U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Public Notice

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Southwest Region (Arizona ● New Mexico ● Oklahoma ●Texas) www.fws.gov/southwest/

Comments Solicited on Refuge Farm Program

Laguna Atascosa and the Lower Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuges (Refuges) in south Texas are currently reviewing farming activities that take place on the Refuges. As part of this process the public is being invited to provide early comments on potential issues or concerns that should be considered.

On many refuges throughout the nation, farming programs provide benefits for both resident and migrating animals. For example, farming programs provide supplemental forage for resident and migratory wildlife, manage undesirable and/or invasive vegetation, restore native habitats and aid in the recovery of threatened or endangered species, and in some cases provide a safe resting spot for migrating waterfowl and help to keep them off private farm fields. Farming programs also provide increased wildlife observation, photography, and environmental education opportunities.

These two Refuges currently manage 7,782 acres of cropland (324 acres on Laguna Atascosa and 7,458 acres on Lower Rio Grande Valley). Farming is accomplished through a cooperative farming program, which allows the Refuges to work with area farmers to restore native habitat. The primary purpose of the farming program is to maintain these acres to prevent the establishment of non-native, invasive grasses prior to habitat restoration. The number of acres farmed in any given year varies. Grain sorghum is the primary crop grown, with minor amounts of other crops such as corn, onions, carrots and melons. Some acres are left fallow. The majority of the farming on the refuges is non-irrigated, which limits the types of crops that can be produced. No genetically modified crops are grown on Laguna Atascosa NWR, but there are genetically modified crops (Roundup Ready corn) used on Lower Rio Grande Valley Refuge.

This comment period is known as 'Scoping' under the National Environmental Policy Act. During scoping the Refuge is looking for general comments on the farming program. These comments will assist in determining the next course of action. Comments will be accepted until August 1, 2010. Comments should be sent to Bob_Barry@fws.gov, or mailed to Bob Barry, Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR, Route 2, Box 202A, Alamo, TX 78516.

This review of the Refuge's farming program is part of a nationwide review of all Refuge farming programs. For the status of farming programs being reviewed throughout the southwest and commenting instructions please visit http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/Plan/planindex.html

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