



Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex Hunting: Frequently Asked Questions

Why is hunting allowed on a National Wildlife Refuge?

Hunting is a healthy, traditional recreational use of renewable natural resources deeply rooted in America's heritage, and it can be an important wildlife management tool. The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) policy permit hunting on a national wildlife refuge when it is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and acquired. Specifically, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 set forth six PRIORITY PUBLIC USES on Refuges: Hunting, Fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. Hunting is currently allowed on 370 of 567 National Wildlife Refuges.

National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) exist primarily to safeguard wildlife populations through habitat conservation. The word "refuge" includes the idea of providing a haven of safety for wildlife, and as such, hunting might seem an inconsistent use of the National Wildlife Refuge System. However, habitat that normally supports healthy wildlife populations produces harvestable surpluses that are a renewable resource.

As practiced on refuges, hunting does not pose a threat to the wildlife populations – and in some instances it is necessary for sound wildlife management. For example, deer and small mammal populations will often grow too large for the refuge habitat to support. If some these animals are not harvested, they destroy habitat for themselves and other animals and die from starvation or disease. The harvesting of wildlife on refuges is carefully regulated to ensure equilibrium between population levels and wildlife habitat.

The decision to permit hunting on national wildlife refuges is made on a case-by-case basis. Considerations include biological soundness, economic feasibility, and effects on other refuge programs.

Why open or expand hunting opportunities now?

Secretarial Order (S.O) 3356 directs the US Fish and Wildlife Service to work with our state, tribal, and territorial natural resources agencies to improve access to hunting and fishing opportunities on Service managed lands. To achieve this, the National and Regional Chiefs of Hunting and Fishing are responsible for working with Refuge managers to identify opportunities to increase access to hunting and fishing on Service lands and aligning to State hunting and fishing regulations, where compatible.

The directives of S.O. 3356 are consistent with years of Service statute, regulations, policy and vision for hunting and sport fishing on Service lands. Specifically, the Fish and Wildlife Act (1956); Refuge Recreation Act (1962); Refuge Administration Act (1966); Refuge Improvement Act (1997) and recommendations 17 and 18 in the Refuge Vision Document titled "Conserving the Future Vision" (<https://www.fws.gov/refuges/pdfs/FinalDocumentConservingTheFuture.pdf>). This is an opportunity to evaluate past decisions and regulations to achieve these goals in meeting the mission of the Service.

Will hunting reduce populations of wildlife?

Hunting is a highly regulated activity that is permitted for species that are abundant and whose populations can withstand pressure from hunting. MassWildlife is the agency responsible for studying and managing game population state-wide and setting state hunting regulations. Based on these studies, MassWildlife regulations permit the take of various species throughout the state as their populations are robust enough to withstand hunting pressure across their range. Migratory Birds, including waterfowl, are managed based on the routes the birds follow as they migrate between nesting and wintering areas, called Flyways. Massachusetts falls within the Atlantic Flyway. The annual process of setting duck-hunting regulations, including bag limits, is managed on a regional flyway level and based on a system of resource monitoring, data analyses, and rule making.

<https://www.fws.gov/birds/management/flyways.php>

How are hunting regulations developed for National Wildlife Refuges?

At a minimum, Refuges follow the respective state established hunting regulations. The management of Game species is the jurisdiction of state wildlife agencies, who study their state populations and set hunting regulations including: species allowed to be hunted, bag limits, method of take, hunting seasons, time of day, among other. As needed, Refuge Managers, may include additional regulations in the hunt plan or through an annual national rule-making process published in the Federal Register. Additional Refuge specific regulations may be necessary to ensure compatibility with the refuge and to protect refuge resources and habitat.

Is hunting safe?

Hunting has been permitted at Assabet River, Great Meadows, and Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge since 2005, and there have not been any hunting accidents among the different user groups in that time. In Massachusetts, the hunting accident rate is very low. An average of 7.25 accidents per 100,000 participants places it among the lowest injury rates for recreational activities. These accidents include falling out of tree stands and self-inflicted wounds. (<https://www.southcoasttoday.com/article/20000702/NEWS/307029927>). For hunting at Assabet River, Great Meadows, and Oxbow NWRs, the number of hunters will be managed via a permit system. Our Federal Wildlife Officers, working in coordination with State Environmental Police Officers, patrol Refuge lands to ensure a safe hunt for all user groups.

All first time hunters must take a Basic Hunter Education Course through the state. (For more information see: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/about-the-hunter-education-courses>) Basic Hunter Education was developed by the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA) and includes the safe handling and storage of hunting arms and ammunition, hunting laws and ethics, care and handling of game, and wildlife conservation. Hunters wishing to use firearms must also possess a Firearms license (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/gun-ownership-in-massachusetts>)

The State of Massachusetts also have hunting PROHIBITIONS (<https://www.mass.gov/doc/2020-massachusetts-fishing-and-hunting-guide/download>, pg. 20) that help to ensure a safe and manageable hunt. These include prohibition on

- Possession of a loaded firearm and archery equipment, discharge of a firearm or archery equipment, or hunting on the land of another within 500 feet of any dwelling or building in use, unless permitted by the owner or occupant.
- Discharge of any firearms or release of any arrow upon or across any state or hard surface highway, or within 150 feet of any such highway is also prohibited.

There aren't that many hunters, why expand hunting?

(<https://www.fws.gov/refuges/hunting/hunters-as-conservationists/>)

Reasons for the decline in hunting and hunters include limited access and opportunities. Over the past few years, in coordination with State Wildlife Agencies, the Service has been focusing efforts to expand recreational hunting opportunities to curtail the decline in hunter numbers while introducing the sport to non-traditional user groups.

Why? Sportsmen and woman directly support wildlife conservation in many ways.

Through the [Duck Stamp](#), hunters help protect and restore habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds and wildlife. The stamp, formally called the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, is required as a license for waterfowl hunting. For every dollar spent on Duck Stamps, [ninety-eight cents go directly to purchase vital habitat or acquire conservation easements](#) within the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since the Duck Stamp's inception in 1934, more than a billion dollars have been raised to purchase more than six million acres of wildlife habitat!

Through the [Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act](#), more commonly known as the Pittman-Robertson Act (1937), hunters fund a range of conservation programs. The act sends revenue from an excise tax on firearms, ammunition and other related equipment to state wildlife agencies to be used for wildlife conservation projects, hunter education and outdoor recreation access. Through Pittman-Robertson, sportsmen and women have contributed more than \$14 billion to conservation since 1937.

America's sportsmen and women generated nearly \$1 billion in excise taxes last year, supporting critical state conservation programs. These funds are generated by excise tax collections on hunting, shooting and fishing equipment and boat fuel that is distributed to all 50 states and U.S. territories by the Service.

To date, the Service has distributed more than \$22.9 billion in apportionments for state conservation and recreation projects. The recipient state wildlife agencies have matched these funds with approximately \$7.6 billion throughout the years, primarily through hunting and fishing license revenues. These annual payments to [state fish and wildlife agencies](#) have resulted in the recovery of deer, turkeys and many non-game species – with benefits to hunters and non-hunters alike.

For a list of all the hunting and fishing items that are taxed that help fund conservation:

<https://www.fws.gov/wsfprograms/Subpages/AboutUs/ItemsTaxedJan2018.pdf>

Why is hunting good for the economy?

In addition to excise taxes collected from these activities, hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities contributed more than \$156 billion in economic activity in communities across the United States in 2016, according to the Service's [National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation](#), published every five years. More than 101 million Americans — 40 percent of the U.S. population age 16 and older — pursue wildlife-related recreation, including hunting and fishing.