

Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge Big Game Hunt Plan

April 2025

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 179
Umbarger, Texas 79091**

Submitted By:

Project Leader Signature

Date:

Concurrence:

Refuge Supervisor Signature

Date:

Approved:

Regional Chief (Acting), National Wildlife Refuge System Signature

Date:

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	Statement of Objectives	4
III.	Description of Hunting Program	4
	A. Areas to be Opened to Hunting.....	4
	B. Species to be Taken, Hunting Periods, Hunting Access	7
	1. BIG GAME HUNTING:	7
	C. Hunter Permit Requirements (if applicable).....	8
	D. Consultation and Coordination with the State and Tribes	10
	E. Law Enforcement	10
	F. Funding and Staffing Requirements	11
IV.	Conduct of the Hunting Program.....	11
	A. Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures	11
	B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations.....	12
	C. Relevant State Regulations	13
	D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting.....	14
V.	Public Engagement	14
	A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program	14
	B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program.....	14
	C. How Hunters Will Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations.....	14
VI.	Compatibility Determination	15
VII.	References	16

List of Tables

Table 1. Management Units, hunt type, huntable species, associated with each unit on Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.....8

Table 2. Species and hunt dates for Buffalo Lake NWR established hunts.....12

List of Figures

Figure 1. Huntable Units on Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.....10

I. Introduction

National wildlife refuges (NWRs) are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), the establishing purpose(s) of an individual refuge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy, and laws and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge (BFLNWR, refuge) was established pursuant to Federal Property and Administrative Service Act of 1949 (40 U.S.C. 471-535), as amended; Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1934 (16 U.S.C. 661-666c) as amended; Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. 742a-742j Stat. 1119) as amended; the Act of May 19, 1948, Public Law 80-537 (16 U.S.C. 667b-667d; 62 Stat. 240) as amended; and The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee), as amended.

The primary purpose of the refuge is “...for use as an inviolate sanctuary...for any other management purposes...using the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 712d) “...shall be administered by him {Secretary of the Interior} directly or in accordance with cooperative agreements... and in accordance with such rules and regulations for the conservation, maintenance, and management of wildlife, resources thereof, and its habitat thereon...” 16 U.S.C. 664 (Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1934 “...for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources...”

Buffalo Lake NWR is located in the southern portion of the Great Plains. This is a native short and mixed grass prairie that once encompassed more than 350,000 square miles in 10 states stretching along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains from Canada to southwestern Texas. The refuge is in a portion of the Great Plains called the Southern High Plains. This includes the Llano Estacado, a large non-mountainous geological region at the southern end of the High Plains. This area covers approximately 20 million acres and is characterized by a flat, featureless, relatively high plateau that was virtually devoid of trees prior to substantial development by humans. Huge herds of bison (*Bison bison*) and pronghorns (*Antilocapra americana*) once roamed the plains, and prairie dogs numbered in the millions. This prairie adapted to grazing and periodic fire, due to developing under climatic conditions characterized by low precipitation.

By the late 1800s, large portions of the original High Plains prairie were converted for agricultural use. By the early 1900s, much of the original shortgrass prairie had been converted to farmlands which increased with the onset of deep well irrigation. Buffalo Lake NWR is located within Randall County, Texas. The total acreage of the county is 906,000 acres of land. Buffalo Lake NWR has a total of 7,664 acres and accounts for less than one percent of the county. The remainder of Randall County remains managed for livestock grazing and irrigated and dry land cropping with a small portion being considered urban or suburban. Therefore, this shift in land use over the last 100 years has caused the extirpation of several wildlife species such as the bison, gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), pronghorn, and elk (*Cervus canadensis*).

Buffalo Lake was first developed in 1937 with the completion of Umbarger Dam, which was built as part of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937 and was managed by the Soil Conservation Service (currently Natural Resource Conservation Service) for water conservation, recreation, and as a wildlife sanctuary. The Service took over operation of the area on November 6, 1958. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Buffalo Lake was widely used as a recreational area providing boating, fishing, and other water related activities.

Tierra Blanca Creek and other natural springs fed Buffalo Lake until the 1970s when irrigation and urban water pumping depleted the aquifers to the point that perennial surface water no longer existed. The draining of the aquifer was compounded by multi-year drought which lowered lake levels even further. Given these conditions, the flows into Tierra Blanca Creek eventually ceased and Buffalo Lake dried up.

However, in 1978 a record flood within the Tierra Blanca Creek drainage filled Buffalo Lake to capacity. Shortly after filling, Umbarger Dam was condemned resulting in the release of all water within Buffalo Lake. In 1992, Umbarger Dam was replaced with a modern flood control structure able to withstand the torrential flooding known to occur within the area. When the lake fills, water quality suffers due to runoff from upstream confined cattle feeding operations. Given the potential health hazard when the lake floods, Buffalo Lake was closed to water activities such as swimming, boating, and fishing. Currently, the refuge allows environmental education and interpretation, wildlife viewing, wildlife photography, hunting, and camping.

The mission of the NWRS, as outlined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (NWRSA), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.), 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.”

The NWRSA (16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(4)) mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the System to

- Provide for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats within the NWRSA.
- Ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the NWRSA are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.
- Ensure that the mission of the NWRSA described at 16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(2) and the purposes of each refuge are carried out.
- Ensure effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with owners of land adjoining refuges and the fish and wildlife agency of the states in which the units of the NWRSA are located.
- Assist in the maintenance of adequate water quantity and water quality to fulfill the mission of the NWRSA and the purposes of each refuge.
- Recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority general public uses of the NWRSA through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife.
- Ensure that opportunities are provided within the NWRSA for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses, and
- Monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge.

Therefore, it is a priority of the Service to provide for wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, including hunting and fishing, when those opportunities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the NWRSA.

Public hunts on Buffalo Lake NWR began in the early 1980s when a pheasant hunt was introduced on small portions of the refuge. Shortly after this hunt was introduced, pheasant populations in the area dwindled, coupled with low harvest and drought the refuge suspended the pheasant hunt. In 2015, the refuge was divided into three hunting units (North, Middle, and South) for youth deer hunting opportunities. This youth centerfire rifle deer hunt has been held annually since then and provides an amazing opportunity for youth hunters. In 2020, efforts to expand recreational opportunities were explored and seasons for quail, pheasant, and dove were added to the refuge hunt program.

II. Statement of Objectives

The objectives of a big game (deer and incidental take of feral hog) hunting program on Buffalo Lake NWR are to provide:

- To protect riparian areas and other native habitats from being over utilized by the current deer population.
- To provide the public with a recreational experience of wildlife on more refuge lands and increase opportunities for hunters/anglers, especially for youth, families, etc.
- To provide a quality hunting experience for hunters.
- To increase/maintain biological diversity by preserving the natural diversity and variety of biotic communities occurring on refuge lands and aid in reducing invasive feral hog populations.
- To provide wildlife-dependent public recreation as mandated by and according to Service law and policy.
- To educate the public and neighboring landowners about effects of overpopulated deer and feral hogs.

III. Description of Hunting Program

A. Areas to be Opened to Hunting.

All areas of the refuge, except the Prairie Dog Area, Headquarters Area, and certain trails, may be opened for hunting for mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), and feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*) at the refuge manager's discretion based on population survey data and varying environmental conditions. The refuge has three distinct management units (North, Middle, and South) within the hunting boundary.

The North Unit encompasses the area North of Campground Road to F.M. 168 and Grazing Units 11 and 12. This unit occupies 1,035 acres and consists of part of the old lake bottom, riparian areas, mixed grass prairie, and canyon breaks. Vegetation in this area includes a mixture of trees along the old lake edge, many grasses such as little blue stem, side oats grama, blue grama, buffalo, and western wheat grass. This area has canyon outcrops with rocky slopes.

The Middle Unit encompasses the area south of Campground Road to Stewart Dike and Grazing Units 1, 2, and part of Unit 3. This unit is 2,966 acres and the area consists of the dry lakebed, riparian areas, and short grass prairie. Vegetation in this area includes trees along the north edge of the old lake bottom, forbs in the old lake bottom, and grasses such as little blue stem, side oats grama, blue grama, buffalo, and western wheat grass.

The South Unit encompasses the area south of Stewart Dike and south of Tour Road Windmill in Grazing Unit 3, Grazing Units 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. This unit is 3,063 acres and consists of wooded areas along the old lake bottom edge and Tierra Blanca Creek. Grasses such as western wheat grass, little blue stem, side oats grama, and buffalo grass. In some areas of this unit, sage bush is present.

Table 1. Management Units, hunt type, huntable species, associated with each unit on Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Management Units (Huntable acres)	Hunt Type	Species
North Unit (1,035 acres)	Youth Rifle	Mule deer, White-tailed Deer, and Feral hog*
North Unit (1,035 acres)	Archery	Mule deer, White-tailed Deer, and Feral hog*
Middle Unit (2,966)	Youth Rifle	Mule deer, White-tailed Deer, and Feral hog*
Middle Unit (2,966)	Archery	Mule deer, White-tailed Deer, and Feral hog*
South Unit (3,063)	Youth Rifle	Mule deer, White-tailed Deer, and Feral hog*
South Unit (3,063)	Archery	Mule deer, White-tailed Deer, and Feral hog*

*Includes incidental take of feral hogs during deer hunts.

The Prairie Dog Area is closed to hunting and is located south of F.M. 1714 and east of F.M. 168. It will remain open to other recreational users during the hunts to provide outdoor recreation opportunities. Deer hunting will not be allowed in the Headquarters Area from the kiosk west to the boundary fence and from the entry road north to the western boundary fence on the Tour Road. See Figure 1.

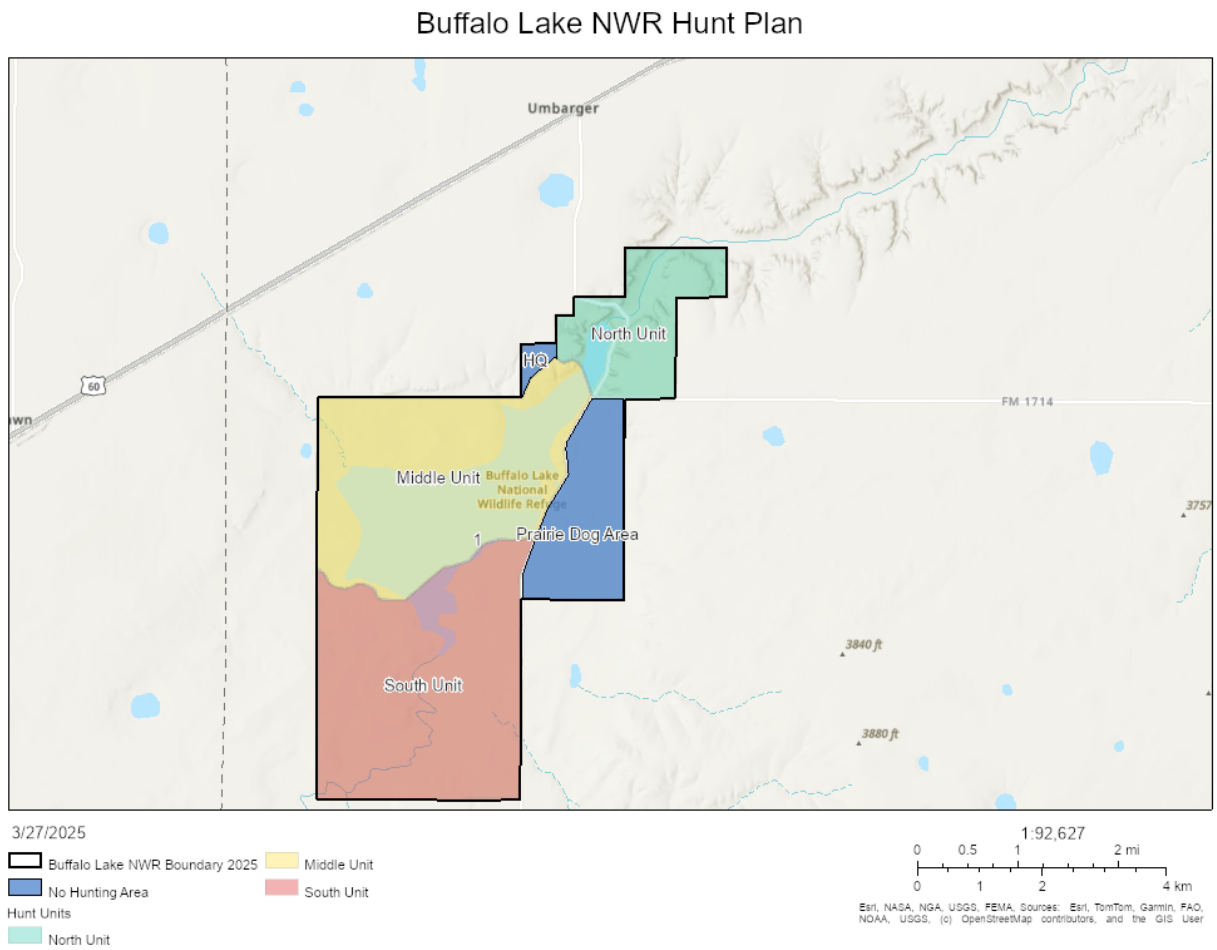


Figure 1. Huntible Units on Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

B. Species to be Taken, Hunting Periods, Hunting Access

1. BIG GAME HUNTING:

Mule deer, white-tailed deer, and feral hog will be allowed to be harvested on Buffalo Lake NWR by permitted hunters using state approved centerfire rifles (.243 or larger) or archery equipment. Number of hunters, species allowed to be harvested, and harvest limits will be determined annually by refuge staff. Refuge staff will submit a permit allotment request to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) each spring, dependent on habitat conditions and deer populations. Antlered or antlerless deer will be legal game to harvest as management needs dictate. Incidental take of feral hog(s) will be allowed by permitted deer hunters at Buffalo Lake NWR. Hunters will be selected by a lottery system administered by the TPWD Public Hunting Lands Program and the hunts will take place within the dates set in Table 2.

Hunters with a disability that prevents them from accessing remote hunt areas may request a Special Use Permit (SUP) 30 days prior to their awarded hunt. Hunters with disabilities awarded a SUP are allowed access with an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) or utility terrain vehicle (UTV). All ATVs/UTVs must remain on established roadways/trails.

Youth Rifle

Mule deer, white-tailed deer and feral hog youth rifle hunts will be held on the refuge. Hunters will be selected by lottery through the TPWD Public Hunting Lands Program. Lands entered in this program may specify hunt dates that suit purposed goals. Each hunter will be allowed to harvest up to one mule deer buck or one white-tailed deer buck, up to one mule deer doe, three white-tailed deer does or a combination of the above species/limits using a centerfire rifle. Harvest limits and species may vary depending on population management goals. Feral hogs may be taken at any time during the youth hunt to reduce or eliminate this invasive species as they occur on the refuge.

Up to four youth rifle hunts will occur during the mule deer and/or white-tailed deer season, which is typically from October to January of each year. Each hunt will include up to three youth hunters. This will allow up to a maximum of ten youth hunters over each hunting season. A two-day Hunt Application 3-2439 NWRS Permit will be issued to youth who are drawn by TPWD. During each of the two-day hunts, the Prairie Dog Area will remain open for other recreational users. All other areas will be closed to the general public during the youth rifle hunts, including the Tour Road and any established trail (Cottonwood, Grassland, and Stewart Marsh) within the hunting units (North, Middle, South).

Archery

Mule deer, white-tailed deer and feral hog archery hunts will be held on the refuge. Hunters will be selected by lottery through the TPWD Public Hunting Lands Program. Lands entered in this program may specify hunt dates that suit purposed goals. Each hunter may be allowed to harvest up to one mule deer buck, one white-tailed deer buck, one mule deer doe, five white-tailed deer does, or a combination of the above species/limits using archery equipment. Harvest limits and species may vary depending on population management goals. Feral hogs may be taken at any time during the hunt to reduce or eliminate this invasive species as they occur on the refuge.

Up to six archery hunts will occur during the mule deer and/or white-tailed deer season, which is typically from October to January of each year. Each hunt may include up to five hunters. This will allow up to a maximum of thirty hunters over each hunting season. Each hunt will have a maximum of four days. A Hunt Application 3-2439 NWR Permit will be issued to hunters by the refuge to allow hunting access on the refuge. During each of the four-day hunts, the Tour Road, Stewart Marsh observation blind, and Prairie Dog Area will remain open for other recreational users. All other areas will be closed during the archery hunts, including any established trail (Cottonwood, Grassland, and Stewart Marsh) within the hunting units (North, Middle, South).

Table 2. Species and hunt dates for Buffalo Lake NWR established hunts.

Species	Approximate Dates based on TPWD and BFLNWR Established Archery Seasons
Mule Deer	October 1 – January 31
White-tailed Deer	October 1 – January 31
Feral hogs	October 1 – January 31 (Incidental Take) *

*Must be in conjunction with a permitted deer hunt.

C. Hunter Permit Requirements (if applicable)

Hunters will apply through the TPWD lottery system for specific hunts. Deadlines for applications are developed by TPWD but normally occur on the 1st and 15th of each month starting in August. The deadline for deer hunts is up to TPWD but is usually two-months before the first hunt. For more information about these hunts, visitors can go to the TPWD web page and view the annual brochure for public hunting. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department public hunting link will be posted on the refuge hunting website. All hunters will need to purchase required licenses and stamps prior to application per TPWD requirements. Notification by TPWD will be given to successful hunters if they are drawn. Once the refuge receives hunters' names from TPWD, the refuge will also notify them with a letter explaining

dates, times, and information on a pre-hunt meeting with an electronic hunt brochure. The refuge will also confirm that they plan to attend the hunt through email or phone. By hunters confirming their attendance, the refuge can give proper notification to visitors of refuge closure dates.

Hunters are allowed to scout anytime from areas open to the public and during regular refuge hours from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. Hunters may enter closed areas for scouting the day before their scheduled hunt, only between 8:00 am until sundown.

The refuge will have a hunter orientation the evening before the hunt. All hunters are required to attend the orientation prior to participating in the hunt. Hunters are given two-weeks' notice of the orientation time and location. If a hunter cannot make the regular orientation, refuge staff will make accommodations, but this may reduce their hunting time. During the orientation, refuge staff will check hunting licenses for all the required stamps and endorsements. Refuge staff will also go over areas open to hunting and, if appropriate, assign compartments to hunters. The orientations also serve a means for hunters to meet and exchange numbers for the hunt.

Hunters are allowed to place ground blinds during the hunt. All blinds must contain the name and address of the hunter. Any ground blind must be removed from the refuge by 8:30 am the following morning after the hunt has concluded. Elevated blinds and tree stands are prohibited on the refuge. The refuge also does not allow the use of bait for big game hunting.

Hunters may camp on the refuge in designated areas such as the campground or Headquarters Area, whichever is deemed most appropriate by the manager for safety reasons. No campfires will be allowed at any time, only gas type stoves will be allowed. The refuge will not provide water or electricity for hunters camping.

Hunters may bring along one non-hunting companion to accompany them in the field. The non-hunting companion may not hunt, hold, or practice with any rifle or archery equipment while on the refuge. We encourage hunters to bring a non-hunting companion for safety reasons. The refuge will allow hunters to hunt from one-half hour before legal sunrise to one-half after legal sunset. Hunters may enter hunting areas one-hour before legal sunrise and exit hunting areas no later than one-hour after legal sunset, but hunters can only hunt during hours set by TPWD. Hunters will be required to check in and out of the refuge. This can be done through text messaging or phone. Hunters ending their hunt earlier than allowed forfeit the privilege of returning to hunt if they change their minds. Hunters will only be allowed to hunt on the refuge during dates set by the refuge and TPWD.

All harvested animals are the responsibility of the hunter. Harvested game should be cared for in a manner that does not cause spoilage. Refuge staff may assist you in retrieving harvested

game, but we cannot guarantee any assistance. The hunter is responsible for processing any meat and must adhere to TPWD's regulations on field processing. Harvested deer must be checked in with refuge staff.

The refuge or TPWD may ask to test harvested deer for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Currently, Buffalo Lake NWR is not in an area requiring mandatory testing of harvested deer. In the future, TPWD may expand the boundaries of mandatory CWD testing and all harvested deer will be required to be tested by TPWD.

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State and Tribes

The refuge reviewed the operations and regulations for neighboring state wildlife management areas and refuges to find consistency where possible. The refuge has reached out to TPWD at various levels for several years to explore new opportunities for the Buffalo Lake NWR Hunting Program. The refuge has coordinated with several TPWD staff members prior to this proposal to gauge ideas and feedback in the development of future. The refuge draw hunt selection process is already administered through the TPWD draw hunt lottery to ensure consistency and reduce operational costs. On March 24, 2025, we requested a letter of support from TPWD for expansion of Buffalo Lake NWR's hunt program. The refuge received a letter of concurrence from the TPWD Wildlife Director on March 27, 2025. Feedback from this support letter will be incorporated where applicable in our final hunt plan. Further coordination will continue to occur to maximize quality recreational opportunities for hunters. Law enforcement officers from both Buffalo Lake NWR and TPWD work together to patrol the refuge as well as, safeguarding hunters, visitors, and both game and nongame species.

There are no Federally Recognized Tribes currently in the Randall County, Texas. Buffalo Lake NWR reached out to the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Mescalero Apache Tribe of the Mescalero Reservation, New Mexico, Jicarilla Apache Nation, New Mexico, Comanche Nation, Tonkawa Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma, Kiowa Indian Tribe of Oklahoma, and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes (Wichita, Keechi, Waco, & Tawakonie), Oklahoma on March 27, 2025 for comment on expansion of the hunting program.

E. Law Enforcement

Enforcement of refuge regulations normally associated with management of a National Wildlife Refuge is the responsibility of commissioned federal wildlife officers. Other officers, special agents, state game wardens, and the local Sheriff's Department often assist the Buffalo Lake NWR full-time federal wildlife officer. The Buffalo Lake NWR law enforcement officer has met

with local law enforcement agencies in the county that contains the refuge to develop good working relationships and coordinate appropriate strategies.

The following methods are used to control and enforce hunting regulations:

- Refuge and hunt area boundaries will be clearly posted.
- The refuge will provide a brochure that shows hunt areas.
- Refuge law enforcement and Buffalo Lake NWR staff will coordinate with TPWD and other law enforcement agencies; and
- Information will be made available at the Buffalo Lake NWR Visitor Center and website.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Annual hunt administration costs for Buffalo Lake NWR, including salary, equipment, law enforcement, collection of hunt data and analysis of biological information, etc., totals approximately \$7,000. Buffalo Lake NWR funds are used to conduct hunts on the refuge. Funding specifically for hunts has not been allocated, although funds are available through hunter fees. Incurred salary and other related operational costs for the hunt and operation of the Buffalo Lake NWR hunts are incurred by TPWD. It is anticipated that funding would continue to be sufficient to continue the hunting program at Buffalo Lake NWR in the future.

IV. Conduct of the Hunting Program

A. Hunter Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures

Hunters will apply through the TPWD Public Hunting Lands Program located at https://www.txfgsales.com/PHS/Welcome.aspx?_ga=2.142926133.1686388296.1671653024-160966359.1629824698. Successful applicants will receive emails from TPWD to confirm acceptance of drawn permit and pay any fees to the State associated with administering that draw hunt. Once accepted, drawn applicants will also receive an email from the refuge with specific information including maps, hunting units, and general rules of the hunt. A response from the hunters will be required two-weeks prior to their scheduled hunt. Once confirmed the hunters will be required to attend a hunting orientation the day before the hunt takes place. Hunters will be required to check in and out during their set hunt times and dates. Prior to hunting on Buffalo Lake NWR, a Hunt Application 3-2439 NWRS Permit will be filled and signed and approved for each hunter. Data on harvested animals may be collected during these hunts. All hunt types on Buffalo Lake NWR are administered through the TPWD draw hunt application system and this process is the same for each hunt type.

B. Refuge-Specific Hunting Regulations

Hunters will receive official notification from TPWD if drawn to participate in a hunt. Hunters must possess a valid State of Texas hunting license and any state-required stamps or tags. Rifle hunters must wear a minimum of 400 square inches of hunter orange, including 144 square inches visible on both the chest and back, and a hunter orange cap/hat visible on the head at all times while in movement within the hunt units. Archery hunters are not required to wear hunters' orange; however, it is recommended to promote safe hunting practices. The refuge does not have antler restrictions for drawn hunts. Hunting areas may be closed at any time due to fire dangers, inclement weather, or other unforeseen circumstances. Listed below are refuge-specific regulations that pertain to hunting on Buffalo Lake NWR as of the date of this plan. These regulations may be modified as conditions change or if refuge expansion continues/occurs.

Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge —

50 CFR 32.62(f)

(f)(1) ***Migratory bird hunting.*** We allow hunting of mourning dove, white-winged dove, and Eurasian collared-dove on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

- (i) We require hunters to obtain an approved Hunt Application 3-2439 NWRS Permit.
- (ii) We limit hunting to no more than 6 days with a maximum of 12 hunters.
- (iii) Hunting hours will be from one-half hour before legal sunrise until noon.
- (iv) All hunters must check in and out at refuge headquarters.
- (v) Bag limits will be determined annually for each species but will never exceed the limits set by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).
- (vi) We prohibit the use of all-terrain vehicles (ATV).
- (vii) One-hour after legal sunset, hunters may be in designated camping areas only.
- (viii) We allow the use of dogs for retrieving game.
- (ix) We do not allow the use of falconry.
- (x) All bird harvests must be checked at the designated checkpoints.

(xi) Hunters are required to attend a briefing prior to all hunts.

(2) **Upland game hunting.** We allow hunting of ring-necked pheasant, northern bobwhite, and scaled quail on designated areas of the refuge subject to the

following conditions:

(i) The conditions set forth at paragraphs (f)(1)(i), (ii), and (iv) through (xi) of this section apply.

(ii) Hunting hours will be from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

(iii) We allow only shotguns for pheasant and quail hunting.

(iv) We prohibit the use of horses.

(3) **Big game hunting.** We allow hunting of white-tailed deer, mule deer, and incidental take of feral hog on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

(i) The conditions set forth at paragraph (f)(1)(i), (iv) through (viii), and (xi) of this section apply and (f)(2)(iv) of this section apply.

(ii) Hunters may enter the hunting area one-hour before legal sunrise and leave one-hour after legal sunset. Hunting hours will be from one-half hour before legal sunrise until one-half hour after legal sunset.

(iii) We prohibit the use of tree stands or any devices such as nails, tacks, and scaffolding used to climb trees, tripod types of blinds or other elevated blinds.

(iv) We prohibit the use of decoys.

(v) We only allow archery equipment or centerfire rifles .243/6mm or larger for big game hunts.

(4) [Reserved]

C. Relevant State Regulations

Hunters must possess a valid State of Texas hunting license and any state-required stamps or tags. Eligible youth hunters/supervisors and adult hunters must have passed a state certified hunter education program. All youth hunters/or sponsors must possess a certificate of completion for a state-approved hunter education course. Hunters will receive official notification and a permit from TPWD if drawn to participate in a hunt. Rifle hunters must wear a minimum of 400 square inches of hunter orange including 144 square inches visible on both the chest and back, and a hunter orange cap/hat visible on the head at all times while in

movement within the hunt units. Archery hunters are not required to wear hunters' orange; however, it is recommended to promote safe hunting practices.

D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Hunting

- No fires are allowed on the refuge
- Hunters must check in and out of refuge while hunting
- Hunters will be required to have their harvest inspected by refuge staff
- We prohibit the use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting on refuge lands

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunting Program

The refuge maintains a posting about the hunts at local post offices, the TPWD website, and on the refuge website. In addition, information about the hunts will be available at Buffalo Lake NWR Headquarters, kiosk, and on the Buffalo Lake NWR website.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunting Program

The refuge has received comments from hunters since hunting has opened on the refuge. Most comments consist of they would like to see more hunting available and more adult hunts offered. The refuge has received mostly favorable input from the public pertaining to hunting on the refuge. Some individuals may have concern with big game hunting reducing other recreational use on the refuge, but the Prairie Dog Area will remain open during archery hunts and youth rifle hunts.

C. How Hunters Will Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations

General information regarding hunting and other wildlife-dependent public uses can be obtained online at the Buffalo Lake NWR website [Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#) or by calling (806-499-3382). Successful draw hunt applicants through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department draw system will be contacted prior to hunts to provide dates, forms, hunting unit directions, maps, applications, and permit requirements about the hunt.

General information on draw hunting administered by TPWD is available at https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/public/public_hunt_drawing/

VI. Compatibility Determination

Hunting and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See attached Draft Compatibility Determination for Deer and Feral hog Hunting at Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

VII. References

- Beach, R. 1993. Depredation problems involving feral hogs. Pages 67-73 in C.W. Hanselka and J.F. Cadenhead, eds. Feral swine: a compendium for resource managers. Texas AgriLife Extension, College Station, Texas.
- Cain, Alan. 2014. Big game harvest recommendations; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.
- Canut, R. and C. Richardson. 1997. Mule Deer Management in Texas. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.
- Gray, Shawn. 2014. Big game research and surveys. Project No, 3 mule deer harvest recommendations. TPWD.
- Pease, M. L., R. K. Rose, M. J. Butler. 2005. Effects of human disturbance on the behavior of wintering ducks. Wildlife Society Bulletin 33: 103-112.
- Purvis, J. 2014. Big game harvest survey results 2000-01 thru 2013-14. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. PWD RP W700 718b.
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_rp_w7000_0718b.pdf
- Sowell, B.F. 1981. Nutritional quality of mule deer diets in the Texas Panhandle. Master's thesis, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. 62pp.
- Stevens, L. 2010. The feral hog in Oklahoma. 2nd Edition. Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation. Ardmore, OK.
- Tate, J. 1984. Techniques in controlling wild hogs in Great Smokey Mountains National Park; Proceedings of a workshop National Park Service Research/Resources Manage. Report SER-72, Nov. 1984.
- Taylor, Rick. 2003. The feral hog in Texas. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. 20pp
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. N.d. Drawn Hunts: The Online-Only Drawing System. ([https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/public/public_hunt_drawing.](https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/public/public_hunt_drawing)) Accessed March 18, 2025.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2013. Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge: Comprehensive Buffalo Lake NWR Hunt Plan 2025

Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2015. Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge: White-tailed Deer,
Mule Deer, and Feral Hog Youth Hunt Plan.