

process to allow alligator hunting on Banks Lake NWR was initiated in 2019. The alligator population in Georgia is one of many renewable natural resources that can sustain limited harvest in concert with biological monitoring and periodic evaluations. Allowing an alligator hunt on Banks Lake NWR will provide hunters additional opportunities where other public lands hunting opportunities are limited. Opening this hunt also supports the refuge's compliance with Secretarial Order 3356, "to support and expand hunting and fishing, enhance conservation stewardship, improve wildlife management, and increase outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans".

II. Statement of Objectives

The objectives of an alligator hunting program on Banks Lake NWR are to provide:

- The public with a high quality recreational experience on more refuge lands and increase opportunities for hunters.
- Wildlife-dependent public recreation as mandated by and according to Service policy and supported by the Improvement Act of 1997.

Although the refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) does not currently allow hunting, it does state that an alligator hunt will be evaluated depending on the population status (USFWS 2009). The CCP's larger goal is to provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation while still providing for optimum habitat and protection for endangered and threatened species. Fish and wildlife conservation will receive first priority in refuge management; wildlife-dependent recreation will be allowed and encouraged as long as it is compatible with, and does not detract from, the mission of the refuge or the purposes for which it was established.

III. Description of Hunting Program

A. Areas to be Opened to Hunting

Acreage of Banks Lake NWR designated on the following map will be open to alligator hunting.