



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building
1 Federal Drive
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS/ARW/RE-AP

AUG 16 1993

Dear Reviewer:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is pleased to provide you with this copy of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact for the proposed Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge located in the Kankakee River Basin (Basin) in northwestern Indiana and northeastern Illinois.

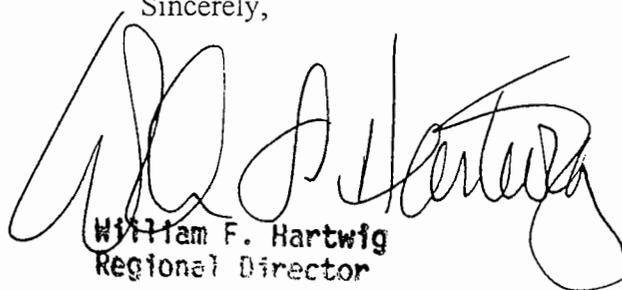
The EA describes and assesses five alternatives, including a "No Action" alternative. The alternatives describe the Service's level of involvement in restoration and preservation of valuable fisheries and wildlife resources and their habitats in the Basin. The Service's proposed action would provide a mixture of activities in habitat management, watershed stewardship, and public use, while providing, to the extent possible, that the widest spectrum of benefits associated with this great area be enhanced and made available to the public.

Included in the front of the EA is the Selection of Alternative and Finding of No Significant Impact, which was based on public input and the analysis of the opportunities and concerns illustrated in the EA.

The Service recognizes that there is rarely total consensus on issues of fish and wildlife resource management, and this project has certainly been no exception. However, we feel this project will provide lasting benefits to fish, wildlife, and the people of this Nation.

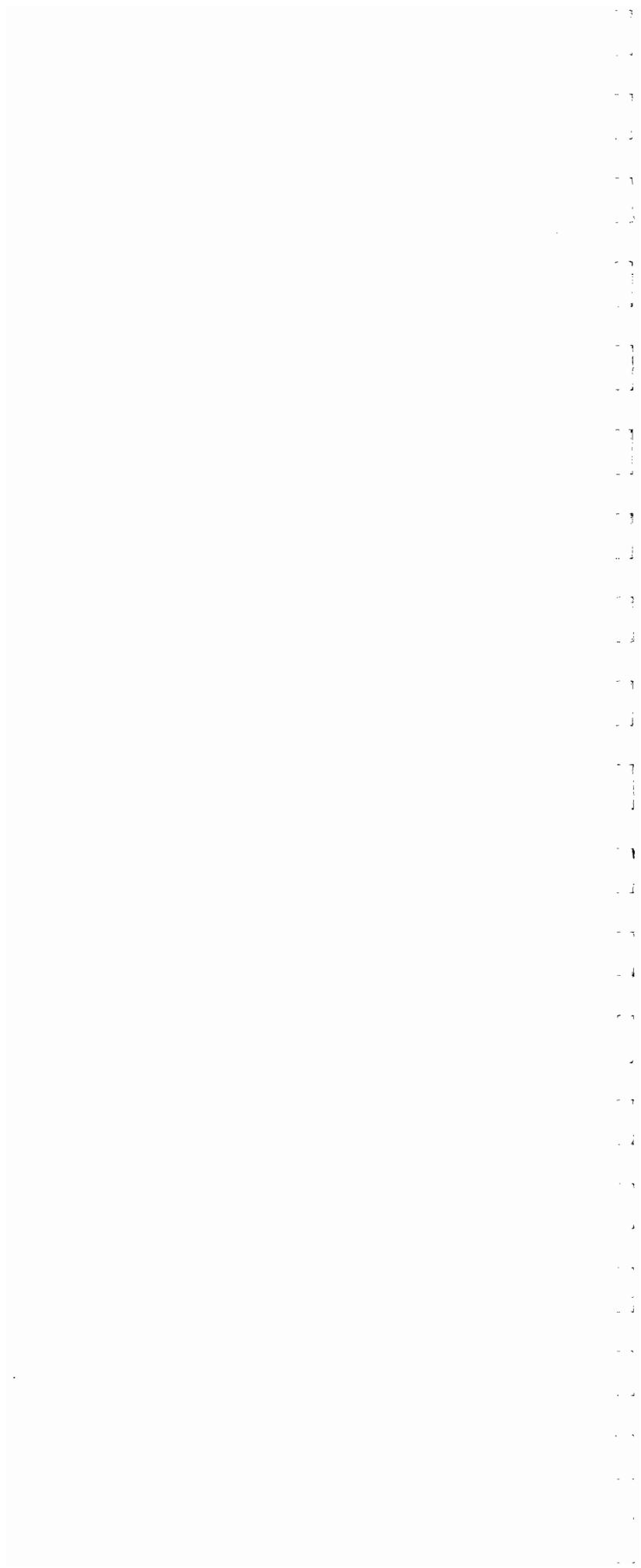
We appreciate the efforts of those who contributed to the planning and public involvement process which made this project a reality.

Sincerely,



William F. Hartwig
Regional Director

Enclosure



*Selection of Alternative
and
Finding of No Significant Impact*

*Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge
Indiana and Illinois*

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to publicly disclose the possible environmental consequences that development of the Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge in the Kankakee River Basin (Basin) could have on the quality of the physical, biological, and human environment, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

The EA presents and evaluates five alternatives, a "No Action" alternative (maintain the status quo) and four "Action" alternatives. The alternative selected for implementation is Alternative 5.

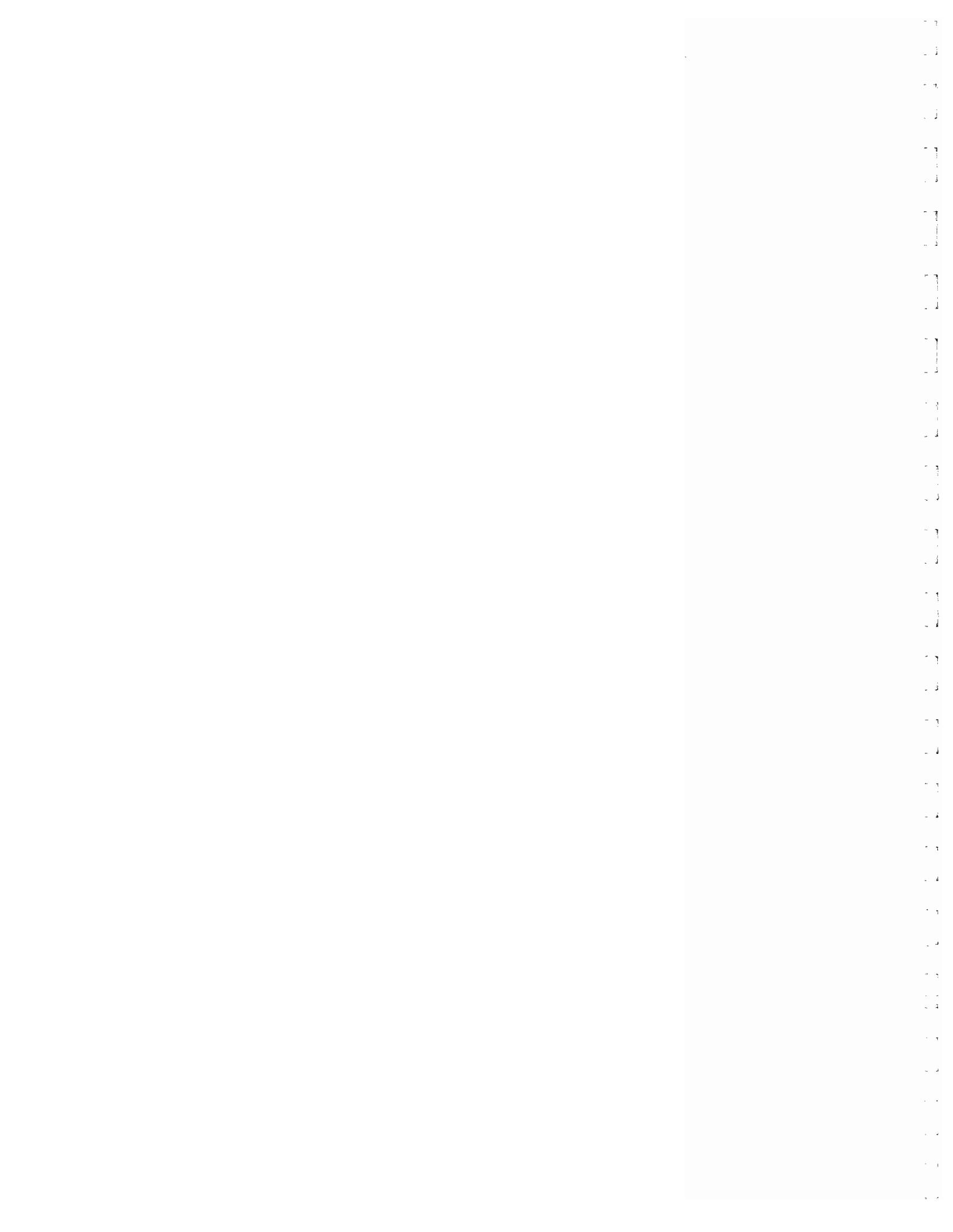
This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), EA, and supporting material will be made available to the public for 30 days from the date below. During this 30-day period the FONSI will not be final, nor will the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implement the selected alternative.

Restoring, preserving, and managing upland, wetland, and riparian habitats by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Basin will provide important benefits to threatened and endangered species, waterfowl and other migratory birds, native fish, and resident flora and fauna, as well as provide the public with additional wildlife-dependent recreation and education opportunities.

For reasons presented below and based on an evaluation of the information contained in the Environmental Assessment, we have determined that Alternative 5 is not a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of Section 102 (2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Reasons:

1. Economic impacts will be negligible compared to the overall economic base of the Basin.
2. Land acquisition will be from willing sellers only.
3. Where Service fee-title acquisition is concerned, annual revenue sharing payments will be made to the counties to help off-set potential impacts to the tax base.
4. Cultural resource inventory surveys are planned to ensure protection of archeological, historical, and architectural resources.
5. This action will not have an adverse impact on threatened or endangered species.
6. This action will not adversely impact drainage networks.



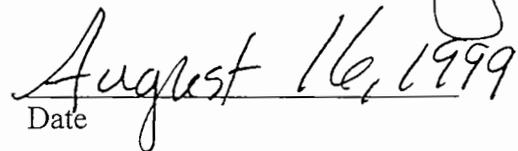
7. This action will not adversely impact floodplains.
8. This action will not adversely impact other planning efforts in the Basin.

Supporting References:

Environmental Assessment
Economic Impact Assessment



Regional Director



Date



Regional Director
Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region
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Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056

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SUMMARY

Introduction

In 1996 the Service initiated a planning process aimed at evaluating the feasibility of developing a new national wildlife refuge in the Kankakee River Basin (Basin) in northwestern Indiana and northeastern Illinois (Figure 1). The process included a thorough review of opportunities and issues related to fish and wildlife resource management by the Service in the Basin as well as an assessment of roles the Service might take in achieving its mission, that of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and resource objectives for the Region. The planning process was initiated in response to the declining status of numerous Service trust resources in the Basin.

Project Scoping and Public Involvement

Numerous Federal, state, local, and private entities were involved in the planning process. These include Indiana's and Illinois' Congressional Delegations, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Interior, Indiana and Illinois Legislative members representing the counties involved, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, representatives from County, Township, and other local governments, representatives of national, state, and local conservation organizations, Farm Bureau, landowners, and many other interested groups and citizens.

Information about the proposed project was provided to the general public through news-releases, presentations, interviews, seven newsletters, one-on-one briefings, and the Internet. Over 5,000 copies of the draft environmental assessment were distributed for a 150-day public review and comment period. The Service coordinated its public involvement effort closely, and corresponded frequently with many of the aforementioned entities. To-date, more than 14,000 people from 44 different states have commented on this Refuge proposal (Figure 7).

Public comments covered a wide range of potential opportunities, issues, and concerns. Many comments encouraged the development of a new national wildlife refuge, while others cited potential conflicts that would need to be addressed before the Refuge proposal moved forward. Some of these opportunities, issues, and concerns included: if developed, what effect would the Refuge have on: 1) biological diversity and abundance; 2) water quality in the Kankakee River; 3) drainage, runoff, and flood control within the Basin; 4) county tax revenues and refuge revenue sharing payments and apportionment; 5) local economies; 6) private property rights; 7) infrastructure, 8) mosquitos; 9) other planning efforts in the Basin; 10) agricultural land, and 11) environmental justice.

Proposed Action

The Service's proposed action in this environmental assessment is to develop the Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge "*for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources*" (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956) and "*for the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions...*" (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986).

The following Refuge mission, vision, guiding principles, goals, objectives, and strategies provide an interim framework for the Refuge until a Comprehensive Conservation Plan has been completed (approximately 12-18 months).

The mission for the Refuge will be to protect, restore, and manage ecological processes within the Kankakee River Basin that benefit threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, native fish, and diverse flora and fauna populations, while providing the public, to the extent possible, high quality wildlife-dependent environmental interpretation, education, and recreation experiences that build an understanding and appreciation for these resources, and the role humankind plays in their stewardship.

The Service's vision for the Refuge is to restore and preserve an ecological system that supplies the needs of migratory waterfowl, neotropical migratory songbirds, native fish, native plant communities, and threatened and endangered flora and fauna. The Refuge and its staff will be leaders in building mutually-beneficial relationships with the public and our partners which will lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of the natural world, and the role humankind plays in its stewardship.

Development and management of the Refuge will be guided by the following principles:

- ☛ *Use an ecosystem approach:* The ecosystem approach is a collaboratively developed vision of desired future conditions that integrates ecological, scientific, economic, and social factors. It is applied within a geographic framework based primarily on ecological factors.
- ☛ *Rely on sound science:* Restoration and preservation of ecological processes will be scientifically sound, ecologically credible, economically and socially acceptable, and legally defensible. Refuge management decisions will be based on sound information from the full range of natural and social sciences.
- ☛ *Use adaptive management processes:* An adaptive management approach features a structured, iterative process that recognizes that most information used in decision making is imperfect and that, as decisions are made, a process is in place to gain better information and to allow managers to make appropriate mid-course corrections.
- ☛ *Results through partnerships:* Partnership initiatives require extensive coordination and communication between federal agencies; state, tribal, and local governments; and stakeholders and customers.
- ☛ *Ensure public involvement:* Refuge planning will include a clear, credible, and meaningful role for public input from the full spectrum of social and cultural backgrounds. Public sentiment and comment at the local, State, and national levels will be considered.

Interim Refuge goals will be consistent with those for the National Wildlife Refuge System. They are:

- ☛ Preserve, restore, and enhance in their natural ecosystems (when practical) all species of animals and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered;
- ☛ Perpetuate the migratory bird resource;
- ☛ Preserve a natural diversity and abundance of fauna and flora on refuge lands; and
- ☛ Provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and humankind's role in their environment and to provide refuge visitors with high quality, safe, wholesome and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife to the extent these activities are compatible with the purposes for which each refuge was established.

Interim Refuge objectives and strategies will include:

Coordination:

- ☛ Provide Service leadership and support to other Federal, state, local, and private agencies for the restoration and preservation of ecological processes in the Basin that benefit migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, native fish, and their habitats (Service trust resources).

- ☛ Foster improved communication and collaboration between Service programs, the states, non-government organizations, and other Federal agencies.
- ☛ Focus Federal, state, and local agencies having related responsibility and/or expertise in the Basin to increase efficiency and develop consistency in natural resource conservation.
- ☛ Accelerate the current status and trends effort toward natural resource restoration and preservation in the Basin through a comprehensive and coordinated system, that complements existing authorities.
- ☛ Intensify and concentrate Federal, state, local, and private habitat restoration and enhancement mechanisms aimed at benefitting Service trust resources in the Basin (such as the Wetland Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, set-aside programs, North American Waterfowl Management Plan, local land trusts, water quality improvement programs, etc.).

Planning

- ☛ Provide a comprehensive statement of Refuge management direction through the development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and associated step-down management plans (the CCP will replace guidance contained in the draft conceptual management plan).
- ☛ Provide avenues for effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with affected parties, including Federal agencies, state conservation agencies, tribal governments, local governments, non-government organizations, and landowners.

Research

- ☛ Support, promote, and coordinate scientific research on, and monitoring of, Service trust resources and their habitat, to improve management decision-making.
- ☛ Use expertise from various agencies, universities, and other sources to develop and disseminate knowledge about natural resources and human uses and values associated with those resources.

Habitat Restoration and Management

- ☛ Through a combination of voluntary partnerships, easements, and land acquisition, restore and preserve approximately 30,000 acres of wetlands, prairies, and oak savanna habitat to meet the needs of migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and aquatic resources in the Basin (willing buyer/willing seller only).
- ☛ Leverage Service restoration and preservation efforts by connecting or enlarging existing managed areas.
- ☛ Restore backwater habitats and reconnect side channels that have been artificially cut-off on the Kankakee River to promote biological diversity and rehabilitate fish spawning, nursery, and overwintering areas.
- ☛ Enhance migratory bird production and use of the area by restoring, enhancing, and managing wetland, savanna, and prairie habitats.
- ☛ Restore and manage areas at the landscape scale to provide the most favorable matrix possible for the refuge and other protected areas (see Noss and Harris 1986, O'Connell and Noss 1992, Missouri Dept. of Conservation 1994).
- ☛ Intensify the Service's Partner's for Fish and Wildlife habitat restoration efforts and identify new opportunities to restore wetlands and grasslands on private lands.

Education and Interpretation

- ☛ Expand public awareness, understanding, appreciation, and stewardship of the Basin's natural resources through high quality wildlife-dependent public interpretive and recreation programs.
- ☛ Establish Refuge outreach programs to develop a more involved citizenry in support of fish and wildlife conservation.

Successful Refuge development will rely on partnerships formed with landowners in the Basin, volunteers and interested citizens, farm and conservation organizations, and other government agencies. Restoration and preservation of habitat by the Service would be on a willing buyer/willing seller basis only. Only lands that the Service acquires would become part of the Refuge. All lands acquired by the Service would be managed as units of the Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. Funding for Service land acquisition would be the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund.

Alternatives

The Service formulated five alternatives (four Action and one No Action) to develop a new national wildlife refuge in the Basin. For each Action alternative, the Service identified a set of "focus areas" which constitute subsets of the Basin (Figures A, B, C)(see Chapter 2 also). In this regard focus areas are the first cut in a planning process aimed at narrowing down high potential geographic areas with significant resource value in the Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region, ie. ⇔ Kankakee River Basin ⇔ focus area ⇔ individual refuge units. However, focus areas are not Refuge boundaries. Refuge boundaries would ultimately conform to individual land tracts as they are purchased from willing sellers within the focus areas. The aim of all action alternatives is to develop a new national wildlife refuge to restore and preserve Service trust resources through a landscape-scale approach in the Kankakee River Basin. The No Action alternative reflects the current state of conservation activity (status quo) within the Basin.

Common to all Action alternatives is the development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan that the Service will complete with partner organizations and the public to determine how best to implement National Wildlife Refuge System projects and programs within the focus areas. In addition to continued public involvement, this step-down planning process will involve hydrologic and ecologic planning with partners such as the Army Corp of Engineers, the U.S. Geological Survey, State DNR's, and others to ensure Service activities will meet habitat and wildlife objectives set for the area, complement other programs and on-going planning efforts, and be responsive to concerns of landowners in the Basin.

Alternative 1 - No Action, the Service would not develop the Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. Restoration and preservation activities in the Basin on behalf of Service trust resources would be expected to proceed at the status quo.

Alternative 2 - through voluntary partnerships, easements, and land acquisition, restore and preserve approximately 30,000 acres (primarily wetlands) in the Basin. This alternative would focus mainly on existing and restorable wetland habitats (Figure 9).

Alternative 3 - through voluntary partnerships, easements, and land acquisition, restore and preserve approximately 30,000 acres (primarily prairie and oak savanna) in the Basin. This alternative would focus mainly on existing and restorable grasslands and important oak-savanna habitat (Figure 10).

Alternative 4 - through voluntary partnerships, easements, and land acquisition, restore and preserve approximately 30,000 acres (primarily endangered species habitat) in the Basin. This alternative would focus on the protection of Federally endangered and threatened species habitat (Figure 11).

Alternative 5 - through voluntary partnerships, easements, and land acquisition restore and preserve approximately 30,000 acres within the Basin. Alternative 5 would be a "hybrid" of alternatives 2-4 (select components of Alternatives 2-4) and is the Service's Preferred Alternative (Figure 12).

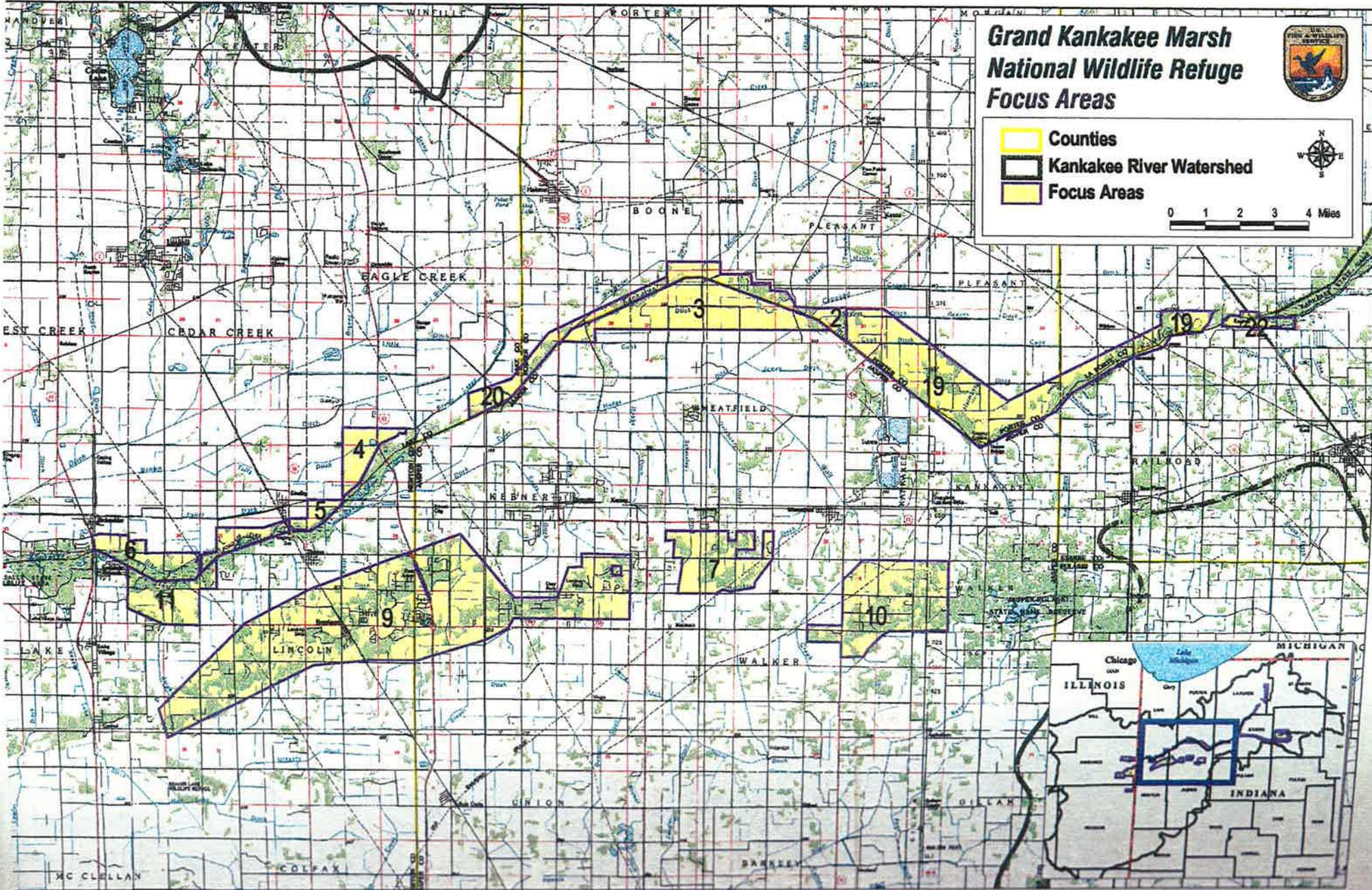
Environmental Consequences

Potential environmental consequences or impacts of the No Action alternative and the four Action alternatives with regard to the opportunities and issues are discussed in Chapter 4 of the EA.

Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge Focus Areas



- Counties
- Kankakee River Watershed
- Focus Areas



Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge Focus Areas



- Counties
- Kankakee River Watershed
- Focus Areas



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