U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Cache River National Wildlife Refuge Hunting and Fishing Plan 2021

Ducks in flooded timber on Cache River NWR – Richard Crossett, USFWS

Cache River National Wildlife Refuge
Hunting and Fishing Plan

August 2021
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Submitted By:
Project Leader

KEITH WEAVER Digitally signed by KEITH WEAVER
Date: 2021.08.06 20:06:12 -04'00'

Signature Date

Concurrence:
Refuge Supervisor

ANITRA FIRMENICH Digitally signed by ANITRA FIRMENICH
Date: 2021.08.10 06:07:50 -06'00'

Signature Date

Approved:
Regional Chief,
National Wildlife Refuge System

BRETT HUNTER Digitally signed by BRETT HUNTER
Date: 2021.08.12 08:36:12 -04'00'

Signature Date

Cache River National Wildlife Refuge
26320 Highway 33 South
Augusta, Arkansas 72006

Table of Contents

I. Introduction 1
II. Statement of Objectives 4
III. Description of Hunting and Fishing Program 4
A. Areas to be opened to Hunting and Fishing 4
B. Species to be Taken, and Hunting and Fishing Periods and Access 13
C. Hunter and Angler Permit Requirements 15
D. Consultation and Coordination with the State 15
E. Law Enforcement 16
F. Funding and Staffing Requirements 16
IV. Conduct of the Hunting and Fishing Program 17
A. Hunter and Angler Permit Application 17
B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations 17
C. Refuge-Specific Fishing Regulations 19
D. Relevant State Regulations 20
E. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting and Fishing 20
V. Public Engagement 21
A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting and Fishing Program 21
B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting and Fishing Program 21
C. How Hunters and Anglers Will Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations 22
VI. Compatibility Determination 22
VI. References 22

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Cache River NWR Hunt Units and Acreage 5
Table 2. Approximate annual costs of administering hunting and fishing programs at Cache River NWR 16

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge Hunt Units. 6
Figure 2. Cache River NWR Present and Future Hunt Areas, Pending Future Acquisitions. 7
Figure 3. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units and Visitor Services Amenities..... 8
Figure 4. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units with Visitor Services Amenities. 9
Figure 5. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units and Visitor Services Amenities.....10
Figure 6. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units and Visitor Services Amenities.....11
Figure 7. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units and Visitor Services Amenities.....12

SECTION A
CACHE RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
MIGRATORY BIRDS, UPLAND, AND BIG GAME HUNTING AND FISHING PLAN

I. Introduction

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

The Central Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex includes six individual and unique National Wildlife Refuges (NWR, refuge). These are Bald Knob NWR, Big Lake NWR, Cache River NWR, Holla Bend NWR, Logan Cave NWR, and Wapanocca NWR. With the exception of Logan Cave NWR, hunting and fishing are approved and existing uses on each of these refuges (USFWS 2009, 2010).

Cache River NWR was established June 16, 1986 under the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C. § 390l(b), Stat. 3583), Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934 (16 U.S.C. § 715d), Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(l)), and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. § 4401-4412).

The purposes of the refuge are:

"... the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions ..." 16 U.S.C. § 3901(b), 100 Stat. 3583 (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986);

"... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 U.S.C. § 751d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934);

"...for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956);

"for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(l) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956);

"…to protect, enhance, restore, and manage an appropriate distribution and diversity of wetland ecosystems and other habitats for migratory birds and other fish and wildlife in North America; to maintain current or improved distributions of migratory bird populations; and to sustain an abundance of waterfowl and other migratory birds consistent with the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan…" 16 U.S.C. § 4401-4412 (North American Wetlands Conservation Act).

The Cache River NWR, located in Cross, Jackson, Monroe, Poinsett, Prairie, and Woodruff Counties, in central Arkansas, was established on June 16, 1986, with the purchase of 1,395 acres. Active land acquisition has continued, within its 286,684 acres land acquisition boundary, on a willing-seller basis and the refuge now includes more than 73,000 acres (USFWS 2012) (Figure 2). The Refuge establishment exemplifies the Service's commitment to conserve and restore bottomland hardwood habitat in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley (MAV). The refuge features some of the largest remaining tracts of bottomland hardwood forest within the MAV. This unique complex of wetlands provides critical wintering habitat for waterfowl and other migratory and resident wildlife species.

The Refuge was also designated as a "Wetland of International Importance" in 1989, under the auspices of the "Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat," commonly referred to as the Ramsar Convention. The Convention criteria, under which these lands qualified as the eighth U.S. Wetlands of International Importance, were: (1) Volume of use by migratory and resident waterfowl, especially mallards; (2) outstanding example of a wetland community characteristic of its bio-geographic region; (3) endangered species; (4) species diversity; (5) research value; and (6) practicality of conservation and management (AGFC 1989).

The mission of the NWRS, as outlined by the NWRSAA, as amended by the NWRSIA (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.), is to:

"... to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

The NWRSAA mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the NWRS to (16 U.S.C. 668dd (a) (4):

- Provide for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats within the NWRS;
- Ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the NWRS are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans;
- Ensure that the mission of the NWRS described at 16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(2) and the purposes of each refuge are carried out;
- Ensure effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with owners of land adjoining refuges and the fish and wildlife agency of the States in which the units of the NWRS are located;
- Assist in the maintenance of adequate water quantity and water quality to fulfill the mission of the NWRS and the purposes of each refuge;
- Recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority general public uses of the NWRS through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife;
- Ensure that opportunities are provided within the NWRS for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses; and

- Monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge.

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

Public hunting and fishing are existing uses on Cache River NWR, which were previously approved with the refuge's hunt plan, fish plan, and Comprehensive Conservation Plan (USFWS 1985, 1985, and 2009, respectively). This Hunting and Fishing Plan for Cache River NWR was developed based on Alternative B (Proposed Action) in the Environmental Assessment (EA) in Section B. The companion Hunting and Fishing Compatibility Determinations (CDs) are included in Appendix B. Upon approval, these documents will replace the existing Hunt and Fish Plans and existing Hunting and Fishing CDs and expand the number of hunted species and species groups in the CCP with recreational hunting of migratory game birds, upland game, and big game, as listed.

Sport Fishing

Sport fishing is an extremely popular activity on the refuge, with anglers targeting several of the 95 species of freshwater fish known to occur in the vast aquatic habitats of the Cache/Lower White Rivers' ecosystem. There are many concrete, gravel, or dirt boat ramps that provide access to the Cache and White Rivers, Bayou DeView, and numerous lakes located throughout the refuge. The most important fish to these user groups are largemouth bass, bluegill, crappie, and catfish. Peak use is during April – July.

Youth, senior fishing, and special educational program events are conducted annually in late spring or early summer. The annual youth fishing derby is open to youths 15 years old and under. All events are held at Miller Pond, which is stocked with channel catfish (Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC)), or with catfish purchased by the refuge from a local fish farmer), and is attended by over 100 youths. This event has been very successful and is supported by numerous local businesses. As additional lands are acquired, it is possible that additional ponds may be used for special fishing events.

Hunting

Hunting is by far the most popular activity that occurs on Cache River NWR. The Refuge was opened for hunting soon after establishment for numerous types of hunting including waterfowl and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). The most popular hunt is a modern gun deer hunt in November and requires a special quota permit (FWS Form 3–2439). All hunters participating in any hunting activity are required to possess a free, annual hunting permit (found on the front of the annual public use brochure or on the refuge website). Hunting for other popular game species (migratory birds, upland game, furbearers, and big game) has occurred on the Refuge for many years (see Section IIIB for species open for hunting).

The Service recognizes that the AGFC is the authority in the state of Arkansas regarding the population status and sustainability of resident wildlife, including the species that are hunted on

Cache River NWR. The Service strives to provide hunting and fishing opportunities at Cache River NWR that are within the State season framework.

II. Statement of Objectives

Hunting and fishing are consistent with the NWRSIA and the refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP; USFWS 2009) goals and objectives to develop compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation programs that lead to enjoyable experiences; a greater understanding of fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation; and a greater appreciation for the value of Cache River NWR.

The following CCP Goals and Objectives were developed to assist in characterizing emphasis on hunting and fishing opportunities for the refuge.

Cache River NWR CCP Goal 4: Develop compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation programs that lead to enjoyable experiences; a greater understanding of fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation; and a greater appreciation for the value of Cache River NWR.

> *Cache River NWR CCP Objective 4-3: Hunting - Annually provide and expand quality, compatible hunting opportunities as feasible.*
>
> *Cache River NWR CCP Objective 4-4: Fishing - Annually provide and expand quality, compatible fishing opportunities as feasible.*

III. Description of Hunting and Fishing Program

Migratory bird hunting seasons and species (including waterfowl) will be consistent with Federal and state season frameworks and regulations. All other species open for take on the refuge are allowable for take under state regulations. Specific hunting and fishing seasons, days, and times may vary in some instances from state frameworks; however, these differences are approved by AGFC. The Cache River NWR hunt and fish public use brochures will be annually updated to reflect more specific information and restrictions, including seasons, days, times, bag limits, access, licenses and permits, allowable hunting and fishing devices and ammunition, other equipment, quota application process, and other refuge-specific regulations.

A. Areas to be opened to Hunting and Fishing

While there are additional new species proposed to be opened in this plan, the entire Cache River NWR is already open to some form of hunting and fishing annually (Figure 1). However, portions of the Refuge such as the waterfowl sanctuaries, Darby's Warrior Hunt Area, or Youth Waterfowl Hunt Areas may be seasonally closed to all public entry and use or only open to select, before mentioned groups (targeted demographic). Additionally, unless there is a compelling reason to not open a particular area for hunting and fishing, future land acquisitions to the Cache River NWR would be open to the public for these activities. In accordance with the approved CCP and Land Protection Plan (LPP) (USFWS 2009 and 2012), Cache River NWR currently has an active acquisition program; those anticipated acquisitions of 213,332 acres within the approved acquisition boundary of 286,684 total acres, would be added to the hunt

and fish program in the future (Figure 2). All future lands acquired and/or managed as part of Cache River NWR, through fee title purchase, donation, lease, management agreement, memorandum of understanding, or any other means, may be opened at the time such document becomes effective to the taking of all allowable species by the public under the conditions of this hunt and fish plan with the exception of any conditions, exclusions, or reservations contained in such document which may expressly prohibit such action. Those anticipated acquisitions are included in the EA in Section B and would be added to the appropriate hunt and fish programs upon acquisition without the development of an additional or amended hunt and fish plan unless specific conditions or circumstances bar this action. The refuge currently has ten hunting units (Table 1 and Figure 3-7) for a total of 73,546 acres. Other public use amenities, including sport fishing areas are provided (Figure 3-7).

Table 1. Cache River NWR Hunt Units and Acreage.

Hunt Unit	Acreage
Black Swamp Area	15,762
Darby's Warrior	387
Dixie	527
Dixie Waterfowl Sanctuary	2,797
Plunkett Farm Waterfowl Sanctuary	1,086
Refuge North	27,512
Refuge South	22,656
Waterfowl Sanctuary-North	1,769
Waterfowl Sanctuary-South	192
Youth Waterfowl Area	858
Total Hunting Acres	**73,546**

Figure 1. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge Hunt Units.

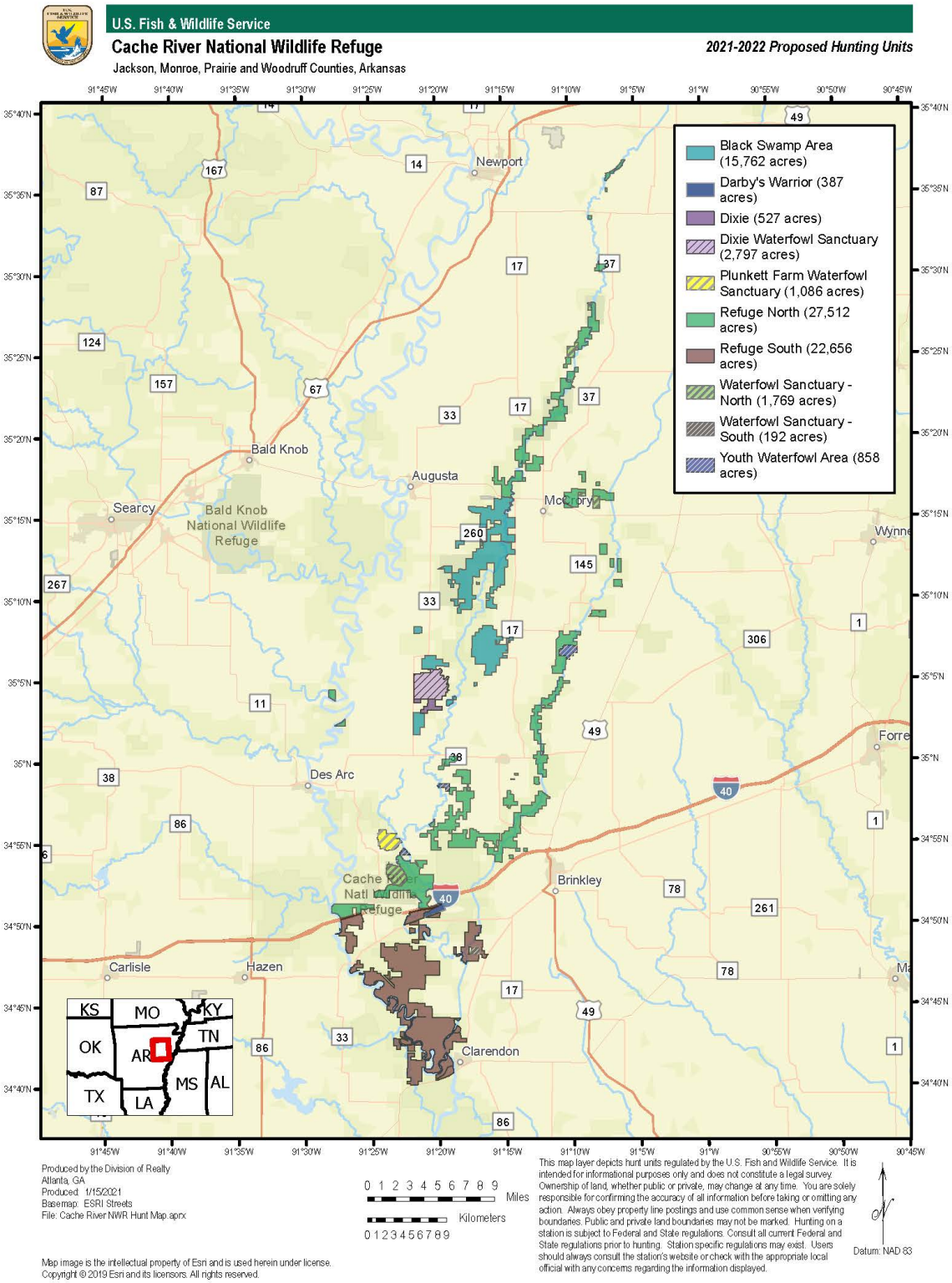


Figure 2. Cache River NWR Present and Future Hunt Areas, Pending Future Acquisitions.

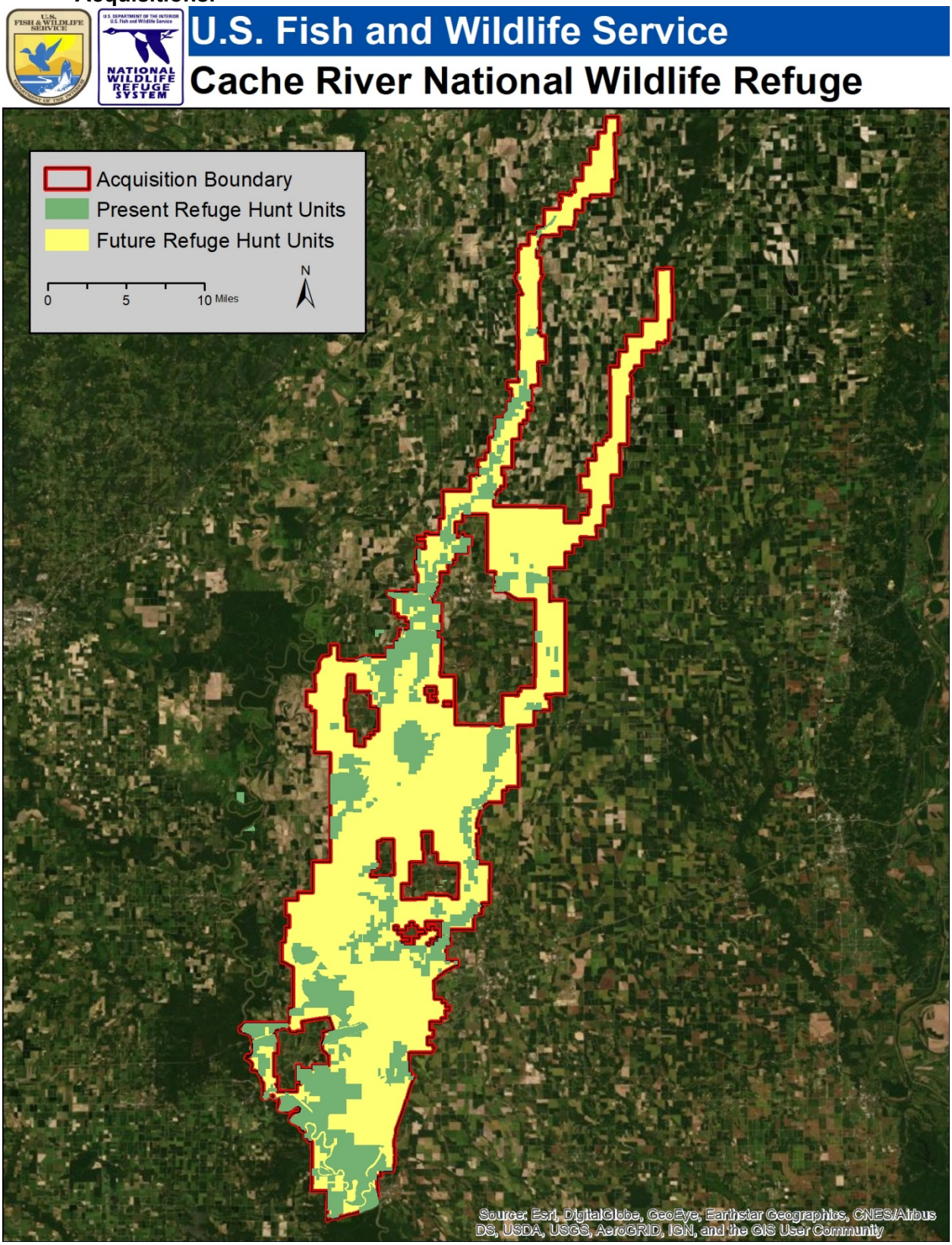


Figure 3. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units and Visitor Services Amenities.

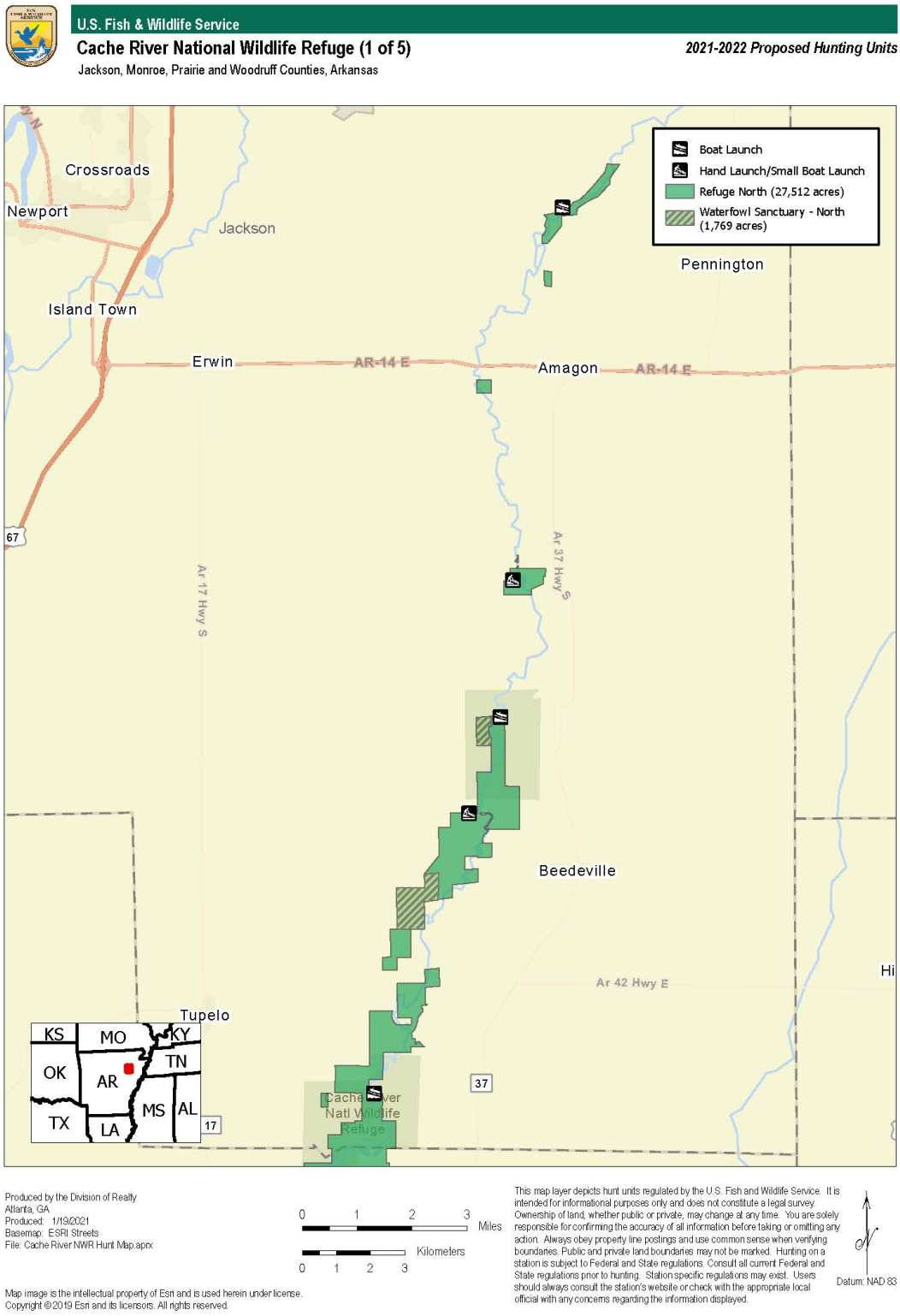
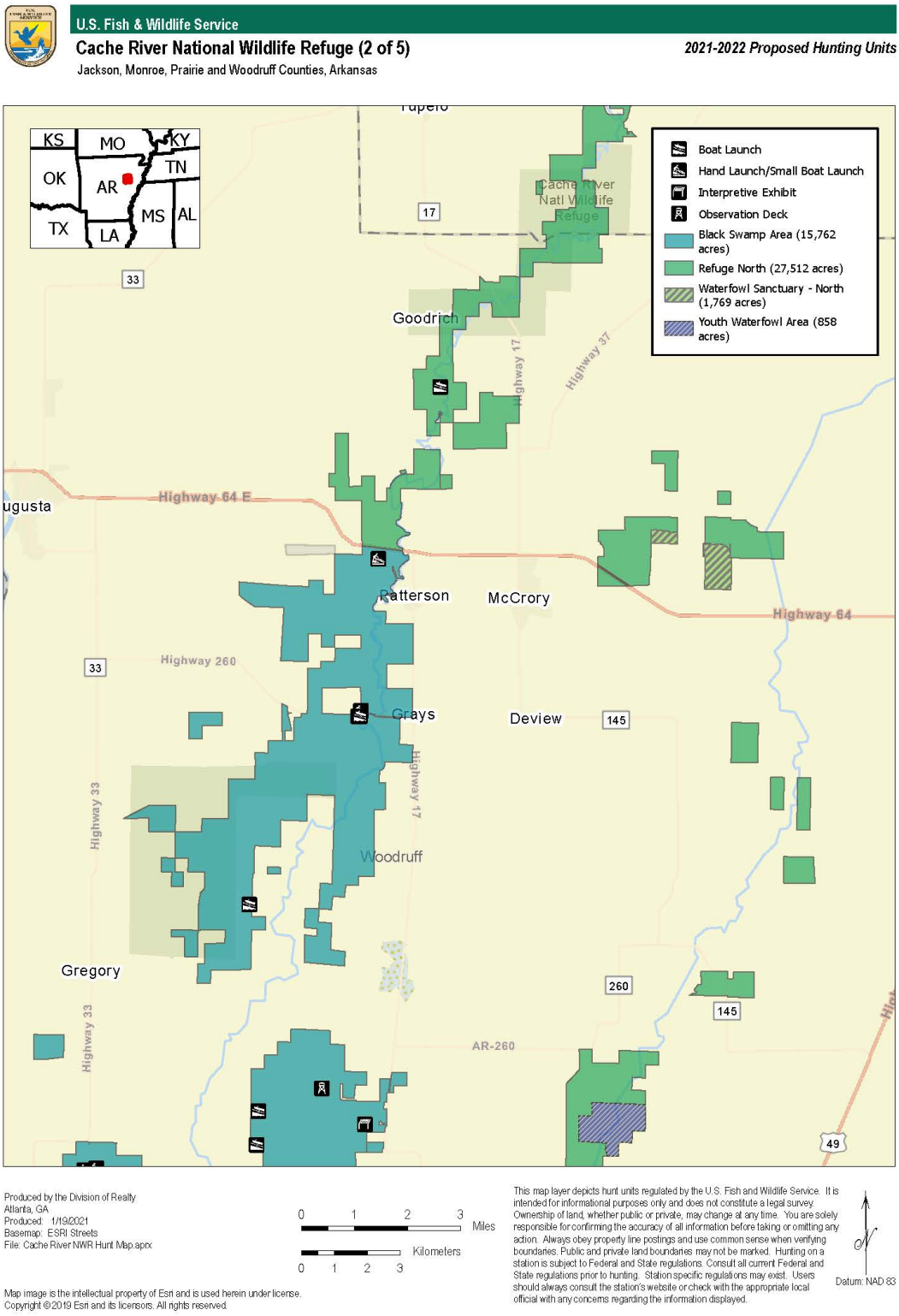


Figure 4. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units with Visitor Services Amenities.



Produced by the Division of Realty
Atlanta, GA
Produced: 1/19/2021
Basemap: ESRI Streets
File: Cache River NWR Hunt Map.aprx

0 1 2 3 Miles
0 1 2 3 Kilometers

This map layer depicts hunt units regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute a legal survey. Ownership of land, whether public or private, may change at any time. You are solely responsible for confirming the accuracy of all information before taking or omitting any action. Always obey property line postings and use common sense when verifying boundaries. Public and private land boundaries may not be marked. Hunting on a station is subject to Federal and State regulations. Consult all current Federal and State regulations prior to hunting. Station specific regulations may exist. Users should always consult the station's website or check with the appropriate local official with any concerns regarding the information displayed.

Datum: NAD 83

Map image is the intellectual property of Esri and is used herein under license.
Copyright © 2019 Esri and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Figure 5. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units and Visitor Services Amenities.

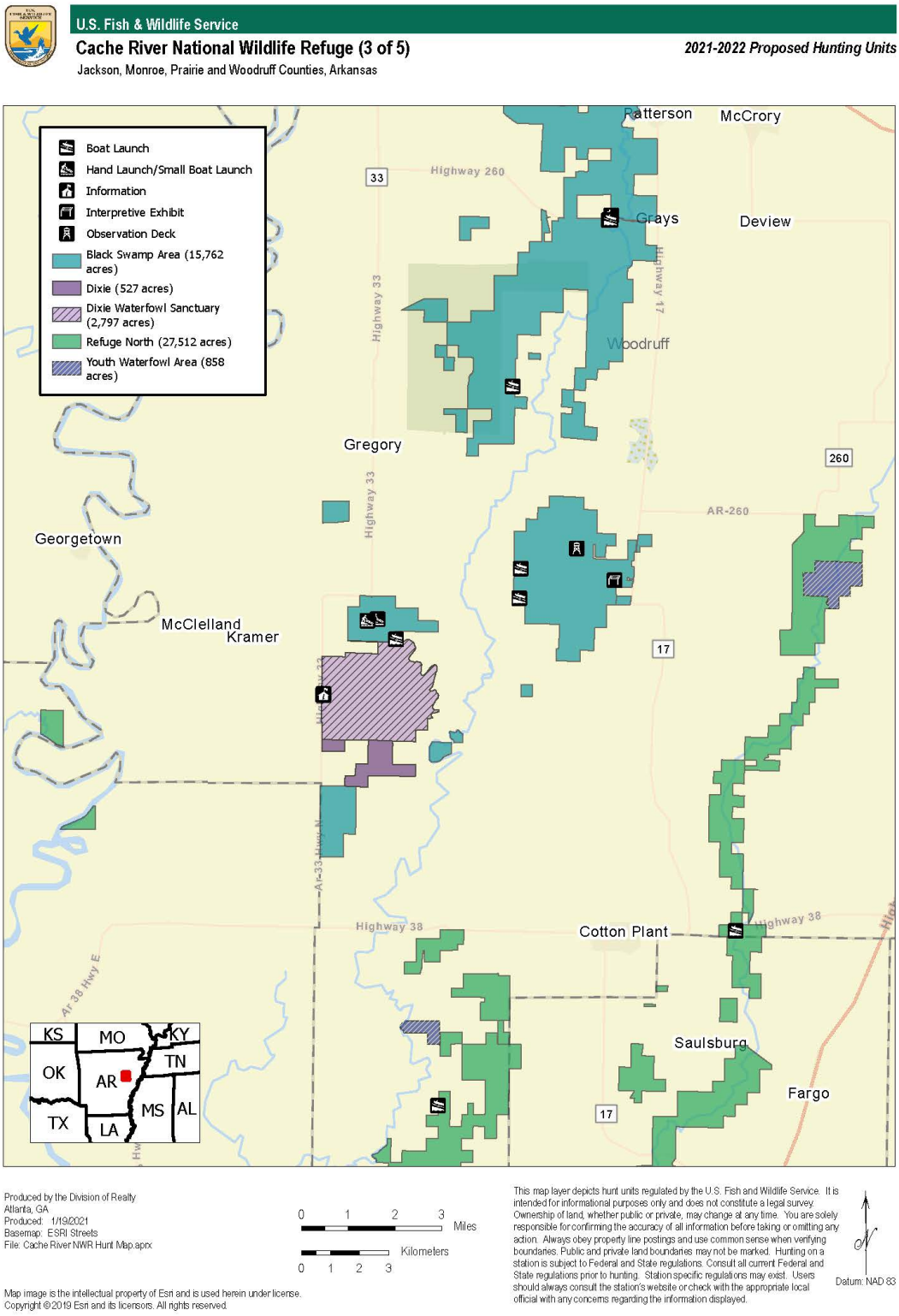


Figure 6. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units and Visitor Services Amenities.

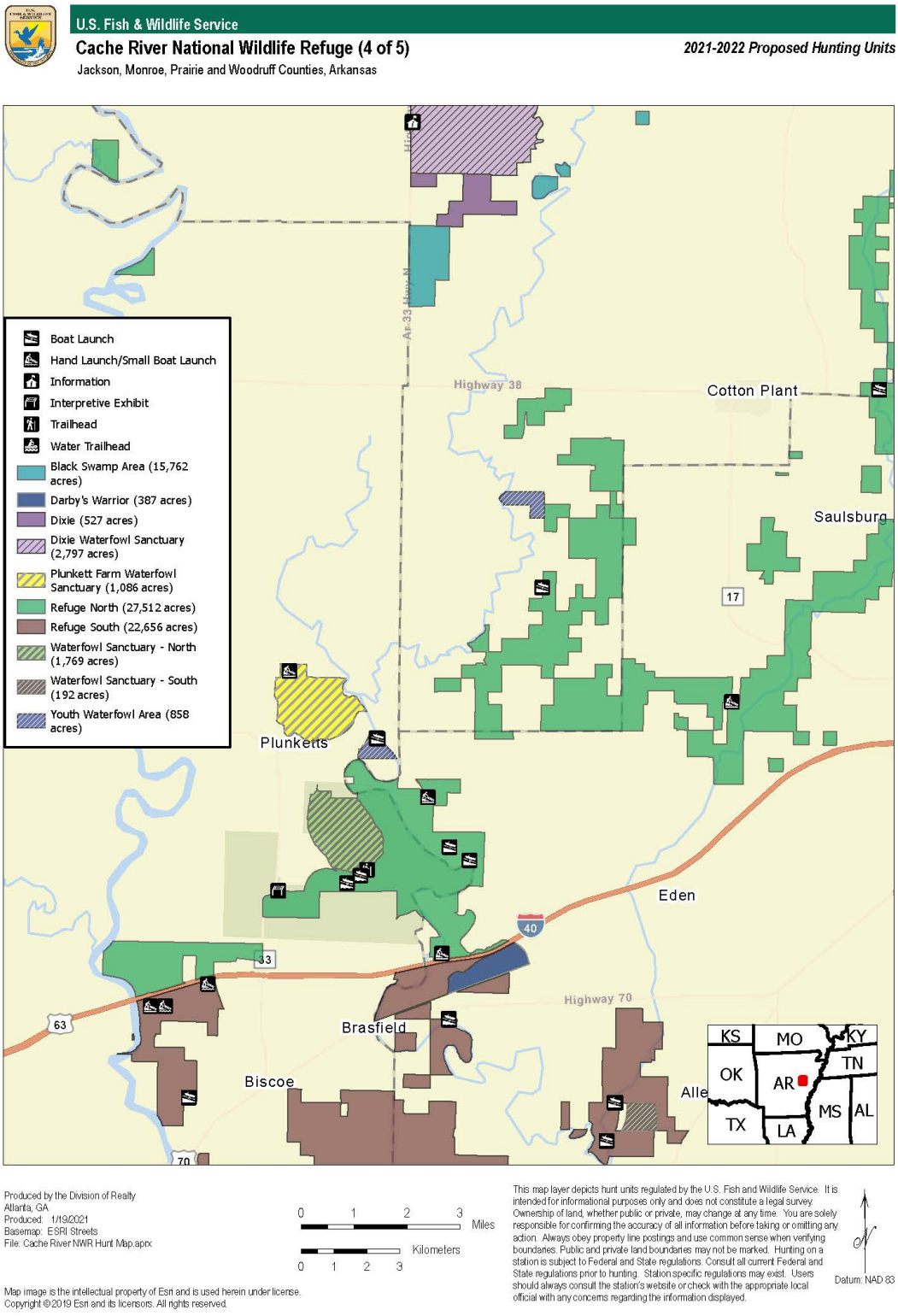
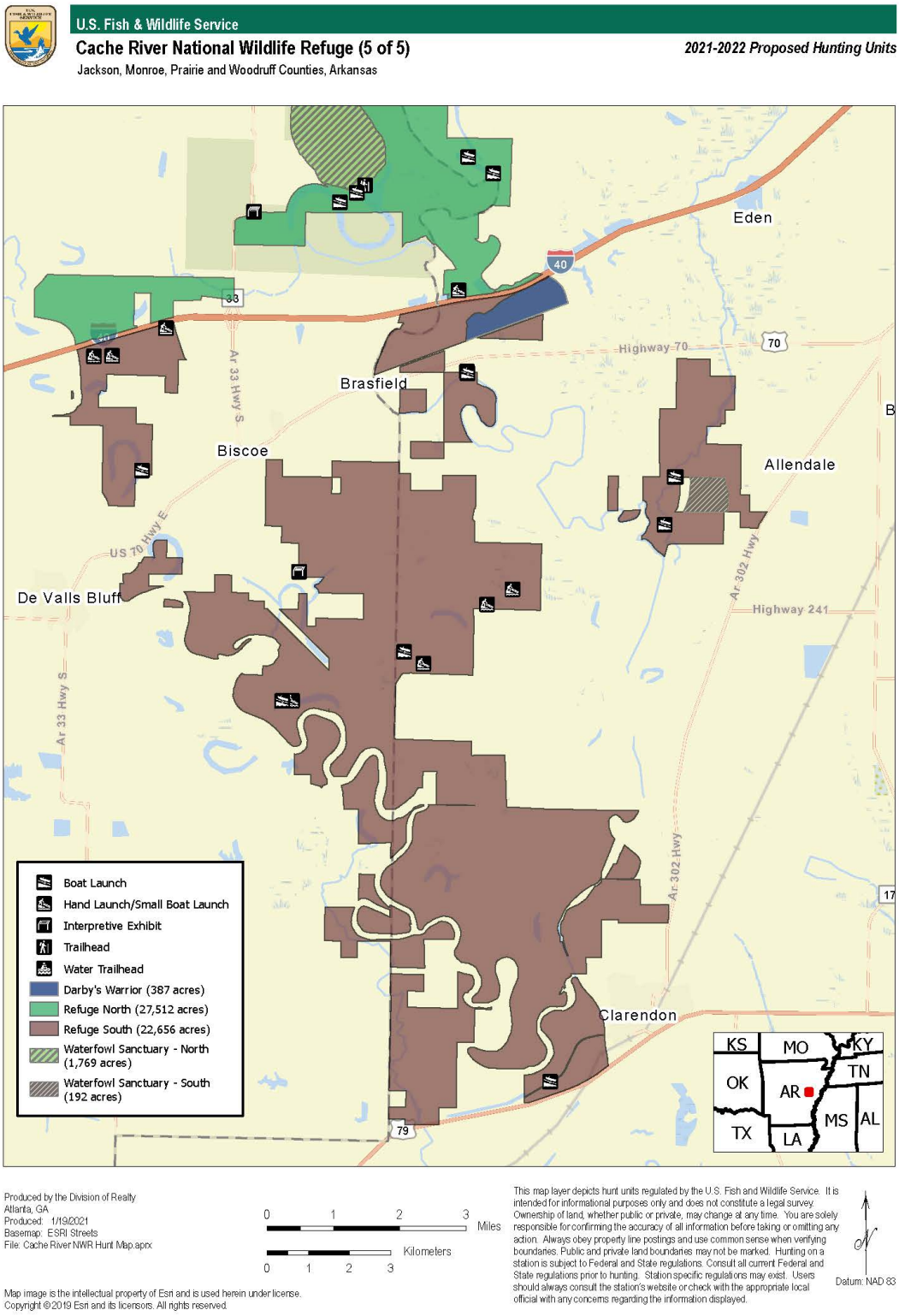


Figure 7. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Hunt Units and Visitor Services Amenities.



B. Species to be Taken, and Hunting and Fishing Periods and Access

Any changes will be identified in the annual refuge public use brochure.

Waterfowl – Ducks, Coots, and Geese allowable for take under Federal and state regulations may be hunted during all state waterfowl seasons until 12:00 noon. All-day hunting allowed for geese (applicable species) during the State Conservation Order. All waterfowl hunting will be in accordance with Federal, state, and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Hunting Guidebook and annual refuge public use brochure

Dove (*Zenaida macroura, Z. asiatica, Streptopelia decaocto*, *Columba livia*) follows the statewide season in accordance with Federal, state, and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Hunting Guidebook and annual refuge public use brochure.

Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) **-** follows the statewide season in accordance with Federal, state, and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Hunting Guidebook and annual refuge public use brochure.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) - follows the statewide season in accordance with Federal, state, and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Hunting Guidebook and annual refuge public use brochure.

Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos, C. ossifragus*) - follows the statewide season in accordance with Federal, state, and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Hunting Guidebook and rannual refuge public use brochure.

Rail (*Porzana carolina, Rallus limicola)***, Gallinule** (*Gallinula chloropus, Porphyrula martinica)* **-** follows the state-wide season in accordance with Federal, state, and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Hunting Guidebook and annual refuge public use brochure.

Rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus, S. aquaticus*) **-** follows the statewide season in accordance with state and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Hunting Guidebook and annual refuge public use brochure. Dogs are permitted.

Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis, S. niger)* - hunting is allowed September 1st through February 29th. Dogs are permitted.

Quail *(Colinus virginianus)* - follows the statewide season in accordance with state and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Hunting Guidebook and annual refuge public use brochure.

Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) - hunting is allowed from September 1st- March 31st. Nighttime hunting for raccoon is allowed with the appropriate equipment and required license. Dogs are required when hunting at night.

Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) - hunting is allowed according to state season. Nighttime hunting for opossum is allowed with the appropriate equipment and required license. Dogs are required when hunting at night.

Furbearer (coyote (*Canis latrans*), beaver (*Castor canadensis*), nutria (*Myocastor coypus*), gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes)*, mink (*Mustela vison)*, muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus)*, striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis)*, bobcat (*Felis rufus)*, and river otter

(*Lutra canadensis)*)- open for incidental take with devices legal for refuge hunts that occur from September 1st to March 31st, and according to any applicable state seasons and regulations.

Feral hogs (*Sus scrofa)* - open for incidental take only during the modern gun and muzzleloader deer seasons with hunting devices legal for those hunts and by archery hunters from November 1st - December 31st unless AGFC prescribes adjustments to these stipulations or seasons in their statewide feral hog control program. Live hogs may not be possessed, transported, or released on the refuge.

White-tailed deer – Archery hunting follows the statewide season in accordance with state and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Hunting Guidebook and annual refuge public use brochure.

The modern gun quota deer hunt requires a quota permit (FWS Form 3–2439). During this hunt, the refuge is closed to all other public entry and use.

The modern gun youth deer hunt occurs during the first statewide youth hunt weekend. The refuge is open to all other activities during this hunt.

Muzzleloader deer hunting is allowed on the refuge during the statewide muzzleloader season, typically occurring in mid-October each year. Currently, a three-day muzzleloader hunt also is conducted on the refuge in late December. No special permit is required for muzzleloader hunting.

Turkey *(Meleagris gallopavo)* - State seasons on all refuge lands located south of Interstate 40. Remainder of the refuge is closed with the exception of those refuge lands included in the combined Black Swamp WMA/Cache River NWR hunts administered by the AGFC. If sustainable turkey numbers are attained on refuge lands north of Interstate 40 and state and refuge managers agree, additional turkey hunting will be allowed, and if the AGFC reopens fall turkey hunting, fall hunting will be allowed on the refuge if approved by state and refuge officials.

Note: of the above-listed species, white-winged, Eurasian collared, and rock dove; Virginia and sora rail; purple and common gallinule; American and fish crow; red and gray fox; bobcat, river otter, mink, and striped skunk, are species that would be newly-opened for take under this hunting and fishing plan.

Public Access: Most Refuge roads are open to the public unless posted as closed or located behind a locked gate or other barrier. Unless stated otherwise, foot traffic is allowed on these roads. However, roads may be closed at any time road conditions or other administrative needs warrant. Boat access is allowed for most of the Refuge and there are many improved and primitive boat ramps. Waterfowl sanctuaries are closed to all public entry and use, including fishing and hunting, from November 15 through February 28. Nighttime use of the Refuge is limited to fishing, frogging, and raccoon/opossum hunting. The Refuge is closed to all entry and public use during the Quota Gun Hunt except for Quota Gun Hunt permit holders and only for the purpose of deer hunting and take of allowable incidental species.

Hunting Access: Hunters may access the refuge no earlier than 4:00 a.m. and must leave one hour after legal sunset, except raccoon/opossum hunters. Waterfowl hunting ends at noon except during the State Conservation Order goose season. During the regular waterfowl season, boats are prohibited on the refuge from 12 a.m. – 4:00 a.m. Hunters trailing or retrieving deer after hours should call the Refuge Office and leave a message stating their name, phone number and the general area in which they are searching for or retrieving deer.

Sport Fishing: Fishing (including bowfishing), frogging, and crawfishing are allowed on all refuge waters in accordance with state and refuge regulations listed in the AGFC Fishing Guidebook and subject to seasonal area closures. All species allowable for take under state regulations are also open for take on the refuge. Popular fishes sought by anglers include various species of catfish, crappie, bream, and bass. Crawfish may be collected for personal use only. Commercial fishing requires a refuge Special Use Permit. Taking or possessing turtles and mollusks is prohibited.

Fishing Access: Fishing, frogging, and crawfishing are allowed during daylight and nighttime hours according to state and refuge regulations and subject to any seasonal area closures on the refuge. Boats with valid registration may be left overnight on the refuge from March 1 through October 31.

C. Hunter and Angler Permit Requirements

A signed Cache River NWR "General Hunting Permit" (signed brochure) must be carried by the hunter at all times while on the refuge and in possession of hunting gear. An electronic signed copy of the permit may also be produced on a person's own cellular phone or other type of portable electronic device that clearly displays and accurately reproduces all of the information. The permit expires on the last day of June and must be signed to be valid. By signing, it states that; "I have read and understand the refuge hunting regulations and agree to obey them and agree to allow USFWS and AGFC Officers to inspect or search all equipment used during my hunt." No permits currently are required for fishing, frogging, or crawfishing, but could be required at some time in the future at the refuge's discretion based on administrative/operational needs.

A Quota Gun Deer Hunt permit (FWS Form 3–2439) is required for the Deer Gun Hunt. They can be purchased at https://cache.recaccess.com beginning August 1. Currently, these permits are $12.50 and are non-transferable and nonrefundable even in the event of refuge closure due to flooding or government shutdowns. Quota permits are sold on a first come, first served until the quota of 2,500 permits are reached. Permit requests will not be accepted in person. Note: quantity, price, and period of availability of permits may change at the discretion of the refuge due to administrative/operational needs.

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

The USFWS/Refuges biennially coordinates hunting and fishing seasons and regulations with the AGFC at our Hunt Coordination meetings and more frequently if the need arises. Seasons dates, changes, harvests, and new regulations are generally some of the items discussed at these meetings along with the latest wildlife management activities. As a result of our consultation/coordination efforts, AGFC is aware that new lands acquired by the refuge will be

incorporated into the hunting and fishing program. The AGFC fully supports increasing the number of acres open to hunting and fishing. Numerous meetings were conducted with the AGFC concerning the latest Service's Hunt/Fish Opportunity Tool (SHOT) to coordinate potential expansion of existing hunting and fishing opportunities on refuge lands. The AGFC fully supports the Refuge hunt programs and encourages the Service to provide as much opportunity as possible. We coordinate with AGFC in offering various hunts and hunter education/outreach programs and providing hunting habitats. The Service recognizes AGFC authority and responsibility for welfare and use of fish and wildlife resources in the state and we defer to their knowledge, expertise, and population status assessments in our development of refuge-specific hunting and fishing programs. The Service recognizes that the AGFC has the lead on any diseases that affect resident wildlife, and the Refuge will support the State in its prevention and surveillance efforts as appropriate. Similarly, the Service is coordinating with AGFC with feral hog control, Chronic Wasting Disease, and other statewide programs.

E. Law Enforcement

Enforcement of refuge violations normally associated with management of a National Wildlife Refuge is the responsibility of commissioned Federal Wildlife Officers (FWO). Currently there are two fulltime Senior Federal Wildlife Officers (SFWO) on the Complex, one of which is stationed at Cache River NWR and who is assisted by the other SFWO on the Complex, Special Agents, AGFC Wildlife Officers, and the local Sheriff Departments.

The following methods are used, in part to control and enforce hunting and fishing regulations:

- Refuge and hunt area boundaries and boat ramp locations will be clearly posted;
- The Refuge will provide a public use brochure that shows hunting areas and boat ramp locations, along with hunting and fishing regulations; and
- Cache River NWR SFWO will randomly check hunters and anglers for compliance with Federal and State Laws.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Annual administrative costs for the hunting and fishing program at Cache River NWR, including salary, facility maintenance, sign maintenance, brochures, etc. are estimated to total approximately $39,662, as listed in the Hunting and Fishing Compatibility Determinations (CDs) (Table 2; Appendix B and C). Less than one full time employee equivalent is expended in conducting hunt-related activities. The revenue from hunting permit sales will offset some of the costs. Annual hunting permit sales for the Refuge are estimated at $35,000 or more. Funds are available to meet the conditions set forth in the Refuge Recreation Act. It is anticipated that funding will continue to be sufficient to maintain the hunting program in the near future, but Increased or additional permit fees could be instituted in the future to cover rising administrative/operational costs.

Table 2. Approximate annual costs of administering hunting and fishing programs at Cache River NWR

Hunt and Fishing program needs and staff involved	Cost
Equipment/Tractor Operators – maintain/repair roads, parking lots, trails for hunts	$5,000
Biologist, Interns, Contractors – operate deer check stations, analyze data, prepare reports	$5,100

Law Enforcement – Senior Federal Wildlife Officers	$16,100
Refuge Managers – brochures, websites, signage, program coordination, public info	$3,800
Online Vendor Fee	$3,000
Total Annual Cost	$33,000
Offsetting Revenue for the Complex	$39,662

IV. Conduct of the Hunting and Fishing Program

A. Hunter and Angler Permit Application

Details on how to apply and acquire a Cache River NWR Deer Gun Hunt Quota permit (FWS Form 3–2439) and General Refuge permit (signed brochure) can be found under Hunting and Fishing permit requirements.

Information on how to obtain a Spring Turkey hunting permit for the Refuge lands within the Black Swamp WMA/Cache River NWR administered by the AGFC can be found at https://www.agfc.com/en/hunting/turkey/turkeypermits/ .

Waterfowl (Special Youth Quota Permit Hunt): Youth Waterfowl Hunt Area Units. Available only to youth under 16. Applications will be received November 1 - 30. For more information, call the refuge office or visit our website for complete details: www.fws.gov/cacheriver/youthwaterfowl.

Anglers currently are not required to obtain a refuge-specific fishing permit, but they must have in their possession a valid AGFC fishing license.

Hunting blinds accessible by wheelchair-bound hunters may be provided in designated areas on the refuge for waterfowl and big game hunting. Blinds may be moveable or fixed, and their placement sites may vary depending on water/habitat conditions and use of areas by the target game species. Blinds/access paths will be of such construction and placement that will ensure compatibility, safety, minimal environmental footprint, and minimize conflicts with other users. A draw permit system would be used to assign hunters to these blinds. Permits would be free. Fishing platforms for wheelchair-bound anglers may be constructed in areas suitable for their placement in a manner that will ensure compatibility, safety, and minimize conflicts with other users.

B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

Specific hunting and fishing seasons, days, and times may vary in some instances from state frameworks, however, these differences are approved by AGFC. The Cache River NWR public use brochures will be annually updated to reflect more specific information and restrictions, including seasons, days, times, bag limits, access, licenses and permits, allowable hunting and fishing devices and ammunition, other equipment, quota application process, and other refuge-specific regulations. To ensure compatibility with refuge purposes and the mission of the Refuge System, hunting must be conducted in accordance with State and Federal regulations, as supplemented by refuge-specific regulations, and information sheets/brochures. Stipulations are detailed in the Hunting CD (Appendix B). The following hunting regulations apply at Cache River

NWR.

Cache River National Wildlife Refuge

(1) *Migratory game bird hunting*. We allow hunting of duck, goose, coot, merganser, snipe, woodcock, rail, gallinule, crow, and dove on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

(i) We require a signed refuge hunting permit (FWS Form 3-2439). Anyone on the refuge in possession of hunting equipment must sign and possess the permit (FWS Form 3-2439) at all times.

(ii) Hunters may enter the refuge beginning at 4 a.m. Except when hunting applicable goose species during the State Conservation Order, waterfowl hunters must exit the refuge by 1 p.m. All other hunters, including those hunting applicable goose species during the State Conservation Order, must exit the refuge no later than 1 hour after legal sunset.

(iii) We allow waterfowl hunting until 12 p.m. (noon), except that during the State Conservation Order, you may hunt for applicable goose species until legal sunset.

(iv) You must remove decoys, blinds, boats, and all other equipment at the end of each day's hunt (see §27.93 of this chapter).

(v) From March 1 through October 31, hunters and anglers may leave boats displaying valid registration on the refuge.

(vi) During the regular State waterfowl hunting season, we prohibit the use of boats on the refuge from 12 a.m. (midnight) to 4 a.m.

(vii) We allow the use of dogs when migratory game bird hunting.

(viii) We allow waterfowl hunting on flooded refuge roads.

(ix) During the quota gun deer hunt, we close the refuge to all other hunts and public entry, unless the refuge is closed to deer hunting at that time due to implementation of State flood closure zone regulations.

(x) All hunters age 11 and younger who possess valid hunter education certification must remain within normal sight and voice contact with an adult age 18 or older who possesses a valid State hunting license. Hunters age 15 and younger who have not completed hunter education must be under the direct supervision (within arm's reach) of an adult age 21 or older who possesses a valid State hunting license. One adult may supervise up to two youth hunters for migratory bird and upland game hunting, but may supervise only one youth during big game hunting.

(xi) We allow incidental take of beaver, muskrat, nutria, river otter, mink, bobcat, fox, striped skunk, and coyote during any refuge hunt with the weapons legal for that hunt, subject to applicable State season and regulations.

(xii) From November 15 to February 28, we close all waterfowl sanctuaries to all hunting and public entry.

(xiii) We allow only hunters to use all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and only from September 1 through March 31, except that during the State Conservation Order, hunters may use ATVs for hunting applicable goose species.

(xiv) Hunters and anglers may not operate conventional motor vehicles, ATVs, bicycles, or e-bikes on any road or trail closed by a locked gate, other barrier, or signage.

(xv) Hunter and anglers may not leave motor vehicles, ATVs, bicycles, or e-bikes unattended overnight on the refuge.

(xvi) We prohibit the use of personal watercraft (e.g., jet skis), airboats, and hovercraft for hunting and fishing on the refuge.

(2) *Upland game hunting*. We allow hunting of squirrel, rabbit, quail, raccoon, opossum, beaver,

muskrat, nutria, river otter, mink, bobcat, fox, striped skunk, and coyote on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

(i) The conditions set forth at paragraphs (c)(1)(i), (v), (vi), and (ix) through (xvi) of this section apply.

(ii) We allow squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, and quail hunting according to season dates and bag limits provided in the annual refuge public use brochure.

(iii) We allow the use of dogs when hunting upland game.

(iv) We prohibit hunting from mowed and/or graveled road rights-of-way.

(v) Hunters may use only shotguns, rifles and handguns chambered for rimfire cartridges, air rifles, and archery tackle.

(vi) Hunters may enter the refuge beginning at 4 a.m. and must exit the refuge by 1 hour after legal sunset, except that we allow hunting of raccoon and opossum at night (from 30 minutes after legal sunset to 30 minutes before legal sunrise) on the refuge.

(vii) We prohibit hunting from a vehicle.

(3) *Big game hunting*. We allow hunting of deer and turkey, and incidental take of feral hog, on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

(i) The conditions set forth at paragraphs (c)(1)(i), (v), (vi), and (ix) through (xvi), and (c)(2)(iv), (vi) and (vii) of this section apply.

(ii) We allow archery/crossbow, modern gun, and muzzleloader deer hunting according to season dates and bag limits provided in the annual refuge public use brochure.

(iii) Hunters may take only feral hog incidental to modern gun and muzzleloader deer hunts and during a specified period during archery deer hunting according to season dates provided in the annual refuge public use brochure.

(iv) Hunters may only use shotguns with slugs, muzzleloaders, handguns with barrel lengths greater than 4 inches, large-bore air rifles, and archery/crossbow tackle for modern gun deer hunting on the Dixie, Dixie Waterfowl Sanctuary, and Plunkett Farm Waterfowl Sanctuary Hunt Units.

(v) You may erect portable stands or blinds 7 days prior to the refuge deer season, and you must remove them from the waterfowl sanctuaries prior to November 15, and from the rest of the refuge within 7 days of the closure of archery season (see §27.93 of this chapter).

(vi) We prohibit leaving any tree stand, blind, or game camera on the refuge without the owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission customer identification number clearly written on it in a conspicuous location.

(vii) We prohibit the possession or use of lead shot and buckshot for deer hunting. We allow lead shot for turkey hunting.

(viii) During the quota gun deer hunt, we allow only hunters possessing a valid quota gun deer hunting permit (FWS Form 3-2439) on the refuge and only for the purposes of deer hunting and the incidental take of allowable species.

(ix) Turkey hunting will be conducted in designated areas according to season dates and bag limits provided in the annual refuge public use brochure.

(x) We prohibit the use of dogs for deer hunting.

C. Refuge-Specific Fishing Regulations

To ensure compatibility with refuge purposes and the mission of the Refuge System, fishing must be conducted in accordance with State and Federal regulations, as supplemented by refuge-specific regulations, and information sheets/brochures. Stipulations are detailed in the Fishing CD (Appendix C).

(4) *Sport fishing*. We allow sport fishing, frogging, and crawfishing on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

(i) The conditions set forth at paragraphs (1)(v), (vi), (ix), (xii), (xiv) through (xvi), and (c)(3)(viii) above apply.

(ii) We prohibit the take or possession of turtles and/or mollusks (see §27.21 of this chapter).

(iii) We allow frogging and crawfishing for personal use only. All crawfish traps must have the owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer identification number permanently affixed.

(iv) We prohibit tournament fishing on the refuge.

D. Relevant State Regulations

The refuge conducts its hunting and fishing program within the framework of Federal and State regulations. Hunting and fishing on the refuge is in some cases more restrictive than AGFC regulations. The refuge coordinates with the State as needed to maintain regulations and programs that are consistent with the State's management programs. Refuge-specific hunting and fishing regulations are listed in Section IV, subsections B and C, respectively.

- Hunter Orange or Chartreuse must be worn in accordance with Arkansas Game and Fish Commission regulations during Quota Gun and Muzzleloader Deer hunts.
- Portable, pop-up blinds must have 144 square inches of blaze orange or chartreuse visible from all sides of the blind during firearms big-game seasons on the Refuge.
- Dog training allowed September 1- April 1.
- Bag limits for all species except deer are the same as state limits.
- The use of dogs for deer hunting is prohibited.
- AGFC CWD regulations apply to deer harvested on the refuge in Jackson County and also will apply to refuge properties in other counties as they are so designated by AGFC in the future.
- Use of natural scents or lures that contain natural deer and elk urine or other bio fluids is prohibited.
- Possession or use of alcoholic beverages while hunting is prohibited

E. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting and Fishing

Cache River NWR public use brochures/permits will be annually updated to reflect more specific information and restrictions, including seasons, days, times, bag limits, access, licenses and permits, hunting and fishing devices, ammunition, other equipment, quota application process, and other refuge-specific regulations.

Access and Vehicle Use

- Cache River NWR is in the acquisition phase and Figure 1 shows the current ownership at the time of this Plan. Isolated land tracts that have been purchased are scattered throughout the acquisition zone and have been posted with refuge boundary signs or marked with yellow boundary paint. Access to many of these refuge lands is currently through private lands and all refuge visitors must obtain permission from adjacent landowners prior to crossing private land to reach refuge lands.
- All conventional vehicles, including ATV/UTVs, bicycles, and e-bikes, must stay on

maintained roads or established parking areas and meet all applicable federal and state requirements regulating the use of a licensed motor vehicle. Vehicles equipped with oversize tractor lug type tires are prohibited. Motor vehicle (including ATVs, UTVs, etc.) speed limit is 25 mph unless otherwise posted.

- Recreational use of ATVs is not allowed. ATVs may only be used September 1 to March 31 and only to provide access for hunting. ATVs may be used only on roads, trails, or established parking areas designated (marked) for ATV use. An ATV is defined as a vehicle with a maximum tire pressure of 15 psi, maximum dry weight of 1550 lbs., and with tires having a maximum centerline lug depth of one inch. Only those vehicles originally designed by their manufacturer to be ATVs are allowed; mini-trucks or other modified off-road vehicles are prohibited.
- ATVs and motor vehicles may not be left unattended overnight on the refuge.
- Horses/mules, personal watercraft (e.g., Jet Ski, etc.), hovercraft, and airboats are prohibited.
- Boats with a valid registration may be left on the Refuge from March 1 through October 31.
- Holders of refuge Quota Gun Deer Hunt permits are NOT entitled to camp on State WMAs during the refuge Quota Gun Deer Hunt.

Prohibited hunting activities include:

- Leaving any tree stand, ground blind or game camera on the refuge without the owner's AGFC license customer ID number clearly written in a conspicuous location.
- Littering; including leaving shell casings and boxes on the refuge.
- Cutting or creating holes or other manipulation of vegetation (cutting bushes, mowing, weed-eating, etc.) or hunting from manipulated areas.
- Driving or screwing any metal object into a tree or hunting from a tree in which a metal object has been driven or screwed to support a hunter.
- Building or hunting from permanent blinds or stands.
- Hunting from a vehicle or use of a vehicle as a deer stand.
- Possession or distribution of bait or hunting over bait, salt, grain, or other feed that could serve as a lure or attraction for wildlife.
- Commercial guiding hunters, or hunting, taking, possessing, or attempting to take wildlife using a guide, guide service, outfitter, club, or organization providing assistance, service, or equipment
- Road hunting

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting and Fishing Program

Most of the Refuge's outreach is conducted through its webpage that is updated as needed. The AGFC also prints Refuge specific rules, regulations, laws, etc. in its hunting public use brochures. Occasionally Refuge information is disseminated through radio and TV media.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting and Fishing Program

Based on the comments received during the CCP (2009) and given that hunting and fishing have already been allowed on Cache River NWR for more than 30 years, little negative public reaction is expected. Hunting and fishing are important economic and recreational uses of Arkansas' natural resources. The public and AGFC are expected to welcome

additional hunting opportunities (See Appendix D for public comment received and Service response).

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

General information regarding hunting and other wildlife-dependent public uses can be obtained at Cache River NWR headquarters at 26320 Hwy 33 south, Augusta, AR 72006 or by calling (501)203-7253. Dates, forms, hunting unit directions, maps, applications, and permit requirements about the hunt will be available on the current annual public use brochure and the Refuge's website at: **http://www.fws.gov/cacheriver** and at the Refuge Visitor Center.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and fishing are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See attached Hunting and Fishing CDs (Appendices B and C).

VI. References

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1995. Cache River NWR Hunt Plan. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1995. Cache River NWR Fish Plan. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2009. Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Central Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex Bald Knob, Big Lake, Cache River, and Wapanocca National Wildlife Refuges. Atlanta, GA. 523 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge Final Land Protection Plan. Atlanta, GA. 100 pp.