

DRAFT
COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

USE: Dove Hunting

REFUGE NAME: Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge

ESTABLISHING AND ACQUISITION AUTHORITIES:

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge was established under the Migratory Bird conservation Act, Emergency Wetlands Resources Act, Refuge Recreation Act, Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

REFUGE PURPOSE(S):

1. "...for use an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)
2. "...the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions..."16 U.S.C. § 3901 (b), 100 Stat. 3583 (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act)
3. "...suitable for – (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species..."16 U.S.C. § 460k-1 "...the Secretary...may accept and use...real...property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors..."16 U.S.C. § 460k-2 (Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. § 460k-460k-4), as amended).
4. "...for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources..."16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "...for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956).

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION:

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.

Description of Use:

(a) What is the use?

The proposed use is to provide dove hunting opportunities compatible with Refuge purposes, in designated areas. Hunting is a wildlife-dependent priority public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System under the National Wildlife System Improvement Act of 1997. Dove hunting is a long standing traditional use in southeast Texas. This Compatibility Determination considers the establishment of dove hunting on the refuge originally proposed by the Refuge Management Alternative D (Preferred Alternative) of the Texas Chenier Plan Refuge Complex Environmental Impact Statement/Comprehensive Conservation Plan (USFWS 2008).

(b) Where is the use conducted?

Anahuac NWR proposes the dove hunting be designated on the East Unit. The area proposed is approximately 550 acres of grasslands with no current public use allowed on it.

(c) When is the use conducted?

On Anahuac NWR, the proposed dove hunt will be within the dove season as set by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). The hunt would be limited to avoid conflicts with the established waterfowl hunts.

(d) How is the use conducted?

Hunting on these Public Hunt Areas is managed in accordance with regulation set forth by the State of Texas under the TPWD Annual Hunt Permit (AHP). Hunters are required to use non-toxic shot. Each hunting party will be required to have a youth hunter, 17 years or younger, accompanying the party.

As stated in Goal 4, of the CCP, the refuge will promote hunter compliance with Federal and State regulations and encourage good sportsmanship, ethical hunting behavior, and understanding of the refuge and its purposes through law enforcement visibility and effective wording within informational brochures with high-quality maps, signs, and website updates. The refuge will continue to encourage hunting participation of under-represented segments of the public such as disadvantaged youth, persons with disabilities, and women, through various organizations.

(e) Why is this use being proposed?

Hunting is an existing wildlife-dependent public use occurring on all three refuges within the Complex. Hunting, one of the six priority public uses of national wildlife refuges. The objective for hunting is to provide safe and high quality hunting opportunities on Anahuac NWR. Dove hunting is a traditional use and still very popular outdoor recreational pursuit in the region. Refuges and other public lands along the Texas Gulf Coast play a key role in providing hunting opportunities to the public.

The guiding principles that the Refuge System uses to manage quality hunting on refuges are: 1) to manage wildlife populations consistent with approved management plans; 2) to promote visitor understanding of and increase visitor appreciation for America's natural resources; 3) to provide opportunities for quality recreational and education experiences; and, 4) to minimize conflicts with visitors participating in other compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:

Resources to administer the hunt program will require fund to cover salaries involvement in initial planning and then law enforcement throughout the season by Refuge law enforcement staff. Other available resources are addressed through the Cooperative Agreement with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, TPWD staff will provide signage for designated dove hunt areas, publications, and assist in conducting law enforcement activities.

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE:

The potential impacts of the Anahuac NWR dove hunt program on the USFWS' ability to achieve Refuge purposes and the National Wildlife Refuge System mission are evaluated here.

Habitats: Foot traffic in areas open to hunting can lead to vegetation trampling, and in heavy use areas, cause plant mortality. Some vegetation trampling and trailing from hunter foot traffic would occur in designated dove hunt areas, although these impacts would be minimal and short-term.

Migratory Birds and Other Biological Resources: The most direct effect of hunting on the Refuge is the mortality of harvested species resulting from hunting activities. Regulations governing dove harvest in the Central and Mississippi Flyways and the State of Texas are developed annually through the Federal framework process for harvest of migratory birds in the U.S. This process is designed to ensure that viable populations are sustained over the long-term. Anticipated annual dove harvest on the Refuge is expected to number fewer than 1000 birds, which represents an extremely small percentage of overall harvest in Texas and the Central Flyway (S.L. Oldenburger, 2014). Cumulatively, dove harvest on all national wildlife refuges open to dove hunting in Texas and the Central Flyway represents a very small percentage of overall harvest of these species. The establishment of a dove hunting program on the Refuge will not have any measurable effect on overall dove populations and the long-term viability of these populations.

Incidental take of other wildlife species, either illegally or unintentionally, may occur with any consumptive use program. Incidental take is expected to be small and will not directly or cumulatively impact current or future populations of wildlife on the Refuge. Although the impacts of dove hunting on birds which are not hunted is likely less than for dove, studies have demonstrated that hunting (including accessing hunt areas) does affect abundance and distribution of other avian species. The noise associated with shooting likely reduces habitat utilization by birds using upland habitats within hunt areas, at least while hunting is occurring.

Means of access to and within Refuge hunt areas may include motorized vehicles and once on the unit walking is the only way to access. Vehicles on roads and walking have potential to disturb birds and influence distribution and habitat use (Burger 1981, Knight 1984, Klein 1993). Walking tends to displace birds and can cause localized declines in species richness and abundance (Riffell *et al.* 1996). Refuge-specific regulations prohibit off-road vehicular travel and all-terrain vehicle use. Areas open for dove hunting will be located so as to minimize impacts to waterfowl and other migratory birds using adjacent managed wetlands.

Other Wildlife-dependent Recreational Uses: A major goal of Anahuac NWR is to provide high quality opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation. The refuge supports all six of the Refuge System's priority wildlife-dependent uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation. Waterfowl hunting has occurred on the Refuge since 1980, and few conflicts among between hunters and other users of the Refuge have been documented. No conflicts are expected between dove hunters and other Refuge users. The separation of hunt units from portions of the Refuge open to wildlife

observation and photography, fishing, environmental education and interpretation minimizes potential conflicts and reduces safety issues. Hunt units are closed to other public uses during the hunting season and during the remainder of the year once the hunting season has closed. The other priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses are offered on portions of the Refuge that are more easily accessible to the public via refuge roads and trails, enhancing the quality of these opportunities for the public.

Cumulative Impacts:

There are no anticipated cumulative impacts. Harvest on the refuge would be limited and would fall within the state's population management goals, which are based on the best available science.

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 Complex. 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. The Environmental Assessment for the Dove Hunt contains a more detailed discussion of the anticipated impacts of hunting on the Complex.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:

This original Compatibility Determination was published with the Draft Texas Chenier Plain Refuge Complex EIS/CCP/LPP in the Federal Register on October 17, 2006. The re-published version of this Compatibility Determination will be published and made available for public review and comment from September 17, 2015 through October 16, 2015. Formal public hearings on this CD were not held due to limited previous interested in the scoping for the proposed dove hunt.

DETERMINATION (CHECK ONE BELOW):

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

In order to ensure that hunting remains a compatible use on the Complex, the following stipulations are necessary:

1. Dove hunting on Anahuac NWR will be administered through a Cooperative Agreement with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department under their "Annual Public Hunting Lease Program."
2. Public hunting of dove would be allowed on designated days and times as a "Youth/Adult" hunt area on a designated portion(s) of the Refuge.
3. Dove hunt areas are determined annually and described in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Public Dove Hunting Areas Supplement to the Texas Public Hunting Lands Map Booklet. Location of this designated dove hunt area has been chosen so as to minimize disturbance impacts to waterfowl and other avian species utilizing managed rice fields and moist soil habitats.

4. Means of access to the hunt area(s) will be by foot and motorized vehicle on roads only. All-terrain vehicles and off road driving is prohibited on the Refuge.
5. Only non-toxic shot may be used.
6. The use of retrieving dogs will be allowed and encouraged in all areas open to dove hunting for the conservation of downed birds. Dogs must be under the control of handlers at all times. No training of dogs will be allowed on the refuge.
7. The Complex prohibits the use or possession of alcoholic beverages while on refuge lands or waters.

JUSTIFICATION:

The Anahuac NWR proposed dove hunting program is determined to be compatible with the establishment purposes of the Refuge and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Migratory bird populations and harvest parameters are monitored and managed on a flyway basis are designed to ensure the long-term sustainability of populations. Additionally, the hunt program on the Refuge will be specifically designed to provide quality public hunting opportunities while minimizing potential impacts to local populations of migratory birds and their habitats.

Regulations govern means of access to hunt area(s), including prohibition of all-terrain vehicle use. The Refuge dove hunt program will also 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 impacts to dove and other wildlife and use this information to adjust the hunt program as necessary to protect Refuge resources.

Hunting is a priority wildlife-dependent public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System under the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. The USFWS strives to provide priority public uses when compatible with the purpose of the Refuge and the mission of the System. Dove hunting is a long-standing traditional use in southeast Texas, and has given many people a deeper appreciation of wildlife and a better understanding of conserving habitat, thereby ultimately contributing to the overall mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Through management as a “Youth/Adult” hunt (all hunters 18 years of age and older must be accompanied by a youth hunter 17 years of age or younger), the dove hunt on Anahuac NWR will provide additional family-oriented recreational opportunity, with a focus on involving and educating youth.

SIGNATURE: Refuge Manager _____
 (Signature and Date)

CONCURRENCE: Regional Chief _____
 (Signature and Date)

MANDATORY 15-YEAR RE-EVALUATION DATE: 2030

Literature Cited

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