

DRAFT
COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION
for White-winged and Mourning Dove, Quail
and Desert Cottontail Rabbit Hunting
on
San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge.

Use: White-winged dove, mourning dove, desert cottontail rabbit, scaled and Gambel's quail Hunting

Refuge Name: San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) was established under the following provisions:

Was established in 1982 under the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 in order ". . . to conserve fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species. . . or plants."

Refuge Purposes:

The underlying reason for establishing the refuge was to protect Yaqui Catfish, Yaqui Topminnow, Yaqui Chub, and Beautiful Shiner habitat.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

The mission of the System is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

Description of Use:

An update of the existing hunting program on the refuge to include hunting for white-winged dove, mourning dove, desert cottontail rabbit, scaled quail and Gambel's quail, which is a wildlife-dependent public use.

Where would the use be conducted?

Dove, quail and rabbit hunting will be allowed in the refuge hunt unit in accordance with the refuge hunt plan. Unit 30A – Southeast corner of unit; That portion of the refuge north of the United States / Mexico International Border which includes approximately 1,300 acres. These lands include all lands east of the refuge road that lies to the east of and runs parallel to Black Draw except for small posted closures around sensitive springs and water developments..

When would the use be conducted?

1. Mourning dove and white-winged dove hunts will be in accordance with State Migratory bird season which runs from September 1-15. Additionally, there is a second season for mourning dove which runs from the second to last weekend in November to the first Monday in January.
2. Desert cottontail rabbit hunts are restricted to the period of September 1 through the 2nd weekend in February. The State season is open year round.
3. Gambel's quail and scaled quail hunts will be in accordance with the State small game season which is approximately the first weekend in October through the second weekend in February.

How would the use be conducted?

Hunting on the refuge is managed in accordance with regulations set forth by the State of Arizona. Hunters are required to use non-toxic shot. No hunting permit is required by the refuge. Hunters must have all applicable State and Federal licenses, tags, and stamps.

Why is this use being proposed?

Hunting is one of the six priority public uses of national wildlife refuges. Hunting is an existing wildlife-dependent public use occurring on the refuge. Public hunts on the San Bernardino NWR began in 1982, with the introduction of shotgun for white-winged and mourning dove, Gambel's and scaled quail, and desert cottontail rabbits. The objective of hunting on the refuge is to provide safe, high quality, low impact recreational opportunity for public use and enjoyment of wildlife resources. This provides the visitor with an additional recreational opportunity where hunting opportunities on public lands are limited.

Availability of Resources:

Adequate funding and staff are available. Administering the refuge hunt program does not require any developed facilities on the refuge. It has been estimated that it will take approximately twenty (25) staff days each year to operate and manage the annual program, provide brochures and hunting regulations, respond to public inquiries, post signage, and enforcement and bag limit checks. The cost to the refuge to annually manage its hunting program is estimated at approximately three thousand six hundred, (\$3,600) dollars.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts: Providing carefully planned and managed hunting opportunities with restrictions that limit access to specific refuge locations will generally minimize disturbance to wildlife populations, the environment, and non-consumptive users. Direct mortality to hunted species (white-winged and mourning dove, quail, and desert cotton-tail rabbits) would, of course,

occur. Some wounding of animals may occur as well. 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. There would be minor disturbance of limited duration to other wildlife during the hunt. Short term impacts include a minimal increase in vehicle emissions and stirring of dust from hunting traffic on roads and trails; minor disturbance to habitat/vegetation due to hunter foot traffic during hunts and scouting; a small potential of spreading invasive species by vehicle and hunter foot traffic; temporary disturbance to early spring nesting birds or wildlife with young; and minimal short-term disturbance to migratory wildlife from human noise. There would be a minimal positive impact on the local economy and positive benefit to hunters by allowing the public to enjoy hunting at an affordable rate in a region where public land is limited. There is an inherent public safety risk associated with the use of any type of firearms. There is always a risk of conflict between undocumented immigrants and hunters but the low number of hunters that use the refuge and the amount of mesquite cover, make the probability of contact very low.

There are no expected impacts to the biological integrity of the refuge. There is no potential displacement of other refuge visitors who would not be able to participate in non-hunting activities during hunt periods. Portions of the refuge will remain available for non-hunting uses.

The proposed use may divert resources from other refuge activities for short periods of time during hunt preparation. These activities would likely be of lower priority - resulting in an overall neutral or positive indirect impact to the refuge.

Long-term Impacts: All long-term impacts of allowing small game and migratory bird hunting are expected to be minimal. Water and soil quality are expected to have little impact; minimal positive impacts to habitat quality and quantity are expected; native wildlife will benefit from reduced competition for food and space; minimal erosion along waterways and wetlands is expected;

Cumulative Impacts: Currently, hunting is allowed for, desert cotton-tail rabbit, white-winged and mourning dove and quail. The refuge is not proposing any new hunts. Other resident wildlife species are also present on the refuge, including songbirds, wading birds, and raptors; small mammals such as gophers, mice, shrews, and bats; reptiles and amphibians such as snakes, skinks, turtles, lizards, salamanders, frogs and toads; and invertebrates such as butterflies, moths, other insects and spiders. Most of these species are common and widespread. In general, these species are broadly distributed throughout the region and have limited home ranges. Hunting is not expected to affect any wildlife populations regionally. Some wildlife disturbance (increased human presence and sounds) will occur locally during the hunting season; however, these impacts are expected to be minor for the following reasons. Collectively, the refuge will be open to hunting for a total of 161 days per year with very low number of hunters and there will be no disruption of use by other wildlife-dependent visitors.

A Section 7 Evaluation completed during this assessment determined that the proposed alternative is not likely to adversely affect any threatened or endangered species. The minimal number of hunters that utilize the refuge, along with the restrictions on areas open to hunting, would greatly reduce the possibilities of negatively impacting the Yaqui chub, Yaqui topminnow, Yaqui catfish, or beautiful shiner.

The number of people hunting on the refuge on any given day will be low during the 161 days open to hunting. Furthermore, hunters will be dispersed throughout the refuge, and 365 days are open to all other wildlife dependent use and recreation during daylight hours.

The Service has concluded that cumulative impacts on the refuge's wildlife populations, either hunted or non-hunted species will be negligible. The Service has also concluded that the proposed action will not cumulatively impact the refuge environment or refuge programs. This determination was based upon a careful analysis of potential environmental impacts of hunting on the refuge together with other projects and/or actions. 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:

Conversations concerning hunting on the refuge have been ongoing with Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) personnel since 2012. The Arizona Game and Fish Department responded in February 2012 in support of new hunting opportunities at the refuge. AZGFD stated that they recommended additional hunting opportunities for archery for deer and javelina hunting on the San Bernardino Unit and possibly also on the Leslie Canyon Unit. AZGFD also suggested the possibility of predator hunting with shotguns, if not centerfire rifles.

Formal scoping for the refuge's hunting program was initiated on April 29, 2015. The Service announced its intent to prepare an Environmental Assessment of alternatives for updating the refuge to continued dove, quail and rabbit hunting. A 14-day scoping period (April 29-May 11) was established under that notice and posted on the refuge website.

During the scoping period the Service received no public comments.

This compatibility determination, along with the Draft EA, is available for public comment until August 26, 2015.

Determination (check one below):

- Use is Not Compatible
- Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. Surveys will continue on the refuge to document abundance of target species to ensure that populations continue to support the refuge hunt program.
2. Activities will be coordinated between Service and AZGFD staff to manage the operation to achieve intended objectives.
3. Both Federal and State law enforcement personnel will ensure compliance with Refuge regulations and State laws for the protection of Refuge resources and the safety of participants.

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 these six wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, which are to receive enhanced and priority consideration in refuge planning and management. Continued hunting (of white-winged and mourning dove, quail and desert cotton-tail rabbits), as proposed, on the refuge will not conflict with any of the other priority public uses, adversely impact biological resources, or detract from refuge goals, objectives, and management activities. Through the compatibility determination process, the Complex has determined that hunting, in accordance with the stipulations provided above, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the Refuge System mission or the purposes of each refuge.

Hunting, as proposed, will be managed in such a way to minimize conflicts with other compatible recreational uses and management programs. The refuge will monitor hunter use, compliance with rules and regulations, and any impacts to native wildlife populations and habitats. This information will be used to adjust this hunt program as necessary to protect refuge resources.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-Evaluation Date: 2030