

Draft Compatibility Determination

Title

Draft Compatibility Determination for Camping (Developed, Semi-primitive, and Back-country/Wilderness), Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge.

Refuge Use Category

Outdoor Recreation (General)

Refuge Use Type(s)

Camping (Developed, Semi-primitive, and Backcountry/Wilderness)

Refuge

Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Purpose(s) and Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies)

"... as a Refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife..."
(Executive Order 8401, dated May 2, 1939)

" ... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." (16 U.S.C. 715d [Migratory Bird Conservation Act])

"... suitable for (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species ..." (16 U.S.C. 460k-1) ... the Secretary ... may accept and use ... real ... property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors ... 16 U.S.C. 460k-2 (Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. 460k-460k-4), as amended).

"... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." (16 U.S.C. 742f(a)(4) ... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ... 16 U.S.C. 99 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956).]

. . for conservation purposes. Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 2002).

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats

within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans (Pub. L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1252).

Description of Use

Is this an existing use?

Yes. This Compatibility Determination (CD) reviews and replaces the CD in the 2000 Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and associated Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant impact (USFWS 2000). The 2000 CD for camping also included Picnicking and Swimming. Picnicking is defined as “eating a meal outdoors, including picnic tables, restrooms, garbage cans, parking lots, trails, and other associated facilities.” Picnicking would be conducted by visitors using developed campgrounds at the Refuge and will therefore not be evaluated separately from camping. Swimming and bathing have been found to be not appropriate, and are prohibited on the Refuge.

What is the use?

Camping is an outdoor recreational activity involving overnight stays away from home in a shelter such as a tent, travel trailer, or a motorhome. The Refuge provides camping opportunities at developed campgrounds and dispersed (primitive) camp sites.

Is the use a priority public use?

No

Where would the use be conducted?

Camping is allowed only in five designated (developed) campgrounds (approximately 30 total sites in Cottonwood, Bear Creek, River Camp, Potters/Bayley, and Horse Camp) and in approximately 28 dispersed (primitive) camp sites across the main unit of the Refuge. Dispersed camp sites can be added or removed at the discretion of the Refuge Manager based on need, however dispersed sites cannot be located within 200 feet of meadows, streams, lakes and/or wetlands.

Entry to all or portions of the Refuge may be temporarily suspended and posted closed due to unusual or critical conditions affecting public safety or any of the resources managed by the Refuge.

When would the use be conducted?

Camping in the five designated campgrounds is allowed April 14 through December 31. Visitors are limited to no longer than 7 days within a 30-day consecutive period from April 14 through August 31 and a 14-day limit from September 1 through December 31. Camping at the 28 dispersed sites is allowed October 1 through

December 31 with a limit of 14 days within a 30-day consecutive period. Established quiet hours are between 10pm and 6am. Camping is most popular at the beginning of the fishing season, holiday weekends, and during big game hunting seasons.

How would the use be conducted?

Campground development and capacity are limited to ensure recreation settings are maintained consistent with Refuge management goals and objectives identified through the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge CCP.

Camping in the Refuge is limited to designated (developed) campgrounds and within 50 feet of the dispersed (primitive) campsite markers only.

Campfires are permitted unless fire restrictions are in place. Campfire restrictions will be posted in all campgrounds and at the kiosks. Fires cannot be left unattended.

The five designated campgrounds (approximately 30 campsites total) provide vault toilets and fire rings. Campers must provide their own drinking water. Fires are allowed only in established fire rings. Garbage must be packed out. Campgrounds can be utilized by RVs, although electricity, water, and dump stations are not available. Campsites are marked and expansion outside of individual campsites is not allowed. Camping with horses is only allowed in the Bear Creek and Horse Camp campgrounds. Horses must be tied to hitch rails, high picket lines, or confined in portable corrals or trailers. Horses may not be tied directly to trees and must be at least 100 feet from streams or other water bodies.

Visitors camping at dispersed sites must set up camp within 50 feet of the dispersed campsite markers, identified with brown carsonite posts. Campers must bury all human waste 6-8 inches deep and at least 200 feet from camp, trails, and water sources. Campfires are allowed at the dispersed campsites only within existing rock fire rings but must follow Industrial Fire Precaution Levels (IFPL) restrictions and protocols posted at the kiosk located at the Refuge Office. .

Campers are allowed to gather firewood for their camps without a permit. Only dead and downed trees can be cut for use. The use of chainsaws is allowed for cutting dead and downed wood, but operators must follow State and Federal laws regarding IFPL restrictions and must conform to the U.S. Forest Service approved mufflers and spark arrestors (all internal combustion engines [chainsaws] must be equipped with a spark arrester that meets the requirements of the U.S. Forest Service Standard 5100-1 [FS5100-1]. This standard establishes the minimum performance and maintenance requirements for spark arresters). All campers must follow the IFPLs posted at the kiosk located at the Refuge Office.

Camping is allowed on a first-come, first-served basis. Camping is limited to 14 consecutive days per party. However, all backcountry campers, and groups of more than 25 people, or containing 10 horses or more using developed campgrounds, must apply for and obtain a SUP to camp on the Refuge. Visitors wishing to obtain a SUP

can submit an application to the Refuge Manager at the Refuge Office or online.

Each SUP application for camping will be evaluated for impacts to wildlife, habitats, Refuge resources, priority public uses, and as appropriate, wilderness character. Conditions may be added to the SUP on a case-by-case basis to minimize the anticipated impacts to resources from camping, and to ensure that any impacts which cannot be avoided, minimized, or mitigated remain temporary and negligible. Some requests may require further analysis of the impacts of the proposed activity on special status species or cultural resources, which may require additional compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and consultation under any other relevant laws.

If the use conflicts with Refuge resources, Refuge management programs, or priority wildlife-dependent uses, the participant(s) must identify in advance the methods/strategies required to minimize or eliminate the potential impact(s) and conflict(s). If unacceptable impacts cannot be avoided, then a SUP would not be issued.

Why is this use being proposed or reevaluated?

This use is being reevaluated in accordance with Service policy, 603 FW 2.11H(2).

Availability of Resources

Annual maintenance and upkeep of existing facilities requires approximately \$5,000. Current levels of use (approximately 200 visits annually for all non-priority uses combined) can be managed with existing resources. Additional staff and funding will be necessary to improve and/or expand the existing camping programs.

Maintenance of Refuge roads incur costs, but costs are not directly related to camping since facilities are shared with other priority public uses.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use

This CD includes written analyses of the environmental consequences on a resource when the impacts on that resource could be more than negligible and therefore considered an “affected resource.” Based on best professional judgement and nearly 25 years of managing this use at the Refuge, air quality, flood plains, cultural resources, and socioeconomics will not be more than negligibly impacted by the action and have been dismissed from further analyses.

Potential impacts of a proposed use on the Refuge's purpose(s) and the Refuge System mission

Camping itself is not a priority public use on Service lands per the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, and is generally conducted for sport and recreation. However, due to but because of the size, remoteness, and quality of roads within the

Refuge, it is important in supporting priority wildlife-dependent uses, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and wildlife photography. It provides opportunities for visitors to enjoy the Refuge's resources, to gain or increase their understanding of and appreciation for fish, wildlife, wildlands ecology, the relationships of plant and animal populations within the ecosystem, and wildlife management. This use will provide opportunities for visitors to directly observe and learn about wildlife and habitats at their own pace in an unstructured environment. This use will enhance the public's understanding of natural resource management programs and ecological concepts to enable them to better understand the problems facing natural resources and to realize what impact the public has on wildlife resources. Additionally, the public can learn about the Service's role in conservation and better understand the biological facts upon which Service management programs are based, consequently fostering an appreciation for the importance of wildlife and habitats.

Participation in this use is expected to contribute to a more informed public, with an enhanced stewardship ethic and greater support for wildlife conservation. Furthermore, this use will provide an intrinsic, safe, outdoor recreational opportunity in a scenic setting, with the realization that those who come strictly for recreational enjoyment will be enticed to participate in the more enhanced facets of the visitor use program and can then become informed supporters for wildlife conservation. By allowing this use with the stipulations described below, we will provide opportunities and facilitate programs in a manner and at locations on the Refuge that offer high quality, wildlife-dependent recreation while maintaining the current levels or increased levels of natural resource values.

Therefore, use of Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge for camping is expected to benefit and promulgate the Refuge's purposes and the Refuge System's mission.

Short-term impacts

The principal impacts associated with campground and campsite use are loss of vegetation, soil compaction, and erosion from trampling in localized areas; reduced water quality from improper disposal of food, dishwater, and feces; and the displacement or habituation of wildlife due to human presence and activities. Campfires have the potential to ignite wildfires; however, there have been no wildfires attributed to campfires on the to date as observed by Refuge staff.

Immediate responses by wildlife to human activity can range from behavioral changes including nest abandonment, altered nest placement, and change in food habits to physiological changes such as elevated heart rates, increased energetic costs due to flight or flushing, or even death (Belanger and Bedard 1990; Kight and Swaddle 2007; Miller and Hobbs 2000; Miller et al. 1998; Morton et al. 1989). According to Knight and Cole (1990), there are three wildlife responses to human disturbance: avoidance, habituation, and attraction. The magnitude of the avoidance response may depend on a number of factors including the type, distance, movement pattern, speed, and

duration of the disturbance; the time of day, time of year, weather; and the animal's access to food and cover, energy demands, and reproductive status (Fernández-Juricic et al. 2007; Gabrielsen and Smith 1995; Knight and Cole 1990). Habituation is defined as a form of learning in which individuals stop responding to stimuli that carry no reinforcing consequences for the individuals that are exposed to them (Alcock 1993). A key factor for assessing how wildlife will respond to disturbance is the predictability of the use. Often, when a use is predictable— for example, when visitors stay on a trail, boardwalk, or viewing deck —wildlife will habituate to and accept human presence (Oberbillig 2000).

The impact of camping and periodic maintenance or upgrades of existing campgrounds, roads, trails, and support facilities is expected to be adverse, but minor and localized, due to the relative low-level of anticipated use, the relatively large size of the Refuge, and stipulations imposed on the use. With stipulations described below, this use generally would result in negligible animal mortality; minor, short-term wildlife disturbance; localized compaction of soil and loss of vegetation; and no introduction of contaminants.

Long-term impacts

The impacts of camping on the vegetation and soil of natural areas can be locally severe and long-term. These impacts compromise the integrity of natural ecosystems and diminish the quality of recreational experiences (Hammitt et al. 2015). Generally, developed campgrounds are expected to receive heavy vehicle traffic and trampling around campsites. Trampling from foot traffic can also be significant in primitive campsites that receive heavy use. These types of disturbances can reduce plant cover and biomass, reduce species richness, introduce invasive species, and overall shift species composition (Cole 2004). In a study of 29 paired campsites and undisturbed control sites (Marion and Cole 1996), results showed most vegetation had been eliminated from campsites and the vegetation that remained primarily consisted of grasses, while forbs dominated the undisturbed control sites. Organic soil horizons on campsites were only about one-third as thick as on the control sites; mineral soil was exposed over most of the campsites. These mineral soils were compacted— exhibiting increased bulk density and penetration resistance. All campgrounds within Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge exhibit these general impacts from use.

The use of campgrounds causes direct impacts to water quality and wildlife habitats through increased sedimentation into streams, increased water temperatures from reduced vegetation and shading, and loss of vegetation from trampling, and therefore has the potential for indirect impacts to fish and wildlife populations. However, with the Refuge's limit on the number of campsites, requiring SUPs for group camping, and other regulations, vehicle traffic and campsite use would remain at acceptable levels and would be expected to cause only minor, long-term, adverse impacts to water quality and wildlife habitat.

There is the potential for introduction of invasive, non-native plant species

associated with camping activity. Most invasive plants need some form of transportation to reach new areas (Trombulak and Frissell 2000). Several potential modes of transportation, or “vectors,” continually travel throughout Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge in the form of vehicle traffic on roads, people, pets, domestic stock, wildlife, and tools and equipment taken onto the Refuge. Overnight use of stock is limited to Bear Creek and Horse Camp Campgrounds for several reasons, including to limit potential impacts from invasive species. This limitation on the use of stock and the requirement that only certified weed-free hay be brought into the Refuge, minimizes likelihood of introduction of invasive plants and impacts to habitat.

Monitoring of public use in identified sensitive wildlife habitats would be used to determine if impacts from camping could impact the health, vigor, or productivity of fish, wildlife, or their habitats in these areas. If such potential for impact is identified, the Refuge would increase public notification and education regarding those impacts and/or close the areas to public use for critical periods or longer if necessary.

Potential Impacts to Wildlife in General:

The long-term effects of wildlife disturbance are more difficult to assess but may include altered behavior, vigor, productivity or death of individuals; altered population abundance, distribution, or demographics; and altered community species composition and interactions. However, while impacts of camping can be serious for individual plants and animals and perhaps localized rare populations, they are generally of little significance to landscape integrity or regional biological diversity. Moreover, unless a localized, rare population is impacted by a single impacted site, the intensity, size, and distribution of impacts are not relevant to the significance of impacts assessed at large spatial scales (Cole 1989).

Potential Impacts to Cultural Resources:

Nearly all of the Refuge is open to public use, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, interpretation, and horseback riding. All recreation uses and activities are regulated and managed to avoid significant effect to biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health. The most noticeable disturbance effects occur along the network of maintained roads and trails which support recreation uses and activities within the Refuge. As such, it is unlikely that this relatively low-use activity would negatively affect cultural resources. The possible threat of inadvertent collection of prehistoric artifacts would be further mitigated through outreach, education, and enforcement of Refuge regulations.

Mitigation of Potential Impacts:

To prevent or minimize these potential long-term impacts, Refuge staff would work to ensure that visitors follow stipulations through law enforcement, Refuge and volunteer presence, and various forms of outreach. Refuge staff and law enforcement would regularly assess campgrounds and trails for safety and quality of visitor

experience, wildlife disturbance, cultural resources, and impacts to soil and vegetation. The Refuge would also monitor these areas for non-native invasive species and implement appropriate control measures. If use levels are resulting in unacceptable impacts to Refuge resources, visitor experience, or public safety, the use may be modified or relocated to prevent additional impacts and restore habitat.

Public Review and Comment

The draft compatibility determination will be available for public review and comment for 14 calendar days to provide comments following the day the notice is published. The public will be made aware of this comment opportunity through our social media outlets and letters to potentially interested parties. A hard copy of this document will be posted at the Refuge Headquarters at 1310 Bear Creek Road, Colville, WA 99114. It will be made available electronically on the Refuge website at https://www.fws.gov/refuge/little_pend_oreille/. Please let us know if you need the documents in an alternative format. Concerns expressed during the public comment period will be addressed in the final Compatibility Determination.

Determination

Is the use compatible?

Yes

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

1. Camping is allowed in five designated campgrounds from April 14 through December 31 and in the dispersed camp sites from October 1 through Dec. 31
2. Visitors using the dispersed camp sites are limited to no more than 14 days within a 30-day consecutive period from October 1 through December 31.
3. Visitors using the five designated campgrounds are limited to no longer than 7 days within a 30-day consecutive period from April 14 through August 31, and a 14-day limit from September 1 through December 31.
4. Quiet hours in camp sites are from 10 PM to 8 AM.
5. Groups of more than 25 people, or groups containing 10 horses or more using developed camp sites, and all backcountry campers using dispersed sites, must obtain a Special Use Permit to camp on the Refuge.
6. The permittee and all associated personnel agree to conduct activities in a safe manner, in compliance with all Refuge regulations and policies, and with precaution to avoid damage to resources, property, or personnel. Refuge staff will not be held responsible for loss of, or damage to, equipment.
7. A copy of the Special Use Permit must be in the permittee or associate's

possession at all times while exercising the privileges of the Permit. A copy of the Permit must be shown to any USFWS employee or Federal law enforcement officer upon request.

8. Failure to abide by any part of the Special Use Permit; violation of any Refuge-related provision or Code of Federal Regulations; or violation of any pertinent state regulation (e.g., fish or game violation) will, with due process, be considered grounds for revocation of the permit and could result in denial of future permit requests for lands administered by the USFWS. This provision applies to all persons working under the authority of the permit.
9. Visitors camping at dispersed sites must set up camp within 50 feet of the designated dispersed campsite markers, identified with brown carsonite posts. Campers must bury all human waste 6-8 inches deep and at least 200 feet from campsites, trails, and water sources.
10. All garbage must be packed out.
11. Campfires are permitted unless seasonal fire restrictions are in effect. Campfire restrictions will be posted in all campgrounds and at the kiosks.
12. Campers must use fire rings in developed and dispersed campsites. Campers may assist Refuge staff by maintaining or reconfiguring existing rock fire rings at dispersed campsites. Campers may not build new rock fire rings.
13. Campers are allowed to gather firewood for their camps without a permit. Only dead and downed trees within 100 feet of a public access road can be cut for use. Campfire restrictions will be posted in all campgrounds and at the kiosks. Fires cannot be left unattended. All campers must follow the Industrial Fire Precaution Levels (IFPL), chainsaw requirements (U.S. Forest Service Standard 5100-1 (FS5100-1) and other campfire restrictions posted at the kiosk located at the Refuge Office.
14. Pets must be on a leash or under control.
15. Camping with horses is only allowed in the Bear Creek and Horse Camp Campgrounds (see attached map). Confined horses must be at least 100 feet from streams or other water bodies. Horses may not be tied directly to trees. They must be tied to hitch rails, high picket lines, or confined in portable corrals or trailers.
16. Horseback riders must supply their own feed. Grazing horses on the Refuge is prohibited.
17. Only certified weed-free hay, hay pellets, or cubes are permitted on the Refuge.
18. Excess manure, straw and hay must be removed from campsites.
19. Swimming and bathing in lakes and streams are prohibited on the Refuge.

20. Visitors are prohibited from collecting and removing any archaeological or historic artifacts, samples, or mementos from the Refuge. If cultural resources, or archaeological or historic artifacts are encountered, leave the item(s) in place and contact the Refuge Manager or nearest USFWS employee.
21. Refuge staff and volunteers will monitor uses to ensure compatibility, refine user estimates, and evaluate compliance. Potential conflicts between user groups will also be evaluated. The Refuge will maintain an active law enforcement presence to ensure visitor compliance with all Refuge rules and regulations.

Justification

Camping itself is not a priority public use within the Refuge, but because of the size, remoteness, and quality of roads, it is important in supporting priority uses including fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, and wildlife photography. Within 50 C.F.R. 26.31, it states that “[p]ublic recreation will be permitted on national wildlife Refuges as an appropriate incidental or secondary use only after it has been determined that such recreational use is practicable and not inconsistent with the primary objectives for which each particular area was established or with other authorized Federal operations.” Additionally this use is consistent with Service policy. Specifically, 8 RM 9.5 (b) states that “[c]amping and picnicking may be permitted only when required to implement or sustain an approved wildlife/wildlands-oriented activity only when no other alternative is practical.”

Camping, as outlined in this compatibility determination, would not conflict with the national policy to maintain the biological diversity, integrity, and environmental health of the Refuge. Based on the stipulations outlined above, it is anticipated that wildlife populations will find sufficient food resources and resting places such that their abundance and use of the Refuge will not be measurably lessened as a result of allowing plant and animal product gathering on Little Pend Oreille NWR. The relatively limited number of individual wildlife expected to be adversely affected as a result of this use will not cause wildlife populations to materially decline, the physiological condition and production of species present will not be impaired, their behavior and normal activity patterns will not be altered dramatically, and their overall welfare will not be negatively impacted. Based on available science and best professional judgement, the Service has determined that camping at Little Pend Oreille NWR, in accordance with the stipulations provided here, would not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the Refuge. Rather, appropriate and compatible camping would be a use of the Refuge through which the public can increase their understanding and appreciation of wildlife and their habitats, as well as the role of the National Wildlife Refuge System in resource conservation.

Signature of Determination

Refuge Manager Signature and Date

Signature of Concurrence

Assistant Regional Director, NWRS, Pacific Region 1 Signature and Date

Mandatory Reevaluation Date

2034

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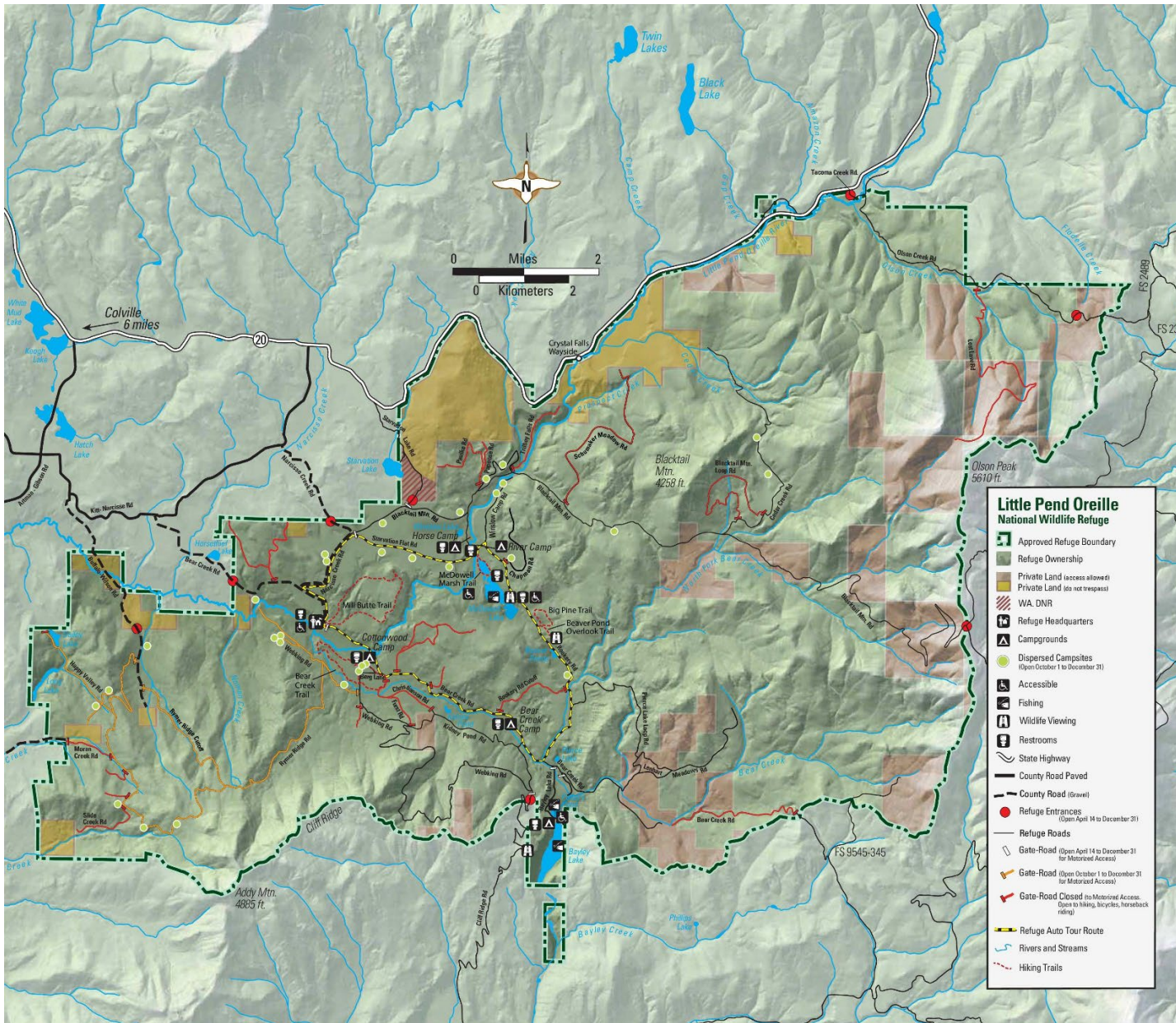


Figure 1. Campgrounds and access, Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge