

APPENDIX C. CENTRAL ARKANSAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX SPORT FISHING COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

Use: Sport Fishing

Refuge name: Central Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex (CANWRC or Complex): Bald Knob NWR, Big Lake NWR, Cache River NWR, Holla Bend NWR, and Wapanocca NWR

**Please note that although Logan Cave NWR is part of the Complex, this compatibility determination (CD) does not apply and Logan Cave NWR is not included.

Date established:

Bald Knob – September 22, 1993

Big Lake – August 2, 1915

Cache River – June 16, 1986

Holla Bend – August 10, 1957

Wapanocca – January 24, 1961

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

Bald Knob NWR:

Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C. § 390l(b), Stat. 3583)

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 [16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(l)]

Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934 (16 U.S.C. § 715d)

Big Lake NWR:

Executive Order 2230, the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. § 715d) Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934 (16 U.S.C. § 715d)

The Wilderness Act of 1964 (16 U.S.C. § 1131-1136)

Cache River NWR:

Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C. § 390l(b), Stat. 3583)

Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934 (16 U.S.C. § 715d)

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(l))

North American Wetlands Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. § 4401-4412)

Holla Bend NWR:

Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934 (16 U.S.C. § 715d)

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(l))

Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S.C. § 460k)

Wapanocca NWR:

Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934 (16 U.S.C. § 715d)

Consolidated Farmers Home Administration Act of 1961 [Title III (P.L. 87-128]

7 U.S.C. 1926 et seq.

Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act of 1972 [Title V, P.L. 92-419]

Refuge Purpose(s):

Bald Knob NWR

"... the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions ..." 16 U.S.C. § 3901(b), 100 Stat. 3583 (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986);

"...for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a) (4) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956);

"...for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (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);

"... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 U.S.C. § 751d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934).

Big Lake NWR

"... as a refuge, reserve, and breeding grounds for native birds" (Executive Order 2230, dated August 2, 1915);

"...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 U.S.C. § 751d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934);

To manage the Big Lake Wilderness as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, as compatible with the purpose for which Big Lake NWR was established 16 U.S.C. § 1131-1136 (The Wilderness Act of 1964).

Cache River NWR

"... the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions ..." 16 U.S.C. § 3901(b), 100 Stat. 3583 (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986);

"... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 U.S.C. § 751d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934);

"...for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956);

"...for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (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);

1956);

“...to protect, enhance, restore, and manage an appropriate distribution and diversity of wetland ecosystems and other habitats for migratory birds and other fish and wildlife in North America; to maintain current or improved distributions of migratory bird populations, and to sustain an abundance of waterfowl and other migratory birds consistent with the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan...” 16 U.S.C. § 4401-4412 (North American Wetlands Conservation Act).

Holla Bend NWR

“... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” 16 U.S.C. § 751d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934).

“...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 (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)(l) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956).

“...suitable for (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species...” 16 U.S.C. § 460k (Refuge Recreation Act of 1962).

Wapanocca NWR

“... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” 16 U.S.C. § 751d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1934).

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

The mission of the Refuge System, as defined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, is:

...to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Description of the Use:

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

Sport Fishing, is an approved and existing use on the Central Arkansas NWR Complex and has been analyzed as part of the Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP) and associated National Environmental Policy Act documents (USFWS 2009, 2010), with the exception of Logan Cave NWR, which is closed to public entry and use. Sport Fishing, which includes frogging and crawfishing, will be allowed on Bald Knob, Big Lake, Cache River, Holla Bend, and Wapanocca NWRs. The crawfishing and frogging components of Sport Fishing are current uses at Bald Knob, Big Lake and Cache River NWRs, but are new opportunities being added for Holla Bend and Wapanocca NWRs, respectively. When determined to be compatible, fishing is

identified as one of six priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (NWRSA), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (NWRSA) (Public Law 105-57).

This determination of compatibility does not pertain to commercial fishing, which is addressed under a different determination and administered under Special Use Permit (SUP) only.

Where is the use conducted?

Bald Knob, Big Lake, Cache River, Holla Bend, and Wapanocca NWRs are within the Central Arkansas NWR Complex. Sport fishing is allowed on all refuge waters subject to various area/zone/temporal closures on each refuge, generally for safety of public and for protection of wildlife or habitat (See 2021 Hunting and Fishing Plans as well as refuge-specific annual public use brochures). Sport fishing occurs in various habitat types including bottomland hardwood forest, baldcypress/tupelo swamps, impoundments, borrow ponds, canals, rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds. Additionally, in accordance with the approved CCP and Land Protection Plan (LPP) (USFWS 2009 and 2012), Cache River NWR currently has an active acquisition program; for this refuge, those anticipated, appropriate acquisitions up to approximately 213,332 acres within the 286,684 acre acquisition boundary, would be added to the fish program in the future (See 2021 Cache River NWR Hunting and Fishing Plan).

When is the use conducted?

Sport fishing are conducted annually, seasonally, and daily within the framework seasons as established by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) and according to refuge-specific regulations.

Most sport fishing occurs during the day; however, sport fishing on Big Lake and Cache River NWRs also is allowed at night (one hour after legal sunset to 4:00 a.m.). Certain areas on each refuge are closed seasonally to all public entry and use, including sport fishing, as waterfowl sanctuaries. Other types of seasonal closures may occur in certain areas on each refuge (e.g., quota gun deer hunts). Sport fishing season dates, hours, seasonal zone closures and other regulations pertaining to timing of sport fishing are provided in an annual sport fishing public use brochure and refuge website for each refuge (see Appendix C1).

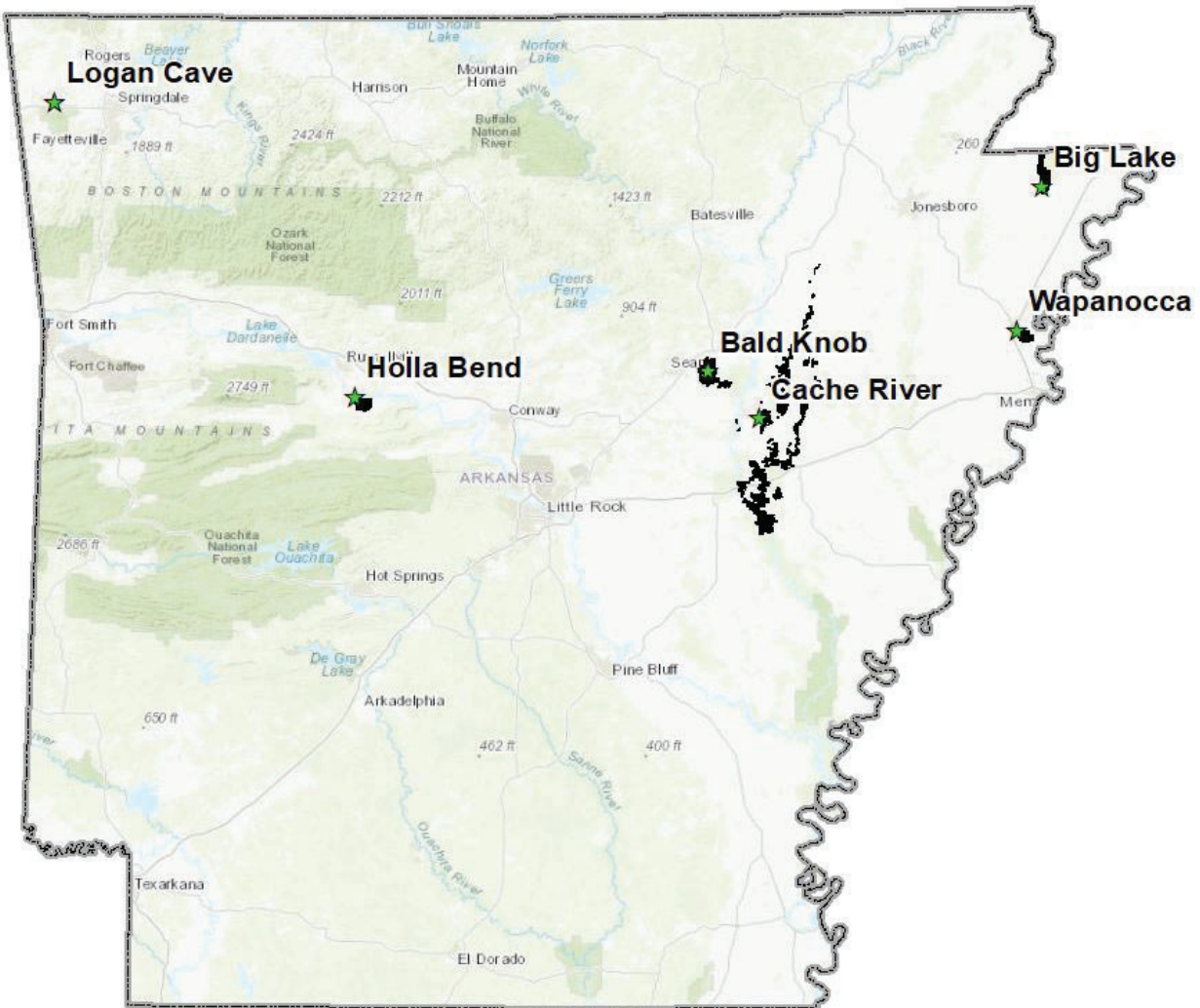
How is the use conducted?

Sport fishing is conducted in accordance with applicable State and Federal regulations and refuge-specific regulations published in 50 CFR 32. Sport fishing seasons and refuge-specific regulations are published for each refuge in annual refuge public use brochures (See Appendix C1).

Sport fishing is administered to ensure compatibility and to maintain a safe, high-quality, low-impact recreational opportunity. Fishing is primarily for bream, crappie, bass, and catfish. Certain areas of some refuges may be closed to fishing or to public entry to limit disturbance to wildlife and to avoid hazardous conditions (e.g., quota gun deer hunt closures, road closures due to flooding, waterfowl sanctuary closures). Bow fishing is allowed according to State and refuge-specific regulations. Frogging and crawfishing are allowed on the refuges according to state and refuge-specific regulations and are included in this determination. These activities are for personal use only. Commercial fishing (fish only) requires a Special Use Permit and is

covered under a separate Compatibility Determination). The take of turtles and mollusks is prohibited on the Complex. Tournament fishing and commercial guiding for fishing are not allowed on the Complex.

Figure 1. Central Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex, including Bald Knob NWR, Big Lake NWR, Cache River NWR, Holla Bend NWR, and Wapanocca NWR.



Access to sport fishing areas will be by foot, motor vehicle, bicycles, e-bikes, motorized boats, canoes, and kayaks, subject to refuge-specific regulations. These modes of travel, which are allowed to facilitate sport fishing (and other compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation), will be conducted in a manner that ensures compatibility. Motor vehicles (automobiles/trucks), bicycles and e-bikes will use established, open roads only. All-Terrain Vehicles/Utility-Terrain Vehicles (ATV/UTVs) are not permitted for fishing, except that SUPs for mobility-impaired ATV/UTV access will be issued upon request to anglers possessing valid State-issued mobility impaired

permits on Holla Bend NWR. Fishing platforms for wheelchair-bound anglers are used on Big Lake and Wapanocca NWRs and additional structures may be constructed in areas suitable for their placement on these and other refuges in the Complex in a manner that will ensure compatibility, safety, and minimize conflicts with other users. Use of horses and mules is not allowed on the Complex.

The refuges may provide various youth fishing special events during which only youth less than 16 years of age can fish, but must be accompanied by an adult. These events are generally conducted in a specific area(s) on the refuges dedicated to this use during the youth fishing events. Additionally, special fishing events may be held on the refuges with certain school programs, disabled individuals, therapy programs, environmental education/outdoors skills programs, and refuge Friends groups. These events will promote sport fishing as a wildlife-dependent activity and to raise awareness of the refuges as conserved aquatic habitats important for fish and other aquatic life and the value of these resources to the public. In some of these circumstances, channel catfish may be stocked in the fishing pond or site by AGFC and/or through a purchase of fish from a private aquaculture operation. Stocking of fish by AGFC or the Service to augment populations solely to benefit general fishing does not occur, but may be permitted in conjunction with request/approval by AGFC for restoration or recreational purposes, but only with native or naturalized species.

Why is the use being proposed?

Sport fishing is an approved and existing use on this Complex (USFWS 2009, 2010) and a legitimate wildlife-dependent recreational use that, when compatible, is one of the priority public uses of the NWRS as defined in the NWRSAA, as amended by the NWRSIA (Public Law 105-57). Fishing is one of the most popular uses of the Refuges in the Complex. Demand for access to, and sport fishing on, public lands appears to be increasing (<https://asafishing.org/reports/new-report-highlights-recreational-fishings-broad-economic-and-conservation-impact/>) The refuges in the Complex on which sport fishing occurs all host abundant and sustainable populations of game fish and aquatic species.

Availability of Resources:

Sport fishing is an existing use on the Complex (with the exception of adding frogging to Wapanocca NWR and crawfishing to Holla Bend NWR) and costs associated with administering the program are expected to be attributed to inflation rather than increased demand for services. Administration of the hunting and sport fishing programs on the Complex is estimated to cost \$116,300 per year. Two Federal Wildlife Officers and a District Patrol Captain enforce federal, state, and refuge sport fishing regulations throughout the Complex. Assistance with law enforcement and compliance with regulations is provided by Wildlife Officers from AGFC. Staff time involving refuge managers to specifically administer sport fishing is minimal. The Complex wildlife biologist will expend minor amounts of time coordinating with AGFC fisheries biologists. The sport fishing program can be successfully administered by existing staff and budgets. Estimated costs of administering the hunting and sport fishing program on the Complex are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Staff involvement and estimated annual costs to administer the Central Arkansas NWR Complex Hunting and Sport fishing Programs and Offsetting Revenues from hunt permit sales and entrance fees associated with sport fishing.

Hunt and Sport fishing program needs and staff involved	Cost
Equipment/Tractor Operators – Maintain/repair roads, levees, parking lots, trails, signage	\$27,000
Biologist, Interns, Contractors – Operate deer check stations, analyze data, prepare reports	\$6,100
Senior Federal Wildlife Officers – Law Enforcement program	\$45,650
Refuge Managers, Forester, Administrative Officer – Program administration, coordination, brochures, mapping, website content, signage, public information	\$34,550
Online Vendor Fee	\$3,000
Bald Knob (\$41,450); Big Lake (\$12,400); Cache River (\$36,200); Holla Bend (\$12,600); Wapanocca (\$13,650) Total	\$116,300
Offsetting Revenue for the Complex (Hunting = \$39,662; Sport fishing = \$2,960) Total	\$42,622

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short Term and Long Term Impacts:

Sport fishing on the Central Arkansas NWR Complex is regulated to ensure compatibility with refuge purposes and mission of the NWRS, to contribute to goals and objectives for aquatic species populations developed by the AGFC and the CCPs (USFWS 2009 and 2010), and provide safe, low-impact, high-quality, wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for the resident and nonresident visitors on the refuges within the Complex. Sport fishing was further stepped-down and analyzed in the Complex Refuge-specific hunting and fishing plans and associated Environmental Assessment (USFWS 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, and 2021f). Sport fishing allows beneficial use of a renewable and sustainable natural resource. In the course of sport fishing experiences on the refuges, participants should gain an increased understanding of fisheries and aquatic resource conservation practices, habitat/wildlife relationships, aquatic species behavior, and the value of aquatic habitat management and public use programs practiced on the refuges. Furthermore, most anglers consume the fish they catch and may have fish mounted for memorabilia of times afield. These opportunities inspire greater appreciation for fisheries/wildlife conservation on national wildlife refuges, and stimulate anglers to more highly value and support national wildlife refuges, the NWRS, and the Service. Sport fishing also combines the features of other priority public uses such as wildlife observation and photography and there is a valuable wildlife/environmental educational component involved, particularly when experienced anglers impart their knowledge and skills to less-experienced fishing partners. Fishing is often a family activity that facilitates a shared appreciation of conserved habitats and consumptive use of abundant, renewable natural resources.

Sport fishing invariably results in some potential negative effects to habitat and wildlife. Fish are killed; most are taken for consumption. Some individuals that are caught, handled, and released also will succumb. However, fisheries management is directed toward populations and not individuals, and game fish are abundant. Some fish and other aquatic and terrestrial wildlife along anglers' routes of travel and at sport fishing sites will be disturbed and disrupted from their

normal activities (e.g., Cole and Knight 1990), but this disturbance and displacement is sporadic, temporary, dispersed in its occurrence, and is not pervasive enough to result in negative impacts to populations. Noise pollution from motorized boats can occur and its effect on wildlife and humans is dependent on various factors of time of day/night, habitat, and weather conditions. Small invertebrates and vegetation can be trampled and some surface effects such as trail compaction, bank erosion, and minor pollution from boat motors, can occur. Currently, the sport fishing use on the Complex is popular but moderate and time and space zoning

Waterfowl sanctuary areas on the Complex provide wintering waterfowl with areas of escape and respite from disturbances caused by all forms of public use, including sport fishing. However, waterfowl using these refuges (in both sanctuary and non-sanctuary areas) typically do not spend 24 hours per day onsite; they move from place to place within the refuges and trade back and forth between the refuges and adjacent non-refuge lands. In the Core Waterfowl Area on Bald Knob NWR, public entry is not allowed after 1 p.m. to limit the late-day human-caused disturbance (including sport fishing) to waterfowl. During the primary waterfowl wintering period (generally early November to late February) visitation for sport fishing is minimal. The likelihood of a threatened, endangered, or candidate species suffering mortality or the fishing activities causing disturbance rising to the level of take for federally-listed species occurring on the Complex is remote.

Littering is typically evident around sport fishing sites and travel routes. Unfortunately, littering results from all uses of the refuge. Litter is aesthetically unappealing and can be injurious to wildlife and aquatic organisms. Conflicts between anglers and non-fishing visitors to the refuges could occur. These conflicts typically involve the spontaneous disturbance of wildlife/fish with which anglers and non-anglers are both seeking contact. Additionally there may be competition for use of popular sport fishing spots. These conflicts are considered to be minor.

All refuge sport fishing seasons on the Complex are approved by AGFC, which continually monitors fish and wildlife populations, evaluates sport fishing harvest, and determines the status of the fisheries across the state. Fishing harvests and aquatic wildlife populations are evaluated at the local, state, and national levels by various agencies and are regulated to ensure sustainability in perpetuity. Examples of fishing reports for Arkansas are available from AGFC at this site: <https://www.agfc.com/en/fishing/fisheries-scientific-reports/>

The refuges defer to AGFC for evaluation and determination of status and health of statewide fisheries and conduct seasons generally in accordance with state seasons, frameworks, and regulations governing take and harvest, except in certain instances in which AGFC approves any variance from general State seasons and regulations.

Cumulative Impacts:

Effects that are minor when considered alone, but collectively may be important are known as cumulative effects. Incremental increases in activities by people engaged in the variety of allowed uses, including sport fishing, on the Complex that continue unchecked potentially could result in cumulative detrimental consequences to wildlife and/or habitats. However, Complex and AGFC staff monitor these activities to ensure wildlife and other refuge resources are not affected in a detrimental manner. Various methods are available to refuge managers that can readily be implemented to effectively manage participant numbers and activity patterns to maintain a compatible, high-quality, low-impact, and safe sport fishing program on the refuges.

Sport fishing conducted in accordance with State and federal regulations is not expected to adversely affect fish/wildlife populations that occur on the refuge and may assist in maintaining desirable age structure in fish populations and promoting the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuges. Sport fishing is an activity that is monitored and regulated to maintain stability within fisheries and a healthy balance between fish populations and aquatic habitats. Cumulative impacts could occur from the combination of uses on the refuge including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, education, interpretation, habitat management and research. Conflicting programs that occur in the same space and time can cause decreased satisfaction from user groups and increase disturbance to wildlife from frequent human visitation, consumptive or non-consumptive. The areas used by the public to fish and those areas frequented by users engaged in other activities are dispersed and often not overlapping temporally and spatially to such degree that there are any significant adverse cumulative effects to fish and wildlife and their habitat resources, public safety, or quality of the visitor experience.

Management actions such as prescribed fire, water management and timber management are necessary aspects of refuge management but the conduct of these activities may not be conducive to fishing activities occurring in the same time and location. Certain research activities may require areas free of public use/disturbance to accomplish research objectives. The refuge considers all uses as activities that are planned/implemented on a yearly basis and programs are structured to allow multiple uses to occur with minimal conflict. Sport fishing seasons and locations allow for anglers to pursue this public use while other uses may be located in other areas of the refuge or at other times to reduce potential conflicts. There will be no adverse cumulative effects to refuge aquatic or terrestrial plant/wildlife communities attributable to sport fishing.

In addition to environmental health, there also are other cumulative beneficial effects to sport fishing on the refuges. Increased wildlife-dependent recreation (fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education); beneficial use of renewable, sustainable aquatic resources; increased appreciation for fish/wildlife conservation, and the role of national wildlife refuges in fish/wildlife conservation, habitat management and restoration all ultimately result from sport fishing programs on national wildlife refuges. Additionally, increased revenues at the local, state, and national levels benefit economies and provide (federal) funding for fisheries research, habitat management, acquisition of habitats, supportive infrastructure, and educational programs designed to raise public awareness and support for fisheries conservation at the local, state, and national levels.

Public Review and Comment:

The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. The Service sent letters regarding the Draft Hunting and Fishing Plans, draft hunting and fishing compatibility determinations, regulations, and EA to the State of Arkansas in October 2020 and April 2021. Refuge staff will continue to coordinate with AGFC to address annual implementation of hunting activities. The Service also sent letters requesting comments and consultation in October 2020 and follow up emails in April 2021 to:

- Osage Nation;
- Quapaw Tribe;
- Shawnee Tribe;

- Choctaw Nation;
- Jena Band of Choctaw;
- Mississippi Band of Choctaw;
- Chickasaw Nation;
- United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee;
- Muscogee Creek Nation;
- Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town;
- Kialegee Tribal Town;
- Thlopthlocco Tribal Town;
- Seminole Nation;
- Delaware Tribe;
- Delaware Nation;
- Shawnee Tribe; and
- Stockbridge Munsee Community

The Bald Knob, Big Lake, Cache River, Holla Bend, and Wapanocca NWRs Draft Hunting and Fishing Plans, Environmental Assessment, and Hunting and Fishing Draft Compatibility Determinations were made available for public review and comment from April 14 to July 6, 2021. Notice was posted at the Central Arkansas NWR Complex Headquarters, refuge websites and refuge Facebook pages. Further, an information bulletin announcing the availability of the documents for public review and comment was provided to *Woodruff County Monitor*, *Town Courier*, *Daily Citizen*, *Evening Times*, *Jonesboro Sun*, *Monroe County Herald*, *Prairie County Herald*, *Wynne Progress*, *Times Herald*, *Newport Independent*, *Log Cabin Democrat*, *Courier*, *Dardanelle Post Dispatch*, and *The Democrat Gazette*. Additionally, public comments were requested through the Federal Register process announced on May 4, 2021, and ended on July 6, 2021 (86 FR Number 23794). Eleven members of the general public, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the Friends of Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge, the Humane Society of the United States (via the Federal Register process), and the Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma submitted comments and Service responses to these comments are addressed in Appendix D.

We received no comments regarding this compatibility determination.

Determination:

Use is not compatible

Use is compatible, with the following stipulations

Stipulations Necessary To Ensure Compatibility:

Sport fishing on the Central Arkansas NWR Complex is administered in a manner that ensures compatibility with refuge purposes and the mission of the NWRS. Sport fishing is annually evaluated within the refuges and coordinated with and approved by AGFC. The refuges continue to adapt the sport fishing program as necessary to maintain compatibility. The stipulations necessary to ensure compatibility are encompassed in the annual regulations for public use/sport fishing on the refuges; these are presented in Appendix C1.

Justification:

Sport fishing is a priority public use as defined by the NWRSA. Sport fishing, which includes frogging and crawfishing, is legitimate and appropriate use of refuges in the Central Arkansas NWR Complex as supported by the Central Arkansas NWR Complex and Holla Bend CCPs and Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSIs) (USFWS 2009, 2010, respectively, and USFWS 2021). Sport fishing is potentially connected with at least three other wildlife-dependent uses – wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education. Service policy is to provide expanded opportunities for wildlife-dependent uses when compatible and consistent with sound fish and wildlife management and ensure that they receive enhanced attention during planning and management. Allowing sport fishing on the refuges not only satisfies a great demand by the public for use of public lands, but also enables the refuges to connect with an influential constituency that hopefully highly values and supports national wildlife refuges and appreciates and supports the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and how refuges fulfill a role in that paradigm. Sport fishing on the refuges in the Complex also inspires support for the art, science, and practice of fisheries conservation and management in the NWRS. Compatible sport fishing programs on refuges also promote the use of sustainable natural resources, not only for recreational and educational benefits but also for human sustenance (i.e., food). Offsetting revenues from sport fishing on the refuges help accomplish projects that benefit visitor services on the refuges for anglers and other visitors. On a local and statewide scale, revenues generated by angler trip expenses, purchases of gear and supplies, and purchase of fishing licenses provide primary and secondary economic benefits including sales and fuel tax revenues, employment, and installation of boat ramps and other supportive infrastructure, that benefit anglers and non-anglers. Federal excise taxes on sport fishing tackle, trolling motors, fish finders, and other equipment used for sport fishing and federal fuel taxes on motorboat/small engine fuels generate funds that support state fisheries conservation, research, management, stocking, and educational efforts that benefit fish populations and habitats and consumptive users of fisheries resources.

Furthermore, sport fishing on refuges is closely monitored and highly regulated and is designed to perpetuate fisheries populations and the habitats on which they and other wildlife depend. Sport fishing can aid in maintaining a healthy balance between wildlife and their habitats and with the human socio-economic environment. Although short-term disturbances and direct mortality occurs with the conduct of sport fishing, these effects are sporadic, short-term, generally dispersed in time and space, and do not result in detrimental long-term or cumulative impacts. Sport fishing on the refuges is administered in a manner that minimizes potential conflicts with other wildlife-dependent uses and is safe, high quality, low-impact recreational use. Sport fishing as described above will not adversely affect the biological and environmental health and integrity of the refuges. Therefore, through this compatibility determination process, we have determined that sport fishing on the refuges within the Central Arkansas NWR Complex, as described herein, and in accordance with the stipulations provided above, is a compatible use that will not materially interfere with, or detract from, the fulfillment of the NWRS mission or the purposes of the refuges.

NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use:

Categorical Exclusion Without Environmental Action Statement

Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Statement

X Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

 Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

Literature Cited:

Cole, D. N. and R. L. Knight. 1990. Impacts of recreation on biodiversity in wilderness. Utah State University. Vol. 0, Article 6.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2009. Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Central Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex Bald Knob, Big Lake, Cache River, and Wapanocca National Wildlife Refuges. Atlanta, GA. 523 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2010. Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge. Atlanta, GA. 191 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2021a. Bald Knob NWR Hunting and Fishing Plan. Atlanta, GA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2021b. Big Lake NWR Hunting and Fishing Plan. Atlanta, GA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2021c. Cache River NWR Hunting and Fishing Plan. Atlanta, GA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2021d. Holla Bend NWR Hunting and Fishing Plan. Atlanta, GA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2021e. Wapanocca NWR Hunting and Fishing Plan. Atlanta, GA.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2021f. Central Arkansas NWR Complex Hunting and Fishing Plan Environmental Assessment. Atlanta, GA.

SIGNATURE: **KEITH WEAVER** Digitally signed by KEITH WEAVER
Refuge Manager _____ Date: 2021.08.06 16:00:29 -04'00'

CONCURRENCE: **ANITRA FIRMENICH** Digitally signed by ANITRA FIRMENICH
Area Supervisor _____ Date: 2021.08.10 06:16:43 -06'00'

Compatibility Coordinator _____ Digitally signed by Pamala J. Wingrove
NWRS, Interior Regions 2 and 4 _____ Date: 2021.08.10 11:23:59 -04'00'

BRETT HUNTER Digitally signed by BRETT
HUNTER
Date: 2021.08.12 08:45:17 -04'00'

Regional Refuge Chief
NWRS, Interior Regions 2 and 4

Signature/Date

MANDATORY 15 YEAR RE-EVALUATION DATE: 2036

APPENDIX C1. STATION-SPECIFIC REGULATIONS FOR SPORT FISHING AND ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES - STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY

Bald Knob NWR

The Bald Knob NWR public use brochure will be annually updated to reflect more specific information and restrictions, including seasons, days, times, bag limits, access, licenses and permits, allowable sport fishing devices, other equipment, and other refuge-specific regulations. Sport fishing is permitted year-round, subject to State seasons and refuge-specific area closures. To ensure compatibility with refuge purposes and the mission of the Refuge System, sport fishing must be conducted in accordance with State regulations, as supplemented by refuge-specific regulations, and described in refuge information sheets/brochures.

Refuge-Specific Sport Fishing Regulations (as published in 50 CFR 32.23)

(4) *Sport fishing.* We allow sport fishing, frogging, and crawfishing on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- (i) The conditions set forth at paragraph (a)(1)(ii), (xi), (xv) through (xvii), and (a)(3)(viii) and (xi) of this section apply.
- (ii) We prohibit the take or possession of turtles and/or mollusks (see §27.21 of this chapter).
- (iii) We allow fishing, frogging, and crawfishing for personal use only. All crawfish traps must have the owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer identification number permanently affixed.
- (iv) You may enter the refuge to fish, frog, or crawfish beginning at 4 a.m. and must exit by 1 hour after legal sunset.
- (v) We prohibit tournament fishing on the refuge.

Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Fishing

Access and vehicle use:

- Waterfowl sanctuaries, are closed to ALL entry and public use, including sport fishing, from November 15 through February 28.
- ATVs use is prohibited.
- Conventional vehicles may be used only on the Farm Unit and ONLY from March 1-November 14. Conventional vehicles must meet all applicable federal and state requirements regulating the use of licensed motor vehicles. Vehicles equipped with oversize tractor lug type tires are prohibited. Use of conventional vehicles is prohibited on the Mingo Creek Unit.
- A portion of the waterfowl hunt area (Core Waterfowl Area) will be closed from November 15 – February 28 to ALL public entry and use after 1 pm to reduce waterfowl disturbance and improve hunt quality (see map). During this period Coal Chute Road, Granary West Road parking area and Frackin Road will remain open to vehicular access.
- Roads may be closed any time conditions or other administrative needs warrant. A locked gate or other barrier, road closed sign, or no vehicle sign means the road is closed to ALL vehicle travel, but not to foot travel unless signed otherwise.
- Parking of vehicles on roadsides that prevents the passage of extra-wide farm equipment is prohibited. Vehicles are subject to be towed at owner's expense.

- Motor vehicle speed limit is 25 mph, unless posted otherwise

Prohibited activities while sport fishing include:

- Commercial fishing
- Taking or possessing turtles or mollusks
- Tournament fishing
- Use of personal watercraft (jet-ski, etc), hover craft, and airboats
- Open alcohol containers on refuge roads, ATV trails, parking areas, boat ramps, fishing piers, or observation decks
- Swimming
- Camping
- Building fires
- Cutting or defacing trees, shrubs, or other plants
- Littering (including, but not limited to, bait containers, fishing line, other tackle, and cigarette butts)
- Use of horses or mules
- Driving on the Little Red River Protection Levee
- Houseboat mooring to the refuge bank on the Little Red River
- Off road vehicling, or driving conventional vehicles on wet/ muddy ungraveled roads

Big Lake NWR

The Big Lake NWR sport fish public use brochure will be annually updated to reflect more specific information and restrictions, including seasons, days, times, bag limits, access, licenses and permits, allowable sport fishing devices, other equipment, and other refuge-specific regulations. Sport fishing is permitted year-round, subject to State seasons and refuge-specific area closures. To ensure compatibility with refuge purposes and the mission of the Refuge System, sport fishing must be conducted in accordance with State regulations, as supplemented by refuge-specific regulations, and described in refuge information sheets/brochures.

Refuge-Specific Sport Fishing Regulations (as published in 50 CFR 32.23)

(4) *Sport fishing.* We allow sport fishing, frogging, and crawfishing on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- (i) The conditions set forth at paragraphs (b)(2)(ii), (x), (xi), (xii) through (xv), and (b)(3)(ix) and (x) of this section apply.
- (ii) Anglers may launch boats only in designated areas.
- (iii) We allow frogging and crawfishing for personal use only. All crawfish traps must have the owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer identification number permanently affixed.
- (iv) We prohibit the take or possession of turtles and/or mollusks (see §27.21 of this chapter).
- (v) We allow fishing, frogging, and crawfishing on all refuge waters from March 1 through October 31.

(vi) We allow fishing in the Sand Slough-Mud Slough area from November 1 through February 28 only with the use of nonmotorized boats and electric trolling motors; anglers may enter this area at 4 a.m. and must depart by 1 hour after legal sunset.

(vii) We prohibit climbing onto or fishing from any water control structure and associated wingwalls and fences, or the top of the Floodway Dam south of Highway 18.

(viii) We prohibit tournament fishing on the refuge.

Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting and Sport fishing

Access and Vehicle Use:

- Motorized boat entry into the Big Lake Wilderness is prohibited any time.
- The entire lake, Baker's Field Island, and the Sand-Slough Moist Soil Unit are waterfowl sanctuaries and are closed to ALL entry and public use, including hunting and fishing, from November 1 - February 28.
- Boats are prohibited November 1 - February 28, except in Ditch 28, Ditch 81 and south of Sand Slough Dam.
- Personal watercraft (e.g., jet-skis, etc.), hover craft, and airboats are prohibited.
- Roads may be closed at any time hazardous or poor road conditions exist or other administrative needs warrant. A locked gate or other barrier, road closed sign, or no vehicle sign means the road is closed to ALL vehicle travel but not to foot travel unless signed otherwise.
- All vehicles must stay on maintained roads or established parking areas and meet all applicable federal and state requirements regulating the use of a licensed motor vehicle.
- Motor vehicle speed limit is 25 mph, unless posted otherwise
- Vehicles equipped with oversize tractor lug type tires are prohibited.
- ATV use is prohibited.
- Prohibited activities while fishing include:
 - Commercial fishing
 - Taking or possessing turtles or mollusks
 - Tournament fishing
 - Use of horses/mules
- Possession of open alcohol containers on refuge roads, ATV trails, parking areas, boat ramps, fishing piers, or observation decks
- Camping
- Building fires
- Cutting or defacing trees, shrubs, or other plants
- Littering (including, but not limited to shotgun shell hulls and cigarette butts)
- Artificial light may not be used to locate wildlife, except as authorized for frogging

Cache River NWR

Specific sport fishing seasons, days, and times may vary in some instances from state frameworks, however, these differences are approved by AGFC. The Cache River NWR sport fish public use brochures will be annually updated to reflect more specific information and restrictions, including seasons, days, times, bag limits, access, licenses and permits, allowable fishing devices, other equipment, and other refuge-specific regulations. To ensure compatibility with refuge purposes and the mission of the Refuge System, sport fishing must be conducted in accordance with State and Federal regulations, as supplemented by refuge-specific regulations, and information

sheets/brochures.

Refuge-Specific Sport Fishing Regulations (as published in 50 CFR 32.23)

(4) *Sport fishing.* We allow sport fishing, frogging, and crawfishing on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- (i) The conditions set forth at paragraphs (c)(1)(v), (vi), (ix), (xii), (xiv) through (xvi), and (c)(3)(viii) of this section apply.
- (ii) We prohibit the take or possession of turtles and/or mollusks (see §27.21 of this chapter).
- (iii) We allow frogging and crawfishing for personal use only. All crawfish traps must have the owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer identification number permanently affixed.
- (iv) We prohibit tournament fishing on the refuge.

Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting and Sport fishing

Access and Vehicle Use:

- Cache River NWR is in the acquisition phase and the public use brochure and refuge website show the current ownership. Isolated land tracts that have been purchased are scattered throughout the acquisition zone and have been posted with refuge boundary signs or marked with yellow boundary paint. Access to many of these refuge lands is currently through private lands and all refuge visitors must obtain permission from adjacent landowners prior to crossing private land to reach refuge lands.
- Refuges roads are open year around. Vehicles must remain on established roads as indicated on the map in the public use brochure or the refuge website.
- Motor vehicle speed limit is 25 mph, unless posted otherwise
- Vehicles may be parked alongside open roads in a manner that will not interfere with the normal flow of traffic.
- Roads may be closed at any time road conditions or other administrative needs warrant.
- A locked gate or other barrier, road closed sign, or no vehicle sign means the road is closed to ALL vehicle travel, but not to foot travel unless signed otherwise. Do not block cabled or gated roads, field roads or trails.
- All conventional vehicles must stay on maintained roads or established parking areas and meet all applicable federal and state requirements regulating the use of a licensed motor vehicle. Vehicles equipped with oversize tractor lug type tires are prohibited.
- Motor vehicles may not be left unattended overnight on the refuge.
- ATV use is prohibited.

Prohibited activities while fishing include:

- Commercial fishing
- Tournament fishing
- Use of Horses/mules
- Use of personal watercraft (e.g., jet-ski, etc.), hover craft, and airboats are prohibited.
- Open alcohol containers on refuge roads, ATV trails, parking areas, boat ramps, fishing piers, or observation decks
- Camping, including mooring houseboats to refuge property

- Littering (including, but not limited to, bait containers, fishing line, other tackle, and cigarette butts)
- Building fires
- Cutting or defacing trees, shrubs, or other plants

Holla Bend NWR

Specific sport fishing seasons, days, and times may vary in some instances from state frameworks, however, these differences are approved by AGFC. The Holla Bend NWR sport fish public use brochure will be annually updated to reflect more specific information and restrictions, including seasons, days, times, bag limits, access, licenses and permits, allowable fishing devices, other equipment, and other refuge-specific regulations. To ensure compatibility with refuge purposes and the mission of the Refuge System, sport fishing must be conducted in accordance with State and Federal regulations, as supplemented by refuge-specific regulations, and information sheets/brochures.

Refuge-Specific Fishing Regulations (as published in 50 CFR 32.23)

(4) *Sport fishing.* We allow sport fishing, frogging, and crawfishing on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- (i) The conditions set forth at paragraphs (f)(2)(iii), (iv), (vi), (viii), (xii), and (xiv) of this section apply.
- (ii) We allow fishing, frogging, and crawfishing on all waters only from March 1 through October 31 from legal sunrise to legal sunset.
- (iii) Anglers must remove boats from the refuge at the end of each day's fishing activity (see §27.93 of this chapter).
- (iv) We prohibit the take or possession of turtles and/or mollusks (see §27.21 of this chapter).
- (v) We allow frogging and crawfishing for personal use only. All crawfish traps must have the owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer identification number permanently affixed.
- (vi) We prohibit access to refuge waters and land from the Arkansas River.
- (vii) We limit trotlines, setline, limblines, yo-yo and free-floating fishing devices to 20 per person; any line that extends into the water must be cotton.
- (viii) Trotlines, setlines, limblines, yo-yos, and free-floating fishing devices must be clearly labelled with the angler's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer identification number, and cannot be left overnight or unattended.

Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Sport fishing

Access and Vehicle Use

- Holla Bend refuge is a nationally designated Fee Area, and a vehicle entrance pass is required of all visitors traveling through the refuge.
- All refuge access is prohibited after dark unless specifically authorized by the Refuge Manager. Entry and exit times for hunting are provided in the hunt public use brochure/permit.
- Access into the refuge is through an automatically time-controlled gate. Closing times are posted near the entrance. If you are locked in the refuge or need assistance, call 911 on a cell phone and you will be connected to the Sheriff's office located in Danville.
- Refuge roads are open year around. Vehicles must remain on established roads as indicated

on the refuge map found in annual public use brochure and refuge website.

- Motor vehicle speed limit is 25 mph, unless posted otherwise.
- Vehicles may be parked alongside open roads in a manner that will not interfere with the normal flow of traffic.
- A cable, gate, road closed sign, or other barrier (i.e. mounded dirt) means the road is closed to all vehicle travel but not to foot travel unless signed otherwise. Do not block cabled or gated roads, field roads or trails.
- Designated areas of the refuge may be closed to fishing and all other public access for resource protection, special management, or safety reasons.
- NOTE: Access to refuge waters and land from the Arkansas River is prohibited. Boating over the dam at the Old River Channel, from either direction, is prohibited. Contact Refuge Manager for additional details.

Prohibited activities while fishing include:

- Commercial fishing
- Tournament fishing
- Camping and fires
- Swimming
- Littering (including, but not limited to cigarette butts, bait containers, fishing line, other tackle,, and fishing line)
- Use and/or possession of alcoholic beverages or controlled substances
- Cutting, or defacing trees shrubs, or other plants
- Use of airboats, water skiing, jet skis, or other personal watercraft

Wapanocca NWR

Specific sport fishing seasons, days, and times may vary in some instances from state frameworks, however, these differences are approved by AGFC. The Wapanocca NWR sport fish public use brochure will be annually updated to reflect more specific information and restrictions, including seasons, days, times, bag limits, access, licenses and permits, allowable fishing devices, other equipment, quota application process, and other refuge-specific regulations. To ensure compatibility with refuge purposes and the mission of the Refuge System, sport fishing must be conducted in accordance with State and Federal regulations, as supplemented by refuge-specific regulations, and information sheets/brochures.

Refuge-Specific Fishing Regulations (as published in 50 CFR 32.23)

(4) *Sport fishing.* We allow sport fishing, frogging, and crawfishing on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- (i) The conditions set forth at paragraphs (i)(2)(iii), (ix), (x) through (xv), and (xvii), and (i)(3)(ii) of this section apply.
- (ii) From March 1 through November 30, we allow fishing, frogging, and crawfishing on all refuge waters. From December 1 through February 28, we allow bank fishing only on Woody Pond and other non-waterfowl sanctuary areas.
- (iii) Anglers, including those frogging and crawfishing, may enter the refuge at 4 a.m. and must leave the refuge no later than 1 hour after legal sunset.

- (iv) We prohibit the take or possession of turtles and/or mollusks (see §27.21 of this chapter).
- (v) Anglers may launch boats only in designated areas.
- (vi) We allow fishing, frogging, and crawfishing for personal use only. All crawfish traps must have the owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer identification number permanently affixed.
- (vii) We prohibit tournament fishing.

Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Sport fishing

Access and Vehicle Use:

- Refuge open to daylight use only.
- Access into the refuge is through an automatically time-controlled gate that opens at 4:00 a.m. and closes at 8:00 p.m. If you are locked in the refuge or need assistance, call 911 on a cell phone and you will be connected to the Sheriff's office.
- The Refuge is closed to ALL other entry and public use during any Quota Gun Hunts.
- Portions of the Refuge are closed as waterfowl sanctuary (see map in public use brochure and refuge website) and are closed to ALL entry and public use, including fishing, from December 1 through February 28.
- ALL boats are prohibited on Wapanocca Lake and Woody Pond from December 1 through February 28.
- You must use the public boat ramp off Highway 77 to launch motorized boats into Wapanocca Lake.
- Boats must be operated at speeds less than 5 mph in the "No Wake Zone" located between the boat launch and open lake.
- Roads may be closed at any time road conditions or other administrative needs warrant. A locked gate or other barrier, road closed sign, or no motorized vehicle sign means the road is closed to ALL motorized vehicle travel but not to foot travel unless signed otherwise.
- All vehicles and bicycles must stay on maintained roads or established parking areas. All vehicles must meet all applicable federal and state requirements regulating the use of a licensed motor vehicle. Modified vehicles equipped with oversize tractor lug tires are prohibited.
- Motor vehicle speed limit is 25 mph, unless posted otherwise
- ATV use is prohibited, except for use by mobility-impaired anglers possessing a SUP issued by the Refuge Manager.

Prohibited activities while fishing include:

- Commercial fishing
- Tournament fishing
- Use of horses/mules
- Use of airboats, personal watercraft (jet-ski, etc.), and hover craft
- Possession of open alcohol containers on refuge roads, parking areas, boat ramps, fishing piers, or observation decks
- Camping
- Building fires
- Cutting or defacing trees, shrubs, or other plants
- Littering (including, but not limited to, shotgun shell hulls and cigarette butts).