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**(d) How would the use be conducted?** Hunting will be subject to federal, state, and Refuge-specific regulations and occur within the State season framework, unless otherwise approved by Georgia DNR. Bag limits and methods of take will coincide with Georgia DNR guidelines (to the greatest extent possible) and will be coordinated with Georgia DNR. The permit system and quotas are subject to change annually at the discretion of the Refuge Manager, for the purposes of management and sustainability.

Alligator hunting is permitted in designated hunt areas by permit only. Hunters must apply at [www.gohuntgeorgia.com](http://www.gohuntgeorgia.com) between June 1 and July 15 to be drawn for the alligator quota hunt. Hunters will access Banks Lake by the refuge boat ramp. Hunters may use hand-held ropes or snares, snatch hooks, harpoons, gigs or arrows with a restraining line attached. Legal alligators must be dispatched immediately upon capture by using a handgun or bangstick, or by severing the spinal cord with a sharp implement. Dispatched alligators must be tagged with a Georgia DNR-supplied temporary harvest tag before transporting. Temporary tags shall be locked through the skin of the carcass. The temporary tag shall remain attached to the alligator hide until the carcass is validated by Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division, Game Management Section personnel and a CITES tag is issued. Temporary and CITES tags may be used only once. The possession of any alligator hide not tagged is prohibited.

Main entrance to the Refuge and the boat ramp is located at 307 GA-122, Lakeland, GA 31635. The use of airboats and jet skis is restricted on the refuge. Refer to the annual Georgia DNR hunting regulations or [www.gohuntgeorgia.com](http://www.gohuntgeorgia.com), or the Banks Lake website for current regulations on hunting within the Refuge.

**(e) Why is this use being proposed?** In addition to hunting being one of the priority public uses, on September 15, 2017, the Secretary of the Interior signed Secretarial Order 3356 with specific directives “to support and expand hunting and fishing, enhance conservation stewardship, improve wildlife management, and increase outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans” (DOI 2017). New uses and expansion of existing uses are being evaluated that may foster positive stakeholder/refuge relations. Hunting as an approved use at the Refuge is being evaluated in order to allow alligator hunting. Since the previous analysis, environmental conditions have not changed substantially. The Service provides the public with opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation to appreciate the value of and need for fish, wildlife, and plant conservation. Furthermore, hunting is a management tool to maintain wildlife populations at acceptable levels.

#### **Availability of Resources:**

*Resources involved in the administration and management of the use* – Banks Lake NWR is managed from Okefenokee NWR, which is approximately 95 miles away. Banks Lake is currently unstaffed and unfunded. At current staffing levels, the Refuge does not have sufficient resources for managing expected levels of participation in these various types of hunts. Okefenokee NWR management has collaborated with Georgia DNR to conduct every aspect of the hunt from the quota drawing to the enforcement.

*Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use* – Existing facilities that support this use include a boat ramp, boat dock, and parking lot. No additional facilities are proposed