

# COMPATABILITY DETERMINATION

## Introduction

The following proposed compatibility determination describes a management activity and use involving the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge and serves to determine if this use is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

**Refuge Use:** Feral Hog Control

**Refuge Name:** Sabine National Wildlife Refuge

**Date Established:** December 6, 1937

**Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:** Executive Order 7764, Migratory Bird Conservation Act

## Refuge Purpose(s):

*... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife ... (Executive Order 7764, dated Dec. 6, 1937)*

*... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds. (16 U.S.C. Sec. 715d [Migratory Bird Conservation Act])*

## Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System:

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."

## Other Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Policies:

Antiquities Act of 1906 (34 Stat. 225)

Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 U.S. C. 668-668d; 54 Stat. 250)

Criminal Code provisions of 1940 (18 U.S.C. 41)

Department of Interior, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Code of Federal Regulations, Title 50, Subchapter C; Title 43, 3101.3-3)

Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.; 87 Stat. 884)

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. 742a-742j; 70 Stat. 1119)

Fish and Wildlife Service (Refuge) Manual

Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965

Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-711; 40 Stat. 755)

Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929 (16 U.S.C. 715r; 45 Stat. 1222)  
Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act of 1934 (16 U.S.C. 718-718h; 48 Stat. 451)  
National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321, et seq.; 83 Stat. 852)  
National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 470, et seq.; 80 Stat. 915)  
National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee; 80 Stat. 927)  
National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-570)  
Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990  
Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S. C. 460k-460k-4; 76 Stat. 653)  
Refuge Revenue Sharing Act of 1935, as amended in 1978 (16 U.S.C. 715s; 92 Stat. 1319)  
Refuge Trespass Act of June 25, 1948 (18 U.S.C. 41; 62 Stat. 686)  
Use of Off-Road Vehicles on Public Lands (Executive Order 11644, as amended by Executive Order 10989)  
Wilderness Act of 1964 (16 U.S. C. 1131; 78 Stat. 890)  
Laws and Regulations of the State of Louisiana relating to hunting  
Additional refuge-specific regulations as published

### **Description of Use: Feral Hog Removal**

The U S Fish and Wildlife Service will aggressively manage feral hogs on the Sabine NWR through the use of four management tools:

- 1) Aerial gunning (from a helicopter) operations would be conducted by USDA Wildlife Services (WS) as requested by FWS personnel ;
- 2) Public hunting regulated by Special Use Permit;
- 3) Ground shooting near feeders by FWS personnel and/or USDA (WS) ;
- 4) Trapping conducted by FWS personnel and/or USDA- WS. Followed by on-site euthanasia.

**Availability of Resources:** There are adequate resources to ensure and administer the use at its current level of participation.

**Anticipated Impacts of Use:** The incidental taking of other wildlife species, either illegally or unintentionally, may occur with any wildlife control program depending on the method used. At current and anticipated public use levels for this program and activities being performed by professional employees from USDA-Wildlife Services or Fish and Wildlife personnel, this incidental take would be very small and would not directly or cumulatively impact population levels on the refuge or in the surrounding area. Currently the refuge does not have any threatened or endangered species restrictions so concerns about incidental take of protected species are minimal. Implementation of a highly effective law enforcement program and continued development of special conditions for certain aspects of the control program would eliminate most incidental take problems.

Access to the control areas by individuals would occur by boat, aircraft (helicopter), or walking depending upon which control tool is being used with the exception of all-terrain vehicle use by disabled individuals, so impacts such as trampling, crushing/grinding vegetation and noise disturbance should be minimal.

The control program under all tools available to Fish and Wildlife Service employees are not expected to indirectly or cumulatively impact refuge resources negatively. During control activities some minimal and short-term direct impacts on refuge resources could occur.

**Public Review and Comment:** A 30 day public review and comment process has been announced via a U S Fish and Wildlife Service News Release. The draft environmental assessment can be found on the internet at <http://www.fws.gov.swlarefugecomplex> or by contacting the Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex at 337-598-2216.

**Determination (check one below):**

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations

**Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:** The removal of feral hogs will be completed in accordance with Department of Interior Policy found in 351DM 2-351 DM 3, Aerial Capture, Eradication and Tagging of Animals (ACETA) Handbook and the final approved Sabine National Wildlife Refuge Feral Hog Management Plan and Environmental Assessment. When the public hunting tool is used the minimum special conditions that will be required are as follows:

1. The Permittee must furnish his or her own hunting equipment prior to the season.
2. No alcohol may be in possession while on the refuge. No littering of any sort on National Wildlife Refuges, carry all trash and waste out.
3. Refuge managers have the authority to cancel this permit at any time. Violation of any federal, state, or refuge regulation, or special condition will result in immediate cancellation of the *Special Use Permit (SUP)* and seizure of all hogs taken.
4. There is no size limit to any mudboats, go-devils, or outboard motors while scouting or during the hunting season; no airboats are allowed. Access will be defined by the refuge manager.
5. Boats operated before sunrise and after sunset must have proper running lights.
6. Each *Permittee* must personally hunt their assigned unit each morning and begin harvesting hogs at official sunrise (nighttime hunting is prohibited).

7. In case of illness or injury to the *Permittee*, a designated assistant may hunt the unit for the *Permittee* with prior approval from the refuge manager.
8. Only firearms with a minimum caliber of a twenty-two magnum are allowed to dispatch hogs. The possession of shotguns is prohibited. All firearms must be unloaded and encased while in refuge parking areas, boat launches, or in route to and from designated hunting areas. Extreme caution must be exercised when using firearms. *Permittees* and their party are responsible for human safety near their sets and are encouraged to ask refuge staff for guidance. No sets will be allowed in areas that jeopardize the safety of other user groups (i.e., active boat travel paths, within 200 feet of boat launches).
9. Hunters will attempt to kill all hogs encountered. No “high grading” is allowed. No live hogs will be removed from the refuge
10. Each *Permittee* must report the number of hogs killed and their location once their permit period expires.
11. Each *Permittee* must remove all sets, markers, boats, trailers, or other gear within twenty-four hours of season closure
12. Hunters are allowed to leave a maximum of two boats with equipment on the refuge while hunting. The refuge is not responsible for theft or damage.
13. *Permittee* may not sell, barter, or gain any other economic benefit from this hunt other than the sale of the hogs, taken by the *Permittee* and their approved assistants, to State authorized processors.
14. The use of hunting dogs may be permitted.

**Justification:**

The purpose of controlling feral hogs is to protect 125,790 acres of fresh, intermediate and brackish refuge marshes from feral hog (*Sus scrofa*) induced erosion, mottled duck and other native species habitat destruction and migratory bird nesting mortality. Currently and in past years, feral hogs have roamed at large on private property adjacent to Sabine National Wildlife Refuge and have gone unchecked and unmanaged. The rapidly expanding distribution of feral hogs in the United States has caused great concern for many land and resource managers. The ecologically-rich marshes of Sabine National Wildlife Refuge have not been immune to the invasion of these animals. cursory observations suggest accelerated increases over the last few years. Feral hogs are omnivores devouring flora and fauna alike.

According to the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center (LSU AgCenter), feral hog populations are growing and expanding in the state and throughout the southeastern states. Hogs are becoming one of the most serious concerns for wildlife managers. They root up food plots, eat the corn at feeders, tear up hardwood stands looking for acorns, and scare other wildlife

away. Hogs also prey on young game animals, compete with native wildlife, carry diseases and pollute streams. Feral hogs damage forest regeneration and other agricultural crops like sugarcane, corn and rice.

Feral hogs are a result of domestic hogs that have been released or a hybrid of domestic hogs and introduced Russian boars. Feral hogs are adaptable to a wide range of habitats -- from piney woods to bottomland hardwoods and even marshlands. Their average size is 100 to 150 pounds, but they can reach over 400 pounds.

Feral hogs are the most prolific large wild mammal in North America with the population able to double in four months. Sows breed throughout the year or seasonally beginning at eight to 10 months of age. They can produce two litters every 12 to 18 months with an average of four to eight piglets per litter. Older sows may have litters of 10 to 13.

Feral hogs carry many diseases that can transmit to humans. Brucellosis is the most dangerous but also the most preventable disease. The disease causes Undulant Fever in humans, which can result in fever, orchitis or oophoritis. Treatment can last for months, and the problems can re-occur at any time. The disease is contracted when butchering or handling the meat of feral hogs. The simple solution is to wear rubber or latex gloves when processing a hog or handling uncooked meat. Properly cooked meat is safe to eat (LSU AgCenter).

Many biologists and wildlife managers recommended trapping or shooting as the best control methods. Feral hogs are considered unregulated quadrupeds in Louisiana. They can be shot by anyone with a legal hunting license during legal daylight shooting hours year-round.

**NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision:** *Place an X in appropriate space.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Statement

\_\_\_\_\_ Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Statement

  X   Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

\_\_\_\_\_ Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

Sabine National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Literature Cited:

Louisiana State University Agriculture Center, 2009. From Web Site Agriculture & Natural Resources, Updated November 9, 2009

**Mandatory 15-year Re-evaluation Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

