

Recreational Hunting  
Decision Document Package

for

**WACCAMAW NWR**

DRAFT

**Contents**

1. Hunting Plan

**RECREATIONAL HUNTING PLAN**

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

WACCAMAW NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

JANUARY 2012

Recommended by \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Refuge Manager

Reviewed by \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
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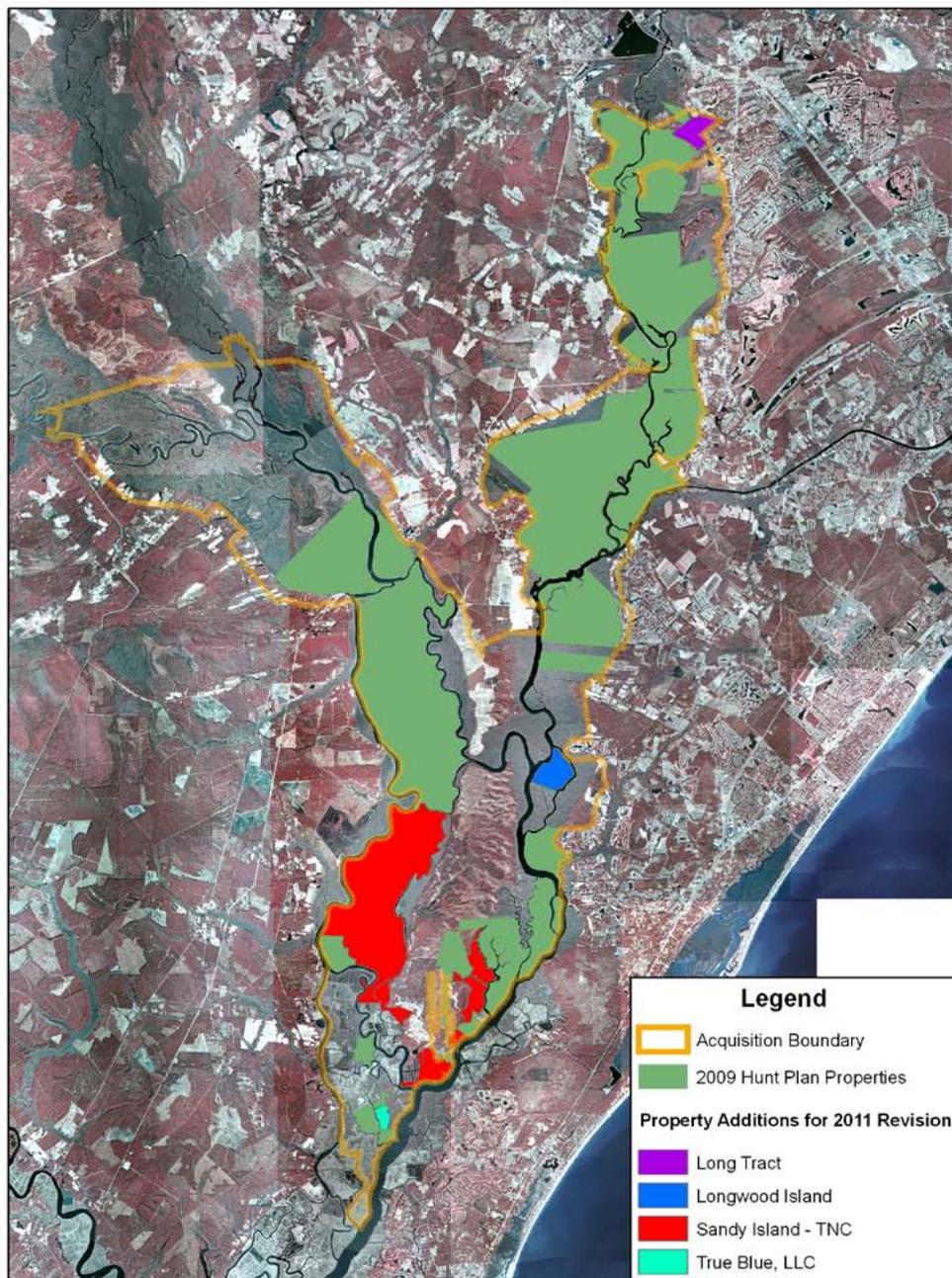
Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Director

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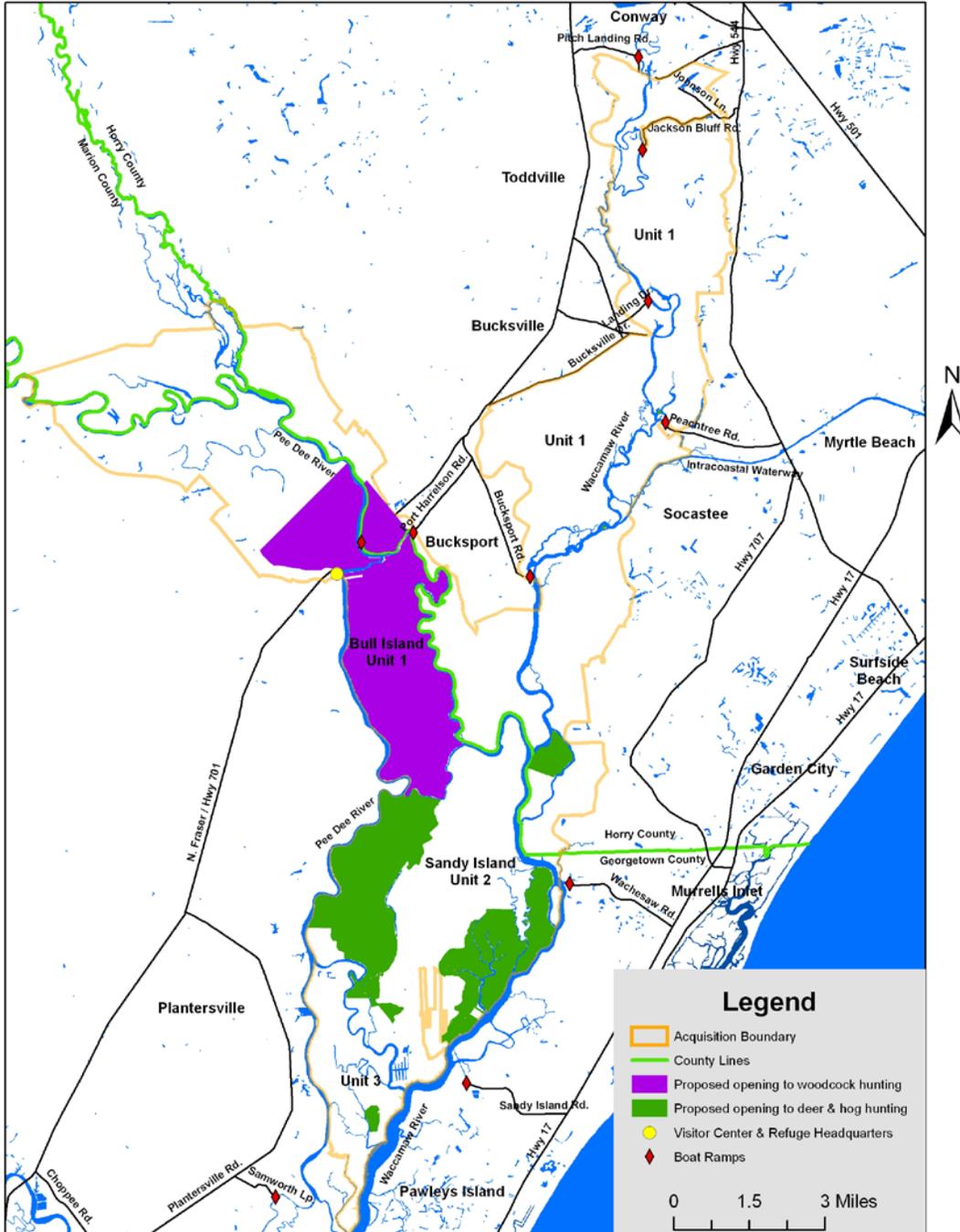
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## Newly Acquired or Leased Refuge Tracts Since 2009 Waccamaw NWR Recreational Hunting Management Plan





# Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge Proposed Hunted Species Additions



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## I. INTRODUCTION

Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was established in December, 1997 to provide and protect habitat for a natural diversity of wetland dependent wildlife associated with the Waccamaw and the Great and Little Pee Dee River floodplain basins. Located in portions of Horry, Georgetown, and Marion Counties, the Refuge's 55,522 acre acquisition boundary includes large sections of the Waccamaw and Great Pee Dee Rivers and a small section of the Little Pee Dee River.

The Refuge area was first identified in the early 1980s as containing a critically important migratory bird habitat that should be preserved. It was included in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Atlantic -Eastern Gulf Coast Migratory Bird Preservation Plan (USFWS 1982) and the Preservation of Black Duck Wintering Habitat Plan (USFWS 1985a). In addition, the Refuge area was identified as one of the top priorities for protection in the Service's Southeast Regional Wetlands Concept Plan (USFWS 1992a), which was prepared as part of the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan that was developed at the request of congress in the emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986. The refuge area is also located in the heart of the Winyah Bay Focus Area (WBFA), an important conservation priority of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The WBFA encompasses 525,000 acres in the lower drainage of the Black, Great and Little Pee Dee, Sampit, and Waccamaw Rivers and has gained national attention for the conservation partnerships which have afforded permanent protection on over 130,000 acres within the focus area boundary.

The wetland diversity of the Refuge is what sets it apart from most others found along the east coast. Wetland habitats range from historic tidal rice fields, to black-water and alluvial floodplain forested wetlands of the Waccamaw and Great Pee Dee Rivers. These tidal freshwater wetlands are some of the most diverse freshwater wetland systems found in North America and they offer many important habitats for migratory birds, fish, and resident wildlife. Avian species such as the swallow-tailed kite, osprey, white ibis, prothonotary warbler, and many species of waterfowl can be observed on a seasonal basis. Additionally, the diversity of these wetland habitats provides important habitats for numerous species of large and small mammals, reptiles, and fish species.

Three federally listed endangered wildlife species occur in the approved Refuge boundary and include the wood stork, red-cockaded woodpecker, and shortnose sturgeon. An Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation has been completed on this proposed hunt plan.

The Refuge's acquisition boundary is divided into three management units. Each unit is defined by a dominant habitat type and consequently requires unit-specific management goals and objectives. Unit 1 is approximately 34,800 acres and is made up entirely of alluvial and black-water floodplain forested wetlands. Unit 2 encompasses Sandy Island and totals 9,144 acres. Most of the acreage in this unit, 6,166 acres, is upland longleaf pine forest with the remaining acreage being made up primarily of tidal forested and emergent wetlands. Unit 3 is

approximately 11,000 acres and is made up of historic tidal rice fields, many of which remain intact and are managed today for wintering waterfowl.

The USFWS is actively acquiring lands within the acquisition boundary from willing sellers. Funding and authorization for Refuge land acquisition was provided primarily through the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 and more recently through Migratory Bird Conservation Commission funding. The Refuge currently owns or leases over 26,000 acres within the boundary.

## **II. CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

The federally legislated purposes for which the Refuge was established are “(1) protect and manage diverse habitat components within and important coastal river ecosystem for the benefit of endangered and threatened species, freshwater and anadromous fish, migratory birds, and forest wildlife, including a wide array of plants and animals associated with bottomland hardwood habitats; and (2) provide compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation & photography, and environmental education & interpretation for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Establishing authorities include Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, Endangered Species Act of 1973, The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act, and the Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

The Refuge Administration Act of 1962 (16 U.S.C. 460K) 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 primary objectives for which the area was established. In addition, the Refuge Recreation Act requires that funds are available for the development, operation, and maintenance of the permitted forms of recreation. In addition to the Refuge Administration Act, the Refuge Recreation Act and the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Improvement Act) also provide the legal basis for holding public hunts on National Wildlife Refuges (NWR’s).

This plan supports the priority public use provisions of the Improvement Act. Hunting, as specified in this plan, is a wildlife-dependent recreational use and the law states that as such, it “shall receive priority consideration in national wildlife refuge planning and management.” The Secretary of Interior may permit hunting on a refuge if he/she determines that such use is compatible with the refuge purpose for which it was established and the hunting program would not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the purposes of the refuge or mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (603 FW).

Recreational hunting on the Refuge has been determined to be an appropriate public use which is compatible with the purpose for which the Refuge was established. This determination is based upon the thorough public analysis of Refuge purpose(s) during the Environmental Impact

Statement (EIS) process for the establishment of the Refuge (Waccamaw NWR FEIS April 1997). Furthermore, hunting was identified as a compatible public use by the Interim Compatibility Determination and the Conceptual Management Plan, both of which were incorporated into the Refuge Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

In 2003, a Refuge hunt plan was developed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) which requires that an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Section 7 consultation are completed before completing a Compatibility Determination to open Refuge lands to a new public use. Since then, the hunt plan has been updated annually, however in 2007 the Refuge hunt plan and EA were expanded to include cumulative impacts of hunting throughout the National Wildlife Refuge System. Hunting was further evaluated in 2008 in the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) which is a long-term comprehensive planning document that includes public comment and input throughout the planning process.

The CCP is an all-encompassing public process through which the Refuge examines past and present management plans and then determines top management priorities to set the course for future management decisions. Within this document, all existing and proposed public uses are evaluated by using the decision process directed by NEPA including completing an Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation, Wilderness Review, and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). In addition to NEPA guidance, the CCP also includes public use reviews which are required by the Improvement Act. The Refuge completed a Finding of Appropriateness of a Refuge Use and Compatibility Determinations on all public uses including hunting before final approval was given for all of the proposed Refuge uses. During the CCP process, numerous public comments were received in support of the Refuge acquiring more land as well as including hunting on newly acquired parcels. Furthermore, hunting was identified as one of the purposes for which the Refuge was established and it was first determined to be a compatible public use in the Interim Compatibility Determination (ICD) and in the Conceptual Management Plan (CMP).

Refuge hunts will be managed similar to South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (State) Wildlife Management Areas and Heritage Trust Preserves. Annual coordination meetings are held with the State to insure that all Refuge hunt regulations are in compliance with State statutes and authorities.

### **III. STATEMENT OF GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

The purposes for which the Refuge was established as outlined in the CCP are to:

- Protect and manage diverse habitat components within an important coastal river ecosystem for the benefit of indigenous species, anadromous fish, migratory birds, and forest wildlife, including a wide array of plants and animals associated with bottomland hardwood habitats; and

- Provide compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation & photography, and environmental education & interpretation for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Additionally, the Refuge has operated under the following management goals:

- Provide habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors, neotropical migratory birds, and resident species;
- Provide opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation & photography, and environmental education & interpretation;
- Protect, restore, and enhance the biodiversity of aquatic resources, wetlands, and their associated habitats on a landscape scale;
- Protect, enhance, and manage migratory bird populations and the habitats upon which they depend;
- Manage National Wildlife Refuges to serve as models for effective conservation of natural resources; and
- Increase and enhance public awareness, support, and participation to carry out the Service's mission through cooperative outreach efforts.

#### **IV. ASSESSMENT**

##### **A. Compatibility with Refuge Objectives**

Recreational hunting as authorized by the federal regulations listed above will not interfere with the primary purpose for which the Refuge was established. This determination is based upon a thorough public analysis of Refuge purpose(s) during the FEIS process for the establishment of the Refuge published in April 1997.

Included within the FEIS, are the CMP and the ICD, both of which address the anticipated allowance of recreational hunting prior to the establishment of the Refuge. Within the CMP, it is stated that "Recreational hunting of waterfowl, small game, and white-tailed deer will be permitted within the framework of state and federal regulations and licensing requirements." The ICD describes ongoing wildlife-dependent recreational activities occurring on lands to be acquired as part of the proposed Refuge and determines if they are compatible with the purpose for which the proposed refuge will be established. One of four uses covered by the ICD is recreational hunting of big game, small game, and migratory and resident birds in accordance with State regulations.

The Refuge hunting program, as designated in the CCP, is a strategy for allowing hunting as a primary use of the Refuge in an effort to provide opportunities for quality, wildlife-dependent public uses, leading to greater understanding and enjoyment of fish, wildlife, and habitats contained within the WBFA. The program is a tool that the Refuge uses to fulfill several of its goals and objectives as outlined in the CCP including:

- Supporting national and regional plans and promoting management actions that will support viable populations of native fish and wildlife species associated with blackwater and alluvial forested wetlands with special emphasis on migratory birds, black bear, and threatened and endangered species
- Conserve, manage, and enhance natural diversity, abundance, and ecological functions of Refuge habitats in support of national and regional plans, with special emphasis on managing towards old growth bottomland forest habitats; and
- Providing opportunities for quality, wildlife-dependent public uses, leading to greater understanding and enjoyment of fish, wildlife, and habitats contained within the Winyah Bay Focus Area;

## **B. Biological Assessment**

### **Hunted Wildlife**

#### **Migratory Game Birds**

Waterfowl hunting has been a rich tradition in the Refuge area. The Refuge acquisition boundary lies in the heart of the WBFA and encompasses a rich diversity of waterfowl habitats from vast spans of forested wetlands to tidal emergent wetlands in the lower half of the Refuge acquisition boundary. These tidal emergent wetlands make up an extensive portion of once forested wetlands that were cleared in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century for rice production, and are now managed waterfowl habitats.

Waterfowl hunting occurs throughout the Refuge acquisition boundary along public thoroughfares that bisect private and public lands as well as a portion of bottomland alluvial forests in Unit 1. These areas are hydrologically dependent on natural annual flooding associated with the Great Pee Dee River and consequently may not offer suitable waterfowl hunting opportunities on a consistent basis. Due to many limiting factors, waterfowl hunting within the designated hunting area has been minimal. In addition, due to a shortage of quality public hunting areas in the WBFA, hunters most often congregate around managed waterfowl habitats and hunter success is generally very low due to a high level of disturbance resulting from the high density of hunters. In recent years, the disturbance levels have reached such an intensity that it is being considered as one of the primary reasons that wintering waterfowl numbers are

declining in the WBFA. One of the primary objectives of the Refuge is to create and enhance waterfowl habitats on Refuge owned lands. The Refuge currently manages over 26,000 acres, many of which contain important migratory waterfowl habitats. Of the total acreage, 20,131 acres (76%) are closed to waterfowl hunting.

Snipe frequently occur in high enough concentrations on Refuge lands to provide moderate to high levels of hunting success. These seasonal concentrations only occur in the tidal emergent wetlands associated with Unit 3 and are most often associated with food availability as a result of soil disturbance by feral hogs. Hunting for snipe is allowed on the Refuge in tracts of tidal wetlands within Unit 3. Snipe hunting occurs after the close of waterfowl season and non toxic shot is required.

Woodcock frequent river bottom habitats throughout the Refuge boundary. The number of woodcock using these habitats is influenced by weather and flood events and population numbers are high enough to provide moderate to high levels of hunting success depending on access. Tracts along the Great Pee Dee River provide some of the best opportunities for walk-in access and these are the parcels being opened to woodcock hunting. As more land is acquired along the Great Pee Dee River, hunter access may be improved which may improve hunter success. Areas proposed to be opened to woodcock are currently open to limited waterfowl hunting and additional disturbance is not likely to increase by adding a woodcock hunt.

## **Big Game**

### **White-tailed Deer**

White-tailed Deer harvest is essential to maintain the herd at or below habitat carrying capacity on Refuge lands. Overpopulation leads to starvation, increased car-deer collisions, and poor overall herd health. Deer herd health checks are conducted every five years on the Refuge by the Southeast Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS) in Georgia. Based on the most recent deer population health evaluation conducted by SCWDS on July 25, 2005, any significant increase in the overall deer population density, would likely result in declines to population health due to density-dependent parasitism and malnutrition. In addition to poor herd health, deer overpopulation results in overbrowsing which can completely change the plant composition of a forest and consequently alter future regeneration.

White-tailed deer occur on all lands within the acquisition boundary, in moderate to high densities, depending on seasonal food availability and habitat conditions. These variables may differ within specific Refuge units and will be considered when adjusting annual hunting regulations. The entire Refuge acquisition boundary has been traditionally hunted in accordance with State regulations for private lands prior to either State or federal acquisition. Based on habitat and herd health assessments for Refuge managed lands, white-tailed deer populations are presently at elevated levels. Deer hunting will take place on Refuge lands where tracts are large enough to allow safe, responsible hunting opportunities in accordance with State and Refuge

regulations. Refuge specific regulations on white-tailed deer hunting may vary between units based on habitat and wildlife management needs listed above.

### **Feral Hogs**

Feral hogs are an extremely invasive non-native species. They can harbor several infectious diseases, some of which can be fatal to native wildlife. By rooting and wallowing, feral hogs destroy wildlife habitat. Damage includes erosion along waterways and wetlands and the loss of native plants. Additionally, feral hogs compete directly for food with native species such as deer, bears, turkeys, squirrels and many other birds and mammals. They are predators of reptiles, small mammals including deer fawns, as well as ground-nesting birds such as turkey and quail.

Feral hogs are an increasing problem both on Refuge lands and adjoining privately owned lands. They occur in all three units of the acquisition boundary. However, they are most abundant in Unit 3 where they thrive in tidal emergent marshes. Hunting of feral hogs provides the Refuge with another management tool in reducing this detrimental species, and at the same time, is widely enjoyed by local hunters. Special hunts may be allowed throughout the year as needed to control this species. Use of dogs to hunt hogs will be considered if other methods of hunting do not provide an adequate measure of control on hog populations.

### **Wild Turkey**

Eastern wild turkey occurs throughout the Refuge acquisition boundary. Biologists with the State have been monitoring wild turkey populations throughout South Carolina and have actively restored populations in all historic ranges throughout the state. Based on data generated from mandatory hunter reporting and monitored successes of the overall restocking program, the local turkey population has withstood hunting on surrounding private lands for several years without a negative cumulative effect on turkey populations. In addition to this data, the Refuge has coordinated with the State to gather information on hunter success rates and impacts on local populations of turkeys associated with youth hunts that are permitted on State lands in similar habitat types. Based on this information, the Refuge should not adversely impact the population if lands are acquired which will provide an opportunity for turkey hunting.

### **Small Game (Gray squirrel, Raccoon, Opossum)**

Although no studies have been conducted on small game within the Refuge, studies have been conducted within and outside of South Carolina to determine the effects of hunting on the population dynamics of small game. Results have consistently shown that small game, such as raccoons and gray squirrels, are minimally affected by hunting but greatly affected by limited food resources.

## **Non-hunted Wildlife**

### **Black Bear**

One of the Refuge's major objectives is to target refuge acquisition and habitat restoration efforts within wetland corridors to improve connectivity between bear populations. There are two populations of the American black bear in South Carolina, one located in the mountainous region and the other in the northern coastal plain. The coastal population, conservatively estimated at 200-300 bears, occurs primarily in Georgetown and Horry counties. The population on the Refuge is unknown, but presently deemed to be relatively low. Black bears need large expanses of forest interspersed with early-successional areas which provide food and escape cover. Early-successional areas also furnish a backup source of food during poor mast-producing years. A minimum of 5,000 acres of such habitat is required before bear management practices may be of any benefit. The Refuge and surrounding wild lands more than meet this minimum requirement and protecting corridors between larger patches of habitat will be essential to conserving bear populations in fast-growing Georgetown and Horry counties. In an effort to conserve these migration corridors and genetic diversity & viability, bear hunting will not be permitted on the Refuge.

### **American Alligator**

The American alligator occurs throughout wetland areas of the Refuge, though in comparatively low numbers with other areas of the county. Alligators are most common in managed wetlands in Unit 3 however they are seen in the rivers and creeks that run through the Refuge. Alligators play a significant ecological role within the Refuge because they are one of the primary apex predators found within the Refuge. Large alligators (over 6 feet in length) help control small and large mammal populations including raccoon and feral hogs. Additionally, older age alligators help reduce the overall alligator population by preying on smaller alligators. Alligator numbers within the Refuge that are in the older age class is relatively low and therefore alligator hunting on Refuge lands is prohibited.

### **Small Game**

Bobwhite quail, dove, mink, beaver, coyote, bobcat, muskrat, otter, skunk, weasel, rails, coot, gallinule, ruffed grouse, crow, fox squirrels, cottontail rabbits, and marsh rabbits do not occur in numbers to adequate support hunting on Refuge lands. If lands are acquired in the future that offer better opportunities, then hunting will be considered unless it conflicts with other management strategies.

### **C. Economic Feasibility**

Many of the annual hunt administration costs including salary, equipment, boundary signs, and maintenance, are also costs associated with other management activities that would be required whether hunting is permitted or not. The cost for hunt brochures, boundary signs, and law enforcement are the primary costs directly associated with hunting. In the case of law enforcement, annual costs are equal or slightly reduced because constant patrols are no longer necessary as was required prior to opening the Refuge to hunting. One full-time employee (FTE) is expended in conducting hunt-related activities during the active hunting seasons. Annual appropriations for the Refuge are adequate to meet the goals and objectives of the hunting program and it is anticipated that future funding at current levels would continue to be sufficient to continue the current and proposed hunting program on the Refuge.

### **D. Relationship with other Refuge Programs**

The proposed hunts are structured in such a way as to offer a quality hunting experience while achieving wildlife management goals and objectives. Big game, waterfowl, and small game hunts are alternated to avoid conflicts between the different hunting interest groups. Refuge areas that offer other public uses such as fishing, wildlife observation & photography, and environmental education & interpretation, are either closed to these uses during the hunts or are closed year round to hunting to avoid any conflicts between hunters and these other public use groups.

### **E. Recreational Opportunity**

Allowing hunting on newly acquired Refuge lands will provide additional opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation. Access is limited on most of the Refuge due to the nature of Refuge habitats. In an effort to increase public use, the Refuge has placed great emphasis on developing quality public recreation areas that are closed to hunting to better serve these special interest groups. For example, the Cox Ferry Lake Recreation Area (CFLRA), a 340-acre recreation area in the northeastern corner of the Refuge has been closed to hunting in an effort to provide year-round opportunities for fishing, wildlife observation & photography, and environmental education & interpretation. With the help of private and public grants, visitor enhancement facilities including a trail network, boardwalk, picnic shelters, overlooks, & kiosks have all been developed on the recreation area. Additionally, the Refuge recently acquired an additional 250 acres adjacent to the CFLRA which is also closed to hunting and will provide additional recreational opportunities.

## **V. DESCRIPTION OF HUNTING PROGRAM**

### **A. General**

Hunting in South Carolina is regulated by pertinent State regulations. All pertinent laws and regulations contained in these codes will apply to the Refuge hunting program. Annual consultation with the State will continue prior to the finalizing of its regulations to ensure that any changes are properly coordinated. In addition to State licensing requirements, Refuge hunt permits will be required for all hunts. These permits will be available free of charge and can be obtained through Refuge facilities or participating local distributors. Seasons and bag limits may be more restrictive but not more liberal than those set by the State.

### **B. Areas Open to Hunting**

An area must be properly posted or depicted on the Refuge hunt brochure map and the boundary line clearly marked before it is open to hunting. At present, all posted areas will be open to hunting unless otherwise posted as a “Closed Area” or “No Hunting Zone”. The Refuge is divided into three distinct hunting units. Unit 1 is primarily comprised of forested floodplain wetlands of the Great Pee Dee and Waccamaw Rivers. Unit 2 is Sandy Island and associated forested and/or diked managed wetlands. Unit 3 primarily consists of a mix of tidal non-functional historic ricefields and functionally intact managed wetlands. Hunting seasons and regulations will be separate for each unit to allow for unit-specific wildlife management needs.

### **C. Species to be Hunted**

Species addressed in this plan to be hunted include migratory birds (snipe, woodcock, & waterfowl), small game (gray squirrel, raccoon, & opossum), and big game (deer, feral hogs, & turkey). Refuge hunts vary by specific units and are set to allow for other management objectives to be met. All hunts will fall within the state season. Either-sex hunting will be allowed when the Refuge hunt overlaps a State designated either-sex day or by using State issued antlerless deer tags or a combination of the two. Feral hogs will be allowed to be taken during Refuge deer hunts and during a special season in the spring. Legal weapons would be limited to those permitted for the coinciding deer hunt. Enforcement of hunt regulations is primarily carried out by the full-time Refuge law enforcement officer, supplemented with assistance from one other Refuge officer when needed. Inadequate access makes the typical game check station impractical and therefore will not be required.

## **VI. MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

### **A. Biological Conflicts**

At present, no biological conflicts are anticipated with any of the types or methods of hunting described in this plan. However, special restrictions such as duration of a hunt or specific area limitations may be used to reduce or prohibit hunting within certain areas of the Refuge where a biological conflict is identified. One example of a potential biological conflict on National Wildlife Refuges is between late fall deer/hog hunting and management goals of a waterfowl management area. This situation is resolved by opening the deer/hog season prior to the arrival of migratory waterfowl. Another potential conflict is the disturbance to non-target species caused by the use of dogs for hunting purposes. Restrictions on the use of dogs will be adjusted to reduce wildlife disturbance while providing for the specific needs of the hunters.

### **B. Public Use Conflicts**

The entire Refuge acquisition boundary has been traditionally used by both private property owners and the general public for a variety of uses, with recreational hunting and fishing being the two primary uses. Most of the lands within Unit 2 and 3 were converted from rice plantations to private waterfowl hunting clubs in the early to mid 1900s. Because of the general difficulty of physically accessing most of the Refuge area, these traditional uses continue to dominate the public use spectrum. Due to the relatively short time periods proposed for the hunts, any other public use conflicts will be of a temporary basis. Modifications to the hunting program may be necessary as other Refuge programs are developed.

Other types of public uses are expected to increase as the public learns more about the Refuge and what it has to offer, such as fishing, wildlife observation & photography, and environmental education & interpretation. These recreational types of activities should not overlap with hunting activities because areas open to hunting are temporarily closed to other public use groups during the hunts. Hunting is not allowed on Sundays so these areas continue to provide limited access during the Refuge hunts. Additionally, areas closed to all hunting, such as the CFLRA, will offer non-hunter user groups access to recreational sites year round. If conflicts arise, management strategies will be implemented to mitigate the problems.

### **C. Administrative Conflicts**

Annual appropriations for the Refuge are adequate to meet the goals and objectives of the hunting program and it is anticipated that future funding at current levels would be sufficient to continue the current and proposed hunting program on the Refuge.

## **VII. CONDUCT OF THE HUNT**

### **A. General Provisions and Access**

The provisions listed below supplement the general regulations which govern the legal use of NWRs and their hunting programs as set forth in Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

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 NWR regulations (50 CFR part 27) and specific Refuge regulations (50 CFR part 32). Discharging firearms or weapons on a NWR is prohibited unless specifically authorized.

A Refuge general hunt permit is required for all hunters and is located on the front of this brochure. This permit along with state hunting licenses and photo identification must be carried at all times while hunting and is not valid until signed & dated by the hunter. By law, National Wildlife Refuges are closed to all recreational activities unless expressly permitted.

Only the hunts listed within this brochure are allowed on the Refuge. Hunting on the Refuge is only allowable in designated areas which are outlined in the attached map. When permitted, hunting, fishing, and other public uses will be in accordance with applicable state regulations and the following special refuge regulations unless otherwise listed.

Entry onto Refuge lands is done wholly and completely at the risk of the individual. Neither the landowner or the Refuge or the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service accepts any responsibility for acts, omissions, activities, or conditions on these lands which cause or may cause personal injury or property damage.

Entry onto Refuge lands constitutes consent to an inspection and search of permits, licenses, hunting equipment, bag limits, vehicles, and their contents by USFWS, State, or local officers.

### **B. Refuge-specific Hunting Regulations:**

#### *Check In*

No check-in is required.

#### *Weapons*

Discharging a weapon for a purpose other than to take legal game animals during established Refuge hunting seasons is prohibited. Discharging any firearm from a boat or vehicle is strictly prohibited (except hunting waterfowl). All firearms must be unloaded and dismantled (or cased) while being transported in a vehicle or boat. Crossbows, blow guns, and poison tipped arrows are prohibited. Only muzzleloading rifles using a single projectile are permitted during muzzleloader hunts.

### *Ammunition*

Non-toxic shot is required when hunting with shotguns with the only exception being slugs. Buckshot is prohibited on all Refuge hunts and may not be in possession at any time while on the Refuge. Use of full metal jacketed bullets or rimfire ammunition during big game hunts is prohibited.

### *Refuge/Cultural and Historic Resources*

All federally owned property including natural, historic, and archeological features are protected by Federal Law. Searching for or the removal of objects of antiquity or other historic value is strictly prohibited.

### *Season Dates & Bag Limits*

Season dates and bag limits are set each year following a coordination meeting between the State and Refuge. Seasons and bag limits may be more restrictive but not more liberal than those set by the State.

### *Closed Areas and Times*

Designated areas will be closed seasonally to hunting, fishing, and all other public access to provide resource protection and reduce migratory bird disturbance. Other areas may be closed for special management and safety reasons. The Refuge is closed everyday from one hour after sunset until one hour before sunrise except when allowances are made for specific Refuge hunts. Hunters may enter the Refuge no earlier than 5:00 am on hunt days and must leave the Refuge no later than 1 hour after legal sunset except during the State waterfowl season where waterfowl hunting is allowed on the Refuge (see waterfowl regulations.) Areas on the Refuge that are open to hunting will be closed to the general public during big game (deer, turkey and hog) hunts.

### *Intoxicants*

While hunting on the Refuge, no person may consume or be under the influence of intoxicants, including alcohol or drugs. Possession of an open container of alcohol while hunting on the Refuge is prohibited.

### *Permits*

A signed and dated Refuge hunting permit, along with proper State hunting licenses, & photo identification (such as a state issued driver's license) are required for all hunts. All permits and licenses must be in the hunter's possession at all times while hunting on the Refuge.

### *Baiting*

Baiting and/or hunting in the vicinity of bait are prohibited. Baiting includes, but is not limited to, the distribution of grains, feeds, salts, mineral blocks, meats, fruits, & other consumable items.

### *Dogs*

Dogs may be used for waterfowl, woodcock, snipe, raccoon, squirrel, and during special hog hunts. Dogs must be leashed and under control of the owner when not in pursuit of authorized game animals. All dogs are required to wear a collar displaying the owner's name, address, and phone number.

### *Vehicles*

Only legally licensed vehicles are allowed on the Refuge. Vehicles are allowed only on established roads marked open. All other roads may be traveled on foot or by bicycle. The speed limit on all Refuge roads is 15 MPH unless otherwise posted. Vehicles may not block access gates and must be parked off of the road. Use of ATVs and airboats to access Refuge lands is prohibited.

### *Youth Hunting & Hunter Education*

A youth hunter is defined as a hunter under the age of 16. All youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult (21 years or older) who has a valid State hunting license, a Refuge hunt permit, and any applicable stamps in their possession while hunting. Youth hunters are not required to have a State hunting license but must possess a Refuge hunting permit. Sight and voice contact must be maintained at all times. During any Refuge big game hunt an adult may only supervise one youth. Youth hunters participating in a big game hunt on the Refuge and who is not sitting in the same stand as the supervising adult, must show proof of successfully completing a State approved hunter education program and must carry it with them at all times along with the Refuge hunting permit. During small game hunts, each adult may supervise a maximum of two youths. Youth hunters are not required to show proof of a State approved hunter education program for small game hunts but must carry a signed Refuge hunt permit with them at all times.

### *Hunting Stands*

Deer and feral hogs must be hunted from elevated stands. Boats are not considered elevated hunting stands and shooting game (except waterfowl) from a boat is prohibited. Only one portable stand per hunter is permitted and must be clearly marked with the hunter's full name and phone number. Placing deer stands on the Refuge more than 3 days prior to the opening day of a specific hunt is prohibited. All hunting stands must be removed from the Refuge no later than 3 days after each Refuge big game hunt. The use of nails, screws, or bolts to attach a hunting stand to a tree or hunting from a tree where a metal object has been driven to support a hunter is prohibited. Living trees or plants may not be trimmed, cut down, or damaged in any manner. Any stands found within designated hunt areas outside of allowed periods will be confiscated.

### *Tree Marking*

Flagging may be used to mark entry sites from roads or trails and again at the stand site. You may use clothes pins with reflective tape between these sites to mark the route to the stand.

Hunters must label all such markers with their full name and remove them at the end of the hunt.

#### *Man-Driving*

Deer and hog hunting by “man-driving” are prohibited. A man-drive is defined as an organized hunting technique including two or more hunters where an attempt is made to drive game animals from cover to shoot, kill, or move animals towards other hunters.

#### *Prehunt Scouting*

Scouting is allowed all year during daylight hours except during the State waterfowl season. During the waterfowl season, scouting is allowed Monday through Friday only. The possession of firearms on the Refuge outside of designated hunting seasons is subject to regulations outlined in 50 CFR part 27. Game/Trail cameras & other scouting devices are prohibited.

#### *Hunter Orange*

Hunters must wear a hat, coat or vest of solid visible fluorescent orange during all big game hunts (deer, hog) except for wild turkey.

#### *Prohibited Activities*

- Hunting from permanent blinds. Also, portable blinds and decoys must be removed at the end of each day’s hunt.
- Camping, overnight parking, open fires, and littering.
- Using illuminating devices for the purpose of spotlighting deer.
- Game/trail cameras & scouting devices are prohibited on Refuge property.
- Hunting for wildlife on any Refuge unit other than that which is officially opened and posted.
- Entering or discharging a weapon within, into, or across a “No Hunting Zone” or “Closed Area”.
- Hunting on Sunday.
- Hunting or shooting any game (except waterfowl) from a boat.
- Hunting from within 100 feet of any roadway, whether open or closed to vehicular traffic or from within 300 yards of any residence or designated hunter check station is prohibited.
- Destroying or cutting vegetation. The possession of axes, saws, machetes, or other tools used for cutting vegetation are not permitted on the Refuge.

- Man-drives, stalk hunting, dog drives, & hunting near artificially pruned trees.

### **C. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunt**

The public has generally supported the Refuge hunting program with continued requests for more hunting opportunities, more access, and longer seasons. The Refuge is located in a mostly rural area and has a long standing tradition of being hunted while it was in private ownership. Public reaction from surrounding communities to all Refuge hunts has been very favorable and should continue to be the same in the future. Nationally, there are some anti-hunting sentiments, and many organizations are opposed to hunting on National Wildlife Refuges. It is possible that some objections may be voiced to some or all of the hunts within this plan. Additionally, different forms of other recreational uses will likely increase over time as the Refuge becomes more popular and some conflicts may arise between these groups. If these conflicts become a problem, management strategies will be implemented to mitigate these conflicts.

### **D. Hunter Application Procedures**

Hunter application procedures are currently not implemented for any Refuge hunt. In the future, if an application procedure is used for any Refuge hunts, application forms approved by OMB will be used.

### **E. Hunter Selection Process**

At this time, there is no hunter selection process for Refuge hunts. Permits will be issued free of charge to all who request one and are available at the Refuge Visitor Center or participating local distributors. The total number of permits distributed annually will not be restricted unless total hunter numbers create issues that significantly impact Refuge habitats negatively, or new areas are entered into the hunting program that may require tighter control of hunter numbers.

### **F. Media Selection for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunt**

The Refuge maintains a contact list of local media outlets including newspapers, radio stations, & television stations. News releases will be developed announcing the hunting season dates, where hunt permits can be obtained, and other pertinent information and will be sent to each of the contacts on the list. Information will also be posted on the Refuge's website and Facebook page.

### **G. Description of Hunter Orientation**

No specific effort is made toward hunter orientation other than previously mentioned media coverage, brochures, and personal contacts. Pre-hunt scouting is allowed since other forms of recreation are allowed in these areas.

## **H. Hunter Requirements**

### *Permits:*

A signed and dated Refuge hunting permit, along with proper State hunting licenses, & photo identification (such as a state driver's license) are required for all adult hunters & adults supervising youth hunters and must be in their possession at all times while hunting on the Refuge.

A youth hunter is defined as a hunter under the age of 16. All youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult (21 years or older) who has a valid State hunting license, a Refuge hunt permit, and any applicable stamps in their possession while hunting. Youth hunters are not required to have a State hunting license but must possess a Refuge hunting permit. Sight and voice contact must be maintained at all times. During any Refuge big game hunt an adult may only supervise one youth. Youth hunters participating in a big game hunt on the Refuge and who is not sitting in the same stand as the supervising adult, must show proof of successfully completing a State approved hunter education program and must carry it with them at all times along with the Refuge hunting permit. During small game hunts, each adult may supervise a maximum of two youths. Youth hunters are not required to show proof of a State approved hunter education program for small game hunts but must carry a signed Refuge hunt permit with them at all times.

### *Allowable equipment:*

Boats, deer stands, blinds, decoys, and other personal property must be removed at the end of each day's hunt. Vehicles are restricted to designated public use roads. ATVs are prohibited. Dogs are prohibited except for hunting waterfowl, snipe, woodcock, squirrel, raccoon and opossum during the Refuge seasons. Weapons are allowed during open hunting season and are limited to those allowed by the State. Additional weapon restrictions apply: firearms larger than .22 caliber rimfire, shotgun slugs, or shells with shot larger than no. 2 shot are allowed only during the Refuge gun deer season. Toxic shot is prohibited.

### *Other Requirements:*

- All regulations listed in Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations.