

Compatibility Determination

Use: BIG GAME AND UPLAND GAME HUNTING

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife 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)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the 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.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge was established on September 25, 2002. Hunting occurred on this private property prior to refuge establishment via hunting leases and other private agreements. Hunting has not been authorized to occur on the Refuge since establishment.

Hunting is 1 of the 6 legislated wildlife-dependent, priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Hunting would occur within designated hunting areas on the Refuge during Refuge hunting seasons that are within Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources established hunting seasons. Meetings would be held annually with Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources staff to set these dates. Hunting would be subject to Federal, State and Refuge-specific regulations.

Since Cahaba River NWR is a new refuge, the exact number of users is unknown. Based on hunting that occurs on the adjacent Cahaba River Wildlife Management Area, we would anticipate up to 75 people and 40 vehicles to utilize the public hunting area each day of the weekend during the peak of seasons for white-tailed deer and wild turkey. We expect approximately 25 people and 15 vehicles on a weekday during the peak of the white-tailed deer and wild turkey season. We anticipate up to 500 additional user-days per year for all other species hunted.

Where would the use be conducted?

Hunting could occur throughout the refuge area acquired to date. As additional areas are acquired they will be evaluated to determine their suitability for this activity.

Access to many areas is limited due to ongoing acquisition. Currently, only one Refuge road connects directly to a public road. All other areas of the Refuge are accessed via gated private roads. Due to ongoing problems with dumping, littering, and graffiti in the area it is unlikely that these gated private roads will be opened for public access. The current lack of access would necessitate hiking to many hunting areas on the Refuge. As we complete Refuge acquisition, additional access could be provided.

When would the use be conducted?

Hunting would occur during designated Refuge hunting seasons that are within Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources established hunting seasons. Meetings would be held annually with Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources staff to set these dates.

How would the use be conducted?

Hunting would be subject to Federal, State and Refuge-specific regulations and occur within designated hunting areas on the Refuge. Camping and use of ATV's would not be allowed. Tree stands or blinds would be removed daily by the hunter.

Why is this use being proposed?

Hunting is proposed to offer the public recreation opportunities that are identified as the priority wildlife dependent public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$9,000 of staff time and \$20,000 of other operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Hunt Coordination Meetings and Data Analysis - \$2,000
Monitoring of Hunting Activities - \$3,000
Trash Pick-up - \$500
Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$3,500

Maintenance Costs

Road Repair/Grading - \$5,000
Gravel - \$10,000
Signs - \$1,000
Trash Removal - \$1,000
Mowing - \$3,000

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge would utilize a self-reporting system to monitor use and harvests. Monitoring costs would be minimized for the Refuge under this scenario and are expected to be \$1,000.00 annually.

Offsetting revenues:

None

What efforts have been made to secure adequate resources to support this priority public use?

The Refuge is currently unstaffed and unfunded. Funding for specific needs and projects are currently being sought through the NWRS Refuge Operations and Needs System (RONS) and Maintenance Management System (MMS) programs. In FY 2004, funding for the Central Alabama National Wildlife Refuge Complex Project Leader position was funded through the Cahaba River NWR RONS project. This position is located at Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in Anniston, Alabama.

Some funding has been provided by the Bibb County Commission in support of the Refuge, and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants as an interim funding measure to support public use projects. A federal matching grant was obtained by the Refuge in 2004 to facilitate improvements to the Cahaba River access point on the River Road using Bibb County Commission funds as a match.

Additional funding to support habitat restoration and studies has been pledged by The Nature Conservancy of Alabama and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants to fund restoration activities. In 2004, funds were obtained using TNC matching funds that will allow restoration of approximately 900 acres of longleaf pine on previously clearcut sites.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are all minor and include damage to vegetation, littering, increased refuge maintenance response to activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts to wildlife or habitats are anticipated with the use as proposed.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the Refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No comments were received during the comment period regarding Hunting.

Three written comments were received on this use following the public meeting held in West Blocton on March 18, 2004. The commenters requested that we coordinate our hunting efforts with the adjacent Cahaba River Wildlife Management Area.

One additional written comment was received in February during our scoping period for this document from a State partner requesting that we coordinate our hunting efforts with the adjacent Cahaba River WMA.

Our response was:

We plan to coordinate the Refuge hunting program with the adjacent Cahaba Wildlife Management Area. We will draft our Hunting Plan in cooperation with the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

NEPA Compliance:

What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge,
October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7
Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Hunting (big game)	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.
Hunting (upland game)	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety. Activity may occur during Refuge hours only. Overnight camping and ATV's will not be allowed.

Deer hunting will be limited to archery-only to limit the number of hunters utilizing the area. Hunting will be limited to those species authorized to be hunted on the Refuge as listed in the Federal Register.

Justification:

Allowing hunting on the Refuge would be consistent with established Refuge goals.

Hunting is 1 of the 6 wildlife-dependent public uses that are to be supported within units of the National Wildlife Refuge System when compatible.

This use is not expected to conflict with any proposed habitat management or reclamation projects on the Refuge provided the Refuge utilizes closures as necessary to protect public safety and to allow habitat management actions such as prescribed burning on the refuge.

Signature:

Refuge Manager:

Stl M 11/18/04
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator:

Rf 24 Nov 04
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor:

Richard P Ingram 11/24/04
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief:

Bud O 11/24/04
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2019