

interests for the protection and conservation of our Nation's wildlife resources. The Administration Act states first and foremost that we focus the mission of the System on conservation of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats. The Improvement Act requires the Secretary, before allowing a new use of a refuge, or before expanding, renewing, or extending an existing use of a refuge, to determine that the use is compatible. The Improvement Act established as the policy of the United States that wildlife-dependent recreation, when compatible, is a legitimate and appropriate public use of the System, through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife. The Act established six wildlife-dependent recreational uses, when compatible, as the priority general public uses of the System. These uses are: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

The Recreation Act authorizes the Secretary to administer areas within the System for public recreation as an appropriate incidental or secondary use only to the extent that doing so is practicable and not inconsistent with the primary purpose(s) for which Congress and the Service established the areas. The Recreation Act requires that

any recreational use of refuge lands be compatible with the primary purpose(s) for which we established the refuge and not inconsistent with other previously authorized operations.

The Administration Act and Recreation Act also authorize the Secretary to issue regulations to carry out the purposes of the Acts and regulate uses.

We develop specific management plans for each refuge prior to opening it to hunting or fishing. In many cases, we develop refuge-specific regulations to ensure the compatibility of the programs with the purpose(s) for which we established the refuge and the mission of the System. We ensure initial compliance with the Administration Act and the Recreation Act for hunting and sport fishing on newly acquired refuges through an interim determination of compatibility made at or near the time of acquisition. These regulations ensure that we make the determinations required by these acts prior to adding refuges to the lists of areas open to hunting and fishing in 50 CFR part 32. We ensure continued compliance by the development of comprehensive conservation plans, specific plans, and by annual review of hunting and sport fishing programs and regulations.

New Hunting and Fishing Programs

In preparation for opening additional refuges to hunting and fishing, or to initiating new hunting or fishing programs on refuges already open, we document appropriate compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through an Environmental Assessment with a finding of No Significant Impact, an Environmental Impact Statement with a Record of Decision, or determine and document that the action qualifies for a Categorical Exclusion. We also conduct and document internal consultations under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and coordinate with the State(s), and if appropriate, Tribe(s) in or near the refuge.

Upon review of these documents, we have determined that the opening of these National Wildlife Refuges to hunting and/or fishing is compatible with the purpose of the refuge and the mission of the system, and not inconsistent with applicable State laws. A copy of the compatibility determinations for each respective refuge is available upon request from the Regional Office noted under the heading "Available Information for Specific Refuges."

We propose to allow the following wildlife-dependent recreational activities:

Refuge	State	Migratory bird hunting	Upland game hunting	Big game hunting	Sport fishing
Wapanocca .....	Arkansas .....	X	.....	X	.....
Grand Cote .....	Louisiana .....	X	X	X	.....
Northern Tallgrass Prairie .....	Minnesota/Iowa .....	X	X	X	.....
Boyer Chute .....	Nebraska .....	X	.....	X	.....
DeSoto .....	Iowa .....	.....	X	.....	.....
Big Branch Marsh .....	Louisiana .....	.....	X	.....	.....
North Platte .....	Nebraska .....	.....	X	X	.....
Coldwater .....	Mississippi .....	.....	.....	.....	X
Bandon Marsh .....	Oregon .....	.....	.....	.....	X
Rappahannock River Valley .....	Virginia .....	.....	.....	.....	X

Lands acquired as "waterfowl production areas," which we generally manage as part of Wetland Management Districts, are open to the hunting of migratory game birds, upland game, big game, and sport fishing subject to the provisions of State law and regulations (see 50 CFR 32.1 and 32.4). This year we are adding Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District in Minnesota to the list of refuges open for all four of these activities.

We are correcting an administrative error in 50 CFR part 32 that occurred with regard to Bandon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. It has come to our attention that the CFR does not indicate that the refuge is open to sport

fishing. We opened the refuge to sport fishing in 1986 (55 FR 30655, 30663; August 28, 1986). It appears that a clerical error was made when the rules adopted in 1986 were being published in the subsequent edition of the CFR. We are correcting that error and part 32 will now reflect that the refuge is open to sport fishing. Coldwater National Wildlife Refuge was part of Tallahatchie National Wildlife Refuge (both in Mississippi) and is an area of the System that we opened by reason of its having been included in Tallahatchie's fishing plan (61 FR 45364, August 29, 1996). It has become a separate unit this year, thus we are including a separate

listing that Coldwater National Wildlife Refuge is open to fishing only.

If finalized as proposed, the 2003–2004 hunting and fishing season will result in a net of three national wildlife refuges added to fishing and four national wildlife refuges added to hunting. This will bring our cumulative total of national wildlife refuges open to hunting to 315 and refuges open to fishing to 274.

Request for Comments

You may comment on this proposed rule by any one of several methods:  
1. You may mail comments to: Chief, Division of Conservation Planning and Policy, National Wildlife Refuge