R1-57

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Memorandum

TO : Staff Specialist for Public Use (ARW-OPR) DATE: 1/5/86

FROM : Refuge Manager, Southeast Idaho Refuge Complex

SUBJECT: Hunting Plans and Sport Fishing Plans - 1986-87

Enclosed are the originals of the Bear Lake, Camas, Grays Lake, and Minidoka hunting plans which have been approved. We made minor revisions according to Jack Waddell's directives and inserted the corrected pages.

Also enclosed is a revised page of the Bear Lake sport fishing plan which was submitted in July. If you would please replace Page 6 with this new one, it may prevent a return for revision.

Charles S. Peck

Enclosures

cc: Refuge District Supervisor
Bear Lake NWR

TEGladwin:wh

Chapter: Hunting
Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Wayan, Idaho

Prepared by: /S/EUGENE C. BARNEY

Submitted by: [signature]

Date: 6/23/86

Reviewed by: _____ Date: _____

Reviewed by: _____ Date: _____

Concurred: [signature] Date: 9/30/86
Regional District Supervisor

Approved: [signature] Date: 10/7/86
Acting ~~Assistant~~ Regional Director
~~Wildlife Resources~~

I. Introduction

Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge is situated in Caribou and Bonneville Counties, about 30 miles north of Soda Springs, Idaho. Located near Wayan, in southeastern Idaho, the refuge lies in the remote and sparsely populated Grays Lake Basin. Grays Lake is a high altitude, mountain valley marsh, composed principally of hardstem bulrush and cattail with scattered small shallow ponds. Snowmelt from mountains which ring the valley accounts for the primary source of water. The elevation of the marsh is about 6385 ft., while the highest surrounding mountain peak is Caribou Mountain at 9803 ft.

Waterfowl hunting occurred in the Grays Lake basin prior to establishment of the refuge in 1965. Under refuge management, a waterfowl hunting program has continued on selected areas within the current refuge boundary. Refuge land acquisition is incomplete and is being pursued on a "willing seller" basis. An equally significant degree of hunting presently occurs on adjacent non-service lands.

II. Conformance with Statutory Authorities

Initial enabling actions for establishment of the refuge, were the October 1964 Memorandum of Understanding between the FWS and Bureau of Indian Affairs; and the Refuge Use and Cooperative Use Agreement Grays Lake, Idaho of 1965 with 22 private landowners of over 30 tracts surrounding the Grays Lake lakebed. Additional acreage was approved in 1972 for fee purchase.

Specific purpose of the refuge at that time was listed as waterfowl production. Later, the primary role adopted for the refuge was that of providing a nesting ground for sandhill cranes, some of which are being used as foster parents for whooping cranes.

Nesting and fledging of young is completed before waterfowl hunting season and is therefore compatible with refuge purposes at that point. Hunting season usually starts the first or second weekend in October and all whooping cranes may not migrate until October 17 (see Section VI.A.), so the potential for conflict exists.

The annual cost to administer the present hunt program is estimated at less than $2,000. Necessary funds are available and, therefore, this hunting program is in compliance with the Refuge Recreation Act.

III. Statement of Objectives

A. General refuge objectives follow objectives of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge Manual):

1. To preserve, restore, and enhance in their natural ecosystems (when practicable) all species of animals and plants that are endangered, or threatened with becoming endangered.

2. To perpetuate the migratory bird resource.
3. To preserve the natural diversity and abundance of fauna and flora on refuge lands.
4. To provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and man's role in his environment, and to provide refuge visitors with high quality, safe, wholesome and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife to the extent these activities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

B. Specific objectives for Grays Lake NWR include the following priority objectives:

1. Whooping crane production.
2. Whooping crane maintenance.
3. Sandhill crane production.
4. Redhead and canvasback production.
5. Dabbling duck production.
6. Canada goose production.
7. Sandhill crane maintenance.

C. Hunting program objectives are synonymous with national objectives (Refuge Manual):

To provide the general public with a quality wildlife-oriented recreational experience and an opportunity to utilize a renewable natural resource.

D. Hunting is tailored to refuge objectives by designation of open areas for most compatibility with whooping cranes. No other potential adverse impact of the hunting program is anticipated.

IV. Assessment

Ample numbers of waterfowl are present on the refuge to satisfy objectives. Refuge land acquisition is incomplete and more hunting pressure occurs on private lands within the approved boundary than on Service lands. The public hunting area is open to waterfowl hunting only. The closed portion of the refuge retains a significant portion of the waterfowl population to meet objectives other than hunting. Average public use visits and hunter visits, 1981-1985, were approximately 770 and 65, respectively.

Competition exists prior to hunting season between waterfowl and cranes for refuge barley fields. By the start of hunting season, standing grain is usually consumed, and most cranes have started their southerly migration.

V. Description of Hunting Program

The attached map depicts areas of the Grays Lake valley including the refuge that are suitable for waterfowl use. The hunting leaflet map delineates the refuge public hunting area.

Species that may be hunted are ducks, geese, and coots during the State season for this part of Idaho. Temporary closures may be necessary where whooping cranes are utilizing segments of the public hunting area. Concurrence from the State Fish and Game has been obtained for any temporary closures.

Legal methods for taking allowed species correspond to State law.

Due to the patchwork land ownership pattern of the refuge, hunter access cannot be controlled (see hunting leaflet map). Due to modest hunter numbers, control is unwarranted. Hunters use BIA, BLM, State, refuge and private lands for access.

Roving field patrol is used to monitor whooping crane movements and to record hunter success or violations. One or 2 crane research project personnel usually monitor whooper activity related to hunting. Usually one law enforcement person is adequate to manage the hunt. Opening weekends for duck or goose hunting may benefit from presence of an additional law enforcement person. Past seasons utilizing the Special Agent and officer from the Refuge Complex on opening weekends has been beneficial. In addition, hunting areas and access roads are posted with signs pointing out that whooping cranes may be present and are protected by Federal and State laws.

VI. Measures Taken to Avoid Conflicts With Other Management Objectives

A. Biological Conflicts

Section 7 consultation has been completed on the annual refuge hunt program that has taken place since the mid-1960's. The intra-service consultation stated that this action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of whooping cranes or result in the destruction or adverse modification of their critical habitat.

B. Public Use Conflicts

Approximately 4% of the annual public visitation occurs in October, not counting hunter use. Freeze-up in this high mountain valley can occur in late October/early November, so public use ceases. The potential for conflict between hunting and other public uses is negligible. Better opportunities exist for bird watching and photography from the county road outside the closed portion of the refuge rather than the hunting area.

C. Administrative Conflicts

No conflicts exist, but rather, other refuge operations are performed in concert with the hunting program. The fall farming program consists of discing food plots after feed is consumed and private grain fields have some harvesting completed. Depredations are thus minimized. Sandhill and whooping cranes have usually migrated by mid-October and food plots can be tilled if dry weather prevails.

VII. Conduct of the Hunt

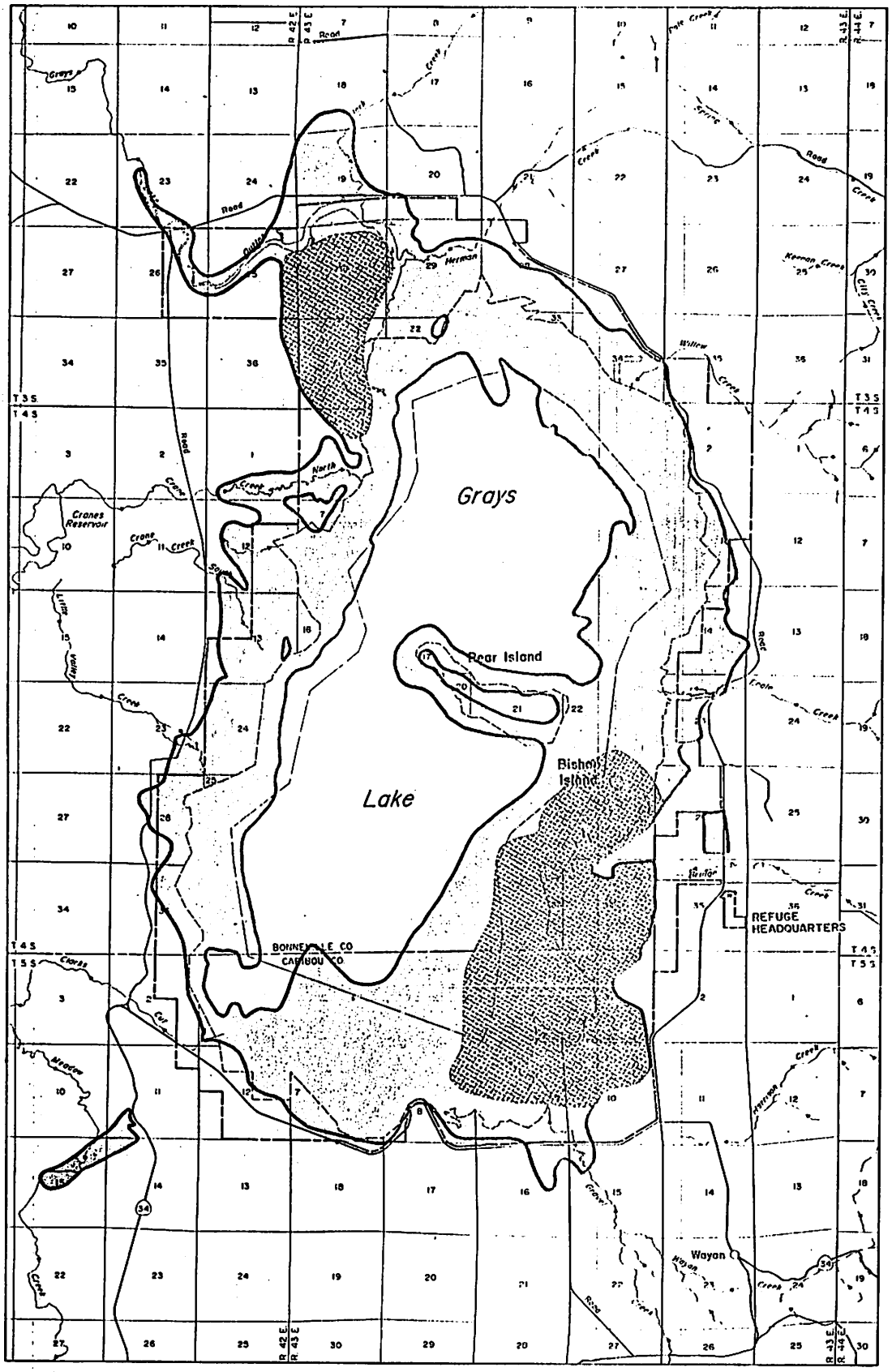
Hunting regulations specific to Grays Lake NWR are available to the public through the refuge hunting leaflet (attached). The prohibition of motorized boats is reiterated in the leaflet as well as in 50 CFR Part 32.

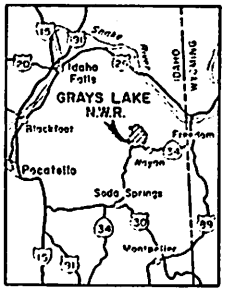
Public reaction to the hunt is primarily favorable. If anti-sentiment exists, it is not expressed to the field. One refuge neighbor on the north end of the valley has expressed a dislike for the hunt because it moves birds away from their property where they can enjoy them.

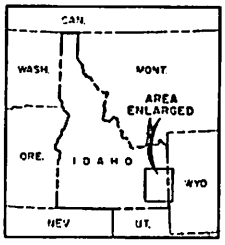
Hunters must comply with State regulations to be eligible to hunt, with regard to licenses and equipment. All hunters under the age of 15 must complete a standard hunter education course before obtaining a license. The refuge hunting leaflet covers the prohibition of open fires, and encourages hunters to use dogs for retrieving and exercise good sportsmanship. Harvest data is obtained from hunters during routine field checks.

GRAYS LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

BONNEVILLE AND CARIBOU COUNTIES, IDAHO
U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE







NORTH

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MILES
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KILOMETERS

WATERFOWL AND WATERBIRD MAINTENANCE SUITABILITY

LEGEND

- Refuge Boundary
- Meander Line
- Approximate 1964 Boundary
- Optimum Crane Areas
- Optimum/Acceptable Areas

6/81

MAP 19