

## Draft Compatibility Determination

**Use:** Turkey Hunting

**Refuge Name:** Washita National Wildlife Refuge

**County:** Custer, Oklahoma

**Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):**

Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Migratory Bird Conservation Act, Refuge Recreation Act

**Refuge Purpose(s):**

“... shall be administered by him [Secretary of the Interior] directly or in accordance with cooperative agreements ... and in accordance with such rules and regulations for the conservation, maintenance, and management of wildlife, resources thereof, and its habitat thereon, ...” 16 U.S.C. § 664 (Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act).

“... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” 16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)

“... suitable for— (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species ...” 16 U.S.C. § 460k-1 “... the Secretary ... may accept and use ... real ... property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors ...” 16 U.S.C. § 460k-2 (Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. § 460k-460k-4), as amended).

**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 wildlife-dependent public use?*

Expanding the Washita NWR Hunting Program to include hunting of wild turkey, which is a wildlife-dependent public use.

*Where would the use be conducted?*

Turkey hunting will be allowed on the entire refuge with the exception of the portion inundated by Foss Reservoir and the areas immediately surrounding the refuge headquarters. This area will be posted as “Area Closed to Hunting” (see No Hunting zone on Figure 2). Approximately 5,797 acres of suitable habitat for turkey are provided within the turkey hunt areas. Washita NWR is divided into five turkey hunt areas.

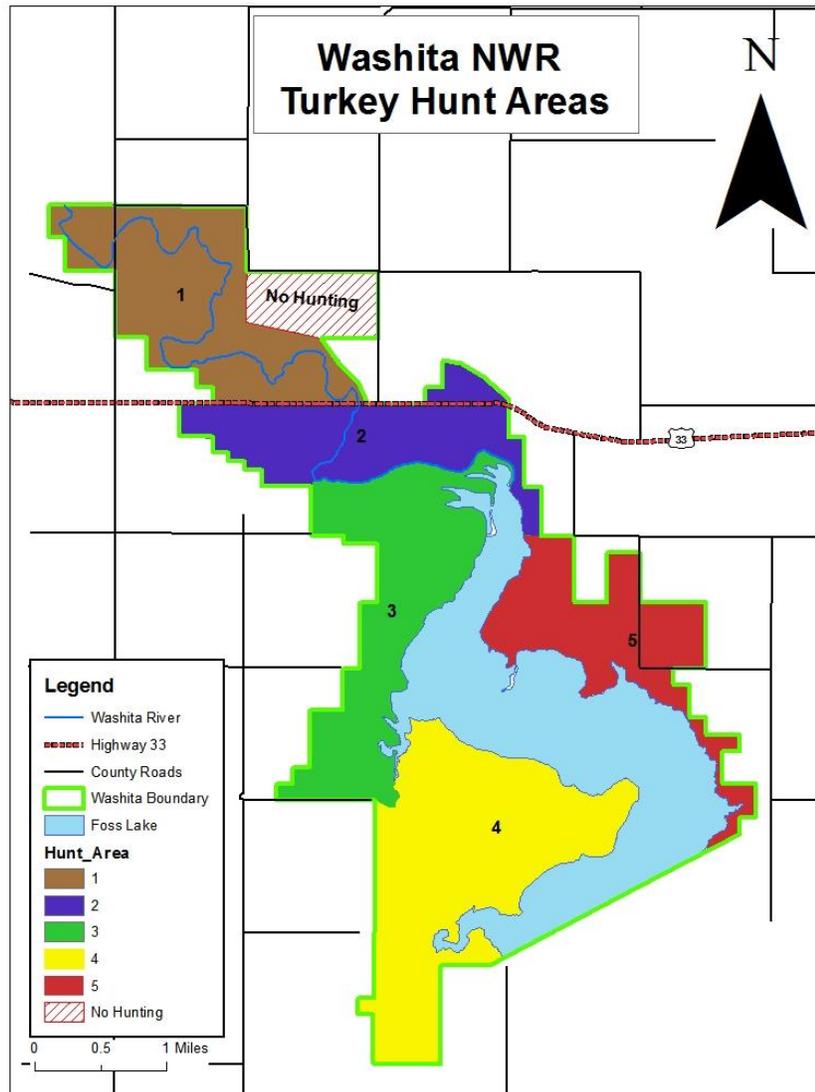


Figure 1. Washita NWR Hunt Areas

*When would the use be conducted?*

A limited wild turkey hunt will be held during the Spring Turkey Season. Hunts will be conducted through the ODWC Controlled Hunts Program.

*How would the use be conducted?*

Participants would be selected via the ODWC Controlled Hunts Program. All applicants would be required by ODWC to pay a fee (currently \$5.00) to apply for Controlled Hunts. All successful applicants would be required to pay a Federal User Fee (currently \$20.00). The Federal User Fee may be waived for Youth Hunt participants. ODWC retains all application fees and forwards all Federal User Fees to the refuge.

Up to 20 permits will be issued as determined by assessment of local turkey population numbers. Hunt Areas will be assigned during hunter selection. Legal weapons will be shotgun (no shot larger than BB) and legal archery equipment. Bag limit is one gobbler per hunt.

The refuge would provide successful applicants with information related to the hunt prior to their hunt and participants would attend a mandatory orientation on the first day of the hunt.

Hunting would be restricted to archery or shotgun only. Only federally approved non-toxic shot, size BB (.180") or smaller will be allowed.

*Why is this use being proposed?*

Turkey hunting on the refuge is proposed to provide an additional recreational hunting program - one of the 6 priority uses for refuges identified in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. The proposed use would provide additional high quality recreational opportunities for users who don't have access to private land, and don't wish to compete with other hunters on the scarce public lands.

Turkeys are a renewable resource. The turkey population has increased in recent years to a point where recreational hunting will not adversely impact the refuge's population.

Expanding hunting opportunities on the refuge promotes positive relationships with the public, hunting organizations, and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. This also encourages family-oriented outdoor recreation and supports the tradition of hunting.

## **Availability of Resources:**

*Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:*

Annual staff time to administer the program - \$2,000

Supplies and materials \$ 100

Total \$2,100

*Monitoring costs:*

The refuge staff has conducted monitoring of the turkey population, and is working to finalize protocols for a turkey survey at present as a component of the Biological Inventory and Monitoring Program. Monitoring will take place during normal workdays, and will not result in any additional costs.

*Offsetting revenues:*

Anticipated user fees would return between \$0 and \$100 per year.

National Wild Turkey Federation and/or other hunting oriented organizations may provide labor or financial support to the program.

## **Anticipated Impacts of the Use:**

*Short-term impacts:*

Providing carefully planned and managed hunting opportunities, as proposed, will generally minimize disturbance to wildlife populations, the environment, and non-consumptive users. Direct mortality to the hunted species (wild turkey) would, of course, occur. The presence and activity of hunters may cause temporary disturbance to other wildlife in the area, but there are no foreseeable detrimental impacts to these species. Concerns are primarily centered on the possibility of impacting non-target species that are sensitive to disturbance. Visitor and hunter safety and law enforcement issues are the priority when designing and planning all hunting activities on refuges. Vehicle traffic will increase slightly during the hunting events, and the sound of gun shots will temporarily reduce the serenity for the non-hunting public. Loss of plants from foot traffic is minor, or temporary. Soil and plant disturbance may occur in ingress and egress routes, but will be minor and temporary because of the limited and controlled use associated with the managed hunts.

The proposed use would divert resources from other refuge activities. These activities would likely be of lower priority - resulting in an overall neutral or positive indirect impact to the refuge.

*Long-term impacts:*

The proposed use would support the NWRs mission, refuge establishment purposes, and refuge objectives by providing a high-quality recreational opportunity for public use and enjoyment of wildlife resources. There is the potential for hunter to spread invasive species, but this is considered minor due to the low number of hunt participants. No detrimental long-term impacts from hunting are anticipated as long as wildlife populations are monitored through the refuge biological program or by state officials.

*Cumulative impacts:*

There are no anticipated cumulative impacts. Harvest on the refuge would be limited, turkey populations would be monitored and adaptive management would be implemented to ensure that hunting does not result in cumulative impacts.

All hunts would follow all applicable laws, regulations and policies; including title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations, the Refuge System Manual, the mission and goals of the Refuge System, and the purposes, goals, and objectives of the refuge. Operating this activity does not hinder the refuge's ability to meet habitat goals, provides for the safety of the area's citizens, and supports several of the primary objectives of the refuge.

**Public Review and Comment:**

The initial period of public review and comment occurred from 05/13/2015 through 05/27/2015. The Turkey Hunt Plan will be made available for public comment from 09/08/2015 through 10/08/2015.

*The following methods will be used to solicit public review and comment:*

Public notice in newspaper with wide local distribution

Posted notice at the refuge headquarters

Posted notices in public places

World Wide Web

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Elk City Daily News, Clinton Daily News.

*Why was this level of public review and comment selected?*

Turkey hunting is a long-standing popular practice in western Oklahoma, and we did not anticipate a large number of responses (positive or negative), but wished to offer ample opportunity to comment.

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

**Determination:**

Hunting (wild turkey)

           Use is not compatible.  
  X   Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

**Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:**

Biological data on the refuge turkey population would be collected and analyzed for use in adaptive management of the resource.

Spring hunt dates, bag limits, and regulations would be coordinated between the refuge and Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation biologists.

All hunters (and adult Mentors if Youth Hunt) must attend a pre-hunt briefing on the first day of the hunt.

Law Enforcement personnel would ensure compliance with refuge regulations and State laws for the protection of refuge resources.

Adequate staffing (Service, ODWC, and/or volunteer) to insure safety would be provided.

Only federally approved non-toxic ammunition allowed.

Hunters must check harvested birds at the refuge check station.

Hunters must check out at the refuge check station upon completing their hunt.

All other state laws and refuge regulations must be observed.

**Justification:**

As defined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, wildlife-dependent recreational uses may be authorized on a refuge when they are compatible and not inconsistent with public safety. Hunting is included as one of the six wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, which are to receive enhanced and priority consideration in refuge planning and management. The proposed spring turkey hunt is designed to minimize conflict with other priority public uses, reduce adverse impacts to biological resources, and is consistent with the refuge goals, objectives, and management activities described in the Washita-Optima CCP. The local turkey population has attained sufficient numbers to support a controlled hunt on the refuge. This proposed use would increase outdoor recreation opportunities consistent with the purpose for which the refuge was established, and would support the

mission of the NWRS. Under controlled conditions, hunting would not adversely impact fish, wildlife, plants or habitat - or the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge and NWRS. Through the compatibility determination process, the refuge has determined that hunting wild turkeys, in accordance with the stipulations provided above, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the Refuge System mission or the purpose for which the refuge was established.

**Signature:** Refuge Manager \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature and Date)

**Concurrence:** Regional Chief \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature and Date)

**Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date:** 2030