

**U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT FOR
CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION
FOR
2024-25 BAYOU TECHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE HUNT PACKAGE**

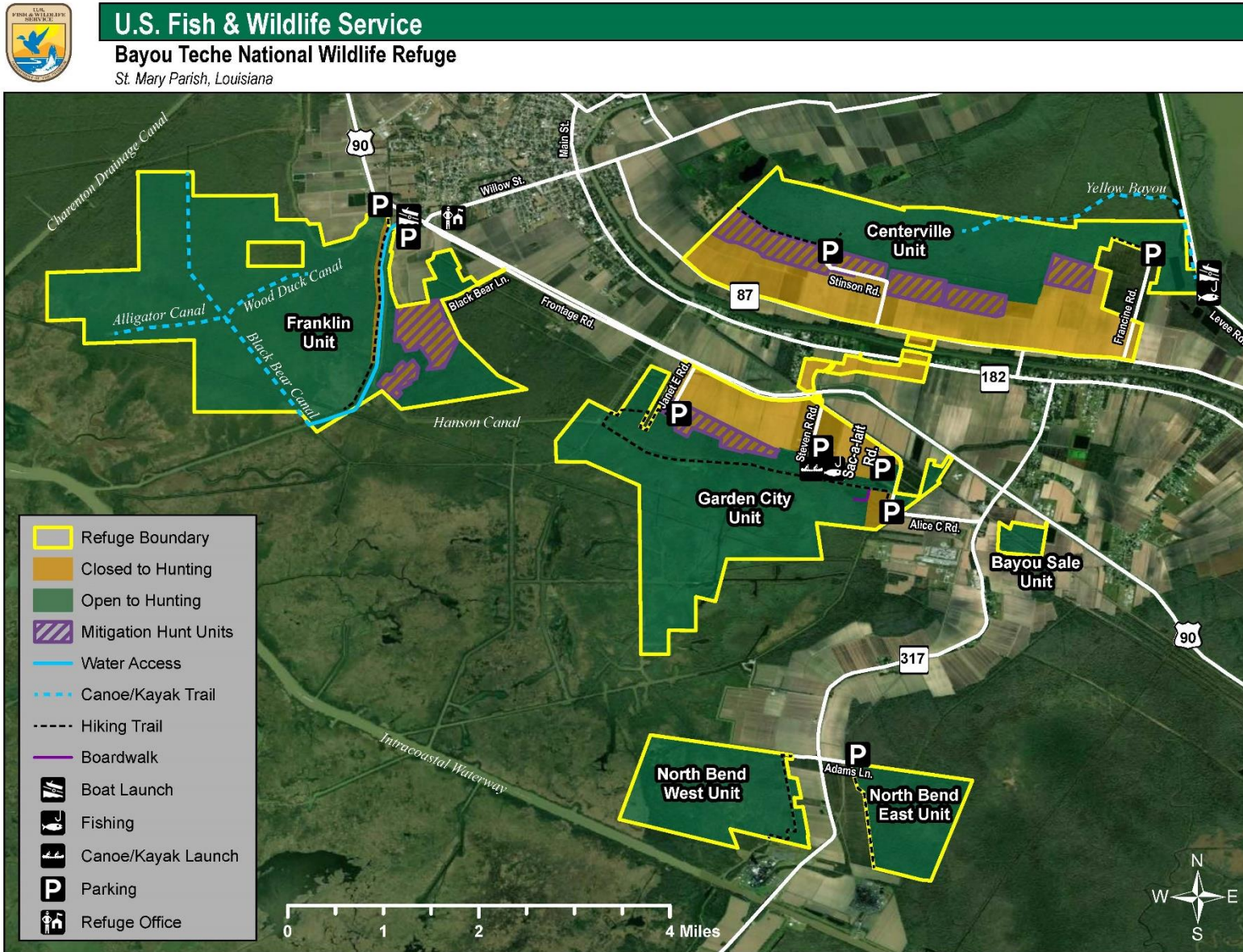
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, USFWS) is proposing to expand existing hunting opportunities at Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, refuge) for: (1) migratory birds (firearms) and (2) white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) with incidental take of feral hog (*Sus scrofa*) (archery). The Service recently acquired approximately 835.19 acres, known as the Mitigation Tracts, for the refuge; see the hatched areas on Figure 1. Under the action and as outlined in Figure 1, the Service will add 835.19 acres to the refuge's existing public hunting program as a new hunt unit to be named Mitigation Units in accordance with the 2021-22 Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex Hunt Package (including the Bayou Teche NWR Hunting Plan and Environmental Assessment [EA] for Migratory Game Birds, Upland Game, and Big Game; USFWS 2021); the Bayou Teche NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) / EA / Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (USFWS 2009a, 2009b); and Federal, state, local, and refuge-specific regulations. The 2021-22 Hunt Package built on and updated the refuge's hunt program and 2007 Hunt Package (USFWS 2007). The 2021-22 Hunt Package specifically included and analyzed the 835.19-acre Mitigation Tracts in anticipation of their future acquisition and inclusion in the refuge's hunt program.

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ'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 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 1508, 43 CFR §46.205, 43 CFR §46.210, 43 CFR §46.215, and 516 DM 8.5.

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

Figure 1. Existing and 2024-25 Proposed Hunt Units for Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge



- ✓ 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 NEPA
- ✓ 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

The Service is, therefore, waiving the requirement to prepare an opening package in compliance with Service policy (605 FW 2.9A).

Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action will make minor changes to the existing hunting program of Bayou Teche NWR through the addition of 835.19 acres in a new hunt unit to be named Mitigation Units for the hunting of: (1) waterfowl (firearms) and (2) white-tailed deer with incidental take of feral hog (archery). This Categorical Exclusion/Environmental Action Statement (CatEx/EAS) tiers from the existing 2021-22 Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex Hunt Package (including the Bayou Teche NWR Hunting Plan and EA for Migratory Game Birds, Upland Game, and Big Game; USFWS 2021) and the Bayou Teche NWR CCP/EA/FONSI (USFWS 2009a, 2009b). The 2021-22 Hunt Package specifically included and analyzed these tracts in anticipation of their acquisition.

Under the Proposed Action, the Service will open an additional 835.19 acres on Bayou Teche NWR in a new hunt unit to be named Mitigation Units (Figure 1) in accordance with existing federal, state, local, and refuge-specific regulations; the 2021-22 Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex Hunt Package (including the Bayou Teche NWR Hunting Plan and EA for Migratory Game Birds, Upland Game, and Big Game; USFWS 2021); and the Bayou Teche NWR CCP/EA/FONSI (USFWS 2009a, 2009b). Under the proposal and as previously analyzed, the Service will expand the current migratory bird hunting (firearms) and big game hunting (archery white-tailed deer with incidental take of feral hog) from the existing 8,937 acres to a new total of 9,772.82 acres (i.e., the existing 8,937 acres in 6 existing hunt units in the Bayou Sale, Centerville, Franklin, Garden City, North Bend East, and North Bend West units; the existing 2,021-acre Closed Area; and the proposed 835.19-acre

Mitigation Units). As depicted in Figure 1, the proposal adds the new 835.19-acre hunt area as the Mitigation Units. Generally, hunting on the refuge annually occurs from mid-September to mid-February. For clarity, since the Proposed Action only includes waterfowl hunting and archery hunting, lead ammunition is not included.

Previously, the 835.19 acres of the proposed refuge hunt unit were part of a private mitigation bank that had approximately 20 hunters. Potentially, the Proposed Action could be expected to increase the annual hunting visits on the refuge from the current 236 to a new total of up to between 250 and 270 from the additional 835.19 acres. The associated increase in anticipated annual take of white-tailed deer would be up to 5 with incidental annual take of feral hog of up to 3, while anticipated annual take of migratory birds would be up to 45. However, the first year or so may see higher-than-expected average take due to the newly opened nature of the hunt unit.

Similar to the existing hunt units and as previously analyzed, the Mitigation Units include bottomland hardwood forest with very shallow, seasonally wet drainage ditches, and marsh.

The existing 8,937-acre hunt program has not resulted in adverse impacts, including to listed species. The increase in acres, hunting visits, and take of white-tailed deer, feral hog, and migratory birds under the Proposed Action would not be expected to change this. Many hunt days during the work week do not have any hunt visitors to the refuge.

The Proposed Action is part of the larger refuge management and hunt program to maintain plant and animal populations at healthy levels while supporting opportunities for appropriate and compatible priority public use.

Specific changes proposed for the existing Sport Hunting Plan are listed.

- Following the second Federal Register notice and approval of the Proposed Action, Figure 1 here would replace Figure 1 (Bayou Teche NWR Hunt Units) in the 2021 Bayou Teche NWR Hunting Plan (USFWS 2021).
- Following the second Federal Register notice and approval of the Proposed Action, 50 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §32.27 would be updated to reflect the new Mitigation Units.

Categorical Exclusions:

Multiple categorical exclusions apply to the Proposed Action, as listed.

- 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.

This CatEx/EAS tiers from the existing 2021-22 Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex Hunt Package/EA/FONSI (USFWS 2021) and the Bayou Teche NWR CCP/EA/FONSI (USFWS 2009a, 2009b). The Proposed Action and hunt area were previously included and analyzed in the 2021-22 Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex Hunt Package/EA/FONSI (USFWS 2021) with the clearly stated intent to add newly acquired properties to the hunt program following acquisition.

Incorporated herein by reference, the draft Section 7 biological evaluation for the Proposed Action found Not Likely to Jeopardize for the alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*) and monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) and found No Effect for West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*). The West Indian manatee is not present in the action area or in areas used to access the action area.

The Proposed Action:

- Was previously analyzed, with no additional anticipated impacts;
- Includes (1) migratory birds (firearms) and (2) white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) with incidental take of feral hog (*Sus scrofa*) (archery);
- Includes an increase in annual hunting visits from the current 236 to a new total of up to between 250 and 270 for the refuge;
- Includes additional annual take of up to 45 migratory birds;
- Includes additional annual take of up to 3 white-tailed deer with incidental annual take of up to 2 feral hogs; and
- Represents a minor change to the refuge's existing hunt program.

As outlined above and tiering from the referenced NEPA and planning documents, the Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further NEPA documentation. Further, this Proposed Action would not trigger an extraordinary circumstance precluding the use of a Categorical Exclusion as outlined under (43 CFR §46.215).

Extraordinary Circumstances (43 CFR §46.215):

Could This Proposed Action:

- | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | a. Have significant adverse effects on public health or safety? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 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? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | c. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA section 102(2)(E)]? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | d. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | e. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | f. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | g. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 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? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | i. Violate a federal law, or a state, local, or Tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 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 such 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?

(If any of the above exceptions receive a “Yes” check (✓), an EA/EIS must be prepared.)

Permits/Approvals:

Endangered Species Act Section 7 Intra-Service Biological Evaluations were completed with the 2021-22 Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex Hunt Package (USFWS 2021) and the CCP (USFWS 2009b). The 2021-22 Hunt Package and its Section 7 previously included and analyzed this action; the 2021 Section 7’s findings were No Effect and Not Likely to Adversely Affect (USFWS 2021). A new Endangered Species Act Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation was completed for the Proposed Action with the Service’s Louisiana Ecological Services Field Office to evaluate any potential impacts to federally listed species, finding Not Likely to Jeopardize for the alligator snapping turtle and monarch butterfly, and finding No Effect for West Indian manatee.

Current Federal and state wildlife law enforcement resources are sufficient to monitor the use of the additional hunt acres; the presence of these officers will provide a deterrent to the take of non-target species. Given the small size of the units, few expected additional hunters, nature of the migratory bird (firearms) and white-tailed deer (archery) hunts, additional impacts from the Proposed Action would be minimized, including impacts to listed species.

Public Involvement/Interagency Coordination:

Public involvement, engagement of potentially interested Native American Tribes, and interagency coordination related to the Proposed Action were previously conducted during the planning processes for the refuge’s 2007 Sport Hunting Plan (USFWS 2007), CCP (USFWS 2009a, 2009b), and 2021-22 Southeast Louisiana

Refuges Complex Hunt Package (USFWS 2021). Since the Proposed Action continues implementation of these previously approved plans, the Refuge Manager sent coordination letters on December 6, 2023, to the state of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and to the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana, Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, and Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe of Louisiana; follow up letters were then sent on August 2, 2024 requesting their comments on the draft hunt package. Since the Proposed Action represents a minor change to those previously approved documents and since no or negligible impacts would be anticipated, public involvement and additional interagency coordination were conducted through the 2024-2025 Hunting and Sport Fishing rulemaking action with public notice through the Federal Register (<https://www.federalregister.gov/>) and the refuge's website (<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/bayou-teche>).

The Service received comments on the draft hunt package from 10 commenters, including the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). Appendix A summarizes the comments received and provides the Service's responses. No changes were made to the action or the documents in response to the comments received.

The Service provided notice of the final decision to open the Mitigation Units to hunting as outlined in the 2024-25 hunt package through the Federal Register (<https://www.federalregister.gov/>) and the refuge's website (<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/bayou-teche>).

Supporting Documents:

Supporting documents for this determination include relevant office file material and the listed key references.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2007. Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge Sport Hunting Package: EAS, Sport Hunting Plan, Environmental Assessment, Compatibility Determination, FONSI, Section 7, Letter of Concurrence, Press Release, Outreach Plan. Southeast Region. April 2007. Atlanta, GA. 67 pp. <https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/Reference/Profile/34718>.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2009a. Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region. October 2009. Atlanta, GA. 122 pp. <https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/Reference/Profile/135841>.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. 2009b. Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment, Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region. May 2009. Atlanta, GA. 152 pp.
<https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/Reference/Profile/135843>.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2021. 2021-22 Hunt Package for Bayou Sauvage, Bayou Teche, Big Branch Marsh, Bogue Chitto, Cat Island, Delta, and Mandalay NWRs, Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex; Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Mary, St. Tammany, Terrebonne, Washington, and West Feliciana Parishes, Louisiana and Pearl River County, Mississippi. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region. August 2021. Atlanta, GA.
<https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/Reference/Profile/158637>.

Within the spirit and intent of the CEQ's regulations for implementing NEPA 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. No further NEPA documentation will therefore be made.
- An Extraordinary Circumstance (43 CFR §46.215) could exist for the proposed action and, so an EA/EIS must be prepared.

Service signature approval:

Signature/Date:

Title:

APPENDIX A. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS AND RESPONSE FROM THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS, Service) appreciates interest in future management and hunting opportunities on national wildlife refuges (NWRs, refuges). For public review and comment, the Service provided public notice of the proposal for Bayou Teche NWR through local and national public notice of the availability of the draft Environmental Action Statement and corresponding draft hunt regulation changes in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). Local public notice included a Public Information Bulletin and information and documents posted on the refuge's website (<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/bayou-teche>). National public notice was provided on August 2, 2024 through the Federal Register (<https://www.regulations.gov/document/FWS-HQ-NWRS-2024-0034-0001>; Docket ID FWS-HQ-NWRS-2024-0034-0001). Public comments on the proposal were received by the Service during the public review and comment period (August 2, 2024 through September 3, 2024 through the Federal Register and August 2, 2024 through September 20, 2024 through the refuge) from 9 members of the general public and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). The LDWF comment letter is included here in its entirety. The Service's responses to comments received through the Federal Register rulemaking process were published in the final rule in the Federal Register. The Service's responses to comments received locally and refuge-specific comments received through the Federal Register are published here.

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Service must respond to substantive comments. For purposes of this planning process, a substantive comment is one that was submitted during the public review and comment period, which was within the scope of the proposed action, was specific to the proposed action, had a direct relationship to the proposed action, and included reasons for the Service to consider it. (For example, a substantive comment could be that the document referenced 500 individuals of a particular species, but that current research found 600. In such a case, the Service would likely update the document to reflect the 600, citing the current research. While a comment that would not be considered substantive would be, "We love the proposal.") Comments outside the scope of the proposal were not addressed.

Any page numbers referenced in the comments or responses relate to the original page numbers in the draft Environmental Action Statement for Bayou Teche NWR released for public review and comment.

LISTED SPECIES AND SPECIES OF CONCERN

Comment: “LDWF has not identified any listed species or species of concern that will be adversely impacted by the proposed hunt package.”

Service’s Response: Comment noted. The Proposed Action was designed to minimize adverse impacts, including to listed species and species of management concern. No changes were made to the documents.

WIDER RANGE OF HUNTABLE SPECIES

Comments: Multiple commenters expressed concern that the Mitigation Units were only being opened to waterfowl hunting and archery deer hunting with the incidental take of feral hog, instead of being opened to match the existing hunt units of the refuge. Multiple commenters expressed concern that the refuge’s Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) intended that the refuge provide opportunities beyond simply waterfowl hunting and archery deer hunting with the incidental take of feral hog. Multiple commenters requested that woodcock be added to the Mitigation Units as a huntable species, especially given the early successional habitat available on the Mitigation Units that could provide woodcock hunting opportunities.

Service’s Response: Comments noted. Hunting on the refuge was specifically addressed in the refuge’s CCP under Goal 3 and Objective 3.2, as listed; the CCP was more general in relation to hunt areas, huntable species, and stipulations (USFWS 2009a, 2009b).

- Goal 3. Provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education and interpretation in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.
 - Objective 3.2. Provide opportunities for hunting and fishing on the refuge in a manner which minimizes conflicts between consumptive and non-consumptive user groups.

Hunting on the refuge was more recently analyzed in the 2021-22 Hunt Package for Bayou Sauvage, Bayou Teche, Big Branch Marsh, Bogue Chitto, Cat Island, Delta, and Mandalay NWRs (USFWS 2021). Appendix D of that 2021-22 Hunt Package included the ongoing acquisition program at Bayou Teche NWR, including the

Mitigation Units (USFWS 2021). While the 2021-22 Hunt Package analyzed future hunting for a range of species on the refuge, including the Mitigation Units, it left the specifics of the exact areas and species to be opened for future hunt packages.

The Service remains concerned that lead is an important issue, and we will continue to appropriately evaluate and regulate the use of lead ammunition and tackle on Service lands and waters. The Service has initiated stakeholder engagement to implement a deliberate, open, and transparent process of evaluating the future of lead use on Service lands and waters, working with our state partners, and seeking input and recommendations from the Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council, other stakeholders, and the public. The best available science, analyzed as part of the 2024-25 annual Hunting and Sport Fishing rulemaking, indicates that lead ammunition and tackle have negative impacts on both wildlife and human health. While the Service continues to evaluate the future of lead use in hunting and fishing on Service lands and waters, we will continue to work with stakeholders and the public to evaluate lead use through the annual rulemaking process. In the interim, our rule makings will be designed not to increase lead use on Service lands and waters. That is why the 2024-25 annual Hunting and Sport Fishing rulemaking includes only hunting opportunities that inherently do not include the use of lead ammunition and hunting opportunities for which lead-free ammunition is required by regulation.

At this point in time, the Service has determined that opening the Mitigation Units to waterfowl hunting and archery deer hunting with the incidental take of feral hog as outlined in the 2024-25 hunt package would serve refuge management goals and objectives; be consistent with state, local, and refuge-specific regulations; comply with NEPA; comply with the Endangered Species Act Section 7 biological evaluation; and comply with the National Historic Preservation Action Section 106 consultation. Given current management, the hunting of woodcock and other species on the Mitigation Units (beyond waterfowl hunting and archery deer hunting with the incidental take of feral hog) were not included in the current hunt package. The Service could, in the future, consider the hunting of additional species, including woodcock, on the Mitigation Units. No changes were made to the documents.

QUALITY AND COMPATIBLE HUNTING

Comment: “LDWF supports the expansion of hunting access on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands, especially when those lands provide hunters with quality

access to wildlife... LDWF supports additional compatible use, public land opportunities to waterfowl and white-tailed deer hunters in Louisiana, while allowing for the continued maintenance of healthy plant and animal populations in the Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge.”

Service’s Response: Comment noted. The Proposed Action was designed to conserve plant and animal populations, while also providing opportunities for compatible quality hunting on the refuge. No changes were made to the documents.

LOTTERY HUNT

Comment: One comment was received suggesting the incorporation of a lottery hunt similar to wildlife management areas.

Service’s Response: Comment noted. Currently, the refuge does not have a lottery hunt. Current environmental conditions, quality of the hunting experience, and hunter use do not indicate the need to further restrict hunting on the refuge. No changes were made to the documents.

HUNT BLINDS

Comment: One comment was received asking if LDWF was going to build blinds.

Service’s Response: Comment noted. The Service regularly partners with LDWF on a variety of actions, including hunting on the refuge. The Service does not construct hunt blinds on the refuge. The Service currently allows the temporary erection of deer stands, which must be removed within 48 hours of the close of deer season on the refuge. The Service currently allows waterfowl hunters to erect temporary blinds under specified restrictions; we require waterfowl hunters to remove all portable blinds and decoys from the refuge by 2 p.m. each day. Currently, the Service does not have plans to construct any hunt blinds on the Mitigation Units. No changes were made to the documents.

COMMENT DEADLINE

Comments: Multiple commenters noted that the refuge’s website had a deadline of 9.30.2024 for comment submission while the Public Information Bulletin had a deadline of 9.3.2024.

Service's Response: The Service acknowledges that the refuge's homepage had a typo in conflict with the published deadline of 9.3.2024 for comments. The Federal Register and the Public Information Bulletin both posted the official deadline of 9.3.2024, while the refuge's homepage posted the typo of 9.30.2024. To accommodate public comments while meeting our rulemaking deadlines, the Service extended the local comment deadline to 9.20.2024 for Bayou Teche NWR's 2024-25 hunt package. No changes were made to the documents.

REFERENCES

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2009a. Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region. October 2009. Atlanta, GA. 122 pp. <https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/Reference/Profile/135841>.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. 2009b. Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment, Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region. May 2009. Atlanta, GA. 152 pp. <https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/Reference/Profile/135843>.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2021. 2021-22 Hunt Package for Bayou Sauvage, Bayou Teche, Big Branch Marsh, Bogue Chitto, Cat Island, Delta, and Mandalay NWRs, Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex; Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Mary, St. Tammany, Terrebonne, Washington, and West Feliciana Parishes, Louisiana and Pearl River County, Mississippi. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region. August 2021. Atlanta, GA. <https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/Reference/Profile/158637>.

JEFF LANDRY
GOVERNOR



MADISON D. SHEAHAN
SECRETARY

PO BOX 98000 | BATON ROUGE LA | 70898

<u>CONCUR</u>	<u>DATE</u>
By	8-27-24
	8-29-24

MEMORANDUM

To: Madison D. Sheahan, Secretary, LDWF

From: Tommy Tuma, Administrator, LDWF Office of Wildlife ^{TT}

Date: August 26, 2024

RE: Bayou Teche NWR Hunt plan comments

Please find attached for your review letter from the USFWS requesting comments and a memo from Schuyler Dartez to me regarding the USFWS Bayou Teche NWR proposed hunt plan.

I asked Schuyler and his staff to review and make comments. With your approval, I will forward these comments to the USFWS.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns or if you would like to add/omit anything.

**JEFF LANDRY
GOVERNOR**



**MADISON D. SHEAHAN
SECRETARY**

PO BOX 98000 | BATON ROUGE LA | 70898

TO: Tommy Tuma
FROM: Schuyler Dartez
DATE: August 23, 2024
SUBJECT: 2024-2025 Hunt Package for Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge Comments

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is in favor of the Proposed Action regarding the 2024-2025 Hunt Package for Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge for the following reasons:

- LDWF supports the expansion of hunting access on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands, especially when those lands provide hunters with quality access to wildlife.
- LDWF has not identified any listed species or species of concern that will be adversely impacted by the proposed hunt package.
- LDWF supports the additional access at Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge due to the preponderance of private land and/or difficult to access public land in the vicinity of the Refuge.
- LDWF supports additional compatible use, public land opportunities to waterfowl and white-tailed deer hunters in Louisiana, while allowing for the continued maintenance of healthy plant and animal populations in the Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.