

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND DECISION TO OPEN HUNTING FOR WILD TURKEY

SACRAMENTO, DELEVAN, COLUSA, AND SUTTER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES CALIFORNIA

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is opening hunting opportunities for wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) on **Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter** National Wildlife Refuges (NWR or Refuges) in accordance with the Wild Turkey Hunt Plan. The Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter Refuges are part of the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex) and are located in the Sacramento Valley of north-central California. The Valley is bordered on the east by the Sierra Nevada Range and on the west by the Coast Range. A total of 5,815 acres on the four refuges would be open to turkey hunting, including 1,699 acres on Sacramento Refuge, 1,678 acres on Delevan Refuge, 1613 acres on Colusa Refuge, and 825 acres on Sutter Refuge.

Selected Action

Alternative A—Proposed Action Alternative:

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, the Service would open the Free Roam and Pheasant Only units at Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter Refuges to hunting of wild turkeys during the fall turkey season on each Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday. In addition, the Service would open the Sacramento and Delevan Refuges to spring turkey hunting. On Sacramento Refuge, spring turkey hunting would take place on 903 acres within the existing hunt area. On Delevan Refuge, spring turkey hunting would take place on 652 acres within the northern sanctuary units as well as on 151 acres within the existing hunt area. The spring turkey season would be limited to Saturdays and Sundays and would only occur on alternate weekends at Sacramento and Delevan Refuges. The spring turkey hunt would be limited to 4-5 mentored hunters on the Sacramento Refuge and 2-3 mentored hunters on the Delevan Refuge. The spring turkey hunt season extends from the last Saturday in March to the first Sunday in May (6 weeks).

The following mitigation measures are incorporated into the proposed action:

- Population monitoring will be reviewed annually with the CDFW to ensure that harvest from hunting is not unacceptably impacting the targeted populations. The program will be modified accordingly.
- To minimize impacts to colonial waterbird rookeries or bald eagle nests, a half-mile radius around rookery sites and bald eagle nests would be closed to hunting and access. Refuge

staff will monitor rookeries and bald eagle nests and, if necessary, refuge staff will adjust hunting to minimize disturbance.

- Sanctuary habitat is available and will be maintained on each Refuge. The Service manages a portion of wetland, vernal pool/alkali meadow, grassland, and riparian habitats as sanctuary (i.e. no hunting or other public access) on each Refuge to reduce human disturbance at sensitive fish, wildlife, and plant sites during the rearing, breeding, and growing seasons.

This alternative was selected over the other alternatives because this alternative offers the best opportunities for public hunting while minimizing impacts on biological resources. This alternative meets the Service's mandates under the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 and Secretarial Order 3356 as described in the Purpose and Need section in the Environmental Assessment. The Service has determined that the hunt plan is compatible with the purposes of the Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter Refuges and the mission of the NWRs.

Other Alternatives Considered and Analyzed

Alternative B—Expanded Spring Wild Turkey Hunt

In addition to the hunt openings described under Alternative A, under the Expanded Spring Turkey Hunt Alternative, the Service would open 303 acres of Colusa Refuge, and 78 acres of Sutter Refuge to the spring wild turkey season on Saturdays and Sundays. The spring turkey hunt on Colusa and Sutter Refuges would occur on alternate weekends from those at Sacramento and Delevan Refuges. The spring turkey hunt on Colusa and Sutter Refuges would take place in the northern portions of each refuge within the current Sanctuary Zone. We would allow 2-4 hunters on Colusa Refuge and 1-2 hunters on Sutter Refuge for the spring turkey hunt. Under Alternative B we would implement the same mitigation measures described for the Proposed Action, although the area of sanctuary on the refuges would be slightly reduced by opening an additional 381 acres of sanctuary to a spring turkey hunt.

This alternative was not selected, because although we would work to minimize impacts to non-hunted wildlife, opening the Sutter Refuge to a spring hunt means that hunters would have to drive on administrative roads that bisect the few areas of sanctuary for migratory waterfowl in the Sutter Basin. In addition, the spring hunt on Sutter Refuge would take place in habitat that is suitable for the federally listed threatened western yellow-billed cuckoo.

The expanded spring hunt would also impact visitor services on Colusa Refuge. Wild turkeys are primarily found in the upland habitats located in the northern part of the Refuge sanctuary where the auto tour route and hiking trails are located. In order to ensure the safety of visitors recreating on Colusa Refuge, we would need to close the auto tour and hiking trails on weekends during the spring wild turkey hunts. This would reduce visitor access to the auto tour route and hiking trails every other weekend from the end of March to the beginning of May.

Although this alternative also meets the purpose and needs of the Service as described above, it would have additional impacts to non-hunted wildlife on the Sutter Refuge and would reduce visitor access to the auto tour route and hiking trails on Colusa Refuge every other weekend from

the end of March to the beginning of May.

Alternative C—No Action

Under the No Action alternative the Service would not open Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa or Sutter Refuges to hunting of wild turkeys.

This alternative was not selected, because it would not meet the purpose and need described in the Environmental Assessment.

Summary of Effects of the Selected Action

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide decision-making framework that 1) explored a reasonable range of alternatives to meet project objectives, 2) evaluated potential issues and impacts to the refuge, resources and values, and 3) identified mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent of these impacts. The EA evaluated the effects associated with three alternatives. It is incorporated as part of this finding.

Implementation of the agency's decision would be expected to result in the following environmental, social, and economic effects:

- Impacts to vegetation and habitats from wild turkey hunts during the fall would be minimal because wild turkey hunting would occur within the existing Free Roam and Pheasant Only hunt units which would result in no additional impacts to vegetation and habitats on these refuges. The wild turkey hunt in the spring would also have minimal impacts to vegetation and habitat due to the limited number of hunters that would be allowed on Sacramento and Delevan refuges and because the spring hunt would occur on alternate weekends.
- Impacts to fish and wildlife during the fall turkey hunt would be minimal because the wild turkey hunt would occur within existing hunt units and on existing hunt days. This means that there would not be an increase in hunting pressure. The spring turkey hunt on both Sacramento and Delevan is limited to alternate weekends and a small number of mentored hunters. The selected action incorporates a half-mile closed zone around rookeries and bald eagle nests.
- The selected action would have no adverse effects on any threatened or endangered species on the refuges. The fall and spring wild turkey hunts are consistent with the 2008 Intra Service consultation on operation and maintenance of the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex.
- The selected action would have no impacts to visitor services in the fall. Hunting wild turkeys during the fall would be subject to the normal California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) hunting requirements and would not result in additional hunters using the four refuges. Hunting wild turkeys in the spring on Sacramento and Delevan refuges would have minor impacts to other visitor services. These minor effects are from trail closures on Saturdays and Sundays that would normally be open for wildlife observation and photography following the fall hunt season. Because hunting would alternate between Sacramento and Delevan Refuges during the spring season, trails on the

Sacramento Refuge would be closed on alternating weekends during the 6-week spring hunting season.

- Opening these four refuges to a fall turkey hunt and opening Sacramento and Delevan refuge to a spring hunt would have minimal cumulative effects. As described in the EA, the CDFG determined the removal of individual animals from resident game bird populations statewide does not significantly reduce those populations and will, therefore, not have a significant environmental impact on resident game birds.

Measures to mitigate and/or minimize adverse effects have been incorporated into the selected action. These measures are described above under the Proposed Action.

While refuges, by their nature, are unique areas protected for conservation of fish, wildlife and habitat, the proposed action will not have a significant impact on refuge resources and uses for several reasons:

- The Service works closely with the State to ensure that additional species harvested on a refuge are within the limits set by the State to ensure healthy populations of the species for present and future generations of Americans.
- The action will result in beneficial impacts to the human environment, providing wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to the public, with only negligible adverse impacts to the human environment as discussed above.
- The adverse direct and indirect effects of the proposed are expected to be minor and short-term.
- The NWRS uses an adaptive management approach to all wildlife management on refuges, monitoring and re-evaluating the hunting and fishing opportunities on the refuge on an annual basis to ensure that the hunting and fishing programs continue to contribute to the biodiversity and ecosystem health of the refuge and these opportunities do not contribute to any cumulative impacts to habitat or wildlife from climate change, population growth and development, or local, State, or regional wildlife management.
- The action, along with proposed mitigation measures, will ensure that there is low danger to the health and safety of refuge staff, visitors, and the hunters/fishers themselves.
- The action is not in an ecologically sensitive area;
- The action will not adversely affect any threatened or endangered species; or any Federally-designated critical habitat;
- The action will not impact any cultural or historical resources;
- The action will not impact any wilderness areas;
- There is no scientific controversy over the impacts of this action and the impacts of the proposed action are relatively certain.

- The proposal will not have any adverse effects on wetlands and floodplains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988, because no actions are being taken on wetlands or in floodplains.
- Wild turkey hunting as described in the selected alternative would not add more than slightly to the cumulative impacts to resident wildlife stemming from hunting at the local or regional level, and would only result in minor, negative impacts to their populations.”

Public Review

The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. Because of their expertise and/or experience in hunting, the Service contacted the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and local hunters to discuss the addition of a wild turkey hunt on Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter refuges. The CDFW and local hunters support the addition of wild turkey to the array of species that can be hunted on refuge land. The Service also coordinated with the Grindstone Indian Rancheria and the Colusa Indian Community Council.

On June 25, 2019, the Service released the Hunt Plan and EA for 30 days of public review and comment. The Service did not receive any public comments on the EA. Additionally, on June 26, 2019, the Service published the draft 2019–2020 Refuge-Specific Hunting and Sport Fishing Regulations in the Federal Register. The National Wild Turkey Federation sent a letter of support in response to the publication of the draft 2019-2020 Refuge-Specific Hunting and Sport Fishing Regulations. The National Wild Turkey Federation supports the expansion of public access for outdoor recreation, including the acreage opened to turkey hunting. The Service did not receive public comments specific to Wild Turkey Hunt Plan and EA for Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter Refuges.

Finding of No Significant Impact

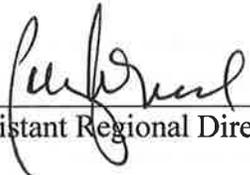
Based upon a review and evaluation of the information contained in the EA as well as other documents and actions of record affiliated with this proposal, the Service has determined that the proposal to implement *Wild Turkey Hunting* on the **Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter** NWRs does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an environmental impact statement is not required.

Decision

The Service has decided to open the Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter NWRs to a fall wild turkey hunt, and to open Sacramento and Delevan NWRs to a spring wild turkey hunt.

This action is compatible with the purposed of the refuges and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. See the Compatibility Determination for Hunting completed in August 2019.

The action is consistent with applicable laws and policies regarding the establishment of hunting on National Wildlife Refuges. Refuge-specific regulations promulgated in conjunction with this action for are in the process of being finalized. See (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-06-26/pdf/2019-11443.pdf>). This action will not be implemented until the regulations are finalized.



Assistant Regional Director, Refuges

8.27.19
Date