands and those of willing private landowners, will be restoring mountain longleaf pine habitats at the Refuge, recreating wetlands on the landscape, and improving degraded habitats. The Service will work cooperatively with interested individuals and organizations to assist with this work.

The public has skills and interests that complement those within the Service. By assisting Refuge staff to restore and reconstruct natural communities, people can develop new skills and stewardship ethics through positive environmental action. By participating, the

public can enjoy the overall success of the project and feel that they are contributing to the larger good.

The growing interest in ecological restoration and reconstruction within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service represents a significant paradigm shift for the agency. The emphasis on public involvement in the process of ecological restoration also represents a paradigm shift for land management agencies, especially the Service. The public can be involved in restoration activities on the Refuge and the Service will look for opportunities to fulfill this promise.

MOUNTAIN LONGLEAF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

HUNTING PLAN

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION STATEMENT

“To administer a national net-work of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

MOUNTAIN LONGLEAF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE MISSION STATEMENT

“To preserve, conserve, and restore biodiversity and biological integrity of the natural landscape and in particular the longleaf pine ecosystem while providing for compatible public uses.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION HP-3
 Background HP-3
 Contaminants HP-3
CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITY HP-5
 Scope and Rationale..... HP-5
 Legal Mandates..... HP-5
 Relationship to Other Plans and Documents HP-6
STATEMENT OF REFUGE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES..... HP-7
ASSESSMENT HP-7
DESCRIPTION OF HUNTING PROGRAM HP-8
 Hunting as a Compatible Public Use HP-9
 Hunting as a Priority Public Use..... HP-9
 Hunting Regulations HP-9
 Regulations Pertaining to all National Wildlife Refuge System Lands..... HP-9
 Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge Specific Regulations..... HP-10
MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT
ACTIVITIES..... HP-11
CONDUCT OF THE HUNT HP-13
 Hunting Orientation and Safety HP-13
 Entry Access/Procedures HP-13
 Law Enforcement..... HP-14
 Community Support..... HP-14

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 Location of Refuge HP-4
Fig. 2 Closed Area Signs HP-5
Fig. 3 Refuge Signs..... HP-11
Fig. 4 Hunting Areas..... HP-12

INTRODUCTION

Background

Fort McClellan military training installation was closed September 1999, in accordance with the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure decision. The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314, authorized the transfer, to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior, approximately 7,759 acres in order to establish Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge (Fig. 1). P.L. No. 107-314 established that the primary purpose of Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was to “enhance, manage, and protect the unique mountain longleaf pine ecosystem on the property.” The majority of the lands at Ft. McClellan were hunted prior to the establishment of the Refuge. On October 23, 2003, the Joint Powers Authority transferred an additional 1,257 acres to the Service bringing the total Refuge size to 9,016 acres.

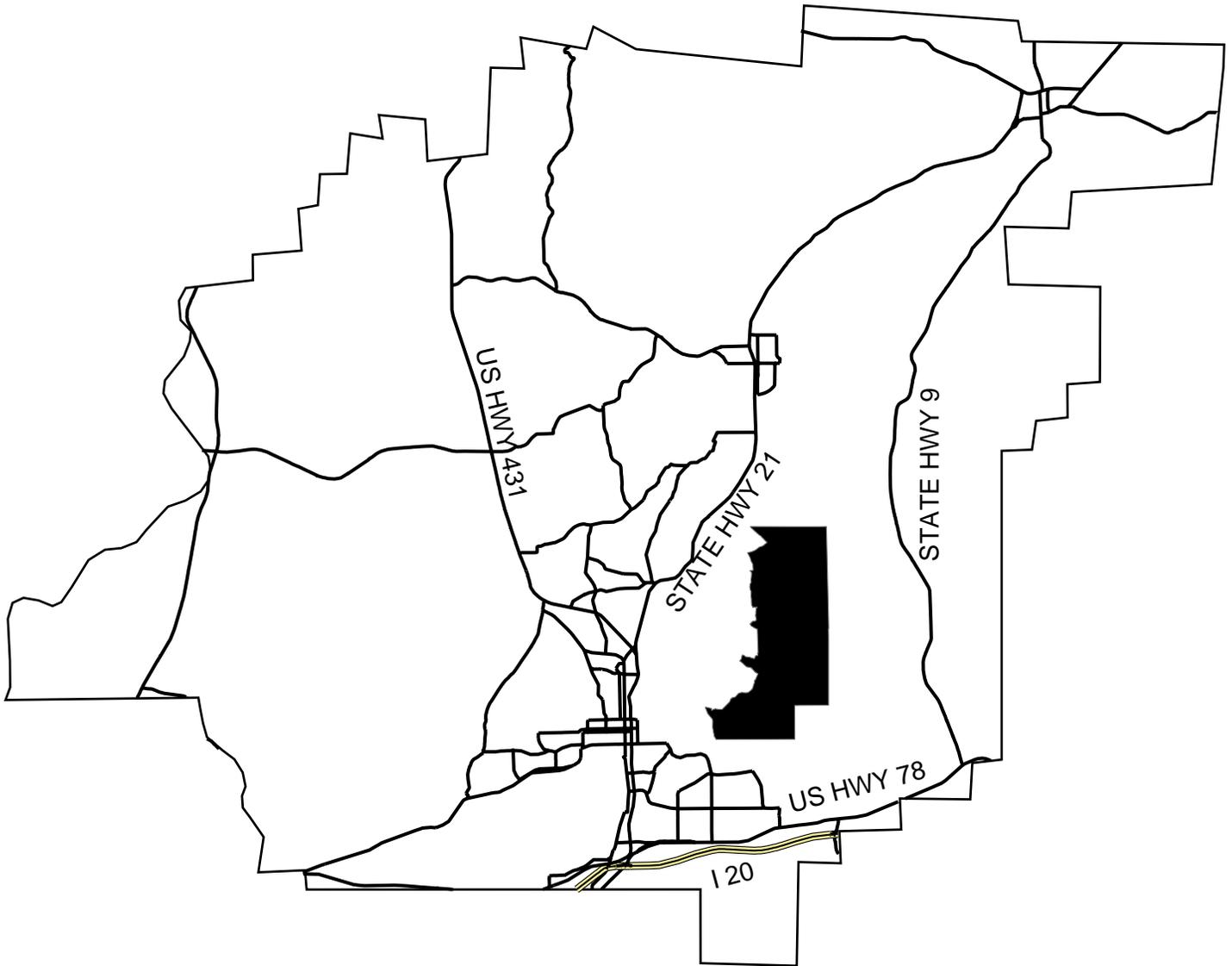
Contaminants

Approximately 6,000 acres of Mountain Longleaf NWR are within areas closed because of unexploded ordnance (UXO), due to other environmental contaminant safety issues and/or inadequate infrastructure to support the use. The Army is currently in the process of identifying and characterizing the extent of contamination. Upon completion of these studies, the Army and the Fish and Wildlife Service will seek to reach agreement on the level of cleanup necessary to allow the Refuge to fulfill its primary purpose and allow expansion of public use into these previously contaminated areas.

Warning signs with the following wording, “Danger Unexploded Ordnance Keep Out” and/or “Area Beyond This Sign Closed - All Public Entry Prohibited”, identify lands within the Refuge closed to public use (Fig. 2). These signs are posted around all areas suspected of containing UXO or environmental contaminants. The public is restricted from entering all areas bounded by these signs.

The remaining portions of the Refuge (~ 3,000 acres) are considered to have little or no UXO and environmental contaminants. These areas will be open to public use upon completion of this public use planning process. The remaining 6,000 acres that contain UXO and other contaminants will be opened under the uses described in this Hunting Plan once a reasonable assurance of public safety can be made.

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge



Legend

-  Roads
-  I 20
-  Refuge
-  Calhoun County



FIG. 1 LOCATION OF THE REFUGE



Fig. 2 Closed Area Signs

CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITY

Scope and Rationale

The Refuge and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources have developed this Hunting Plan (Plan) to guide hunting on the Refuge in a manner that allows us to fulfill the purpose for which the Refuge was established as well as to provide a public benefit. The draft of this Plan will allow the public to comment on the proposals presented within the Plan and to influence any future changes. Once the Plan is adopted it will be an instrument that guides future decisions on hunting at the Refuge. A cooperative agreement will be pursued with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to implement this Plan.

Legal Mandates

Guidance for authorizing public uses on National Wildlife Refuges is provided in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (the Act) of 1997. The Act states, “compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System . . . through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife.” The Act recognizes that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of the Refuge System that should receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management. Other uses not listed as priority public uses may be allowed if they are determined to be appropriate and compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

According to the Act, when a wildlife-dependent recreational use is determined to be a compatible use and is not inconsistent with public safety, that activity should be facilitated. The term “compatible use” is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the refuge. The US Fish and Wildlife Service’s Final Compatibility Policy Pursuant to the Act delegates the responsibility of determining compatibility to the Refuge Manager with concurrence by the Regional Office Supervisor.

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314, authorized the transfer, to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior, approximately 7,759 acres in order to establish the Refuge. P.L. No. 107-314 established that the primary purpose of the Refuge was to “enhance, manage, and protect the unique mountain longleaf pine ecosystem on the property.”

On October 23, 2003, the Joint Powers Authority transferred 1,257 acres to the Department of the Interior. This transfer increased the size of the Refuge to 9,016 acres and provided additional acreage for habitat restoration, wildlife management activities and public use.

Relationship to Other Plans and Documents

Concurrent with the development of this Hunting Plan, the Refuge is developing a Public Use Plan that will outline the Refuge’s proposed public use program. The Public Use Plan will provide more complete guidance as to the timing and location of other public use activities on the Refuge.

The Refuge completed compatibility determinations on uses proposed within this document. All uses proposed are deemed to be compatible with the mission of Mountain Longleaf NWR. These uses, which include big game, upland game, and migratory bird hunting will be presented in this Draft Hunting Plan to solicit public comments. A list and detailed description of the hunting opportunities proposed for the Refuge is provided in this document.

The Hunting and Public Use Plans are considered interim planning documents. All refuges are required to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan that will describe the desired future conditions of a refuge and provide long-range guidance and management direction to achieve refuge purposes; help fulfill the National Wildlife Refuge System mission; maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System and help meet other mandates. The Hunting and Public Use Plans currently being developed are considered “step-down” management plans of this future Comprehensive Conservation Plan. These plans will be incorporated and amended as necessary when the Refuge develops its Comprehensive Conservation Plan as required within 15 years of establishment.

The Refuge developed this plan in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Their ideas and suggestions were incorporated into this document prior to this public review. A cooperative agreement will be pursued with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to implement this Plan. Any proposed changes to the document that result from the public review will also be coordinated with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources prior to finalizing the Plan.

Upon completion and adoption of the Final Hunting Plan, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will publish in the Federal Register a Proposed Rule to allow hunting on the Refuge. Following the comment period on the Proposed Rule, a determination will be made whether to go forward with opening the Refuge to hunting as outlined in the proposed hunting plan and a subsequent Final Rule will be published outlining the final decision on hunting at Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge.

STATEMENT OF REFUGE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314, authorized the transfer, to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior, approximately 7,759 acres in order to establish the Refuge. P.L. No. 107-314 established that the primary purpose of Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge was to “enhance, manage, and protect the unique mountain longleaf pine ecosystem on the property.” Additional management objectives given in P.L. No. 107-314 are to: 1) conserve and enhance populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem, 2) protect and enhance the quality of aquatic habitat in the refuge, 3) provide, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, 4) provide opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law.

ASSESSMENT

Populations of game animals are not currently monitored within the refuge so population estimates are not known. Species proposed to be hunted within this plan were previously hunted during Army management. Suitable habitat exists on the Refuge to support populations of all species proposed to be hunted. Population of these species should not be negatively affected by hunting. As habitat conditions improve and/or additional areas are remediated of contaminants on the refuge, hunting of additional species may be allowed following public comment and review of the proposed expansion in the Federal Register. A portion of species harvested may be examined and data recorded by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources at check-in stations to

monitor trends in health and as a population index. In addition to providing recreational opportunities, hunting will provide useful population data from retrieved harvest information.

DESCRIPTION OF HUNTING PROGRAM

Most Refuge management activities (restoration, public use, hunting, monitoring and research) will provide an opportunity for public participation and to teach/encourage environmental stewardship. Programs and activities will be developed to create in our visitors:

- Awareness and ecological understanding of the Refuge and adjacent landscape.
- Knowledge of how humans affect the natural system.
- Understanding of the value of mountain longleaf pine habitat for wildlife.
- Recognition of wildlife values in general.

Hunting on the Refuge will occur through a cooperative partnership with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The hunting program will mirror to the greatest degree possible the season dates and weapons type used currently on Alabama Wildlife Management Areas. The permit required to hunt on the refuge will be the permit issued annually by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Hunters should refer to the permit for specific regulations regarding hunting on the Refuge.

Hunting on Refuge lands will be allowed for big game, upland game and migratory game bird species. Hunting dates will be set annually through meetings with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Hunters will be required to follow all State and Federal laws and regulations and all Refuge specific regulations.

Hunting on the refuge is currently limited by Army Land Use Controls agreed to by the Service when the Refuge was established. Once clean-up of contaminants and unexploded ordnance by the US Army is complete, these land use controls may be modified.

Hunting is further limited due to a portion of the Refuge being within the limits of the City of Anniston. We will work with the City of Anniston to alleviate concerns regarding hunting with firearms within the city limits and hopefully change the zoning of that portion of the refuge to allow hunting with firearms. The Refuge is proposing safety measures that provide for public safety while allowing hunting to occur within areas near development. These safety measures are discussed within this document and within the Compatibility Determination for Hunting in Appendix A.

Hunting as a Compatible Public Use

As previously stated, the term “compatible use” is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the refuge. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is “to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

The Service has responsibility for the protection and management of fish, wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend. Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge is a special place where the Service will maintain and enhance the mountain longleaf pine ecosystem for wildlife. In fulfilling our resource responsibilities, however, we also will provide the public with opportunities to enjoy and learn about wildlife and opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation so long as they do not materially interfere with our habitat and wildlife conservation activities and do not pose a hazard to the public’s safety.

This section describes hunting opportunities that we determined to be compatible with the goals of the Refuge and provides guidelines and plans for facilities and activities (see also attached Compatibility Determinations). Specific locations of facilities, except in a few instances, are not yet known. As funding becomes available, facilities will be developed to aid in the management of the Refuge including the support of all forms of public use including hunting.

Hunting as a Priority Public Use

The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 (PL 105-57) (NWRIA) states that hunting is one of 6 wildlife-dependent public uses that, when determined to be compatible, is to be a priority public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Hunting provides the public with wildlife-oriented recreation opportunities and has been determined to be compatible with the purposes for which this Refuge was established.

Hunting Regulations

Regulations Pertaining to all National Wildlife Refuge System Lands

There are regulations regarding hunting on all National Wildlife Refuges which can be found in 50 CFR 32.2. The following list contains an overview of these regulations but is not a complete list or exact text of each regulation. Each hunter should familiarize themselves with the regulations as they are published in the Code of Federal Regulations.

1. Each person will secure and possess the required State licenses.
2. Each person will comply with the applicable provisions of the laws and regulations of the State where they are hunting.
3. Each person will comply with the terms and conditions of access on a refuge.
4. Each person must comply with any refuge specific regulations.
5. It is prohibited to use any drug on any arrow.
6. Baiting or hunting over a baited site is prohibited.
7. The use of nails, wire, screws or bolts to attach a stand to a tree or hunting from a tree in which a metal object has been driven to support a hunter is prohibited.
8. It is unlawful to use or possess alcoholic beverages while hunting.

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge Specific Regulations

Refuge specific regulations have been proposed to further ensure the safety of visitors and habitats of the Refuge. These refuge specific regulations once published may be found in 50 CFR 32.20 and will include:

Migratory Game Birds

A. Hunting of Migratory Game Birds. We allow hunting of woodcock on designated areas of the refuge in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. You must possess and carry a signed hunt permit when hunting.

Upland Game Hunting

B. Upland Game Hunting. We allow hunting of quail, squirrel, rabbit, groundhog, raccoon, opossum, beaver and fox on designated areas of the refuge in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. You must possess and carry a signed hunt permit when hunting.
2. We allow hunting during daylight hours only.
3. We prohibit the use of dogs to hunt or pursue raccoon, opossum or fox.

Big Game Hunting

C. Big Game Hunting. We allow the hunting of white-tailed deer, bobcat, coyote, feral hog and turkey on designated areas of the refuge in accordance with State regulations and subject to the following conditions:

1. You must possess and carry a signed hunt permit when hunting.
2. We prohibit damaging trees or hunting from a tree that contains and inserted metal object. Hunters must removed stands from trees after each day's hunt.
3. You may not use dogs to hunt or pursue big game.

MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

In order to avoid conflicts with other management and public use activities, the Refuge has proposed a series of Refuge-specific regulations. Initially, hunting will be limited to the area east and south of Ridge Road (Fig. 4) on the eastern and southern slopes of Choccolocco Mountain. Approximately 6,000 acres of the Refuge are closed because of unexploded ordnance (UXO), due to other environmental contaminant safety issues and/or inadequate infrastructure to support the use. The Army is currently in the process of identifying and characterizing the extent of contamination. Upon completion of these studies, the Army and the Fish and Wildlife Service will seek to reach agreement on the level of cleanup necessary to allow the Refuge to fulfill its primary purpose and allow expansion of public use into these previously contaminated areas.

Access to public use areas will be from Ridge Road which is accessible by two-wheel drive vehicle during most of the year but four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended due to the steep terrain.

Hunting permits and related information will be issued by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources each fall for the current hunting season. This information will be available at the Refuge Office, District II Wildlife Section Office and various licensing agents throughout the Calhoun County area. Hunting permits will contain maps of hunting area locations and rules and regulations. Each hunter must sign the hunting permit prior to hunting to show that they have read and understand the rules and regulations.

The boundary of all lands owned by the Service will be marked with Refuge boundary signs (Fig. 3). All areas permanently off-limits to hunting will be clearly marked with No Hunting or Closed Area Signs. A safety buffer of 150 yards will be established on lands the Service owns adjacent to other developed areas for visitor and neighborhood safety.



Fig. 3 Refuge Signs

MOUNTAIN LONGLEAF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

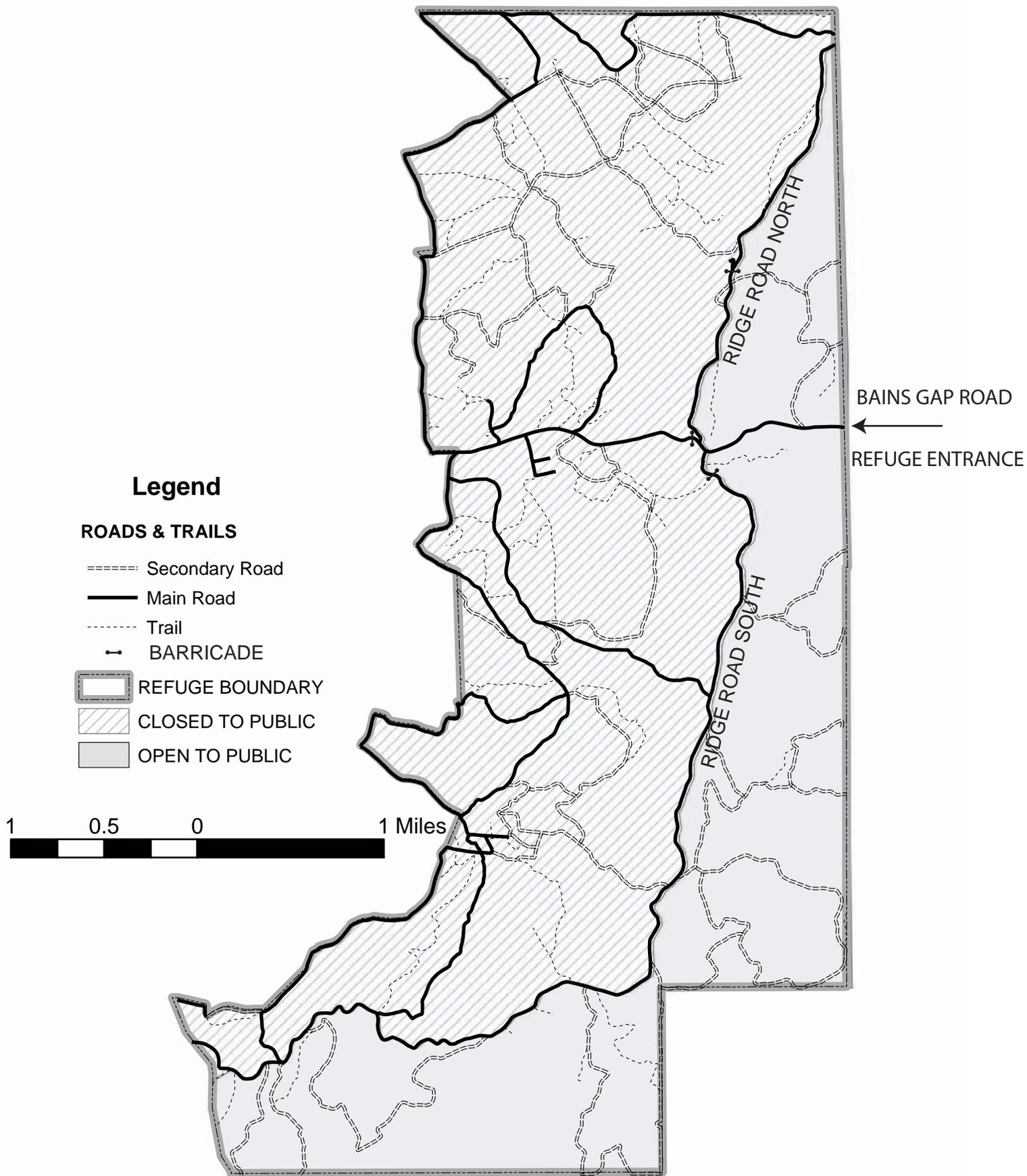


FIG. 4 PUBLIC ACCESS AREAS

CONDUCT OF THE HUNT

Hunting Orientation and Safety

To ensure the safety of residences and businesses adjacent to the refuge, archery-only weapon areas will be established within those areas of the refuge that are within the Anniston city limits and zoned to preclude discharge of firearms. In addition, safety zones will be established that are consistent with the State of Alabama's Wildlife Management Area regulations. Wildlife Management Area regulations prohibit the discharge of firearms within 150 yards of any dwelling and within 100 yards of any road.

Visitor orientation will be provided directly on the Refuge through the use of signs, brochures, flyers, maps, and trail guides to direct hunters. Outlets off the Refuge that would be a source of information would be the Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area and may also include local media, sporting goods stores, chamber of commerce offices, tourism offices, and the Internet.

To ensure visitor safety, the Army will provide safety-briefing materials that contain basic information on site history, UXO hazards, and the appropriate action to be taken if UXO items are encountered. Safety brochures describing and depicting hazards will be available at the Refuge headquarters and information kiosks on the Refuge. The Service will provide maps detailing areas of the Refuge that are closed for safety and resource management.

Entry Access/Procedures

Public entry into the Refuge initially will only be possible through the east gate (Fig. 4) on Bains Gap Road. Due to ongoing UXO and contaminant remediation on the western portions of the Refuge we will not allow access through those closed areas of the Refuge until clean-up has been completed.

Existing gates within the Refuge restrict access to UXO/contaminated lands. The Army will remain responsible for securing, locking and maintaining these gates. As described in the MOA, the FWS will work closely with the Army in controlling visitor access and monitoring Refuge visitors. The Army will be responsible for maintaining all Army signage, fencing, gates and barricades necessary to ensure public safety within lands that have the potential or are known to contain UXO/environmental contamination. Hunters should report any damaged or missing gates, barricades and/or signs to Refuge personnel. Refuge personnel will notify the Army of any damage to these safety features in a timely manner.

Law Enforcement

Enforcement of Refuge trespass and other public use violations normally associated with management of a National Wildlife Refuge will be the responsibility of commissioned Refuge Law Enforcement Officers and cooperatively by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and other city and county law enforcement agencies. General trespass, poaching, and other violations will be cooperatively enforced by these agencies. Procedures for obtaining law enforcement assistance will be based on legal jurisdiction where the incident occurs. For assistance on the Refuge within the City of Anniston, the Anniston Police Department will be contacted as needed, while the Calhoun County Sheriff would be contacted for assistance within the Refuge outside of the city limits.

The FWS will meet with local law enforcement agencies and develop coordinated law enforcement strategies. Strategies that involve restricted access lands within the Refuge will be further coordinated with the Army. Enforcement of safety restrictions related to UXO/environmental contamination remains the responsibility of the Army.

Community Support

The success of the Refuge will not only be measured by the ecological restoration and enhancement of the mountain longleaf pine ecosystem, but also by our effectiveness in working with other agencies and individuals to preserve and enhance the biodiversity in Alabama and public use on the Refuge. The local community must view the Refuge as a positive economic benefit to the community and as a good neighbor.

Many refuges across the country have the privilege of working cooperatively with a non-profit community support group, which can support the Refuge through volunteer hours, outreach, advocacy, and funding. The Service welcomes the opportunity to continue to work with partners and other groups. Whether or not partnerships are formalized, the Service and its partners will continue to work under the principles of trust, respect, and open communications.

APPENDIX A

COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATIONS

for

Fishing

Environmental Education & Interpretation

Bicycling

Horseback Riding

Hunting

Wildlife Observation & Photography

Wild Food Gathering

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FISHING.....	CD-2
Determination:	CD-5
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION.....	CD-6
Determination:	CD-10
BICYCLING.....	CD-11
Determination:	CD-15
HORSEBACK RIDING	CD-16
Determination:	CD-20
BIG GAME, MIGRATORY BIRD AND UPLAND GAME HUNTING	CD-21
Determination:	CD-26
WILDLIFE OBSERVATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY	CD-28
Determination:	CD-32
WILD FOOD GATHERING.....	CD-33
Determination:	CD-37

Compatibility Determination

FISHING

Refuge Name: Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

County: Calhoun, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314
Additional acquisition authority: Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purpose(s):

Establishment purpose: "(2) The Secretary of Interior shall manage the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in a manner that— (A) conserves and enhances populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the Refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem; (B) protects and enhances the quality of aquatic habitat in the Refuge; (C) provides, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography; (D) provides opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law; and (E) is consistent with environmental restoration efforts conducted by the Secretary of the Army on the Refuge or on lands adjacent to the Refuge." 116 Stat 2710, dated Dec. 2, 2002.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Providing fishing opportunities was included as a management objective within the legislation establishing Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge and was identified as a compatible public use within the Environmental Assessment prepared for the establishment of the refuge. The two lakes identified in the Environmental Assessment as being appropriate for fishing were not included within the legislated acreage that established the refuge nor are they included within the current acquisition boundaries of the Refuge.

Where would the use be conducted?

Suitable habitat to support fishing does not occur within the refuge boundaries or the acquisition boundaries.

When would the use be conducted?

NA

How would the use be conducted?

NA

Why is this use being proposed?

NA

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Adequate habitat to support fishing does not occur within the refuge boundaries.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use: None

Maintenance costs: None

Monitoring costs: None

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts: None

Long-term impacts: None

Cumulative: None

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began December 29, 2003 and ended January 27, 2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Article in newspaper with wide local distribution.
Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge web site.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 4 week review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

One commenter requested additional information on why we continue to list fishing under our management objectives since it is no longer compatible.

Our response was:

The text included in the Legal Mandates Section of both the Hunting Plan and the Public Use Plan is the exact text from the legislation that established the refuge. The footnote at the bottom of the page is an attempt to explain why we are unable to support the objective as listed in that legislation due to lack of suitable habitat.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

Determination:

Fishing (general)

Use is not compatible.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility: Not applicable

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: February 5, 2019

Compatibility Determination

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

Refuge Name: Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

County: Calhoun, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314
Additional acquisition authority: Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purpose(s):

Establishment purpose: "(2) The Secretary of Interior shall manage the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in a manner that— (A) conserves and enhances populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the Refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem; (B) protects and enhances the quality of aquatic habitat in the Refuge; (C) provides, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography; (D) provides opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law; and (E) is consistent with environmental restoration efforts conducted by the Secretary of the Army on the Refuge or on lands adjacent to the Refuge." 116 Stat 2710, dated Dec. 2, 2002.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Environmental Education and Interpretation are 2 of the 6 legislated wildlife-dependent, priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since Mountain Longleaf NWR is a new refuge, the exact number of users is unknown. Local interest in these activities is high and initial estimates are 5,000 users annually. This high priority public use will be expanded as resources and demand permit.

No Environmental Education and Interpretation opportunities have been developed since establishment of the Refuge on May 29, 2003.

Where would the use be conducted?

Environmental Education and Interpretation would occur within the 3,300 acres designated as public use areas on the refuge. As additional areas are cleared of unexploded ordnance and determined to be safe by the Army and state and federal regulators, they will be evaluated for inclusion in the public use areas.

The initial area to be opened to the public consists of the eastern and southern slopes of the Choccolocco Mountains up to the ridge line. Habitat is primarily forested with a mixture of pine and hardwoods with hardwoods predominant within the drainages. These habitat types are similar throughout all the Refuge.

When would the use be conducted?

Environmental Education and Interpretation would occur year round during designated Refuge hours.

How would the use be conducted?

Environmental Education and Interpretation would be subject to any applicable federal, state and refuge-specific regulations and occur within designated public use areas on the Refuge.

Why is this use being proposed?

Environmental Education and Interpretation are proposed to offer the public educational opportunities that are identified as priority wildlife dependent public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$12,000 of staff time and \$13,000 of operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use.

Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no law enforcement or administrative staff and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Mountain Longleaf NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet these needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

Interpretive signs must be developed and installed to support these uses.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Monitoring or Guiding of Activities - \$7,500

Trash Pick-up - \$500

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$4,000

Maintenance Costs

Road/Trail Repair/Grading - \$3,000

Signing - \$4,000

Vehicle - \$5,000

Mowing - \$1,000

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters in order to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to Environmental Education and Interpretation is estimated at \$300 initially and \$100 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues: None

What efforts have been made to secure adequate resources to support this priority public use?

The Army has provided funding for initial Refuge operations sufficient to allow this use to occur. Additional operating funds will be sought for subsequent years to allow this use to continue, as Army funding is limited in amount and duration.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are minor damage to vegetation, littering, increased maintenance activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts to wildlife or habitats are anticipated.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began December 29, 2003 and ended January 27, 2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Article in newspaper with wide local distribution.
Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge web site.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 4 week review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

One commenter asked if we intend to construct trails for other uses including hiking, interpretation and wildlife observation.

Our response was:

No new trails are planned at this time due to lack of funding and limited personnel. We will utilize existing roads and firebreaks previously used by the Army for their

management as refuge trails. As the need arises and funding and/or personnel (including volunteers) become available we will establish additional trails.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

Determination:

Interpretation	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.
Environmental education (teaching teachers or group leaders)	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.
Environmental education (other)	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.
Environmental education (teaching students)	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety.

Justification:

Allowing wildlife observation and photography on the Refuge would fulfill two of the purposes as stated in our establishment legislation.

Wildlife observation and photography are 2 of the 6 wildlife-dependent public uses that are to be supported within units of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

These uses are not expected to conflict with any proposed habitat management or contaminant cleanup on the Refuge provided the Refuge utilizes closures of short duration with little advance notice. These closures are necessary to allow for habitat management actions such as prescribed burning on the refuge and unexploded ordnance cleanup on and adjacent to the refuge.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: February 5, 2019

Compatibility Determination

BICYCLING

Refuge Name: Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

County: Calhoun, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314
Additional acquisition authority: Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purpose(s):

Establishment purpose: "(2) The Secretary of Interior shall manage the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in a manner that— (A) conserves and enhances populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the Refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem; (B) protects and enhances the quality of aquatic habitat in the Refuge; (C) provides, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography; (D) provides opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law; and (E) is consistent with environmental restoration efforts conducted by the Secretary of the Army on the Refuge or on lands adjacent to the Refuge." 116 Stat 2710, dated Dec. 2, 2002.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Riding bicycles for transportation, pleasure or exercise does not legally occur on the Refuge and is not one of the 6 priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Where would the use be conducted?

As proposed, bicycling would be allowed only for transportation only on those roads open for vehicle traffic.

When would the use be conducted?

Bicycling could occur year round during refuge hours. Bicycling is more likely to occur from April to October due to weather conditions.

How would the use be conducted?

It is anticipated that bicycle riding would be self-guided utilizing refuge maps, brochures and kiosks.

Why is this use being proposed?

Bicycling is an environmentally sound transportation method that would allow users to visit the refuge without noise or air pollution associated with motor vehicles. Bicycling is allowed on the nearby Talladega National Forest and the adjacent Alabama Forest Commission property.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$2,000 of staff time and \$5,000 of operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use provided bicycling is confined to roads that allow vehicular traffic.

Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no law enforcement or administrative staff and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Mountain Longleaf NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet these needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

Traffic on Refuge roads is expected to be limited to refuge users only and a bicycle or pedestrian lane should not be required. In the future, if any Refuge road is used as a public thoroughfare, a bicycle and pedestrian lane would be necessary.

Bicycle racks will need to be provided for refuge users who travel on bicycles and then utilize interpretive trails.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Monitoring or Guiding of Activities - \$500

Trash Pick-up - \$500

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$1,000

Maintenance Costs

Road/Trail Repair/Grading - \$1,500

Signing - \$500

Vehicle - \$1,000

Mowing - \$1,000

Bicycle Racks - \$1,000

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters in order to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to bicycling is estimated at \$300 initially and \$100 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are littering, increased maintenance activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts are expected on wildlife or habitat.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated with this use as proposed.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began December 29, 2003 and ended January 27, 2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Article in newspaper with wide local distribution.
Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge web site.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 4 week review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

One commenter asked us to develop a multiple use trail system that would allow cyclist as well as equestrians.

Our response was:

As we tried to explain in the Legal Mandates section of both the Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan, there are six uses that are to receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management. Those uses include Environmental Education, Interpretation, Hunting, Wildlife Observation and Photography. (Fishing is the sixth use but that opportunity does not exist on the refuge. See comment 13.) We will first seek appropriate staffing and funding levels to ensure these uses are fully supported prior to expending scarce funding and personnel resources on non-priority uses such as horseback riding and bicycling.

Although horseback riding and bicycling are not priority uses, we do recognize the fact that the refuge is uniquely located between the City of Anniston and the Talladega

National Forest and Alabama Forest Commission property. This corridor of public properties provides many opportunities for enhanced management of both habitats and public use. As staffing and funding permit, the refuge will seek to highlight the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System to additional users who may use the refuge to access additional public lands from Anniston.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment..

Determination:

Bicycling

Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Bicycling would be confined to roads open to vehicular traffic. Bicycles and bicycling would be prohibited on all firebreaks, trails, and roads not open for vehicular traffic.

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety.

Justification:

As proposed, bicycling would enable refuge users to travel to refuge trailheads and kiosks. Bicycling would support legislated wildlife-dependent public uses.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: February 5, 2014

Compatibility Determination

HORSEBACK RIDING

Refuge Name: Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

County: Calhoun, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314
Additional acquisition authority: Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purpose(s):

Establishment purpose: "(2) The Secretary of Interior shall manage the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in a manner that— (A) conserves and enhances populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the Refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem; (B) protects and enhances the quality of aquatic habitat in the Refuge; (C) provides, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography; (D) provides opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law; and (E) is consistent with environmental restoration efforts conducted by the Secretary of the Army on the Refuge or on lands adjacent to the Refuge." 116 Stat 2710, dated Dec. 2, 2002.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Horseback riding for pleasure does not currently occur on the Refuge and is not one of the 6 priority public wildlife dependent uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Where would the use be conducted?

Refuge roads, firebreaks and trails.

When would the use be conducted?

Horseback riding could occur year round during refuge hours. Horseback riding is more likely to occur from April to October due to weather conditions.

How would the use be conducted?

It is anticipated that Horseback riding would be self-guided utilizing refuge-provided maps, brochures, and kiosks.

Why is this use being proposed?

Horseback riding is popular in the local area. Groups supporting horseback riding have contacted the refuge concerning the possibility of utilizing the area. Horseback riding is allowed on the nearby Talladega National Forest that are off-limits to vehicles and the adjacent Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

It is estimated that \$200,000 will be needed to redesign and reconfigure trails in order to avoid steep slopes. It is unknown if the level of unexploded ordnance and other contaminant clean-up will be sufficient to allow this to occur. Approximately \$20,000 of staff time and \$42,800 of operations and maintenance funding would be needed to administer this use.

Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no law enforcement or administrative staff and would rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no maintenance staff but would use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Mountain Longleaf NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet these needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

Special parking area would be needed to allow parking of trucks and horse trailers.
Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$10,000

Maintenance Costs

Estimated one time cost for trail redesign and reconfiguration - \$200,000

Road/Trail Repair/Grading - \$20,000

Signing - \$1,000

Vehicle - \$5,000

Mowing - \$1,000

Parking Areas - \$5,000

Monitoring - \$10,300

Trash Pick-up - \$500

Monitoring costs:

If horseback riding occurs on any roads, trails or firebreaks on the refuge it would be necessary to implement an extensive monitoring system for the areas open for this use. Due to the steep terrain that refuge roads/trails/firebreaks traverse and the soil types found on the refuge, extensive erosion is probable. Monitoring costs would be approximately \$10,000 annually.

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters in order to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to Horseback riding is estimated at \$300 initially and \$100 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are damage to vegetation due to trampling and browsing, erosion, littering, greatly increased maintenance activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

Long-term impacts to wildlife are expected to include loss of habitat due to extreme erosion and infrastructure improvements and possible loss of habitat due to exotic species introduction. The increase in maintenance required to support this use would detract from normal maintenance and maintenance conducted in support of legislated wildlife dependent priority public uses.

Cumulative:

Each use added in addition to priority public uses will result in an increase in traffic and needed infrastructure. Horseback riding will lead to cumulative impacts to habitat, maintenance costs and infrastructure needs.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began December 29, 2003 and ended January 27, 2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Article in newspaper with wide local distribution.
Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge web site.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 4 week review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

One commenter asked us to reconsider allowing horseback riding because it is a popular activity and provides tourism and an economic benefit to the community. This commenter states that the horseback riding community would provide the resources necessary to maintain the necessary trails.

Our response was:

Horseback riding is not a priority public use on a National Wildlife Refuge. We will first utilize our limited available resources to support those activities which are priority public uses. The portion of the refuge property where we can allow public use is limited to

approximately 3,300 acres of primarily steep inaccessible terrain on the eastern and southern slopes of Choccolocco Mountain. These areas cannot support an intensive use such as horseback riding without negatively impacting the resources that we were established to protect.

Once clean-up of environmental contaminants are complete on all refuge lands, we will re-evaluate the compatibility of horseback riding on the refuge if requested.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

Determination:

Horseback riding

Use is not compatible.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility: Not applicable

Justification:

Horseback riding would necessitate additional parking, infrastructure and maintenance beyond what the refuge's current budget can support or staff oversee.

Horseback riding would lead to the direct loss of habitat due to infrastructure improvements, erosion and trampling.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: February 5, 2014

Compatibility Determination

BIG GAME, MIGRATORY BIRD AND UPLAND GAME HUNTING

Refuge Name: Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

County: Calhoun, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314
Additional acquisition authority: Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purpose(s):

Establishment purpose: "(2) The Secretary of Interior shall manage the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in a manner that— (A) conserves and enhances populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the Refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem; (B) protects and enhances the quality of aquatic habitat in the Refuge; (C) provides, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography; (D) provides opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law; and (E) is consistent with environmental restoration efforts conducted by the Secretary of the Army on the Refuge or on lands adjacent to the Refuge." 116 Stat 2710, dated Dec. 2, 2002.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge was established on May 29, 2003. Hunting did not occur on the U.S. Army property that became Mountain Longleaf NWR immediately prior to establishment but had occurred in the recent past under Army management. Hunting has not been allowed on the Refuge since establishment.

Hunting is one of the 6 legislated wildlife-dependent, priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Hunting would occur within designated hunting areas on the refuge during Refuge hunting seasons that are within Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources established hunting seasons. Meetings would be held annually with Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources staff to set these dates. Hunting would be subject to Federal, State and Refuge-specific regulations and occur within designated hunting areas on the Refuge.

Since Mountain Longleaf NWR is a new refuge, the exact number of users is unknown. Based on hunting that occurs on the adjacent State of Alabama Wildlife Management we would anticipate up to 200 people and 125 vehicles to utilize the public hunting area each day of the weekend during the peak of seasons for white-tailed deer and wild turkey. We expect approximately 100 people and 75 vehicles on a weekday during the peak of the white-tailed deer and wild turkey season. We anticipate up to 1,000 additional user days per year for all other species hunted..

Where would the use be conducted?

Hunting would occur within designated hunting areas on the refuge. Initially, hunting would be restricted to approximately 3,300 acres of the 9,016 acre refuge due to safety concerns associated with unexploded ordnance. As additional areas are cleared of unexploded ordnance and determined to be safe by the Army and state and federal regulators, we anticipate opening additional areas to hunting. Once all areas are cleared of unexploded ordnance, we anticipate most of the 9,016 acre refuge to be opened for hunting.

The initial area to be opened to hunting consists of the eastern and southern slopes of the Choccolocco Mountains up to the ridge line. Habitat is primarily forested with a mixture of pine and hardwoods with hardwoods predominant within the drainages. These habitat types are similar throughout all the Refuge.

When would the use be conducted?

Hunting would occur during designated Refuge hunting seasons that are within Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources established hunting seasons. Meetings would be held annually with Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources staff to set these dates.

How would the use be conducted?

Hunting would be subject to federal, state and refuge-specific regulations and occur within designated hunting areas on the Refuge. Camping and use of ATV's would not be allowed. Tree stands or blinds would be removed daily by the hunter.

Why is this use being proposed?

Hunting is proposed to offer the public recreation opportunities that are identified as the priority wildlife-dependent public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$10,000 of staff time and \$25,000 of other operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use.

Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no law enforcement or administrative staff and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. In addition, the State of Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries has committed staff to facilitate hunting on the refuge. Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff as well as State personnel to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Mountain Longleaf NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet these needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use: None

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Hunt Coordination Meetings and Data Analysis - \$3,000

Monitoring of Hunting Activities - \$3,000

Trash Pick-up - \$500

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$3,500

Maintenance Costs

Road Repair/Grading - \$15,000

Signing - \$1,000

Trash Pick-up - \$1,000
Vehicle - \$5,000
Mowing - \$3,000

Monitoring costs:

The refuge will utilize data collected by the State at area check-in stations. Monitoring costs would be minimized for the refuge under this scenario and are expected to be \$500.00 annually.

Offsetting revenues: None

What efforts have been made to secure adequate resources to support this priority public use?

The State of Alabama has agreed to provide staff and resources to the degree necessary to allow this use to occur on the refuge. This includes staff from the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, brochure printing, and facilities maintenance assistance at the State level.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are minor damage to vegetation, littering, increased maintenance activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts to wildlife or habitats are anticipated.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began December 29, 2003 and ended January 27, 2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Article in newspaper with wide local distribution.
Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge web site.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 4 week review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

Commenter A asked us to reconsider allowing American woodcock and bobcat hunting on the refuge. The commenter states that both species are declining in numbers and that in order to fulfill our purpose to “restore and enhance” populations of wildlife, these species should not be hunted.

Our response was:

The American woodcock is a migratory game bird species monitored and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The commenter is correct that this species has experienced a decline in population (1.8 to 2.3% per year since 1968). The major causes of these declines are believed to be degradation and loss of habitat on breeding and wintering grounds. Hunting of this species is not believed to contribute to the declining population of this species. Hunting of American woodcock on the refuge is not likely to have an affect on American woodcock population numbers.

Bobcats in the southeast United States and throughout their range are considered to be stable or increasing in population and distribution. We would incorporate any additional relevant data provided by the commenter, to support the assertion that bobcat numbers are declining, into future harvest management on the refuge.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

Commenters B & C requested that we limit big game hunting to archery-only in order to make it safer for other users on the refuge as is done at other refuges.

Our response was:

As proposed, hunting of deer and other big game will be allowed during the legal hunting season using any weapon legally allowed in the State of Alabama subject to local zoning regulations. We have proposed allowing all legal weapons to provide continuity between the refuge and the adjacent Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area. We believe that the current state regulations, combined with our refuge-specific regulations, provide an adequate assurance of safety for refuge visitors and neighbors. If conflicts arise between

competing users or refuge neighbors, we will then evaluate how best to manage uses to avoid future conflicts.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

Commenter D requested that we limit firearms hunting to the area currently designated as public use and any future expansion be limited to archery-only hunting. This commenter also stated that they would not support a change in zoning for the refuge to allow the discharge of firearms and that a 200' buffer should also be established around the refuge as a no hunting zone.

Our response was:

We believe that the current state regulations, combined with our refuge-specific regulations, provide an adequate assurance of safety for refuge visitors and neighbors. If conflicts arise between competing users or refuge neighbors, we will then evaluate how best to manage uses to avoid future conflicts. We will work with the City of Anniston to alleviate concerns regarding hunting with firearms within the city limits and hopefully change the zoning of that portion of the refuge to allow hunting with firearms.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

Commenter E requested that we not allow any firearms hunting within 250 yards of the property line of the Center for Domestic Preparedness' Chemical, Ordnance, Biological, and Radiological/Nuclear Training Facility.

Our response was:

We are aware of concerns with firearms hunting in this area. The timeline for clean-up and public access to this area of the refuge is unknown. Prior to allowing public use within this area we will coordinate our actions with the Center for Domestic Preparedness.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

Determination:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Hunting (big game) | Use is compatible with the following stipulations. |
| Hunting (other migratory birds) | Use is compatible with the following stipulations. |
| Hunting (upland game) | Use is compatible with the following stipulations. |

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Hunting of upland game, big game, and migratory game birds on the refuge is compatible so long as support from the State of Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries is provided at a level that minimizes annual costs to the refuge. Those costs are currently capped at \$10,000 for staff time and \$25,000 dollars for other operations and maintenance funding as described in the Hunting Plan for the Refuge.

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety.

Hunting is compatible provided archery-only weapon areas are established within those areas of the refuge that are within the Anniston city limits and zoned to preclude discharge of firearms. In addition, safety zones will be established that are consistent with the State of Alabama's Wildlife Management Area regulations. Wildlife Management Area regulations prohibit the discharge of firearms within 150 yards of any dwelling and within 100 yards of any public road as designated by permit. These safety zones would apply to those areas of the Refuge that are adjacent to other developed or intensive use areas but outside of the city limits. These safety zones would also apply to areas within the city limits should they be rezoned to allow the discharge of firearms.

Justification:

By allowing hunting on the Refuge we would fulfill one of the purposes as stated in our establishment legislation.

Hunting is 1 of the 6 wildlife-dependent public uses that, when compatible, are to be supported within units of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Hunting is not expected to conflict with any proposed habitat management or contaminant cleanup on the Refuge provided the Refuge utilizes closures of short duration with little advance notice. These closures are necessary to allow for habitat management actions such as prescribed burning on the refuge and unexploded ordnance cleanup on and adjacent to the refuge.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: February 5, 2019

Compatibility Determination

WILDLIFE OBSERVATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Refuge Name: Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

County: Calhoun, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314
Additional acquisition authority: Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purpose(s):

Establishment purpose: "(2) The Secretary of Interior shall manage the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in a manner that— (A) conserves and enhances populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the Refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem; (B) protects and enhances the quality of aquatic habitat in the Refuge; (C) provides, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography; (D) provides opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law; and (E) is consistent with environmental restoration efforts conducted by the Secretary of the Army on the Refuge or on lands adjacent to the Refuge." 116 Stat 2710, dated Dec. 2, 2002.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Wildlife Observation and Photography are 2 of the 6 legislated wildlife-dependent, priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since Mountain Longleaf NWR is a new refuge, the exact number of users is unknown. The level of interest in the local community has been significant since establishment but the number of users can only be approximated at 50,000 annually.

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge was established on May 29, 2003. Wildlife Observation and Photography have not been allowed on the Refuge since establishment.

Where would the use be conducted?

Wildlife Observation and Photography would occur within the 3,300 acres designated as public use areas on the refuge. As additional areas are cleared of unexploded ordnance and determined to be safe by the Army and state and federal regulators, they will be evaluated for inclusion in the public use areas.

The initial area to be opened to the public consists of the eastern and southern slopes of the Choccolocco Mountains up to the ridge line. Habitat is primarily forested with a mixture of pine and hardwoods with hardwoods predominant within the drainages. These habitat types are similar throughout all the Refuge.

When would the use be conducted?

Wildlife Observation and Photography would occur year round during designated Refuge hours.

How would the use be conducted?

Wildlife Observation and Photography would be subject to any applicable federal and refuge-specific regulations and occur within designated public use areas on the Refuge.

Why is this use being proposed?

Wildlife Observation and Photography are proposed to offer the public recreation opportunities that are identified as the priority wildlife dependent public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$7,000 of staff time and \$15,000 of other operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use.

Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no law enforcement or administrative staff and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Mountain Longleaf NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet these needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use: None

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Monitoring of Activities - \$3,000

Trash Pick-up - \$500

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$3,500

Maintenance Costs

Road Repair/Grading - \$6,000

Signing - \$1,000

Vehicle - \$5,000

Mowing - \$3,000

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters in order to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to Wildlife Observation and Photography is estimated at \$700 initially and \$250 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues: None

What efforts have been made to secure adequate resources to support this priority public use?

The Army has provided funding for initial Refuge operations sufficient to allow this use to occur. Additional operating funds will be sought for subsequent years to allow this use to continue, as Army funding is limited in amount and duration.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are minor damage to vegetation, littering, increased maintenance activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts to wildlife or habitats are anticipated.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began December 29, 2003 and ended January 27, 2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

- Article in newspaper with wide local distribution.
- Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge web site.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 4 week review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

- One commenter asked if we intend to construct trails for other uses including hiking, interpretation and wildlife observation.

Our response was:

No new trails are planned at this time due to lack of funding and limited personnel. We will utilize existing roads and firebreaks previously used by the Army for their management as refuge trails. As the need arises and funding and/or personnel (including volunteers) become available we will establish additional trails.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

Determination:

Photography (wildlife)	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.
Wildlife Observation	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety.

Justification:

Allowing wildlife observation and photography on the Refuge we would fulfill one of the purposes as stated in our establishment legislation.

Wildlife observation and photography are 2 of the 6 wildlife-dependent public uses that are to be supported within units of the National Wildlife Refuge System when compatible.

These uses are not expected to conflict with any proposed habitat management or contaminant cleanup on the Refuge provided the Refuge utilizes closures of short duration with little advance notice. These closures are necessary to allow for habitat management actions such as prescribed burning on the refuge and unexploded ordnance cleanup on and adjacent to the refuge.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: February 5, 2019

Compatibility Determination

WILD FOOD GATHERING

Refuge Name: Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

County: Calhoun, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. No. 107-314
Additional acquisition authority: Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purpose(s):

Establishment purpose: "(2) The Secretary of Interior shall manage the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in a manner that— (A) conserves and enhances populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in the Refuge, including migratory birds and species that are threatened or endangered, with particular emphasis on the protection of the mountain longleaf pine plant ecosystem; (B) protects and enhances the quality of aquatic habitat in the Refuge; (C) provides, in coordination with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the public with recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography; (D) provides opportunities for scientific research and education on land use and environmental law; and (E) is consistent with environmental restoration efforts conducted by the Secretary of the Army on the Refuge or on lands adjacent to the Refuge." 116 Stat 2710, dated Dec. 2, 2002.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Gathering of wild foods is not one of the 6 legislated uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System and is not currently allowed on the refuge. Based upon requests received by the Refuge to date for this activity, it is estimated that 100 or fewer users per year would directly pursue this activity. Other users may passively pursue this activity while visiting the refuge for another purpose.

Foods that are proposed to be allowed to be harvested for personal use are limited to fleshy fruited species such as blackberry (*Rubus* spp.), persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), plum (*Prunus* spp.), huckleberry (*Gaylussacia* spp.), elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) and blueberry (*Vaccinium* spp.). Soft fleshy fruited species are only briefly available to wildlife during the peak of their fruiting period and quickly ripen and deteriorate. The number of people involved in this activity are not expected to significantly impact the amount of food available for wildlife during this brief period.

Foods that would be prohibited from gathering include all mast, nut and cone producing species including oaks (*Quercus* sp.), hickory (*Carya* sp.) and pine (*Pinus* sp.). These foods if left ungathered remain a viable source of food for wildlife long after ripening. Gathering of these foods would likely impact food availability to wildlife.

Where would the use be conducted?

As proposed, compatible wild food gathering would be allowed on those areas of the Refuge open for other forms of public use.

When would the use be conducted?

Wild food gathering would occur during periods that the individual fruits are ripe. No refuge season dates are proposed. The time of ripening is species dependent and would likely commence in June (blackberry) and end in October (persimmon). This use could be conducted only during regular refuge hours.

How would the use be conducted?

It is anticipated that wild food gathering would be self-guided and no special brochures or maps would be available. Users would over time locate favorite areas to conduct this activity.

Why is this use being proposed?

Wild food gathering is a traditional activity conducted in the local area and has been requested by some people in the local community. Other public areas such as the Talladega

National Forest and Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area allow wild food gathering to a greater extent than is proposed by the refuge.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$500 of staff time and \$100 of other operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use provided no special maps or facilities are developed for wild food gathering.

Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no law enforcement or administrative staff and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Mountain Longleaf NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Mountain Longleaf NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet these needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

No special equipment or facilities are expected to be required.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Monitoring - \$400

Trash Pick-up - \$50

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$50

Maintenance Costs

Road/Trail Repair/Grading - \$50

Signing - \$25

Vehicle - \$25

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters in order to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to wild food gathering is estimated at less than \$100 initially and less than \$100 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are minor damage to vegetation, littering, increased maintenance activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts are expected on wildlife or habitat.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated with this use as proposed.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began December 29, 2003 and ended January 27, 2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Article in newspaper with wide local distribution.
Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge web site.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 4 week review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

One comment was received stating that the Compatibility Determination to allow Wild Food Gathering is not supported by available data. The commenter states that the compatibility determination suggests that; 1. only a few plant species are available to produce fleshy fruits sought by foraging wildlife species, 2. the production of fleshy fruits are so limited in quantity and so perishable that the value to wildlife is insignificant, 3. the amount of fleshy fruits harvested by the public will have little or no impact on

wildlife. The commenter did not provide additional data regarding levels of use or exact impacts.

Our response was:

The commenter is correct in stating that wild food gathering has the potential to adversely affect wildlife. If not controlled and monitored individuals may cause local shortages of food resources to wildlife. In order for an activity to be determined to be compatible on a National Wildlife Refuge it must be determined that the activity will not: a. conflict with one of the priority public uses, b. adversely affect wildlife or habitats, or c. materially interfere with or detract from refuge goals, objectives or management activities. The limited number of users combined with the wide distribution of available fruit will not likely lead to adverse impacts to wildlife. We will monitor the impact of the number of users and re-evaluate the compatibility of this use as necessary.

Response to specific points made by the commenter:

1. We did not attempt to list all fleshy fruited species that are used by wildlife. We have attempted to highlight those species that are used by wildlife and which are also likely to be used by individuals gathering food on the refuge. Many other fleshy fruited species not listed in the determination are used by wildlife.
2. We have not suggested that fleshy fruited species are limited in quantity. The opposite is in fact true on the refuge. We have a large diversity of fruiting species widely dispersed across the refuge. We do assume that these fruiting species are only briefly available to wildlife to consume. While many species produce fruit over a long period of time, individual fruits, once ripe, deteriorate fairly rapidly.

We believe that the number of individuals gathering fruiting species will be small (approximately 100 annually with additional passive users). Given the small number of users and the wide dispersion of species we do not believe that wildlife species will be adversely affected.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

Determination:

Natural resource collection (wild food gathering)

Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

All mast, nut and cone producing species including oak (*Quercus* sp.), hickory (*Carya* sp.) and pine (*Pinus* sp.) would be prohibited from being gathered. These foods if left ungathered remain a viable source of food for wildlife long after ripening. Gathering of these foods would likely impact food availability to resident wildlife species.

Commercial gathering of wild foods would be prohibited. Only those fruiting species listed in the Description would be allowed to be harvested.

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety.

Justification:

As proposed, wild food gathering would allow the small number of interested individuals to enjoy the refuge with little or no additional cost to the refuge. This use, while not wildlife dependent, is a traditional use that was likely conducted on the property over time.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: February 5, 2014

APPENDIX B

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

Response To Comments

This section will attempt to summarize all public comments received on the documents and any corresponding changes that were made as a result of the comments. We appreciate the time and effort put forth by everyone in reviewing the documents and/or commenting on the plans.

Seventy-six copies of the Plans were distributed to individuals and agencies that were on our mailing list. Three additional copies of the document were mailed to persons responding to the newspaper article on the availability of the plans. These Plans were also available online to interested individuals but the number of people accessing the plans by way of the internet is unknown.

Comments on Planning Documents

Comment 1: The scales on the maps appear to be wrong.
Corresponding Document(s): All

Response: The scales on the maps were wrong and have been corrected.

Comment 2: Two commenters asked us to reconsider allowing horseback riding because it is a popular activity and provides tourism and an economic benefit to the community. One of the commenter stated that an Equestrian Center is planned within JPA lands to allow access to future trails on the refuge.

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan and Compatibility Determination

Response: Horseback riding is not a priority public use on a National Wildlife Refuge. We will first utilize our limited available resources to support those activities which are priority public uses. The portion of the refuge property where we can allow public use is limited to approximately 3,300 acres of primarily steep inaccessible terrain on the eastern and southern slopes of Choccolocco Mountain. These areas currently open for public use cannot support an intensive use, such as horseback riding, without negatively impacting the resources that we were established to protect.

Once clean-up of environmental contaminants are complete on all refuge lands, we will re-evaluate the compatibility of horseback riding on the refuge if requested. See Comment 3 also.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 3: One commenter asked us to develop a multiple use trail system that would allow cyclist as well as equestrians.

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan

Response: As we tried to explain in the Legal Mandates section of both the Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan, there are six uses that are to receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management. Those uses include Environmental Education, Interpretation, Hunting, Wildlife Observation and Photography. (Fishing is the sixth use but that opportunity does not exist on the refuge. See comment 13.) We will first seek appropriate staffing and funding levels to ensure these uses are fully supported prior to expending scarce funding and personnel resources on non-priority uses such as horseback riding and bicycling.

Although horseback riding and bicycling are not priority uses, we do recognize the fact that the refuge is uniquely located between the City of Anniston and the Talladega National Forest and Alabama Forest Commission property. This corridor of public properties provides many opportunities for enhanced management of both habitats and public use. As staffing and funding permit, the refuge will seek to highlight the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System to additional users who may use the refuge to access additional public lands from Anniston. See Comment 2 also.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 4: One commenter asked that we not change the name of Bain's Gap Road
Corresponding Document(s): All

Response: Most roads on the refuge were unnamed. Of those that were named, we anticipate changing some of the names so that they are more descriptive or applicable to a National Wildlife Refuge. Bain's Gap Road is a historical name that is not proposed to be changed. It is listed in various spellings (Bain, Bains, and Bain's) on maps dating to the late 1800's. We will attempt to standardize this road's name on all of our maps to Bain's Gap Road in the future.

All referencing to Bains Gap Road on the map were changed to Bain's Gap Road.

Comment 5: One commenter asked how the refuge will prevent trespass from the refuge onto adjacent private property.

Corresponding Document(s): Hunting and Public Use Plans

Response: Trespass generally occurs either inadvertently or intentionally. Inadvertent trespass would occur because a person is lost, disoriented, does not have a map or there are no clear boundaries between adjacent properties. Intentional trespass would

occur because an individual knowingly disregards property boundaries or does not concern themselves with property boundaries.

The refuge is able to minimize or eliminate inadvertent trespass by providing maps and marking the boundaries and trails to enable a visitor to orient themselves to the area. A person who knowingly trespasses is much harder to control. We would rely on law enforcement personnel who will respond to incidents of trespass. We believe that incidents of intentional trespass will actually decrease with the opening of the refuge to the public rather than increase.

Since the closure of Fort McClellan in 1995 there has been little or no enforcement of trespass incidents. Individuals have used the military base as a destination or as a pass-through point to gain access to adjacent property for hunting or other recreational activities. That will change as refuge personnel are added and law enforcement begins to occur. An important component of law enforcement will be cooperation from adjacent landowners to report incidents of trespass in order for us to be able to focus our efforts on problem areas.

Once we have boundary signs around the entire perimeter of the refuge, we will then be able to enforce and prosecute those individuals who knowingly trespass on the refuge. We believe that most, but not all, problems associated with illegal trespass from the refuge onto private property will be eliminated with proper law enforcement.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 6: One commenter requested additional data on types and locations of contaminants.

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan

Response: As stated within these Plans, the Army is currently determining what, if any, contamination exists within these areas. As data is gathered, it is made available to the public through the Restoration Advisory Board and documents are made available at a local repository. Additional information on the Restoration Advisory Board and available documents can be found at <http://www.mcclellan-rab.army.mil/> or you may contact the refuge office to receive U.S. Army contact information.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 7: One commenter asked how the public is involved in clean-up decisions, if the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army reach agreement on the level of clean-up without allowing the public to be involved as a stakeholder.

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan

Response: The corresponding portions of these documents state that; "the Army and the Fish and Wildlife Service will seek to reach agreement on the level of cleanup necessary to allow the Refuge to fulfill its primary purpose and allow expansion of public use into areas once contamination has been remediated." The agreed level of clean-up represents the minimum amount that we can accept and still effectively operate the refuge as envisioned in the legislation that established the refuge.

The Army, in coordination with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, follows a process under law called CERCLA that allows for public comment on the defined clean-up levels. As the Army completes characterization of contaminants and starts to define the clean-up levels it will publish a draft Record of Decision; it is at this point that the public in general can comment on and/or express their opinions and concerns with the proposal. Additionally, during the ongoing work leading up to the clean-up decision the public can participate through a quarterly held Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) that consists of members of the local community.

Anyone wishing to learn more about the clean-up process should become familiar with the RAB process and documents available at the local repository. Information on RAB and its meeting dates and locations may be found at <http://www.mcclellan-rab.army.mil/> or you may contact the refuge office to receive U.S. Army contact information

Comment 8: The Plans state that there will be a Comprehensive Conservation Plan completed within 15 years. One commenter asked why does it take 15 years to complete that plan?

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan

Response: The Comprehensive Conservation Plan is an overarching document that incorporates all of the documents that we are currently developing into a cohesive vision for setting goals and objectives for the refuge. While this document could conceivably be written at the establishment of the refuge, it would be subject to multiple changes over the course of the first few years following establishment because of additional data that is gathered.

When a new refuge is established, there are many variables that may be unknown including:

1. acreage and location of all important habitats and the species that utilize those habitats
2. levels of public use that will occur
3. which compatible uses will be the most important to those users
4. species and habitat responses to management practices
5. staffing schedules and how we will be able to expand compatible uses
6. what funding will be available to support both public use and management activities

This data is needed in order to set goals and objectives for the refuge. The Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan are both considered interim documents and will become step-down plans of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan once it is developed. In addition to the Public Use and Hunting Plans, we are developing a Habitat Management Plan to guide our other management activities on the refuge. There is no public review period for this document but if you would like to receive the final draft of this document you may contact the refuge.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 9: One commenter asked if we have baseline data for ‘comparison and evaluation’ of your stated goal to ‘restore ecological integrity’?

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan

Response: We do not, at this time, have all of the data that we need. We are in the process of developing a Habitat Management Plan. Within that document we will set interim goals and objectives and determine the data needed to refine the goals and objectives and/or meet those objectives.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 10: Two commenters asked how we will provide access for hunting to the southern portion of the refuge if we barricade the Ridge Road south of Bain’s Gap Road.

Corresponding Document(s): Hunting Plan and Public Use Plan

Response: We anticipate the barricade south of Bain’s Gap Road on Ridge Road to be temporary and hope to have vehicle access to the southern portion of the refuge by fall 2004.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 11: One commenter asked if there will be cost-sharing or other incentives to encourage private landowners to help restore mountain longleaf pine.

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan

Response: The refuge will work within existing programs to encourage landowner conservation and restoration of longleaf pine. In addition, the refuge will attempt to provide resources to support prescribed burning of longleaf pine stands adjacent to the refuge.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 12: One commenter stated that the Compatibility Determination to allow Wild Food Gathering is not supported by available data. The commenter states that the compatibility determination suggests that; 1. only a few plant species are available to produce fleshy fruits sought by foraging wildlife species, 2. the production of fleshy fruits are so limited in quantity and so perishable that the value to wildlife is insignificant, 3. the amount of fleshy fruits harvested by the public will have little or no impact on wildlife.

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan and Compatibility Determination

Response: The commenter is correct in stating that wild food gathering has the potential to adversely affect wildlife. If not controlled and monitored individuals may cause local shortages of food resources to wildlife. In order for an activity to be determined to be compatible on a National Wildlife Refuge it must be determined that the activity will not: a. conflict with one of the priority public uses, b. adversely affect wildlife or habitats, or c. materially interfere with or detract from refuge goals, objectives or management activities. The limited number of users combined with the wide distribution of available fruit will not likely lead to adverse impacts to wildlife. We will monitor the impact of the number of users and re-evaluate the compatibility of this use as necessary.

Specific points made by the commenter:

1. We did not attempt to list all fleshy fruited species that are used by wildlife. We have attempted to highlight those species that are used by wildlife and which are also likely to be used by individuals gathering food on the refuge. Many other fleshy fruited species not listed in the determination are used by wildlife.
2. We have not suggested that fleshy fruited species are limited in quantity. The opposite is in fact true on the refuge. We have a large diversity of fruiting species widely dispersed across the refuge. We do assume that these fruiting species are only briefly available to wildlife to consume. While many species produce fruit over a long period of time, individual fruits, once ripe, deteriorate fairly rapidly.
3. We believe that the number of individuals gathering fruiting species will be small (approximately 100 annually with additional passive users). Given the small number of users and the wide dispersion of species we do not believe that wildlife species will be adversely affected.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 13: One commenter requested additional information on why we continue to list fishing under our management objectives since it is no longer compatible.

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan, Hunting Plan and Compatibility Determination

Response: The text included in the Legal Mandates Section of both the Hunting Plan and the Public Use Plan is the exact text from the legislation that established the refuge. The footnote at the bottom of the page is an attempt to explain why we are unable to support the objective as listed in the legislation due to lack of suitable habitat.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 14: Two commenters requested that we limit big game hunting to archery-only in order to make it safer for other users on the refuge as is done at other refuges. Another commenter requested that we limit firearms hunting to the area currently designated as public use and any future expansion be limited to archery-only hunting. This commenter also stated that they would not support a change in zoning for the refuge to allow the discharge of firearms.

Corresponding Document(s): Hunting Plan

Response: As proposed, hunting of deer and other big game will be allowed during the legal hunting season using any weapon legally allowed in the State of Alabama, subject to local zoning regulations. We have proposed allowing all legal weapons to provide continuity between the refuge and the adjacent Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area. We believe that the current state regulations, combined with our refuge-specific regulations, provide an adequate assurance of safety for refuge visitors and neighbors. If conflicts arise between competing users or refuge neighbors, we will then evaluate how best to manage uses to avoid future conflicts. We will work with the City of Anniston to alleviate concerns regarding hunting with firearms within the city limits and hopefully change the zoning of that portion of the refuge to allow hunting with firearms.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of these comments.

Comment 15: One commenter requested that we not allow any firearms hunting within 250 yards of the property line of the Center for Domestic Preparedness' Chemical, Ordnance, Biological, and Radiological/Nuclear Training Facility.

Corresponding Document(s): Hunting Plan

Response: We are aware of concerns with firearms hunting in this area. The timeline for clean-up and public access to this area of the refuge is unknown. Prior to allowing

public use within this area we will coordinate our actions with the Center for Domestic Preparedness.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of these comments.

Comment 16: One commenter asked us to reconsider allowing American woodcock and bobcat hunting on the refuge. The commenter states that both species are declining in numbers and that in order to fulfill our purpose to “restore and enhance” populations of wildlife, these species should not be hunted.

Corresponding Document(s): Hunting Plan and Compatibility Determination

Response: The American woodcock is a migratory game bird species monitored and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The commenter is correct that this species has experienced a decline in population (1.8 to 2.3% per year since 1968). The major causes of these declines are believed to be degradation and loss of habitat on breeding and wintering grounds. These declines are being addressed on a national scale and federal harvest guidelines are adjusted as necessary to attempt to stem this population decline. Hunting of this species is not believed to contribute to the overall decline in population of this species. Hunting of American woodcock on the refuge is not likely to have an affect on American woodcock population numbers.

Bobcats in the southeast United States and throughout their range are considered to be stable or increasing in population and distribution. We would incorporate any additional relevant data provided by the commenter, to support the assertion that bobcat numbers are declining, into future harvest management on the refuge.

No changes were made to any of the documents as a result of this comment.

Comment 17: Two commenters requested that we open Bain’s Gap Road to the general public as an evacuation route in case of an incident at the Anniston Army Depot, for emergency vehicles in case of other emergencies and as a general economic benefit to the community.

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan

Response: While this comment is not directly relevant to the plans, it is an issue of importance to many in the community and we will attempt to explain the issue here.

Prior to the closure of Fort McClellan in 1999, the Army allowed the public to utilize Bain’s Gap Road during daylight hours subject to closures at the discretion of the base commander. It has been closed to the public since 1999. This road was closed when the refuge was established in May 2003 and has remained closed since that time.

We anticipate Bain’s Gap Road remaining closed to the public until clean-up of unexploded ordnance is completed by the Army and the remainder of the refuge is

opened to the public. Currently, Army contractors are clearing most of the roads and areas that we have identified as high use areas on the refuge of unexploded ordnance. A safety zone, up to 2,500 feet, is necessary when the contractors are working to clear an area of unexploded ordnance. This necessitates the frequent closure of large portions of the refuge including Bain's Gap Road to official personnel including refuge staff.

Once clean-up of ordnance on the roads and high use areas is complete, it is our hope that the refuge and Army will have reached agreement on the level of clean-up for the remainder of the closed portion of the refuge. Once an agreement has been reached with the Army and the necessary environmental documents are completed, Army contractors will begin removing ordnance items from the remainder of the closed portion of the refuge. Safety zones will again be necessary resulting in the frequent closure of Bain's Gap Road to official personnel including refuge staff.

It is not feasible to open Bain's Gap Road to the general public while clean-up is continuing. Once clean-up is complete and the remainder of the refuge is opened to the public, we will then evaluate how to allow access to the refuge from both the east and west via Bain's Gap Road. As a preliminary step to determine what controls are necessary to protect refuge visitors from any future through-traffic, we will be conducting an engineering evaluation of Bain's Gap Road.

The use of Bain's Gap Road as an evacuation route can best be discussed by sitting down with stakeholders and determining the best method to access the road in an emergency. We will arrange to do that in the near future.

Comment 18: Two commenters found a discrepancy between the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the Hunting Plan. A reference to hunting of only deer, turkey and squirrel in the EA was not consistent with

Corresponding Document(s): Hunting Plan and Environmental Assessment

Response: Within the EA, we initially evaluated impacts associated with hunting of only 3 species (deer, turkey and squirrel). Following talks with the State of Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, the decision was made to include all game species legally hunted within the State of Alabama. All references were changed to reflect the expanded hunting and all impacts within the EA were reviewed and updated to ensure impacts were properly evaluated. A reference to hunting of only those 3 species was inadvertently left in the EA.

The single sentence referencing hunting of only deer, turkey and squirrel was removed. The EA was reviewed to ensure that all impacts of the hunting program as currently proposed were fully assessed.

Comment 19: One commenter asked if we intend to construct trails for other uses including hiking, interpretation and wildlife observation.

Corresponding Document(s): Public Use Plan

Response: No new trails are planned at this time due to lack of funding and limited personnel. We will utilize existing roads and firebreaks previously used by the Army for their management as refuge trails. As the need arises and funding and/or personnel (including volunteers) become available we will establish additional trails.

Comment 20: One commenter stated that there is a conflict of wording in paragraphs regarding hunting on the pages HP18, HP 14 and PU 11.

Corresponding Document(s): Hunting Plan and Public Use Plan

Response: We could not identify the exact discrepancy but have attempted to standardize the wording of the section dealing with hunting in relation to safety zones and the Anniston city limits.

Wording has been standardized to hopefully prevent confusion.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Hunting and Public Use Plans

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

Fort McClellan, Calhoun County, Alabama

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

December 26, 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION.....	EA-3
II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION	EA-6
A. ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION – NO PUBLIC USE AND NO HUNTING.....	EA-7
B. ALTERNATIVE 2: ACCOMPANIED PUBLIC ACCESS AND NO HUNTING.....	EA-7
C. ALTERNATIVE 3: PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE – IMPLEMENTATION OF PROPOSED INTERIM PUBLIC USE AND HUNTING PLANS	EA-7
III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT	EA-8
A. GENERAL.....	EA-8
B. VEGETATION.....	EA-8
C. WILDLIFE RESOURCES.....	EA-9
D. ENDANGERED SPECIES.....	EA-9
E. WETLANDS	EA-10
D. FISHERY RESOURCES	EA-10
E. SOCIOECONOMIC AND LAND USE CONDITIONS.....	EA-11
F. HUNTING.....	EA-11
G. CULTURAL RESOURCES	EA-11
IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES	EA-11
V. INFORMATION ON PREPARERS.....	EA-12
VI. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION	EA-12
LITERATURE CITED	EA-14

LIST OF FIGURES

FIG. 1 LOCATION OF REFUGE	EA-4
FIG. 2 PUBLIC USE.....	EA-5

I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposes to adopt interim Public Use and Hunting plans for Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). Proposed uses within these plans have been determined to be appropriate and compatible with the Refuge System and the purpose for which the refuge was established. The Refuge was created (May 2003) on a portion of Fort McClellan, which was closed in 1999 under the Base Realignment and Closure Act (Figure 1). The Refuge is currently closed to the public pending adoption of an interim Public Use Plan and an interim Hunting Plan by the Service.

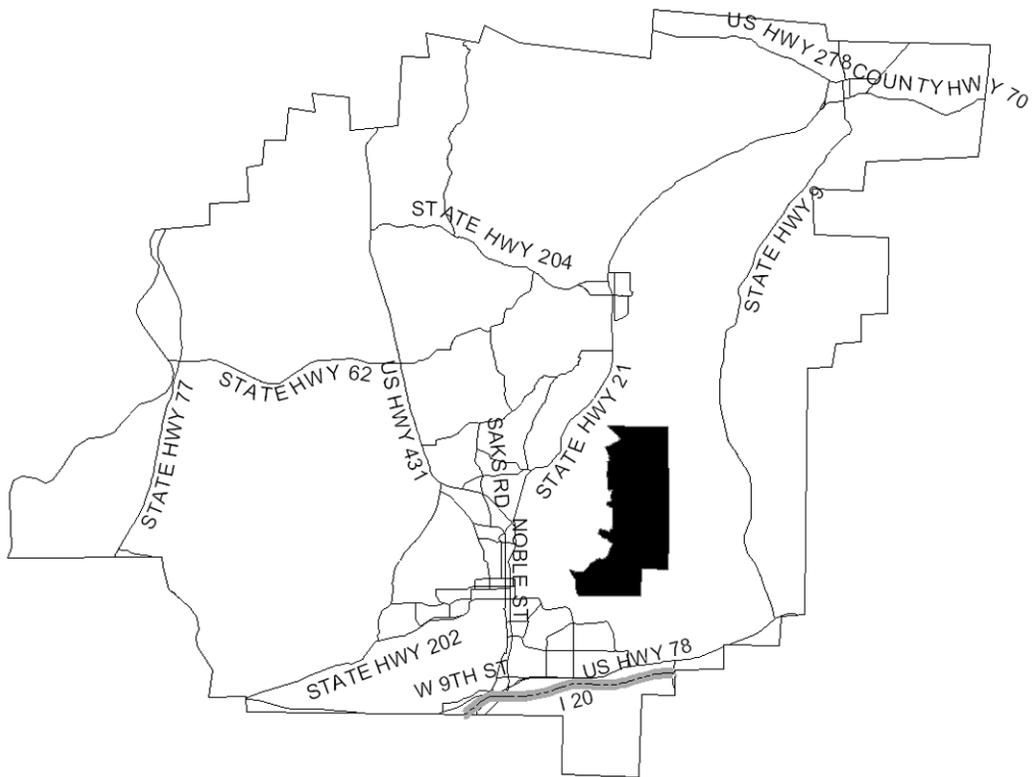
This document considers the proposed interim Public Use Plan and Hunting Plan and two alternatives to adoption of the proposed plans, and analyzes and compares the impacts that each alternative is likely to have on the human environment.

Historical use of Refuge lands for recreation and hunting was limited under Army ownership. While the Army maintained recreational facilities on Fort McClellan, these areas were outside of current Refuge boundaries. Refuge lands were primarily used for military training and firing ranges. Much of the area that now forms the refuge was within the boundaries of firing range safety fans. These areas were closed to both the public and trainers during the use of firing ranges. With eight small arms ranges firing into the face of Choccolocco Mountain, much of the area remained closed most of the time. Hunting was allowed under a controlled and restricted program.

During base closure, the potential hazards of unexploded ordnance (UXO) were identified as a risk to public safety, and the entire area that eventually became the Refuge was closed to both public use and hunting in 1999. The Army initiated a program of sampling and studying the geographical distribution and risk level of UXO/environmental contamination. As of November 2003, Army was able to characterize 3345 acres of the total 9016 acre Refuge as safe for public use (Figure 2). The 3345 acres are considered free of UXO contamination, and are identified by Army and Service as "Public Access" lands that could possibly be opened for public uses "during daylight hours". The proposed interim Public Use and Hunting plans would guide implementation of this possibility.

The proposed interim Public Use and Hunting plans must ensure the public a reasonable degree of protection from the hazards associated with unintentional or illegal access to UXO contaminated study areas. Such areas are designated "No Public Access" or "Potential UXO Areas," but are in close proximity or adjacent to lands under consideration for public access. The Army and the Service share responsibility for access-related public safety. The Army is and will in the future provide safety related pamphlets and brochures for distribution to public users. They have also undertaken a community outreach education program on UXO safety in the local area.

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

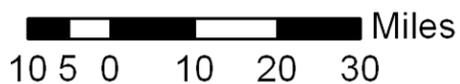


Alabama Locale

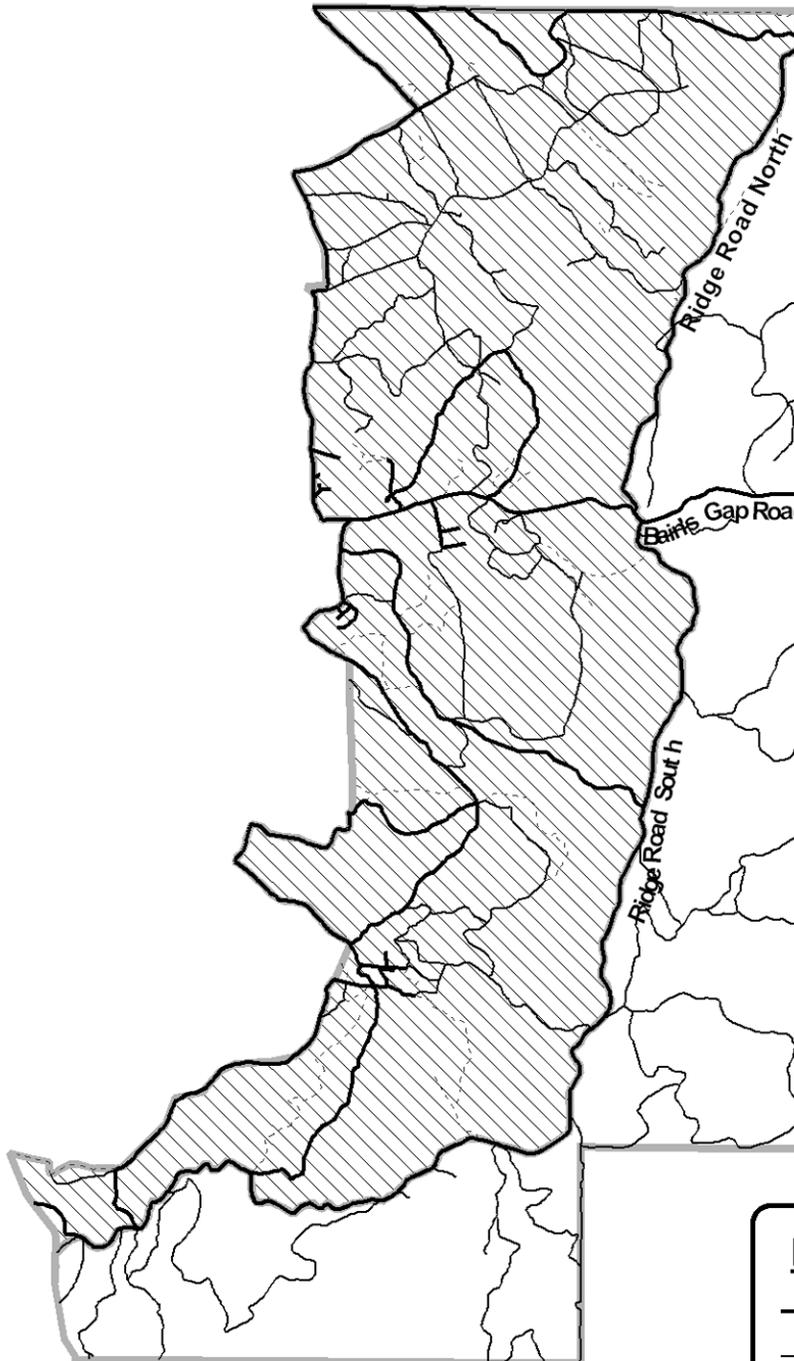


REFUGE LOCATION

-  I-20
-  ROADS
-  REFUGE
-  CALHOUN COUNTY



Public Access



←
East Gate Entrance

REFUGE ROADS

- Main Road
- Secondary Road
- Trails
-  Closed
-  Public Access Area



Purposes for which the Refuge was established include (1) preserve and enhance the natural mountain longleaf pine ecosystem in the Fort McClellan Main Post area; (2) help perpetuate the neotropical migratory bird resource; (3) preserve the natural diversity and abundance of flora and fauna, with special emphasis on threatened and endangered species; (4) provide compatible wildlife dependant recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation; and (5) promote an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology. Analysis of alternatives considered the primary purposes of the Refuge along with environmental and social/cultural consequences related to implementing these programs.

Wildlife-dependant recreational uses, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education, are identified as priority uses in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. These potential uses were reviewed and considered for compatibility during development of the proposed interim Public Use and Hunting plans.

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is “ to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans” (National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997). National wildlife refuges provide important habitat for native plants and many species of mammals, birds, fish, insects, amphibians, and reptiles. They also play a vital role in preserving endangered and threatened species. Refuges offer a wide variety of wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities and many have visitor centers, wildlife trails, and environmental education programs. Nationwide, about 30 million visitors annually hunt, fish, observe and photograph wildlife, or participate in educational and interpretive activities on refuges.

The historical background and description of natural and cultural resources on the Refuge can be found in the Final Environmental Assessment (EA) for Proposed Establishment of Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS 2003).

II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

The assessment of possible interim public use and hunting options was evaluated through the following three alternatives.

Alternative 1 (No Action - No Public Use or Hunting Programs)

Alternative 2 (Accompanied Public Use and No Hunting)

Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative – Implementation of proposed interim Public Use Plan and proposed interim Hunting Plans)

A. Alternative 1: No Action – No Public Use and No Hunting

Under this alternative, the Refuge remains closed to the public and management is limited to the maintenance, management and restoration of the mountain longleaf pine forest communities. Only Service personnel that have been thoroughly briefed on UXO hazards will be permitted access. This alternative represents existing baseline conditions and the continuation of prohibiting public use and hunting opportunities on the area. This alternative represents the most economical alternative for public access during the interim period of UXO/environmental characterization and remediation.

B. Alternative 2: Accompanied Public Access and No Hunting

Under this alternative, the Service will provide accompanied access to individuals and groups interested in visiting the Refuge. Hunting will not be allowed because hunters could not be directly supervised and controlled during their visits. Anticipated public uses are limited to wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation. All visitors will be accompanied by a Service employee that has been thoroughly briefed on UXO hazards on the Refuge. This alternative represents the second most economical public access option during the UXO/environmental characterization and remediation.

Only 3345 acres of the total 9016 acre Refuge will be open for public use (Figure 2). All access would be along existing paved and gravel roads. Foot traffic will be allowed on dirt roads and trails. No additional facilities or construction will occur for this interim public use proposal. Accompanied visitors will be allowed access off existing roads and trails within the 3345 acre area.

C. Alternative 3: Preferred Alternative – Implementation of proposed interim Public Use and Hunting Plans

Under the preferred alternative, the Service will allow priority public uses to include hunting, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. Fishing opportunities are not available on the Refuge. Only 3345 acres of the total 9016 acre Refuge will be open for public use and hunting (Figure 2). The hunting program will be operated in cooperation with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Access will be along existing paved, gravel and dirt roads. No additional facilities or construction will occur for this interim public use and hunting alternative. Visitors will be allowed access off existing roads and trails within the 3345 acre area. Gates will be closed at dusk and access will be restricted during nighttime hours.

Public use, other than hunting, will be allowed throughout the year. Only Bains Gap Road and Ridge Road will be opened to motorized vehicles. The only direct access into the Refuge will be through the Bains Gap Road East Gate. This gate will be opened at dawn and closed at dusk, limiting public access into the refuge to daylight hours. A security gate across Bains Gap Road west of the gap will restrict travel to the west. The Ridge Road will be open north of Bains Gap to Moorman Hill, while the road will be gated to motorized vehicles just south of Bains Gap. Security gates will restrict access to all roads leading off these two ungated roads. Foot traffic will be allowed on all lands within the public use area (Figure 2). Safety brochures and information on UXO hazard will be available to visitors at the Refuge Headquarters and information kiosks on the Refuge.

Alternative 3 (implementation of public use and hunting plans) was selected as the preferred alternative. Both legislation and comments solicited for the Refuge Establishment EA (USFWS 2003) supported a public use and hunting program on the Refuge. As additional acreage is identified by the Army as safe for public use, future additions to the public use area will be evaluated.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This section describes the environment that is affected by the alternatives. A detailed description of the natural, social and cultural environment on the Refuge can be found in the Refuge EA (USFWS 2003). The following sections provide an overview of resources located on the 3345 acre area (Figure 2) that will be open for public use and hunting.

A. General

The Refuge is located just north of the city of Anniston in Calhoun County, Alabama. Birmingham, Alabama is 65 miles to the west; Atlanta, Georgia is 85 miles to the east; and Chattanooga, Tennessee is 125 miles to the northeast (Figure 1).

B. Vegetation

The Refuge was established to protect and manage one of the finest remaining examples of mountain longleaf pine forest. This forest type is primarily within restricted areas of the Refuge on the west and south facing slopes of Choccolocco Mountain. The 3345 acre designated public access area (Figure 2) is located along the north south ridge of Choccolocco Mountain. While longleaf pine forms isolated stands or a component of forests in this area, most forests of higher elevation ridges and eastern mountain slopes are dominated by Virginia pine and oak/hickory hardwood forests. In

general, mountain longleaf pine rarely is a conspicuous component of the forest above an elevation of 1800 feet.

C. *Wildlife Resources*

The Refuge contains a rich diversity of wildlife and habitat types. Lands designated for potential public use primarily include shallow rocky high elevation soils and steep slopes. While carrying capacity of these lands is somewhat lower than western sections of the Refuge, habitat is available for white-tailed deer, turkey and gray and fox squirrels. Other game species such as morning dove, bobwhite and rabbits are more common in lower elevations on the Refuge that currently are restricted for public use.

Most Refuge areas including designated public use lands are covered by a relatively unfragmented forested landscape. Fort McClellan and now Refuge forests have been identified as important habitat for forest interior and neotropical migratory nesting birds (Soehren 1995; Webb 1996). Studies on Fort McClellan demonstrated that core areas of unfragmented forest support many neotropical nesting birds that are absent from forest edge areas and small forest fragments (Soehren 1995). Forest interior nesting birds recorded in these interior forests included yellow-billed cuckoo, red-eyed vireo, black-and-white warbler, worm-eating warbler, ovenbird, Kentucky warbler, and scarlet tanager. Further studies on the cause for population declines within fragmented landscapes on Fort McClellan used artificial nests to evaluate the type and distribution of nest predation as a possible cause for the decline of forest interior birds (Keyser 1998). This study indicated that nest predation by large predators, those animals more closely associated with forest edge, increased as forest fragment size decreased. Conclusions of previous studies indicate that activities that create forest openings, forest edge or permanently clear timber within unfragmented forest could adversely affect neotropical migratory nesting birds (Soehren 1995; Webb 1996).

D. *Endangered Species*

Endangered/threatened species, along with rare biota and ecologically important or sensitive natural communities, were inventoried by the Army on Fort McClellan (Garland 1996). With the decision to close Fort McClellan in 1995, the Army prepared and submitted a Biological Assessment (BA) to the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service on endangered and threatened species listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (USCOE 1998). The BA identified area streams as foraging habitat for the endangered gray bat and the historical presence of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) in pine forests within the mountains. Streams within the Refuge however were considered low quality foraging habitat and provide little or no value to foraging gray bats (*Myotis grisescens*). The red-cockaded woodpecker historically was found within refuge forests but has not been recorded on refuge lands since 1968 (Summerour 1992). With restoration efforts and improving habitat, woodpeckers could

be relocated or pioneer to the Refuge from existing clusters in the adjacent Talladega National Forest.

A single Candidate Species, white-fringeless orchid (*Platanthera integrilabia*) has been recorded on Refuge lands. This orchid has been found in spring seepages in the upper reaches of North Branch Cane Creek and Cave Creek. Both areas are outside of public use areas on lands restricted because of potential contamination by unexploded ordnance (UXO). Potential habitat for this orchid includes all perennial seepages on the Refuge. Studies commissioned by the Army, identified 23 potential seepages which are high priority locations for finding the orchid (Whetstone et al. 1998). Generally, most of these seepage areas are found along the mountain base where infiltration waters from precipitation come to the ground surface. Few are located on the mountain ridge or upper slopes that are designated for public use.

Studies undertaken by The Nature Conservancy (ANHP 1994; Garland 1996), recorded 18 animals (mostly caddisflies) and 7 plants that are included on Natural Heritage Program tracking lists. Four additional species, Appalachian cottontail (*Sylvilagus obscurus*), Diane butterfly (*Speyeria diane*), Carlson's caddisfly (*Polycentropus carlsoni*) and Fraser's Loosestrife (*Lysimachia fraseri*) were formerly Candidate 2 species and are now referred to as Species of Concern. With the exception of Appalachian Cottontail, all are associated with springs or seepage areas. The Appalachian cottontail is suspected to inhabit high elevation areas along Choccolocco Mountain with previous studies collecting juvenile animals believed to be this species (Webb 1996b). This northern cottontail is known to inhabit the Talladega Mountains and would be expected to occur on the Refuge.

E. Wetlands

Steep mountain ridges and slopes limit the types and extent of wetlands on the Refuge. Springs and associated seepages comprise the only wetland type that can be found on Refuge lands. Most, but not all, are located along the base of Choccolocco Mountain. While some are seasonal, the larger more significant wetlands are perennial and up to 7 acres in size. They are located at springs and associated seeps along streams flowing from upland areas. Studies commissioned by the Army identified 23 areas on the Refuge that meet the jurisdictional definition of wetlands in the 1987 Army Corps Manual.

D. Fishery Resources

No recreational fishery resources exist on the refuge. All streams within the refuge boundaries are small perennial or ephemeral streams that are unable to support fishing.

E. Socioeconomic and Land Use Conditions

The general socioeconomic conditions of Anniston, Fort McClellan and Calhoun County are described in the Refuge Establishment EA (USFWS 2003).

F. Hunting

Early hunting and wildlife management records for Fort McClellan are unavailable. It appears that guidance on wildlife management was first provided by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service in 1952 followed by the first cooperative management plan with the Alabama Department of Conservation (ADC) in 1964. Dr. Charles W. Summerour of Jacksonville State University prepared the first detailed wildlife management plan in 1967. In 1982, the Army hired a full-time wildlife biologist to manage the program. The Cooperative Plan with ADC first prepared in 1964 was subsequently revised in 1980, 1987, 1991 and 1998. The only significant change to this plan has been the inclusion of Fort McClellan as a participant in Alabama's Deer Management Program (Reisz Engineering and Gene Stout Associates 1998). All hunting on Fort McClellan was discontinued by the Army in 1999 because of safety issues related to potential UXO contamination.

G. Cultural Resources

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and Section 14 of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act require the Service to evaluate the effects of any of its actions on cultural resources (historic, architectural and archaeological) that are listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The Army contracted an archaeological survey of the entire military installation, including the Refuge lands. Seventeen of the historic properties identified on the Refuge are eligible for the NRHP.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section analyzes and discusses the potential impacts of the three alternatives described in Section II.

Minimal or no adverse effects are anticipated under any of the three alternatives. While the Preferred Alternative (Implementation of proposed interim Public Use and Hunting plans) will increase human activity on the Refuge, none of the proposed activities are ground intrusive or physically disturbing to the local environment. Impacts associated with all alternatives fall within the range of historical impacts. The No Action Alternative, or baseline condition, has only been in place since 1999. The historical and long-term use of the site prior to 1999 was as a firing range and impact fan, with some limited

public access and hunting. Resumption of public use and hunting after a four year hiatus will not set precedent, or create direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to fish and wildlife resources.

There is an increased risk of inadvertent or illegal entry from public use areas into restricted areas under the Preferred Alternative. With unaccompanied access individuals and the Refuge must be monitored and patrolled to a greater extent than under the No Action Alternative and the Accompanied Public Access and No Hunting Alternative. This increased risk, however can be minimized through the use of law enforcement, signage, brochures and outreach programs that will be provided to the public and are outlined in the plans.

Motorized access to the refuge for hunting will use existing paved, gravel and dirt roads. Refuge trails will be limited to foot travel. Motorized access for public use during other times of the year would be limited to paved and gravel roads. Because the majority of the Refuge contains slopes greater than 40 percent, erosion and sedimentation from activities that damage or reduce ground cover are significant environmental issues. Existing roadways and trails will be utilized for Refuge access until detailed analysis is completed and appropriate designs are considered for any future access requirements.

Alternatives A (No Action) and B (Accompanied Public Use and No Hunting) did not provide the optimum uses as directed in the legislative transfer of lands, public comments for the Refuge EA, and concluded through refuge compatibility determinations. The preferred alternative (Implementation of Hunting and Public Use Plans) provides opportunities for both public use and hunting. As the level and extent of UXO contamination is better understood and characterized, the scope of restrictions is expected to be reduced. Eventual remediation of these lands could potentially remove most or all land use restrictions at some future time. During the interim period of UXO/Environmental characterization and remediation, land use restrictions can be expected to guide the extent of public use and access on the Refuge.

V. INFORMATION ON PREPARERS

This document was prepared by Bill Garland, USFWS, Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge, Fort McClellan, Alabama

VI. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

As previously described, the Service proposes to implement a controlled program for hunting and public use on the Refuge. Details of these programs are provided in the

proposed "Public Use Plan" and the proposed "Hunting Plan". An analysis of three alternatives related to public use and hunting included:

Alternative A: No Action (No public use or hunting)

Alternative B: Accompanied Public Access and No Hunting (Refuge closed to public and access only allowed when accompanied by employee)

Alternative C: Preferred Alternative (Implementation of Hunting and Public Use Plans)

An analysis of potential environmental and cultural resource impacts from the three alternatives concluded no significant adverse impacts are anticipated under any alternative. Legislation and Refuge compatibility determinations however support the Preferred Alternative (Implementation of Hunting and Public Use Plans). While the Preferred Alternative provides opportunities and programs supported by the Service, the extent of these programs during the interim period of environmental/UXO remediation depends more on safety considerations and the land use restrictions imposed on the Service by the Army. The Preferred Alternative represents the greatest degree of hunting and public use that can currently be provided on the Refuge.

Literature Cited

Alabama Natural Heritage Program (ANHP). 1994. Natural Heritage Inventory of Fort McClellan, Main Post: Federal Endangered, Threatened, Candidate Species and State-Listed Species. Submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District and Fort McClellan by Alabama Natural Heritage Program, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Montgomery, AL. 76 pp.

Garland, B.W. 1996. Endangered Species Management Plan for Fort McClellan, Alabama (Draft). Directorate of Environment, Fort McClellan, AL. 76 pp.

Keyser, A.J., G.E. Hill and E.C. Soehren. October 1998. Effects of Forest Fragment Size, Nest Density, and Proximity to Edge on the Risk of Predation to Ground-Nesting Passerine Birds. *Conservation Biology* 12(5): 986-994.

Reisz Engineering and Gene Stout and Associates. 1998. Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan, 1998 - 2002, Fort McClellan, Alabama. Submitted to U.S. Army, Fort McClellan, AL. 161 pp.

Soehren, E.C. 1995. Effects of Forest Fragmentation on Breeding Populations of Neotropical Migratory Birds on Fort McClellan, Alabama. Thesis. Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL. 60 pp.

Summerour, B. 1992. Results of Red-cockaded Woodpecker Survey of Fort McClellan, Alabama, 21 March - 3 June, 1992. Jacksonville State University: Jacksonville, AL. 17 pp

U.S. Army. 2003. Final Environmental Condition of Property (ECOP), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge, Fort McClellan, Calhoun County, Alabama. Provided to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an attachment to the deed transfer.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USCOE). 1998. Biological Assessment: Disposal and Reuse of Fort McClellan, Alabama. Prepared by 3D/International, Cincinnati, Ohio. 61 pp.

U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (USTDC). 1998. Final Environmental Impact Statement, Disposal and Reuse of Fort McClellan, Alabama. Prepared by Mobile District, Corps of Engineers, Mobile, AL. 2 vol.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2003. Final Environmental Assessment and Land Protection Plan Proposed Establishment of Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge, Calhoun County, Alabama. USFWS, Southeast Region, Atlanta, GA. 44 pp.

Whetstone, R.D., S.J. Threlkeld, H.A. Jackson and T.L. Hofmann. 1998. Botanical Study of Upland Seeps on Fort McClellan, Alabama with Special Attention to *Platanthera integrilabia* (Orchidaceae). Prepared for Reisz Engineering, Huntsville, AL. 16 pp.

Webb, D.R. 1996a. Effects of Habitat Fragmentation on Avian Neotropical Migrants at Fort McClellan, AL. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Defense Legacy Resource Management Program. Net Work Associates, Eugene, OR. 15 pp.

Webb, D.R.. 1996b. Survey of the Appalachian Cottontail (*Sylvilagus obscurus*) on Main Post, Fort McClellan. U.S. Army Legacy Resources Management Program, Project 94-0637. Net Work Associates, Eugene, OR. 14 pp.

Facility: Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge
Title: Public Use and Hunting Plans for Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

For the reasons briefly presented below and based on an evaluation of the information contained in the supporting references enumerated below, I have determined that public use and hunting activities described as the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 3) in the attached Environmental Assessment (sub-section II.C) at Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge is not a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. An Environmental Impact Statement will, accordingly, not be prepared.

Reasons:

1. Providing the general public with a quality wildlife oriented recreational experience, through hunting and other wildlife oriented activities will have no detrimental affects to Mountain Longleaf Refuge or the environment.
2. There are no anticipated impacts to threatened and endangered species or other wildlife populations on the Refuge.
3. The preferred alternative represents the widest possible and safest public use of the Refuge under Army land use restrictions involving unexploded ordnance on adjacent lands.

Supporting References:

1. Environmental Assessment
2. Section 7 Consultation
3. Cultural Resource Review
4. Compatibility Determination

Regional Director, FWS, Region 4

Date: _____

Distribution:
Wash., DC (OEC)
State Clearinghouse