

COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

USE: Hunting

REFUGE NAME: Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge

DATE ESTABLISHED: May 19, 1958

ESTABLISHING and ACQUISITION AUTHORITY(IES):

Migratory Bird Conservation Act {16 U.S.C. 715d}

REFUGE PURPOSE(S):

“..for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.”
16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act).

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION:

“The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (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” (Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105-57).

DESCRIPTION OF USE:

(a) What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

The use is public hunting of migratory game birds (waterfowl, coots, woodcock, gallinule, snipe, and rail), big game (deer and turkey), and small/upland game (ring-necked pheasant, ruffed grouse, cottontail rabbit, gray squirrel, coyote, raccoon, skunk, opossum, and fox) on Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Hunting was identified as one of six priority public uses of the Refuge System by the Refuge System Administration Act (NWRSA) of 1966, as amended by the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-57), when found to be compatible.

(b) Where would the use be conducted?

Migratory Birds: Waterfowl and coot hunting will be permitted in Cayuga, Mohawk, and Oneida Pools outside of a closed area around Kanyoo Trail. A total of 2,218 acres (20.5 percent) of wetland habitat are open to waterfowl hunting. Hunting will be from designated stand markers and/or on a “free-roam” type system. The number of available hunting permits will be limited for both stand and free-roam hunting systems.

The hunting of other migratory game birds (woodcock, snipe, rail, and gallinule) will be permitted east of Sour Springs Road. However, during periods when waterfowl hunting is taking place on the refuge, other migratory game bird hunting is closed in this area, but opens up in the

waterfowl hunting area for permitted hunters. Swallow Hollow Trail (156 acres), Onondaga Trail (219 acres), and the Iroquois Job Corps Center (118 acres) are closed to hunting to protect facilities, structures, and other user groups. The area east of Sour Springs Road, not including closed areas is 3,254 acres (30 percent) of the refuge. Habitats include wetlands, grasslands, shrublands, and forested areas.

Deer: Deer hunting will be permitted throughout the entire refuge, except in areas closed to protect facilities and structures or to create buffers around refuge trail systems. Closed areas include: Headquarters (80 acres), Iroquois Job Corps Center (118 acres), Kanyoo Trail (121 acres), Onondaga Trail (219 acres), and Swallow Hollow Trail (156 acres). A total of 10,134 acres (93.6 percent) are open to deer hunting within wetland, grassland, shrubland, and forested habitats.

Turkey: Turkey hunting will be permitted throughout the entire refuge except in areas closed to protect facilities and structures or to create buffers around refuge trail systems and bald eagle nesting areas. Closed areas include: Headquarters (80 acres), Iroquois Job Corps Center (118 acres), Kanyoo Trail (121 acres), Onondaga Trail (219 acres), Swallow Hollow Trail (156 acres), and bald eagle nesting areas. Bald Eagle nesting areas will only be closed during the spring hunting season and nesting acreage may vary based on the number of nesting territories. Approximately 10,102 acres (93.3 percent) will be open to turkey hunting in wetland, grassland, shrubland, and forested habitats annually.

Small/Upland Game: Hunting of small/upland game (ring-necked pheasant, ruffed grouse, cottontail rabbit, gray squirrel, coyote, raccoon, skunk, opossum, and fox) will be permitted throughout the entire refuge, with the exception of areas closed to protect refuge facilities and structures or to create buffers around refuge nature trail systems. Closed areas include: Headquarters (80 acres), Iroquois Job Corps Center (118 acres), Kanyoo Trail (121 acres), Onondaga Trail (219 acres), and Swallow Hollow Trail (156 acres). A total of 10,134 acres (93.6 percent) are open to small and upland game hunting within wetland, grassland, shrubland, and forested habitats. Maps of the refuge hunting areas can be found in the Multi-Species Hunting Plan as Figures 1 and 2.

(c) When would the use be conducted?

Migratory Birds: Hunting will be conducted during the New York State waterfowl and other migratory bird hunting seasons, in accordance with Federal and State regulations. All hunting hours will follow New York State regulations. Refuge regulations on specific hunt seasons are as follows:

- We allow waterfowl hunting on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from one-half hour before legal sunrise until 12 p.m. Permits are required and must be turned in by 1 p.m. on the hunt day. Other migratory game birds (woodcock, gallinule, snipe, and rail) may be taken with a permit within the waterfowl hunt areas, in accordance with the designated times and locations above. Other migratory game birds may also be hunted in areas east of Sour Springs Road, except that during periods when waterfowl hunting is taking place on the refuge, other migratory game bird hunting is closed in this area. We will not host waterfowl hunts on opening day of regular deer firearms season.

- The Youth Waterfowl Hunt Program is held on the Saturday of the New York State designated Youth Hunt Weekend. Hunting will occur from one-half hour before legal sunrise until 12 p.m. Permits are required and must be turned in by 1 p.m. of the hunt day.

Big Game: Hunting will be conducted during New York State’s big and small game hunting seasons, in accordance with Federal and State regulations. While the refuge refers to turkey as a big game species, New York State manages turkey under small game. In cooperation with the State, we may adjust hunt season dates and bag limits in the future as needed to achieve balanced wildlife population levels within habitat carrying capacities.

Turkey hunting will be permitted during both New York State’s spring and fall turkey seasons. The youth spring turkey hunt will be held during the New York State Youth Hunt weekend.

Small/Upland Game: Hunting of small/upland game species (ring-necked pheasant, ruffed grouse, cottontail rabbit, gray squirrel, coyote, raccoon, skunk, opossum, and fox) will be conducted during New York State’s species-specific small game hunting seasons, in accordance with Federal and State regulations. We allow small/upland game hunting from September 1 until the end of February from sunrise to sunset.

(d) How would the use be conducted?

All Hunting: We will continue to conduct our hunting program in accordance with State and Federal regulations. Federal regulations in 50 CFR pertaining to the NWRSA, as well as existing, specific refuge regulations will apply. However, the Refuge Manager may, upon annual review of the hunting program, impose further restrictions on hunting, recommend that the refuge be closed to hunting, or further liberalize hunting regulations up to the limits of State regulations. We will restrict hunting if it becomes inconsistent with other, higher priority refuge programs or endangers refuge resources or public safety.

All persons hunting on the refuge must have all required permits and a valid State hunting license. Individuals hunting on the refuge are subject to the inspection of permits, licenses, hunting equipment, game bagged, boats, vehicles, and their contents by Federal or State officers. Unarmed hunters may scout areas that will be open to hunting with parameters that will be set annually. Dogs are prohibited during scouting.

“No hunting” zones include, but are not limited to: the immediate areas around the refuge office and Visitor Center; around refuge residences; the vicinity of the Iroquois Job Corps Center; Swallow Hollow, Kanyoo, Headquarters, and Onondaga Nature Trails; and safety zones around roadways and private residences adjacent to the refuge that are still subject to State regulations. Weapons may not be discharged within, into, or across a “No Hunting Zone” or “Closed Area,” or from on or across any refuge road. Hunting from within 500 feet of any hiking trail or from within 500 feet of any resident or refuge building is prohibited.

Vehicles are only allowed on established roads marked open for vehicular travel. Vehicles must be parked off the lane of travel and clear of gates. All-terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and snowmobiles are not allowed.

Waterfowl hunters who possess a permit to hunt at a “Canoe Only” site are required to use non-motorized canoes or boats to access those sites. For non-waterfowl hunters, canoes, and other non-motorized boats may only be used on Oak Orchard Creek, from Knowlesville Road to Route 63. Non-waterfowl hunters may launch boats into Oak Orchard Creek from Route 63, Sour Springs Road, and Knowlesville Road. Hunting from canoes and non-motorized boats is permitted per State law. Temporary ground blinds are acceptable but must be removed at the end of each day’s hunt.

We do not allow falconry as a means of take for any hunt program.

All Migratory Bird: Hunters may use only approved non-toxic shot for shotgun hunting. Dogs are allowed for hunting of migratory birds during designated seasons.

Hunters with disabilities possessing, or who qualify for, a New York State disabled hunting license, Golden Access, or America the Beautiful Access Pass may qualify for special accommodations.

Waterfowl: All waterfowl hunters are required to have taken and passed the New York State Waterfowl Identification Course. We will continue to provide a 50 percent discount on permit fees for Golden Age and America the Beautiful – Interagency Senior Pass Holders. A pre-season lottery to select hunters for high volume hunt days will be conducted. The number of days selected for the pre-season lottery will be determined annually based on trend data, as well as when waterfowl hunting opens in the refuge’s region. Hunters will complete the Waterfowl Lottery Application as instructed with a predetermined application fee prior to the established deadline. Hunters will receive notification of selection and the date for which they were selected. Hunters will report to the Waterfowl Permit Station per the process described below.

On waterfowl hunt days of the New York State season’s first session (or “split”), the refuge will hold a daily drawing for hunt stands and “free-roam” areas at the Waterfowl Permit Station at 5 a.m. All hunters will be required to show their hunting license, valid duck stamp, Harvest Information Program (HIP) number, and Waterfowl Education Certification of Qualification card to enter the drawing. Hunters will then be handed a numbered disc. When their number is called, they may choose a hunt stand or “free-roam” area location. The Migratory Bird Hunt Report form will serve as the hunter’s permit for the day. A predetermined fee will be charged for each permit. Up to two other people (hunters or non-hunters) may accompany the permit holder. Hunt reports must be submitted as designated by 1 p.m. of the permit day. A stand-by drawing will be conducted for any additional hunters present at the check station on the preseason lottery days to fill any remaining hunting slots.

On waterfowl hunt days of the New York State season’s second session, stands will be reserved through a similar application process as the preseason lottery draw, but on a “first-come, first-served” basis. Hunters will reserve their blind and pay their application fees at that point. There will be no morning Waterfowl Permit Station draw. However, hunt reports still need to be submitted as designated by 1 p.m. on the permit day.

A waterfowl hunting blind is available for disabled hunter access. Hunters with disabilities will follow the same process as other hunters for the preseason lottery draw, indicating “Handicapped Blind” during the application process. To reserve the blind on all other refuge hunt days, hunters must submit their name by 12 p.m. the day prior to the hunt. A separate draw will be held and selected individuals will be notified prior to the close of business the day before the hunt.

Youth waterfowl hunting will be permitted for junior hunter between 12 to 15 years of age in the same areas of the refuge that are open to the regular waterfowl hunt. The limited number of permits for this program may vary from year to year. Youth that would like to participate in the Youth Waterfowl Hunt Program must pre-register by completing a Migratory Bird Hunt Application form as designated. To take part in the program, participants need their parent/guardian’s permission. The program is free but space is limited with preference given to first-time participants; therefore, pre-registration does not guarantee participation.

Youth must have a non-hunting guide with them during the hunt who will coach as well as help call in birds, if needed. Guides must have a Waterfowl Education Certificate of Qualification. The waterfowl youth hunt will take place during Saturday of the New York State Waterfowl Youth Hunt Days. The procedures for the permit station are the same as those described above for the first session of the New York State’s regular waterfowl hunt season.

All hunters must stay within 100 feet of their designated stand marker unless they are hunting in the “free-roam” area or unless they are dispatching a crippled bird. Vegetation may not be intentionally removed or altered in any way.

Other Migratory Game Birds: Other migratory game birds (woodcock, gallinule, snipe, and rail) may be hunted during New York State species-specific seasons from September 1 through the end of February. The refuge will allow other migratory game bird hunting in areas where waterfowl hunting occurs with a waterfowl hunting permit as described in this section above under “*Waterfowl.*” In those areas east of Sour Springs Road, a permit is not required to hunt other migratory birds.

All Big Game: Temporary portable tree stands and ground blinds are acceptable but must be removed daily. Permanent tree stands and ground blinds are prohibited. Hunters cannot use screw-in steps, nails, spikes, wire, or bolts as climbing or hanging devices to attach a stand to a tree. Trees and other vegetation may not be damaged or marked in any way. Deer and turkey hunters will be encouraged to use non-toxic ammunition voluntarily. Scavenging of unrecovered deer and deer gut piles resulting from the permit deer hunt could cause detrimental impacts from lead exposure.

Deer: Deer may be hunted during designated State seasons. No permit or report is required. We issue non-ambulatory hunt permits which allow the use of designated refuge roads for hunting deer. Hunters who wish to reserve one of these sites must have a valid non-ambulatory hunting license from New York State. The hunter must contact the refuge during regular business hours to receive this permit.

Turkey: A pre-season lottery drawing will be conducted to select hunters for the 75 permits that are available for the refuge's spring turkey season. Hunters will complete the Big/Upland Game Hunt Application as instructed with a pre-determined application fee prior to the established deadline. The lottery draw will allow hunters to be considered for two separate sessions that they will rank by preference; Session 1 runs from May 1 to May 15 with 50 permits available and Session 2 runs from May 16 to May 31 with 25 permits available. Hunters will receive notification of selection and the session for which they were selected.

Scouting for fall turkey is permitted from September 1 through the last day of February and for spring turkey from April 22 to April 30, excluding the New York Youth Hunt Weekend.

The Youth Spring Turkey Hunt will be held on the Saturday and Sunday of the New York State Youth Turkey Hunting weekend. This hunt is for youth ages 12 to 15. Youth interested in participating in the program must complete a Big/Upland Game Hunt Application as designated. The youth must have permission from their parent or guardian to participate in this program. The program is free, but space is limited to 25 participants.

Youth hunters must be accompanied by a non-hunting adult guide the day of the hunt. Adult guides may not hunt. Hunters are required to turn in a Big Game Harvest Report.

Fall turkey hunting will be allowed in accordance with New York State seasons and regulations. A permit and harvest report is not required.

Small/Upland Game: Small/upland game (ring-necked pheasant, ruffed grouse, cottontail rabbit, gray squirrel, coyote, raccoon, skunk, opossum, and fox) may be hunted during designated State and refuge seasons. Dogs are allowed for hunting of small and upland game.

(e) Why is the use being proposed?

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. Iroquois NWR's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) identified goals and objectives to: (1) allow access for hunting of small game, deer, turkey, waterfowl, and other migratory birds in accordance with New York State regulations and consistent with sound biological principles; and (2) provide participants with reasonable harvest opportunities, uncrowded conditions, and minimal conflicts with other users.

The purpose of the proposed action will bring the refuge into compliance with direction detailed in the CCP. Furthermore, Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3356 directs the Service to enhance and expand public access to lands and waters on national wildlife refuges for hunting, fishing, recreational shooting, and other forms of outdoor recreation. Providing opportunities for visitors to hunt will promote one of the priority public uses of the Refuge System outlined in the Improvement Act of 1997, as well as promote stewardship of our natural resources and increase public appreciation and support for the refuge.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:

The following breakdown shows the estimated amount of funds needed to administer the hunt.

Identifier	Cost
Preparation of waterfowl hunt areas, parking lots	\$5,000
Maintain roads, trails*	\$1,500
News releases, fact sheets, reports	\$2,500
Lottery systems, check station	\$6,000
Maintain hunting signs	\$6,500
Enforcement**	\$2,500
Youth hunts	\$2,500
Total Annual Cost	\$26,500

** Refuge trails and roads are maintained for a variety of activities. Costs shown are a percentage of total costs for trail/road maintenance on the refuge and are reflective of the percentage of trail/road use for this activity. Volunteers account for some maintenance hours and help to reduce overall cost of the program.*

*** Enforcement is non-Law Enforcement Staff ensuring area closed signs are in place, answering questions, calling NYDEC Officers, etc. since the refuge does not have a Law Enforcement Officer*

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE:

The following are anticipated impacts for hunting on Iroquois NWR. For more specific impacts, including a cumulative impact analysis, please refer to the CCP for Iroquois NWR.

Hunting is a very popular, longstanding public use on the refuge. All areas of the refuge are open to some form of hunting during the hunting season except areas posted with safety zone or closed area signage. Although conflicts among user groups can arise, that does not appear to be a significant issue at anticipated levels of use. In the future, we may need to manage public use to minimize conflicts and ensure public safety, should significant conflicts become evident. That may include public outreach or zoning to separate user groups.

Because the refuge has been open to hunting since it was established, and hunting occurred in the area for many years before the creation of the refuge, we expect no additional impacts. Some disturbance of non-target wildlife species and impacts on vegetation may occur. However, those impacts should be minimal because hunting is regulated by the refuge, normally occurs outside the breeding season (exception to this is the spring turkey season), and specific refuge regulations prohibit the use of ATVs, off-road travel, permanent stands and blinds, camping, and fires, which would most likely be the causes of any significant damage vegetation.

All game hunting and associated hunter activity will likely cause indirect disturbance of non-target birds, but only in the short-term. There is no anticipated impact on endangered or threatened species on the refuge from any refuge hunting opportunities. Section 7 consultation with New York Field Office concurred with “no effect” to any threatened or endangered species. To help prevent future lead contamination from occurring on the refuge, deer and turkey hunt participants will be encouraged to use non-toxic ammunition voluntarily. Scavenging of

unrecovered deer and deer gut piles resulting from the permit deer hunt could cause detrimental impacts from lead exposure. Hunters may use only approved non-toxic shot for the shotgun hunting of all small/upland game species, and all migratory game bird species.

All Migratory Game Bird Hunts: The Service manages migratory birds on a flyway basis and states establish hunting regulations in each state based on flyway data and the regulations framework provided by the Service. Atlantic Flyway and New York State regulations apply to the migratory game bird hunting program at Iroquois NWR. The refuge hunting regulations, which are more restrictive than State and other Federal regulations, limit hunt days and hunting hours. These refuge-specific restrictions are in place to help provide a quality hunting experience for refuge hunters, and ensure that hunting remains compatible with other refuge purposes. Hunting will reduce the number of birds in the flyway, within allowable limits, as determined by State and Federal agencies.

Waterfowl and coot: The temporary impacts of waterfowl and coot hunting are mitigated by the presence of adjacent refuge habitat where hunting does not occur and where birds can feed and rest undisturbed. Refuge regulations ensure that areas of inviolate sanctuary remain free of disturbance throughout the season. Additionally, waterfowl and coot hunting occurs 3 days per week on the refuge which gives the birds an opportunity to feed and rest on non-hunting days in the hunting locations.

On average, approximately 1.58 waterfowl have been harvested per hunter per day since 1975. This equates to a little over 1,270 birds being harvested per year on the refuge. The waterfowl most often harvested by hunters on the refuge are mallard, American wigeon, green-winged teal, wood duck, and Canada goose.

The activity of waterfowl and coot hunters has little impact on other refuge visitors, with the exception of those who wish to observe or photograph wildlife at the Cayuga overlook and areas along Feeder Road. Some users may be impacted by the presence and noise associated with waterfowl and coot hunting on the western portion of the refuge beginning at Route 63.

Other Migratory Game Birds: The temporary impacts of other migratory game bird hunting are mitigated by the presence of adjacent refuge habitat where hunting does not occur and where birds can feed and rest undisturbed. Refuge regulations ensure that areas of inviolate sanctuary remain free of disturbance throughout the season.

Refuge harvest totals for other migratory game birds are low. This is a result of a low number of hunter visits for these species. Permits have not been required for other migratory birds since 2009, so refuge specific data collection on harvest and hunter visits has not occurred since that time. Based on previous refuge and current State collected data (Raftovich et. al., 2018), it is estimated that woodcock are hunted an average of 14 visits per year, with a harvest of 1.72 birds per year. Although snipe and rail have been hunted on the refuge, estimates show none have been harvested. Gallinule have not been recorded as harvested on the refuge and are estimated to have similar hunt and harvest numbers to rails and snipe.

The activity of hunting for other migratory game birds has little impact on other refuge visitors, with the exception of those who wish to observe or photograph wildlife at the Cayuga overlook and areas along Feeder Road on permitted days (three per week). Hunt areas east of Sour Springs Road have no overlooks. Some users may be impacted by the presence and noise associated with other migratory bird hunting. Refuge users that may be impacted will be those walking on Onondaga, Kanyoo, Headquarters, and Swallow Hollow Trails that may hear the noise associated with hunting. Hunters must be at least 500 feet away from refuge trails.

Deer: Conflicts between hunters can occur. In some cases, competition among hunters for choice sites is keen, and has led to unethical behavior. Hunters may only use portable tree stands that must be removed on a daily basis. However, some stands are left in place illegally for prolonged periods or are nailed directly into trees. On average, the refuge staff removes 10 tree stands per year that are attached to trees and left from previous year's hunt.

Permits have not been required for deer hunting on the refuge since 2009, so refuge specific data collection on harvest and hunter visits has not occurred in that time. Based on previous refuge and current State collected data (NYDEC, 2007-2018), the average number of deer harvested on the refuge annually is 208 with 3,700 deer hunt visits annually. Refuge staff believes that the refuge deer population is similar to the overall population of western New York, which is managed by New York State. While many hunters use the refuge to hunt deer, more do so during the regular season than any other season (archery, crossbow, or muzzleloader).

The activity of deer hunters has some impact on other refuge visitors. While the bow hunting season has little or no impact on the public, the regular and muzzleloader seasons may. Some users may be impacted by the presence and noise associated with shotgun and muzzleloader hunting which occurs on the entire refuge (excluding closed areas). Visitors will be impacted by this as they walk on refuge trails and visit refuge overlooks or may avoid the refuge completely due to safety concerns.

Deer hunting helps to keep deer populations within the carrying capacity of the habitat, thus reducing excessive damage to vegetation caused by over-browsing and maintaining understory habitat for other species. There may be temporary impacts on other species of wildlife during deer season. However, in the case of migratory waterfowl, impacts are expected to be minimal. Deer hunters will cause little disturbance in the marshes where migratory birds feed and rest because most deer hunting occurs in upland habitats. Additionally, the New York State regular deer hunting season typically occurs for only 4 weeks with the muzzleloader deer season occurring an additional week, which will give the birds an opportunity to feed and rest undisturbed in those areas before and after the season.

Spring Turkey: Between 1986 and 2018, 130 turkeys were harvested on the refuge. Since 2013, the refuge has given out up to 75 permits per season. Prior to 1994, a greater number of permits were given out annually, fluctuating from year to year. The average annual hunter success rate since 1994 has been 11.78 percent with an average of four birds harvested each year. Due to the small number of permits issued and the secretive nature of this hunting activity, impacts of turkey hunting on non-target species on the refuge will be minimal. Additionally, known sensitive areas, like bald eagle nesting sites, will be closed to any entry.

Spring turkey hunting has little impact on other refuge visitors because hunting only occurs in the morning during the month of May. Hunters are located far away from other public use areas and hunting will not conflict with any other scheduled visitor activities. Refuge users that may be impacted will be those walking refuge trails and those visiting overlooks who may hear a single shotgun discharge associated with hunting. Hunters must be at least 500 feet away from refuge trails.

Fall Turkey: The fall turkey season usually lasts 2 weeks from late October to early November. Fall turkey hunting is typically an opportunistic hunt by hunters already afield. Fall turkey hunting has not previously been held on the refuge, so there are no refuge specific hunter and harvest statistics. In 2018, the State reported that 20 turkeys were harvested in Genesee County and 20 turkeys were harvested in Orleans County during the fall turkey season (NYDEC, 2018). It is anticipated that refuge harvest will coincide with State harvest proportions. Since the refuge is already open to other activities and it is opportunistic in nature, we do not expect any additional impacts to refuge wildlife or resources.

Small/Upland Game Hunting: Permits have not been required for small/upland game hunting on the refuge since 2009, so refuge-specific data collection on harvest and hunter visits has not occurred since that time. New York State also does not collect harvest data on these species

Based on refuge data collected from 2003 to 2009 for small/upland game, refuge averages are as follows: cottontail rabbits were hunted an average of 127 times per season with approximately 40 harvested annually; ruffed grouse were hunted an average of 33 times per season with approximately 2 birds harvested annually; gray squirrels were hunted an average of 110 times per season with approximately 34 harvested annually; pheasants were hunted an average of 24 times per season with approximately 1.5 birds harvested annually; foxes were hunted an average of 34 times per season with only one fox being harvested; and coyotes were hunted an average of 29 times per season with only one coyote being harvested. Most small/upland game hunters are hunting multiple species each time they hunt therefore the number of times a hunter is actually on the refuge hunting during the season would be lower than the numbers above suggest.

The activity of upland game hunters has little impact on other refuge visitors. Some users may be impacted by the presence and noise associated with small/upland game hunting. Other refuge users that may be impacted will be those walking on Onondaga, Kanyoo, Headquarters, and Swallow Hollow Trails that may hear the noise associated with hunting. Hunters must be at least 500 feet away from refuge trails.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts on the environment result from incremental impacts of a proposed action when these are added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. While cumulative impacts may result from individually minor actions, they may, when viewed as a whole, become substantial over time. The refuge hunt program is designed to be sustainable through time given relatively stable conditions, especially because of the close coordination that the refuge has with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC).

The cumulative impacts of hunting on waterfowl, coots, woodcock, gallinule, snipe, rail, deer, turkey, cottontail rabbit, ruffed grouse, gray squirrel, ring-necked pheasant, fox, and coyote populations on the refuge are negligible. The proportion of the refuge's harvest of these species is negligible when compared to local, regional, and Statewide populations and harvest.

The refuge conducts its hunting program within the framework of State and Federal regulations. Hunting at the refuge is at least as restrictive as the State of New York and in some cases more restrictive. Additionally, the refuge coordinates with the State as needed to maintain regulations and programs that are consistent with the State's management programs. Thus, we anticipate no direct or indirect cumulative effects on resident or non-hunted wildlife by hunting on the refuge.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:

This compatibility determination is developed as part of the Iroquois NWR Hunting Plan. The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. To prepare the current plan, refuge staff met with NYDEC staff. We posted the draft Hunting Plan and Compatibility Determination on March 18, 2020 for public review. Comments were accepted through April 17, 2020. We informed the public through local media releases, the refuge website, and social media. Eight separate comments on the draft documents were received, with our responses attached to the Categorical Exclusion (Appendix B).

DETERMINATION (CHECK ONE BELOW):

Use is not compatible

Use is compatible, with the following stipulations

STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:

To ensure compatibility with refuge purpose(s) and Refuge System mission, hunting can occur at Iroquois NWR in accordance with State and Federal regulations, and refuge-specific restrictions to ensure that public use, wildlife, and habitat management goals are achieved, and that the program is providing a safe, high-quality hunting experience for participants. We will evaluate this program regularly and if monitoring indicates that this use or any of its components are not compatible (materially interferes with or detracts from fulfillment of the Refuge System mission or the purposes of the refuge), we would curtail, modify or eliminate the use or component.

The following stipulations are necessary to ensure compatibility:

- Permits are required for waterfowl and spring turkey seasons to provide migratory bird resting areas and to limit potential impacts to refuge resources.
- Eagle nesting zones will be managed according to the *National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines*.

- Hunters may use only approved non-toxic shot for the shotgun hunting of all small/upland game species, and all migratory game bird species.

JUSTIFICATION:

Hunting is a priority wildlife-dependent use for the Refuge System through which the public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife. Service policy is to provide expanded opportunities for wildlife-dependent uses when compatible and consistent with sound fish and wildlife management, and ensure that they receive enhanced attention during planning and management.

Hunting is a traditional and well-established activity on Iroquois NWR. It is consistent with the purposes for which the refuge was established, the Service policy on hunting, the Improvement Act of 1997, and the broad management objectives of the Refuge System. Hunting satisfies a recreational need, but hunting on national wildlife refuges is also an important, proactive management action that can prevent overpopulation and the deterioration of habitat. Disturbance to other species will occur, but this disturbance is generally short term. Suitable habitat exists on refuge lands to support hunting as proposed.

This activity will not conflict with any of the other priority public uses or adversely impact biological resources. Therefore, through this compatibility determination process, we have determined that hunting on the refuge, in accordance with the stipulations provided above, is a compatible use that will not materially interfere with, or detract from, the fulfillment of the Refuge System mission or the purpose of the refuge.

SIGNATURE:

Refuge Manager

(Signature)

03 AUG 20

(Date)

CONCURRENCE:

Regional Chief

(Signature)

(Date)

MANDATORY 15 YEAR RE-EVALUATION DATE:

(Date)

LITERATURE CITED:

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC). 2007-2018. White-tailed Deer Harvest Summary. <www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/42232.html>. Accessed 30 July 2019.

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Raftovich, R.V., Chandler, S.C., and Fleming, K.K. 2018. Migratory bird hunting activity and harvest during the 2016-17 and 2017-18 hunting seasons. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Laurel, Maryland, USA.