

Archery White-tailed Deer Hunting Revised Supplement to the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge Environmental Assessment For Public Use Plan

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Purpose and Need	1
Preferred Alternative.....	2
Detailed Description of Supplemental Proposed Action	3
Affected Environment.....	4
Landscape of Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge.....	4
Vegetation.....	5
Hydrology	6
Fish and Wildlife.....	6
Cultural Resources	7
Public Use.....	8
Habitat Management and Restoration.....	8
Environmental Consequences.....	9
Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of Proposed Action on Wildlife Species	9
Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of Proposed Action on Refuge Programs, Facilities and Cultural Resources	11
Anticipated Impacts of Proposed Action on Refuge Environment and Community	11
Other Past, Present, Proposed, and Reasonably Foreseeable Hunts and Anticipated Impacts.	12
Anticipated Impacts if Individual Hunts are Allowed to Accumulate.....	13
References.....	14
Public Involvement and Comments Received:.....	15

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this Supplement is to clarify actions that will be taken under the selected alternative for the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan. A Public Use Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was prepared by Refuge staff and approved by the Regional Director on August 6, 2001. The public use plan and EA outline six wildlife-dependent uses that are priority for the Refuge: wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, interpretation, hunting and fishing. The preferred alternative stated “because of the small size of the Refuge, the few lands that have been acquired, and the proximity of residences, the Service will consider opening appropriate lands to waterfowl hunting and evaluate other hunting opportunities as additional lands are acquired”. Over 100 additional acres have been acquired by the Service since 2001 so we are proposing to open Refuge lands to archery deer hunting (Figure 1). This

supplement describes the proposal to allow archery deer hunting and the related environmental consequences.

Preferred Alternative

The preferred and selected alternative presented in the Environmental Assessment to the Whittlesey Creek Public Use Plan, relating to hunting and access, is as follows:

“2.4.2 Alternative 2 - Compatible Public Uses, Including Hunting (Preferred Alternative)

The general philosophy for public use on the Refuge would be: “Everything the Service does in relation to the Refuge (management, restoration, public uses, monitoring, research) will be viewed as an opportunity to provide public participation and teach/encourage environmental stewardship. Programs and activities will be developed to create in our visitors:

- Awareness and ecological understanding of the Refuge and adjacent landscape
- Knowledge of how humans affect the natural system
- Understanding of the value of habitat for fish and wildlife
- Recognition of fish and wildlife values in general.”

Six wildlife-dependent uses are considered priority recreational uses for this Refuge: wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, interpretation, hunting and fishing. In addition, research is considered a priority use, but is not public/recreational use. Use guidelines under this alternative are described below.

Hunting:

Guidelines for hunting on Refuge lands would be limited to waterfowl hunting for this alternative. The Service would consider providing hunting opportunities for upland birds, deer and other species on Refuge lands once additional properties are acquired and the Service understands public needs and evaluates safety issues.

An Interim Waterfowl Hunting Plan would be developed for the Refuge. In general, the Service would follow all regulations of the State of Wisconsin on lands it owns. The following interim guidelines would be followed.

General

Hunters would be required to follow all state laws and regulations. This includes no shooting within 100 yards of a residence without permission of the resident. The Service does not allow baiting on any refuge system lands, so baiting would not be allowed on the Refuge.

Ground or elevated blinds may be used if they do not damage live vegetation and are completely removed from the property each day at the close of the hunting hours. Ground blinds may be constructed entirely of dead vegetation found on the property.

Nontoxic shot is required for all shotgun use on the Refuge. A no-hunting buffer on lands the Service owns adjacent to the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center would be established for visitor safety needs.

Waterfowl Hunting

Waterfowl hunting would be allowed on Refuge lands east of Highway 13 as provided in the Interim Hunting Plan. The Service would not limit use unless high demand creates safety concerns. Most waterfowl hunters respect spacing needs between hunters and blinds and would be self-regulating. Most waterfowl hunting in the proposed Refuge currently takes place along and near the Lake Superior shore.

Orientation and Access to the Refuge:

A clear system of welcome and orientation signs would allow visitors to know where to go, what recreation, interpretation, and educational opportunities are available, any limits on uses, and how to make the best use of their time while visiting the Refuge. Physical developments to accommodate public use and enjoyment of the Refuge would initially be limited to small parking areas and informational and educational signs. The Service would construct short hiking trails and wildlife observation areas. All facilities developed would be accessible to people with disabilities. Generally, lands would be open during daylight hours. All use on the Refuge would be non-motorized, except on public roads and the existing snowmobile trail.”

Detailed Description of Supplemental Proposed Action

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposes to open lands owned by the Service (Service) within the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) to public hunting of white-tailed deer by archery hunters. Hunters will be required to follow all Federal and State laws and regulations for archery deer hunting.

Refuge-specific Hunting Regulations

- Archery deer hunting will be allowed to take place on Refuge lands owned by the Service that constitute tracts greater than 20 acres.
- No hunting will be allowed within a designated, signed area around the Coaster Classroom and visitor center boardwalk.
- The construction or use of permanent blinds or platforms is not permitted.
- Ground blinds or any elevated stands may be used only if they do not damage live vegetation, including trees. Note: The cutting of shooting lanes and use of screw-in tree-stands or steps are considered damaging.
- Ground blinds may be constructed entirely of dead vegetation found on the property.
- All stands and blinds must be completely removed from the Refuge each day at the close of hunting hours.
- Motorized vehicles are allowed only on public roads and parking areas.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Regulations that apply to all hunting on refuges are found in 50 CFR §32.2 (*Code of Federal Regulations* under section “What are the requirements for

hunting on areas of the National Wildlife System?”). Subpart B of these regulations further describe any individual refuge-specific regulations.

Archery hunters will be encouraged to check-in at Refuge headquarters, but no Refuge-specific permit will be required or issued. Tagging of harvested deer must follow state regulations, but the Service will request that hunters notify us of harvested deer.

We will encourage hunters to come to Refuge headquarters before they hunt to receive a packet of information about the archery hunt. The Service will provide annual information about where archery deer hunting is allowed each year through maps and flyers that will be available at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center (Refuge headquarters) or on the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge web page. No other orientation or pre-hunt scouting will be provided by staff. Hunters are encouraged and welcome to scout Refuge lands during daylight hours before hunting.

The Service does not anticipate a large demand to hunt Refuge lands. There are several hundred thousand acres of federal and county forest lands available for archery hunting within 30 miles of the Refuge. We expect that most hunters will be nearby neighbors and landowners who own land within the Refuge boundary.

Affected Environment

Landscape of Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge

The Refuge is located in the coastal area of Lake Superior at the mouth of Whittlesey Creek, which is part of a large wetland complex that extends from just north of the mouth of Whittlesey Creek to the west edge of the City of Ashland, Wisconsin (Figure 1). This coastal wetland complex is a significant part of the wildlife habitat and aquatic resources of Chequamegon Bay. The area is used by many fish and wildlife species and is an important area for migrating birds.

The fee title acquisition area of the Refuge is 540 acres. To date, about 230 acres have been acquired by the Service. In addition, the Service is authorized to acquire up to 1200 acres of conservation easements in the watershed. To date, 40 acres of easements have been acquired.

The Refuge also encompasses the mouth of Whittlesey Creek, so it is located at the downstream end of the Whittlesey Creek watershed. The Whittlesey Creek Priority Watershed Project plan provided a description of the watershed (Gardner and Malischke 1996). The Whittlesey watershed, including both groundwater and surface water drainages, covers 18 square miles. Characteristics include:

- Land uses in the watershed are agriculture and forest related. The area is dotted with farms and rural dwellings.
- Public lands within the watershed include about 7,600 acres within the Chequamegon National Forest boundary.
- Land-use within the drainage is composed of 50% National Forest, 14% agricultural land, and the remaining 36% are natural areas such as wetlands, woodlots, and small rural plots.

- Although there has been a decline in the number of operations, agriculture is still an important land use in the watershed.
- Whittlesey Creek currently has good water quality and is classified by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as an outstanding resource water.
- The stream is a class I trout water supporting both salmonid and non-salmonid fish species. It is also a regionally important spawning area for anadromous trout and salmon from Lake Superior.

Vegetation

Current habitat cover types and their acreages of the Refuge are shown in the following table. The habitat types listed follow the National Vegetation Classification System (Federal Geographic Data Committee 1997), which is still in draft form for Wisconsin.

Table 1. Existing vegetation within 540 Refuge boundary

Vegetation Type	Acres
Black Ash-Red Maple saturated forest	126
Green Ash-American Elm temporarily flooded forest	25
Trembling Aspen temporarily flooded cold-deciduous forest	3.5
Trembling Aspen-Paper Birch forest	45
White Pine forest	3
White Cedar saturated forest	7
Canada Blue-joint seasonally flooded herbaceous cover	156
Alder-dominated seasonally flooded shrubland	37
Hayland	93
Plantation – pine	1.5
Sedge saturated meadow	3
Homesites – old	1
Homesites - existing	38

The saturated and seasonally flooded lands within the Whittlesey Creek NWR receive water from both overland flow and groundwater seeps. Where the groundwater is close to the surface, these lands will remain saturated near or at the surface most of the year. Shrubby wetlands and forested wetlands are a result of these conditions. These saturated conditions are prevalent near Lake Superior, at floodplains between the creeks and along Terwilliger Creek.

Land use within the Refuge boundary was mostly farmland in the 1930's. Since then, most of the farmland has been abandoned and has regrown with water-tolerant trees and shrubs such as willows, white cedar, black ash and speckled alder (*Alnus rugosa*). Currently, about 60 acres remain as hayland or pastureland. Reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) dominates many old hayfields, especially where golf course construction was initiated.

Fish and wildlife habitats in the Refuge have been altered substantially by human use. Both bottom land forest and sedge meadow were converted for agricultural use earlier this century. Portions were altered further for construction of a golf course. Four non-vegetated ponds were created during construction of the golf course and nonnative grasses and conifers were introduced. Changes in water regime as well as past land use have changed wetland vegetation; most of the low-lying acres are dominated by reed canary grass, a non-native invasive wetland plant. Some wet meadow acres, especially those that have been left unused for a decade or more, are regrowing to shrubs such as willow and alder, and might eventually regrow to lowland swamp with black ash and cedar.

Hydrology

The Whittlesey Creek watershed covers approximately 12,000 acres when one includes both surface groundwater recharge and surface water contributing areas. The groundwater recharge portion of the watershed is found to the west in the upper reaches, which have deep sand deposits. Most of this portion of the watershed is contained in the Chequamegon-Nicollet National Forest. This area moves surface water through a thick layer of sand (up 400 feet deep) that discharges into Whittlesey Creek at various points. This system provides year-round base flow to Whittlesey Creek about 18 cubic feet per second (cfs).

The surface water contributing area is approximately 4,700 acres, which includes Whittlesey Creek, the North Fork of Whittlesey Creek, and numerous small tributaries that enter both. The elevation of the surface water contributing area changes from 1,100 feet mean sea level (msl) at the upper end, to about 600 feet msl at Lake Superior. Soils of the surface water area are dominated by heavy clays, which along with relatively steep terrain, gives rain and snowmelt little chance to infiltrate. The result is a very flashy stream that peaks quickly within 24 hours of a large rainfall or snowmelt.

In 1949, the Army Corps of Engineers dredged 4,500 feet of the Whittlesey Creek stream channel in an effort to dewater and stabilize the floodplain. Meanders were removed and a straight channel was constructed from Highway 13 to Lake Superior. In 1958, the channel was redirected toward its natural mouth because sand deposits had filled the dredged channel. Effects of this channelization are still seen today, with much of the lower end of Whittlesey Creek experiencing accretion from sediment build-up and an unstable hydrology.

Fish and Wildlife

Fish - A species list compiled from information gathered by the Wisconsin DNR and Service's Sea Lamprey Management identified 21 species of fish, including seven salmonid species found in Whittlesey Creek. Whittlesey Creek supports a recreational fishery, primarily for brook trout and rainbow trout. It is also an important spawning stream for the naturalized coho salmon.

The Service and the Wisconsin DNR are conducting an experimental rehabilitation program for coaster brook trout in Whittlesey Creek. The experiment includes a stocking plan over seven years; the first stocking took place in 2003 and will continue each year until 2009.

Habitat degradation within Whittlesey Creek has lowered the productive capacity of this stream, particularly for brook trout. Substrate suitable for spawning and woody debris important as

rearing habitat and for aquatic insect production have been degraded by high flows which erode stream banks, remove woody debris, and redeposit coarse materials in unsuitable areas. As the water level recedes, sedimentation results.

Birds – Two hundred twenty six bird species have been identified in the area, including waterfowl, neotropical migrants, raptors, grassland and shore birds. The wetlands, woodlands and agricultural grasslands within the watershed provide resting and breeding habitat for migratory birds.

Mammals – Over 50 mammals have been noted in the area of and surrounding the Refuge. Mammals that are notable for northern Wisconsin include black bear, gray wolf and fisher.

We do not have Refuge-specific population information on state-managed white-tailed deer. However, the Wisconsin DNR estimates the 2006 post-hunt, white-tailed deer population for Deer Management Unit 3 (see deer zone map, Figure 2) to be 27 deer per square mile. The population density varies, with high populations in the upper part of the watershed. The summer population increases by 35 to 40 percent with fawn recruitment (personal communication with Todd Naas, Wildlife Biologist with the Wisconsin DNR). From the period of record from 1997-2006, the average density within Deer Management Unit 3 is 105% over the Wisconsin DNR goal of 10 to 16 deer mile².

Reptiles and Amphibians – Fifteen reptiles and 10 amphibians have been noted from the region. The wood turtle is listed as state threatened. Although there is suitable habitat present in Whittlesey Creek, its presence has not been documented.

Federally Threatened and Endangered Species - Four federally listed threatened and endangered species occur in the Lake Superior region of northern Wisconsin: the bald eagle, gray wolf, Canada lynx and piping plover. Bald eagles nests within a couple miles of the Refuge and use the Refuge and surrounding wetlands as a food source. There are no eagle nests on the Refuge. Numerous sightings of gray wolf have been made in and near the Refuge. Occasional sightings of piping plovers have been made near the mouth of Whittlesey Creek during migration. Piping plovers have recently nested on select beaches of the Apostle Islands. There have been no Canada lynx sighted in or near the Refuge.

Cultural Resources

Twenty two properties in Bayfield County had been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. None of the properties are located within the boundaries of the proposed Refuge or within Barksdale Township. There were thirteen buildings or farmstead complexes within the proposed boundary when it was established. Eight of these have been removed once the Service acquired them. One of the homes remaining may have been the home of Asaph Whittlesey, founder of Ashland, Wisconsin, in 1860, and after whom Whittlesey Creek was named. Also within the proposed boundaries could be the site of the cabin built by Pierre Esprit Radisson in 1664 (Adams 1961 and Vestal 1940). The Refuge Manager considers potential impacts of proposed management activities on historic properties, archeological sites, traditional cultural properties, sacred sites, human remains and cultural materials.

Public Use

The Whittlesey Creek NWR is open to wildlife-dependent public uses, including wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, interpretation, waterfowl hunting (east of Hwy. 13) and fishing. The Refuge's headquarters and point of contact for visitors is the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, which is located immediately south of the Refuge. In 2004, 160,000 visitors came to the Visitor Center, where they can access refuge information and view the Whittlesey Creek exhibit, along with many other Great Lakes' exhibits. The Service also provides interpretive and education programs at the Visitor Center in cooperation with Center partners.

A three-season environmental education shelter with accessible trails and parking is the only visitor facility on the Refuge. The Public Use Plan recommends that additional parking and trail facilities be built as lands are acquired and funds are available. The specific locations of these facilities are not yet known, but they must be compatible with habitat restoration plans. No section of the Refuge is closed to the public, so visitors can walk anywhere on Refuge lands owned by the Service. Motorized vehicle use is prohibited except on public roads.

Habitat Management and Restoration

Refuge staff have initiated management activities, including reforestation and wetland restoration. The Refuge Habitat Management Plan guides future habitat restoration work in floodplains, wetlands, streams and uplands (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2006). Staff will follow goals established for the Refuge and modified for the Habitat Management Plan:

- Restore watershed and stream hydrologic functions that improve fish and wildlife habitat within the stream and the Refuge, with an emphasis on native species.
- Plan and implement a project to reintroduce coaster brook trout, under the guidance of the Lake Superior Brook Trout Rehabilitation Plan (Newman et al. 1999).
- Contribute to the restoration of natural species diversity of migratory birds that use coastal wetlands and stream floodplain habitats.
- Reduce sediment loads into Whittlesey Creek to historic (pre-European settlement) range of variability.
- Restore to the extent possible historical hydrologic conditions in the coastal wetlands and floodplains of the Refuge.
- Manage for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses, including environmental education, hunting, fishing, wildlife-viewing, and demonstrating restoration and management techniques.
- Conduct all management activities with an ecosystem approach in cooperation with agencies that manage adjacent and nearby lands and facilities.

Restoration and management objectives and strategies focus on resources of concern, mostly habitat for coaster brook trout and migratory birds.

Environmental Consequences

The annual impacts caused from public use in general are described in detail in the document: "Environmental Assessment for the Public Use Plan, Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge Bayfield County, Wisconsin" dated April 6, 2001. The impacts from the proposed archery deer hunt are specified in the remainder of this section.

Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of Proposed Action on Wildlife Species

Resident Wildlife

The 2005 post-harvest population estimate for the Deer Management Unit 3 (DMU 3), which includes the Refuge is 14,400 deer (26 deer per square mile) (Dhuey 2006). The 2006 post-harvest population estimate for DMU 3 is 14,985 (27 deer per square mile). The Wisconsin DNR's unit 3 goal is 8,880 (16 deer per square mile) (Rolley 2006). Summer population estimates are 30 to 40 percent higher with fawn recruitment. Deer hunting alone will not provide the management needed to reach the population goal in DMU 3. Periodic severe winters help keep the population in closer to goal.

The 6-year average (2001-2006) total harvest in DMU 3 is 3,571 deer (2,128-4,473), or approximately 6.4 deer per square mile. Harvest is similar in DMU 6 which is immediately adjacent to DMU 3. For this 6-year period, average annual harvest in DMU 6 was 3,328 deer. During this same period, the archery harvest in DMU 3 accounted for approximately 14% of the harvest (7.8-18.3%). The average archery harvest within DMU 6 was 657 which accounted for 19.7% of the total harvest. To estimate the expected archery harvest from the Refuge, we selected the highest total harvest level (4,473) during this period within DMU 3, and the highest archery harvest success (18.3%). In this high harvest rate scenario within DMU 3, the estimated deer harvest from archers would be 819 or 1.5 deer mi². Extrapolating this harvest to the Refuge, it is estimated the archery harvest within the 225 acre Refuge is 0.5 deer per year.

It is likely that the Refuge will receive a higher density of hunters and a slightly larger harvest than the averages noted above, simply because it is public lands. However, there are hundreds of thousands of acres of federal, state and county forests lands in Bayfield County, so hunters can readily disburse, especially during archery season. In addition, hunters cannot bait on Refuge lands, but they can on all other public forest lands, so public forest lands are much more popular for archery hunting.

Average annual deer harvests from DMU 3 and 6 are 3,571 and 3,328 respectively and less than 20% of this harvest is attributed to archery. Archery deer hunting will have a minimal effect on the deer population in both the Refuge and within deer management unit 3.

Direct or indirect impact to other resident wildlife, such as ruffed grouse, cottontail and snowshoe hare, pine marten, black bear, beaver, muskrat and mink, would be non-existent or minimal.

Migratory Birds

No migratory birds will be directly affected by this proposed hunt. The only indirect effect would be disturbance by feeding or resting birds when hunters walk into and out of their stands. This disturbance will have no greater or lesser effect than other public uses have on migratory birds, such as wildlife viewing and wildlife photography.

Endangered Species

We have evaluated the effects of the proposed action to federally-listed threatened and endangered species in accordance to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. A synopsis of the consultation follows.

Piping Plover:

The piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is listed as endangered in Wisconsin. It nests on bare shoreline adjacent to water. It is known to nest on Lake Superior shoreline in a few locations, including Long Island in the Chequamegon Bay, as recently as 2005. There are no records of nesting pairs on or in the immediate vicinity of the Refuge and the shoreline habitat of the Refuge is not adequate for piping plover. Piping plovers are occasionally spotted in the Bay during spring migration (Verch 1999) and have been seen near the Whittlesey Creek mouth during migration (Ryan Brady, personal communication, Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, Ashland, WI). A threat to piping plovers that nest on Lake Superior is disturbance by people who use the shoreline for recreation. Because piping plovers are not present within the area during the archery season, the hunt would have no adverse effect on piping plovers.

Bald Eagle:

The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is listed as threatened in Wisconsin. A proposal to delist the species from the Endangered Species list is currently being reviewed. Bald eagles nest along the Lake Superior shoreline, including the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore as well as on inland lakes in northern Wisconsin. The nearest recorded nest site is about two miles from the Refuge boundary (Joel Trick, personal communication, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Green Bay, WI). Eagles are frequent visitors to the Refuge and surrounding area, but there are none that currently nest within or adjacent to the Refuge lands. Bald eagles are sensitive to human disturbance during critical times of the nesting season, especially during nest initiation in February. Archery deer hunting will take place in the fall when eagles are migrating or searching for food. Archery hunting would have no adverse effect on bald eagles.

Canada Lynx:

This species is listed as threatened in Wisconsin. It is occasionally found in the northern forest areas of the state. Bayfield and Ashland counties are included in the list of counties with the highest likelihood of occurrence, but lynx are considered to be very rare in Wisconsin, with only a few records in the state in the past 20 years (Joel Trick, personal communication, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Green Bay, WI). Reasons for decline include changes in habitat that are detrimental to their prey (showshoe hare); and increase in roads, which provide increased access for trappers, and competitors such as coyotes and bobcats. They have not been sighted in the Refuge. Archery hunting would have no adverse

effect on Canada lynx.

Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of Proposed Action on Refuge Programs, Facilities and Cultural Resources

Refuge Facilities and User Conflicts

Conflicts could occur between non-consumptive users and archery hunters, especially in September and early October, when visitation remains high at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and in the Coaster Classroom. The Service will manage public use to avoid conflicts as much as possible by prohibiting archery hunting within a buffer near the Visitor Center's boardwalk and around the Refuge's Coaster Classroom site.

Archery hunters are very inconspicuous and will shoot a deer only when it is within about 30 yards or less. Their mode of hunting minimizes user conflicts. However, other users could disrupt the experience for a hunter when they are not aware that the hunter is in her/her blind/stand. We are not proposing to control these situations; hunters will have to accept the potential for interference from other users.

Cultural Resources

Archery deer hunting will require no habitat or soil disturbance. The proposed action would not impact cultural resources.

Anticipated Impacts of Proposed Action on Refuge Environment and Community

Refuge Natural Environment

Archery deer hunters are not allowed to impact live vegetation according to proposed regulations. If we find that archery hunters are not following this regulation, we will likely close archery hunting.

Hunters are not allowed to bait, which helps safeguard the spread of invasive species that could be associated with bait.

Deer browsing affects many of the Refuge's native plants' ability to grow and sustain themselves. Most strongly affected are trees and shrubs. A habitat restoration objective within the Refuge is to restore riparian and floodplain forests. Deer browsing affects our ability to grow trees. We do not expect that the number of deer harvested will have a significant effect on slowing deer browsing. However, we expect a small reduction in browsing impacts.

The proposed action should not affect the Refuge's habitat or the Services ability to restore and manage habitat.

The proposed action would have no effect on the Refuge's water quality, air quality or soils.

Impact on Adjacent Lands and Nearby Residents

Refuge lands are adjacent to private lands as well as those held in public trust. The U.S. Forest Service manages lands of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, which is immediately south of Refuge lands (Figure 1). Some private landowners hunt and some do not. There is no hunting on Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center lands.

It is possible that hunters would trespass on private lands when accessing their deer hunting blind or when tracking a wounded deer. However, without the expressed or implied consent of that landowner, this is illegal. We will attempt to minimize boundary confusion and clarify Refuge rules by requesting that all archery hunters obtain a packet of information at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center. The packet will contain the most recent Refuge map that delineates archery hunt areas, Refuge specific rules and a harvest survey. Several private landowners previously hunted this land and are interested in continuing to hunt it once the land is reopened for hunting.

Impacts to visitors at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center will be minimized by designating a no-hunting buffer between the Refuge and Visitor Center lands.

Economic Impacts

The economic impact of the proposed action on the Refuge and local community should be minimal. We anticipate that most hunters will be local, so there will be few tourism dollars brought into the community. The Refuge staff will be required to spend additional time to produce hunter information and analyze survey data, but there will be no negative economic impact on the Refuge.

Other Past, Present, Proposed, and Reasonably Foreseeable Hunts and Anticipated Impacts

The Refuge's 2001 Public Use Plan and Environmental Assessment laid the framework for hunting on the Refuge:

“Hunting provides the public with wildlife-oriented recreation opportunities. Refuge policies and programs will be developed to provide visitors with a high-quality hunting experience. Recreation and environmental education will be joined with hunter skills education programs designed to assist the hunting public in the development of safe and effective hunting skills and environmental stewardship values.”

“Guidelines for hunting on Refuge lands will be limited to waterfowl hunting for this plan version. The Service intends to provide hunting opportunities for upland birds, deer and other species on Refuge lands once additional properties are acquired and the Service understands public needs and evaluates safety issues.”

Waterfowl hunting was open on Refuge lands along Lake Superior in 2003. This proposed action would provide deer archery hunting in the fall of 2007 and beyond. No other hunting is currently allowed on Refuge lands.

Pam Dryer, Refuge Manager, has discussed deer gun hunting with adjacent landowners and most are in favor of opening Refuge lands to shotgun slug deer hunting. The Service will continue to evaluate the possibility of shotgun slug hunting. Implementation of this hunt would not occur sooner than the 2008 season. Shotgun slug hunting is allowed statewide during regular gun season. Implementation of shotgun-only hunt within the Refuge during the gun season likely would result in a larger number of deer harvested than archery hunting. If we identify concerns for excess harvest or hunter and resident safety, we would consider issuing limited number of permits for shotgun slug hunting. Additional deer harvested through a shotgun-only hunt will likely reduce deer browsing and improve tree establishment.

The Service has no plans to open the Refuge to small game hunting within the next five years, but it may be available within the next 10 years. This determination will occur after most of our forest restoration plantings are done and established to maximize restoration success.

The following policy guides all hunting on Whittlesey Creek NWR lands:

Hunters will be required to follow all State laws and regulations. This includes no shooting within 100 yards of a residence without permission of the resident. The Service does not allow baiting on any refuge system lands, so baiting will not be allowed on the Refuge.

Ground or elevated blinds may be used if they do not damage live vegetation and are completely removed from the property each day at the close of the hunting hours. Ground blinds may be constructed entirely of dead vegetation from on the property.

Non-toxic shot is required for all shotgun use on the Refuge.

A no-hunting buffer of about 200 yards will be in place on Service-owned lands adjacent to the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center to ensure visitor safety needs.

This policy helps minimize impacts to the environment and users of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center.

Anticipated Impacts if Individual Hunts are Allowed to Accumulate

Impacts to Wildlife and Habitat

Deer archery hunting will have minimal impacts to the deer population, and therefore to their habitat. Deer browsing impacts may be reduced slightly, but will not diminish significantly with archery hunting.

Shotgun slug hunting, if allowed in the future, would result in more deer harvested on Refuge lands. The six-year average of deer harvested from gun hunting in deer management unit 3 is 5.5 deer per square mile. If we extrapolate 5.5 deer per square mile to 225 acres of Refuge lands, we would anticipate about 2.3 deer harvested per year, at current population levels, within Refuge lands from gun hunting. This harvest would have little impact in helping the Wisconsin DNR meet their deer management goals. Deer browsing impacts to trees and shrubs within the Refuge, however, would likely diminish.

Small game hunting, if allowed, could result in a local population fluctuation for rabbit, squirrels and ruffed grouse, but we currently have no local population information, so we cannot currently measure effects. The Service would follow state regulations for daily and possession bag limits. The cumulative impact of allowing the archery hunt, and the likely scenario of adding small game and gun-deer in the future is insignificant when considering the adequacy of the Wisconsin DNR's population management strategy throughout Wisconsin.

Impacts to Users

If deer archery, deer gun and small game hunting are all allowed on the Refuge, Refuge user conflicts will likely increase. We anticipate that most hunters respect spacing needs between hunters and blinds and will essentially self-regulate themselves. However, user conflicts might occur between wildlife observers, photographers and hunters.

To minimize conflicts, we will continue to prohibit hunting at the Coaster Classroom site and within the buffer next to the Visitor Center. We will also monitor use and adjust open and closed areas if needed.

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2006. Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge habitat management plan and environmental assessment. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fort Snelling, Minnesota.

Vestal, S. 1940. King of the Fur Traders, the Deeds and Deviltry of Pierre Esprit Radisson. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA.

Public Involvement and Comments Received:

A public notice was published two times each in two local papers (see attached copy of the notice). It was originally printed on December 8 and 15, 2005 in the County Journal, and again in 2007 on February 8th and 15th. It was originally printed on December 7 and 10, 2005 in the Ashland Daily Press, and again in 2007 on February 10th and 17th.

The archery hunting plan, compatibility determination and supplemental environmental assessment were available for review on the Whittlesey Creek Refuge's web site or by contacting the Refuge office. No public comments were received in 2005 or 2007.

Refuge staff also sent a letter to all private landowners within the Refuge boundary to inform them of the proposed plan and compatibility determination. No comments were received from them.

Prepared By:

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Reviewed By:

Peter Fasbender, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Region 3 Regional Office, Ft. Snelling, MN
Katie Goodwin, Park Ranger, Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Ashland, WI

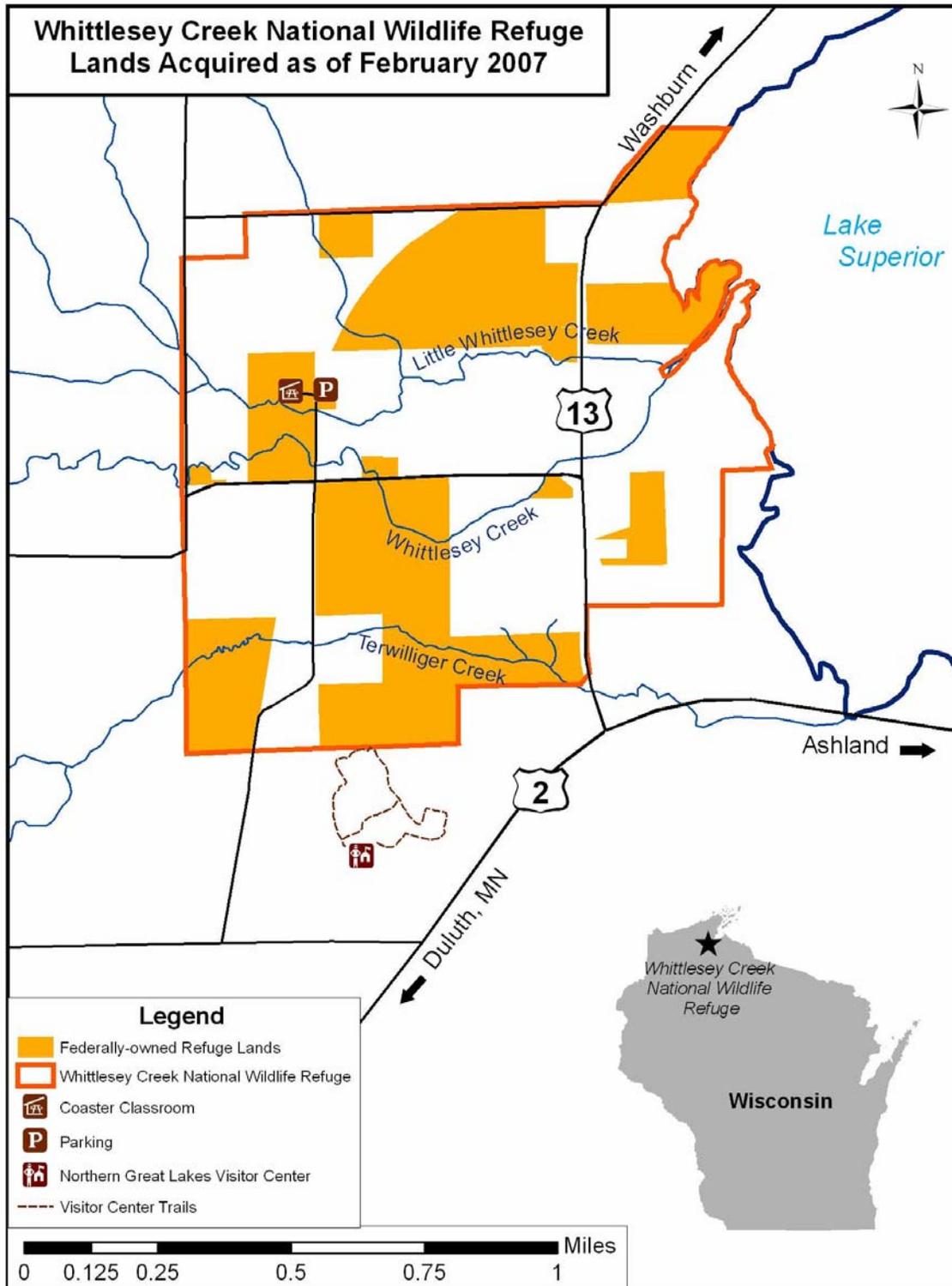


Figure 1. Location of Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge and Refuge Boundary.

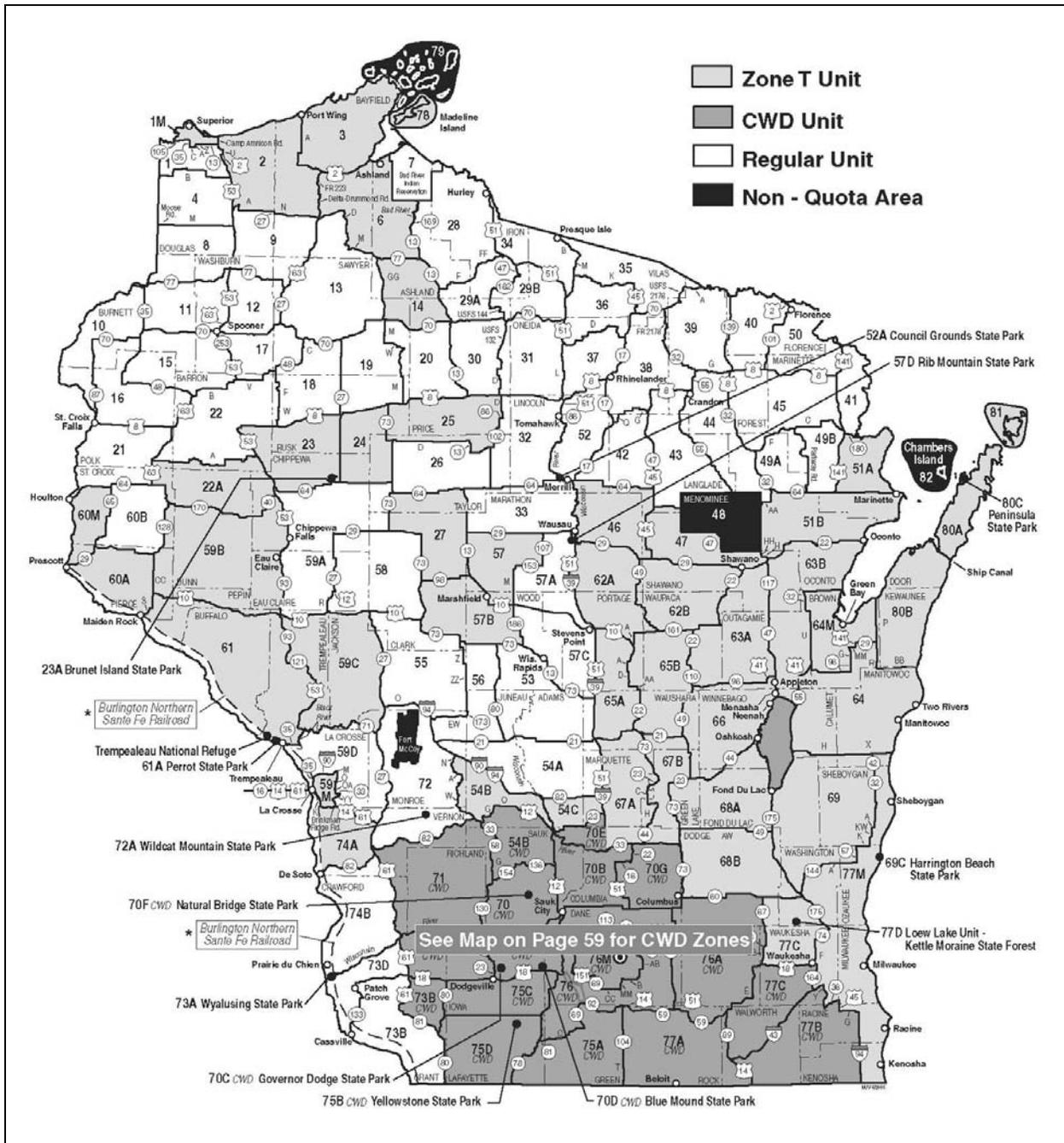


Figure 2. Wisconsin DNR deer management units. The Refuge is located within Unit 3.