

[From Winter 2002]

## **Wallops Island NWR Opened for White-tailed Deer Hunt**

Wallops Island National Wildlife Refuge (WINWR), a satellite refuge of Chincoteague NWR, abuts state highway 175 and the neighboring NASA Wallops Flight Facility (WFF). Historically, deer-vehicle collisions on the busy road have been frequent. Occasional deer-aircraft collisions have also occurred on WFF.

In addition, heavy deer browsing has reduced the diversity of the shrub and herbaceous forest understory on the refuge. This has compromised the primary goals of the refuge - to preserve, enhance, protect, and improve habitat for migratory bird species.

Chincoteague NWR staff recognize that well managed hunting can effectively control deer populations. To alleviate the deer collision hazards adjacent to the refuge, and to reduce the affects of overbrowsing on refuge habitats, refuge staff proposed opening WINWR for the first time to public hunting.

Last winter CNWR, in coordination with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, performed an Environmental Assessment and held a public meeting concerning the proposed deer hunt. Following a favorable public response, refuge staff completed a Compatibility Determination for a hunt. The final rule, opening WINWR to deer hunting, was published in the Federal Register in September 2002.

This fall, refuge staff posted safety zones, installed three temporary parking areas, and constructed an information/check-in kiosk on the site. The hunt was advertised during October 2002, with opportunities for five hunt parties, of up to five hunters each. Public response has been excellent.

The refuge hopes that in addition to alleviating deer-vehicle collisions, this new hunt program will also increase the quality of forage areas, escape cover, and nesting habitat for neotropical songbirds and other forest-floor or mid-canopy wildlife species.

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