

# *Appendix F. Summary of Public Comments and Service Responses*

## **Introduction**

In March 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published the draft Hunt Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The draft Hunt Plan and EA proposed opening the Refuge for alligator hunting.

On March 23, 2020, we distributed an information bulletin to news organizations and partners through an email to the availability of the hunt plan. The hunt plan was uploaded onto the refuge website. The local public comment period was from March 23, 2020 until April 20, 2020. A total of three individuals shared comments through email correspondence. This document addresses the substantive comments and provides our responses to them. The Service's responses to comments received through the Federal Register rulemaking process were published in the final rule in the Federal Register

**Comment:** Opposition to all hunting on NWRs.

**Service Response:** Hunting is a priority public use under the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997. In March 2017, Secretarial Order 3347 was signed stating the Department of the Interior is entrusted with overseeing Federal lands for the benefit of current and future generations. This includes advancing conservation stewardship and increasing outdoor recreation opportunities, including hunting and fishing, for all Americans. In September of 2017, Secretarial Order 3356 titled "Hunting, Fishing, Recreational shooting, and Wildlife Conservation Opportunities and Coordination with States, Tribes, and Territories," built on Secretarial Order 3347. This order included specific directives for Department of the Interior agencies to implement that will increase access for hunting and fishing. This Order continues the Department's efforts to enhance conservation stewardship; increase outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans, including opportunities to hunt and fish; and improve the management of game species and their habitats for this generation and beyond.

**Comment:** Instead of allowing limited hunting, open the refuge to state alligator season until 10 alligators have been taken.

**Service Response:** In consultation with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and based on the available alligator population survey data, Banks Lake NWR was recommended to be open to hunting during the first two weekends of the season, which would be the most efficient way to manage a limited hunt in the refuge. Identifying limited hunt dates also assure hunters that have been drawn for Zone 4 the opportunity to hunt on the refuge without concern of reaching limits early.

**Comment:** Opening the refuge to duck hunting.