

**Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge**

**and**

**Fallon National Wildlife Refuge**

**Waterfowl, Other Migratory Bird, Upland Game, and Big Game Hunt Plan**

*March 2020*

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
1020 New River Parkway, Suite 305  
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Date

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**STILLWATER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
AND  
FALLON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
WATERFOWL, OTHER MIGRATORY BIRD, UPLAND GAME, AND  
BIG GAME  
HUNTING PLAN**

**1. Introduction**

National Wildlife Refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), the purposes of an individual refuge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy, laws and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and Stillwater WMA were established through a 50-year agreement signed in 1948 by the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District, Nevada State Board of Fish and Game Commissioners, and the Service (Tripartite Agreement). In 1949, Stillwater NWR was established as a wildlife sanctuary and closed to hunting. In 1990, Public Law 101-618 (§210(b)(1)) expanded the approved boundary of Stillwater NWR to include Stillwater Marsh. The Tripartite Agreement was not renewed and the WMA ceased to exist. P.L. 101-618 shifted the legal authority for managing the lands now within Stillwater NWR from the Tripartite Agreement to the Refuge System Administration Act. In addition to the boundary expansion, Public Law 101-618 §206(b)(2) also outlined four purposes for which the Service must manage Stillwater NWR, which included providing opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation, including hunting. The primary purposes of Stillwater NWR as established by P.L. 101-618 are:

1. Maintaining and restoring natural biological diversity within the refuge.
2. Providing for the conservation and management of fish and wildlife and their habitats within the refuge.
3. Fulfilling international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife.
4. Providing opportunities for scientific research, environmental education, and fish and wildlife oriented recreation.

Stillwater NWR is located in the Lahontan Valley, near the community of Fallon, sixty miles east of Reno. The wetlands within Stillwater NWR are well-known to birders and waterfowl hunters. This area has been designated a site of international importance by the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network because of the hundreds of thousands of shorebirds,

such as long-billed dowitcher, black-necked stilt, and American avocet passing through during migration. Also listed as a *Globally Important Bird Area* by the American Bird Conservancy and an *Important Bird Area* by the National Audubon Society, more than 280 species have been sighted in the area. These tremendously rich and diverse wetlands attract more than a quarter million waterfowl, as well as over 20,000 other water birds, including American white pelicans, double-crested cormorants, white-faced ibis, and several species of egrets, herons, gulls, and terns. The Stillwater NWR contributes substantially to the conservation of wildlife and its habitat in the western Great Basin. It encompasses a great diversity of habitat, from freshwater to brackish water marshes and alkali playas, and extensive salt desert shrub lands. These habitats attract nearly 400 species of vertebrate wildlife (more than 280 bird species) and countless species of invertebrates.

Waterfowl, shorebirds, and other water birds are abundant, especially during migration. This immense richness and abundance of wildlife and habitat in a desert environment provides a striking setting for hunting, observing, and learning about wildlife in the Great Basin. Waterfowl hunting has a long history at the Stillwater Marsh and this tradition will continue. The human association with the Stillwater Marsh goes back at least 12,000 years. In recent years, bird watching and environmental education have been growing in popularity. In addition to obtaining enjoyment from Stillwater NWR's wildlife and habitat, individuals partaking in these activities have been instrumental in ensuring the long-term viability of the wetlands on Stillwater NWR.

Fallon NWR was established in 1931, by Executive Order 5606, with its primary purpose being "as a refuge and breeding ground for birds and other wild animals." Fallon NWR is managed as part of the Stillwater NWR Complex. Fallon NWR lies 20 miles northeast of the community of Fallon, Nevada, and approximately 70 miles east of Reno. Both refuges are located in Churchill County, Nevada.

The mission of the NWRS, as outlined by the Refuge System Administration Act, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.), is to:

*"... 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."*

The Refuge System Administration Act mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the System to (16 U.S.C. 668dd (a) (4):

- Provide for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats within the NWRS;
- Ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the NWRS are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans;
- Ensure that the mission of the NWRS described at 16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(2) and the purposes of each refuge are carried out;

- Ensure effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with owners of land adjoining refuges and the fish and wildlife agency of the states in which the units of the NWRS are located;
- Assist in the maintenance of adequate water quantity and water quality to fulfill the mission of the NWRS and the purposes of each refuge;
- Recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority general public uses of the NWRS through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife;
- Ensure that opportunities are provided within the NWRS for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses; and
- Monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge.

Therefore, it is a priority of the Service to provide wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, including hunting and fishing, when those opportunities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

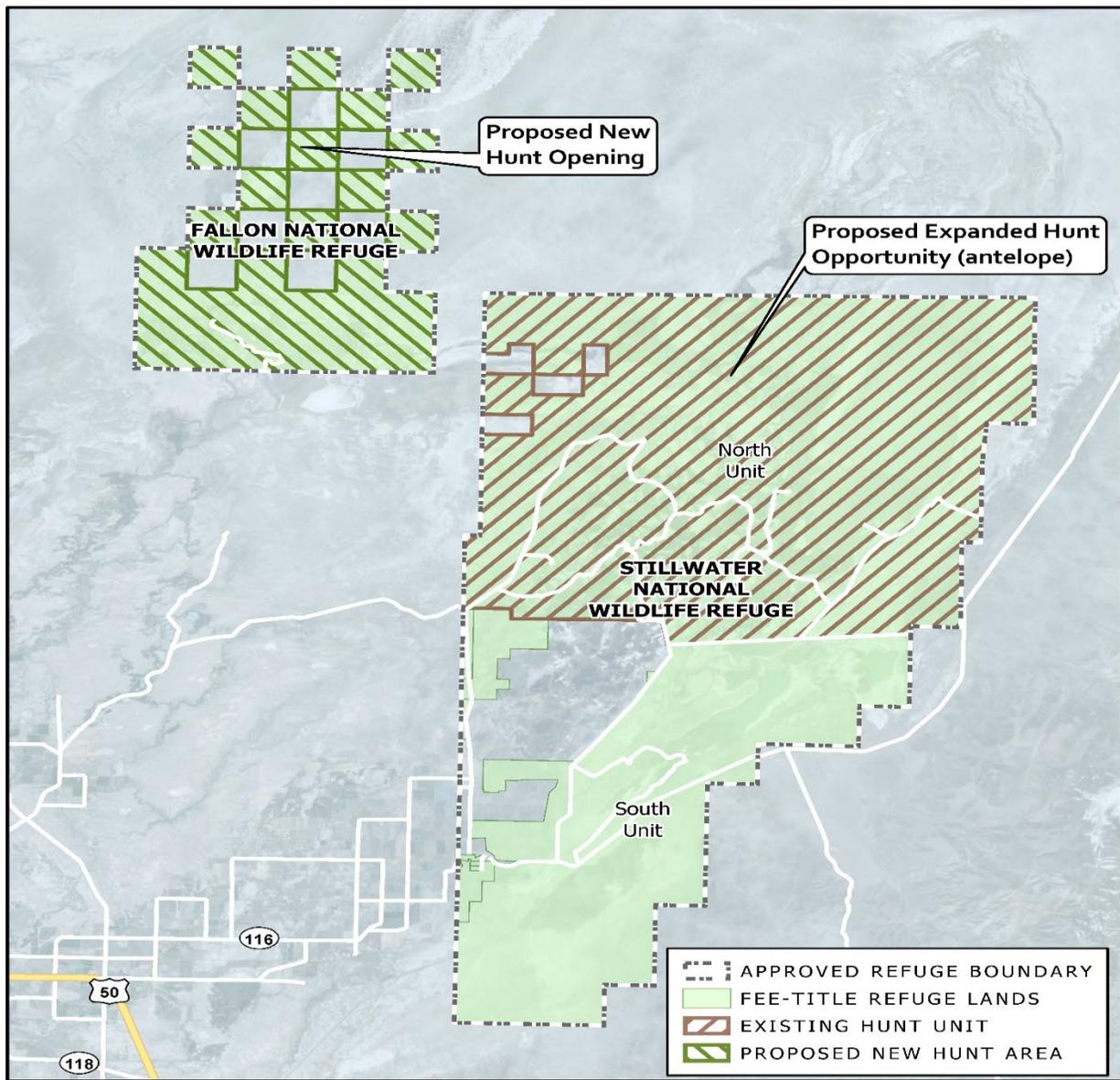
## **2. Statement of Objectives**

The objectives of a migratory bird, upland game, and big game hunting program on Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR are consistent with the Mission of the NWRS, the purposes for which the refuges were established, and the refuges' Comprehensive Conservation Plan's detailed strategies to achieve goals and Objectives A.c.4, A.c.4(a), A.c.4(b), B.e.2, C.a.1, and C.a.2 (USFWS 2002).

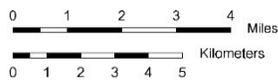
## **3. Description of Hunting Program**

### **A. Areas to be Opened to Hunting**

On Stillwater NWR, the following Stillwater Marsh units would be open to waterfowl hunting during the State- designated hunting season: Swan Lake, Pintail Bay, North, South, and West Nutgrass, Willow Lake, Lead Lake, Tule Lake, Goose Lake, Big Water, and Swan Check. On Stillwater NWR, 54,064 acres in the North Unit (North of Division Road) would continue to be open to hunting during the State-designated hunting seasons. In addition, the Taber and Dutchbill units will be open to hunting at the conclusion of their life use estates. These two units would be used for youth, veteran, handicapped, and other special hunting opportunities. Hunting would continue to be permitted in the designated areas within the approved boundary of the refuge shown on Figure 1.



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Figure 1. Hunt Locations on Fallon and Stillwater National Wildlife Refuges

On Fallon NWR, all 17,955 acres of the refuge would be open to hunting for waterfowl, other migratory birds, upland game, and big game during the State-designated hunting seasons. See Figure 1.

**B. Species to be Taken, Hunting Periods, Hunting Access**

The previously described lands on Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR will allow hunting opportunities according to the seasons and hunting hours established by State regulations for migratory birds, upland game, big game, furbearers, and turkey. The species likely to be found on the refuges are listed below.

- **WATERFOWL**

Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR provide hunting opportunities for:

- Ducks
- Geese
- Swans
- Coots
- Mergansers
- Snipe

- **MIGRATORY BIRDS OTHER THAN WATERFOWL**

Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR provide hunting opportunities for:

- Dove

- **UPLAND GAME**

Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR provide hunting opportunities for:

- Quail
- Rabbit

Stillwater NWR also provides hunting opportunities for ring-necked pheasant.

- **BIG GAME HUNTING**

Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR provide hunting opportunities for:

- Mule deer
- Pronghorn

- **FURBEARERS:**

Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR provide hunting opportunities for:

- Badger
- Beaver
- Coyote

Fallon NWR also provides hunting opportunities for squirrel.

- **WILD TURKEY**  
Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR provide hunting opportunities for wild turkey.

### **C. Hunter Permit Requirements (if applicable)**

Not applicable.

### **D. Consultation and Coordination with the State**

Between 2000 and 2001, the Service met with a working group sponsored by NDOW to discuss concerns expressed during the public comment period, including hunting-related topics. Working group members included representatives from NDOW, Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners, Churchill County, the Service, and several interest groups. The hunting program at Stillwater NWR is based primarily on public review of the CCP and coordination with the working group. The Service will continue to discuss hunting opportunities with NDOW and work to ensure safe and enjoyable recreational hunting opportunities on the refuges.

Hunter participation and harvest data are collected by State and Service law enforcement officers who work together to patrol the Stillwater and Fallon NWRs, safeguarding hunters, visitors, and both game and nongame species.

### **E. Law Enforcement**

Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR are patrolled by a Service law enforcement officer (primary Federal jurisdiction) who has responsibility for upholding the Code of Federal Regulations and the United States Code. This includes enforcing the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, Archaeological Resource Protection Act, Clean Water Act and the Federal Endangered Species Act. Churchill County Sheriff's Department and NDOW (local and state jurisdiction) provide backup for specific incidents as needed. Assistance to other Federal and State law enforcement agencies would be provided on certain off-refuge operations, particularly in relation to violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act. The most common infractions occurring on the refuge are for off-road travel and resource damage, prohibited weapons use, artifact collection, and wildlife/habitat disturbance.

Monitoring hunter density would provide the Refuge Manager with information to determine unsafe conditions.

### **F. Funding and Staffing Requirements**

Annual hunt administration costs for Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR including primarily staff salary, equipment, law enforcement, brochures, collection of hunt data, and analysis of biological

information, totaling approximately \$13,000. It is anticipated that funding would continue to be sufficient to continue the hunting program at Stillwater and Fallon NWRs in the future.

#### **4. Conduct of the Hunting Program**

##### **A. Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures (if applicable)**

Take of any approved species on the Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR must be in accordance with the State of Nevada hunting regulations and Federal Regulations. Mule deer, antelope, swan, and turkey hunting are allowed by tags issued through NDOW's annual tag drawing. Administration of controlled hunt permitting for mule deer, antelope, swan, and wild turkey is assumed by NDOW.

Hunting on Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR is on a first-come, first-served basis.

(1) Youth Hunts (waterfowl – Stillwater NWR, Fallon NWR)

Youth seasons include waterfowl as specified by Nevada Small Game Hunt regulations.

(2) Youth Hunts (upland game – Stillwater NWR, Fallon NWR)

Youth seasons include upland game as specified by Nevada Small Game Hunt regulations.

(3) Youth Hunts (big game – Stillwater NWR, Fallon NWR)

Youth seasons include big game as specified by Nevada Big Game Hunt regulations.

(4) Veteran/Active Duty Military Hunts (waterfowl – Stillwater NWR, Fallon NWR)

Veteran/Active Duty Military seasons include waterfowl as specified by Nevada Small Game Hunt regulations.

##### **B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations**

The Refuge System Administration Act, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 [Improvement Act]) govern the administration and public use of refuges and the Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S.C. 460k-460k-4) (Recreation Act) govern the administration and public use of refuges. Station-Specific Hunting Regulations (50 CFR § 32.47) and Public Access and Recreation Regulations (50 CFR § 26.34) are published annually in the U.S. Federal Register.

We allow migratory game bird, upland game, and big game hunting on designated areas of Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR in accordance with State regulations and the Refuge-specific regulations that pertain to hunting on these refuges as of the date of this plan. Refuge-specific regulations can be found through an online search for “Station-Specific Hunting Regulations” issued by the Fish and Wildlife Service at *Regulations.gov*.

### C. Relevant State Regulations

Hunting on the refuges will be conducted consistent with the regulations of the State available at [Nevada Hunt Seasons and Regulations](#)

### D. Other Refuge Rules for Hunting

#### (1) Allowable equipment at Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR

- Method of take for Stillwater NWR: Hunters must use only a shotgun and federally approved non-lead shot for waterfowl, migratory game bird other than waterfowl, and upland game hunting. Hunters must use only shotguns, muzzle loading rifles, or bow and arrow for big game (see 50 CFR § 32.2(k), 50 CFR § 20.21(j)).
- Method of take for Fallon NWR: Per state regulations.
- Dogs are required to be kept on a leash, except for hunting dogs engaged in authorized hunting activities and under the immediate control of a licensed hunter (see 50 CFR § 26.21(b)).
- Permanent blinds are not allowed. You must remove all personal property, including decoys and boats, at the end of each day (see 50 CFR § 27.93).
- Archery hunting (including crossbow) is allowed.
- Falconry is allowed.
- The use of artificial lighting is prohibited on Stillwater NWR.
- Motorized and non-motorized boats may be used for hunting in accordance with Public Access and Recreation Regulations (50 CFR § 26.34) and as posted on the refuge.

#### (2) Use of open fires

- Fires are prohibited on the refuge, except portable gas stoves (see 50 CFR § 27.95(a)).

#### (3) Hunter training and safety

Hunters are required to successfully complete a hunter education course to purchase a State hunting license.

#### (4) Other information for Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR

- Falconry is allowed.
- Dog field trials are not allowed (see 50 CFR § 27.91).
- Target shooting is prohibited.
- Persons possessing, transporting or carrying firearms on national wildlife refuges must comply with all provisions of state and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 CFR § 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in part 32).
- Additional parking is allowed alongside refuge roads where parked vehicles do not impede traffic.

- Overnight stays are allowed at designated sites within the refuge boundary and limited to four (4) consecutive nights at one location, not to exceed twelve (12) consecutive nights on the refuge.

In addition, 50 CFR § 27 Prohibited Acts governs those acts by the public which are prohibited at all times on national wildlife refuges; these prohibited acts at all times including during hunting seasons and are incorporated by reference.

## **5. Public Engagement**

### **A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program**

The Services publicizes the hunt program to a list of local media contacts for news releases. A news release announcing the hunt will be distributed to media approximately one month prior to the first day of the hunt. Seasonal announcements, if needed, will be issued thereafter. Refuge-specific regulations and seasons/areas open to hunting are published annually in the NDOW Hunting Regulations.

### **B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program**

Most hunters supported the opening of the Stillwater NWR and Fallon NWR to hunting. Hunting has been and continues to be widely accepted traditional use in Nevada. In 2000, during the comment period and public meetings for Stillwater NWR, a variety of opinions were heard (USFWS 2002). The majority of the comments received supported increasing access to Stillwater NWR and opening as much of the refuge to hunting as possible. Some hunters, and other refuge visitors, may object to boat access only during the general waterfowl season in the hunt area of the refuge (with the exception of Swan Check Lake, which is open to non-motorized boating year-round), and to not installing additional boat ramps on Stillwater NWR. This Hunt Plan will be available for public review and comment. Comments received will be considered in the Service's decision making process. The Service would continue to hold a post-season hunting meeting to gather concerns and suggestions about the hunt. This meeting is open to all user groups and interested parties. The information gathered is used to make appropriate revisions to improve the quality of future hunts on the refuge(s).

### **C. How Hunters Will Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations**

General information regarding hunting and other wildlife-dependent public uses can be obtained at Stillwater NWR Complex headquarters at 1020 New River Parkway #305, Fallon, Nevada 89406; or by calling (775) 423-5128. Dates, hunting unit directions, maps, and other hunt information will be available on the station website at: *Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge*.

## **6. Compatibility Determination**

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See attached Compatibility Determinations for hunting.

## **7. References Cited**

(USFWS) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2002. Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Boundary Revision. May 2002.