

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Activities on Portions of Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge as Described in the Hunting and Fishing Plan

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to allow hunting and fishing on Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Fishing and 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 fishing and hunting at any time if necessary for public safety, to provide wildlife sanctuary, or for other reasons. Alternatives considered included: proposed action, no action (refuge closed to fishing and hunting), and Day-Use Area closed to hunting.

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

Alternative A: proposed action – Hunting and Fishing and Public Access Plans would permit deer, turkey, and squirrel hunting and fishing in areas as described in the existing plans.

This alternative would allow fishing, and deer, turkey, and squirrel hunting on designated areas of Big Oaks NWR after determining that: 1) such activity is consistent with resource objectives and 2) biological monitoring programs on Big Oaks NWR or local Indiana Department Natural Resources properties provide adequate assurances the target species supports a harvestable surplus. Existing areas of Big Oaks NWR currently proposed under this alternative include the numbered areas within the day-use and hunting areas.

Hunting of squirrel, deer, and turkey would be conducted in accordance with all applicable state and federal regulations. Coordination with IDNR biologists will promote continuity and understanding of Service and state resource goals and objectives, and will help assure that the decision-making process takes into account all interests.

Fishing interests will concentrate on large and smallmouth bass, bluegill, and catfish at Old Timber's Lake and special event fishing on refuge ponds and streams. The number of boats on Old Timbers Lake would remain 25.

Alternative B: No Action – Hunting and Fishing would be closed and the Hunting and Fishing Plan and Public Access Plan would be revised to prohibit these activities.

Under this alternative, the refuge would become closed to hunting and fishing. Other uses would continue, such as wildlife viewing, photography, environmental education and interpretation.

Alternative C: The existing Hunting and Fishing and Public Access Plans would be amended to exclude hunting activities in the Day-Use Area.

The Day-Use Area would become closed to hunting under this alternative. This would allow other activities such as fishing, wildlife viewing, photography, environmental education, and interpretation to be unimpeded during refuge hunts in the Day-Use Area.

The preferred alternative was selected over the other alternatives because:

1. The preferred alternative would allow the refuge to manage wildlife populations, allow the public to harvest a renewable resource, promote a wildlife-oriented recreational opportunity, increase awareness of Big Oaks NWR and the National Wildlife Refuge System, and meet public demand.
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 Big Oaks 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. The refuge could better manage wildlife populations.
2. This would allow the public to harvest a renewable resource.
3. The public would have increased opportunity for wildlife-oriented recreation.
4. Local businesses would benefit from anglers and hunters visiting from surrounding counties and states.
5. The Service will be perceived as a good steward of the land by continuing traditional uses of land in Indiana and by allowing youth an opportunity to learn about fishing and hunting.

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

1. The Refuge Access Plan and Hunting and Fishing Plan will be followed
2. The refuge law enforcement program will ensure fishing and hunting regulation compliance and will protect refuge resources.

The proposal is not expected to have any significant adverse effects on wetlands and flood plains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988 because this area has

historically had a high use of recreational fishing and hunting with no detrimental long-term effect on wetlands.

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

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Ecological Services, Bloomington, IN
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife

Copies of the Environmental Assessment are available by writing:

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge
1661 W. JPG Niblo Rd
Madison, IN 47250

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):

(for each factor list the page numbers of the EA where the factor was discussed.)

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered and this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment (EA, pp 16-22). The actions will not have a significant effect on public health and safety (EA, pp 15).

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, pp 16-22).

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, pp 16-22).

5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, pp 16-22).

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, pages 28).

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, pages 22-29).

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, pages 16, 30).

9. The actions are not likely to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, or their habitats (Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation Form attached to EA).

10. The actions will not lead to a violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pages 29-30).

References: Environmental Assessment of Activities on Portions of Big Oaks NWR as described in the Hunting and Fishing Plan, Compatibility Determinations, Letter of Concurrence, Intra-Service Section 7 Evaluations

Regional Director

Date