

Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge posted the draft Hunting Plan and Compatibility Determinations on March 18, 2020 for public review. Comments were accepted through April 17, 2020. Eight separate comments on this draft document were received, with responses below.

General Hunting Comments

Comment: Several comments received in support of the plan and thanking for keeping the hunting tradition alive. Also, one comment was received in opposition to hunting, stating we need to let go of the tradition, and asked if we put as much effort into saving wildlife.

Response: 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 as well. Hunting is also a secondary use and allowed when populations can handle the harvest and after habitat and wildlife goals. Iroquois NWR's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) completed in 2011 identified goals and objectives for each habitat, visitor services, partnerships, hunting and fishing, and other management activities. You can find this document on our website at www.fws.gov/refuges/iroquois.

Deer Hunting

Comment: Scouting should be prior to September 1 to reduce pressure in the forest before the deer season begins on October 1.

Response: We understand that scouting is part of deer hunting and provide opportunities to conduct the activity. However, our primary purpose is to provide habitat for the migratory bird resource and minimize disturbance by limiting activities during nesting, resting, and migrations times.

Comment: Restrictions on antlers should be made so we can see big bucks.

Response: Iroquois NWR follows hunting regulations set by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and deviate for legal mandates or incompatibilities with the refuge purpose. Overall the goal is for healthy, sustainable populations and to reduce potential for habitat degradation. Populations need to be managed at a county or geographic area larger than the refuge to achieve this.

Falconry

Comment: Several commenters suggested we offer falconry as a hunting opportunity.

Response: We did not address falconry in this hunt plan, because, until recently, it was not perceived as a popular mechanism for hunting. We will take this means of hunting into consideration for future years and discuss with interested parties like the North American Falconry Association, as we evaluate.

Youth Hunt Programs

Comment: A comment was made about spending tax dollars on youth hunts

Response: Youth hunt programs provide a unique opportunity for younger populations to learn about the natural world. They are a great way to empower new hunters with the outdoor skills and confidence to continue the tradition of ethical hunting. Many of our refuge programs, including youth hunts, are in conjunction with partners that help sponsor the events.

Gaining Privilege to Hunt

Comment: A suggestion was made to have work, such as invasive control, to gain privileges to hunt.

Response: The refuge works with many partners like Ducks Unlimited and local waterfowl associations to accomplish our work including wildlife and habitat projects and educational type programs. Unfortunately, trying to ensure that the 5,000+ hunters that use the refuge participate in work activities would not be functional. Hunters already pay license and permit fees to participate in hunt programs with some fee dollars going back into managing these recreational activities.

Waterfowl Populations

Comment: A comment stated that waterfowl numbers are falling and therefore unacceptable to continue hunting them.

Response: Waterfowl populations are heavily monitored and managed by the Migratory Bird Program along Flyways with state conservation agencies. Harvest levels are established to ensure populations are well within standards to maintain populations goals. Waterfowl hunting seasons and harvest limits fluctuate annually as part of this process.

Lead Shot

Comment: A comment was made over concerns of lead shot use on the refuge.

Response: In 1991, lead ammunition was banned for hunting migratory waterfowl (ducks, geese, swans) and coots due to the large deposition of lead into wetlands and the effects seen on wildlife. More forms of non-toxic ammunition are becoming available to hunters and we will encourage the use of these until Federal or State regulations restrict the use of additional lead ammunition.

Maps and Signs

Comment: A commenter thanked the refuge for the updated maps with clearer no hunt zones. It was noted that the migratory bird hunting map doesn't show the bald eagle nests.

Response: Migratory bird hunting seasons are outside the nesting period for eagles and therefore don't require restricted access. For other hunting (like spring turkey season) or activities that may take place during eagle nesting season, required restrictions are put into place based on current national Bald Eagle Management Guidelines.

Comment: A commenter was opposed to the large “no hunt zone” sign at the office and inferred that it deters from other recreational enjoyment.

Response: No hunt zones are in place and clearly marked for safety in areas where hunting is not allowed. These are standard national signs used to inform hunters of safety zones around trails, facilities, etc. On Iroquois NWR, these zones include the immediate areas around refuge headquarters, refuge residences, the vicinity of Iroquois Job Corps Center, Swallow Hollow Trail, Onondaga Trail, Kanyoo Trail, and HQ Trail.

Parking lot repair and new pull offs

Comment: Improve parking lots and create new pull offs along roadways for hunters.

Response: We attempt to re-gravel parking lots annually with the staffing and funding we have allotted. We have identified a couple of new areas for off-street parking as part of this process, but with all the public roads that are around the refuge, this may not eliminate parking along roadsides.