

**U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

**South Arkansas Refuge Complex
Trapping Plan**

for

*Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge
Overflow National Wildlife Refuge
Pond Creek National Wildlife Refuge*

March 7, 2016

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Abstract: The Trapping Plan for the South Arkansas Refuge Complex (SARC) covers Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Overflow NWR and Pond Creek NWR. This Trapping Plan covers trapping in accordance with State and refuge regulations for badger, beaver, bobcat, coyote, gray fox, red fox, mink, muskrat, nutria, opossum, raccoon, river otter, spotted skunk, striped skunk and weasel. The program is designed to manage furbearer populations, reduce impacts and damage to refuge infrastructure and private property, and provide a recreational opportunity on the refuge during the trapping season. This document includes refuge specific regulations and an overview for trapping throughout the refuges.

Furbearer trapping has been a traditional use throughout south Arkansas and is an important element of wildlife management programs within the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC), as well as, the National Wildlife Refuge System. The refuge currently allows the take of furbearers and nuisance animals by refuge staff, licensed trappers, and partner resource agency staff through a Refuge Special Use Permit (SUP) and Trapping Permit issued by AGFC. Removal methods of nuisance animals (primarily beaver and nutria) have included trapping or the use of firearms.

This Trapping Plan allows trapping of badger, beaver, bobcat, coyote, gray fox, red fox, mink, muskrat, nutria, opossum, raccoon, river otter, spotted skunk, striped skunk and weasel, using recreational trappers for resource management purposes. The opening of trapping seasons and trapping methods on the refuge generally follow regulations established for the state of Arkansas and special conditions within the SUP for trapping. Trap selection is based on best management practices (BMP) that ensure the welfare of trapped animals, avoid unintended captures of other non-target animals, and improve trapper safety. The refuge permits trappers the use traps identified as permissible by AGFC trapping regulations.

Guidance for authorizing furbearer management on the refuge is provided by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, and each station's Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

For further information about the Trapping Plan, please contact the Project Leader or Deputy Project Leader, Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge, 5531 Highway 82 West, Crossett, AR 71635. Phone: 870-364-3167. Fax: 870-364-3757.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The South Arkansas Refuge Complex (SARC) Trapping Plan covers Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Overflow NWR and Pond Creek NWR. This Trapping Plan addresses trapping in accordance with State and refuge regulations for badger, beaver, bobcat, coyote, gray fox, red fox, mink, muskrat, nutria, opossum, raccoon, river otter, spotted skunk, striped skunk and weasel. The program is designed to manage furbearer populations, reduce impacts and damage to refuge infrastructure and private property, and provide a recreational opportunity on the refuge during the trapping season. This document includes refuge specific regulations and an overview for trapping throughout the refuges. This plan provides a description of the trapping program and highlights the following considerations: biological soundness, economic feasibility, and effects on other refuge programs. The planning effort also includes an Environmental Assessment.

Felsenthal NWR

Established in 1975, Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is located in southeast Arkansas, about five miles west of Crossett, Arkansas in Ashley County. Named for a small community located at its southwest corner, this 65,000 acre refuge contains an abundance of water resources dominated by the Ouachita and Saline Rivers, and the Felsenthal Pool.

Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge was established as mitigation for the creation of the Corps of Engineers (COE) Ouachita and Black Rivers Navigation Project and Felsenthal Lock and Dam. On average, only about four barges per month use the navigation channel. The Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project began in 1902 and is a 337-mile long waterway. The project stretches from central Arkansas to Jonesville, Louisiana where it converges with the Tensas and Little Rivers to form the Black River. The project also provides for a multitude of recreational opportunities with facilities spread along the entire length of the river.

The COE Mississippi Field Office, located in Vicksburg, MS manages natural resources, recreation and flood control on the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. Currently the Louisiana Field Office manages 23 recreation areas along the Ouachita-Black Rivers including Felsenthal Lock and Dam. In total there are 209 picnic sites, 169 campsites, 24 boat ramps, and 1 swimming beach. Geographically, the 65,000-acre refuge is located in what is known as the Felsenthal Basin, an extensive natural depression that is laced with a vast complex of sloughs, bayous and lakes. The region's two major rivers, the Saline and Ouachita, flow through the refuge. These wetland areas in combination with the refuge's diverse forest ecosystem of bottomland hardwoods, pine forests and uplands support a wide variety of wildlife and provide excellent fishing, hunting, boating, wildlife observation opportunities and environmental education opportunities.

This low lying area is dissected by an intricate system of rivers, creeks, sloughs, buttonbush swamps and lakes throughout a vast bottomland hardwood forest that gradually rises to an upland forest community. Historically, periodic flooding of the "bottoms" during winter and spring provided excellent wintering waterfowl habitat. These wetlands, in combination with the

pine and upland hardwood forest on the higher ridges, support a wide diversity of native plants and animals.

About 63% of Felsenthal NWR is bottomland hardwoods (~40,000 acres), about 15% is the permanent 65 foot pool (~15,000 acres), with the remaining in upland pine-hardwoods (~10,000 acres).

Felsenthal NWR's goal is to promote the environmental health of the Ouachita and Saline River and enhance the biological diversity of associated habitats within the river basin. Through active management, the refuge contributes significantly to the conservation of the green tree reservoir and species in the Felsenthal Basin. Management actions that support the recovery for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker are a priority. Open water at Felsenthal NWR (e.g. Felsenthal Pool) consists of 15,000-acres that can more than double to 36,000 acres during winter and spring flooding. Local communities realize economic and social benefits as visitors enjoy the refuge's natural beauty and biological diversity. Visitors engage in a wide variety of wildlife-dependent activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. Through the educational and interpretive programs, people come to value the ecological significance of the refuge and its importance as a link with other natural areas within the Felsenthal Basin. In turn, refuge visitors become better stewards of their own local environments.

Felsenthal NWR provides hunting, fishing (recreational, tournaments, and commercial), wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretative activities for the public. Wildlife observation can be done through several different means of travel. The refuge has two walking trails open for public use; one is located behind the office and is handicap accessible, and the Sand Prairie Trail is located off of the Pine Island Road. The refuge also has an extensive system of ATV/UTV trails comprising approximately 40-miles. The ATV/UTV trails are broken down into blue and yellow trails, blue trails are open year round for fishing access, while the yellow trails are only open during the regular hunting season that lasts from September until January. The ATV/UTV trails can be utilized by hikers, horseback riding, and bicycles. Felsenthal also has seven undeveloped campsites available for use. Campsites can be utilized all year long with no special use permits required for camping.

There are eleven fishing and watercraft launches located around the refuge to include the; Lock and Dam launch, Grand Marais Launch, Shallow Lake Launch, Jones Lake Launch, Deep Slough Launch, Old Beer Joint (Hogan Track) Launch, Crossett Harbor Launch, Pine Island Launch, Prairie Island Launch, Eagle Lake Launch, and Pereogeethe Lake Launch. Fishing opportunities include recreational (bream, bass, and crappie), bow-fishing, bass tournaments, and commercial fishing. Fishing can be done during the day or at night since the refuge is open 24 hours a day. Fishing can be done on any waters on the refuge except during waterfowl season inside of the waterfowl sanctuary and year around at the Eagle Lake Pond and Refuge Headquarters Pond.

Hunting opportunities at Felsenthal NWR include hunting for rabbit, squirrel, coyote, quail, deer, turkey, raccoon, and waterfowl. Felsenthal also offers two quota deer hunts with the use of modern firearm and muzzleloader, and one quota turkey hunt with modern firearm. Waterfowl

hunting is the biggest draw for hunters to the refuge. Waterfowl hunters are not allowed to enter into a hunting area until 4:00 A.M.; this means hunters must stay at their vehicle if entering by foot or ATV/UTV, and if by boat, they must remain in the main river channel or at the boat launch until the legal entry time. Waterfowl hunting ends at 12:00 noon, and waterfowl hunters must leave the refuge by 1:30 each day.

Overflow NWR

Overflow National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1980, encompasses 13,973 fee-title acres in the southeast corner of Ashley County, Arkansas, about five miles west of Parkdale. Overflow NWR was established to protect one of the last remaining bottomland hardwood forests considered vital for maintaining mallard, wood duck, and other waterfowl populations in the Mississippi Flyway. The bottomland hardwood forest consists primarily of willow oak and overcup oak. The willow oaks produce small acorns that are an excellent source of food for the mallards and wood ducks in the winter. Bald cypress and tupelo gum occur along streams, channels and sloughs throughout the refuge. This ~13,000 acre wetland complex consists of seasonally flooded bottomland hardwood forests, impoundments, and open fields.

About 60% of Overflow NWR is bottomland hardwoods (~8,650 acres), about 15% reforested (~2,020 acres), about 15% wetlands and beaver ponds (~1,500 acres), with the remaining acreage in agriculture (~800 acres) and upland pine-hardwoods (200-300 acres). During the winter, a 4,000-acre greentree reservoir is created when the bottomland hardwood forests are allowed to flood.

Overflow NWR provides hunting, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretative activities for the public. Wildlife observation can be done through several different means of travel. The refuge has a walking trail open for public use, and is located by the office and goes by an observation blind that can be utilized to observe wildlife. The refuge also has an extensive system of ATV/UTV trails comprising approximately 17-miles of trails. The ATV/UTV trails are marked yellow trails and they are only open during the regular hunting season that lasts from September until January. The ATV/UTV trails can be utilized by hikers, horseback riders, and bicycles. Overflow NWR does not have any campsites available on the refuge, and fishing is not allowed on the refuge due to the high contamination of the water (USFWS 2010).

Hunting opportunities on the refuge include hunting for rabbit, squirrel, coyote, deer, turkey, raccoon, and waterfowl. Waterfowl hunting is the biggest draw for hunters to the refuge. Waterfowl hunters are not allowed to enter into a hunting area until 4:00 A.M.; this means hunters must stay at their vehicle if entering by foot or ATV/UTV and if by boat, hunters must remain at the boat launch until the legal entry time. Waterfowl hunters are limited to using a 25 H.P. boat motor (mud motors are allowed), waterfowl hunting ends at 12:00 noon, and waterfowl hunters must leave the refuge by 1:30 each day. No boats are allowed on the refuge from 1:30 P.M till 4:00 A.M. each day to lessen the disturbance of resting waterfowl.

Pond Creek NWR

Pond Creek NWR, established in 1994, is located in Sevier County, Arkansas, approximately 55 miles north of the city of Texarkana and 142 miles southwest of Little Rock. The refuge protects the largest remaining tract of bottomland hardwoods along the Little River, and extends west from U.S. Highway 71 almost to the Oklahoma state line. Pond Creek bisects the refuge and flows from the northwest to the southeast where it intersects the Cossatot River just upstream from the confluence of the Cossatot/Little Rivers.

Pond Creek NWR consists of 26,292 acres of fee title ownership and public use activities are also managed on an additional ~2,000 acres through various easements. The refuge is located on the floodplain and overflow bottoms formed at the junction of the Little and Cossatot Rivers upstream from Millwood Lake. Generally, the Little River forms the southern boundary of the refuge and the Cossatot River forms the eastern boundary.

The refuge's northern boundary follows the Woodbine escarpment, a relatively low rise that separates the bottoms from the uplands. Pond Creek runs through the middle of the refuge, with approximately half of its watershed within the refuge and many of its south-flowing tributaries reaching into the uplands directly north. Open water covers about 2 percent of the refuge. Virtually all of the refuge (elevation below 290 feet) is part of the Millwood Lake flood-pool, with the flowage easement held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Goals of Pond Creek NWR include, restoring and managing diverse habitats designed to achieve the refuge purpose and wildlife population objectives, maintain viable, diverse populations of native flora and fauna consistent with sound biological principles, protect the area's wetlands and resource values through protection strategies, and develop and implement a quality wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education program that leads to enjoyable recreational experiences and a greater understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife resources.

The refuge has accomplished many of these goals by developing and implementing various plans to manage the forest habitat and wildlife populations. Hydrology restoration projects have also been implemented in an effort to restore proper ecosystem function due to drastic alterations by previous landowners.

Hunting, trapping, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretative activities are also provided for the public. Wildlife observation can be done through several different means of travel. The refuge has 3 walking trails open for public use, 45 miles of gravel roads, and 15-miles of ATV/UTV trails. The ATV/UTV trails marked with yellow trails are only open during the regular hunting season that lasts from September until January. Those trails marked with blue are open year-round to gain fishing access. The ATV/UTV trails and gravel roads can be utilized by hikers, horseback riders, and bicycles. Seven camping areas are located throughout the refuge and are open year-round unless flooded. Hunting opportunities on Pond Creek NWR include hunting for rabbit, squirrel, coyote, deer, turkey, raccoon, and waterfowl.

Conformance with Statutory Authority

The refuges within the SARC are managed and administered as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the Department of Interior. The refuge system operates under a variety of legal authorities, regulations and policies. The following federal legislative and administrative authorities and Service policies apply to trapping on refuge lands:

- The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 recognizes that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible, are a legitimate and appropriate uses of land within the National Wildlife Refuge System. Other uses not listed as priority public uses may be allowed if they are determined to be appropriate and compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.
- The Refuge Recreation Act (P.L. 87-714; 16 U.S.C. 460K-460k-4; 76 Stat. 653), as amended; which authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to administer refuges, hatcheries and other conservation areas for recreational use, when such uses do not interfere with the area's primary purposes.
- The Fish and Wildlife Act (16 U.S.C. 742a-742j; 70 Stat. 1119), as amended establishes a comprehensive national fish, shellfish, and wildlife resources policy with emphasis on the commercial fishing industry but also with a direction to administer the Act with regard to the inherent right of every citizen and resident to fish for pleasure, enjoyment, and betterment and to maintain and increase public opportunities for recreational use of fish and wildlife.
- Title 50 CFR 29.1 which provides for public or private economic use of the natural resources of any wildlife refuge.
- Title 50 CFR 31.14 which authorizes the taking of animal species that are surplus or detrimental to the management program of a wildlife refuge.
- Title 50 CFR 31.2 which authorizes trapping as a method of surplus wildlife population control and disposal.
- Presidential Executive Order 13112 and the resulting *The National Strategy for Management of Invasive Species for The National Wildlife Refuge System* which sets forth a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the critical problem of invasive species in the United States.

As practiced on refuges, trapping has been shown to have no adverse effect and may have beneficial effects (i.e. protection of habitat infrastructure or predator control for migratory bird protection) on the long-term stability and health of wildlife populations and their habitats (USFWS 1997). The harvesting of wildlife on refuges is carefully regulated to ensure equilibrium between population levels and wildlife habitat. In addition to providing wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, trapping will promote a better understanding and appreciation of refuge habitats and their associated wildlife resources. Implementation of this plan is also supported by each refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan.

Refuge Goals

Felsenthal NWR

Felsenthal NWR was established in 1975 for the following purposes:

- “...shall be administered by him [Secretary of the Interior] directly or in accordance with cooperative agreements...and in accordance with such rules and regulations for the conservation, maintenance, and management of wildlife, resources thereof, and its habitat thereon.” 16 U.S.C. 664 (Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act)
- “...suitable for incidental fish and wildlife oriented recreational development; the protection of natural resources; and the conservation of endangered species or threatened species.” 16 U.S.C. 460k-1 (Refuge Recreation Act)
- “...the Secretary...may accept and use...real...property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors.” 16 U.S.C. 460k-2 (Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. 460k-460k-4), as amended)

Furthermore, Felsenthal NWR is operated under the following management objectives:

- Provide habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds.
- Provide habitat and protection for endangered species such as the red-cockaded woodpecker.
- Provide recreation and environmental education for the public.
- Protect cultural resources.

Overflow NWR

Overflow NWR was established in 1980 for the following purposes:

- “...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” 16 U.S.C. 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)
- “...suitable for incidental fish and wildlife oriented recreational development; the protection of natural resources; and the conservation of endangered species or threatened species.” 16 U.S.C. 460k-1 (Refuge Recreation Act)
- “...the Secretary...may accept and use...real...property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors.” 16 U.S.C. 460k-2 (Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. 460k-460k-4), as amended)

- “...conservation, management, and ...restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats...for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.” 16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(2) (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act)

Furthermore, Overflow NWR is operated under the following management objectives:

- Provide a diversity of habitat types for migratory waterfowl and other birds.
- Provide habitat and protection for endangered and threatened species.
- Provide opportunities for environmental and ecological research.
- Provide a variety of recreational opportunities consistent with primary wildlife objectives.
- Expand the public’s understanding of and appreciation for the environment with special emphasis on natural resources.

Pond Creek NWR

Pond Creek NWR was established in 1980 for the following purposes:

- “...the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international treaty obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions.” 16 U.S.C. 3901(b) Stat.3582-91(Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986)
- “...recognize the important public purposes served by non-consumptive activities, other recreational activities, and wildlife-related public use, including hunting, fishing and trapping.” Furthermore, this plan “...shall permit, to the maximum extent practicable, compatible uses to the extent that they are consistent with sound wildlife management, and in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System, Administration Act of 1997 (16 USC668dd-668ee) and other applicable laws.” (Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Act of 1996)

Furthermore, Pond Creek NWR is operated under the following management objectives:

- Restore and maintain diverse habitats designed to achieve refuge purpose and wildlife population objectives.
- Maintain viable, diverse populations of native flora and fauna consistent with sound biological principles.
- Protect the area’s wetlands and resource values through land protection strategies.
- Develop and implement a quality wildlife dependent recreation and environmental education program that leads to enjoyable recreational experiences and a greater understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife resources.

The SARC Trapping Plan and trapping program directly supports the protection, restoration and management of native habitats for waterfowl and associated wildlife species; biological diversity and resource infrastructure; as well as providing a compatible recreation opportunity.

II. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION WITH THE STATE

As directed by Service policy in the USFWS Refuge Manual, 7 RM 15.11 (USFWS 1982), the refuge furbearer management program is planned, managed, conducted and evaluated in coordination with the AGFC in ways that conserve fish, wildlife, and their habitat, ensure trapper and visitor safety, comply with State and Federal laws and regulations and promote respect for the resource.

Following the adoption of this plan, the refuge will consult and coordinate with Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) to address annual implementation of trapping activities. Trapping opportunities on the refuge are primarily developed to be consistent with AGFC state seasons and regulations with the exception of more restrictive special conditions and species targeted for the furbearer management program (Appendix A).

III. REFUGE ENVIRONMENT

Felsenthal NWR

Established in 1975, Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is located in southeast Arkansas, about five miles west of Crossett, Arkansas in Ashley County. Named for a small community located at its southwest corner, this 65,000 acre refuge contains an abundance of water resources dominated by the Ouachita and Saline Rivers, and the Felsenthal Pool.

Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge was established as mitigation for the creation of the Corps of Engineers (COE) Ouachita and Black Rivers Navigation Project and Felsenthal Lock and Dam. Historically, only about four barges per month use the navigation channel. The Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project began in 1902 and is a 337-mile long waterway. The project stretches from central Arkansas to Jonesville, Louisiana where it converges with the Tensas and Little Rivers to form the Black River. The project also provides for a multitude of recreational opportunities with facilities spread along the entire length of the river.

The COE Mississippi Field Office, located in Vicksburg, MS manages natural resources, recreation and flood control on the Ouachita-Black Rivers Navigation Project. Currently the Louisiana Field Office manages 23 recreation areas along the Ouachita-Black Rivers including Felsenthal Lock and Dam. In total there are 209 picnic sites, 169 campsites, 24 boat ramps, and 1 swimming beach. Geographically, the 65,000-acre refuge is located in what is known as the Felsenthal Basin, an extensive natural depression that is laced with a vast complex of sloughs, bayous and lakes. The region's two major rivers, the Saline and Ouachita, flow through the refuge. These wetland areas in combination with the refuge's diverse forest ecosystem of bottomland hardwoods, pine forests and uplands support a wide variety of wildlife and provide excellent fishing, hunting, boating, wildlife observation, and environmental education opportunities.

This low lying area is dissected by an intricate system of rivers, creeks, sloughs, buttonbush swamps and lakes throughout a vast bottomland hardwood forest that gradually rises to an upland forest community. Historically, periodic flooding of the "bottoms" during winter and spring provided excellent wintering waterfowl habitat. These wetlands, in combination with the

pine and upland hardwood forest on the higher ridges, support a wide diversity of native plants and animals.

About 63% of Felsenthal NWR is bottomland hardwoods (~40,000 acres), about 15% is the permanent 65 foot pool (~15,000 acres), with the remaining in upland pine-hardwoods (~10,000 acres).

Overflow NWR

Overflow National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1980, encompasses 13,973 fee-title acres in the southeast corner of Ashley County, Arkansas, about five miles west of Parkdale. Overflow NWR was established to protect one of the last remaining bottomland hardwood forests considered vital for maintaining mallard, wood duck, and other waterfowl populations in the Mississippi Flyway. The bottomland hardwood forest consists primarily of willow oak and overcup oak. The willow oaks produce small acorns that are an excellent source of food for the mallards and wood ducks in the winter. Bald cypress and tupelo gum occur along streams, channels and sloughs throughout the refuge. This ~13,000 acre wetland complex consists of seasonally flooded bottomland hardwood forests, impoundments, and croplands. In addition, the Oakwood Unit (an area of 2,263 acres in Desha County transferred from the Farmers Home Administration in 1990) is administered by Overflow NWR. The Oakwood Unit is currently closed to the public and is very passively managed.

About 60% of Overflow NWR is bottomland hardwoods (~8,650 acres), about 15% reforested (~2,020 acres), about 15% wetlands and beaver ponds (~1,500 acres), with the remaining acreage in agriculture (~800 acres) and upland pine-hardwoods (200-300 acres). During the winter, a 4,000-acre greentree reservoir is created when the bottomland hardwood forests are allowed to flood. About 60% of the acreage of the Oakwood Unit is reforested, about 30% is in waterfowl impoundments, and about 10% is bottomland hardwoods.

Pond Creek NWR

Pond Creek NWR, established in 1994, is located in Sevier County, Arkansas, approximately 55 miles north of the city of Texarkana and 142 miles southwest of Little Rock. The refuge protects the largest remaining tract of bottomland hardwoods along the Little River, and extends west from U.S. Highway 71 almost to the Oklahoma state line. Pond Creek bisects the refuge and flows from the northwest to the southeast where it intersects the Cossatot River just upstream from the confluence of the Cossatot/Little Rivers.

Pond Creek NWR consists of 26,292 acres of fee title ownership and public use activities are also managed on an additional ~2,000 acres through various easements. The refuge is located on the floodplain and overflow bottoms formed at the junction of the Little and Cossatot Rivers upstream from Millwood Lake. Generally, the Little River forms the southern boundary of the refuge and the Cossatot River forms the eastern boundary.

The refuge's northern boundary follows the Woodbine escarpment, a relatively low rise that separates the bottoms from the uplands. Pond Creek runs through the middle of the refuge, with approximately half of its watershed within the refuge and many of its south-flowing tributaries reaching into the uplands directly north. Open water covers about 2 percent of the refuge.

Virtually all of the refuge (elevation below 290 feet) is part of the Millwood Lake flood-pool, with the flowage easement held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Furbearer Management Program Goals

Furbearer trapping has been a traditional use throughout southern Arkansas and is an important element of wildlife management programs within the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, as well as, the National Wildlife Refuge System. More than half of all wildlife refuges have used trapping for reasons that include habitat management, facility protection or for recreational, commercial or subsistence opportunities (USFWS 1997). Furbearer trapping on the refuge is considered an important management tool in meeting refuge goals and objectives. Wetland management, dike/levee maintenance, and wildlife management are influenced by furbearer management. The trapping program conducted on the refuge is designed to reduce impacts and damage to refuge facilities, maintain predator populations, and offer a recreation opportunity.

The Service permits trapping of furbearing animals on National Wildlife Refuges where it may contribute to and be compatible with the management objectives of the refuge. The refuge will implement a trapping program for resource management and public-use objectives with the following goals:

- Reduce numbers of beavers, muskrats, nutria and raccoons to limit damage to refuge habitat and adjoining private property.
- Safeguard refuge infrastructure (levees, roads, water control structures) critical to managing habitat for fish and wildlife.
- Provide a traditional recreational use of refuge resources while meeting the purposes of the refuge and mission of the Refuge System.
- Provide quality trapping opportunities that minimize conflict with other public use activities.
- Control exotic invasive species (e.g. nutria).

Furbearer Trapping Program

In Arkansas, 15 species are defined as fur-bearing mammals that may be trapped. Many are considered abundant and are closely monitored by Arkansas Game and Fish Commission resource staff in order to maintain healthy populations (AGFC 2013). Trapping is also highly regulated in the state; several State regulations set standards for animal welfare by limiting when, where, and how animals are taken. The opening of trapping seasons, trapping methods, and other regulations on SARC refuges generally follow regulations established for the state; however, trapping is further restricted by refuge specific regulations identified in each Refuge Public Use Regulations brochure and special conditions identified in the refuge's trapping SUP. Also, refuge management may at any time, before or during the trapping season, halt or limit trapping on the refuge. Information on Arkansas trapping regulations can be found on the following link: <http://www.agfc.com/hunting/pages/huntingfurbearertrappingregulations.aspx> Components of the trapping program are described below.

Special Use Permit for Trapping

Refuge Special Use Permits (SUPs) will be issued to trappers that present an Arkansas State trapping permit at a current fee of \$35.00. Permits will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis and may be limited based on management needs. Trappers must carry the State trapping permit and the SUP while trapping. Conditions of the SUP may be modified as needed; these changes will be made by an addendum which becomes part of the issued SUP. The permit includes terms and conditions of trapping activity and requires each permit holder to keep a trapping log. The log will provide the refuge with valuable information on total species taken (target and non-target) and the trapping location and method. This information will assist with building a refuge-specific database for monitoring and future management.

Target Species

Beaver, nutria, and raccoon are abundant refuge-wide and throughout the state of Arkansas. These species have been chosen for management for impacts linked to the well-being of ground-nesting birds, exotic invasive species management and damages caused to refuge infrastructure and habitat resources. Nutria (*Myocastor coypus*) is a large, herbivorous, semiaquatic mammal native to South America; its destructive feeding and burrowing behaviors make this invasive species a pest in several states throughout the U.S., including south Arkansas.

Trap Type and Check Frequency

The refuge permits legal traps, snares and techniques identified by AGFC as permissible land-set and water-set traps. General regulations per AGFC and refuge trapping regulations include, but are not limited to:

- Non-drowning sets with foothold traps, snares and box traps must be checked daily. Kill traps must be checked at least every 72 hours.
- Foothold traps must be smooth-jawed.
- Foothold traps on land must have a jaw spread no greater than 6 inches (measured from the inside edge at the dog).
- Foothold traps in water sets must have a jaw spread no greater than 8 1/2 inches (measured from the inside edge at the dog).
- Foothold traps with a jaw spread greater than 5 inches (measured from the inside edge at the dog) must have offset or rubber-padded jaws.
- Body-gripping traps on land must have a jaw spread no greater than 6 inches.
- Body-gripping traps in water sets must have a jaw spread no greater than 10 inches.

Handling Incidental Take

If a non-target species (e.g. animal that is not authorized to be trapped under a special use permit) is found alive and in satisfactory condition, it is encouraged in the special conditions that the animal be released if it can be done in a safe manner. Animals found dead or mortally injured will be immediately disposed of in accordance with State regulations if applicable. Incidental take of any animal also requires the permittee to document the take on the daily log.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Furbearer Populations

Refuge staff will use information from daily logs to compile and summarize harvest data. This information will be included in a Trapping Report that is used for management purposes and shared with respective resources agencies. The refuge will also support research of furbearer populations in conjunction with AGFC wildlife biologists, universities, and other organizations.

Law Enforcement Reporting and Revocation of Privileges

Refuge law enforcement and management will evaluate and make an appropriate judgment if a permittee fails to comply with any of the refuge special conditions associated with a Trapping SUP. Terms of revocation will be included in the SUP provided to each permittee. Possible actions may include: a) revocation of existing permits; b) refusal of future trapping privileges; and c) refusal of other privileges requiring a SUP.

Refuge Access

Parking lots, ATV/UTV trail access points, refuge roads and boat ramps provide access throughout the refuges and are identified in each of the refuge's Public Use Regulations brochure. All licensed vehicles are restricted to existing county roads or designated refuge access roads unless special provisions are made in a SUP. Utility and all-terrain vehicles are permitted in accordance with refuge specific regulations. Access by boat is permitted on waters adjacent to, and within lands owned by the refuge and in accordance with refuge specific regulations.

Orientation and Safety

Orientation to refuge lands is provided through signs, brochures, websites and maps. The refuge does not require specific orientation or safety training for individuals participating in general trapping activities; however, the state of Arkansas has requirements for trapper education and safety training (e.g. hunter education) and offers an annual course schedule.

Entry and Access Procedures

There are no special entry or access procedures for trappers using the refuge with the exception of designated seasonally closed areas (e.g. sanctuaries) and permanently closed areas. The closed area restriction reduces the extent of disturbance to waterfowl and other wildlife by human activities during the trapping season, thus enhancing the ability of the refuge to provide secure resting and feeding areas for migrating waterfowl and other wildlife. Other closed areas may include administrative areas. When necessary, designated closed areas may be open to trapping on a very limited basis and with restrictions and special conditions identified on the refuge SUP. All closed areas are described and identified in the refuge's Public Use Regulations brochure.

Trapping Report

During the trapping season, the permittee is required to keep a Trapping Report (Appendix B) which will provide a record of all animals (target and non-target) taken and the number of traps used. Trapping Reports must be returned to the refuge office no longer than 30-days after the end of the refuge trapping season. Data from the logs will be compiled and summarized following the close of the trapping season and used by the refuge to monitor furbearer harvest.

V. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Components necessary to implement the Trapping Plan include monitoring and evaluation, plan review and revision, funding and coordination with AGFC.

Monitoring and Evaluation (Biological Conflicts)

Refuge staff will coordinate with AGFC and other wildlife resource professionals to ensure that the refuge trapping program will not adversely impact species populations. These monitoring activities include direct observation of populations, consultation with state and federal resource specialists, trapping reports and review of current species survey information and research. Land use changes, habitat condition, management objectives, invasive species, floods, disease outbreaks, and climate may alter expected outcomes; monitoring will be critical to detecting and reacting to such change. As a result, refuge management could limit or exclude trapping activities on portions of the refuge to avoid conflicts related to biological resources.

Plan Review and Revision

Public uses are developed to complement each other and reduce conflict. Wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, interpretation, hunting and fishing are current activities at the refuge. No conflicts are expected but if conflicts arise, refuge management may limit uses to minimize conflict and ensure public safety. As noted above, environmental change and unforeseen effects may call for changes in the plan. Periodically, refuge staff and resource partners will review the effectiveness of the Trapping Plan and make revisions as needed. The annual refuge trapping report (assembled from the trappers Trapping Reports) will also provide year-to-year feedback from trappers on plan effectiveness and any emerging issues.

Funding & Staffing Requirements

The Trapping Plan is designed to be administered with minimal refuge resources. The annual costs of enforcing a trapping program on the refuge come out of the refuge's annual budget. Expenses include boundary posting, signage, brochures, parking lot/facility maintenance, gate installation, trail maintenance and permit activities.

Law Enforcement and Coordination with Partners

Law enforcement of refuge and State trapping regulations, trespass and other public use violations associated with management of the refuge is the responsibility of commissioned Refuge Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs). State commissioned AGFC Conservation Officers also assist LEOs in enforcing refuge regulations. On-going coordination and communication is conducted by all officers throughout the year.

VI. REFERENCES

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. 2013. Strategic Furbearer Management Plan.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1982. Trapping. Refuge Manual. 7 RM 15.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. Mammal Trapping within National Wildlife Refuges 1992-1996; U.S. Dept. of Interior, Arlington VA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2010. Felsenthal and Overflow National Wildlife Refuges Comprehensive Conservation Plan, p.g. 29.

APPENDIX A: Special Conditions

South Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex Special Conditions

These Special Conditions may be revised as necessary by the Refuge Manager when conditions change or new information is obtained.

South Arkansas Refuge Complex Permitted Trapping Special Use Conditions

1. See Refuge Public Use brochure for the official trapping season dates.
2. Trappers must meet Arkansas state license requirements and possess a Special Use Permit for trapping on the refuge. Trappers shall carry on their person the required State and Federal licenses and permits while trapping and when requested to do so, present them to any Federal or State Officer. Permits are not transferable. Trapping on Felsenthal NWR will be done in accordance to all state and federal regulations.
3. The area open for trapping includes the entire refuge except for the waterfowl sanctuary which is closed to all entry as is stated in current Refuge Public Use Brochure.
4. The use of any form of sight bait (visual attractant) is prohibited.
5. Traps must be checked daily during daylight hours only.
6. During the refuge hunt seasons, trappers may possess firearms legal for that hunt only.
7. Every effort will be made to prevent the capture of non-target species. However, if any wildlife species other than those authorized is found in a trap alive in a satisfactory condition, it shall be immediately released. Non-target species found dead or seriously injured in the traps shall be disposed of as designated by the Refuge Project Leader.
8. Permittee shall submit a written report of trap-take of both target and non-target species or a negative report to the refuge office within 30 days of the conclusion of trapping season. The capture of all non-target species, regardless of condition, must be reported. Trappers should also immediately report the presence of diseased animals to the Refuge Office, (870) 364-3167.
9. See Refuge Brochure Permit for regulation on motorized vehicles.

Failure of the permittee to comply with any of these Special Conditions, with the State or Federal law, or special refuge regulations will be sufficient cause for refusal of future Special Use Permits being granted to the permitted party.

APPENDIX B: Trapping Report



**SOUTH ARKANSAS REFUGE COMPLEX
TRAPPING REPORT**

PERMITTEE'S NAME _____
 REFUGE PERMIT NUMBER _____
 DATE SUBMITTED _____
 NUMBER OF DAYS TRAPPED _____
 AVERAGE NUMBER OF TRAPS USED _____
 RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS

| Target Species | Number Harvested |
|----------------|------------------|
| Badger | |
| Beaver | |
| Bobcat | |
| Coyote | |
| Gray Fox | |
| Mink | |
| Muskrat | |
| Nutria | |
| Opossum | |
| Otter | |
| Raccoon | |
| Skunk | |
| Weasel | |
| | |
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| | |

| Non-Target Species | Number Trapped |
|--------------------|----------------|
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**Complete and return this report to Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge Office no later than 30 days after the trapping season ends.
 Felsenthal NWR
 5531 Hwy 82 West Crossett, AR 71635**

