Appendix E. Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR Wilderness Review

1.0 Introduction

Wilderness Reviews are a required element of Comprehensive Conservation Plans (Plans), and each refuge must follow the Review process outlined in 602 FW 1-3 and 610 FW 1-4. The process includes interagency and tribal coordination, public involvement, and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance (610 FW 4.4 A). The purpose of the Review is to identify lands and waters that merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and recommend suitable lands for congressional designation (610 FW 4.4 A).

There are three phases to the Review process: (1) inventory, (2) study, and (3) recommendation. During the inventory phase, we identify lands and waters that meet the minimum criteria for wilderness designation (610 FW 4.4 B). Lands and waters that meet the minimum criteria for designation are called Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). In the study phase, we assess a range of management alternatives to determine if a WSA is suitable for wilderness designation and corresponding management or if management under an alternate set of goals and objectives is more appropriate (610 FW 4.12 A). The findings of the study phase determine whether we will recommend a WSA for designation in the Final CCP. If we determine that the Refuge contains lands and/or waters that are suitable for wilderness designation, we report the recommendation from the Director through the Secretary and the President to Congress in a subsequent Wilderness Study Report (610 FW 4.4).

2.0 Wilderness Inventory

Section 2 (c) of the Wilderness Act states that wilderness is an area that is "untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." The act identifies the minimum criteria that an area must meet to be eligible for Wilderness. Service policy states that we use the act's minimum criteria to identify potential wilderness areas. These criteria include size, apparent naturalness, and outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation. Supplemental values are evaluated and documented but are not required for a WSA. Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR's CCP Planning Team met on January 25, 2011, to perform the inventory phase of the review.

2.1 Identification of Lands that Meet the Size Criteria

First, the team reviewed the Refuge for any lands that meet the size criteria outlined by 610 FW 4.8 and described here:

- An area with more than 5,000 contiguous acres. State and private lands are not included in making this acreage determination.
- A roadless island of any size. A roadless island is defined as an area surrounded by permanent waters or that is markedly distinguished from the surrounding lands by topographical or ecological features (610 FW 1.5 Z).
- An area of less than 5,000 contiguous acres that is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition and of a size suitable for wilderness management.
- An area of less than 5,000 contiguous Federal acres that is contiguous with a designated wilderness, recommended wilderness, or area under wilderness review by another Federal wilderness managing agency such as the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, or Bureau of Land Management.

After reviewing Refuge lands using the map on the following page, the team found that no areas meet the size criteria as described. As the map shows, there are numerous roads scattered across the Refuge in each Refuge unit. Therefore, there are no roadless areas or islands of any sufficient size as to make feasible its preservation for wilderness management. Furthermore, the entire Refuge is actively managed for Attwater's prairie-chicken recovery efforts and shows signs of human modification. Grazing management and prescribed fire are used as part of these recovery measures across the entire Refuge landscape. In addition, the Refuge manages three food plots to provide supplemental forage for wildlife, including the Attwater's prairie-chicken. All of these management activities are consistent with the recovery measures outlined in the Attwater's Prairie-Chicken Recovery Plan. Thus, there are no Refuge lands of any size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.

Lands and waters that meet any of these four size criteria would be identified as inventory units during the review process. Because Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR does not contain any inventory units that meet the size criteria, the team concluded the Wilderness Review.

3.0 Wilderness Inventory Summary

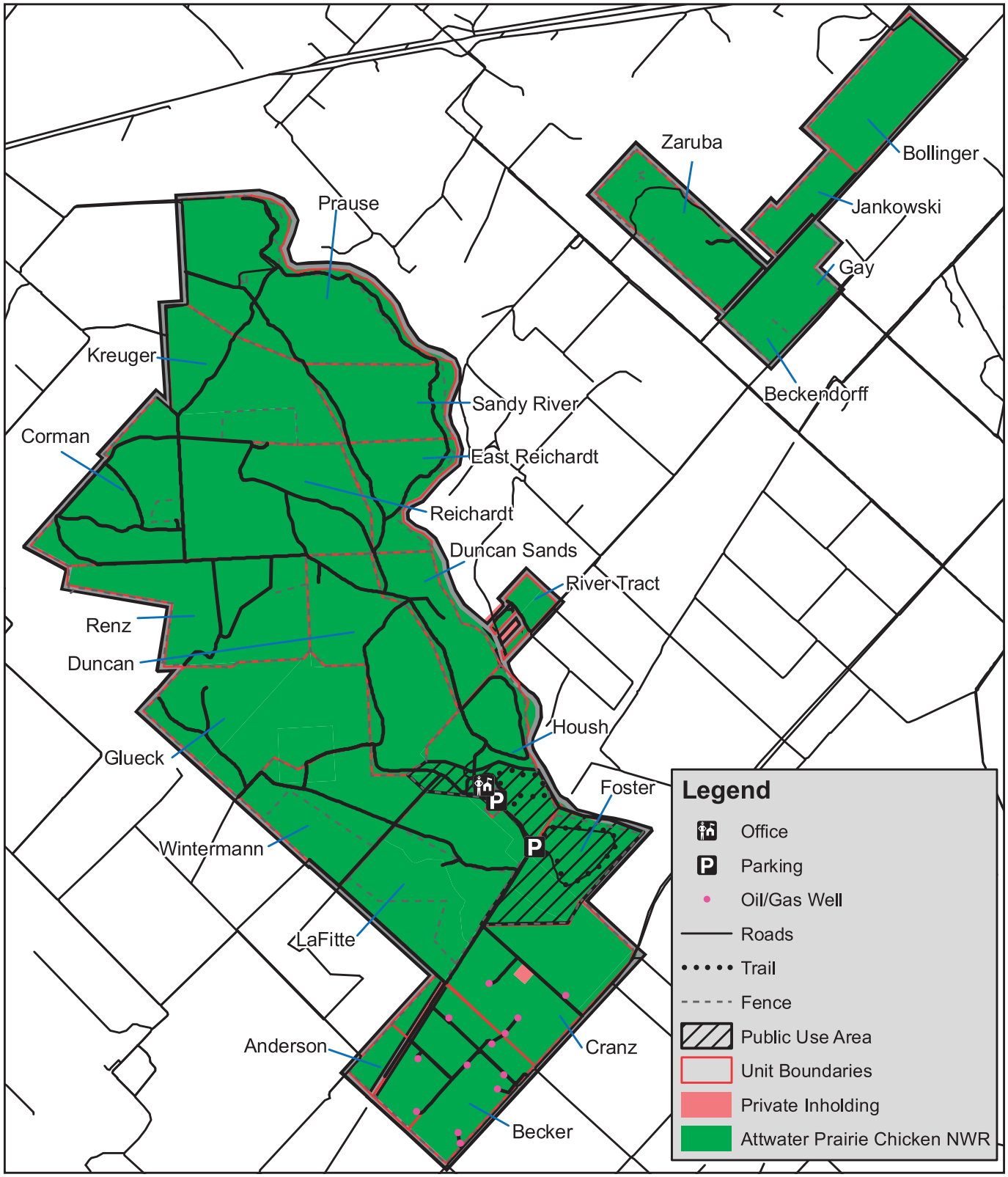
After completing the inventory phase of the Wilderness Review, none of Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR's lands meet the minimum criteria for a Wilderness Study Area. Therefore, the Team does not recommend that the Wilderness Study portion of the Review be performed. This concludes the Wilderness Review process at this time. The process will be replicated in accordance with policy at the time of the next CCP revision.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge

Austin/Colorado Counties, Texas

Map E-1. Wilderness Review Map



PRODUCED IN THE DIVISION OF REFUGE PLANNING
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO
LAND STATUS CURRENT TO: 5/31/09
MAP DATE: Jan. 2012
BASEMAP: N/A
MERIDIAN: N/A
FILE: atw_wilderness_review_1.25.12sk

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometers

UTM ZONE 14
NAD 83

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