

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



**Environmental Assessment
for the
Public Use Plan**

**Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge
Bayfield County, Wisconsin**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1. Purpose of and Need for Action	1
1.1 Background/Introduction	1
1.2 Purpose.....	3
1.3 Need	3
1.4 Decisions that Need to be Made	3
1.4.1 Alignment with Existing Conservation Plans	3
1.5 Scoping	4
1.6 Issues and Concerns.....	5
1.6.1 Leadership.....	5
1.6.2 Fish and Wildlife Conservation	5
1.6.3 User Conflicts	6
1.6.4 Regional Coordination	6
1.6.5 Trapping.....	6
1.6.6 Hunting	7
1.6.7 Trespass	7
1.6.8 Outdoor Recreation Trends.....	7
1.6.9 Community Involvement	8
1.6.10 Treaty of Lake Superior Chippewa in Ceded Territory	9
1.7 Permits, Licenses, and Other Compliance Required	9
1.7.1 Federal, State, and Local Permit Requirements.....	9
1.7.2 Compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.....	9
1.7.3 Cultural Resources and Historic Preservation Laws.....	9
Section 2. Alternatives	11
2.1 Introduction.....	11
2.2 Formulation of Alternatives.....	11
2.3 Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study.....	11
2.4 Description of Alternatives	11
2.4.1 Alternative 1 - No Action	11
2.4.2 Alternative 2 - Compatible Public Uses, Including Hunting (Preferred Alternative)	13
2.4.3 Alternative 3 — Compatible Non-consumptive Public Uses	17
2.5 Comparison of Alternatives	20
2.6 Preferred Alternative.....	21
Section 3. Affected Environment.....	22
3.1 Landscape of Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge.....	22
3.2 Refuge Lands	22
3.3 Fish and Wildlife of the Refuge.....	23
3.4 Federally Threatened and Endangered Species	24
3.5 Cultural Resources	25
3.6 Economic Resources.....	25
3.7 Recreational Opportunities	26

Section 4. Environmental Consequences	27
4.1 Alternatives	27
4.1.1 Alternative 1 - No Action	27
4.1.2 Alternative 2 (preferred) - Compatible Public Uses, Including Hunting.....	29
4.1.3 Alternative 3 - Compatible Non-consumptive Uses	30
4.2 Comparison of Environmental Impacts by Alternative	32
 Section 5. List of Preparers.....	 33
 Section 6. Consultation with Others	 33
 Section 7. References.....	 35
 Appendix A. Results of Questionnaire Sent by Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute.....	 36
Appendix B. Letters Sent to Whittlesey Habitat Coalition and Agencies	42
Appendix C. Letter Received from Wisconsin DNR and Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission	 48
Appendix D. Whittlesey Habitat Coalition Members.....	51
Appendix E. Written Comments Received from May 17, 2000 Open House	53
Appendix F. Fish Species Captured in Whittlesey Creek.....	54
Appendix G. Comments Received from Public on Draft Plan and Service Responses to Them	 55

Section 1. Purpose of and Need for Action

1.1 Background/Introduction

The Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was established with the first purchase of land by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in October 1999. The refuge is located in Bayfield County of northern Wisconsin in the Town of Barksdale (Figure 1). The purpose of the Refuge is for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources. The Service is working with individuals, groups, and governmental entities to protect and restore coastal wetland and stream habitats that are utilized by migratory trout and salmon from Lake Superior and by migratory birds. The Refuge will protect, restore, and manage coastal wetland and spring-fed stream habitat. Up to 540 acres of coastal wetland will be acquired in fee title, and up to 1260 acres will be protected through conservation easements in the Whittlesey watershed.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act specifically provided people the opportunity to enjoy, understand, and be part of wildlife conservation on refuges. Lands purchased by the Service will be open to limited wildlife-dependent recreational uses. The Refuge System Improvement Act states that compatible, wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation are the priority public uses of the refuge system. The Service determines whether these uses are compatible for each individual refuge. A use is determined to be compatible if it does not interfere with the fulfillment of the mission of the refuge system or the purpose of the refuge.

Figure 1. Location of Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge and Land Acquired as of March 30, 2001 **NOT SHOWN**

Bayfield County contains 315,768 acres of public lands, including the Chequamegon National Forest, Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, State Parks, and tracts of County Forest land. In the immediate vicinity of the refuge are several conservation areas. To the east, the City of Ashland's Prentice Park includes shallow wetlands and spring ponds that are popular for wildlife viewing. The Fish Creek Sloughs, part of the South Shore Fish and Wildlife Management Area owned and managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, includes about 2,000 acres managed as a Priority Coastal Wetland. The Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center is located on a 180-acre tract owned by the U.S. Forest Service, immediately south of the Refuge (Figure 2). The Center, jointly funded by state and federal sources, provides education and interpretation of the ecology and history of the northern Great Lakes region, as well as tourism information.

The Refuge is located in a region where outdoor recreation is highly favored by both local residents and tourists. In addition to public lands, several regional trails for biking, hiking, jogging and snowmobiles are located in the area. The Refuge lands have been traditionally used by landowners and residents for fishing, birdwatching, trapping, hunting, and other uses. Also, the City of Ashland, is about one and one-half miles east of the Refuge. Even though the acreage proposed to be acquired for the Refuge is very small compared to other public lands in the area, all these factors create an atmosphere of high expectations for public use on the Refuge.

The Service must carefully plan for these expectations and ensure that fish and wildlife resources on the Refuge are protected while providing public use.

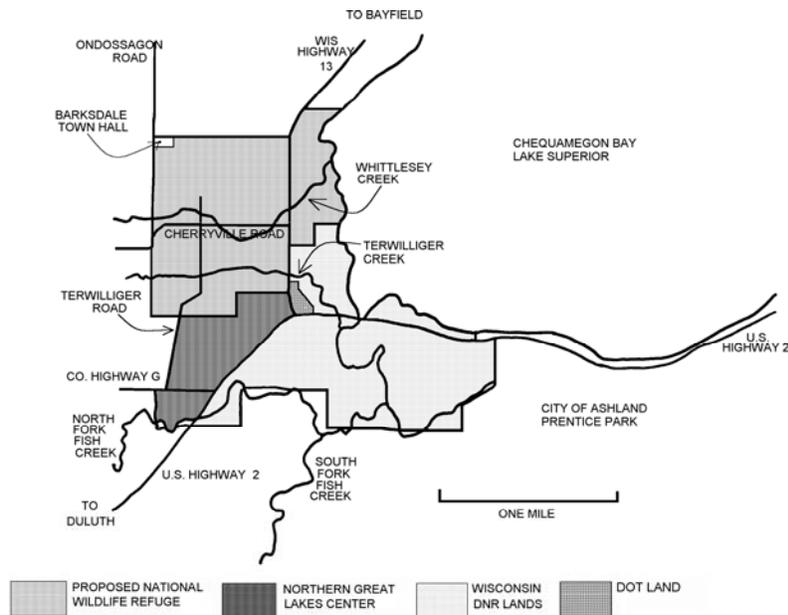


Figure 2. Public Lands Near Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge

1.2 Purpose

The Purpose of this environmental assessment is to evaluate alternatives for public use of the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

1.3 Need

There is a need to ensure that fish and wildlife resources on the Refuge are protected while providing public use. There is a need to involve the public with refuge activities and to demonstrate appropriate stewardship to the public along with providing environmental education. There is a need to provide for the six recognized public uses of the refuge to the extent possible and to determine their compatibility with Refuge goals.

1.4 Decisions that Need to be Made

This environmental assessment is prepared to evaluate the environmental consequences of public use on the Refuge. Two decisions are to be made by the Regional Director based on the environmental assessment: 1) selection of an alternative and 2) determination if the selected alternative is a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment requiring preparation of an environmental impact statement. These decisions are part of the compatibility determination that is also required for public use on national wildlife refuge system lands.

1.4.1 Alignment with Existing Conservation Plans

The Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge Interim Comprehensive Conservation Plan (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1998) provides guidance for public use on the Refuge until a public use plan is developed and adopted. The Interim Plan generally provides for the priority compatible uses of hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation. Snowmobile use on a snowmobile trail through the Refuge is provided for three years. The Interim Plan states that minimum facilities will be built to provide public use. Trapping is not addressed in the Interim Plan, and collecting any plant or animal will be allowed only by special use permit for scientific or monitoring purposes.

The preferred alternative (described in Section 2.4.2) describes uses in more detail, but does not conflict with the Interim Plan, except for two uses: 1) collection of plants for food gathering is allowed by special use permit for noncommercial harvest, and 2) the interim snowmobile trail use will become a permanent trail; Bayfield County has purchased perpetual easements for snowmobile use on the trail from existing landowners. Also, trapping is addressed in all the alternatives, but was not addressed in the Interim Plan.

The Service developed a strategic plan for implementing the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act called "Fulfilling the Promise" (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

1999). This plan clarifies the vision for the National Wildlife Refuge System and outlines strategies for improving delivery of the System's mission. The proposed public use plan is compatible with the priorities and strategies outlined in Fulfilling the Promise.

1.5 Scoping

The Service has sought public involvement in the project through outreach to interest groups, local governments, and the general public. The development of the preferred alternative included communication with affected and interested parties. Several avenues were used to send and receive information about the draft public use plan.

Questionnaire

The Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute developed and distributed a public use questionnaire that specifically asked respondents if they would use the Refuge and what kind of uses they would participate in. The Institute mailed about 550 questionnaires to people in the local area who had previously expressed interest in the Refuge and to all landowners in the Whittlesey watershed. One hundred seventy-one questionnaires were completed and returned to the Institute. A summary of the results are provided as Appendix A.

Meetings with partners

Service personnel met with managers of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and the Wisconsin DNR to hear their suggestions and concerns.

Agency letters

Letters were sent to tribal, state and federal agencies in the region (Appendix B) requesting input. A letter was received from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (Appendix C).

Contacts with landowners

Service personnel contacted most landowners who own land within the proposed Refuge boundary via phone and letter. Some landowners were difficult to contact or their addresses and phone number were unknown. The intent of these contacts was to provide a Service contact for questions and concerns and to inform them of our plans.

Plan review

The Whittlesey Habitat Coalition (Appendix D) received two working drafts of the proposed plan and provided comments via letter and during the Whittlesey Habitat Coalition meeting on April 25.

The draft plan was made available for public review on January 2, 2001. Over 100 copies were sent to interested parties. Legal notices ran twice in the both the Ashland Daily Press and the Bayfield County Journal. A front-page article about the draft plan ran in the Ashland Daily Press. The draft plan and environmental assessment were posted on the Service's web site. Comments were accepted for 45 days. We received comments

from nine individuals. Their suggestions did not change the plan, environmental assessment or compatibility determinations substantially. Summaries of comments received and Service responses to them can be found in Appendix G. The comments are on file at the Refuge headquarters and can be viewed by the public.

Open house

The Service, in cooperation with the Whittlesey Habitat Coalition, conducted a public open house for the proposed public use plan. The open house took place at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center on Wednesday, May 17, 2000 from 2:00 to 8:00 p.m. The purpose of the open house was to provide an opportunity for the Service to communicate plans for public use on the Refuge and to listen to suggestions from citizens who attended. Those who attended had the opportunity to provide comments. The meeting was informal, allowing people to attend when they had time and stay as long as they desired. The Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute helped host the event.

Twenty-four local residents attended with various questions and concerns. Several citizens were interested in coaster brook trout plans. One adjacent landowner was concerned about the possibility of the public trespassing on his property. Several citizens who trap furbearers attended to express their concern that trapping would not be allowed. A few just wanted to talk about the area and their experiences with Whittlesey Creek. Two members of the Bayfield County Board also attended. Those who attended stayed for at least a half hour each; some stayed over an hour to visit. All who attended asked to receive a copy of the draft public use plan. A few people sent written comments based on our discussion with them (Appendix E).

1.6 Issues and Concerns

Several key issues were noted by the Service during our meetings with partners and in reviewing results of the questionnaire and open house. Below is a description of these key issues as perceived by the Service. These issues are addressed in each alternative of this environmental assessment.

1.6.1 Leadership

The Service can provide professional expertise, as well as funding, for wetland and stream restoration projects, and can demonstrate how restoration can improve the Whittlesey Creek watershed and Lake Superior tributaries in general. The Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center can provide professional expertise for environmental education programs and interpretation. The Service and the Center will coordinate their programs and projects as much as possible.

1.6.2 Fish and Wildlife Conservation

The Service's strategic plan for implementing the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act ("Fulfilling the Promise," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1999) places wildlife habitat "first and foremost." Several comments were provided by questionnaire respondents raising concerns about providing recreation that might endanger fish and

wildlife populations and their habitats. The Service will evaluate all uses to ensure that they are compatible with the purposes of the Refuge. Concurrently, the Service will provide a place where people have the opportunity to enjoy, understand and be part of wildlife conservation on refuges. This issue is critical to public use on the Refuge.

1.6.3 User Conflicts

Because of the small land base proposed for the Refuge (540 acres), the Service needs to analyze and then, if necessary, design facilities and implement rules to minimize conflicts between users. For example, conflicts could occur between hikers and hunters, or snowmobilers and snowshoers.

1.6.4 Regional Coordination

Several regional trail facilities might be interested in accessing the Refuge. The Tri-County Corridor Trail is within one mile of the Refuge. The Wisconsin DNR's boat access and parking lot are within one-half mile of the proposed Refuge. The snowmobile trail traverses the proposed Refuge on rights-of-way owned by Bayfield County. The Service will coordinate our plan with these existing, and possible future, facilities as much as possible. Where compatible, the Service will provide access.

The Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center will be expanding some of its environmental education and interpretation activities and facilities. Coordination will take place as noted in the leadership issue.

In addition to coordination for public use, there is a need to coordinate restoration and management programs among the agencies that own and manage land at the head of the Chequamegon Bay. Bayfield County is initiating a land use plan and will be informed of Service plans. Management and restoration needs identified by natural resource agencies in and near the Whittlesey watershed, as well as land-use plans developed by the County or Town of Barksdale, could have some effect on public use in the long-term.

1.6.5 Trapping

Most trapping in the region occurs in public waters. Local trappers have requested that trappers have access to trapping on and through the Refuge, which is a traditional use area. The Refuge is a small land base and trapping could create conflicts with other users. It is unlikely that trapping on refuge lands would affect regional furbearer populations, but it might affect populations locally. If certain species are creating problems to Service property, such as beaver to restored riparian habitats or muskrats to wetland embankments, then the Service would consider trapping as a means to manage and possibly control such damage.

Trapping is not one of the priority public uses listed in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, so trapping is currently considered a management tool by the Service, not a preferred public use. However, because of the strong desire by local trappers to continue with a traditional use, the Service will continue to study this issue. The Service will consider allowing trapping if there are no demonstrated user conflicts and if there is information to support population management or control. A separate trapping plan would be developed and environmental analysis would be conducted to allow trapping on the Refuge. Such planning would include analysis of harvest data from the area, close coordination with the Wisconsin DNR, and discussions with trappers.

1.6.6 Hunting

Several issues relate to hunting on or near the Refuge. Because the Refuge will be relatively small in size, the Refuge will provide limited public hunting opportunities.

- 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.
- Waterfowl hunters often access Whittlesey Creek sloughs from Lake Superior. They most often leave enough space between hunting parties for courtesy and safety, but once the Refuge becomes public land, hunting demands might increase, creating crowding problems and safety issues. Monitoring use will be critical.
- Permissible use of blinds or stands will be clearly communicated to the public.
- Several private residences are located within and adjacent to the proposed refuge, and state law prohibits shooting within 100 yards of an occupied building, unless permitted by the resident. Safety of residents is an important consideration.
- Users of the adjacent Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center must feel safe all times of the year; the Refuge will work with the Center to ensure public safety.

- Some refuges across the country provide special access to hunting opportunities for people with disabilities. The Service will evaluate the potential to accommodate this at the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

1.6.7 Trespass

Private landowners adjacent to Service lands have the right to control access to their land. The Service has a responsibility to clearly post Refuge boundaries and provide information about respecting property rights. The County Sheriff enforces trespass laws, and the Service is responsible for informing the Sheriff of refuge acquisitions and plans. Private landowners adjacent to Service lands should also be kept informed of Refuge activities and plans. Even so, trespassing by the public on adjacent private lands could occur, and the Service must recognize this as an issue of concern for both the Service and adjacent landowners.

1.6.8 Outdoor Recreation Trends

The Wisconsin DNR updated its State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan in 2000 (Wisconsin DNR 2000). The DNR conducted a survey of Wisconsin residents in 1999 to determine resident outdoor recreation activity use and trends. The leading outdoor recreation activity was walking for pleasure, followed by driving for pleasure, swimming, wildlife viewing and picnicking. Between 50 and 90 percent of survey respondents participated in these activities. Most of these activities require no special equipment or training, can be done near home or a park, and can be done by all age groups, either alone or with friends or family. Activities with participation rates from 30 to 50 percent are bicycling, hiking, fishing, nature study or bird watching, motor boating, and nature photography. These activities require at least some equipment, and in some cases, training. Approximately 23 percent of state residents participate in hunting.

The priority public uses of the national wildlife refuge system include hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation. These activities overlap considerably with many activities identified above that have high participation rates. Based on the State's participation information, the interest expressed in the Refuge by the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute's questionnaire, the close proximity of the Refuge to the City of Ashland, and visitor use at the adjacent Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, the Service should anticipate high demand for wildlife-dependent public use on the Refuge.

The Wisconsin DNR's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan also provides trends for outdoor recreation in the state. They predict that little change in participation rates will occur in the short-term for activities of walking and driving for pleasure, swimming, wildlife viewing, and picnicking. Over the long-term, however, they note that these activities will benefit from broad programs aimed at maintaining and improving Wisconsin's environment. Conversely, these same activities could suffer wherever the natural environment is threatened. This issue is reflected in the Service's vision for its refuges that fish and wildlife habitat conservation must come first and foremost.

1.6.9 Community Involvement

The success of the Refuge will not only be measured by the ecological restoration of the site, but also by our effectiveness in working with other agencies and individuals to preserve and enhance the biodiversity in Wisconsin, the Lake Superior basin, and the nation.

The Whittlesey Habitat Coalition has been and will continue to provide advice and assistance in planning and protecting the Refuge. Their advice and assistance will continue to be sought for public use, as well as refuge management.

Many public use activities will be done cooperatively with partners and with the use of volunteers. Activities such as Little Whittlesey clean up, outdoor skills education programs, and bird watching clinics and events are examples of public use activities that can be run cooperatively with the help of others.

Many refuges across the country have the privilege of working cooperatively with a nonprofit community support group, which can support the refuge through volunteer hours, outreach, advocacy, and funding. The Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge already has a very strong base of support from informal and formal partnerships, including the Whittlesey Habitat Coalition. The Service welcomes the opportunity to continue to work with current partners and other groups. Whether or not partnerships are formalized, the Service and its partners will continue to work under the principles of trust, respect, and open communication.

The Service will also work with corporate/business partners as we plan and conduct special public activities. Such partnerships might provide better flexibility in meeting the needs of the public and volunteers.

1.6.10 Treaty of Lake Superior Chippewa in Ceded Territory

The Lake Superior basin of the current State of Wisconsin was included in lands ceded by the Chippewa to the United States in a treaty in 1842, under which the Chippewa bands retained rights to use the ceded territory for hunting, fishing, and gathering. These rights are exercised on public lands and are negotiated on a government-to-government basis between the Service and the Tribes.

The Service will seek to develop a Memorandum of Understanding with tribal governments for meeting treaty rights on Service-owned lands in the Refuge. These rights will meet reasonable limitations based on standards of conservation of fish and wildlife populations and public safety. These same standards apply to all users of the Refuge. These rights will apply regardless of which alternative is chosen by the Service.

The negotiations and decision making processes will be available for public review and comment as the Memorandum of Understanding is developed.

1.7 Permits, Licenses, and Other Compliance Required

The following describes how the Service will comply with various permits and other project review requirements.

1.7.1 Federal, State, and Local Permit Requirements

State permits under Wisconsin State Statutes chapters 29 and 30 would be obtained for instream habitat restoration activities. State permits under Wisconsin State Statutes chapters 29 would be obtained for stocking fish (29.535) and scientific collector permits for fisheries evaluations (29.17).

1.7.2 Compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act

The project area is within the breeding range of the bald eagle, gray wolf, and piping plover. Fassets locoweed is also identified as occurring in Bayfield County. An Intra-Service Section 7 consultation will be conducted for this proposed project. The affected area has been evaluated for the presence of threatened and endangered species. No activities will be permitted that are likely to adversely affect any federally listed species or habitat that sustains them.

1.7.3 Cultural Resources and Historic Preservation Laws

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires federal agencies to consider the effects of their undertaking on properties meeting the criteria for the National Register of Historic Places. The regulations in 36 CFR Part 800 describe how federal agencies are to identify historic properties, determine effect on significant historic properties, and mitigate adverse effects.

American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 iterates the right of Native Americans to free exercise of traditional religions and use of sacred places. Indian Sacred Sites (1996) Executive Order 13007 requires federal agencies to accommodate access to and ceremonial use of sacred sites, to avoid adverse effects and avoid blocking access, and to enter into early consultation.

Service policy to comply with historic preservation laws requires the Project Leader to inform the Regional Historic Preservation Officer of any potential undertakings or other activities early enough to allow complete consultation with all involved parties.

Section 2. Alternatives

2.1 Introduction

This section explains how alternatives were formulated and eliminated from further study, describes alternatives, and identifies the preferred alternative.

2.2 Formulation of Alternatives

Four alternatives were considered. Factors considered in the development of alternatives were:

1. Compatibility of the purpose of the Refuge and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
2. Size limitation of the Refuge, affecting natural resources of the refuge and concerns for public safety.
3. Coordination with surrounding public lands.
4. Demands and expectations of public use.
5. Issues identified in the scoping process.

2.3 Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study

No alternatives were eliminated from detailed study.

2.4 Description of Alternatives

2.4.1 Alternative 1 - No Action

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. If the Service does not take action to plan and develop a place for the public to feel safe and welcome, and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, then lands would remain closed to the public. This alternative would create a refuge that is a haven for fish and wildlife only, but not for people.

Under the no action alternative, the Service would continue to plan for and implement habitat and fish population restoration efforts. It would also manage existing habitats to benefit fish and wildlife. These actions would not be carried out in cooperation with the public, but it is likely that some agency partners would be involved. The Refuge would not provide opportunities to demonstrate stewardship, nor would it provide opportunities for the public to view the refuge or its wildlife. Environmental programs, special events, hunting, and fishing would not be provided by the Service and could not take place on Refuge lands.

Analysis of Issues:

Leadership by the Service

The Service would continue to provide leadership in ecological restoration, but would not demonstrate how its stewardship actions could be used by interested landowners and managers on Refuge lands, since public use would not be allowed. Opportunities would be missed to provide stewardship education by the Service and other agencies.

Fish and Wildlife Restoration and Protection

Conservation of fish and wildlife populations includes both habitat and population management. Habitat management and restoration would occur on Refuge lands, as well as within the Whittlesey watershed. Included in habitat conservation are stream and riparian area restoration, wetland rehabilitation, and grassland management. Population management would focus on rehabilitation of coaster brook trout and conservation of migratory birds.

Habitat and population rehabilitation and management of coaster brook trout and migratory birds would continue under this alternative. Few public, volunteers, and partners would be involved in the Service's efforts. Agencies that own and manage adjacent land, such as the U.S. Forest Service or the Wisconsin DNR would likely work with the Service where their goals overlap.

Regional Coordination

Coordination with regional environmental education facilities, especially the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, would be minimized. The Service would not continue its partnership at the Center, which would reduce coordination with the Center's partners. There would also be no coordination with regional trail providers and users, except the snowmobilers. The permanent easements on the snowmobile trail through the Refuge would still apply and its use would continue.

Trapping

Traditional users of the proposed refuge lands would be required to find alternative locations for trapping.

Hunting

Hunters could continue to hunt waterfowl on Lake Superior adjacent to the Refuge, but could not access the Refuge for hunting or retrieving waterfowl. Traditional users of the proposed refuge lands would be required to find alternative locations for hunting.

Trespass

There would be very few, if any, problems with users accidentally or purposely trespassing on adjacent private property from the Refuge.

Recreation Trends

Refuge lands would not provide recreation opportunities for local residents or tourists, except snowmobilers who use the snowmobile trail through the refuge. Increased demand for outdoor recreation and wildlife watching would be provided elsewhere.

Community Involvement

The community could remain involved in a limited basis. For example, the news media could provide information about restoration activities, as could the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center. People who are interested could see the Refuge as they drive through it on public roads. The Habitat Coalition could continue to provide service and technical assistance to the Refuge. Public involvement in the Refuge directly, through ecological restoration, special events, or environmental education would not occur.

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.

Wildlife Observation and Photography:

Wildlife observation generally needs few facilities. All Refuge lands would be open to wildlife observation, unless closed for public safety or wildlife conservation reasons. For example, a buffer area around a nesting osprey might be established to minimize disturbance to the birds. If any parcels of Refuge land are closed, the Service would notify the public and clearly mark where the closed areas are.

Interpretive programming and special event planning would be designed to help visitors develop their observation skills.

Wildlife photography would be allowed along trails and observation points with no special guidelines. The Service could issue special use permits to individuals who wish to set up temporary blinds for wildlife photography.

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 from 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.

Fishing:

Fishing is currently allowed in public waters, under state regulations, and this would not change. Access might be provided through the refuge for the public in general. For example, the proposed parking area next to Whittlesey Creek could provide access for stream anglers.

Environmental Education and Interpretation:

The Service would cooperate with the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and other organizations to plan and offer interpretive and environmental education programs. The Service would continue its partnership with the Center. **The Service's focus in working with the Center would be fish and wildlife conservation, management, and restoration.** The Service can play a leadership role in showing how the best science and technology are used for wildlife conservation and restoration efforts. Service lands would be a model and demonstration area for habitat management which foster broad participation in natural resources stewardship.

The educational theme for the Refuge's environmental education and interpretive activities would be "**habitat restoration - recreating ecosystems piece by piece.**" The Service, on Refuge lands and those of willing private landowners, would restore fish habitat for trout and salmon in Whittlesey Creek, recreating wetlands on the landscape, and improving degraded habitats. The Service would work cooperatively with interested individuals and organizations to assist with this work.

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.

Research:

Research would be an important part of the Service's restoration and management efforts. Research that takes place on the Refuge must be applicable to the Service's goals for the Refuge. It is likely that many research needs would be met by other organizations, such as the U.S. Geological Survey, colleges, and universities. All research would be coordinated with the Service and permits would be required. For ongoing research efforts, the Service would establish memorandums of understanding with universities.

Other Nonpriority Uses:

Wild Food Gathering

Wildlife food gathering includes berry picking, mushroom harvest, and harvest of other natural foods that are used by humans for sustenance, medicinal or ceremonial purposes. Opportunities are limited on the Refuge and we are not aware of traditional harvest within the Refuge. Because the Service considers the needs of wildlife first, the Service would monitor harvest of a resource that is utilized by wildlife. Noncommercial harvest of wildlife food would be allowed under special use permit.

Trapping

Trapping is allowed in state-controlled public waters adjacent to the Refuge. Trapping will not be allowed for recreational purposes on lands owned by the Service until a compatibility determination is made about trapping. A separate trapping plan would be developed before the Service would allow trapping on the Refuge. Until then, trapping would be allowed as a management tool only if needed to protect refuge facilities.

Pets

Dogs would be allowed on the Refuge, but must be kept on a leash, except when used to retrieve waterfowl during waterfowl hunting season. No other pets would be allowed on the Refuge at any time.

Analysis of Issues:

Leadership by the Service

The Service would continue to provide leadership in ecological restoration, and would demonstrate how its stewardship actions could be used by interested landowners and managers. Opportunities would be optimized to provide stewardship education by both the Service and other agencies, especially at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center.

Fish and Wildlife Restoration and Protection

Habitat and population rehabilitation and management would take place under this alternative. Agencies that own and manage adjacent land, such as the U.S. Forest Service or the Wisconsin DNR would likely work with the Service where their goals overlap. The Service would periodically assess the effect that predatory furbearers (skunk, raccoon, fox, coyote, fisher) are having on migratory birds to determine if there is a need to manage furbearer populations.

Regional Coordination

Coordination would take place, where possible, for all restoration, management, education, and compatible public uses under this alternative. Regional coordination would reduce user conflicts, improve the quality of environmental education and interpretive programs, and provide public use opportunities between Refuge lands other public lands.

Hunting

Waterfowl hunters would continue to hunt in traditional areas. Where hunting for other game species is traditionally provided on private lands within the Refuge boundary, those hunters would need to find alternative locations for hunting as the Service acquires Refuge lands. This could force those hunters to move to areas already occupied or crowded, but this is difficult to determine and measure.

Trapping

Traditional users of the proposed refuge lands would be required to find alternative locations for trapping, at least until a decision is made about trapping.

Trespass

Trespass problems would likely occur. The Service would manage public use to

avoid trespassing by the public as much as possible through proper signing, communication to users, and by working with the county sheriff to enforce trespass complaints. The Service would consider placing signs at its boundary that clearly mark not only the Refuge boundary, but also clearly mark private property.

Recreation Trends

This alternative would meet some local and regional recreation demand, especially for walking and wildlife observation. A limited amount of recreation demand on a statewide basis would be met with this alternative.

Community Involvement

This alternative would require an increase in community and partnership involvement for successful refuge operations, restoration, management, and education. Community support would likely increase for habitat restoration, environmental education, and public use.

2.4.3 Alternative 3 — Compatible Non-consumptive Public Uses

Non-consumptive Public Uses:

This alternative would provide public use opportunities for the priority non-consumptive uses of wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation. The management and implementation of these uses would be done the same as described in Alternative 2. The general philosophy of public use would remain the same, as well as the approach to environmental education and interpretation. The Service would continue its partnership at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center as described in Alternative 2. Research would be allowed as described in Alternative 2.

Consumptive Public Uses:

Hunting, trapping, and wild food gathering would be allowed only when needed to accomplish habitat and population management goals and to fulfill ceded territory treaty rights. Hunting, trapping and wild food gathering would not be considered compatible public uses and would not be managed as such. Fishing would be provided only on state-controlled public waters. No access or bank fishing would be allowed.

Trapping - Trapping is allowed in state-controlled public waters adjacent to the Refuge. Trapping for beaver or muskrat would be allowed on lands owned by the Service only if needed for management purposes.

Hunting - Waterfowl hunting is allowed in state-controlled public waters adjacent to the Refuge. Hunters would not be allowed to use Refuge lands for either hunting or retrieving game. Hunting for nonmigratory birds and resident wildlife would be allowed on lands owned by the Service if needed to protect and manage populations and meet habitat goals of the Refuge. Hunting for migratory birds

would not be allowed. A separate hunting plan would need to be developed for the Service to allow hunting on the Refuge.

Wild Food Gathering - No wild food gathering would be allowed under this alternative.

Pets - Dogs would be allowed on the refuge, but would be required to be leashed at all times. No other pets would be allowed.

Analysis of Issues:

Leadership by Service

The Service would continue to provide leadership in ecological restoration, and would demonstrate how its stewardship actions could be used by interested landowners and managers. Opportunities for stewardship education by both the Service and other agencies would be limited to non-consumptive uses. The Service would remain involved in the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center for these education opportunities. This alternative would eliminate opportunities at the Refuge for skill building and education in hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Fish and Wildlife Restoration and Protection

Habitat and population rehabilitation and management would be done under this alternative. Agencies that own and manage adjacent land, such as the U.S. Forest Service or the Wisconsin DNR would likely work with the Service where their goals overlap. Management of game populations by harvest would occur only if needed to protect or enhance those populations on a local level. The Service would periodically assess the effect that predatory furbearers (skunk, raccoon, fox, coyote, fisher) are having on migratory birds to determine if there is a need to manage furbearer populations.

Regional Coordination

Coordination would take place, where possible, for all restoration, management, education, and compatible public uses under this alternative. Regional coordination would reduce user conflicts, improve the quality of environmental education and interpretive programs, and provide non-consumptive public use opportunities between Refuge lands and other public lands. There would be little coordination between consumptive users and the Service for skills training and education in hunting, fishing and trapping.

Trapping

Trapping would be allowed if needed only for management purposes. Traditional users of the proposed refuge lands would be required to find alternative locations for trapping.

Hunting

Waterfowl hunting could continue adjacent to the Refuge on Lake Superior, allowing some hunters to continue hunting in traditional areas. However, it is likely that some waterfowl hunters would be required to find alternative locations for hunting. Where hunting for other game species is traditionally provided on private lands within the Refuge, those hunters would need to find alternative locations for hunting as the Service acquires such lands. This could force those hunters to move to areas already occupied or crowded, but this is difficult to determine and measure.

Trespass

Trespass problems would occur less under this alternative than under Alternative 2 because there would be fewer consumptive users. The Service would manage public use to avoid trespassing by the public as much as possible through proper signing, communication to users, and by working with the county sheriff to enforce trespass complaints. The Service would consider placing signs at its boundary that clearly mark not only the Refuge boundary, but also clearly mark private property.

Recreation Trends

This alternative would meet some of the local and regional recreation demands, especially for walking and wildlife observation. A limited amount of the recreation demand on a statewide basis would be met with this alternative. Closure of the Refuge for consumptive uses could have a negative impact on the demand for those outdoor sports.

Community Involvement

This alternative would require an increase in community and partnership involvement for successful refuge operations, restoration, management and education. As long as this involvement includes proper leadership, the impacts to the Refuge would be positive. Support would increase for habitat restoration,

environmental education, and public use. Involvement in and support from consumptive users would likely decrease over time.

2.5 Comparison of Alternatives

The table below summarizes the actions relating to seven issues addressed in section 1.3 that are anticipated under each alternative. Detailed discussion of the environmental impacts of each alternative can be found in section 4. Some of the issues are carried into the impact assessment and are described in more detail in section 4.

ISSUE	ALTERNATIVE 1 NO ACTION	ALTERNATIVE 2 (Preferred) COMPATIBLE USES, INCLUDING HUNTING	ALTERNATIVE 3 NON-CONSUMPTIVE COMPATIBLE USES
Leadership by the Service	Leadership would be met for restoration, but demonstration would be limited. The Service would not continue its partnership at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center.	Leadership would be provided for restoration and would be demonstrated to the public. The Service would continue its partnership with the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and participate in education and interpretive programs.	Similar to alternative 2, but no leadership would be provided for training in safe and ethical hunting and fishing.
Fish and Wildlife Conservation	Habitat restoration and population rehabilitation would be done, but would be done primarily by the Service alone.	Habitat restoration and population rehabilitation would be done primarily by the Service with numerous partners. Fish and wildlife populations of concern would be monitored to ensure they are not negatively impacted.	Same as alternative 2, but it is unlikely that hunting, trapping and fishing partners would be as actively involved as partners.
Regional Coordination	Coordination would be limited to restoration and management activities, but would not be done for education and public use.	Coordination would take place for restoration, management, education, and compatible public uses.	Same as Alternative 2.
Trapping	Trapping would be done only for management needs, under special use permit. Trappers would be required to find alternative locations.	Trapping would be done only for management needs, under special use permit, until a compatibility determination is made. Trappers would be required to find alternative locations.	Same as Alternative 1.

ISSUE	ALTERNATIVE 1 NO ACTION	ALTERNATIVE 2 (Preferred) COMPATIBLE USES, INCLUDING HUNTING	ALTERNATIVE 3 NON-CONSUMPTIVE COMPATIBLE USES
Hunting	Hunting would not be allowed; users would be required to find alternative locations.	Waterfowl hunting would be allowed in select areas. Other hunters might be required to find alternative locations.	Hunting would be done only for management needs, under special use. Waterfowl hunters that hunt on Lake Superior adjacent to the Refuge would be required to find alternative locations for hunting from blinds.
Trespass	Trespass problems would be almost nonexistent since there would be no use.	Trespass problems would likely occur. These would be avoided and mitigated with proper signing, communication to users, and enforcement.	Similar to Alternative 2, but with fewer occurrences.
Recreation Trends	Residents and tourists would not use the refuge, so increased use would take place elsewhere in the region.	The Refuge would meet some regional recreation demands.	Fewer regional recreation demands would be met when compared with Alternative 2.
Community Involvement	Involvement would be minimal.	Community and partnership involvement would continue and increase for all aspects of refuge operations, restoration, management, and education.	Similar to Alternative 2, but involvement from consumptive users would likely be less.

2.6 Preferred Alternative

The preferred alternative is the Alternative 2 - Compatible Public Use, Including Hunting.

Section 3. Affected Environment

3.1 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 a 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. 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 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 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.
- Agricultural lands account for 14% of the total drainage area, and 50% of the total are National Forest lands. The remaining 36% of the area includes 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 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.

Fishery habitat in Whittlesey Creek is threatened due to sedimentation. At times the stream carries a heavy load of sand and silt. While the silt is typically carried out to the lake, sand deposits remain in the stream and have a negative impact on the in-stream habitat. There is also concern about sand deposition in the lower mile of the stream. Past and present activities such as logging, agriculture, transportation, residential and commercial development have had cumulative impacts on the natural stream functions and the in-stream habitat of Whittlesey Creek.

3.2 Refuge Lands

The existing Refuge lands and land proposed to be acquired consists of Lake Superior coastal wetlands, sedge meadow, lowland hardwood swamp, black spruce swamp, other palustrine emergent wetland types, created palustrine non-vegetated ponds, and agriculture fields. Whittlesey, Little Whittlesey and Terwilliger creeks flow through the Refuge, collecting water from the many cold-water spring upwellings in the streams and bordering wetlands.

Fish and wildlife habitats in the Refuge have been altered substantially by human use. One hundred ten acres of sedge meadow were converted for agricultural use earlier this century and 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 has changed wetland vegetation; most of the wet meadow acres are dominated by reed canary grass, an invasive wetland plant. Some wet meadows are becoming dominated by shrubs and might regrow to lowland swamp with black ash and cedar.

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. All of the activities in the watershed, particularly stream channel alterations, have altered the hydrology and resulted in a straight, shallow stretch of stream lacking significant habitat diversity (Garnder and Malischke 1996).

The wetland portion of the mouth constitutes a rare coastal wetland. Measures are being taken to control purple loosestrife in this area. The sand bedload resulting from streambank erosion in the watershed is severely impacting the diversity of vegetation and water depths in both the Whittlesey Creek estuary and the Chequamegon Bay.

Goals for fish and wildlife habitat on the refuge are to:

- Protect and restore habitat in Whittlesey Creek, Little Whittlesey Creek, and Terwilliger Creek for migration, spawning, and rearing of anadromous trout and salmon from Lake Superior.
- Restore and manage habitat for waterfowl, neotropical migrants, and other migratory birds.
- Restore to the extent possible historical hydrologic conditions in the coastal wetlands and streams, including restoring Whittlesey Creek to its historic channel.
- Restore topography where altered by development, and enhance existing constructed ponds for wildlife values.

3.3 Fish and Wildlife of the Refuge

Whittlesey Creek is an important component of the Lake Superior fishery, producing six percent of all Wisconsin coho salmon in Lake Superior, which is outstanding considering the size of Whittlesey Creek (Steve Schram, Wisconsin DNR, personal communication). A species list compiled from information gathered by the Wisconsin DNR and Service's Sea Lamprey Management identifies 21 species of fish, including seven salmonid species found in Whittlesey Creek (Appendix F). Whittlesey Creek supports a recreational fishery, primarily for brook trout and rainbow trout.

Brook trout are the only salmonid species native to tributaries within the Refuge. Stream resident brook trout and anadromous brook trout, termed coasters, were both present at one time. Currently, stream resident brook trout are present in Whittlesey Creek while coasters are believed to be extirpated. Overfishing and habitat alteration are identified as the primary causes for extirpation of coasters. Restoration of coaster brook trout is a Refuge goal.

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. Groundwater discharge to the stream, an important component of brook trout habitat, is impacted by increased surface runoff and groundwater use within the watershed. Restoration of habitat in tributaries and on Refuge lands is anticipated to benefit native and nonnative salmonids.

Waterfowl, neotropical migrants, raptors, grassland, and shore birds, as well as several amphibian and state listed plant species of concern, will benefit from restoration and management of the converted wetlands. The 540 acres within the proposed Refuge boundary will complement the 2,000 acres of coastal wetlands owned and managed by the WDNR and City of Ashland. These wetlands will provide resting and breeding habitat for waterfowl and neotropical migrant birds. Area biologists have identified 226 species of birds in the area.

3.4 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.

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 1999 (Joel Trick, personal communication, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Green Bay, WI). 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.

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 being reviewed as this EA is written (Fed. Reg., Vol. 64, No. 128, pp. 36454-36464). 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.

Gray Wolf:

The gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) is listed as endangered in Wisconsin, but a proposal has been presented to the public to delist it to threatened. The nearest wolf packs are 10 to 20 miles from the Refuge (Joel Trick, personal communication, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Green Bay, WI). We are not aware of wolf use within the Refuge boundary, but a wolf might pass through the Refuge periodically as it moves from one wolf pack to another in the region.

Canada Lynx:

This species is listed as threatened in Wisconsin. It is occasionally found in 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 lynx decline include changes in habitat that are detrimental to their prey (snowshoe hare), and additional roads that provide increased access for trappers, coyotes, and bobcats.

3.5 Cultural Resources

Through 1997, 18 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. Within the proposed boundaries are thirteen buildings or farmstead complexes. One of these buildings 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). There are no properties on the National Register of Historic Places, however, within the Refuge.

3.6 Economic Resources

Whittlesey Creek provides angling opportunities to the public for anadromous coho salmon and steelhead as well as resident brook and rainbow trout. Whittlesey Creek provides reproduction and rearing habitat for coho salmon and steelhead, and smolts produced in this watershed have a significant impact on the economically important Lake Superior fishery.

Property owners in the fee title Refuge boundary paid over \$15,000 in property taxes in 1998. As the Service acquires lands, they make revenue sharing payments to the local governments. Payments are based on the greatest of: 3/4 of 1 percent of the fair market value; 25 percent of net receipts; or \$0.75 per acre. Congress must appropriate these funds specifically for this program, but seldom fully funds it.

The tourism and outdoor recreation industry is a very important component of the economy of the state and region. Travel expenditures in Wisconsin have nearly doubled since 1993. Presently, Wisconsin tourism is a 7.7 billion industry and is among the top-three industries in the state (Wisconsin Department of Tourism 2000a). This industry also adds to the local economies. Ashland County had \$42,919,305 in expenditures from tourism in 1999 and Bayfield County had \$672,834,324 in expenditures in the same year (Wisconsin Department of Tourism 2000b).

3.7 Recreational Opportunities

Section 1.6.8 provided information from the 2000 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (Wisconsin DNR 2000). The leading outdoor recreation activity was walking for pleasure, followed by driving for pleasure, swimming, wildlife viewing and picnicking. Between 50 and 90 percent of survey respondents participated in these activities. Activities with participation rates from 30 to 50 percent are bicycling, hiking, fishing, nature study or bird watching, motor boating and nature photography. Approximately 23 percent of state residents participate in hunting. The Wisconsin DNR's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan also provides

trends for outdoor recreation in the state. They predict that little change in participation rates will occur in the short-term for activities of walking and driving for pleasure, swimming, wildlife viewing, and picnicking.

Outdoor recreation opportunities are very abundant in Bayfield and Ashland counties. According to 1995 data from Wisconsin DNR (WI Department of Commerce 2000), the two counties combined have ten percent of Wisconsin's mountain biking trails (326 miles), five percent of Wisconsin's snowmobile trails (689 miles), and six percent of Wisconsin's hiking trails (352 miles) and cross-country ski trails (594 miles). The city of Ashland has a hiking trail that follows Lake Superior for a few miles, trails and wildlife viewing areas in its Prentice Park, and the Tri-County Corridor, which is a 61.8 mile trail that follows an abandoned railroad right-of-way from Ashland to Superior, Wisconsin. Water-based recreation is also very popular in the two counties. Fishing, canoeing, boating, kayaking, and sailing are available on Lake Superior, inland lakes, and many miles of streams that enter into Lake Superior and the Mississippi River drainage.

Public lands in the two counties include the Chequamegon National Forest, several state parks, county forest land, the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, and numerous local and county parks.

Environmental education and interpretation with staff are provided at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, the Cable Natural History Museum, and the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

The mouth of Whittlesey Creek is a popular area for waterfowl hunting. Hunters also use the Fish Creek Sloughs Fish and Wildlife Management area for waterfowl hunting and mammal trapping. Hunting and trapping has traditionally taken place within the boundaries of the proposed refuge, but we have no information on the amount of use or what species were harvested.

The Chequamegon Bay area in general is widely used by local birdwatchers. Birding and wildlife watching by tourists will likely increase as more people visit the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and learn about the fish and wildlife resources of the area. The proximity of the Center, in general, will also increase recreational opportunities for both visitors of the area and local residents. As access, trails, programs, and special events are planned and developed by the Center, use will increase in the immediate vicinity, as well as the region.

Section 4. Environmental Consequences

4.1 Alternatives

The alternatives are briefly described below. The 10 issues identified through the public scoping process are listed under each issue, along with a description of the impact created by the alternative.

4.1.1 Alternative 1 - No Action

No Action would be taken to provide public use, which means that public use would not be allowed on the Refuge. The Service would continue to act on its own in planning and implementing habitat and population restoration actions.

Fish and Wildlife Populations:

Population management would focus on rehabilitation of coaster brook trout and conservation of migratory birds. Population objectives are established for brook trout cooperatively with other management authorities in the Lake Superior basin (Newman, et al. 1999). The Service would be involved in specific actions to meet population objectives both on and off the Refuge. Harvest by fishing might have an adverse effect on newly established populations if not carefully managed. Under any alternative, the Service would be limited in its ability to manage fishing on the Refuge. The Service would rely on the Wisconsin DNR to manage and regulate brook trout harvest in Whittlesey Creek through its fishing regulations.

Migratory bird populations are managed through habitat conservation and harvest for waterfowl that are hunted. All other migratory bird populations are managed by restricting take of any migratory bird and by cooperatively managing breeding, wintering and migration habitat. Some management is done cooperatively with other countries, non-profit organizations and states. Habitat management within the Refuge would focus on breeding habitat for waterfowl and neotropical migrants. Because the land base for the Refuge is small, it would not be practical to manage migratory bird populations strictly within the Refuge. The Service would work cooperatively with others to manage habitat on a regional basis for all migratory birds. Public use could negatively affect local populations mostly from disturbance. Hunting affects waterfowl populations mostly on a regional and national basis. Local populations might also be affected by hunting, but closing hunting on the Refuge would have little positive effect, because of its small size and few acres of open water that would create a refuge from hunting for those birds.

Management of small game bird, furbearer, and white-tailed deer populations are the responsibility of the Wisconsin DNR. Populations are managed on a much broader scale than the Refuge, so harvest regulations do not consider impacts to the Refuge. The Service has no intent to monitor resident wildlife populations on the Refuge, unless there is an indication of problems, such as damage from beaver; or conflicts with Refuge goals, such as deer herbivory that could negatively affect cedar re-establishment. Therefore,

hunting and trapping of resident wildlife on the Refuge are not considered a means to manage regional population goals established by the DNR. Rather, hunting and trapping resident wildlife are considered for their compatibility with Refuge goals.

Under this alternative, the Service's ability to reach its fish and wildlife population goals would not be negatively affected. Support from citizens and conservation/sporting organizations might be reduced, which could slow the Service in reaching its goals. Disturbance of wildlife by people would be minimized under this alternative, which could enhance some wildlife populations, such as migratory birds.

We do not have Refuge-specific population information on state-managed wildlife, such as deer, bear, and furbearers, so we do not know the effect that closing the Refuge to harvest of these species will have. Under this alternative, the Service would monitor select wildlife species to determine if any species specific management would be needed. The Service would periodically assess the effect that predatory furbearers (skunk, raccoon, fox, coyote, fisher) are having on migratory birds to determine if there is a need to manage furbearer populations.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat:

This alternative would not affect the Service's ability to reach habitat goals established for the Refuge (see Section 3.2). However, the Service's ability to work with partners, especially citizens who are interested in helping the Service with ecological restoration, would be limited, which might slow progress toward habitat goals.

Recreation Opportunities:

There are significant opportunities for outdoor recreation in the Ashland/Bayfield County area. Even so, when local citizens and landowners were asked about their interest in participating in public uses of the refuge, there were high expectations (Appendix A). The City of Ashland provides few opportunities for environmental or outdoor skill building opportunities. The Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center hosts over 140,000 visitors per year and many of these people will be interested in enjoying wildlife viewing opportunities on Refuge or Center lands. Therefore, we anticipate an increased demand for the types of public use the Refuge would offer. Under this alternative, increased demand for outdoor recreation and wildlife watching would not be provided on Refuge lands. Outdoor recreation, especially that related to wildlife, would be provided elsewhere.

User Conflicts:

There would be no user conflicts, since there would be no users.

Threatened and Endangered Species:

Threatened and endangered species would be neither enhanced nor negatively affected under this alternative.

4.1.2 Alternative 2 (preferred) - Compatible Public Uses, Including Hunting

Priority public uses would include fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, interpretation and waterfowl hunting. Wild food gathering would be provided under a special use permit. Access would be provided via parking areas and trails. The Service, as a partner of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, would work closely with Center partners to develop environmental education programs and interpretative activities. Trapping for recreational purposes would not be allowed until a compatibility determination is made; until then, trapping will be used for management purposes only.

Fish and Wildlife Populations: Under this alternative, the Service's ability to reach its fish and wildlife population goals would not be negatively affected. Population rehabilitation and management would be accomplished with agencies that own and manage adjacent land, such as the U.S. Forest Service or the Wisconsin DNR, as well as interested citizens and organizations whose goals overlap with the Service.

Public use might negatively affect individual wildlife species that are disturbance-sensitive, such as certain migratory birds during the nesting season, but this impact would be minimal. It is unlikely that public use will affect the population viability of such species. The Service will monitor migratory bird populations and if a negative impact from public use is noted or suspected, public use will be managed to reduce or eliminate disturbance.

Harvest of waterfowl at the Refuge should not negatively affect the overall harvest and management needs the Service establishes for waterfowl populations on a regional and continent-wide basis. Waterfowl hunting, however, would increase movement of local populations out of the Refuge to other areas of the Chequamegon Bay.

We do not have Refuge-specific population information on state-managed wildlife, such as deer, bear, and furbearers, so we do not know the effect harvest of these species on the Refuge will have. The Service would periodically assess the effect that predatory furbearers (skunk, raccoon, fox, coyote, fisher) are having on migratory birds to determine if there is a need to manage furbearer populations.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat:

This alternative would not affect the Service's ability to reach habitat goals established for the Refuge. Citizens would be more willing to work with the Service to accomplish ecological restoration goals than under Alternative 1, since they will have the opportunity to visit, use, and work on the Refuge.

Harvesting of wild food is expected to be low and is not expected to diminish wildlife food sources or diminish wildlife survival. Wild food harvest will be monitored through special use permit to ensure that wildlife habitats are not negatively affected.

Recreational Opportunities: This alternative would meet some local and regional recreation demand, especially for walking and wildlife observation. Traditional waterfowl hunting at Whittlesey Creek would continue and use might increase as the property becomes public land.

User Conflicts: User conflicts could occur, especially between consumptive and non-consumptive users. Possible conflicts are:

- Snowmobilers and snowshoers near the snowmobile trail.
- Walkers (wildlife observers) and hunters, especially if an access trail is provided to the lake shore.

The Service would manage use to avoid conflicts as much as possible, by proper placement of access points, trails and appropriate closures. For example, placing a buffer near the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center would avoid conflicts between hunters and observers that are using the trails from the Center that connect with Service lands. The Service would also consider closing trails near traditional hunting areas during the heaviest hunting use, such as weekends during the waterfowl season. Snowmobilers would be required to remain on the designated snowmobile trail, but noise and exhaust are unavoidable impacts to other users near the snowmobile trail.

Threatened and Endangered Species: Public use near the mouth of Whittlesey Creek could affect disturbance-sensitive piping plovers, if this species population increases and they begin to nest on shoreline and sandbars adjacent to the Refuge. It is very unlikely that piping plovers would attempt to nest within or adjacent to the boundary of the Refuge, but if they did, the Service would immediately take action to minimize human disturbance as much as possible. This could include closure of certain areas to the public.

Nesting bald eagles are also sensitive to human disturbance, especially during nest initiation. The Service would monitor any bald eagle use, and as with piping plovers, would minimize disturbance from human use by proper control of public use.

Gray wolf and Canada lynx are not known to use the Refuge. The Service would monitor use by keeping track of sightings. Proper management and protection measures would be determined at the time the Refuge becomes used by either species.

4.1.3 Alternative 3 - Compatible Non-consumptive Uses

Priority public uses would include wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. All consumptive uses, including hunting, fishing, wild food gathering, and trapping would be closed, unless needed for management purposes. Access would be provided via parking areas and trails. The Service would continue its partnership with the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and would work closely with Center partners to develop environmental education and interpretive programs.

Fish and Wildlife Populations: Under this alternative, the Service's ability to reach its fish and wildlife population goals would not be negatively affected. Population rehabilitation and management would be accomplished with agencies that own and manage adjacent land, such as the U.S. Forest Service or the Wisconsin DNR, as well as interested citizens and organizations whose goals overlap with the Service. Some organizations or citizens, especially consumptive users, might not assist the Service in reaching population goals. This could slow the Service's ability to reach its goals, but would not completely hinder its ability.

Management of game populations by harvest would occur only if needed to manage or enhance those populations on a local level. We do not have Refuge-specific population information on state managed wildlife, such as deer, bear, and furbearers, so we do not know the effect that closing the Refuge to harvest of these species will have. The Service would periodically assess the effect that predatory furbearers (skunk, raccoon, fox, coyote, fisher) are having on migratory birds to determine if there is a need to manage furbearer populations.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat: Same as alternative 2.

Recreation Opportunities: This alternative would meet some local and regional recreation demand, especially for walking and wildlife observation. Closure of the Refuge for consumptive uses would have a negative impact on the demand for those outdoor sports.

User Conflicts: User conflicts between consumptive and non-consumptive users would be minimized, but could occur between snowmobilers and non-motorized users in the winter. Snowmobilers would be required to remain on the designated snowmobile trail, but noise and exhaust are unavoidable impacts to other users near the snowmobile trail.

Threatened and Endangered Species: Same as alternative 2.

4.2 Comparison of Environmental Impacts by Alternative

RESOURCE	ALTERNATIVE 1 NO ACTION	ALTERNATIVE 2 (Preferred) COMPATIBLE USES, INCLUDING HUNTING	ALTERNATIVE 3 COMPATIBLE NON- CONSUMPTIVE USES
Fish and Wildlife Populations	No effect on the Service's ability to reach population goals for brook trout or migratory birds, but goals might be reached slower than alternative 2. Disturbance to wildlife from humans would be minimal. Select species of resident wildlife would be monitored to assess management needs.	No effect on the Service's ability to reach population goals for brook trout or migratory birds. Disturbance by humans minimal and monitored. Select species of resident wildlife would be monitored to assess management needs.	Same as alternative 2, except the ability to reach goals might be slower than alternative 2.
Fish and Wildlife Habitat	No effect on the Service's ability to reach habitat goals, but might be slower than alternative 2.	No effect on the Services' ability to reach habitat goals.	Same as alternative 1.
Recreation Opportunities	Increased demand for outdoor recreation would not be provided on the Refuge.	Some local and regional demand for walking and wildlife observation would be met. Demand for traditional waterfowl hunting on the Refuge would be met.	Some local and regional demand for walking and wildlife observation would be met. Demand for waterfowl hunting would not be met.
User Conflicts	There would be no conflicts.	User conflicts could occur, especially between consumptive and non-consumptive users	User conflicts between consumptive and non-consumptive users would be minimal.
Threatened and Endangered Species	No effect.	Unlikely, but possible effect if piping plovers nest adjacent to Refuge; effect minimized by restricting public use if this occurs.	Same as alternative 2

Section 5. List of Preparers

Pam Dryer, Wildlife Biologist, Ashland Fishery Resources Office

Lee Newman, Fishery Biologist, Ashland Fishery Resources Office

Section 6. Consultation with Others

For issues identification and public use ideas:

Darrell Fenner, Mike Voglesang, Greg Kessler - Wisconsin DNR, northern WI

Cathy Techtmann - University of Wisconsin Extension, Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, Ashland, WI

Steve Hoecker - U.S. Forest Service, Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, Ashland, WI

Mike Gardner - Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute, Northland College, Ashland, WI

Members of the Whittlesey Habitat Coalition at the Coalition's April 25, 2000 meeting

Numerous citizens who completed and submitted the questionnaire and attended the open house.

For Service policies and guidance regarding public use and NEPA compliance:

Tom Worthington, Nita Fuller, Rollin Siegfried, Jeff Gosse, John Dobrovolny - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ft. Snelling, MN

Larry Wargowsky - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, WI

Federally listed threatened and endangered species:

Joel Trick - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Green Bay, WI

Draft document reviewed by:

Jeff Gosse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ft. Snelling, MN

Tom Busiahn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ashland, WI

Gretchen Loeffler, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ashland, WI

John Dobrovolny, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ft. Snelling, MN

Tribal treaty rights on ceded territory:

Neil Kmiecik, Jonathon Gilbert - Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission

Tom Busiahn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, previously at Ashland, WI, currently at Washington D.C.

Section 7. References

- Adams, A. T., (Ed.) 1961. The Explorations of Pierre Esprit Radisson. Ross and Haines, Inc. Minneapolis, MN.
- Ashland Daily Press Newspaper, Ashland, WI. Several issues from 1870.
- Gardner, M. and J. Malischke. 1996. Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Plan for the Whittlesey Creek Priority Watershed Project. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources; Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; Bayfield County Land Conservation Department; and Whittlesey Steering Committee. Madison, WI.
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- Wisconsin Department of Commerce. 2000. County Economic Profiles. Web site: <http://badger.state.wi.us/agencies/commerce>.
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- Wisconsin Department of Tourism. 2000b. 1999 Economic Impact. Web site: www.tourism.state.wi.us/agency/htm/99econoimpactxls.htm.

Appendix A. Results of Questionnaire Sent by Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute

Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Interest Questionnaire Response Please return by March 31, 2000

1. Do you think you will use the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge when it is open to the public?

No 21 (please skip to question 4)

Yes 150

2. Which of the following activities might you participate in? (Check all that apply)

96 Wildlife watching

91 Bird watching (12) (7)

 Hunting (Circle one: Ducks/Upland Game/
Both (35))

54 Nature photography

89 Fishing on Whittlesey Creek

113 Walking or hiking

46 Nature walks with a naturalist

73 Self-guided nature tours

27 Environ. education for school or youth groups

57 Cross-country skiing

45 Snowshoeing

21 Research or study

16 Other: *see below

 Other: _____

3. What seasons of the year would you use the Refuge? (Check all that apply)

123 Summer 132 Fall 101 Winter 122 Spring

4. Do you have any suggestions or concerns about public use of the Refuge you would like to share?

Listed Below.

5. Would you be interested in receiving additional information about the refuge, including a copy of the public use plan? Yes 117 No 35

If yes, please provide your name and address and tell us how you would prefer to receive information.

Name:

Address:

City/State/ZIP:

I would prefer to receive information about the refuge by: (Check one only)

89 Newsletter via postal mail

29 Newsletter via e-mail. My e-mail address is: _____

6 Internet web site

22 Newspaper

1 Other: **see below

*Other Comments

- Painting scenery
- Driving through the refuge and seeing the refuge
- Audubon has committed 200 hours of service (2)
- Horseback riding
- Hiking with dog (if permitted)
- Botanizing & mushrooms; observing reptiles, amphibians, and insects
- Snowmobiling (2)
- Just enjoying it like it was when I was growing up in the area
- I think it would be great for kids to learn
- Family background
- Trapping
- I wish it was golf
- ATV Trails
- Picnics & canoeing
- Dog training
- Restoration of native coaster brook trout
- Changing fishing regulations to protect native species (ie: single baubles artificial lares or flies)

**Other Contacts

- Visits by FWS people
- By mail
- At public meetings

Survey Comments

- I have concerns that plans to reintroduce “Coaster” brook trout would have a negative impact on both native and naturalized fish within the watershed.
- The currently identified fee title acquisition area will not protect trout and salmon spawning habitat. It should be expanded upstream. I think the easement program will provide minimal habitat protection.
- No motorized vehicles, no blinds installed.
- Pollution – trash – litter; overuse by humans impacting wildlife.
- Include more acreage; lots of acreage
- Get rid of buildings along Hwy 13
- Get rid of building along Hwy 2 shoreline, west of NSP plant
- Are the Nat’l Park Service and USGS your partners also?
- Work with surrounding property owners outside of the refuge to promote and enhance their property for fish and wildlife habitat.
- There are houses in this area, how will their ownership be protected from public use? I would suggest this be a no firearms area.
- Walking trails.
- Restrict motorized vehicles.
- Protect water quality in adjacent areas.
- If you want public use, it should have been a golf course.
- I am totally against removing any more land from the tax base.
- No one has ever used that land for the above activities. Why do you think they will now?
- I oppose the use of motorized vehicles in the refuge, it is especially important to keep ATVs out. They are loud, polluting, and will rut out the clayey wet soils, they also encourage invasion by harmful exotic plant species.
- It should be a golf course not a man made swamp for bug breeding.
- No vehicles of any kind.
- Proper signage.
- Preserve fishing on Whittlesey Creek.
- The budget will get too high & public funds to keep it going. Up keep on the building alone will be very high much less paying staff. Many volunteers will be needed for programs and teaching.
- If you use the word refuge don’t let anyone hunt on the land.
- Started fishing on creek 65 years ago and would like to see it kept natural and like it was at that time.
- I think its wrong for the state to own land, and compete with private people for ownership of land. I would rather see a beautiful golf course in that area.
- Habitat protection and wildlife first priority, human use a secondary priority. The above priorities stated, don’t alienate local users or constituencies. Build/show value of the refuge to the local community.
- Wildlife Refuge to me would be keep the people out, as it is now. Making it public is interesting to me. Will attend your meetings. Hope you have a great plan. Lived and enjoyed this area all my life, outdoors fish & wildlife, with so many people we need controls that are understandable and workable.

- The public needs to be informed. I am a member of Trout Unlimited. Our chapter could help inform the public about Whittlesey Creek habitat, trout fishing, etc.
- Should be open to Public Use.
- Keep it from too much people pressure.
- I am not crazy about hunters in a walking corridor.
- Just keep it as it is: no trails, no parking areas, no buildings by the gov't. Leave as is!
- A designated no hunting zone at the mouth of Whittlesey (or somewhere) for those who enjoy watching migratory water fowl without the noise of Hwy 2 and without the risk and interference from hunters.
- Are the lands in this area being misused now? Of all these so called "benefits" which are presently not available. Why do we need you to do what is already being done. What will happen to adjoining land values, what will become of the tax revenue for out town and school?
- The primary use of the refuge should be just that – a refuge for wildlife, even if that means restricting use by humans.
- Parking along Hwy 13
- There should be "quiet" activities in consideration of wildlife – no ATVs or snowmobiles.
- It would be nice to have a parking lot and walking trail access to the creek mouth for ice fishing access. Keep snowmobile usage to a minimum or eliminate it.
- Excellently produced maps of the area and well developed trails should be provided to reduce impacts of use.
- NO motorized anything.
- This refuge should be about the natural goings on of nature it-self. Any encroachment by humans must be minimized and in a quiet and peaceful manner. I am not in favor of hunting or trapping in this refuge. However, if raccoons or some other predator got out of control, I would relent. This refuge must also be restored to its original ecosystem in every way. Flora and Fauna must be indigenous to the site and all exotics must be carefully removed. I am not in favor of using man made toxic chemicals – there has to be a better way which is safe to the environment. I have personally fought hard for this refuge and will continue. I greatly appreciate being included. P.S. I see no reason to allow motorized ATVs or snowmobiles, etc. They are disruptors and polluters – even motor boats pollute terribly. Lets make it a place where man's footprint has little or no impact. Nature is in great need of such places.
- I think it is important to save or improve the spawning grounds for the coho salmon & other fish.
- Will privately owned parcels be clearly marked so that trespassers will not be a problem? Are there any areas of quicksand at the refuge?
- Please restrict hunting.
- "Visitors" not disturb wildlife or litter. That some areas (maybe breeding or birthing) be closed.
- If it is a refuge, why hunting?
- Don't make it so accessible that it suffers from overuse.
- Maintain the services promised to maintain hunting, fishing and gathering on refuge land.
- I just want to see it used by the public. I think its important for people to know its available.
- The more critical habitat for wildlife should be left undisturbed.

- Private adjacent property must be clearly marked & refuge visitors must respect the landowners rights.
- Tribal subsistence hunting opportunities need to be incorporated where possible.
- Snowmobile & ATV use – any other motorized use – Jetski problems? – should be a non-motorized area. Allowing hunting? We need lower deer #s anyway!
- We don't need a Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge.
- Make sure the boundaries of the refuge are clearly marked and signed, so the public does not use private land, as if it were public land.
- Perhaps public & handicap blinds with limited access only – catch & release only
- Please avoid providing access via any motorized vehicle if possible.
- Protection of water, banks.
- I'm concerned that the refuge will be closed to the public; if so why? And what would the reason be?
- Concerns on the stream beds tilling in with the sand – a chronic problem – Fish creek & Whittlesey. Fish creek area very wild – can we keep it that way & still enjoy it... by more than a few...i.e. canoe access from Hwy 2 – to Long Bridge?
- Keep it open for hunting, fishing & trapping. Link trails with the Visitor Center & coordinate programs. Establish a self guided tour. Acquire lands as rapidly as reasonable. Quickly establish Conservation Easements w/ Phillips if possible.
- Leave the refuge in a wild and natural state. Don't make a lot of trails in it so people can dump all their garbage and make a mess of it.
- My largest concern would be that people would leave trash in the woods or streams.
- Would like to see catch & release only – artificials only or other strict fishing regs.
- Leave it in private ownership
- What is going to be the impact on the town of Barksdale's valuation and their budget if they lose 540 acres off the tax role?
- I am concerned about clear postings of legal access points for fishing.
- I would prefer it to be a non-motorized use area and no hunting.
- With the increased public use of the land in the refuge are you not concerned about traffic – liability – maintenance not only of the refuge but of public roads, etc.?
- Approx 50% of Bayfield Co is now owned by the Federal, State, or Local Government. I think that's enough.
- Just that it is free to use for all tax payers.
- I see it as eroding our tax base – putting more cost on the middle class tax payers. If you have so many rules & regulations on public property – it excludes those who prefer motorized recreation.
- No motorized noisy transportation
- Make meeting area more available.
- It's really funny, but everytime a refuge is established to protect and restore some land, the agencies behind the projects try to find ways to use the properties to draw more people to that area and then there would be if the properties were just left alone. I suggest to forget about trying to draw tours, and nature walks to the area and let the animals really be in a refuge in peace without any human interference whatsoever. Then it would be a true refuge.
- Don't need strangers in Barksdale.

- Hunting & Fishing seem inconsistent with my concept of a Refuge. Motorized us as well. Over-use in general could pose a problem, although development, housing, golf course, or casino are far more deleterious, and a public refuge has potential to provide understanding of & experience in the natural communities.
- Try to develop a fair method of keeping the refuge from getting too crowded.
- Walking trails should not be for walking dogs or bicycle riding.
- Open to the public means open to fishing and hunting on the property.
- Keep electric and phone company out of there digging up putting in cables and no spraying to kill vegetation.
- My property borders the western line of this refuge and I believe a fence should be constructed to keep public from trespassing onto my property. Which is all wooded.
- Costs – expenses – tax dollars
- Although hunting is compatible and should be allowed, a public use plan should focus on improving opportunities for environmental education and awareness, especially because of its proximity to the NGL visitor center.
- The refuge is representing only the environment, what possible suggestions or concerns by the citizenry would be redressed by a group of FASCISTS?!!!!!!
- Should have been made into a golf course.
- You bug pickers have taken enough land from the tax rolls. It would have made a nice golf course.
- Leave it wild; no trails & access points
- I think this refuge should be closed to the public to protect this sensitive area.
- Maintain open to hunting & fishing east of Hwy 13. Use refuge area adjacent to Visitor Center west of Hwy 13 for environmental education. Could close this area to firearms hunting. Restore wetlands.
- Would prefer not to see any additional consumption of private property by liberal representatives of our government, operating under the pretence of environmental protection. The Refuge is nothing more than a land grab!!
- First off, tear down the Tower of Babel & return the land to grazing animals. You built it in a swamp that I thought you were protecting. Then return the rest of your Refuge land to private owner & let them make something useful out of it. Then load your socialist ass up & leave this country. You people are wasting our tax dollars. We don't need or want a wildlife refuge. Or any more government boondoggles.
- Minimum impact activities only.
- We do hope that there is no plan to push landowners into giving up what is theirs. We do not plan on anyone owning this land other than family members. Please do not allow under handed tactics or practices to happen.
- Communicate openly.

Appendix B. Letters Sent to Whittlesey Habitat Coalition and Agencies



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Fishery Resources Office
2800 Lake Shore Drive East
Ashland, Wisconsin 54806-2427
715-682-6185
FAX 715-682-8899



March 6, 2000

Sent to: Whittlesey Habitat Coalition Members,

Dear Whittlesey Habitat Coalition Member,

We are moving forward with planning for public use of the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge. I am requesting your suggestions and comments regarding public use of the refuge.

Attached is the timeline for developing the public use and hunting plans. Our goal is to have Service lands available for public use by the Fourth of July weekend and to have the option to be open for hunting by this waterfowl season. We have set an aggressive schedule, but we think it can be done, unless we encounter major issues or concerns. Plans will be developed for the entire proposed refuge, but will be implemented in phases as we acquire additional lands.

The Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute is assisting the Whittlesey Habitat Coalition by sending out a public use questionnaire. You will be receiving the questionnaire, which I hope you complete as a member of the community. If you have any agency/organization suggestions or comments relative to public use, please provide those in a separate, official letter by March 27, 2000. We will look forward to hearing from you.

I also wanted to let you know that I will be leaving the Ashland area soon. I have accepted a position with the Fish and Wildlife Service in Columbia, Missouri as refuge biologist for the Big Muddy National Wildlife Refuge. Pam Dryer will be coordinating the public use planning effort and facilitating the work of the Habitat Coalition in the near future, so please contact her with questions you might have (715-682-6185, ext. 215; pam_dryer@fws.gov).

Thank you so much for your dedication and enthusiasm in making this Refuge a reality. I am very excited about my new position and will take the lessons you have all taught me to make good things happen on the Missouri River. It has been a privilege working with you.

Sincerely,

Maureen Gallagher
Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Enclosure

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Fishery Resources Office
2800 Lake Shore Drive East
Ashland, Wisconsin 54806-2427
715-682-6185
FAX 715-682-8899

March 6, 2000

Chairman Eugene Bigboy
Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewas
PO Box 39
Odanah, WI 54861

Dear Chairman Bigboy,

We are moving forward with planning for public use of the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge. I am requesting your suggestions and comments regarding public use of the refuge.

Attached is the timeline for developing the public use and hunting plans. Our goal is to have Service lands available for public use by the Fourth of July weekend and to have the option to be open for hunting by this waterfowl season. We have set an aggressive schedule, but we think it can be done, unless we encounter major issues or concerns. Plans will be developed for the entire proposed refuge, but will be implemented in phases as we acquire additional lands.

The Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute is assisting the Whittlesey Habitat Coalition by sending out a public use questionnaire. You will be receiving the questionnaire, which I hope you complete as a member of the community. If you have any agency/organization suggestions or comments relative to public use, please provide those in a separate, official letter by March 27, 2000. We will look forward to hearing from you.

Pam Dryer will be coordinating the public use planning effort and facilitating the work of the Habitat Coalition in the near future, so please contact her with questions you might have (715-682-6185, ext. 215; pam_dryer@fws.gov).

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Maureen Gallagher
Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Enclosure

Letter sent to:

Chairman Eugene Bigboy
Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewas
PO Box 39
Odanah, WI 54861

Robin Jaeger
Bureau of Indian Affairs
615 Main Ave. W
Ashland, WI 54806

Julie Van Stappen
Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
415 Washington Ave.
Bayfield, WI 54814

Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
P.O. Box 180496
Delafield, WI 53018-0496

Bing Tage
Ducks Unlimited
4381 Cedar Ln
Rhineland, WI 54501



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Fishery Resources Office
2800 Lake Shore Drive East
Ashland, Wisconsin 54806-2427
715-682-6185
FAX 715-682-8899

March 31, 2000

Mr. James Schlender, Director
Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission
P.O. Box 9
Odanah, WI 54891

Dear Jim,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is moving forward with planning for public use of the newly established Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge. At this time, no plans have been completed, but the Service is starting to gather input on issues and preferences for use of the Refuge.

We understand that any portion of the Refuge that is opened to hunting and fishing by the general public will also likely be open to use by members of Lake Superior Chippewa bands under treaty rights. We hope to work with the Commission and tribal governments proactively to include treaty activities in the public use plan for the Refuge.

We are interested in meeting with you and appropriate staff to discuss the issue, and determine what next steps would be appropriate.

Attached is the timeline for developing the public use and hunting plans. Our goal is to have Service lands available for public use by the Fourth of July weekend and to have the option to be open for hunting by the fall waterfowl season. Plans will be developed for the entire proposed refuge, but will be implemented in phases as we acquire additional lands.

I will call you next week to arrange a meeting. If you have any immediate questions, please call me. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Busiahn
Supervisory Fishery biologist

c: Larry Wargowsky, Necedah National Wildlife Refuge
Rollin Siegfried, Refuge Program Manager, Great Lakes & Ohio River Ecosystems
Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Fishery Resources Office
2800 Lake Shore Drive East
Ashland, Wisconsin 54806-2427
715-682-6185
FAX 715-682-8899



April 11, 2000

MEMORANDUM

TO: Whittlesey Habitat Coalition
FROM: Pam Dryer
RE: Whittlesey Creek NWR Public Use Plan - Working Draft

Dear Coalition Members,

Enclosed is a copy of the working draft of the public use plan, for your review. Please bring comments, suggestions, concerns that you have to the Coalition meeting on April 25. If you cannot attend the meeting, please call me with your comments, or send them via e-mail or letter. We will discuss the plan and your suggestions during the Coalition meeting.

This is a working draft, which means you'll notice there are a still some questions that I have and some sections that need additional information. Our interest in getting this plan to you in this form is to get your feedback before we send it out for public review. I appreciate your patience and understanding in reviewing a draft that needs work!

Thank you so much for your help and interest. Please call me if you have any questions.

Enclosure

**Appendix C. Letter Received from Wisconsin DNR and Great Lakes
Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission**

Appendix D. Whittlesey Habitat Coalition Members

Al Bochler
P.O. Box 106
Ashland, WI 54806

Darryl Fenner
Wisconsin DNR
P.O. Box 545
Washburn, WI 54891
715-373-6165

Jeff Carlson
Trout Unlimited
Rt 1, Box 268
Mason, WI 54856
715-765-4828

Larry Wargowsky
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
W7996 20th St. W
Necedah, WI 54646-7531
608-565-2551

Martin Hanson
Mellen, WI, 54546
715-274-2344

Judy Henry
Chequamegon - Nicolet National Forest
113 Bayfield
Washburn, WI 54891
715-373-2667

Judy Pratt-Shelly
Red Cliff Dept. of Environ. Protection
P.O. Box 529
Bayfield, WI 54814
715-779-3700

Matt Dallman and Becky Sapper
The Nature Conservancy
618 Main Street West
Ashland, WI 54806
715-682-5789

Peter David
GLIFWC
P.O. Box 9
Odanah, WI 54861
715-682-6619

Sandy Schultz
ABDI- Land Conservation Committee
P.O. Box 267
Ashland, WI 54806
715-682-7187

Steve Hoecker
Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center
29270 County Highway G
Ashland, WI 54806
715-685-9983

Pam Dryer
Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge
c/o Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center
29270 County Highway G
Ashland, WI 54806
715-685-2678

Mike Gardner or Ted Gostomski
Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute
1411 Ellis Ave.
Ashland, WI 54806
715-682-1481

Gary Haughn
Natural Resources Conservation Service
P.O. Box 267
Ashland, WI 54806
715-682-7187

Neil Paulson
P.O. Box 36
Drummond, WI 54832
715-739-6745

Tom Cogger, Tribal Liason
Natural Resources Conservation Service
P.O. Box 267
Ashland, WI 54806
888-361-2000, mail box 301

Appendix E. Written Comments Received from May 17, 2000 Open House

- As a long time resident of the Chequamegon Bay Area, I am please to see the development of the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge. I am also pleased that traditional uses of the area for hunting and fishing will be continued. By conserving habitat for wildlife such as ducks, geese, swans, deer and grouse, you also improve the habitat for predatory animals such as racoons, fox and coyotes. To maintain a balance in the ecosystem, it would seem that the harvest of some of these animals would be important. For this reason, I would recommend that trapping, the most efficient way of harvesting predators, be an available activity within the refuge. (Signed by Thomas D. Frizzell, Bayfield, WI)

- In conversation with Pam Dryer and Tom Busiahn on 5/17/00, it came across to me that trapping on the Refuge is an issue only because of concerns for user conflicts. It became apparent that either the USFWS has a political agenda against trapping or they need to be educated on the biological benefits of trapping. Education & ethics are the main focus of the Trappers Association on both the state and national levels. Trapping has an important part in the management of furbearing animals as well as nesting and migrating birds as well as being the first door opened in the history of northern Wisconsin and the Chequamegon bay area. By eliminating trapping in the National Wildlife refuge System Improvement Act, you are closing the door on an important piece of use, education, & management tool. Work with us – all will be good. Feel free to cal upon myself or any of the organizations dedicated to wildlife management. (Michael Gustafson, member of National Trappers Association, Wisconsin Trappers Association)

- Items that are important to me:
 - ✓ The close cooperation you describe of the “Visitor Center.” They need to be closely linked together.
 - ✓ A reasonable trapping program should be allowed.
 - ✓ The refuge needs to pursue purchase of additional lands with additional energy. A part of this seems to be a need to look at your appraisals. They seem low – too low to successfully acquire important parcels.
 - ✓ Someone needs to lead the coordination of all of the Fish Creek/Whittlesey Coastal Wetland Management, i.e. City, DNR, FS, F&WS together in a plan for the total good of the wetland. The agencies need equality in the planning/management processes, but the leadership to get it moving/keep it moving could well be the F&WS because they have the types of expertise needed. To do it they need a refuge manager who is on site.

Appendix F. Fish Species Captured in Whittlesey Creek

Brown Trout
Brook Trout
Rainbow Trout
Coho Salmon
Chinook Salmon
Pink Salmon
Splake
Slimy Sculpin
Ninespine Stickleback
Brook Stickleback
Common Shiner
Spottail Shiner
Blackchin Shiner
Johnny Darter
Fathead Minnow
Blacknose Dace
White Sucker
Rainbow Smelt
Creek Chub
Central Mudminnow

Data compiled from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sea Lamprey Management, Marquette, MI
Compiled 1997

Appendix G. Comments Received from Public on Draft Plan and Service Responses to Them

Red Cliff Natural Resources Program, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewas

- Requests clarification on development of MOU for tribal treaty rights.
Response: The details of, and process we use for the MOU will be worked out as we begin to develop the MOU. We plan to use existing examples to guide us, such as the MOU developed between tribes and the U.S. Forest Service for plant harvest on National Forest lands in Ceded Territory.
- Suggests that wild food gathering including collection of plants for medicinal or ceremonial purposes.
Response: We have revised the definition of wild food gathering to include plants used for medicinal or ceremonial purposes.
- Trapping should be utilized as a management tool when necessary and tribal members can provide assistance with this.
Response: Trapping for management purposes will be allowed as needed. We will need to work out tribal treaty rights related to trapping as we develop the MOU.
- The Tribe does not support work that supplements or support non-native fish species restoration or management.
Response: The work of the Refuge and the Fish and Wildlife Service is also associated with restoration of native fish species. Our goals, no doubt, overlap.
- Consider impacts that increased public use will have on fish populations and habitats.
Response: Please be aware that public use will be adjusted if we need to protect fish and wildlife resources. The primary focus of all refuges within the national wildlife refuge system is wildlife first.

Bayfield County Tourism & Recreation

Compatible public uses are fair and just. Grateful for the permanent snowmobile trail easement across the property.

Response: Thank you.

Dennis Pratt, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

- Beaver control should be considered so fish migration is not blocked.
Response: Stream restoration efforts will incorporate the Service's ecosystem approach to conservation. If beaver management is identified as one of our management/restoration needs, we will plan to implement it.
- See if we can compile outdoor recreation information by region, not just by state.
Response: We also would like to have outdoor recreation information available by region. The best source of this information is the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; we

used the statewide information available from the 2000 SCORP for this document. Unfortunately, the DNR did not compile trend or use information on a regional basis, but might at a later date. I have asked to get the information when/if it becomes available. To compensate for the lack of regional information, I was able to gather facility and tourism expenditures for Ashland and Bayfield County, which at least gives us some sense of the importance of outdoor recreation for this region.

- Hard to compare the three alternatives.
Response: I agree. We follow standard formats. Please note the tables that summarize the alternatives and impacts to resources. I hope these help clarify the alternatives.
- Alternative 3 should still allow catch and release angling.
Response: Good point. Under Alternative 3, we could consider catch and release for special events when outdoor skills are being taught. However, for public use purposes, catch and release is still considered angling, which would be closed under Alternative 3. Under Alternative 2, our preferred alternative, we would consider catch and release if there is a biological/management reason to do so, and we would work in concert with the DNR before we agreed to such regulations.
- Background information needs work and Dennis has some good historical information he can offer.
Response: We will work with you to update the background information for use in our future documents. Thank you for offering to help.

David A. Bratley, Washburn, WI

Suggests setting aside a waterfowl rest area in the Chequamegon Bay wetlands, either in the Refuge or Fish Creek Sloughs, where hunting is not allowed. Would enhance birdwatching opportunities.

Also concerned that hunters are leaving trash along the shoreline and paths, which should be cleaned up.

Response: The waterfowl use around the Bay near shore is definitely different between spring and fall, possibly for two reasons: 1) food sources are nearer shore in the spring, and 2) hunting pressure and search for food moves divers to the open water in the Bay. Large rafts are formed by diving ducks at this time of year. Bluebills are comfortable on open waters searching for mollusks, fairy shrimp and other aquatic animals. Redheads and canvasback also prefer open water, but will search for aquatic vegetation, which may be found in Kakagon sloughs.

Dabblers, as you noted, find areas like Prentice Park. The new wetland restorations inland on the Refuge will also provide refuge for dabblers. We are also planning a wetland restoration project on the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center's land, which will be closed to hunting. We suspect that the divers, because of hunting pressure anywhere on the bay, will still move out to open water in the fall, creating a de facto refuge.

Trash left by users will be picked up by refuge staff or volunteers. Littering is prohibited and violators can be fined.

Terri Bahe, Washburn, WI

Suggests a long-term goal of moving the snowmobile trail off of the refuge. In the meantime, suggests a reduced speed zone.

Response: Good idea. We will ask the Bayfield County Snowmobile Alliance to consider a reduced speed zone. Regarding moving the trail off the Refuge, see response to Richard Spotts comments.

Gary Haughn, Ashland Field Office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA

Recommends including the entire watershed in habitat and restoration planning.

Response: This will be done when we begin to develop our restoration and habitat management plan. For the public use plan, we consider use on and adjacent to the Refuge.

Elisabeth Quast, Benoit, WI

Supports eliminating motorized trails and not allowing any additional ones. Also suggests that we delay a parking lot decision and utilizing the Visitor Center's facilities.

Response: The existing snowmobile trail follows a permanent right-of-way easement for snowmobile use. The Refuge founders evaluated the possibility of moving the snowmobile trail outside the refuge boundaries, but were not able to find a good alternative route. We must honor existing easements. We will keep communicating with the Bayfield County Snowmobile Alliance about minimizing impacts to the Refuge (see comment from Terri Bahe), but it will be up to Bayfield County to move the trail.

Regarding the parking lot decision, we will wait to make a decision. The location identified on the map in the plan is a potential site, but not the only option.

Richard Spotts, Ashland, WI

- Supports no more motorized use beyond the existing snowmobile trail. Motorized vehicles could significantly impact wetlands and saturated soils.

Response: This will happen. No motorized use of additional motorized trail, other than existing travel rights-of-way, will be allowed on refuge lands.

- Suggests avoiding wetlands as much as possible for hiking trails.

Response: We will avoid them as much as possible, but we will also want the public to have access to select wetland areas for education and wildlife observation.

- Concerned with proposed parking area off Cherryville Road, since it is adjacent to Whittlesey Creek. That site might be better served if restored to natural conditions. Suggests waiting until we acquire additional tracts that could provide other options for parking, especially something off State Highway 13. In the meantime, utilize the Visitor Center facilities.

Response: We will wait to make a decision on the parking area. See response above to Elisabeth Quast's comments.

- Discourage off-trail or cross country hiking, because of sensitive wetlands within refuge.
Response: We will make users aware of sensitive nature of wetlands. We expect that the vast majority of people will stay on trails or high ground, for their own convenience and safety. If we discover that damage is occurring from off-trail use, we will close those areas.

Phyllis Johnson, Cornucopia, WI

Concerned with hunting and conflict with other users.

Response: You are right. We might have to close trails to the Lake during waterfowl season. All other users, however, will be given consideration during the waterfowl season and we will manage use to avoid conflicts.