

HUNTING PLAN
AMENDMENT NO. 2
CROSS CREEKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
DOVER, TENNESSEE
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MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING

CROSS CREEKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
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I. INTRODUCTION

Cross Creeks National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established by Public Law 83 - 780, Senate Document No. 81 and Public Land Order 4560, to mitigate the loss of waterfowl habitat at Kentucky Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge. The waterfowl habitat loss was due to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Lake Barkley/Barkley Dam Project authorized on September 3, 1954. A Memorandum of Understanding, for the development of Cross Creeks NWR, between the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) was signed on September 9, 1962. A final transfer of mitigation lands from the USACE took place on January 31, 1967.

Active management to mitigate the loss of waterfowl habitat began in 1962, with the construction of impoundments, roads, and water control structures. Cooperative farming also began during this period. As facilities were developed and became productive, waterfowl numbers increased. There were early attempts to establish a Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) flock at Cross Creeks NWR, as well as other refuges in the southeast. The original objective was to establish a decoy flock for attracting geese that were displaced from the Kentucky Woodlands NWR, due to inundated habitat by the Lake Barkley Reservoir Project. The initial stock of fifteen (15) geese came from Horseshoe Lake (Illinois) and Swan Lake NWR (Missouri). These geese were true migrants and the attempt to establish a decoy flock failed.

In 1967, the FWS decided to establish resident flocks at Cross Creeks NWR, Wapanocca NWR, Holla Bend NWR, Yazoo NWR, Noxubee NWR, St. Marks NWR, and Eufaula NWR. Giant Canada Geese (*B. c. maxima*) were purchased from private breeders in Minnesota and Illinois and transplanted to the above-mentioned NWR's. Cross Creeks NWR received five (5) pairs of maximas in 1967. In 1970 six (6) additional birds were relocated from Wapanocca NWR. During this period ten nesting islands were constructed. The first young to reach flight stage occurred in 1969. This was the beginning of resident Giant Canada Geese at Cross Creeks NWR. Generally, the numbers were small and did not impact refuge operations and management objectives.

During the mid-1970's, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) began developing the 175,000 acre Land-Between-the Lakes (LBL) recreational area on Lake Barkley and Kentucky Lake. TVA developed a propagation facility to produce Giant Canada Geese

and began stocking reservoirs throughout the Tennessee Valley. The stocking program in concert with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency's (TWRA) transplant program was a success biologically and initially accepted by the public.

The resident Giant Canada Goose flock continued to increase through natural production, protection, and periodic releases by the TWRA and U.S. Department of Agriculture-Animal Damage Control (USDA-ADC) of nuisance geese from other areas of the state. As the numbers increased more problems were experienced at Cross Creeks NWR in association with the Cooperative Farming Program. As efforts were increased to provide the best wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl, extensive crop depredation was not acceptable.

Efforts to trap and relocate Cross Creeks NWR nuisance geese met with opposition from the TWRA and the USDA-ADC. Through the concept of cooperation, meetings were held with all concerned agencies. A general agreement was reached on July 7, 1994, concerning the Giant Canada Goose issue (attachment). One of the action items included in the agreement was for TWRA to propose an experimental September resident Giant Canada Goose hunting season; therefore, Cross Creeks NWR submitted amendment no. 1 to the approved hunting plan in March 1995.

The TWRA experimental September Canada Goose season proposal was not well received by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Commission (TWRC). TWRC did not believe that there existed a suitable resident Canada Goose population in and around the Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley areas for hunting. No September Canada Goose hunting season was implemented in West Tennessee during 1995. In 2002 TWRA did initiate a September Canada Goose hunting season in West Tennessee. Since initial discussion in 1994, Giant Canada Geese have continued to increase in numbers and continue to cause an unacceptable level of crop depredation. Cross Creeks NWR submits this amendment to the approved hunting plan to open the refuge to September Canada goose hunting.

II. Conformance with Statutory Authorities

One of the primary purposes for Cross Creeks NWR is to provide habitat for migratory birds, principally wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl. The refuges' Cooperative Farming Program is a key tool the refuge uses to provide the best possible wintering habitat for the SJBP Canada Geese and other wintering waterfowl. Resident Giant Canada Geese damage a significant portion of the cooperative farmers' crop; therefore, reducing the refuge's ability to secure and keep good cooperative farmers and the resident Giant Canada geese directly compete with migratory waterfowl by reducing crop yields.

Hunting of Canada geese during the State September Canada Goose season will remove some portion of the nuisance Giant Canada geese without inadvertently harvesting migratory Canada Geese. Participating in the State's September hunt season will also

demonstrate that the refuge is making an effort to control row crop depredation and thus attempting to provide the best possible wintering habitat migratory waterfowl.

This proposed amendment to the Cross Creeks NWR hunting plan is estimated to cost a minimum of \$4,000.00 to initiate and \$3,000.00 to administer and manage in succeeding years. A simple breakdown of the estimated cost is given below:

Administration	\$1,300.00
Law Enforcement Activities	300.00
Data Collection, Collar Observations	620.00
Public Information (leaflets, etc.)	800.00
Total	\$3,000.00

Public participation in this September Canada goose season is expected to generate 50 to 150 hunter visits each hunting season.

III. Statement of Objectives

The primary management objectives of the refuge are to provide protection, feeding, and resting areas for migratory birds. Current objectives call for managing the refuge for a wide assortment of wildlife, including providing wintering habitat for average peaks of 40,000 ducks and 10,000 Canada geese and one nesting pair of southern bald eagles. Other major objectives include:

- A. Providing for wildlife oriented recreation, including hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation and photography.
- B. Providing wildlife interpretation and environmental education through; structured programs presented by the refuge's Wildlife Interpretive Specialist, visitor center, a nature trail, an auto tour route, and kiosk.

The primary management objective for initiating September Canada goose hunting is to take positive action toward limiting crop depredation caused by Giant Canada Geese.

IV. Assessment

As the number of resident Canada Geese using the refuge has increased, they compete for resources to the detriment of the refuge's Cooperative Farming Program and ultimately decrease the refuge's ability to provide the best possible wintering waterfowl habitat. During spring and fall an estimated 600 resident Canada geese use the refuge for feeding, resting, and/or nesting habitat. During the spring resident Canada geese graze on cooperative farmers' crops, sometimes reducing yields in selected areas to zero. During late summer, when Barkley Lake begins fall drawdown, resident Canada geese browse in

moist soil areas reducing natural grass seed production.

During 2002 the State opened a September Canada Goose season in West Tennessee. Cross Creeks NWR lies within the TWRA West Tennessee Zone. This hunting season provides the refuge opportunities to reduce crop depredation and increase public hunting opportunities. It is the intent of the refuge not to function as a sanctuary, during the September Canada goose season, for a non-migratory waterfowl that detracts from the refuge's ability to provide the best possible wintering waterfowl habitat.

V. Description of hunting Program

It is proposed that Cross Creeks NWR be open to the taking of Canada Geese during the State September Canada Goose season in the West Tennessee Zone. As Cross Creeks NWR was acquired under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act no more than 40% of the refuge will be open to Canada goose hunting. The refuge will seek to ascertain the most productive hunt areas and designate such areas open. Hunters will be informed of designated hunt areas via maps, brochures, and news releases.

This proposed September Canada Goose hunting season will be carried out in accordance with state and federal regulations. The hunting program will be a permit required non-quota hunt. The permits are refuge hunt brochures which have a certification signature box on the front cover. Refuge permits are used to serve as a tool to educate hunters on refuge-specific regulations. Permits also serve to reduce refuge-specific regulation enforcement issues.

The hunting program will be monitored by refuge and TWRA personnel. Law enforcement officers will conduct periodic field compliance checks. Refuge staff will continue to conduct Canada Goose collar observations and winter waterfowl surveys. An estimated 20 staff days at a cost of \$3,000 will be needed to administer this program.

VI. Measures Taken to Avoid Conflicts With Other Management Objectives

A. Biological Conflicts

This proposed Canada Goose hunting season will be held during the first half of September; therefore, avoiding the harvest of migratory Canada Geese and other waterfowl. Based on Canada Goose collar observations, few migratory Canada Geese use Cross Creeks NWR before November.

There is a remote probability that Canada Goose hunting could conflict with the refuge's effort to preserve and protect the Southern Bald Eagle. There is a possibility that a hunter could shoot one of these threatened birds due to misidentification or willful misconduct, but the possibility is remote.

B. Public Use Conflicts

Time and space zoning will be used to minimize any conflicts between Canada Goose hunting and other public uses.

C. Administrative Conflicts

When conducting a Canada Goose hunting program two legal reservations must be considered:

1. Proclamation 2329, October 8, 1963, Citation 28 FR 10782; Secretary of the Interior designated the closure of hunting migratory birds between river mile 90.0 and river mile 102.5 (see attached Federal Register, Vol. 28, Num. 153 dated August 7, 1963).

2. The National Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd) and the Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S.C. 460k) governs the administration and public use of refuges. The Administration Act provides for the taking of migratory game birds on no more than 40% of an area designated as an inviolate sanctuary. Cross Creeks NWR was acquired under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §715 - 715r) "for use as an inviolate sanctuary for migratory birds" (16 U.S.C. §715d).

Time needed to administer the September Canada Goose hunt will be incorporated into the annual work schedule so as not conflict with existing refuge programs.

VII. Conduct of the Hunt

Designated portions of Cross Creeks NWR will be open to the hunting Canada Geese during the established TWRA West Tennessee September Canada Goose season. Hunting will be allowed in accordance with State regulations and subject to the following conditions:

1. You must have on your person a current, signed copy of the Cross Creeks National Wildlife Refuge hunting permit while hunting Canada geese on the refuge.

2. We allow hunting of Canada geese during the State established September Canada goose season, however, on the refuge this season will be closed during the state wood duck/teal season. Consult the refuge brochure and the Tennessee hunting guide for the exact season dates of the State September Canada goose season. September season Canada geese taken on the refuge count toward the state bag and possession limit.

3. All hunters under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult hunter 21 years old or older, who must remain in sight and normal voice contact with person being supervised. One adult hunter may supervise no more than two youths.
4. We do not allow the hunting of September season Canada geese within 50 yards of any building, public use road, or boat launching ramp.
5. We allow hunters access to the refuge from 1½ hours before sunrise to 1½ hours after sunset.
6. We allow hunters the use of dogs to retrieve Canada geese.
7. We only allow portable blinds. We do not allow the cutting of refuge vegetation to construct blinds. You must remove your portable blinds, boats, decoys, and all other personal equipment from the refuge at the end of each day's hunt.
8. All vehicles must remain on maintained roads and parked so as not to interfere with other traffic or parked in designated parking areas.
9. We do not allow the use of motorized off-road vehicles (e.g. ATV's) on the refuge.
10. We do not allow the use of horses or other animal conveyances to be used on refuge hunts.
11. We do not allow boats to be left on the refuge overnight.
12. It is prohibited for any person or group to act as a hunting guide, outfitter, or in any other capacity that receives pay from other individual(s) either directly or indirectly for services rendered.

Public opinion concerning the addition of September Giant Canada goose hunting to the existing hunt program will be mixed. However, the refuge expects many more favorable versus unfavorable comments. As Stewart County's predominant land use pattern continues to shift from rural family farms to suburban subdivisions demand for public hunt areas will continue to increase. It is expected that most negative comments will be generated from adjacent landowners. At this time it is anticipated that conflicts between hunters and the fishing public could occur.

September Giant Canada Goose hunters will not have to register to hunt, but will be required to possess the refuge hunt brochure which also serves as the hunting permit. No

hunter selection procedure will be required.

Canada Goose hunting information will be publicized through news releases, visitor contact at the refuge office and visitor center, and distribution hunting brochures. A news release containing hunt season dates, how permits can be obtained, and other information will be developed. Weeks prior to the hunting season a news release will be submitted to area newspapers. Hunt brochures will be mailed out to hunters requesting them, if requested by telephone or e-mail.

All persons participating in the September Giant Canada Goose hunting season will be required to follow all state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations. State hunting regulations can be found in the Tennessee Hunting and Trapping Guide or on the www.tnwildlife.org web site. General regulations pertaining to all National Wildlife Refuges and refuge-specific hunt regulations can be found in Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Inquires about any federal and refuge-specific regulations may be directed to refuge management.