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 Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge 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 Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to limited hunting for a Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day, and open the whole refuge to white-tailed deer hunting with muzzleloaders during Minnesota's muzzleloader season.

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

- Opening 40% of the Hamden Slough NWR for hunting on Youth Waterfowl Day, and opening the entire Refuge for deer hunting during the muzzleloader deer season – the Proposed Action;
- Leaving the Refuge closed to hunting – the No Action Alternative;
- Harvesting deer by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) personnel, for any necessary depredation control;
- Open all of the refuge to big game, small game and upland game hunting seasons, in accordance with the State of Minnesota regulations; and permitting migratory game bird hunting on 40% of refuge property during the state waterfowl seasons.

The preferred alternative was selected over the other alternatives because:

1. The preferred alternative would allow the Hamden Slough NWR to manage wildlife populations, allow the public to harvest a renewable resource, promote a wildlife-oriented recreational opportunity, increase awareness of Hamden Slough 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 Hamden Slough NWR was established.
4. There are no conflicts with local, state, regional, or federal plans or policies.
5. The proposed hunting dates are limited to a single day during the fall bird migration for waterfowl hunting in September, and to a 15 day period for deer muzzleloader hunting, after the fall bird migration is complete, in late November and early December.
6. The proposed numbers of hunters are limited to youth, 15 years of age and under, for waterfowl; and to only muzzleloader hunters for deer.

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

1. The Hamden Slough NWR deer harvest can help reduce depredation impacts caused by white-tailed deer.

2. Short-term, temporary disturbance to migratory birds, especially waterfowl, for one day on 40% of the Refuge.
3. 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.
4. There are no cultural or historic resource effects.
5. Cumulative impacts to flyway waterfowl populations will be insignificant.
6. Cumulative impacts to white-tailed deer populations in surrounding deer management units will be miniscule.

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

1. Access will be by walking or non-motorized boats only; no motorized vehicle use will be allowed.
2. The Youth Waterfowl Hunt will be one-day in September and the Muzzleloader Hunt will be late November to early December, eliminating conflicts between waterfowl and deer hunters.
3. Conflicts with other users would be minimized to one day during the fall migration season. Most other public use is minimal during muzzleloader season since wetlands are frozen, thus minimizing public use conflicts between hunters and non-hunters.

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 comments in 2005 include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Twin Cities Ecological Resources Field Office, Bloomington, Minnesota
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish & Wildlife.
- White Earth Reservation, Wildlife Department.

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

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 3 Division of Migratory Birds, Ft. Snelling, Minnesota
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish & Wildlife.

Cumulative impact evaluation of waterfowl populations for the entire flyway was coordinated with Service flyway biologists. These biologists concurred with our findings.

Cumulative impact of white-tailed deer populations included data evaluation of deer management units within and surrounding the Hamden Slough NWR. The analysis was provided to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, who concurred with our findings.

Copies of the Environmental Assessment are available by writing:

Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge
26624 North Tower Road
Detroit Lakes, MN 56501

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, pages 15-16)**

2. **The actions will not have a significant effect on public health and safety (EA, pages 31-34).**

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, pages 16 and 32).**

4. **The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, page 36).**

5. **The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, pages 31-34).**

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, page 34).**

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 16-35).**

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 and 32).**

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, and EA page 31).**

10. **The actions will not lead to a violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pages 15, 22-23, 26, 31, 32, 35-36).**

References: Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Hunting Plan, Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge, Becker County, Minnesota; Hunting Plan, Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge, Compatibility Determination, Letters of Concurrence, Refuge-specific Regulations, Intra-Service Section 7 Evaluation.

_____ _____

Regional Director Date