

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



News Release

Midwest Region

External Affairs Office

Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building, 1 Federal Drive, Ft. Snelling, MN 55111-4056
612/713-5360 Fax: 612/713-5280 <http://midwest.fws.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact:
Refuge Manager Don Hultman (507) 452-4232

Amended Hunting Regulations Proposed for Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today published a proposed rule in the Federal Register to amend the hunting regulations for the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

The amendments will implement the final major recreation changes outlined in the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) approved in 2006.

The public has 30 days to comment on the new regulations. The new rules are scheduled to take effect for the 2009-2010 hunting season.

Refuge Manager Don Hultman said the biggest change in the new rules is a modification of the Waterfowl Hunting Closed Areas in Pool 4 of the Refuge near Wabasha, Minn., and Nelson and Alma, Wis. The Nelson-Trevino closed area will be eliminated, a new Big Lake closed area established, and modifications made to the existing Peterson Lake closed area.

Hultman said the acres closed to some form of hunting in Pool 4 will go from the current 6,884 acres to 3,500 acres. The 3,773-acre Nelson-Trevino closed area will be open to hunting during the waterfowl season for the first time since 1958.

However, the means of access for hunting in Nelson-Trevino will change as it was designated a Slow, No Wake Area in rulemaking last year and the boating restrictions took effect March 16.

In Slow, No Wake Areas, watercraft with motors are allowed but they must travel at slow, no wake speed from March 16 through October 31 each year. During the same time period, operation of airboats and hovercraft is prohibited.

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Hultman said other proposed changes include the establishment of a 24-acre No Hunting Zone on Fountain City Bay in Pool 5A next to Merrick State Park in Wisconsin and the establishment of a 75-acre No Hunting or Trapping Zone on the so-called Mathy Tract on Brice Prairie near Pool 7.

“The Fountain City Bay No Hunting Zone was identified in the CCP and is mainly to reduce conflicts with state park users and provide an additional resting area for waterfowl. Although closed to hunting, the area will remain open to fishing and boating,” said Hultman.

The Brice Prairie area was acquired last year for the purpose of a future office and maintenance facility for the Refuge’s La Crosse District. The tract will be restored to native grassland and is in a mostly developed residential and commercial area, Hultman said. The tract’s relatively small size, administrative purpose, and location in a predominantly residential and commercial area led to the no hunting or trapping designation. The site will be open to hiking, bird watching, education, and other passive recreation allowed throughout the Refuge.

Finally, the Refuge has proposed a modification of its waterfowl retrieval regulation. Under the new rule, hunters must immediately make a reasonable effort to retrieve downed waterfowl unless the bird lies in plain sight, is clearly dead, and there is no risk of loss due to wind or current.

Hultman said this change adds a time element to existing state retrieval regulations and is designed to reduce the loss of downed birds and to discourage hunters from shooting at birds that are beyond effective shotgun range.

“During a public waterfowl workshop in 2007, 33 of 35 participants voted in favor of this change to the retrieval regulations,” Hultman said.

The entire proposed rule, along with fact sheets and links to maps and the CCP, is available at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/UpperMississippiRiver/>, click on Current Topics, or you may call (507) 452-4232 and request a copy.

Comments on the proposed rule must be received by May 28, 2009 and can be made on-line at the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov> and by following the instructions for submitting comments.

Comments may also be sent by mail to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: RIN 1018-AW48; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203. E-mail or faxed comments will not be accepted and all comments will be posted including any personal information provided.

The refuge CCP was approved in October 2006 following four years of effort, including 46 public meetings or workshops attended by 4,500 persons. Previous rules in 2007 and 2008 implemented most of the hunting, fishing, and general recreation regulations outlined in the CCP.

In addition to being the most visited refuge in the country, the “Upper Miss” Refuge has the added complexity of a major navigation system, including 11 locks and dams, within its boundary. It is also a world-class fish and wildlife area which harbors 306 species of birds; 119 species of fish; more than 200 active bald eagle nests; thousands of heron and egret nests; spectacular concentrations of canvasback ducks, tundra swans, and white pelicans; and several threatened or endangered species.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>