

Public Involvement on Kootenai NWR Hunt Plan Amendment
January 2013

The refuge posted the hunt plan amendment on the refuge website on December 5, 2012 and sent emails to a 65-person email list, including Boundary County Commissioners, and a press release to the local newspaper, the Bonners Ferry Herald. We also mailed the amendment to the Jennifer Porter, Chair of Kootenai Tribe of Idaho. We posted the announcement in the refuge kiosks. Copies of the draft documents were made available at the refuge office. The comment period ended on January 7, 2013.

We received five comments from the following groups or individuals:

Rob Fredericks and Mimi Feuling
Mike Gondek
Harlow "Bud" McConnaughey
Ken Roberts
Jon Meadows and Kootenai Valley Sportsman Association

We shared early versions of the proposed ADA deer hunt with Idaho Department of Fish and Game Panhandle Regional Supervisor Charles "Chip" Corsi who provided insightful suggestions. We incorporated many of these into the Hunt Plan Amendment.

The following topics were mentioned in the comments received from the public on the Hunt Plan Amendment:

furbearer trapping; changing the name from "refuge" to "wildlife management area;"
proposed viewing platform; waterfowl hunting changes (buffer, safety, retrieval zone size
and grain); big game hunting changes

1) Establish a recreational trapping opportunity for aquatic furbearers.

Thank you for your comment. Kootenai NWR did not consider developing a recreational trapping program in the recently completed Comprehensive Conservation Plan (2011). It is something we could consider in the future but is outside the scope of the Hunt Plan Amendment and its implementation.

2) Change the name of the refuge to Kootenai National Wildlife Management Area.

Legislation would be required to change the name of the refuge. Refuges are named when established by law, proclamation, executive order, agreement, public land order, donation document, or administrative memorandum. Renaming the refuge is outside the scope of the Hunt Plan Amendment.

3) Building a wildlife viewing platform is not necessary and too expensive for infrequent use.

The proposed wildlife viewing platform, although included on the map in the Hunt Plan Amendment, is not part of the Hunt Plan Amendment implementation.

4) Why are waterfowl hunters limited to 25 shells per day?

Many refuges and other hunting areas regulate the number of shotgun shells a hunter may possess to reduce the potential for unsportsmanlike behavior including excessive or indiscriminant shooting which can lead to increased wounding of birds that are not retrievable. It may also reduce the potential for a hunter to take shots beyond the effective range of their shotgun. Hunters who take long shots are more likely to cripple vs. kill the bird.

5) Two comments mentioned the proposed waterfowl hunt buffer zone. One said, "We do not believe the proposed 200 yard buffer along the western edge of the Auto Route is at all necessary. The Retrieval Zone along this same area will serve as the buffer." Another suggested a smaller buffer of 100 or 150 yards.

We are not proposing to add an additional 200-yard buffer along the western edge of the Auto Tour. We are proposing to have a consistent 200-yard buffer (or retrieval, safety, no shooting) zone to protect visitors using both the Auto Tour and Deep Creek Trail. Please refer to Figure 2, the Hunt Program Amendment Map. Hunters may retrieve birds in this zone but are not allowed to shoot any weapons while in the buffer (AKA safety or retrieval zone). The buffer acreage is not counted as active hunting acreage although waterfowl hunters may enter to retrieve downed birds.

6) Maintain unharvested grain in both the hunt and nonhunt areas.

Typically we grow about the same acreage in the hunt and non-hunt areas and it is never harvested.

7) Allow retrieval of wounded grouse (and other animals) from sanctuary area if no firearms, hunting dogs, or vehicles are allowed in the area.

Sanctuary areas are closed to hunting and disturbance from other public uses and may be where wounded animals run after being shot. We discourage pursuit of a wounded animal in the sanctuary area due to disturbance to other sensitive species as well as disturbance to waterfowl hunters, depending on the season, area. In addition, the pursuit of a wounded animal would constitute hunting in a close area particularly if it would need to be dispatched.

8) Concur with the elimination of upland bird and big game hunting west of Westside Road due to safety risks and poaching potential.

Thank you for your comment.

9) Concur with the proposed changes in the Hunt Plan Amendment.

Thank you for your comment.

10) Is the proposed requirement to use non-toxic, non-lead ammunition for the ADA deer hunts a state law? Seems extreme to make this a requirement for rifles, handguns, muzzleloaders, and shotgun slugs.

The State of Idaho does not require use of non-lead ammunition for any big game hunts. Refuges may require use of non-toxic ammunition to prevent raptors or other non-target species that may scavenge from a carcass containing lead fragments. Scavengers readily ingest the fragments with the meat. Alternatives to lead are available and effective. Also, modern firearm rifles will not be allowed for this special deer hunt.

11) Do not allow hunting of anything other than waterfowl on the bottom land portion of the refuge due to potential disturbance to waterfowl. Since the refuge was purchased with Duck Stamps funds, its management priority should be waterfowl hunting.

While we do not believe that a single deer hunter located in a blind will constitute a significant disruption to waterfowl, we plan to monitor this new ADA deer hunt for any undue disturbance. Mobile hunters are likely to be more disturbing to waterfowl than hunters located in a fixed blind. The proposed location of the blind for this hunt is west of the grass field and east of the Myrtle Creek Dike. Waterfowl do not commonly use this area. If we find there is substantial disturbance we can alter or discontinue the hunt.

The first priority for every refuge is to conserve, manage, and restore fish and wildlife habitats. Hunting is one of six public uses that the Refuge Administration Act, as amended, identified as having priority on refuges along with wildlife observation, wildlife photography, fishing, interpretation, and environmental education. All of these uses, if determined to be compatible, are to have equal consideration. We applaud the role that waterfowl hunters play in supporting wildlife conservation including the purchase of Duck Stamps.