

## **COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION**

**USE:** Hunting – Big Game, Upland Game, Waterfowl and Other Migratory Birds

**REFUGE NAME:** Red River National Wildlife Refuge

**DATE ESTABLISHED:** October 2000

### **ESTABLISHING and ACQUISITION AUTHORITY:**

The refuge establishment and acquisition authorities for Red River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge) is House Resolution 4318, the Red River National Wildlife Refuge Act (Public Law 106-300).

### **REFUGE PURPOSES:**

The purposes for which Red River NWR was established are:

1. To provide for the restoration and conservation of native plants and animal communities on suitable sites in the Red River basin, including restoration of extirpated species;
2. To provide habitat for migratory birds; and
3. To provide technical assistance to private landowners in the restoration of their lands for the benefit of fish and wildlife (114 Stat. 1056, dated October 13, 2000).

### **NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION:**

“The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) is 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” (Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105-57).

### **DESCRIPTION OF USE:**

#### **(a) What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?**

The use is public hunting of white-tailed deer, wild turkey, quail, squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, duck, goose, coot, gallinule, rail, snipe, woodcock, dove, and incidental take of feral hog, beaver, and coyote on Red River NWR, as listed and in accordance with refuge-specific regulations, other federal regulations, and applicable state regulations. The use is an existing use on the refuge, which was previously approved with the refuge’s 2008 Comprehensive

Conservation Plan. This re-evaluation of the use includes continuing existing hunting but correcting the administrative error by adding gallinule, snipe, rail, and incidental take of beaver and coyote into 50 CFR Part 32 for Red River NWR. Hunting was identified as one of six priority public uses of the Refuge System by the Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-57), when found to be compatible. Big Game Hunting, Small Game Hunting, and Migratory Bird Hunting are existing uses and were determined to be compatible in both the 2008 Red River NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan and associated Environmental Assessment (CCP, USFWS 2008)) and the 2009 Red River NWR Sport Hunting Plan (USFWS 2009).

**(b) Where would the use be conducted?**

Red River NWR is open to hunting on refuge lands except those areas specifically closed according to the annual Public Use Regulations brochure. Zoning of the refuge is used to minimize conflicts between hunters and other user groups. These zones are modified when needed for biological, administrative or safety reasons. Currently, hunting is open on most lands of the refuge except the lake itself and around the Visitor Center. This determination applies to the entire refuge and the impacts analysis reflects anticipated impacts to all of the refuge.

**(c) When would the use be conducted?**

Hunting seasons are established annually, as agreed upon, during bi-annual hunt coordination meetings with Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries (LDWF) personnel. Seasons mostly fall within the LDWF framework but sometimes are more restrictive than the state but never more liberal. Hunters would be able to access the refuge from 4:00 am to one hour after legal shooting hours during seasons open to hunting as specified in the annual Public Use Regulations brochure.

**(d) How would the use be conducted?**

Refuge units designated as hunting units will be open to hunting unless otherwise posted. All hunting activities will be in accordance with state, Federal, and refuge-specific regulations for each season.

Hunters would be required to sign and carry a Public Use Regulations brochure with them on their person. The brochure will cover all refuge regulations, hunting units, and species. The brochure can be obtained by visiting the refuge headquarters, most parking lots or by going online to the refuge's website. Hunters would need to attain all other applicable local, state and/or Federal licenses, permits or stamps in accordance with local, state and Federal laws. A complete listing of all refuge regulations can be found in the Wildlife and Fisheries Code of Federal Regulations (50CFR) and annual Public Use Regulations brochure.

Refuge properties will be open to hunting from 4:00 am to one hour after legal shooting hours. Primary access is by vehicle on roads open to vehicular traffic, on designated all-terrain vehicles (ATV) trails and by foot.

Lottery waterfowl hunts and any other special hunts, such as disabled hunts, will be drawn at random for a pre-specified number of hunters determined by current habitat conditions and administrative abilities. Specific instructions for applying to lottery hunts will be posted on the refuge’s website annually.

**(e) Why is the use being proposed?**

Hunting is one of the priority public uses outlined in the Refuge System Improvement Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) supports and encourages priority uses when they are appropriate and compatible on national wildlife refuge lands. Hunting is a healthy and traditional recreational use of renewable natural resources that is deeply rooted in America’s heritage. Hunting is also an important wildlife management tool to keep certain populations, such as white-tailed deer, at healthy levels.

The proposed action will further align the refuge with the Department of the Interior’s Secretarial Order 3356, which directs the Service to enhance and expand public access to lands and waters on national wildlife refuges for hunting, fishing, recreational shooting and other forms of outdoor recreation. The proposed action will promote one of the priority public uses of the Refuge System. Hunting will also promote the stewardship of our natural resources and increase the public’s appreciation and support for the refuge.

Hunting fulfills Objective E-2 in the Red River NWR CCP (USFWS 2008) to provide quality hunting opportunities.

**AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:**

Hunt administration costs for Red River NWR, including salary, equipment, law enforcement, maintenance and communication with the public will be approximately \$10,500 annually. Costs associated with the hunt program will be funded by the annual operating budget (visitor services and/or maintenance funds, as appropriate).

**Table 1. Funding and Staffing Requirements**

Identifier	Cost
Staff (Maintenance Workers, Biologist, and Refuge Managers) Hunt Program	\$5,000
Maintain roads, parking lots, trails*	\$1,000
News releases, fact sheets, reports for Hunt Program	\$500
Maintain hunting signs	\$1,000
Law Enforcement**	\$3,000
<b>Total Annual Cost</b>	<b>\$10,500</b>

Identifier	Cost
<p><i>*Refuge trails and roads are maintained for a variety of activities. Costs shown are a percentage of total costs for trail/road maintenance on the refuge and are reflective of the percentage of trail/road use for hunting and fishing. Volunteers account for some maintenance hours and help to reduce overall cost of the program.</i></p>	
<p><i>**Detailed Federal wildlife officers since the Complex does not have a law enforcement officer.</i></p>	

Off-setting Revenues: No off-setting revenues.

**ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE:**

Red River NWR has been opened to hunting for over a decade, with no noticeable adverse impacts on the population of species hunted or other associated wildlife. While managed hunting opportunities may result in localized disruption of individual animals’ daily routines, no noticeable adverse effect on populations has been documented. However, should it become necessary, the refuge has the latitude to adjust hunting seasons annually or to close the refuge entirely if there are safety issues or other concerns that merit closure. This latitude, coupled with monitoring of wildlife populations and habitat conditions by the Service and LDWF, will ensure that long-term negative impacts to either wildlife populations and/or habitats on the refuge are unlikely. Should hunting pressure increase on the refuge, alternatives such as lottery hunts, a reduction in the number of days of hunting, or restrictions on that part of the refuge open to hunting can be utilized to limit impacts. Hunting by the public may have adverse impacts on refuge facilities, other visitors and non-target wildlife. Rules and regulations mitigate most of these impacts to a negligible level. Hunters and non-hunting visitors are separated by zoning. It is illegal to harass or take species that are not in season. Littering, vandalism, etc., are illegal as well.

**Migratory Birds**

Each year, Service biologists and others gather, analyze and interpret biological survey data and provide this information to all those involved in the process through a series of published status reports and presentations to Flyway Councils and other interested parties (USFWS 2019).

Because the Service is required to take abundance of migratory birds and other factors in to consideration, the Service undertakes a number of surveys throughout the year in conjunction with the Canadian Wildlife Service, state and provincial wildlife-management agencies, and others. To determine the appropriate frameworks for each species, the Service considers factors such as population size and trend, geographical distribution, annual breeding effort, the condition of breeding and wintering habitat, the number of hunters and the anticipated harvest. After frameworks are established for season lengths, bag limits and areas for migratory game bird hunting, migratory game bird management becomes a cooperative effort of state and Federal governments. After Service establishment of final frameworks for hunting seasons, the states may select season dates, bag limits and other regulatory options for the hunting seasons. States may always be more conservative in their selections than the Federal frameworks but never more

liberal. Season dates and bag limits for national wildlife refuges open to hunting are never longer or larger than the state regulations. In fact, based upon the findings of an environmental assessment developed when a national wildlife refuge opens a new hunting activity, season dates and bag limits may be more restrictive than the state allows. At Red River NWR, regulations are more restrictive for waterfowl than the state allows by ending hunting at noon. We allow waterfowl hunting every day of the 60-day state season and therefore must minimize disturbance during the hunting season by limiting hours of day that boat and hunting disturbance can occur. The negative effects of disturbance to wintering waterfowl are discussed in the refuge's CCP and Habitat Management Plan, and the refuge's objectives for providing Duck Energy Days (DEDs) will be difficult to achieve if disturbance is not limited by hours of day (USFWS 2008 and 2013). In the 2017 hunting season, an estimated 1,083,900 ducks were harvested in Louisiana alone (Raftovich *et al.* 2019). No more than 2,000 ducks are harvested on Red River NWR, representing less than 1% of the statewide harvest. In 2018, an estimated 133,200 doves were harvested in Louisiana (Raftovich *et al.* 2019). No more than 100 doves, representing less than 1% of the statewide harvest, are expected to be harvested annually on the refuge.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) considerations by the Service for hunted migratory game bird species are addressed by the programmatic document "Second Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement: Issuance of Annual Regulations Permitting the Sport Hunting of Migratory Birds (EIS 20130139)," filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on May 24, 2013. A notice of availability was published in the Federal Register on May 31, 2013 (78 FR 32686), and Record of Decision on July 26, 2013 (78 FR 45376). This Environmental Impact Statement addresses NEPA compliance by the Service for issuance of the annual framework regulations for hunting of migratory game bird species. NEPA compliance is also addressed for waterfowl hunting frameworks through the annual preparation of separate environmental assessments, the most recent being "Migratory Game Bird Hunting Regulations 2019-20," with its corresponding June 14, 2018, Finding of No Significant Impact.

Although woodcock are showing declines in numbers on their breeding grounds, habitat loss is considered to be the culprit, not hunting. This assertion was tested in a study conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in 2005 (McAuley *et al.* 2005). Results showed no significant differences in woodcock survival between hunted and non-hunted areas. Furthermore, the authors concluded that hunting was not having a considerable impact on woodcock numbers in the Northeast (McAuley *et al.* 2005). In the 2018 season, an estimated 10,600 woodcock were harvested in Louisiana (Raftovich *et al.* 2019). Very little woodcock habitat is available on the refuge and few hunters attempt to harvest woodcock; therefore, woodcock hunting should have no adverse cumulative effects on their local, regional or flyway populations.

Snipe, rail, gallinule and coot hunting are not popular in north Louisiana and are rarely participated in. These species are hunted more in the marshes of south Louisiana. Numbers of these species harvested on the refuge would be less than 10 for each. In 2017, statewide harvest estimates in Louisiana for snipe, rail, gallinule and coot are 600, 100, 6,500 and 29,200, respectively.

Hunting migratory birds on the refuge would make the birds more skittish and prone to

disturbance, reduce the amount of time they spend foraging and resting, and alter their habitat usage patterns (Raveling 1979, Owen 1973, Pease *et al.* 2005, St. James *et al.* 2013, Shirkey *et al.* 2020). Disturbance to non-target birds and resident wildlife would likely occur from hunting and associated hunter activity but would be short-term and temporary. Because migratory bird hunting occurs during the non-breeding season for non-target and target birds, the effects on migratory birds are expected to be minimal.

## **Big Game**

Deer hunting does not have regional population impacts due to restricted home ranges. The average home range of a male deer in Mississippi is  $1,511 \pm 571$  S.D hectares. (Mott *et al.* 1985). Therefore, only local impacts occur. Deer gun hunting has been occurring on lands adjacent to the refuge for decades. The LDWF estimates 138,300 deer were harvested throughout the state in 2016/17 (LDWF 2017). The 10-year average annual statewide harvest is 153,180 deer. The refuge does not foresee harvesting more than 100 deer per year, representing less than one percent of the long-term average statewide harvest. Therefore, deer hunting on Red River NWR should not have negative cumulative impacts on deer populations.

The LDWF closely monitors turkey populations using harvest data and poult surveys to monitor reproductive trends which directly correspond to turkey numbers. Annually, the LDWF adjusts season dates and bag limits to ensure that turkey populations are not adversely affected by hunting. The refuge may have a more conservative season than the LDWF but not a more liberal one. Turkey hunting has been occurring on private lands adjacent to the refuge without adverse effects to the population.

## **Small Game**

Squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, and opossum cannot be affected regionally by refuge hunting because of their limited home ranges. Only local effects will be discussed. Opossum and raccoon are hunted primarily at night. Raccoon are more sought after than opossum by the public. Hunting helps regulate opossum and raccoon populations; however, unless the popularity of this type of hunting increases, raccoon and opossum numbers will always be higher than desired. When these species become extremely overabundant, diseases such as distemper and rabies reduce the populations. However, waiting for disease outbreak to regulate their numbers can be a human health hazard. Adverse impacts to raccoon and opossum are unlikely considering they reproduce quickly, are difficult to hunt due to their nocturnal habits, and are not as popular for hunting as other game species.

Studies have been conducted within and outside of Louisiana to determine the effects of hunting on the population dynamics of small game. Results from studies have consistently shown that small game, such as rabbits and squirrels, are not affected by hunting but rather are limited by food resources (Schwartz and Schwartz 1959, Whitaker and Hamilton 1998, Yarrow and Yarrow 1999). The refuge consulted with biologists at the LDWF in association with this assessment on the cumulative impacts of hunting on rabbits and squirrel. The statewide Louisiana harvest for squirrel during 2016/17 was estimated at 1,462,600. The LDWF estimated 196,400 rabbits were



taken by hunters in the 2016/17 season. Under the proposed action, the refuge estimates a maximum 30 rabbits and 300 squirrels would be harvested, representing less than 0.01% of the statewide harvest. Gray squirrels, fox squirrels, eastern cottontails and swamp rabbits are prolific breeders, and their populations have never been threatened by hunting in Louisiana even prior to the passing of hunting regulations as we know them today.

Quail are non-migratory and therefore are not regionally affected by hunting. Only local effects will be discussed. The early successional habitat that quail favor is not abundant on the refuge; therefore, quail hunting is limited. Studies by the LDWF indicate that a harvest of <30% on hunting areas in the southeast should be sustainable. In the past five years, no quail have been harvested on the refuge. The harvesting of quail should not have negative cumulative effects on their local population.

### **Incidental Take Species**

Feral hog is an introduced, non-native species that is considered an outlaw quadruped by the LDWF. Outlaw quadrupeds according to the State of Louisiana is an invasive species which has caused severe crop and land damage throughout the state, examples are feral hogs, coyotes, and armadillos. There are no bag limits on feral hogs and they can be hunted year-round on private land. Hogs can harbor several infectious diseases, some of which can be fatal to wildlife and harmful to humans (Simoes 2013, Kaller *et al.* 2016). By rooting and wallowing, feral hogs destroy habitat that wildlife depend on. Destruction includes erosion along waterways and wetlands and the loss of native plants (USDA 2020). Additionally, feral hogs compete directly for food with deer, bears, turkeys, squirrels and many other birds and mammals (USDA 2020). They are predators of small mammals and deer fawns, as well as ground-nesting birds such as turkeys (USDA 2020). Because hogs are already present on the refuge, the Service is not concerned there will be an effort by the public to move hogs onto the refuge for hunting opportunities. Therefore, by allowing for the incidental take of feral hogs during other legal hunting seasons, this provides the refuge with another management tool in reducing this detrimental species and, at the same time, provides a recreational opportunity widely enjoyed by local hunters. No additional impacts should occur with the incidental hunting of hogs because users would be hunting other species on the refuge and harvest a hog if they come across one.

Coyotes and beaver cannot be affected regionally by refuge hunting because of their limited home ranges. Only local effects will be discussed. Coyotes depredate small mammals, songbirds and their nests, turkey and quail nests and any other animal they opportunistically encounter. When coyote numbers are high, local wildlife populations can be negatively affected. (Kilgo *et al.* 2010). Coyotes are probably the most resilient species in North America. Today, regulated hunting has no negative cumulative impact on their populations. Beaver adversely affect the refuge by impounding thousands of acres of forest and causing large die-offs of timber. Incidental take of both coyotes and beaver to keep populations lower is beneficial in helping meet refuge objectives.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

Cumulative impacts on the environment result from incremental impacts of a proposed action when these are added to other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions. While cumulative impacts may result from individually minor actions, they may, viewed as a whole, become substantial over time. The refuge hunt program is designed to be sustainable through time, given relatively stable conditions, particularly because of close coordination with the LDWF.

The cumulative impacts of hunting on white-tailed deer, wild turkey, quail, squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, duck, goose, coot, gallinule, rail, snipe, woodcock, dove and incidental take of feral hog, beaver, and coyote populations at the refuge are negligible. The proportion of the refuge's harvest of these species is negligible when compared to local, regional and statewide populations and harvest.

Because of the regulatory process for harvest management in place within the Service, the setting of hunting seasons largely outside of the breeding seasons of resident and migratory wildlife, the ability of individual refuge hunt programs to adapt refuge-specific hunting regulations to changing local conditions, and the wide geographic separation of individual refuges, we anticipate no direct or indirect cumulative impacts on resident wildlife, migratory birds, and non-hunted wildlife by use of hunting on the refuge.

Other refuge actions including wildlife observation, photography, education, interpretation, research and management could potentially overlap with hunting activity causing a disturbance of those actions and a decrease in visitor experience or management effectiveness. Refuge hunts are managed in such a way that use is limited in time and location to exclude it from these other refuge uses etc.

### **PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:**

This compatibility determination for Red River NWR was available for review and comment in the spring of 2021 nationally through the Federal Register and locally from April 14 through July 6, 2021 at the Refuge Complex office, on refuge and national websites (<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/>), and on social media. National public notice was provided through the Federal Register ([Volume 86, Number 84; 86 FR 23794; Docket No. FWS-HQ-NWRS-2021-0027, FXRS12610900000-212-FF09R20000; pages 23794-23842](#)) which was published on May 4, 2021. Initial scoping letters were sent to the State on October 1, 2020 with a follow up letter sent on April 29, 2021. Tribal letters were sent to Quapaw, Caddo Nation, Coushatta, Choctaw Nation, Jena Band of Choctaw, Mississippi Band of Choctaw and Tunica-Biloxi on October 1, 2021. A follow-up letter was sent on June 4, 2021. One comment was received in the form of a letter from the Humane Society of the United States that was also received to the Federal Register. A response to that letter is provided in the Final Rule.



**DETERMINATION (CHECK ONE BELOW):**

Use is not compatible

Use is compatible, with the following stipulations

**STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:**

To ensure compatibility with refuge purposes and the Refuge System mission, hunting can occur at Red River NWR in accordance with state and Federal regulations and special refuge-specific restrictions. The refuge can, and has, established more restrictive seasons and bag limits to prevent over-harvest of individual species or disturbance to trust species. The 50 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 32 outlines refuge-specific regulations; 50 CFR Part 20 outlines migratory bird hunting; 50 CFR Part 26 outlines Public Entry and Use, including specific regulations for Red River NWR; and 50 CFR Part 27 outlines prohibited acts. The refuge hunt brochure will provide important information and requirements for hunting on the refuge. This permit, which augments the state hunting regulations, explains both the general hunt regulations and the refuge-specific regulations. These regulations and restrictions will ensure that wildlife and habitat management goals are achieved and that the program is providing a safe, high-quality hunting experience for participants. All hunters are required to possess a refuge hunting permit while participating in refuge hunts. Law enforcement patrols are frequently conducted throughout the hunting season to ensure compliance with refuge laws and regulations. This hunting program will be monitored, and potentially modified or eliminated, if any the program's components are found not compatible.

The following regulations appear in 50 CFR 32 and ensure the implementation of the Red River NWR Hunt Program meets the purposes of the refuge and the safety of participants.

(r) *Red River National Wildlife Refuge—(1) Migratory game bird hunting.* We allow hunting of duck, goose, coot, woodcock, snipe, rail, gallinule, and dove on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- (i) Hunters must possess and carry a signed refuge permit (signed refuge brochure).
- (ii) We allow waterfowl hunting until 12 p.m. (noon) during the state season and must exit the refuge no later than 1:30 p.m.
- (iii) Hunters may enter the refuge no earlier than 4 a.m.
- (iv) Hunters may only hunt during designated times and seasons, as listed in refuge brochure (signed brochure).
- (v) We prohibit hunting within 100 feet (30 meters) of any public road, refuge road, trail or ATV trail, residence, building, aboveground oil or gas or electrical transmission facility, or designated public facility.
- (vi) When hunting migratory game birds, you may only use dogs to locate, point, and retrieve.
- (vii) We allow the incidental take of coyote, beaver, and feral hogs in designated areas during refuge hunts with weapons legal for the hunt.

(2) *Upland game hunting.* We allow hunting of quail, squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, and opossum on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

(i) The conditions set forth at paragraphs (r)(1)(i), (iii), (iv), (v), and (vii) of this section apply.

(ii) We allow hunting of raccoon and opossum during the daylight hours of rabbit and squirrel season. We allow night hunting during December and January, and you may use dogs for night hunting.

(iii) We allow the use of dogs to hunt squirrel and rabbit after December 31.

(iv) Hunters must exit the refuge no later than 1 hour after legal shooting hours, unless participating in authorized nighttime hunting.

(3) *Big game hunting.* We allow hunting of white-tailed deer, and turkey on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: The conditions set forth at paragraphs (r)(1)(i), (iii), (iv), (v), and (vi) and (r)(2)(iv) of this section apply.

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

(i) We allow use of only electric trolling motors on all refuge waters while fishing.

(ii) Recreational fishing using commercial gear (slat traps, etc.) requires a special refuge permit (Special Use Permit (FWS Form 3-1383-G)), which is available at the refuge office. You must possess and carry the special refuge permit while fishing using commercial gear.

(iii) We prohibit the taking of alligator snapping turtle (see §27.21 of this chapter).

## **JUSTIFICATION:**

Hunting is a priority wildlife-dependent use for the Refuge System through which the public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife. Service policy is to provide expanded opportunities for wildlife-dependent uses when compatible and consistent with sound fish and wildlife management and ensure that they receive enhanced attention during planning and management.

Hunting satisfies a recreational need, but hunting of certain species on national wildlife refuges is also an important, proactive management action that can prevent overpopulation and the deterioration of habitat. Disturbance to other species will occur, but this disturbance is generally short-term. Suitable habitat exists on refuge lands to support hunting as proposed.

Hunting is a very popular and traditional wildlife-dependent use by the public that has been occurring for centuries in this area. Hunting on private land in this region is becoming less available to most people due to the costs associated with leasing hunting rights. Memberships in hunting clubs can range from a couple of thousand to tens of thousands of dollars a year. The refuge often attracts those hunters who cannot afford to join a hunting club.

This activity will not conflict with any of the other priority public uses or adversely impact biological resources. Therefore, through this compatibility determination process, we have determined that hunting on the refuge, in accordance with the stipulations provided above, is a compatible use that will not materially interfere with, or detract from, the fulfillment of the Refuge System mission or the purpose(s) of the refuge.

**NEPA COMPLIANCE FOR REFUGE USE (Check one below):**

- Categorical Exclusion Without Environmental Action Statement
- Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Statement
- Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact
- Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

**LITERATURE CITED:**

LDWF. 2017. Louisiana Big and Small Game Harvest Survey for 2016-2017. Baton Rouge, LA, 19pp.

McAuley, D.G, J.R. Longcore, D.A. Clugston, R. B. Allen, A. Weik, S. Staats, G.F. Sepik, Wl Halteman. 2005. Effects of hunting on survival of American woodcock in the northeast. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 69(4): 1565–1577.

Mott, S.E., R.L. Tucker, D.C. Guynn, H.A. Jacobson. 1985. Use of Mississippi bottomland hardwoods by white-tailed deer. *Proceedings of the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies* 39: 403-411.

Kaller, M., Bret Collier, E. Achberger, and O. Barry. 2016. Detection of feral hog impacts to water quality and wildlife. Louisiana State University.

Kilgo, J.C., H.S. Ray, C. Ruth and K.V. Miller. 2010. Can coyotes affect deer populations in Southeastern North America? *JWM* 74 (5): 929-933.

Owen, M. 1973. The management of grassland areas for wintering geese. *Wildfowl* 24: 123-130.

Pease, M.L., R.K. Rose, and M.J. Butler. 2005. Effects of human disturbances on the behavior of wintering ducks. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 33: 103-112.

Raftovich, R.V., K.K. Fleming, S.C. Chandler, and C.M. Cain 2019. Migratory bird hunting activity and harvest during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 hunting seasons. U.S. Fish and wildlife Service, Laurel, Maryland, USA, 75 pp.

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- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2008. *Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Red River National Wildlife Refuge*. Atlanta, GA.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2013. *Habitat Conservation Plan for Red River National Wildlife Refuge*. Farmerville, LA, 73 pp.
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- Yarrow and Yarrow 1999. *Managing Wildlife: On Private Lands in Alabama and the Southeast*. Sweetwater Press, 1<sup>st</sup>. ed., pp. 588



## U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

### ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record and determined that the following proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA documentation requirements consistent with 40 CFR §1508.4, 43 CFR §46.205, 43 CFR §46.210, 43 CFR §46.215, and 516 DM 8.

Proposed Action and Alternatives. Red River NWR is open to gallinule, snipe, rail, and incidental take of beaver and coyote hunting as stated in the current 2009 Sport Hunting Plan and associated Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact. In 2010, gallinule, snipe, rail, and coyote were listed in 50 CFR Part 32 as huntable species for Red River NWR, although analyzed, but due to an administrative error beaver was not listed. In 2011, gallinule, snipe, rail, and coyote were dropped from 50 CFR Part 32 as huntable species for Red River NWR. The 2009 Sport Hunting Plan EA analyzed direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on these species, refuge facilities, non-hunted wildlife, habitats, wildlife-dependent recreation, cultural resources and the public environment (pages 14-28). These species have been open to hunting on the refuge since the 2009 Sport Hunting plan was finalized. Currently, no changes are being proposed to their seasons, and while habitats and vegetation on the Red River NWR would be expected to continue to be impacted by outside factors, including human population increases and associated development patterns, climate change, and invasive species, the Service is unaware of any other adverse environmental trends or planned actions that would adversely impact hunting of these species. Red River NWR is seeking to correct the administrative error by adding gallinule, snipe, rail, and incidental take of beaver and coyote into 50 CFR Part 32 for Red River NWR.

Categorical Exclusion(s). **This proposed action is covered by the following categorical exclusion: 516 DM 8.5 B (7)**

“An action by the Service that only results in “minor changes in the amounts or types of public use on Service or State managed lands, in accordance with existing regulations, management plans, and procedures” is categorically excluded from further NEPA analyses, because it has been determined to be a class of action which does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment” (516 DM 8.5 B (7)). The action does not trigger an Exception to the Categorical Exclusions under 43 CFR §46.215.

Permits/Approvals. Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation

Public Involvement/Interagency Coordination. None

Supporting Documents.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2009a. Compatibility Determinations for Big Game, Upland



Game and Migratory Bird Hunting on Red River NWR. Southeast Region. Farmerville, LA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2009b. Environmental Assessment for Sport Hunting Plan. Southeast Region. Farmerville, LA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2009c. Sport Hunt Plan for Red River NWR. Southeast Region. Farmerville, LA.

CHRISTOPHER  
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Act. Project Leader

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Date

**REGION 4  
INTRA-SERVICE SECTION 7 BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION FORM**

**Originating Person:** Gypsy Hanks

**Telephone Number:** 318-726-4222

**E-Mail:** gypsy\_hanks@fws.gov

**Date:** 5/17/21

**PROJECT NAME (Grant Title/Number):** 2021-22 Red River NWR Hunt Plan CatEx

**I. Service Program:**

- **Ecological Services**
- **Federal Aid**
- **Clean Vessel Act**
- **Coastal Wetlands**
- **Endangered Species**
- **Section 6 Partners for**
- **Fish and Wildlife**
- **Sport Fish Restoration**
- **Wildlife Restoration**
- **Fisheries**
- **Refuges/Wildlife**

**II. State/Agency:** Louisiana

**III. Station Name:** Red River NWR

**IV. Description of Proposed Action (attach additional pages as needed):**

Red River NWR is open to gallinule, snipe, rail, and incidental take of beaver and coyote hunting as stated in the current 2009 Sport Hunting Plan and associated Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact. In 2010, gallinule, snipe, rail, and coyote were listed in 50 CFR Part 32 as huntable species for Red River NWR, although analyzed, but due to an administrative error beaver was not listed. In 2011, gallinule, snipe, rail, and coyote were dropped from 50 CFR Part 32 as huntable species for Red River NWR. The 2009 Sport Hunting Plan EA analyzed direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on these species, refuge facilities, non-hunted wildlife, habitats, wildlife-dependent recreation, cultural resources and the public environment (pages 14-28). These species have been open to hunting on the refuge since the 2009 Sport Hunting plan was finalized. Currently, no changes are being proposed to their seasons, and while habitats and vegetation on the Red River NWR would be expected to continue to be impacted by outside factors, including human population increases and associated development patterns, climate change, and invasive species, the Service is unaware of any other adverse environmental trends or planned actions that would adversely impact hunting of these species. Red River NWR is seeking to correct the administrative error by adding gallinule, snipe, rail, and incidental take of beaver and coyote into 50 CFR Part 32 for Red River NWR.

**V. Pertinent Species and Habitat:**

Red River NWR ECOS to identify threatened and endangered species, including for purposes of this Biological Evaluation. This is done because the ECOS database is the better of the Service's databases for Red River NWR and may contain the best available information on species presence. Nevertheless, in order to ensure a

thorough review, this Biological Evaluation considers all threatened and endangered species identified by both the IPAC and ECOS databases. Note, however, that these databases are updated regularly, approximately every 90 days, and, thus, it is possible that the specific threatened and endangered species identified as present on or near the refuge may change between the finalization of this Biological Evaluation and its publication and/or between finalization and your reading this document.

Staff present on the refuge and conducting this evaluation may have the best available information about the presence of fish and wildlife species. Thus, where species are identified by either database, but the refuge has information that the species is not actually present within the “action area,” we have explained that as the basis for our determination that any hunting and fishing activities will have no effect on the species.

**A. Include species/habitat occurrence maps:**

**B. Species, critical habitat and Federal Status:**

SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT	STATUS <sup>1</sup>
Red-cockaded woodpecker ( <i>Picoides borealis</i> )	E
Northern long-eared bat ( <i>Myotis septentrionalis</i> )	T
Louisiana pine snake ( <i>Pituophis ruthveni</i> )	T
Monarch butterfly ( <i>Danaus plexippus</i> )	C
Earth-fruit ( <i>Geocarpon minimum</i> )	T

<sup>1</sup> STATUS: E=endangered, T=threatened, PE=proposed endangered, PT=proposed threatened, CH=critical habitat, PCH=proposed critical habitat, C=candidate species

<sup>2</sup> REFUGE: Delete column if only one refuge

**VI. Location (attach map):**

**A. Ecoregion Number and Name:**

Lower Mississippi River Ecosystem

**B. County and State:** Caddo, Bossier, Red River, Natchitoches, and DeSoto Parishes, LA

**C. Section, township, and range (or latitude and longitude):**

**D. Distance (miles) and direction to nearest town:** scattered tracts throughout the Red River Valley from Bossier City, LA to south of Natchitoches, LA

**E. Species/habitat occurrence:**

Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW): Red-cockaded woodpeckers require old growth pine forest as nesting habitat. This habitat does not exist on Red River NWR, which is located along the Red River alluvial valley and is mostly wetland habitat.

Northern long-eared bats (NLEB): The presence of northern long-eared bat is unknown on the refuge. The refuge is in the southern part of the bat’s range and is located within the White-nose Syndrome Buffer Zone. No known maternity roosts exist on the refuge.

Louisiana Pine Snake: Louisiana pine snakes utilize open pine forest with well-

drained sandy soils, an herbaceous understory and the presence of Baird's pocket gopher mounds. Red River NWR does not have this type of habitat. Most of Red River NWR is within the Red River delta or alluvial valley and is wetland habitat. No open pine forest exists on the refuge. No records of Louisiana pine snake occur on the refuge. The best information available indicates that the refuge cannot support a population of Louisiana pine snake due to the lack of habitat necessary.

Monarch butterfly: This species occurs across North America during spring and summer but migrates to Central America beginning in early fall. The primary habitat is open field and grasslands with the main food source being milkweed.

Earth-fruit: Earth-fruit is an annual flowering plant that occurs in prairies/barrens and sandstone glades. Red River NWR does not have prairies/barrens or sandstone glades. In addition the plant needs a certain amount of disturbance such as fire to keep competition from other plants low. No habitat on Red River NWR fits this description. No known Geocarpon exist on the refuge. No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Botanists from Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries have surveyed and collected plants at Red River NWR but have not found earth –fruit. However, because earth-fruit seed can be viable in the soil for several years and the plant is tiny and only visible for 3-6 weeks of the year, it could be present without Service biologists and staff knowing.

**VII. Determination of Effects:**

**A. Explanation of effects of the action on species and critical habitats in item (attach additional pages as needed):**

SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT	IMPACTS TO SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT
Red-cockaded Woodpecker	<p>No critical habitat has been designated for RCWs.</p> <p>The refuge does not have any suitable habitat for RCWs. RCWs require pine forest of at least 30 years of age for foraging habitat and &gt;60 years of age for roosting/nesting habitat. Red River NWR is a wetland refuge and does not have upland pine forest. The species does not exist on the refuge and therefore, hunting on the refuge would not impact the species.</p>
Northern long-eared bat	<p>Red River NWR lies within the White-nose Syndrome Buffer Zone for northern long-eared bats. Although no known maternity colonies exist on the refuge that does not mean that NLEB are not present. Like most bats, northern long-eared bats emerge at dusk to feed. They primarily fly through the understory of forested areas feeding on moths, flies, leafhoppers, caddisflies, and beetles. During the summer, these bats roost singly or in colonies underneath bark, in cavities or in crevices of both live trees and snags (dead trees). In winter, they hibernate in caves and mines, called hibernacula. They use areas in various sized caves or mines with constant temperatures, high humidity, and no air currents. However, there are no caves or mines on the</p>

	<p>refuge. White-nose syndrome, a fungal disease known to affect bats, is currently the predominant threat to this bat, especially throughout the Northeast where the species has declined by up to 99 percent from pre-white-nose syndrome levels at many hibernation sites. Human presence and related noise during hunting activities have not been included among the activities interfering or affecting this species, especially during the dusk and evening hours when the bat feeds. However, it is possible that the use of portable, removable tree stands and climbing on trees, which are allowed on the refuge, could disturb and flush individuals of this species utilizing the same tree as hunters. Noise from gun use might also flush roosting bats from trees, although it is more likely the bats will remain in place when only disturbed by noise. In either case, when such disturbances do occur and flush bats from trees it does not result in mortality or rise to the level of take. Also, hunting does not occur in spring and summer months when bats would be using trees for roosting and maternity colonies.</p> <p>Lead shotgun ammunition is not permitted on the refuge; however, lead rifle ammunition is. Upland game shot used throughout the refuge is lead-free. Ammunition used for big game hunting may contain lead. The amount of lead introduced to the environment as a result of big game hunting will be negligible because hunters utilizing centerfire lead ammunition for big game utilize very few bullets when hunting since every shot counts and big game quickly abandon a site after a shot is fired. The bioaccumulation of lead is a potential concern, but it does not present a significant issue on this refuge as some hunters will choose non-lead methods of take such as archery and non-lead ammunition. We encourage the use of non-toxic ammunition and educate hunters about lead. Moreover, this species does not scavenge, and therefore will not be impacted by lead fragments in gut piles (which are often buried) left on the refuge after hunting seasons. Instead, this species consumes insects and other food sources very unlikely to be impacted by lead in the environment. Current hunting areas, along with non-lead alternatives and education, would not result in lead levels toxic to this species. Thus, we believe that this activity might affect, but is not likely to adversely affect this species because individuals of this species would fly away temporarily from areas used by possible hunters.</p>
Louisiana pine snake	<p>No critical habitat has been designated for Louisiana pine snakes.</p> <p>Louisiana pine snake require pine forest; however, Red River NWR does not have pine forest. It is a wetland refuge. The species does not exist on the refuge and therefore, hunting on the refuge would not impact the species.</p>

<p>Monarch butterfly</p>	<p>Monarch butterflies spend spring and summer in areas of North America preferring open field and grassland habitats. This species migrates to Central America beginning in early fall. Their primary food source is milkweed.</p> <p>Activities associated with hunting and sport fishing, including addition of new species/hunts, will not alter the habitat of this species because only foot travel is allowed in any areas of grassland habitat suitable for Monarch butterflies, so it is unlikely that individual plants that may be damaged or destroyed would impact habitat quality. Hunting does not occur on the refuge during spring and summer when monarchs utilize grasslands on the refuge, particularly milkweeds. Fishing does occur during this time; however, over 90% of fishing on the refuge occurs from boats in permanent lakes and bayous. The approximate 10% of fishing done by land is from piers and along roadsides. Very little foot traffic occurs on grasslands during summer months on the refuge.</p> <p>Lead shotgun ammunition is not permitted on the refuge; however, lead rifle ammunition is. The amount of lead introduced to the environment as a result of this incidental hunting, however, is negligible given less than 5 coyotes and beavers are harvested annually on the refuge. The use of lead to hunt feral hogs would be of greater amount; however, because the Monarch butterfly forages <i>exclusively</i> on nectar from milkweed, bioaccumulation of lead would not affect this species due to their position in the food chain, as plants will not uptake lead unless soil lead levels are very high.</p>
<p>Earth-fruit</p>	<p>No critical habitat has been designated for earth-fruit.</p> <p>Although the likelihood of earth-fruit occurring on the refuge is low, it could be present. Earth-fruit is an annual that is above ground from 3-6 weeks in the spring. Impacts by hunting would be unlikely because no hunting season occurs during spring on the refuge. Hunters are not permitted to dig or move soil nor would they have any reason to do so.</p> <p>Leadshot ammunition is not permitted on the refuge; however, lead rifle ammunition is. Because earth-fruit is under ground during hunting season, lead ammunition from hunting would not affect it.</p>

**B. Explanation of actions to be implemented to reduce adverse effects:**

1. No hunting seasons occur on the refuge during RCW nesting season or during NLEB maternity colony season. Therefore disturbance to RCWs and NLEBs during breeding season would not occur by hunters.
2. It is not believed that NLEB winter on the refuge because NLEB are known to hibernate in



caves and mines. Neither caves nor mines exist on the refuge; therefore, it is unlikely that hunters would be able to disturb hibernating NLEB.

3. Hunting on the refuge requires non-toxic shotgun ammunition during all open hunting seasons on the refuges. Lead rifle shot is permitted on the refuge for incidental hunting of beaver, and coyote. The amount of lead introduced to the environment as a result of this incidental hunting, however, is negligible given less than 5 coyotes and beavers are harvested annually on the refuge. Many refuge hunters will choose non-lead shot methods of take such as archery. We encourage the use of non-toxic ammunition when allowed and educate hunters about lead. As a result, there are no anticipated adverse impacts to any of the above listed species from lead.
4. Staff present on the refuge and conducting this evaluation have the best available information about the presence of endangered and threatened species. Red-cockaded woodpecker and Louisiana pine snake, both species that specialize in open pine forests, do not exist on the refuge which is primarily wetlands within the Red River alluvial valley. Open pine forest does not exist on the refuge.
5. The refuge will modify hunting/fishing activities if unusual concentrations of threatened and endangered species are known to be present and would be threatened by hunting/fishing activities.
6. The presence of Federal and State wildlife law enforcement officers will provide a deterrent to the take of non-target species.
7. It is extremely unlikely earth-fruit exists on the refuge. In the off-chance it does occur, no negative effects should occur to earth-fruit as it is only above ground during the spring when no hunting season occurs.

**VIII. Effect Determination and Response Requested:**

<u>SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT</u>	<u>DETERMINATION<sup>1</sup></u>			<u>RESPONSE<sup>1</sup> REQUESTED</u>
	<u>NE</u>	<u>NA</u>	<u>AA</u>	
Red-cockaded woodpecker	X			Concurrence
Northern long-eared bat		X		Concurrence
Louisiana pine snake	X			Concurrence
Monarch butterfly	X			Concurrence
Earth-fruit		x		Concurrence

<sup>1</sup>DETERMINATION/RESPONSE REQUESTED:

NE = no effect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action will not directly, indirectly, or cumulatively impact, either positively or negatively, any listed, proposed,

