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(Draft) **Compatibility Determination**

Use

Youth and Mobility Impaired Hunters Spring Rio Grande Turkey Hunt

Refuge Name

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge

City, County, State

San Antonio, Socorro County, New Mexico

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities

Bosque del Apache NWR was established on December 18, 1936, with the acquisition of the first tract of land, using the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 712d). Additional lands were added to the refuge Executive Order No. 8289 dated November 29, 1939.

Refuge Purposes

“...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purposes, for migratory birds.” Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 712d)

“...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” Secretarial Order 8289.

The Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. 460-1) states that each Refuge is:

“suitable for incidental fish and wildlife oriented recreational development, the protection of natural resources, and the conservation of endangered or threatened species.”

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

“The mission of the Refuge System 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” (National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105-57).

Description of Use

(a) **What is this use?** A Youth and Mobility Impaired Hunters Spring Rio Grande turkey hunt at Bosque del Apache NWR

Is it a priority public use? The use is “Hunting” one of the six priority uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee, as amended by Pub. L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1252).

(b) Where would the use be conducted? Spring Rio Grande turkey hunting would occur in two hunting units on the refuge: the North hunting unit and the South hunting unit. The North hunting unit will include Refuge lands from the north boundary of the refuge southward to ¼ mile of the existing tour route. The South hunting unit will include Refuge lands ½ mile South and East of Marsh Loop (Refuge Wildlife Drive) to the South boundary of the Refuge. The South hunting unit is bounded on the East by the Low Flow Conveyance Channel and on the West by the Interior Drain.

(c) When would the use be conducted? Youth and Mobility Impaired Hunters Spring Rio Grande turkey hunting would occur for four consecutive weekends between April 15 and May 10 annually or in conjunction with New Mexico Game and Fish season structures.

(d) How would the use be conducted? Annually, allowable hunter harvest would be determined by summer production surveys and winter roost counts. Allowable harvest that season would be considered conservative in its harvest (up to 4 bearded turkeys = up to 4 hunters) or liberal (up to 8 bearded turkeys = up to 8 hunters) based on these surveys. Participation in the youth and mobility-impaired Spring Rio Grande turkey hunt would be limited to 1 hunter/weekend (conservative) or 2 hunters/weekend (liberal) determined by an application and lottery draw. Successful applicants would be allowed access to the hunting area on 1 weekend as determined by the application and lottery process. Spring turkey hunting would be subject to any applicable federal, state and refuge-specific regulations and occur only within the above designated areas on the refuge, unless otherwise specified by Refuge management.

(e) Why is this use being proposed? We propose the spring hunting of the non-native Rio Grande turkey by youth and mobility impaired hunters to manage Rio Grande turkey at healthy sustainable populations levels, to provide the public with opportunities for recreation in one of the six priority wildlife-dependent public uses of the Refuge System, to promote youth outdoor education and opportunities, and to provide opportunities to mobility impaired hunters.

Availability of Resources

Spring Rio Grande turkey hunting will only be allowed in areas of the refuge that are not open to the public. Additional facilities or improvements to accommodate mobility-

impaired hunters will be minimal but necessary to assure a safe and enjoyable experience.

Annual road maintenance	- \$500.00
Law Enforcement	- \$100.00
Total	- \$600.00

Anticipated Impacts of Use

Spring Rio Grande turkey hunting will cause minimal disturbance to vegetation and other wildlife through walking or use of wheelchair or other approved mobility conveyances. Some loss of Rio Grande turkey with shotgun or archery equipment will occur. There will be minimal impacts to other visitors, because hunt areas are separate from the main refuge visitor areas.

Our knowledge and observations of the refuge's Public Use areas show no evidence that Spring Rio Grande turkey hunting will adversely affect the wildlife resources. Although we do not expect substantial cumulative impact from this priority use in the near future, it will be important for refuge staff to monitor the youth and mobility-impaired spring Rio Grande turkey hunting program and, if necessary, respond to conserve high quality wildlife resources.

Public Review and Comment

We will post notice of intent to offer a Youth and Mobility Impaired Hunters Turkey Hunt on the refuge for 30 calendar days and collect all public responses. Notice of intent will be placed in the refuge visitor center, posted on refuge web-site or partner web-site, and distributed to state media via U.S. Fish and Wildlife Region Two External Affairs office. All public responses will be collected and reviewed before any final decision in regard to this proposed hunt is rendered.

Determination

Use is not compatible

Use is compatible, with the following stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

- Hunters should be monitored to ensure that they are following state, federal, and refuge-specific regulations.
- Spring Rio Grande turkey will be limited to youth and/or mobility impaired hunters
- Hunter participation will be determined through lottery drawing of eligible hunters

- Spring Rio Grande turkey hunting will be limited to 4 hunters (1/weekend) on conservative years and 8 hunters (2/weekend) in liberal years
- No more than 8 bearded turkeys will be harvested annually
- Participants will be informed of proper trash disposal locations.

Justification

Currently there is limited opportunity for hunting Rio Grande turkeys in the Middle Rio Grande Valley, New Mexico, due to limited habitat. This opportunity becomes more constricted when you look at opportunities to mentor youth or provide safe accessible opportunities for mobility impaired sportsmen. Suitable numbers of Rio Grande turkey exist within established hunting areas on the refuge and it is estimated that populations can withstand this level of hunting pressure without significant impacts. The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 identifies hunting as a priority public use on refuges and stipulates that priority public uses should be facilitated when compatible with refuge purposes.

NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision (check one below)

Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Statement

Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Statement

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

Environmental Impact Statement and record of Decision

Project Leader _____
(Signature)

Concurrence

Regional Director _____
(Signature)

Mandatory 15 year Re-evaluation Date

(Date)

Literature Cited

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act 1997. Public Law 105-57-Oct. 9, 1997.

Kerlinger, P. 1994. The Economic Impact of Birding and Ecotourism on the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge Area, New Mexico, 1993-1994

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Vangilder, L.D. 1992. Population dynamics. Pages 144-164 *in* J.G. Dickson, ed. The wild turkey: biology and management. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, PA.

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