

U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

The Service is proposing to make minor revisions to the hunting regulations on Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in accordance with the 2015 Sport Hunting Plan, Environmental Assessment (EA), and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 2015) and the Waccamaw NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and EA/FONSI (USFWS 2008).

The Service has fully satisfied the other requirements for expanding these opportunities on the refuge, as listed:

- ✓ determining that the opportunities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (see attached Compatibility Determination, USFWS 2015))
- ✓ ensuring the opportunities are consistent with existing state, local, and refuge-specific regulations (50 CFR §32.20b)
 - *Use of signs and brochures may supplement the refuge-specific regulations
- ✓ complying with the National Environmental Policy Act (see below)
- ✓ complying with the Endangered Species Act Section 7 evaluation (see attached Consultation documentation)
 - OR N/A because there are no candidate, threatened, or endangered species present
- ✓ complying with the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultation
 - OR N/A because there are no cultural or historic resources present

Proposed Action:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposes to expand waterfowl hunting opportunities at Waccamaw NWR by adding 43 acres, acquired in 2020, to the refuge's hunt Unit 2 (Figure 1). Under the proposal and as previously analyzed (USFWS 2015), the Service would expand the current waterfowl hunting area for lottery hunts only on the managed wetlands east of the Great Pee Dee River. The acquired property was previously leased and was included in the refuge's Waccamaw NWR Hunt Plan (USFWS 2015) and analyzed in the associated EA/FONSI (USFWS 2015). Although the property was included in the Waccamaw NWR Hunt Plan (USFWS 2015) and analyzed in the associated EA/FONSI (USFWS 2015), hunting has not occurred on this property. Environmental Action Statement tiers from the 2015 Hunting Plan/EA/FONSI (USFWS 2015). The 2015 Section 7

Endangered Species Act Biological Evaluation (USFWS 2015) for the 2015 Hunting Plan/EA/FONSI (USFWS 2015) also included the proposed action.

This proposed action is covered under the following categorical exclusions:

Multiple categorical exclusions, as listed below, apply to the Proposed Action 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(A)(1): Changes or amendments to an approved action when such changes have no or minor potential environmental impact.
- 516 DM 8.5(B)(7): 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.
- 516 DM 8.5(B)(9): Minor changes in existing master plans, comprehensive conservation plans, or operations, when no or minor effects are anticipated. Examples could include minor changes in the type and location of compatible public use activities and land management practices.
- 516 DM 8.5(B)(10): The issuance of new or revised site, unit, or activity-specific management plans for public use, land use, or other management activities when only minor changes are planned. Examples could include an amended public use plan or fire management plan.

The above-listed categorical exclusions apply to the proposed action because the acres being added to the refuge's waterfowl hunt program and associated hunt map updates were previously included and analyzed in the above-referenced Waccamaw NWR Hunting Plan/EA/FONSI (USFWS 2015), the associated Section 7 Endangered Species Act (ESA) Biological Evaluation (BE, USFWS 2015), and the Section 7 ESA BE associated with this analysis (USFWS 2023). This action tiers from those approved documents, which included an impact analysis of the proposed action. Environmental conditions and the use have not changed substantially since the documents were written. Further, the proposed action involves minor changes to the existing hunt program and hunt map with minimal potential environmental impacts expected. The proposed action does not trigger any of the extraordinary circumstances outlined in 43 CFR §46.215 that preclude the use of a categorical exclusion. No further National Environmental Policy Act analysis or documentation is required.

Extraordinary Circumstances (43 CFR §46.215)

Could This Proposed Action

Yes/No

- a. Have significant adverse impacts on public health or safety?
 - b. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (EO 11990); floodplains (EO 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas?
 - c. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [National Environmental Policy Act section 102(2)(E)]?
 - d. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?
 - e. Establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?
 - f. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?
 - g. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau?
 - h. Have adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species?
 - i. Violate a federal, state, local, or Tribal law or requirement imposed to protect the environment?
 - j. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low-income or minority populations (EO 12898).

- k. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of sacred sites (EO 13007).
- l. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and EO 13112).
- m. Have material adverse effects on resources requiring compliance with Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management), Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), or the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act?

Within the spirit and intent of the Council of Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established this administrative record and have determined:

- The proposed action is covered by a categorical exclusion as provided by 43 CFR §46.210 or 516 DM 8.5. Further National Environmental Policy Act documentation is not required.**
- An environmental assessment or environmental impact statement is required because the proposed action could result in an extraordinary circumstance.**

Figures

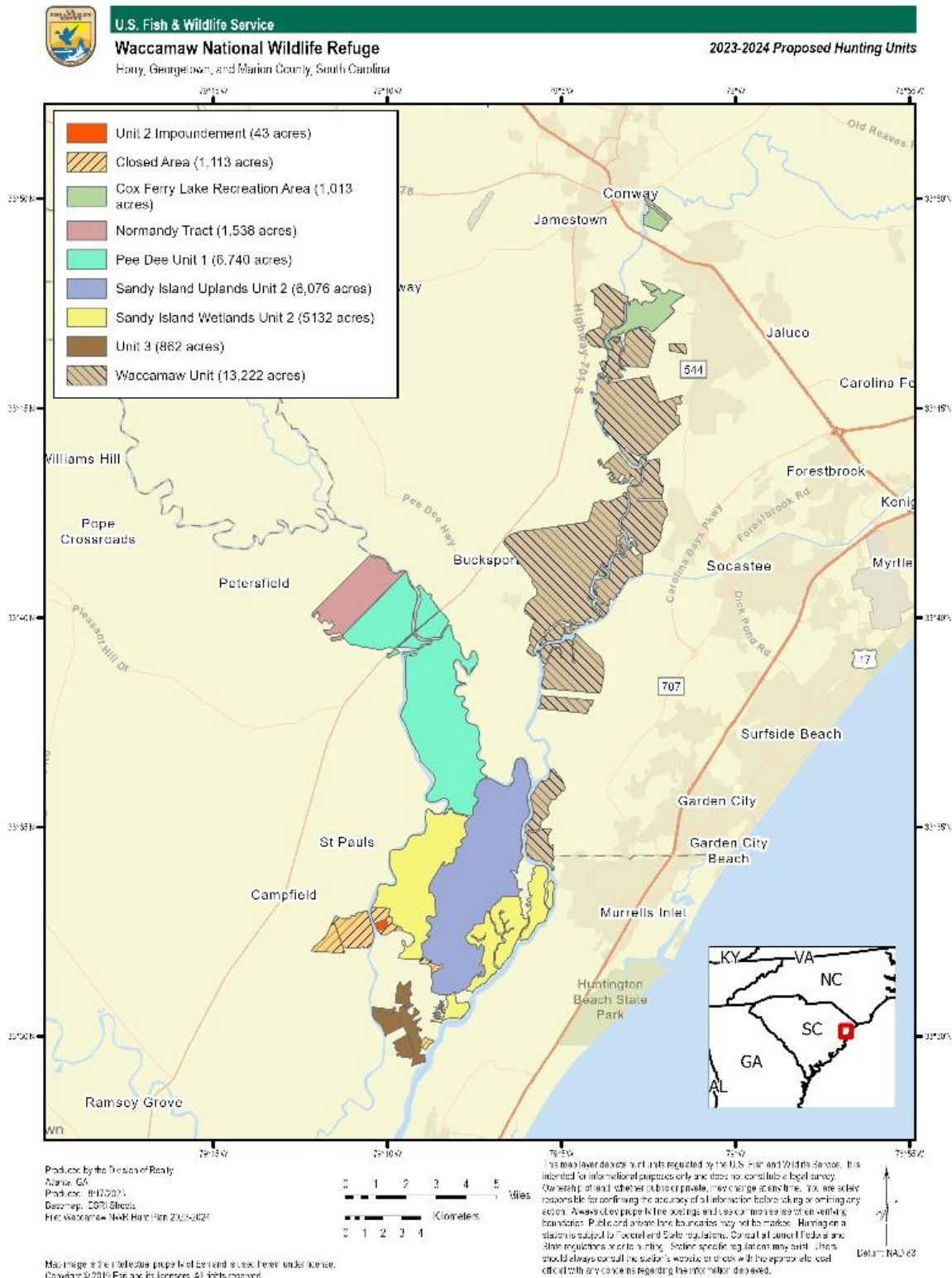


Figure 1. Map of Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge’s proposed 2023–24 hunt units. Unit 2, included in the proposed action, is shown in red.

References

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2008. *Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan*. U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region. 237 pp.
https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Waccamaw_CCP.pdf
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2015. Waccamaw NWR Hunt Plan, Environmental Assessment, and Finding of No Significant Impact.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2023. Waccamaw NWR Section 7 ESA Biological Evaluation Associated with 2024 Hunt Plan Addition.

Service signature approval:

Signature

Title

Date