

ANNUAL HUNTING PROGRAM

BIG GAME

WALLOPS ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

2003

SUBMITTED BY: *Daniel B. Stoltz* *7/21/03*
Sup. Refuge Operations Specialist Date

REVIEWED BY: *See email - 2 pg in* _____
Regional Public Use Specialist Date

REVIEWED BY: *See Next Page* _____
Regional Biologist Date

APPROVED BY: *John W. Scherer* *7/21/03*
Refuge Manager Date

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SUBMITTED BY: _____ Date
 Sup. Refuge Operations Specialist

REVIEWED BY: _____ Date
 Regional Public Use Specialist

REVIEWED BY: *Walter C. ...* 7/17/2003
 Regional Biologist Date

APPROVED BY: _____ Date
 Refuge Manager



Sarah Bevilacqua
07/18/2003 09:04 AM

To: John Schroer/R5/FWS/DOI@FWS
cc: Harold Laskowski/R5/FWS/DOI@FWS, John
Stasko/R5/FWS/DOI@FWS
Subject: Re: Hunt Program - Wallops Island□

John and Hal. I do not need to review, but the new draft policy is that after Hal reviews it, it needs to be approved by the Refuge Supervisor.

Sarah Bevilacqua
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John Schroer

John Schroer
07/15/2003 05:07 PM

To: Harold Laskowski/R5/FWS/DOI@FWS, Sarah
Bevilacqua/R5/FWS/DOI@FWS
cc:
Subject: Hunt Program - Wallops Island□

J
John Schroer

Sarah and Hal,

Attached please find our Hunt Program for Wallops Island.

Please review, comment, and sign and return to this office the cover sheet.

Thanks,



Whunt03.doc

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A. Biological Soundness

The primary goals of Wallops Island NWR (WINWR) are to preserve, enhance, protect, and improve habitat for migratory bird species. Chincoteague NWR (CNWR) is scheduled to begin its Comprehensive Conservation Plan in 2009, which will include the WINWR. In the interim, WINWR is being managed, bearing in mind objectives developed during establishment of the refuge Fire Management Plan in 1986: Primary objectives for this area are to allow for natural succession with little or no habitat management. This interim management regime has been selected because forested habitats in the mid-Atlantic are severely fragmented; and old-growth forests are extremely rare. Much of the remaining mature hardwood and mixed hardwood/pine woodlands on private lands in the region are being converted to loblolly pine plantations. Tree farms lack the biological and structural diversity essential to supporting a diverse assemblage of migratory bird species.

The impacts of dense deer populations on forest regeneration and the composition and diversity of the herbaceous understory have been well-documented (Behrend et al. 1970; Tilghman 1989). Numerous studies have shown that overbrowsing by deer can decrease tree reproduction, understory vegetation cover, plant density, and plant diversity (Warren 1991).

Degradation of forest habitat from deer overbrowse can have a detrimental effect on deer herd health and displace other wildlife communities (e.g., neotropical migratory songbirds and small mammals) (VDGIF 1999). High deer populations can reduce habitat quantity and quality, thereby displacing songbirds and small mammals that depend on understory vegetation for foraging areas, escape cover, and nesting surfaces (DeCalesta 1997). Species richness and abundance of intermediate canopy nesting songbirds can be reduced in areas with higher deer densities (DeCalesta 1997).

Deer populations in Virginia have increased significantly in the past 65-70 years, due to changes in landscape cover, reforestation, farm abandonment, protective game laws, and restocking. The current VA population is stable and estimated at approximately 900,000 animals. As a result, state deer management objectives currently focus on controlling deer population growth (VDGIF 1999).

Local deer population increases have resulted in habitat degradation on the refuge. A visual inspection of the refuge by USFWS biological staff has revealed high levels of browse damage and negative impacts to forest understory vegetation (e.g. lack of regeneration of native woody plants and forbs).

WINWR is a small, 373-acre conservation area, located in Accomack County. Currently, the refuge deer herd travels freely between the refuge and adjacent habitats. The refuge likely functions as a sanctuary from hunting pressure during the deer season. Consequently, this sanctuary effect increases the deer density and the impact on the vegetative community during the hunting season, and may increase the local survival rate and contribute to an increase in deer populations on adjacent properties outside the hunting season.

The success of deer management on this small refuge is largely dependent upon the state's ability to meet its deer management objectives in the surrounding landscape. The herd reduction goals of the state of Virginia in Accomack County are concerned with the cultural carrying capacity, e.g. a measure of the tolerance of citizens in the area to deer. Therefore, the reduction of deer on WINWR is largely dependent upon factors beyond the Refuge's control, e.g. the degree of deer control effort sponsored by the VDGIF in Accomack County.

In 2002, a total of 24 hunters hunted at least one time. Hunters used shotguns and rifles. Of the 25 deer for which data on weapons were recorded, 19 were taken with a rifle and 6 with a shotgun. No hunter chose to hunt with a bow. A total of 17 bucks and 28 does were harvested. Hunters were required to check their deer in at an approved State check-station. The refuge collected no additional data on these animals. However, hunters that participated in the Wallops Island NWR hunt indicated that the deer were in excellent condition.

Landowners that participate in VDGIF DPOP program are required to collect data on deer harvested on their land. These data are used by VDGIF to set season and bag limits in Accomack County.

B. Economic Feasibility

In 2002, forty-three hunter applications were submitted and permits were awarded to 25 hunters. A total of \$715 was collected in fees. An estimated 10 staff days will be required to plan and manage the hunt concurrently with the CNWR hunt in 2003. Project costs will include: postage and printing costs for applications, permits, and regulations for hunters, advertising, equipment for the deer check in station, adequate sign-posting for boundaries/ parking/and closed areas, handling public inquiries, and law enforcement. Cost to manage the hunt is estimated to be \$2500. Sufficient funds are available in the annual CNWR budget of over one million dollars to cover the cost.

C. Relationship with Other Programs and Recreational Opportunity

Endangered and Threatened Species

A Section 7 Evaluation was prepared and submitted as part of the big-game hunting proposal. Potential effects on the bald eagle were considered. This species currently uses the refuge only sporadically. The potential of future impacts on bald eagle nesting activity do exist. Nest building activity may be initiated as early as November 1 in coastal Virginia. However, the bald eagle is not currently breeding at WINWR, nor has the refuge been recorded as a breeding site for the bald eagle since WINWR was created in 1975 (Ailes, USFWS, pers. comm.). Therefore, there are no anticipated adverse impacts to this species at this time.

Impacts on Other Types of Public Use

Public use, other than deer hunting, is not allowed at WINWR; therefore, no use conflicts are anticipated now or in the near future. A buffer zone, closed to hunting, will be maintained around the maintenance compound occupied by the National Park Service (NPS) and around a sea-level fen located on WINWR. State regulations pertaining to hunting activity near public roads and trespass on private property apply.

D. Refuge Regulations

Federal Regulations

Hunting on the Refuge will comply with all applicable Federal regulations, as listed in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 50. Refuge-specific requirements will be listed as permit conditions required of each hunter. Where Federal regulations are more restrictive than State regulations, the Federal regulations will take precedence. General stipulations for refuge hunting as contained in the Code of Federal Regulations (50 CFR Part 32) state that hunters must have a valid state license, comply with all current federal hunting regulations, and comply with all state hunting and safety regulations. Additionally, hunters must comply with the terms and conditions established by the Refuge for access to the Refuge itself and for its hunting program. Some of the more pertinent Federal regulations for hunting on refuge lands follow:

- 1) The use of all terrain vehicles (ATV's) or other vehicles on refuge lands is prohibited.
- 2) The use of nails, wire, bolts, etc., to attach a stand to a tree is prohibited, as is the use of a tree stand with existing nails, wire or bolts.
- 3) Hunting over bait is prohibited.
- 4) The use or possession of alcoholic beverages or controlled substances is prohibited.

Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

In addition to the foregoing State and Federal regulations, Refuge-specific hunting regulations, as listed in 50 CFR 32.66, are as follows- We allow hunting of white-tailed deer on designated areas of the refuge in accordance with State regulations and the following conditions:

1. We require a refuge permit.
2. We do not allow dogs.
3. We allow only portable tree stands on the refuge, and hunters must remove them at the end of each hunt day.
4. Hunters must comply with refuge check-in and check-out procedures as specified on the hunt permit.
5. During firearms big game season, including scouting days, hunters must wear in a conspicuous manner on head, chest, and back a minimum of 400 square inches (2,600 cm²) of solid colored hunter orange clothing or material.
6. We prohibit camping.
7. We prohibit the use of open fires.

E. Compatibility

The primary purpose for Wallops Island NWR is its “ ... particular value in carrying out the national migratory bird management program.(16 U.S.C. 667b-667d).” The primary goals of the refuge are to preserve, enhance, protect, and improve habitat for migratory bird species. These goals are currently compromised by the impacts to the understory habitats by abundant deer browsing. Recreational hunting of white-tailed deer will not interfere with the primary purposes for which the refuge was established. A public deer hunt on Wallops Island NWR is considered a feasible and cost effective means of improving habitat quality, especially for forest understory, migratory songbirds, and for maintaining structural and species diversity on the refuge.

An assessment of refuge resources can be found in the Environmental Assessment for Public Deer Hunting on the Wallops Island NWR that has been prepared to address the impacts of opening the refuge to hunting (January 2002). Also, a separate Compatibility Determination for white-tailed deer hunting has been completed (January 2002). This document addresses environmental impacts, population status, and effects of hunting on non-target species. In summary, the hunt program will not result in unacceptable impacts to the Refuge resources nor the target species of the hunt plan provided that the Refuge regulations listed in this document are followed.

F. Recommendations for the 2003 Program

With the exception of proposed changes to the hunt dates, the 2002 protocols and rules will be observed. The protocols and rules for the 2003 hunt program on WINWR are:

1. The Refuge hunt will be advertised through the local media, the VDGIF and CNWR websites.
2. Hunters may acquire the application for the drawing by visiting the Refuge office during working hours, or request via phone or mail.
3. Applications must be complete when submitted to the refuge office. Applications may be submitted in person or by mail. They will not be accepted over the phone, fax or e-mail.
4. Hunters may apply in a party of up to a maximum of five hunters. At least one member of the party must be 18 years of age or older.
5. The names, and hunting license numbers of all members of a party must be listed on the application. A contact name and phone number must be designated on each application.
6. If applications are received bearing the name and license number of a hunter more than once, all applications by this person will be rejected.
7. The hunt application must be accompanied by a nonrefundable \$5.00 application fee.

8. WINWR will be hunted as a single unit. A single hunting party will be drawn for each of the five hunt periods.
9. Hunters will be selected by lottery. A computerized lottery will be conducted similar to the one held for the big game hunt on CNWR.
10. If it is established that a party does not intend to hunt, or their \$20.00 permit fee is not received by 4:30 PM on October 8, 2003, an alternate party will be contacted.
11. The hunt will be conducted during the first five weeks of the state firearms season. Hunts will be restricted to Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of each week. Hunt dates will be November 17 - 19, and 24 - 26; December 1 - 3, 8 - 10, and 15 - 17.
12. Hunters may scout on the Sunday immediately before the hunt period for which they have been drawn.
13. If a party does not show up for any or all of their assigned hunt days, the unit will not be hunted on those days. There will be no stand-bys.
14. Hunters must park in the designated parking area along Rt. 175.
15. Hunters will have a self check-in and check-out at a kiosk erected near the Refuge gate. Hunters will sign in each time they enter or leave the refuge, including hunters scouting during their designated Sunday scouting period. Hunters will provide the following information:
 - Date
 - Name of each party member
 - Hunt license number
 - Vehicle license number
 - Time in and out
 - Sex of each deer bagged
16. An area around the National Park Service work site will be posted as closed to hunting. Hunters entering and exiting the Refuge through this area must have their weapons unloaded. There shall be no loitering in closed areas.
17. Hunters pursuing crippled deer into Refuge areas closed to hunting may not be in possession of a firearm or bow.
18. The sea-level fen will be closed to all public entry, for any purpose.
19. Hunters are restricted to hunting from the upland portions of the refuge. Hunting from the marsh is prohibited. Deer shot from the upland and downed in the marsh may be pursued with a loaded firearm or nocked arrow to facilitate retrieval.

20. As prescribed by state regulation, deer must be checked in at a state approved check station.
21. WINWR deer limits will conform to state limits prescribed for Accomack County.
22. All state licensing and stamp requirements apply.
23. State restrictions on weapons apply.
24. Hunters must abide by all applicable state hunting regulations. There will be no hunter orientation.

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