

News Release

**Department of the Interior / U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge
1428 Highway 27, Bell City, LA 70630
Telephone 337-598-2216 / FAX 337-598-2492**

For Immediate Release:
June 19, 2006

Contact:
Diane Borden-Billiot, Outreach Coordinator
337-558-5574 office
337-912-0622 cell

Sabine National Wildlife Refuge Closed, Cameron Prairie and Lacassine will be Open for Waterfowl Hunting

Hackberry, LA -- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that Sabine National Wildlife Refuge - a favorite waterfowl hunting area for many Louisiana hunters - will be closed for the upcoming waterfowl hunting season, crabbing, cast netting for shrimp and remain closed to other public uses. The refuge has been closed for public safety since it suffered extensive damage as a result of Hurricane Rita, which deposited tons of debris over large sections of the refuge.

At the same time, managers emphasized that Cameron Prairie and Lacassine National Wildlife Refuges are open to the public for fishing, wildlife observation, and photography. Waterfowl hunting will resume at both of these refuges this fall. Cameron Prairie will host its youth waterfowl lottery hunt. Lacassine will have its youth and senior lottery hunts in addition to a general hunt. The general hunt is open Wednesday through Sunday during the Louisiana west zone duck and coot season and its September Teal season.

Sabine refuge recreational areas along Highway 27 received varying amounts of damage to bridges, piers, observation towers, boardwalks, restroom facilities, fences, and parking lots. These facilities need to be repaired before the areas can be re-opened for public use. Refuge staff is working with state and local partners, contractors, and other federal agencies to have these repairs completed.

"It is our expectation that contractors will begin working on bridge, fence, and parking repairs as early as this summer with the majority of facility repairs and hazardous debris removal beginning this fall or winter," said Don Voros, project leader for the Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

West of Highway 27, Sabine refuge canals and marshes were severely impacted by storm wind and water. Approximately 32,000 acres of refuge marshes, levees, and canals have been negatively impacted. Canals and marshes are clogged with seven million cubic meters of debris from off shore rigs and coastal communities. There are both physical and chemical hazards present throughout the refuge, many of which have settled below the marsh and water surfaces. Tanks and barrels containing hazardous liquids and gases have the potential to explode or break down and release toxins into the environment. Over 1,400 hazardous material containers have been identified and are estimated to contain between 115,000 and 350,000 gallons of hazardous liquids and gases.

"Public safety is the primary reason that Sabine refuge is still closed," said Terry Delaine, refuge manager. Progress on clean up and repairs is slow, however, the process is ongoing. Non-hazardous debris was removed from roadside recreational areas in May and some mowing has taken place this month.

For more information about waterfowl hunting or other public uses at the Cameron Prairie and Lacassine refuges please call 337-598-2216.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System that encompasses more than 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. The agency also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.