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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge
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News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Date April 8, 2016**

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Hunt Program Modification

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) announces the proposal to modify the Refuge hunt program for 2016/ 2017. The proposed changes are an attempt to provide a safer and higher quality hunt. The Refuge is requesting public comments on the proposed changes.

The first proposed change is a fee increase from \$15.00 to \$25.00 per limited/ quota permit for both the waterfowl and for the big game hunt limited/ quota permits. However, the Refuge will eliminate the \$5.00 waterfowl application fees. The result of the new fee modification will be a \$5.00 increase for waterfowl limited/ quota permits and a \$10.00 increase for the big game hunt limited/ quota permit. Current cost to provide the hunts exceed the cost recovered. The fee increase will assist in the current cost of providing safe quality hunting at Refuge.

The second proposed change is for the waterfowl hunt program: (Option 1) to add area 2 and area 3 to the current limited/ quota permit time from (November and December); (Option 2) to keep area 1 and 4 as limited/ quota permit during November, December, and add January. These options are an attempt to reduce the overcrowding issue and to provide a safer hunting environment. The early teal and youth hunts will not change with either option.

The last proposed change will be to restrict fuel based motors to the perimeter of the impoundments to reduce habitat destruction. Shallow habitats damaged by boats and motors are difficult to repair and may take years to mend naturally.

A public comment period will be available for 30 days. You may provide comments to the following email: MINWRHuntProgram@fws.gov, or by writing to the refuge at Merritt Island

National Wildlife Refuge, PO Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32780. The limited/ quota permits will continue to be available through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Hunters must apply for the Merritt Island NWR Quota Permits on FWC's website at <http://myfwc.com/hunting/>.

The required Merritt Island NWR Hunt Brochures contain Refuge specific Federal regulations which will remain free of charge and will be available at the Refuge Visitor Information Center, Refuge kiosks, and on the Refuge's website.

The National Wildlife Refuge System protects wildlife and wildlife habitat on more than 150 million acres of land and water from the Caribbean to the Pacific, Maine to Alaska. Refuges also improve human health, provide outdoor recreation, and support local economies. Visit our home page at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/>.

