

**Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge**

**Game Species Hunt Plan  
Migratory Birds, Small and Big Game**

**August 2014**

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

**Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge  
19502 Iris Road  
Little Falls, MN 56345**

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# **Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge**

## **Game Species Hunt Plan**

### **Migratory Birds, Small and Big Game**

#### **I. Introduction**

This Hunt Plan formulates the general concept for hunting opportunities on fee title lands as identified in the Crane Meadows Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) (USFWS 2010). The CCP provided general direction for Refuge management over short- and long-term timeframes.

The Refuge has acquired just 2,042 acres of the approved 13,540-acre acquisition area in Morrison County. Within the acquisition area, approximately 900 acres are owned and managed by the state, and the remaining land is privately owned (see Figure 1 page 4). Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (NWR or Refuge) was established by the Federal Property and Administrative Service Act of 1949 (40 U.S.C. 471-535), as amended; Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1934 (16 U.S.C. 661-666c) as amended; Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. 742a-742j Stat. 1119) as amended; the Act of May 19, 1948, Public Law 80-537 (16 U.S.C. 667b-667d; 62 Stat. 240) as amended; and The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee), as amended.

The Refuge was established in 1992 to conserve and protect the diminishing number of high quality wetlands that remain on the American landscape. It was created under the authority of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 to protect one of the largest intact sedge meadow wetland complexes in the state (FWS, 1990). It also protects and maintains important wildlife, recreation, and archaeological resources. The main funding source at the creation of the Refuge was the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Located in central Minnesota, the Refuge falls in the transition zone between the northern forests and the mid-continental prairies and is situated on the Anoka Sand Plain only five miles from the Mississippi River. The critical and diverse wetland habitats characteristic of the Upper-Midwest provide important habitat for local and migratory wildlife, maintain essential ecological services, provide an element of water control and flood relief, and offer unique recreation, education, and research opportunities.

Currently the Refuge provides limited hunting opportunities for the youth and persons with disabilities. All of these hunts are conducted on three tracts; the Headquarters Unit, the Platte River West and the Sedge Meadows Unit. There is a spring turkey hunt and a white-tailed deer hunt. Both types of hunting alternate from either the youth or persons with disabilities. The deer hunt for the youth is an archery hunt that is opened for a limited time during the normal State season. The deer hunt for persons with disabilities is an early (October) special hunt, conducted when temperatures are warmer. Turkey hunting for both groups is conducted during the regular

spring state season.

This Hunt Plan will describe, in detail, the current and future hunting opportunities, how hunting will be conducted, and conflict resolution with other management objectives. The Hunt Plan will be a step-down plan of the overall Visitor Services Plan which is in the process of completion.

DRAFT

# Crane Meadows NWR

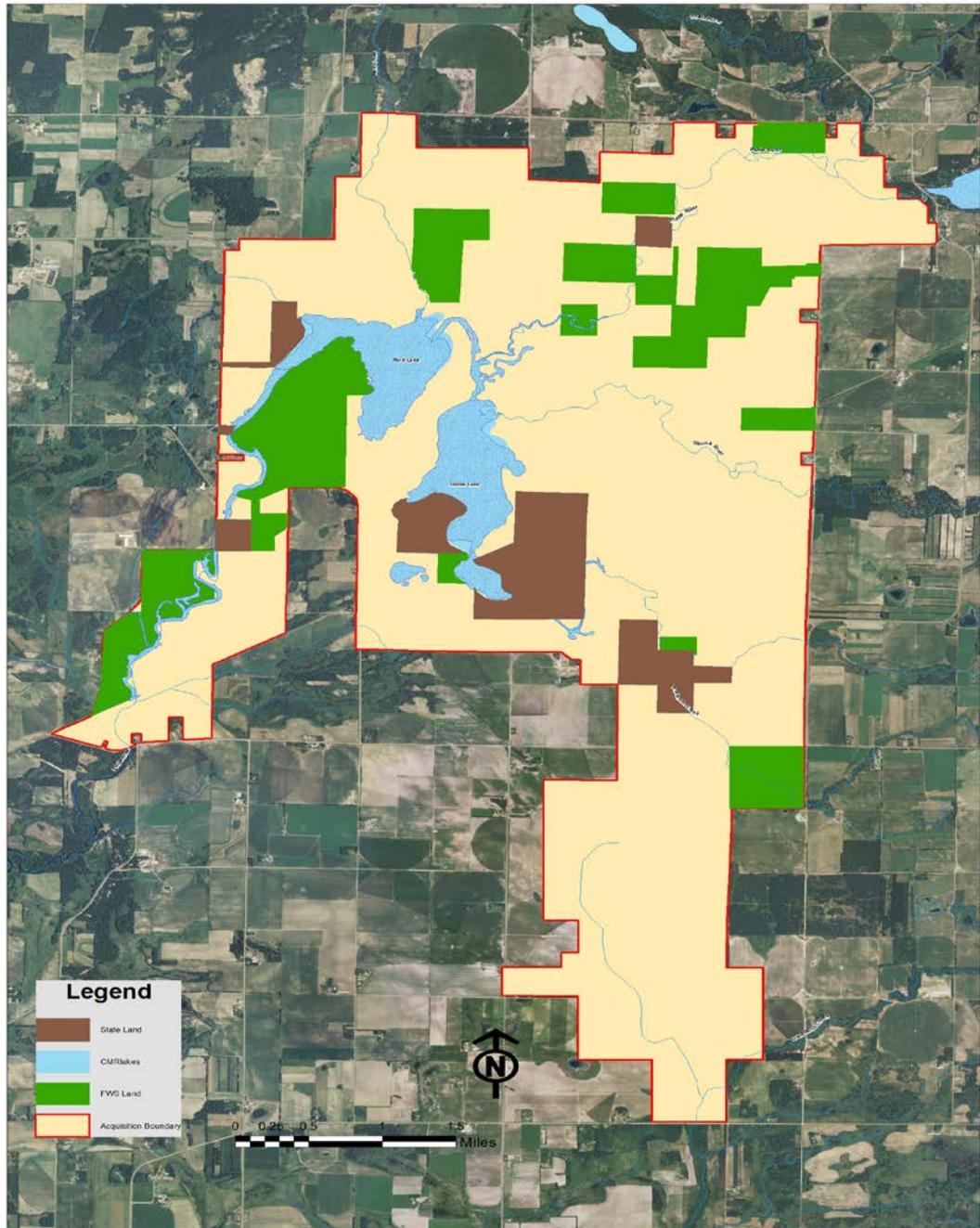


Figure 1. Crane Meadows NWR Map

## **II. Concurrence with Statutory Authorities**

The Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S.C. 460K) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to administer refuges, hatcheries, and other conservation areas for recreational use. The Refuge Recreation Act requires 1) that any recreational use permitted will not interfere with the primary purpose for which the area was established; and 2) that funds are available for the development, operation, and maintenance of the permitted forms of recreation.

Fundamental to the management of lands within the National Wildlife Refuge System (System) is the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-57), an amendment to the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 provided a mission for the System and clear standards for its management, use, planning, and growth. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 recognized that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible with the mission of the System and purposes of the Refuge, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of the System. Compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are the priority general public uses of the System and shall receive priority consideration in planning and management. Hunting as specified in this plan is a wildlife-dependent recreational use and the law states that as such, it “shall receive priority consideration in national wildlife refuge planning and management.” The Secretary of Interior may permit hunting on a refuge if it is determined that the use is compatible. The hunting program would not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the purposes of the refuge or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Recreational hunting authorized by the regulations should not interfere with the primary purpose for which Crane Meadows NWR was established. Hunting was identified in the Final Environmental Assessment for the Refuge (USFWS 1992), as well as, in the 2010 CCP as being a priority wildlife-dependent public use that will be authorized on the Refuge. The Service has determined through a Compatibility Determination (CD), completed during the 2010 CCP process that this use is compatible with the purpose of the Refuge and the mission statement of the NWR System. This Hunt Plan has been developed to guide hunting on the Refuge in a manner that allows the Service to fulfill the purposes for which the Refuge was established, as well as, to provide wildlife-dependent recreation.

Hunting on the Refuge allows Refuge staff to manage wildlife populations at acceptable levels, provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for the public, and promote a better understanding and appreciation of natural habitats and their associated fish and wildlife resources. Implementation of the proposed actions will be consistent with the Refuge Recreation Act, the Refuge Administration Act, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the establishment of the Crane Meadows NWR and compatible with Refuge purposes.

## **Relationship to other Plans and Documents**

The CCP and Environmental Assessment (EA) (USFWS 2011) for Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge have been approved. The CCP and EA addressed current and future management of the Refuge, including visitor services. The Hunt Plan is a step down management plan of the CCP and Visitor Services Plan, and as such, contains more detailed information describing the entire hunt program on the Refuge. A Hunt Plan was written in 2010 for two types of special hunts; white-tailed deer and wild turkey. The hunts were for the disabled and the youth and only on specific areas of the Refuge. The step-down process provides managers and employees an opportunity to identify the specific implementation actions that will be carried to meet the over-arching framework of the CCP. This plan will also be included as a chapter of the Visitor Services Plan upon its completion.

The first Hunt Plan developed for the Refuge was approved in 2010. This plan, along with accompanying paperwork was developed to fulfill the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, opening the Refuge to partial hunting. It considered the biological, environmental, and socioeconomic effects that implementing the preferred alternative, as well as, two other alternatives. Each alternative had different issues and concerns as identified during the planning process. The preferred alternative was to open select units of the Refuge to Special Hunts. It also allowed consideration of new lands to hunting opportunities.

Big game, small game, and migratory bird hunting are presented in this amended Hunt Plan. A list and a detailed description of the hunting opportunities proposed for the Refuge are also provided in this document.

Upon completion and adoption of this Hunt Plan, the Service will publish in the Federal Register a Proposed Rule that updates the hunting program on the Refuge. Following the comment period on the Proposed Rule, a determination will be made whether to implement the updated hunting opportunities as outlined in this Hunt Plan.

Subsequently, a Final Rule will be published outlining hunting on the Refuge.

## **III. Statement of Objectives**

The objectives of migratory bird, upland game, and big game hunting on Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge are to provide:

1. Wildlife-dependent public recreation as mandated by and according to Service policy.
2. The public with a high quality recreational experience on more refuge lands and increase opportunities for hunters, especially for youth.

3. Educate the public on management of wildlife populations. This will help foster a better appreciation of our resources and how they are interconnected, i.e. avoiding vegetation degradation (browse line) from an overabundance of deer.

4. Biological diversity by preserving the natural diversity and variety of biotic communities occurring on Refuge lands.

## **IV. Assessment**

### **A. Are wildlife populations present in numbers sufficient to sustain optimum population levels for priority refuge objectives other than hunting?**

The Service has allowed limited public hunting and has administered a hunting program on the Refuge starting in 2012. The existing hunt program has not placed a significant time burden on Refuge employees. Each hunt has been hosted by a third party with the Refuge acting as a facilitator. Nor has the Service noted any significant adverse effects of this program on the administration of the Refuge and has determined that hunting is compatible with the purposes of the NWR System's mission statement.

White-tailed deer, waterfowl, waterbirds, turkeys, passerines, and mammalian predators are monitored on the Refuge and surrounding areas by the Service and conservation partners. Amphibians, reptiles, and insects also are monitored, although less frequently.

Recent assessments of species hunted in the vicinity of the Refuge indicate that those species are not facing a general decline. For waterfowl, the annual assessments are based upon the distribution, abundance, and flight corridors of migratory birds. The annual Waterfowl Population Status Report (USFWS 2013) includes the most current breeding population and production information available for waterfowl in North America and is a result of cooperative efforts by the Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service, various state and provincial conservation agencies, and private conservation organizations. Waterfowl populations are strong, according to the 2013 Report. The preliminary estimate of total waterfowl populations from the traditional survey area (north-central United States, south-central and northern Canada, and Alaska) is 45.6 million birds. This estimate represents a 6 percent decrease from last year's estimate of 48.6 million birds, but is still 33 percent above the long-term average (1955-2012). The total duck estimate excludes scoters, eiders, long-tailed ducks, mergansers and wood ducks. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) statewide estimate on the breeding duck population was 683,000 for 2013. Despite lingering winter weather it's up last year's estimate of 469,000 birds. This year's estimate is 10 percent above the long-term average of 620,000 breeding ducks.

A preliminary report for 2013 reported a Minnesota statewide deer harvest of 171,000 animals. That is the lowest since 1998 and the third consecutive year of decline. It is suggested that part of the reason for the decline in harvest during the past few years was the restricted harvest of antlerless deer through more lottery areas and fewer intensive and managed deer areas that we have used in an attempt to allow populations to stabilize or rebuild in many parts of the state

reported deer harvest numbers from 1951 to 2011. The number of deer harvested in the State was below 20,000 until the early 1980s. Since then, the number of deer harvested has risen tremendously to a level where over 100,000 deer have been taken each year since 1992. The 2012 Minnesota Deer Harvest Report indicates that the 186,684 deer were harvested and 192,031 deer harvested in 2011.

In 2012 there were 2,653 deer harvested in Minnesota Deer Hunting Zone 221. Crane Meadows NWR is located within the 647 square mile border of the Zone. Deer harvest on the Refuge in 2012 was 7 deer for 14 hunter participants.

In Minnesota, the spring wild turkey hunting season is designed to regulate harvest and distribute hunting pressure by allocating permits across 12 permit areas (PAs) covering the entire state (Figure 4) and 8 time periods using a quota system. Although youth hunters can purchase a permit over-the-counter, adult hunters interested in pursuing wild turkeys are required to apply for a permit through a lottery system. Preference for this lottery system is determined by the number of years a valid but unsuccessful application has been submitted since last receiving a permit. Hunters can apply individually or in a group of up to 4 hunters. Successful applicants are notified through U.S. mail, and unsuccessful applicants are awarded a preference point. The goal of this system is to provide quality turkey hunting opportunities by minimizing hunter interference rates, conservatively harvesting turkeys in permit areas where the turkey range is expanding, yet allowing a substantial harvest in the remainder of the state.

The wild turkey population is rapidly expanding in Minnesota. Starting in 2012 there were two notable regulation changes in the spring hunting season: the last 4 time periods (E, F, G and H) had an unlimited number of permits available and the number of PAs was reduced from 81 to 12 PAs by pooling smaller PAs into larger ones. Permits for time periods E through H and all surplus licenses remaining after the drawing were offered over-the-counter in mid-March on a first-come, first-served basis (Walburg and Grund 2012).

Numeric changes in annual turkey harvests can be influenced by turkey population size, hunter effort, and weather. As of 2010, Minnesota's wild turkey population appeared to be stable or growing modestly throughout most of the range, with more rapid growth in the northern PAs (Giudice et al. 2011).

Data for other small (upland) game is collected by MNDNR during their biennial survey of Minnesota small game hunters, included in the Small Game Harvest Survey. Annual population indices, 10-year averages, and historical information are used to determine hunting guidelines for the species.

#### **B. Is there competition for habitat between target species and other wildlife?**

Game populations are such that hunting on Refuge lands would be consistent with the harvestable surplus of these species while not affecting priority Refuge objectives. There is no apparent competition for habitat between game species and trust species nor are there

unacceptable levels of predation by game species and other wildlife forms. Federal and state regulations permit hunting of species to maximize utilization of harvestable surplus of resident game and migratory birds and to tailor harvest opportunities to local management desires. Target species compete with various other species of wildlife although none of their populations are at such a level to be deemed as nuisance or invasive species. Hunting of these populations will ensure that populations do not reach a level in which they will become over-competitive with other target species.

**C. Are there unacceptable levels of predation by target species on other wildlife?**

All species that are available for hunting have little or no predation on other wildlife

**V. Description of the Hunting Program**

**A. Areas of the Refuge that support populations of the target species.**

The Refuge consists of forming a transition zone between tallgrass prairie to the southwest and deciduous forests to the northeast, leading to a distinctive set of vegetative communities. The following habitat types include:

*Wetlands and Open Water* – The wetland types in this category include: open water, river/stream, emergent marsh, sedge meadow and willow-dogwood shrub swamp. The majority of this category is made up of sedge meadows, followed closely by shrub swamp.

*Woodlands* – There are three woodland types in this category; oak, oak-aspen and jack pine. The majority of this habitat type is comprised of oak woodland. Oak woodland is defined as dry-mesic hardwood forests; typically deciduous-dominated, but at times mixed deciduous-conifer.

*Lowland Forest* – The northern floodplain forest is a lowland deciduous riparian forest on the sandy alluvial soils along water courses.

*Oak Savanna* – Small patches totaling approximately of a native oak savanna subtype, identified as southern dry savanna, have been retained in the Refuge acquisition area from pre-settlement times.

*Grasslands/Prairie* – The category includes southern dry, southern mesic, and wet prairie habitats. The southern dry prairie is dominated by short grasses and herbaceous vegetation. The southern mesic prairie consists primarily of native warm season grasses and tallgrass prairie species that were planted during restoration efforts. Wet prairie is characterized by both warm and cool season grasses, sedges, and forbs.

All of the Refuge owned lands support huntable populations of the target game species. These species have been evaluated in further detail in the Environmental Assessment that was implemented to support any hunting activities that will be conducted on Crane Meadows NWR. The populations will be evaluated both by the USFWS and the MNDNR on a yearly basis to ensure that the populations will support these hunting activities.

## **B. Areas to be opened to hunting**

The Refuge is proposing public hunting opportunities on all tracts of land currently owned by the Refuge. All future purchases of lands to be managed by the Refuge will be evaluated for proposed hunting opportunities.

Refuge Units may be closed as deemed necessary for protection of Refuge owned infrastructure, accessibility issues, safety reasons, to protect wildlife populations, or to minimize conflicts with non-consumptive users.

As additional lands are acquired and Refuge management programs are instituted, it may become necessary to impose some regulations that are more restrictive than state laws. Modifications will be included during the annual amendment process through the Federal Register, and the public will be informed through media and posting. Hunting success (harvest) will be determined initially on the basis of random, informal contacts with hunters. Minnesota's required deer and turkey check program provides a quality assessment of the Refuge's deer and turkey harvest.

The following are tracts currently managed by the Refuge and are being proposed for hunting.

### Veith Tract

This 150 acre tract was acquired in 2010. The entire unit will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

### South Iris Road Tract

This 48.5 acre tract was acquired in 2008. The entire unit will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

### Grewe Tract

This 40 acre tract was acquired in 2006. The entire unit will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

### Rice Creek Tract

This is a 177.7 acre tract. Most of the tract (151 acres) was acquired in the mid 1990's. The 26.7 acre Wilkinson Parcel was added to it in 2004. The entire unit will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

### Highway 27 Tract

This 80 acre tract was acquired in 1998. The entire unit will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

#### Platte River West Tract

This 255 acre tract was acquired in the mid 1990's. The tract was formerly known as the Girtz and Ulrud Tracts, 163.07 and 92.25 acres, respectively. The unit would be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

#### 133<sup>rd</sup> Bridge Unit

This 140 acre tract was acquired in the 1990's. The entire unit will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

#### Scholen Memorial Tract

This 22.08 acre tract was acquired in 1993. The entire unit will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

#### Soo Line East Tract

This 58.9 acres tract was acquired in 1995. The entire unit will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

#### Sedge Meadow Unit

Most of the 486.9 acre was acquired in the mid 1990's. The entire unit will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

#### Platte River 80 Tract

The Platte River 80 acre tract was acquired in 1995. If acquired, it will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

#### Platte River 40 Tract

This 40 acre tract was acquired in 1995. The Platte River 40 Tract does not have an easement corridor to access the property. If acquired, it will be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, state seasons, and Refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

#### Headquarters Tract (Special Hunts Only)

This 462.7 acre tract was acquired in the mid 1990's. The office and shop buildings are located on the parcel of land. It is a unique piece of ground; the Platte River runs along the west and northern borders. This tract is adjacent to Rice Lake on the northeastern corner. It is comprised of a variety of habitats; prairie, oak savanna, wetland, woodland, etc. As a result, the 3.7 mile Platte River Trail winds through the parcel showcasing the various habitats. The Headquarters tract will only be open special hunts. It will entail closing the Platte River Trail for the two-day hunt which is a minimal conflict with other user groups. Due to public safety, conflict with user groups and security this tract of land will be closed to hunting for the general public during the regular hunt seasons.

### **C. Species to be taken, hunting periods, hunting access**

The Refuge proposes to open the majority of the Refuge to small game, migratory birds and big game hunting for certain species, in designated areas, in accordance with state and federal laws. All other species are protected. The species to be hunted are determined with biological justification to support the management of target and non-target populations. The following lists are species in consideration for hunting at Crane Meadows NWR;

#### **Migratory Birds**

Ducks  
Geese  
American Coot  
American Woodcock  
Mourning Dove  
Common Snipe

#### **Small Game**

Ruffed Grouse  
Ring-Necked Pheasant  
Rabbit (cottontail)  
Gray and fox squirrel

#### **Big Game**

White-tailed Deer  
Wild Turkey

The Refuge hunting seasons will correspond with the State open seasons. The exceptions would be special hunts conducted for the disabled. Those hunts will be planned and coordinated through the State's rules and guidelines for special hunt types.

Crane Meadows NWR is in a highly agricultural area of MN where vehicle travel is low. Preferred parking areas for hunters' access will be in designated parking lots and approaches to fields but because of low traffic volume parking along roadsides will be permitted. Parking lots will be established in areas where parking along roadsides may be dangerous. Some areas will only be accessible Access to tracts will be by foot only unless otherwise deemed acceptable by refuge management for disabled hunters.

### **D. Consultation and Coordination with the State**

National Wildlife Refuges, including Crane Meadows NWR, conduct hunting programs within the framework of state and federal regulations. All authorized hunts are regulated by the state of Minnesota, but the Refuge may elect to be more restrictive to support Refuge management goals. The EA associated with this Hunt Plan and the Preferred Alternative discussed in that document, has been reviewed and is supported by the MNDNR. The Refuge has moved forward with developing this Hunting Chapter based upon earlier formal coordination with the MNDNR, as well as, the intervening informal discussions.

The results of this coordination are reflected in this Hunt Plan. Crane Meadows NWR will continue to consult and coordinate with the MNDNR annually to maintain regulations and programs that are consistent with the State; as well as, to monitor populations of game species and set harvest goals. The Refuge will strive to maintain consistent regulations with the MNDNR whenever applicable

### **E. Law Enforcement**

Enforcement of Refuge violations normally associated with management of a National Wildlife Refuge is the responsibility of commissioned Refuge Law Enforcement Officers. Other refuge officers, Special Agents, State Conservation Officers, and the local Sheriff's Department often assist the Crane Meadows NWR full time law enforcement officer.

The following methods are used to control and enforce hunting regulations:

- Refuge and hunt area boundaries will be clearly posted;
- The Refuge will provide a brochure that shows hunt areas;
- Crane Meadows NWR law enforcement officer(s) will randomly check hunters for compliance with Federal and State Laws, as well as Refuge-specific regulations pertinent to hunting, including compatibility stipulations;
- Crane Meadows NWR law enforcement officer(s) will coordinate with MNDNR officers and other law enforcement agencies; and
- Information will be made available at the Crane Meadows NWR headquarters and website.

### **F. Funding and Staffing Requirements**

Annual hunt program administration costs, for Crane Meadows NWR, including salary for law enforcement and visitor service personnel, signage, law enforcement equipment, brochures, maintaining website, collection of hunt data and analysis of biological information, totals approximately \$20,000. It is anticipated that funding would continue to be sufficient to continue the hunting program at Crane Meadows NWR in the future.

## **VI. Measures Taken to Avoid Conflicts with Other Management Objectives**

### **A. Biological Conflicts**

The Refuge avoids conflict related to biological resources by adopting the "wildlife first" principle which is explicitly stated in the Refuge Improvement Act. The staff monitors species population trends to ensure that target species can be hunted on the Refuge without adversely affecting the local population. These monitoring activities include direct observation of populations, consultation with State and Service species specialists, and review of current species survey information and research. Although not proposed in this current plan, the Refuge could

limit or exclude hunting activities on portions of Refuge to avoid conflicts related to biological resources. Special hunts may also be used to manage hunting pressure and overall take at appropriate levels.

Currently there are no federally endangered species documented on the Refuge. Should this change, areas inhabited by the subject species will be evaluated for hunting suitability. Hunting will not conflict with the recovery and/or protection of these species. Attached and included in this proposal are a Section 7 analysis and an Environmental Assessment specifically for the hunting program.

### **B. Public Use Conflict**

In an effort to avoid conflicts with non-hunting priority recreational uses as outlined in the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act, and for safety, the Refuge enforce a series of Refuge-specific hunting regulations. The boundaries of most lands owned by the Service are posted with Refuge boundary signs. Areas administratively closed to hunting will be clearly marked with “No Hunting Zone” or “Area Beyond This Sign Closed” signs.

The 463 acre Headquarters Tract is currently the only Refuge property with public access and accommodations for public uses other than hunting. The 3.7 mile Platte River Trail winds through this Tract. There are two wildlife observation platforms, several informational kiosks and benches to facilitate wildlife-dependent recreation and visitation. It will be closed to hunting with the exception to special hunts. Public visitation has increased dramatically through the past decade. According to the 2013 Refuge Annual Performance Plan (RAPP), 11,408 visitors used the foot trail (USFWS 2013). In order to minimize public use conflicts and for the safety of non-hunting priority recreational users, the Refuge is proposing to close the Headquarters Tract to general public hunting. If closed, the property will be signed appropriately to notify users. Once the tract is closed, minimal conflicts between wildlife observers and hunters is expected.

Public use conflicts will be minimized through close coordination with other public agency programs conducted on lands near the Refuge's hunting zones. The most significant of these involves the MNDNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife.

### **C. Administrative Conflicts**

Refuge management activities can be accomplished without conflict with hunting activities through the use of administratively closed areas, timing of hunts, and hunt methods.

## **VII. Conduct of the Hunt**

### **A. General Refuge Regulations**

All hunting on Crane Meadows NWR, with the exception of special hunts, will be consistent with state and federal laws and regulations and those pertaining to all National Wildlife Refuge System lands.

#### **Regulations pertaining to all National Wildlife Refuge System Lands**

Regulations pertaining to hunting on all National Wildlife Refuges are found in 50 CFR 32.2.

#### **§ 32.2 What are the requirements for hunting on areas of the National Wildlife Refuge System?**

The following provisions shall apply to each person hunting on areas of the National Wildlife Refuge System:

- (a) Each person shall secure and possess the required state license.
- (b) Each person 16 years of age and older shall secure and possess a Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp while hunting migratory waterfowl.
- (c) Each person shall comply with the applicable provisions of Federal law and regulations including this subchapter and the current Federal Migratory Bird Regulations.
- (d) Each person shall comply with the applicable provisions of the laws and regulations of the state wherein any area is located unless further restricted by Federal law or regulation.
- (e) Each person shall comply with the terms and conditions authorizing access or use of wildlife refuges, including the terms and conditions under which hunting permits are issued.
- (f) Each person must comply with the provisions of any refuge-specific regulations governing hunting on the wildlife refuge area. Regulations, special conditions, and maps of the hunting areas for a particular wildlife refuge are available at that area's headquarters. In addition, refuge-specific hunting regulations for migratory game bird, upland game, and big game hunting appear in §§32.20 through 32.72.
- (g) The use of any drug on any arrow for bow hunting on national wildlife refuges is prohibited. Archers may not have arrows employing such drugs in their possession on any national wildlife refuge.

(h) The unauthorized distribution of bait and the hunting over bait is prohibited on wildlife refuge areas. (Baiting is authorized in accordance with state regulations on national wildlife refuges in Alaska).

(i) The use of nails, wire, screws or bolts to attach a stand to a tree, or hunting from a tree into which a metal object has been driven to support a hunter is prohibited on wildlife refuge areas.

(j) The use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting is prohibited.

(k) You may possess only approved nontoxic shot while in the field, which we identify in 50 CFR 20.21(j), while on Waterfowl Production Areas, or on certain other areas of the National Wildlife Refuge System as delineated on maps, leaflets and/or signs, available at each refuge headquarters or posted at each refuge, or as stated in refuge-specific regulations. Where we allow turkey and deer hunting, you may use slugs and shot containing lead to hunt these species unless prohibited by refuge-specific regulations and/or state law.

(l) The refuge-specific regulations are found in §32.20 through §32.72. Minnesota Refuges are found under §32.42. Refuge permits and brochures should also include those items and any special conditions allowed by paragraph (f) of this section.

## **B. Refuge Specific hunting Regulations**

### **Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge**

***I. Migratory Game Bird Hunting.*** We allow hunting of goose, duck, coot, woodcock, snipe, and mourning dove on designated areas of the Refuge in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. Field possession of migratory game birds is not permitted on Refuge areas closed to migratory game bird hunting.
2. No boats are permitted on interior wetland basins of the Refuge.
3. Decoys and blinds must be removed from the Refuge following each day's hunt except for blinds made entirely of marsh vegetation.
4. No boats are permitted on interior wetland basins of the Refuge.
5. Decoys and blinds must be removed from the Refuge following each day's hunt except for
6. Entry to hunting areas is not allowed earlier than 2 hours before legal shooting hours.
7. Use of hunting dogs is allowed, provided the dog is under the immediate control of the hunter at all times, during the State-approved hunting season (see § [26.21\(b\)](#) of this chapter).
8. No camping is allowed on the Refuge.

**II. Upland Game Hunting.** We allow hunting of ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, gray and fox squirrel, and cottontail rabbits on designated areas of the Refuge in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. Shotgun hunters may possess only approved nontoxic shot while hunting for all upland game species (see § [32.2\(k\)](#)).
2. We prohibit field possession of upland game species on areas closed to upland game hunting.
3. Conditions of A6 apply.

**III. Big Game Hunting.** We allow hunting of white-tailed deer and turkey on designated areas of the Refuge in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. We prohibit the construction or use of permanent blinds, platforms, or ladders.
2. Hunters must remove all stands from the Refuge at the end of each day's hunt (see § [27.93](#) of this chapter).
3. Hunters must dismantle hunting blinds, platforms, and ladders made from natural vegetation at the end of each day.
4. We prohibit the possession of hunting firearms or archery equipment on areas closed to white-tailed deer or turkey hunting.
5. We prohibit deer pushes or deer drives in the areas closed to deer hunting.
6. Shotgun hunters may possess only approved nontoxic shot while hunting for turkey (see § [32.2\(k\)](#)).
7. Conditions A4 and A6 apply.

Other regulations related to activities typically associated with hunting and found elsewhere in 50 CFR apply to all National Wildlife Refuges and the IRCP.

- Public access, including hunting, is prohibited in administratively closed areas (50 CFR 26.21). (Examples of signs posted on administratively closed areas at the Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge include “Area Beyond This Sign Closed” or “No Hunting Zone.”)
- Public access, including hunting, is allowed only in designated areas (50 CFR 26.21).
- No motorized vehicles are allowed within the hunting units except at designated parking areas or by Special Use Permit (50 CFR 27.31).
- Target shooting is prohibited (50 CFR 27.42, 27.43).

The regulations, as they are published in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), are the official notification to the public. Copies of the CFR can be found in libraries and on the internet.

A general synopsis of regulations relating to hunting on the Refuge and other federal lands in Minnesota, is published the Minnesota Hunting and Trapping Regulations Handbook produced by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Annual updates to Refuge regulations are provided to the MNDNR for review and publication. State hunting regulations applicable to the Refuge, such as seasons, bag limits, and general methods of take also are published in the Handbook and Guide.

### **C. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunt Plan**

User conflicts between hunting and non-hunting visitors are likely to be minimal since the Refuge tracts, other than the Headquarters Unit are closed to public access. The opening of the Refuge to other public uses will be addressed in the Visitor Services Plan for Crane Meadows NWR.

Currently all of the non-hunting visits occur on the Headquarters Tract. Most visitations occur from April through October for bird and wildlife observation or are associated with environmental education and interpretation. The majority of the environmental education and interpretation activities occur in the spring before school is recessed for the summer.

Additionally, the Platte River Trail is located on the Headquarters Tract. It receives a considerable amount of winter use since it's groomed for cross-country skiing.

### **D. Description of Hunter Application, Registration, and Selection process**

For general hunting activities no special application or registration process is required at this time.

For general hunting activities, there is no special hunter selection process. Hunters who are eligible to hunt under Minnesota law are allowed to hunt on the Refuge units.

The Refuge Special Hunts will be coordinated by a third party. It will be their responsibility to determine the individuals selected for each hunt. The Refuge will provide the guidelines and support to help facilitate the hunt.

### **E. Media Selection for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunt**

The Refuge maintains a mailing list, for news release purposes, to local newspapers, radio, and websites. Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with hunting seasons. In addition, information about the hunt will be available at Crane Meadows NWR headquarters or on the Crane Meadows NWR website.

Crane Meadows NWR  
19502 Iris Road  
Little Falls, MN 56345  
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## **F. Hunter Requirements**

Hunters who are eligible to hunt under Minnesota law are allowed to hunt on Refuge units. The Refuge does not routinely require hunters to report on hunting activities. If an additional reporting program should be implemented, the Refuge will use the appropriate form approved by the Office of Management and Budget.

The Refuge requires no specific orientation or safety training for hunters participating in general hunting activities. Minnesota has established hunter education and safety training requirements. Those individuals born after 12/31/1979 are required to obtain a Minnesota Firearm Hunter Safety Certificate who wish to purchase a small or big game license.

## **VIII. Compatibility Determination**

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this Hunting Plan have been found compatible with the goals of Crane Meadows NWR and the USFWS.

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