

**U.S. Department of the Interior
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Region 6, Denver, Colorado**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge
Proposed Addition
Bates County, Missouri

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has completed the *Environmental Assessment and Comprehensive Management Plan*. The Environmental Assessment evaluates four alternatives, including a No Action Alternative, and the subsequent environmental consequences of expanding the Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) into Bates County, Missouri.

Alternative B, the preferred alternative, was selected, with a minor modification, for implementation because it best meets the Service's objective to maintain wildlife habitat integrity on a landscape scale. Alternative B expands the Refuge and authorizes the Service to protect 9,750 acres in fee title along the Marais des Cygnes River in western Missouri. Initially, the Service considered an overall project boundary for the expansion that included 11,390 acres. However, after further internal analysis and consultation, the final project area boundary was modified to 9,750 acres. The final project area increases the focus on the highest priority lands identified for protection by eliminating some upland lands that are in smaller tracts. The final focus area also buffers the proposed Refuge boundary from the developed community of Amoret, Missouri.

The Refuge expansion has been proposed to help protect and restore the rare habitats of the floodplain corridor of the Marais des Cygnes River in Missouri, and provide the public with additional wildlife-dependent recreation and education opportunities. The expansion will promote beneficial conservation practices on sensitive areas within and adjacent to the proposed Refuge expansion boundary (such as erosion-prone, riparian, and wetland areas), improve water quality, increase the amount and diversity of habitat available for dependent species, and preserve landscape integrity for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The following is a summary of anticipated environmental effects from implementation of the preferred alternative:

1. Restoring, preserving, and managing additional upland, wetland, and riparian habitats, by the Service as an addition to the Refuge, will provide or conserve important habitat for threatened and endangered species, waterfowl and other migratory birds, and native resident flora and fauna.

2. The Refuge expansion will provide the public with additional wildlife-dependent recreation and education opportunities.

3. Promoting beneficial conservation practices on sensitive areas within and adjacent to the proposed Refuge expansion boundary (such as erosion-prone, riparian, and wetland areas) will improve water quality, increase the amount and diversity of habitat available for dependent species, and preserve the Refuge for the continuing benefit of the American people.
4. The preferred alternative would affect location and distribution, but not rate or density, of human population growth. Positive effects may occur from increased public wildlife viewing, fishing, and hunting opportunities. Open space may also enhance property values on adjoining lands as people begin to seek out undeveloped lands in the future.
5. The Service, within the approved project boundary, would create no additional land-use regulations. Preventing subdivision and development could decrease future tax revenues in certain market areas. However, open space could actually provide a net savings to local governments when compared to the revenues generated and the cost of services associated with residential development.
6. The proposed expansion would have long-term positive impacts on wildlife habitat and result in the long-term conservation of migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, native plants, and the overall biological diversity along the Marais des Cygnes River.

As part of the public scoping process associated with this action, comments were solicited from the public through news releases and public meetings. An open house was held at the Butler Senior Center in Butler, Missouri, on May 21, 2002. Public comments were taken to identify issues to be analyzed for the proposed project. Approximately 29 landowners and citizens attended and most expressed positive support for the project. In addition, the Service's field staff contacted local government officials, other public agencies, sportsmen and women groups, and conservation groups, all of which expressed an interest in and a desire to protect the Marais des Cygnes River corridor and habitats.

The preferred alternative identified in the Environmental Assessment has been modified by decreasing the overall project area from 11,390 acres to 9,750 acres. The justification for the change in the preferred alternative is as follows:

- The reduction in the overall project area increases the focus on priority areas identified in the Land Protection Plan. The priority areas contain the key private lands that are of the greatest concern for protection.
- The smaller project area excludes many small tracts of land.
- The project area was reduced on the southern side of the community of Amoret, Missouri, to provide a buffer for the proposed Refuge and the community (see the attached revised map).

This boundary modification will not change any of the environmental effects analyzed in the Environmental Assessment and Land Protection Plan. The priority zones for the Land Protection Plan have been modified by eliminating low priority tracts.

Based on my review and evaluation of the information contained in the supporting reference, I have determined that establishing an executive boundary for the expansion of the Marais des Cygnes NWR is not a major Federal action that 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. Accordingly, the preparation of an environmental impact statement on the preferred alternative is not required.

The FONSI, Environmental Assessment, and other supporting documents are on file at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuge Planning, P.O. Box 25486, DFC, Denver, Colorado 80225, telephone 303-236-4369. They are available for public inspection upon request.

Supporting Reference

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2004. *Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge Proposed Addition, Environmental Assessment and Comprehensive Management Plan.*

/s/ J. Mitch King

OCT 27 2006

Regional Director, Region 6
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Date

Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Date

