

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced that effective Feb. 22, the rules governing possession of firearms on national wildlife refuges will change as a result of legislation enacted by Congress.

After this date, the law allows an individual to lawfully possess a firearm within the boundaries of a national wildlife refuge in accordance with federal, state and local firearms laws.

As directed by this new law, the service will look to the laws of the state and locality in which the refuge or refuge unit is located to govern possession of firearms on the refuge.

Visitors will be allowed to possess firearms on national wildlife refuges provided they comply with applicable provisions of federal, state and local law.

Persons with so-called firearm “carry” permits will be able to possess firearms on a refuge in accordance with the provisions of the state issued permit.

The new law applies to all 551 units of the national wildlife refuge system, as well as the national monuments and the 392 units of the national park system.

While the law will change the application of rules regarding possession of firearms, it has no impact on the authorized uses of firearms on national wildlife refuges.

The law does not allow visitors to fire or discharge the firearms in any way, brandish the weapon in the view of others, or any other use of the firearm.

Enforcement of regulations concerning firearms use remains under the purview of the Department of the Interior.

While possession on a refuge may generally be allowed under state law, possession of firearms will remain prohibited in federal facilities.

Examples include: visitor centers, refuge administrative office buildings, refuge maintenance offices and workshops, field and backcountry offices, ranger stations and fee collection stations.

Refuge visitors wishing to possess firearms on any unit of the national wildlife refuge system should carefully read and understand the laws of the state in which the refuge they plan to visit is located—as well as applicable local and county laws and ordinances that derive from that respective state’s law.

The laws of the states in which they reside, or from which they may have received firearms permits, do not apply when they are away from those states, although some states offer reciprocity and allow possession based on another state’s permits.

Hunting, trapping and fishing are considered to be a legitimate, traditional recreational and wildlife management use of renewable natural resources on refuges.

However, this new law does not change or expand hunting opportunities on national wildlife refuges or exempt hunters from state or federal hunting regulations.

Each person who hunts on a national wildlife refuge must have the required state license(s) required by the refuge, as well as any permits and/or user fees.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Act of 1966, other laws and the fish and wildlife service’s policy permit hunting on a refuge when it is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and acquired. For additional information, go to:<http://www.fws.gov/refuges/hunting/>.

The law does not differentiate between concealed handguns under state permit and long guns (rifles, shotguns, muzzleloaders) and it applies to all firearms, which are defined as a weapon designed to fire a projectile by the use of an explosive charge. All federal firearms statutes remain unchanged.

Nearly 40 million people visit national wildlife refuges each year, generating almost \$1.7 billion in sales for regional economies. In addition to wildlife observation, many refuges provide rich opportunities for hiking, canoeing, hunting and fishing. To learn more about visiting a national wildlife refuge go to: <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/visitors/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The system is both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service.

For more information on their work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.