

## COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

**USE:** Hunting

**REFUGE NAME:** Leslie Canyon National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

### **ESTABLISHING and ACQUISITION AUTHORITIES:**

Leslie Canyon NWR was established on May 31, 1988 to help protect the fish and wildlife associated with the Río Yaqui watershed. Leslie Canyon NWR was established under the authority of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 in order to "...conserve fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species...or plants."

### **REFUGE PURPOSE(S):**

Leslie Canyon NWR, located in Cochise County, Arizona, was set aside to conserve fish and wildlife species that are listed as threatened or endangered. Specifically to protect the Yaqui Topminnow (*Poeciliopsis sonoriensis*) and Yaqui Chub (*Gila purpurea*).

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

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

### **DESCRIPTION OF USE:**

#### ***What is the use?***

Hunting on national wildlife refuges can be authorized under the authority of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. Hunting is open for migratory game bird, upland game, and big game hunts on the Leslie Canyon NWR in accordance with the refuge's Hunt Plan and Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). Migratory game bird species include mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), white-winged dove (*Zenaida asiatica*), and Eurasian collared-dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*). Upland game species include for badger (*Taxidea taxus*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), coati (*Nasua narica*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), desert cottontail (*Silvylagus audubonii*), black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), Gambel's quail (*Callipepla gambelii*), scaled quail (*Callipepla squamata*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), ring-tailed cat (*Bassariscus astutus*), striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), hooded skunk (*Mephitis macroura*), western spotted skunk (*Spilogale gracilis*), and American hog-nosed skunk (*Conepatus leuconotus*). Big game species include black bear (*Ursus americanus*), javelina (*Pecari tajacu*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). Hunters will be expected to comply with refuge and State of Arizona regulations, as well as applicable federal laws.

### ***Where is the use conducted?***

Hunting for all species is allowed in the area of Leslie Canyon NWR that is open to the public year-round, approximately 810 acres (Attachment A). This is all refuge lands north of Leslie Canyon Road. Leslie Canyon NWR is located in the southern portion of State Hunt Unit 30A, approximately 17.5 miles north of the United States-Mexico international border.

Public entry to portions or all of the refuge may be suspended due to unusual or critical conditions affecting land, water, habitat, wildlife populations, and the quality of the visitor experience or visitor safety. Areas that are open or closed to public entry are determined based first on the needs of wildlife and habitat protection. The refuge is a dynamic environment and thus short- and long-term changes to public uses like wildlife observation, photography, and hunting may be necessary to protect the wildlife and habitat and provide quality recreational experiences for the public.

### ***When is the use conducted?***

The refuge hunt area is open for hunting during daylight hours only.

Hunting of mule deer, white-tailed deer, mourning dove, white-winged dove, Eurasian collared dove, javelina, gambel's quail, and scaled quail is in alignment with Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) State seasons.

Hunting of badger, black bear, bobcat, coati, coyote, gray fox, black-tailed jackrabbit, cottontail rabbit, raccoon, ring-tailed cat, striped skunk, hooded skunk, western spotted skunk, and American hog-nosed skunk is only allowed when their State season dates overlap with a general or archery State deer and/or javelina hunt season (i.e., these species may only be hunted during State deer or javelina seasons). Youth may hunt these species during youth only deer or javelina seasons.

Season overlaps occur in August, September, October, November, and December of each year:

- Black bear (~71 days).

Season overlaps occur in August, September, October, November, December, January, and February of each year:

- Badger, bobcat, gray fox, raccoon, and ring-tailed cat (~116 days).
- Coyote, striped skunk, hooded skunk, western spotted skunk, and American hog-nosed skunk (~116 days).
- Coati, jackrabbit and cottontail rabbit (~116 days).

### ***How is the use conducted?***

To ensure a productive hunt and the safety of visitors and staff, all hunting activities are conducted in accordance with federal and state hunt regulations. Hunting activities can only

occur in designated areas, see attachment A. Hunting on Leslie Canyon NWR would align with State age requirements and State bag limits. Hunters must poses any and all State and Federal required licenses, tags, and stamps. The refuge would align with State hunting methods, with the following exception: we prohibit falconry, pneumatic weapons, night hunting, and the use of dogs for pursuit or retrieval.

***Why is the use being proposed?***

Hunting is a priority public use identified in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, and it helps accomplish the goals and objectives of the refuge and promotes appreciation and support for the National Wildlife Refuge System mission. Hunting provides the public with a unique opportunity to participate in one of the wildlife-dependent public uses. The hunt program will be administered in accordance with sound wildlife management principles and the utmost concern for public safety.

Secretarial Order 3356 continues the Department of the Interior's efforts to enhance conservation stewardship; increase outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans, including opportunities to hunt and fish; and improve the management of game species and their habitats for this generation and beyond. It directs several components of the Department to assess past and ongoing implementation of the recommendations set forth in Executive Order 13443, "Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation," to inform how best to enhance and expand public access to lands and waters administered by the Department-lands and waters owned by all Americans-for hunting, fishing, recreational shooting, and other forms of outdoor recreation.

**AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:**

Administering the refuge hunt program does not require any developed facilities on the refuge, however installing a public restroom may need to be considered in the future. It has been estimated that this hunt program will affect the refuge greatest during August through the following January each year (deer hunt seasons). It is expected to cost the refuge approximately \$50,934.00 annually to operate and manage the annual program, provide brochures and hunting regulations, respond to public inquiries, post signage, collect and analyze hunt data, and conduct enforcement of hunt regulations for 6 months out of the year. There is one law enforcement officer that has responsibility for significant international border issues along with endangered species and common public use issues, who will also be responsible for checking hunters for compliance with federal, state, and refuge-specific regulations. Coordination with AZGFD, Border Patrol, Cochise County Sheriff's Office, and other law enforcement agencies can occur.

**ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE:**

Short and Long-term Impacts:

Hunting can cause minor to moderate short-term disturbance. Facilitating hunting may result in some environmental impacts to the refuge, its habitat, and wildlife species. Allowing hunters foot traffic access to open areas of the refuges may result in some soil compaction, erosion, trampling of vegetation, littering and disturbance to wildlife. Humans can also be vectors for invasive plants when off-refuge seeds cling to their clothing, footwear, or equipment and are

deposited on the refuge. Once established, some invasive plants can out-compete native plants, thereby altering habitats and indirectly impacting wildlife. The threat of invasive plant establishment requires annual monitoring and treatment when necessary. Negligible impacts to air quality by minor increases to vehicle emissions is expected. Negligible impacts to non-consumptive public users are also expected with temporary disturbances from hunters. Refuge management is expected to experience long-term impacts with funding the hunt program.

Hunting may also result in short-term and long-term beneficial impacts to the visitor experience and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Given the refuge has been closed to hunting since its establishment in 1988, it is projected that many hunters will visit the area during the first year of hunting. The estimated number of hunters during the first year is 620–1,238. This estimate is calculated above using a percent of permit only general hunts for unit 30A. After the first year of hunting, it is assumed that hunter numbers will drop to lower numbers as one of the six priority wildlife-dependent recreational uses, hunting can increase the visitors understanding and appreciation of wildlife and their habitat needs as well as the role of the National Wildlife Refuge System in resource conservation. Hunters are expected to increase refuge visitation numbers from September through February. Hunters may utilize local businesses and hotels in order to prepare for hunts at LCNWR, potentially bringing an increase to the local economy. Water quality and threatened and endangered species are not expected to see impacts.

While there are endangered species in close proximity to the 810-acre area, the terrain in that part of the open area does not favor hunting. Hunting, along with all public entry, would continue to be prohibited in the closed area. Occasional trespass by individuals entering the closed area is expected to slightly increase, which results in temporary disturbance to species in the closed area.

#### Cumulative Impacts:

It is not expected that a hunt program at LCNWR will have any adverse cumulative impacts on the local or regional populations of any species given the small size of LCNWR's open area in comparison to State hunt unit 30A. Any take occurring on LCNWR will likely not add to the impacts of current hunting within the state hunt unit 30A. The hunting program rules will be the same as, or more restrictive than, hunting regulations throughout the State of Arizona. By maintaining hunting regulations that are the same as or more restrictive than the State, individual refuges ensure that they are maintaining seasons which are supportive of resident wildlife management on a more regional basis. Such an approach also provides consistency with large-scale population status and objectives. The refuge coordinates with the State regarding the hunting program.

Please refer to the Environmental Assessment for Opening Hunting on Leslie Canyon NWR for a detailed description of short-term, long-term, and cumulative impacts.

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

The refuge posted a public notice on the refuge website for a 30-day informal public scoping period from September 27<sup>th</sup> 2019 to October 28<sup>th</sup> 2019. The refuge received one letter from

public scoping, voicing support of the proposal and approval to open the area for hunting. This compatibility determination, along with the associated Hunt Plan and Environmental Assessment, will be made available for public review and comment from XX to XX.

**DETERMINATION:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Use is not compatible

  X   Use is compatible with the following stipulations:

**STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:**

To ensure compatibility with the National Wildlife Refuge System and the refuge goals and objectives, wildlife observation, photography and Hunting can only occur under the following conditions:

1. The service will allow hunting in areas open to the public during specifically designated seasons and during daylight hours.
2. The service will regulate times, areas, and conditions for hunting. This can also include short-term or long-term closure of areas open to hunting due to unusual or critical conditions affecting land, water, habitat, wildlife populations, the quality of the visitor experience or visitor safety.
3. The service will only allow street-legal, motorized vehicle use on designated roads and parking areas and the service will not allow off-road motor vehicle travel.
4. The service will not allow baiting, blinds, stands, trail or scouting cameras.
5. The service will not allow target shooting, camping, or fires on refuge.
6. Over the 15-year life of the CD, the service will assess the carrying capacity of the hunting program and determine the optimal management that will provide visitors with quality wildlife viewing opportunities while maintaining a balance between wildlife disturbance and an outstanding visitor experience.

**JUSTIFICATION:**

Hunting occurs on the refuge as a primary use that facilitates the primary wildlife-dependent recreation uses defined by the NWR System Improvement Act of 1997. Hunting as described above is consistent with the management direction provided in the CCP. Hunting is not expected to greatly conflict with any of the other priority public uses. Hunting is not expected to adversely impact biological resources. Therefore, through the compatibility determination process, we have determined that hunting, in accordance with the stipulations provided above, is a compatible use that will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the refuge.

**Signature:** Refuge Manager \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature and Date)

**Concurrence:** Regional Chief \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature and Date)

**Mandatory 15-year Re-Evaluation Date:** 2035

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ATTACHMENT A

