

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

For the reasons presented below and based on an evaluation of the information contained in the supporting references, I have determined that implementation of the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge Waterfowl Hunt Plan is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. An Environmental Impact Statement will, accordingly, not be prepared.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to open a portion of the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to waterfowl hunting during Wisconsin's waterfowl season.

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

- No Action Alternative - No action would be taken by the Service to open Refuge lands to public use. This alternative would effectively close all lands to the public, except by special use permit.
- Compatible Public Uses, Including Hunting (Preferred Alternative) - Six wildlife-dependent uses are considered priority recreational uses for this Refuge: wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, interpretation, hunting and fishing. Waterfowl hunting would be allowed on Refuge lands east of Highway 13 as provided in the Interim Hunting Plan.
- Compatible Non-consumptive Public Use Alternative - This alternative would provide public use opportunities for the priority non-consumptive uses of wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation.

The preferred alternative was selected over the other alternatives because:

1. Priority wildlife-dependent recreation, including wildlife observation, hunting, fishing, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation will have minimal impact on the resources of the Refuge and are a positive result of the proper protection and management of wetland and stream systems.
2. Non-priority public uses of allowing pets and wild-food gathering will be allowed under adequate restrictions and monitoring to protect fish and wildlife resources on the refuge.
3. Public use of this Refuge will help build support for the Refuge and the Service's mission. The preferred alternative promotes wildlife-oriented recreational opportunities.
4. The preferred alternative is compatible with general Service policy regarding the establishment of hunting on National Wildlife Refuges.
5. The preferred alternative is compatible with the purpose for which Whittlesey Creek NWR was established.
6. There are no conflicts with local, state, regional, or federal plans or policies.
7. The proposed waterfowl hunt is limited to Refuge lands east of Highway 13, which includes less than 25 percent of lands within the Refuge boundary. Hunters will follow Wisconsin's state regulations.

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

1. The Service's ability to reach its fish and wildlife population goals would not be negatively affected.
2. The preferred alternative would not affect the Service's ability to reach habitat goals established for the Refuge.
3. Disturbance to migratory birds during the waterfowl hunting season would be minor and would take place on less than 25 percent of the Refuge.
4. The project area is within the range of 3 federally listed threatened species. No activity will occur that will adversely affect any federally listed threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat.
5. There are no cultural or historic resource effects.
6. Cumulative impacts to flyway waterfowl populations will be insignificant.
7. Potential user conflicts will be managed by the Service as much as possible by properly placing access points, trails and closing appropriate areas when necessary.
8. The economic impact of the preferred alternative on the local community would be minimal.

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

1. Potential conflicts between current and future uses will be minimized by properly placing access points, trails and closing appropriate areas when necessary.
2. No baiting is allowed on any Refuge lands.
3. No live vegetation can be used to construct blinds, nor can any live vegetation be removed without a special use permit.
4. No hunting will be allowed on or near the Coaster Classroom site. No hunting will be allowed within a 200 yard buffer of Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center lands.

The proposal is not expected to have any significant adverse effects on wetlands and flood plains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988 because of the same reasons mentioned immediately above.

The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties.

Parties contacted for the initial environmental assessment in 2001 included:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ecological Services office in Green Bay, Wisconsin; Refuge Division in the Regional Office, Ft. Snelling, Minnesota; and Ashland Fishery Resources Office in Ashland, Wisconsin.
- Private and public landowners within the Whittlesey Creek watershed.
- Partners of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Ashland office.
- Whittlesey Habitat Coalition.
- The general public through ads and newspaper articles.

Further communication and coordination took place in 2007, to include:

- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish & Wildlife.
- General public through ads in local newspapers.

Copies of the Environmental Assessment are available by writing:

Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge
29270 County Highway G
Ashland, WI 54806

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):

(each factor lists 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, page 43).**
- 2. The actions will not have a significant effect on public health and safety (EA, pages 36-40).**
- 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, page 37).**
- 4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, Appendices A through E, G and H).**
- 5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, pages 32-40).**
- 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 38-40).**
- 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 38-40).**
- 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, page 37).**
- 9. The actions are not likely to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, or their habitats (EA page 36).**
- 10. The actions will not lead to a violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, page 13).**

References: Environmental Assessment for the Public Use Plan, Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge; Waterfowl Hunting Plan, Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Compatibility Determination, Letters of Concurrence, Refuge-specific Regulations, Intra-Service Section 7 Evaluation.

Regional Director

Date