

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

### 2007 Environmental Assessment and Proposed Hunting Plan for Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge

**The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to** expand hunting opportunities on the Agassiz NWR as follows:

- \* Open Agassiz NWR to grouse and deer archery hunting during and after the deer firearms season in the same areas open to deer/firearms. Hunter access will be more restrictive after the close of the deer firearms season.
- \* Expand deer hunting opportunities to include deer/muzzleloader (blackpowder) hunting, following state season in the same areas open to deer/firearms. Hunter access will be more restrictive than access during the deer firearms season.
- \* Open 14,800 acres on the east side to the two day state season Youth Deer Hunt.
- \* Open 4,200 acres on Farmes Pool to the one day state season Youth Waterfowl Hunt.

Hunting activities will be permitted, but administratively limited to those areas specified in the refuge-specific regulations. All or parts of the refuge may be closed to hunting at any time if necessary for public safety, to provide wildlife sanctuary, or for other reasons.

The EA identified three possible alternatives:

1. Alternative A: No Action – Current Direction
2. Alternative B: Open a portion of the refuge to bear, waterfowl, small game, following state seasons and open entire refuge to deer archery/blackpowder following the deer firearms season.
3. Alternative C: Proposed Action – Preferred Alternative.

**The Service has analyzed the following alternatives to the proposal in an Environmental Assessment (copy attached):**

Alternative A: No action - Under this alternative, hunting would be limited to deer firearms and moose following state seasons in areas currently open to hunting. There would be no change to current public use and wildlife management programs.

Alternative B: In addition to current hunting opportunities, open 14,800 acres on the east side to bear (no baiting), waterfowl, and upland game following state seasons. During and after the deer/firearms season open to deer/archery and deer/muzzleloader (state season) in the same areas open to deer/firearms. Hunter access will be more restrictive after the close of the deer firearms season.

Alternative C: Proposed action (\* outlined above) – Preferred Alternative.

**The preferred alternative was selected over the other alternatives because:**

1. The preferred alternative would promote a wildlife-oriented recreational opportunity, allow the public to harvest a renewable resource, meet public demand, allow the refuge to manage wildlife populations, increase awareness of Agassiz NWR and the National Wildlife Refuge System.
2. The preferred alternative is compatible with general Service policy regarding the establishment of hunting on National Wildlife Refuges.
3. The preferred alternative is compatible with the purpose for which Agassiz NWR was established.
4. This proposal does not initiate widespread controversy or litigation.
5. There are no conflicts with local, state, regional, or federal plans or policies.

**Implementation of the agency's decision would be expected to result in the following environmental, social, and economic effects:**

1. This would allow the public to harvest a renewable resource.
2. The public would have increased opportunity for wildlife-oriented recreation.
3. Local businesses would benefit from hunters visiting from surrounding counties.
4. The Service will be perceived as a good steward of the land by continuing traditional uses of land in Minnesota and by allowing youth an opportunity to learn about hunting.

**Measures to mitigate and/or minimize adverse effects have been incorporated into the proposal. These measures include:**

1. Youth deer hunt (2 day season in October) is located in an area not open to the general public at that time.
2. Youth waterfowl hunt (1 day season in September in MN at this time) is located in an area that has not been open to the public at this time; however, a new 'year round' hiking trail is being established in this area. Signs will be posted at the trail head warning users of hunting activity.
3. Opening the refuge to grouse, deer/archery and deer/muzzleloader (blackpowder) during and after the deer/firearms season in the same area open to deer/firearms occurs at a time when this area is not been open to the general public. The hunts occur at a time when most migratory birds, especially marsh and water birds have migrated out of the area. Disturbance to other wildlife will be minimal as hunter access will be greatly limited (primarily walk-in) and use is expected to be low. Also, the timing of these hunts (mid-November to end-December) should not interfere with fall prescribed burning goals. If conditions should be ideal for a prescribed burn during this time, ensuring hunter safety will come first.
4. The regional refuge law enforcement program and closely regulated hunting seasons will ensure hunt regulation compliance and will protect refuge resources.

**The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. Parties contacted include:**

- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Division of Ecological Services, Bloomington, MN
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Birds, Fort Snelling, MN
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division, Regional Office, Bemidji, MN and Area Wildlife Manager, Thief River Falls, MN
- Public Comments (EA Appendix)

**Copies of the Environmental Assessment are available by writing:**

Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge  
22996 290<sup>th</sup> St. NE  
Middle River, MN 56737

**Therefore, it is my determination that the proposal does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the National Environment Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an environmental impact statement is not required. This determination is based on the following factors (40 CFR 1508.27):**

1. **Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered and this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment (EA, pages 14-42).**
2. **The actions will not have a significant effect on public health and safety (EA 4.4.6, page 42; EA 4.4.7, page 42).**
3. **The project will not significantly effect any unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historical or cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (EA 4.1.1, page 15; EA 4.5.3.B, pages 63-64).**
4. **The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA 4.4.7, page 42; EA 4.5.3.B, pages 63-64).**
5. **The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment. (EA 1.6, page 4; EA 4.1.2, page 15).**
6. **The actions will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (EA 4.5.3. D, page 64).**
7. **There will be no cumulative significant impacts on the environment. Cumulative impacts have been analyzed with consideration of other similar activities on adjacent lands, in past action, and in foreseeable future actions (EA 4.5.3, pages 51-65).**
8. **The actions will not significantly affect any site listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places, nor will they cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (EA 4.4.1, page 15; EA 4.5.3.B, pages 63-64).**

