

Hunting Plan
Decision Document Package
for
Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR

Contents

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Hunting Plan for Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to open to most fee title properties of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR to the hunting of migratory game birds, uplands game and big game. Hunting activities will be permitted, in accordance with the hunting seasons and regulations set by the States of Minnesota and Iowa, after the following determinations are made for each unit:

- 1) The unit is large enough to support the anticipated quantity, frequency, and duration of hunter use without adversely affecting game populations or habitat conditions within the area;
- 2) Public access to the unit does not require travel across private lands or closed government lands;
- 3) Sites are available for hunters to park their vehicles legally and in a manner that will not adversely affect the habitat in the unit or existing public travel routes;
- 4) Public hunting will not have adverse effects on any federally listed or proposed species of concern; and
- 5) Hunting can be conducted without jeopardizing public safety.

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

No action alternative - Under this alternative, hunting would not be allowed on fee title units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR.

Proposed action Under this alternative, migratory game bird, upland game, and big game hunting would be allowed on most fee title units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR.

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 Northern Tallgrass Prairie 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 Northern Tallgrass Prairie 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. Provide the public with safe and enjoyable hunts that are compatible with the Refuge purpose.
2. Provide quality hunting opportunities that minimize conflict with other public use activities.
3. Provide the public with opportunities to hunt migratory game birds, upland game and big game species that are consistent with the states of Minnesota and Iowa, that don't adversely affect localized wildlife populations, and are consistent with the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act.
4. Promote a better understanding and appreciation of tallgrass prairie habitats and their associated fish and wildlife resources.

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

The onsite manager, after consulting with the Project Leader, may establish specific regulations for an individual unit to ensure the above requirements are met. Certain units or portions of units may remain closed or be periodically closed to hunting if the onsite manager determines that there are specific habitat, wildlife protection, and/or public safety needs that require establishing sanctuary areas.

Hunting would be conducted in accordance with all applicable state and federal regulations. Coordination with Minnesota and Iowa DNR 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.

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 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:

- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Copies of the Environmental Assessment are available by writing:

Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR
c/o Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge
44843 County Road 19
Odessa, MN 56276

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, pages 16-20) 2. The actions will not have a significant effect on public health and safety (EA, pages 13-14).**
- 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, 38).**
- 4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, pages 16, 38).**
- 5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, page 16, 38).**
- 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 16, 37).**
- 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 14-39).**
- 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 13, 36).**
- 9. The actions are not likely to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, or their habitats (15, 20)**
- 10. The actions will not lead to a violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pages 41).**

References: Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Hunting Plan, Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Minnesota and Iowa.

Regional Director

Date