



June 9, 2026

Mr. Brian Nesvik
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: National Wildlife Refuge System; 2026-2027 Station-Specific Hunting and Sport Fishing Regulations – Docket Number: FWS-HQ-NWRS-2026-1223

Dear Director Nesvik,

On behalf of the American Sportfishing Association (ASA), thank you for your leadership in advancing one of the most significant federal expansions of recreational fishing in recent history. The 2026–2027 Station-Specific Hunting and Sport Fishing Regulations proposed rule represents a meaningful and historic commitment to the recreational fishing community and businesses that depend on outdoor recreation.

The American Sportfishing Association is the nation’s recreational fishing trade association, providing a united voice for the recreational fishing industry when emerging laws and policies affect sportfishing businesses, anglers and fisheries. With 57 million Americans fishing every year, recreational fishing is a key contributor to the overall U.S. economy, generating \$230 billion in economic output and supporting over 1.1 million jobs.

The proposed rule would expand fishing access across a wide range of waters on the National Wildlife Refuge System, from warmwater lakes to coldwater streams, giving more Americans the chance to experience their public lands and waters. Expanded access under the proposed rule would increase opportunities to pursue striped bass at New Jersey’s Cape May NWR, bull trout at Idaho’s Kootenai NWR, and crappie at Theodore Roosevelt NWR. With fishing access expanded at 27 NWRs, the Hunt-Fish rule will welcome more anglers outdoors, supporting the significant economic impact made by sportfishing, as well as thousands of American manufacturers, retailers and small businesses.

Expanded access is most meaningful when anglers can practically and affordably use it. The Hunt-Fish rule ensures anglers may use traditional fishing tackle, like lead jigs and sinkers, at eight NWRs where restrictions on such tackle were slated to take effect in 2026. Not only would these restrictions on lead tackle force anglers to choose between more costly or less-effective tackle, but these planned restrictions were neither supported by scientific evidence nor consistent with state management. By ensuring that anglers can choose to use traditional tackle where consistent with state law, the Service is helping ensure fishing opportunities on NWR waters are accessible, affordable, and broadly available.

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We appreciate that the current proposed rule recognizes the primary role of scientific management led by state fish and wildlife agencies. The 2022-23 and 2023-24 Hunt-Fish rules applied blanket lead tackle restrictions across refuges with differing habitats, species, angling methods, and state regulations, without identifying links to population-level impacts to wildlife present at those refuges. The 2026-27 proposed rule provides a meaningful corrective, not only in rescinding the restrictions scheduled under prior rules, but in aligning NWR regulations with state management and requiring station-specific scientific bases for restrictions.

The Hunt-Fish rule builds on the Department of Interior's recent secretarial order to eliminate barriers to recreational access on public lands under its jurisdiction. By applying the order's thoughtful, science-based framework for the use of lead tackle, the 2026-27 proposed rule recognizes the importance of state wildlife management authority while removing unnecessary restrictions that would have limited fishing access.

As America prepares to celebrate its 250th anniversary, the 2026-27 Hunt-Fish rule is a timely commitment to expanding access to the public lands and waters that remain central to our national outdoor heritage. ASA commends and encourages the Service to finalize the proposed rule, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Service to expand recreational access across the National Wildlife Refuge and National Fish Hatchery Systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Connor Bevan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Connor" being more prominent than the last name "Bevan".

Connor Bevan
Inland Fisheries Policy Director
American Sportfishing Association