
to support this use.

Maintenance costs – Maintenance associated with this use is already being performed by staff and/or Lanier County throughout the year, during the normal course of their duties. Examples include: mowing, trail maintenance, signage, parking areas, structure maintenance (boat ramps, fishing piers), and trash removal. This use should not incur any additional maintenance needs; however, it may influence the timing of when and how often maintenance should be performed.

Monitoring costs – Okefenokee NWR staff and Federal Wildlife Officers will monitor effects of and compliance with current operations during the normal course of their duties. Any issues that arise from the alligator hunt will be forwarded to Georgia DNR. Georgia DNR will continue to monitor the alligator population with surveys and regular patrols by Conservation Rangers for compliance. Costs for the Georgia DNR surveys and law enforcement patrols will be covered by Georgia DNR.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Although hunting causes mortality and temporary disturbance to wildlife, harvesting populations within the carrying capacity of existing habitat ensures long-term health and survival of the species. Hunting, and its associated activities, can result in positive or negative impacts to wildlife and other Refuge resources. With proper management and monitoring, hunting (as proposed for the Refuge) is expected to cause only minor negative impacts. A positive effect of the Refuge hunting program will be the provision of additional wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, a better appreciation and more complete understanding of the wildlife and habitats associated with the Refuge, and an opportunity to utilize a sustainable, renewable resource. This can translate into more widespread and stronger support for the Refuge, the NWRS, and the Service (Waters 2010).

By using the Georgia DNR quota system, a limited numbers of hunters are selected for Zone 4 each year. Alligator permits available each year allow a specific number of alligators to be harvested within a zone. Increasing public access for alligator hunting can be expected to have moderately beneficial impacts to the overall health of alligator populations and their distribution over the Refuge. Furthermore, increasing access for alligator hunters can be expected to have a minor beneficial impact to fishermen. By allowing alligator hunters to access the refuge, the hunters will be able harvest some of the larger alligators. This can not only create a friendlier environment for anglers, but also allow an increased number of juvenile alligators to reach adulthood, potentially increasing the population. Collectively, these actions aid in maintaining a sustainable alligator hunt on the Refuge. Some disturbance to surface soils, topography, and vegetation will occur in areas selected for hunting; however, effects will be minimal. Negligible impacts to the natural hydrology of the Refuge are also expected. The Refuge expects impacts to air and water quality to be minimal and result only from Refuge visitors' boat emissions. No long-term or cumulative impacts are anticipated as a result of hunting alligators as proposed on the Refuge.

Potential impacts associated with hunting include direct mortality, short-term changes in game species distribution and abundance, and disturbance (to target and non-target species).

Increased access for hunting has the potential to cause various levels of impacts to public safety. The Refuge is open during the hunting season to other priority public uses such as fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and canoeing and kayaking. To safely provide both hunting and non-hunting recreational uses, hunting will be restricted to two three-day weekends within the State