

generally available for general public use prior to government acquisition; however, they were fished and hunted upon by friends and relatives of the landowners, and some were under commercial hunting and fishing leases. Many nearby residents also participate in other forms of nonconsumptive outdoor recreation, such as biking, hiking, camping, birdwatching, canoeing, and other outdoor sports.

Economic impacts of refuge fishing and hunting on local communities are calculated from average expenditures in the "1995 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation". In 1995, 42 million U.S. residents 16 years old and older hunted and/or fished. More specifically, 37 million fished and 14.5 million hunted. Those who both fished and hunted account for the 9.5 million overage. Nationwide expenditures by sportsmen totaled \$42 billion. Trip-related expenditures for food, lodging, and transportation were \$16 billion or 37 percent of all fishing and hunting expenditures; equipment expenditures amounted to \$19 billion, or 46 percent of the total; other expenditures such as those for magazines, membership dues, contributions, land leasing, ownership, licenses, stamps, tags, and permits accounted for \$6.9 billion, or 16 percent of all expenditures. Overall, anglers spent an average of \$41 per day. For each day of hunting, big game hunters averaged spending \$40, small game hunters \$20, and migratory bird hunters \$33.

Applying these national averages to projected visitation at Big Branch Marsh NWR results in the following: 20,000 fisherman are expected to spend \$820,000 annually in pursuit of their sport, while an estimated 1,000 hunters will spend \$35,000 annually hunting on the refuge. While many of these fishermen and hunters already make such expenditures prior to the refuge opening, minor amounts of these additional expenditures are directly due to the land now being open to the general public.

This rulemaking was not subject to Office of Management and Budget review under Executive Order 12866. A review under the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980 (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*) has revealed that although the rulemaking would only slightly increase visitation and expenditures in the surrounding area of the refuge, it would not have a significant effect on a substantial number of small entities in the area, such as businesses, organizations and governmental jurisdictions.

Environmental Considerations

Pursuant to the requirements of section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(C)), an environmental assessment was prepared for this opening. Based upon the Environmental Assessment, the Service issued a Finding of No Significant Impact with respect to the opening. A Section 7 evaluation pursuant to the Endangered Species Act was conducted. The Service determined that the proposed action will not affect any Federally listed or proposed for listing threatened or endangered species or their critical habitats. These documents are on file at the offices of the Service and may be reviewed by contacting the primary author noted below.

Unfunded Mandates

The Service has determined and certifies pursuant to the Unfunded Mandates Act, 2 U.S.C. 1502 *et seq.*, that this rulemaking will not impose a cost of \$100 million or more in any given year on local or State governments or private entities.

Primary Author. Stephen R. Vehrs, Division of Refuges, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, DC, is the primary author of this proposed rulemaking document.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 32

Fishing, Hunting, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Wildlife, and Wildlife refuges.

Accordingly, Part 32 of chapter I of Title 50 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 32—[AMENDED]

1. The authority citation for Part 32 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 301; 16 U.S.C. 460k, 664, 668dd, and 715i.

§ 32.7 [Amended]

2. Section 32.7 *List of refuge units open to hunting and/or fishing* is amended by adding the alphabetical listing of "Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge" under the State of Louisiana.

3. Section 32.37 *Louisiana* is amended by adding in alphabetical order Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge to read as follows:

§ 32.37 Louisiana.

* * * * *

Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge

A. *Hunting of Migratory Game Birds.*
Hunting of ducks, coots, and snow geese is

permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

1. Permits are required.

B. *Upland Game Hunting.* [Reserved]

C. *Big Game Hunting.* Hunting of white-tailed deer is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

1. Permits are required.

D. *Sport Fishing.* Fishing is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

1. Fishing is permitted during daylight hours only.

2. Only the use of rod and reel or pole and line is permitted.

3. The use of trotlines, slat traps and nets is prohibited.

4. The use of boats and motors larger than 25 horsepower is not permitted.

5. Air-thrust boats, motorized pirogues, go-devils, and mud boats are not permitted in refuge waters.

* * * * *

Dated: June 3, 1996.

George T. Frampton, Jr.,

Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

[FR Doc. 96-15137 Filed 6-20-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

50 CFR Part 32

RIN 1018-AD77

Addition of Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge to the List of Open Areas for Sport Fishing in Louisiana

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposes to add Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge to the list of areas open for sport fishing in Louisiana along with pertinent refuge-specific regulations for such activities. The Service has determined that such use will be compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established. The Service has further determined that this action is in accordance with the provisions of all applicable laws, is consistent with principles of sound fish and wildlife management, and is otherwise in the public interest by providing additional recreational opportunities at a national wildlife refuge.

DATES: Comments may be submitted on or before July 22, 1996.

ADDRESSES: Assistant Director—Refuges and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1849 C Street, NW, MS 670 ARLSQ, Washington, DC 20240.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stephen R. Vehrs, at the address above; Telephone (703) 358-2397.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: National wildlife refuges generally are closed to hunting and sport fishing until opened by rulemaking. The Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) may open refuge areas to hunting and/or fishing upon a determination that such uses are compatible with the purpose(s) for which the refuge was established. The action also must be in accordance with provisions of all laws applicable to the areas, must be consistent with the principles of sound fish and wildlife management, and otherwise must be in the public interest. The Service proposes to open Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge to sport fishing.

Request for Comments

Department of the Interior policy is, whenever practicable, to afford the public a meaningful opportunity to participate in the rulemaking process. A 30-day comment period is specified in order to facilitate public input. Accordingly, interested persons may submit written comments concerning this proposed rule to the person listed above under the heading **ADDRESSES**. All substantive comments will be reviewed and considered.

Statutory Authority

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (NWRSA) of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. 668dd), and the Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S.C. 460k) govern the administration and public use of national wildlife refuges. Specifically, Section 4(d)(1)(A) of the NWRSA authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to permit the use of any area within the Refuge System for any purpose, including but not limited to, hunting, fishing and public recreation, accommodations and access, when he determines that such uses are compatible with the major purpose(s) for which the area was established.

The Refuge Recreation Act (RRA) authorizes the Secretary to administer areas within the Refuge System for public recreation as an appropriate incidental or secondary use only to the extent that it is practicable and not inconsistent with the primary purpose(s) for which the areas were established. The NWRSA and the RRA also authorize the Secretary to issue regulations to carry out the purposes of the Acts and regulate uses.

Hunting and sport fishing plans are developed for each existing refuge prior to opening it to hunting or fishing. In many cases, refuge-specific regulations are developed to ensure the compatibility of the programs with the purposes for which the refuge was

established. Initial compliance with the NWRSA and the RRA has been ensured for hunting and sport fishing on newly acquired refuges through an interim determination of compatibility made at the time of acquisition. This has ensured that the determinations required by these acts have been made prior to the addition of refuges to the lists of areas open to hunting and fishing in 50 CFR part 32. Continued compliance is ensured by the development of long-term hunting and sport fishing plans and by annual review of hunting and sport fishing programs and regulations.

The Service has determined that this action is in accordance with the provisions of all applicable laws, is consistent with principles of sound fish and wildlife management, helps implement Executive Order 12962 (Recreational Fisheries), and is otherwise in the public interest by providing additional recreational opportunities at national wildlife refuges. Sufficient funds will be available within the refuge budget to operate the hunting and sport fishing programs as proposed.

Opening Package

In preparation for this opening, the following documents are included in the refuge's "openings package" for Regional review and approval from the Washington Office: a hunting and fishing management plan; an environmental assessment; a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI); a Section 7 evaluation or statement, pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, that this opening is not likely to adversely affect a listed species or critical habitat; a letter of concurrence from the affected State; and refuge-specific regulations to administer the hunting and fishing programs. Upon review of these documents, the Secretary has determined that the opening of the Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge to sport fishing is compatible with the principles of sound fish and wildlife management and otherwise will be in the public interest. A brief description of the refuge program follows.

Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge

Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), located in west-central Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, was established March 6, 1992 to provide wintering habitat for mallards, pintails, and wood ducks and nesting habitat for wood ducks to meet the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Additional Service objectives for the refuge include:

- Providing habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- Providing habitat for a natural diversity of plant and wildlife species; and
- Providing opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education when compatible with other refuge objectives.

This 6,077 acre refuge is a natural sump bordered by the higher ridge lands of the Red River on the north and east and by the terrace uplands on the west and south. Although this area was once a very productive bottomland hardwood ecosystem and formerly provided ideal habitat for upland game, land clearing and a shift to agriculture have made it more attractive to a wider variety of waterfowl species and wading birds. Shorebird abundance has also escalated.

Except for an experimental crawfish season conducted the past few years, and wildlife observation limited to foot travel, there are no public use opportunities on Grand Cote NWR. The crawfishing season is extremely popular, and there has been much public demand for opening of traditional sport fishing.

Traditional sport fishing will be for game fish such as largemouth bass, white and black crappie, bluegill, redear, and other sunfish species; and rough fish such as channel, blue, and flathead catfish, as well as other species such as gar, gizzard shad, carp, and freshwater drum. The refuge season will fall within the framework of the State of Louisiana season established by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

With implementation of this rule, traditional sport fishing and crawfishing (referred to collectively as "fishing" throughout the remainder of this plan) would be permitted, limited to those areas specified in the refuge-specific regulations. All or parts of the refuge may be closed to fishing at any time, if necessary, for public safety, to provide wildlife sanctuary, or for administrative reasons.

Construction of a new refuge office/visitor contact station will precede the opening of fishing. Additionally, a refuge fishing lake in the existing crawfishing pond, construction of a handicapped-accessible fishing pier, expanding and relocating crawfishing to a new area, and a wildlife observation tower and nature trails are all in the planning stages.

Opening fishing on Grand Cote NWR will allow harvest of a renewable resource, promote a wildlife-dependent recreational opportunity that is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established, increase

awareness of Grand Cote NWR and the National Wildlife Refuge System, and meet public demand.

Areas that will support a fishing program include the Bayou Choctaw, Coulee des Grues, a proposed fishing lake in the existing crawfishing pond, and various refuge drainages. Areas open to fishing would depend on waterfowl use during the migration period. Resting and feeding areas may be set aside to protect waterfowl from disturbance during the winter months. These areas would be closed to fishing.

Paperwork Reduction Act

This regulation has been examined under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 and has been found to contain no information collection requirements.

Economic Effect

Service review has revealed that this rulemaking will increase fishermen visitation to the surrounding area of the refuge before, during or after recreational uses, compared to the refuge being closed to these recreational uses. When the Service acquired this land, all public use ceased under law until opened to the public in accordance with this rulemaking.

The refuge is located away from large metropolitan areas. Businesses in the area consist primarily of small family owned stores, restaurants, gas stations and other small commercial enterprises. In addition, there are several small commercial and recreational fishing and hunting camps and marinas in the general area. This proposed rule would have a positive effect on such entities; however, the amount of revenue generated is not large.

Many area residents enjoy a rural lifestyle that includes frequent recreational use of the abundant natural resources of the area. A high percentage of the households enjoy hunting, fishing, and boating in area wetlands, rivers and lakes. Refuge lands were not generally available for general public use prior to government acquisition; however, they were fished and hunted upon by friends and relatives of the landowners, and some were under commercial hunting and fishing leases. Many nearby residents also participate in other forms of nonconsumptive outdoor recreation, such as biking, hiking, camping, birdwatching, canoeing, and other outdoor sports.

Economic impacts of refuge fishing and hunting programs on local communities are calculated from average expenditures in the "1995 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation". In 1995, 42 million U.S. residents 16 years

old and older hunted and/or fished. More specifically, 37 million fished and 14.5 million hunted. Those who both fished and hunted account for the 9.5 million overage. Nationwide expenditures by sportsmen totaled \$42 billion. Trip-related expenditures for food, lodging, and transportation were \$16 billion or 37 percent of all fishing and hunting expenditures; equipment expenditures amounted to \$19 billion, or 46 percent of the total; other expenditures such as those for magazines, membership dues, contributions, land leasing, ownership, licenses, stamps, tags, and permits accounted for \$6.9 billion, or 16 percent of all expenditures. Overall, anglers spent an average of \$41 per day. For each day of hunting, big game hunters averaged spending \$40, small game hunters \$20, and migratory bird hunters \$33.

Applying these national averages to projected visitation at Grand Cote NWR results in the following: 2,500 fishermen are expected to spend \$102,500 annually while fishing on the refuge.

This rulemaking was not subject to Office of Management and Budget review under Executive Order 12866. A review under the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980 (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*) has revealed that the rulemaking would increase visitation and expenditures in the surrounding area of the refuge. The rulemaking would not have a significant effect on a substantial number of small entities in the area, such as businesses, organizations and governmental jurisdictions.

Environmental Considerations

Pursuant to the requirements of section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(C)), an environmental assessment was prepared for this opening. Based upon the Environmental Assessment, the Service issued a Finding of No Significant Impact with respect to the opening. A Section 7 evaluation pursuant to the Endangered Species Act was conducted. The Service determined that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect any Federally listed or proposed for listing threatened or endangered species or their critical habitats. These documents are on file at the offices of the Service and may be reviewed by contacting the primary author.

Unfunded Mandates

The Service has determined and certifies pursuant to the Unfunded Mandates Act, 2 U.S.C. 1502 *et seq.*, that this rulemaking will not impose a cost of \$100 million or more in any given

year on local or State governments or private entities.

Primary Author. Stephen R. Vehrs, Division of Refuges, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, DC 20240, is the primary author of this rulemaking document.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 32

Fishing, Hunting, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Wildlife, Wildlife refuges.

Accordingly, Part 32 of Chapter I of Title 50 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 32—[AMENDED]

1. The authority citation for Part 32 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 301; 16 U.S.C. 460k, 664, 668dd, and 715i.

§ 32.7 [Amended]

2. Section 32.7 *List of refuge units open to hunting and/or fishing* is amended by adding the alphabetical listing of "Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge" under the State of Louisiana.

3. Section 32.37 *Louisiana* is amended by adding in alphabetical order Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge to read as follows:

§ 32.37 Louisiana.

* * * * *

Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge

A. *Hunting of Migratory Game Birds.* [Reserved]

B. *Upland Game Hunting.* [Reserved]

C. *Big Game Hunting.* [Reserved]

D. *Sport Fishing.* Fishing and the taking of crawfish is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions.

1. Permits are required to take crawfish.

2. Boats may not be left on the refuge overnight.

3. Yo-yos are permitted during daylight hours only.

4. Frogging is not permitted.

* * * * *

Dated: June 3, 1996.

George T. Frampton, Jr.,
Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

[FR Doc. 96-15133 Filed 6-20-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

50 CFR Part 32

RIN 1018-AD82

Addition of Mandalay National Wildlife Refuge to the List of Open Areas for Sport Fishing in Louisiana

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Proposed rule.