

# Chapter 1: Introduction, Purpose and Need, and Issues

## Introduction

This document is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge (NWR or Refuge). It follows the basic and accepted format for a CCP and stems from an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was completed in 2008.

Trempealeau NWR is located within the Mississippi River Valley in southwestern Wisconsin (Figure 1). This 6,226-acre Refuge in Buffalo and Trempealeau Counties is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Refuge was established by Executive Order 7437 in 1936 as “a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife” (Appendix E). Trempealeau NWR is part of the Upper Mississippi River NWR Complex with headquarters in Winona, Minnesota. The Complex includes Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife & Fish Refuge and Driftless Area NWR.

Trempealeau NWR lies adjacent to Navigation Pool 6 of the Mississippi River and is strategically located on this important migration corridor, providing resting and feeding habitat for thousands of waterfowl and other birds during spring and fall. The Refuge also includes more than 700 acres of rolling native prairie and oak savanna, habitat types that are scarce in Wisconsin.

## Refuge History and Purpose

In the late 1800s a railroad was constructed along the Mississippi River. Today it forms the Refuge’s south boundary. In the early 1900s, a drainage district was formed with the intent of draining the area



*Northern Shoveler Hen / USFWS*

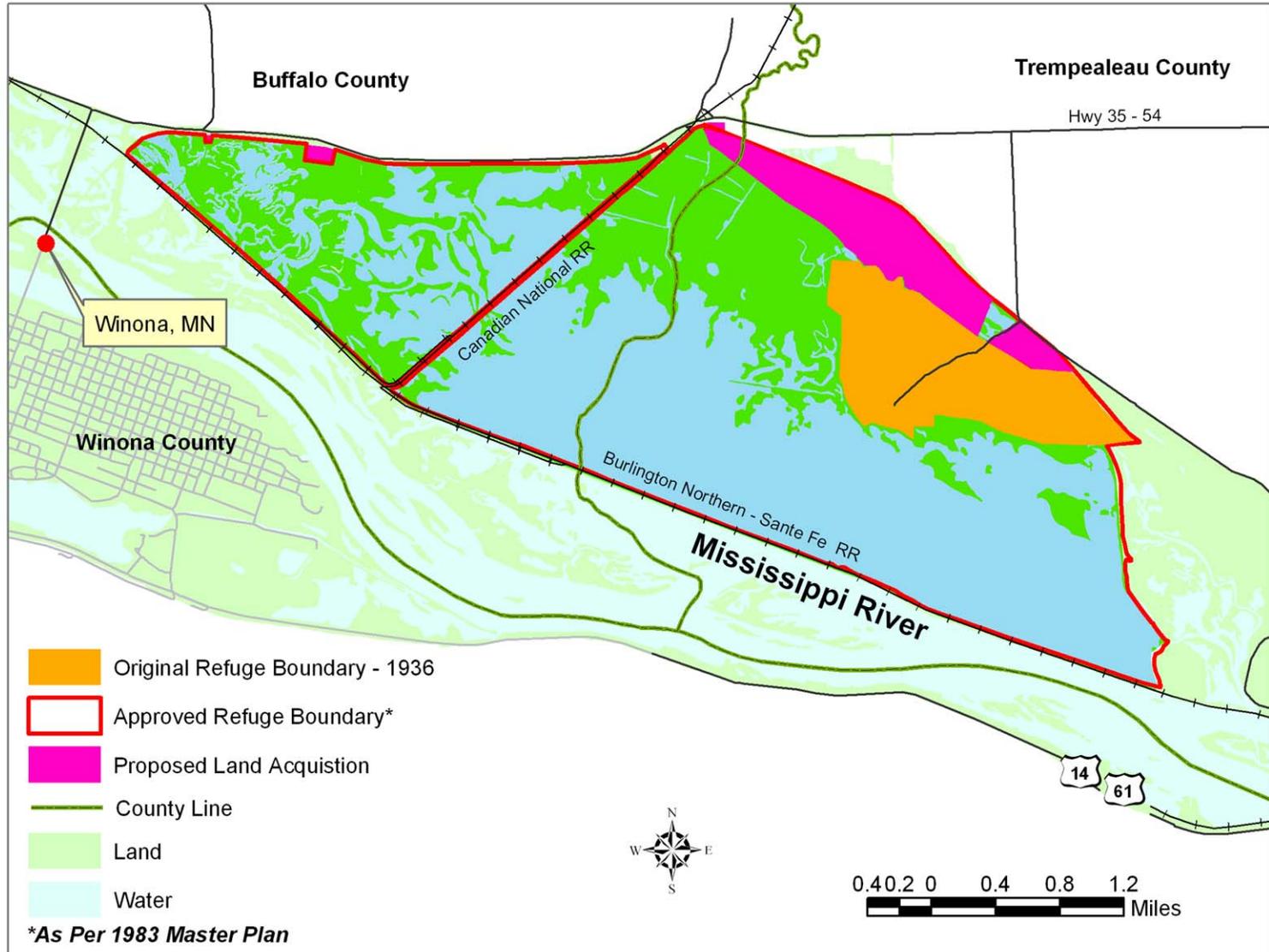
north of the railroad dike for farming. The district dug a channel diverting the Trempealeau River and Pine Creek into the Mississippi River about 3 miles downstream of the Trempealeau River’s original delta. Dredged material taken from the new channel was placed on the south bank to create barrier dikes to protect adjacent lands from flooding. Attempts to drain and farm within the dikes were largely unsuccessful and the drainage district eventually went bankrupt. Following the completion of Lock and Dam 6 at Trempealeau in the mid-1930s, water levels throughout Pool 6 were raised several feet and stabilized for navigation on the main river channel. Wetlands protected by the railroad and barrier dikes became part of a corporation known as Delta Fish and Fur Farm (Delta FFF).

Trempealeau NWR was established in 1936 when 706.9 acres were set aside by Executive Order 7437 (Appendix E) (Figure 2 on page 3). The original Refuge consisted of an upland portion with open areas

**Figure 1: Location of Trempealeau NWR in Wisconsin**



**Figure 2: Trempealeau NWR Boundary**



of former hay, pasture, and cropland. For more than 40 years the Refuge remained small in spite of several attempts to purchase more than 5,000 acres of the surrounding Delta FFF. The Delta FFF yielded a variety of incomes to its owners from farming, timber harvest, commercial fishing, furbearer trapping, and turtle and bait fish harvest. In addition, a group of local sportsmen leased the marshes for waterfowl hunting. Under private ownership the area remained relatively unchanged. Of significance was the major flood in 1965 which breached dikes, inundated Refuge buildings, and caused irreparable damage to wetland plant communities.

In 1975, Dairyland Power Cooperative acquired the Delta FFF. Dairyland wanted to construct a rail loop for a coal off-loading facility near their power generating plant at Alma, Wisconsin. The land they would need was part of the Upper Mississippi River NW&FR. As part of a land exchange Dairyland divested 132 acres of the Delta FFF and sold an additional 4,778 acres to the Service in 1979. This addition, plus other recent acquisitions, has brought Trempealeau NWR to its present 6,226 acres.

The 1936 Executive Order and subsequent legislation established the purposes of the Refuge as listed in Need II on page 5. These purposes remain valid to this day and guide the planning management, administration, and use of the Refuge.

## Refuge Vision

The vision for Trempealeau NWR is:

“Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge is enjoyed and appreciated by the people of America as a beautiful, scenic place where a diversity of native plants and animals thrive in healthy prairies, forests, and wetlands.”

## Purpose and Need for the Plan

### Purpose

Comprehensive Conservation Plans are designed to guide the management and administration of National Wildlife Refuges for a period of 15 years and help ensure that each refuge meets the purpose for which it was established and contributes to the overall mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) (see Need I on page 5). The CCP helps describe a desired future condition of the Refuge, and provides both long-term and day-to-day guidance for management actions and decisions. It pro-



*American Coot, USFWS*

vides both broad and specific policy on various issues, sets goals and measurable objectives, and outlines strategies for reaching these objectives. A CCP also helps communicate the Refuge’s management direction to other agencies and the public.

The NWRS Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 mandates that the Secretary of the Interior, and thus the Service, prepare CCPs for all units of the National Wildlife Refuge System by October 2012. In addition to this mandate, there are several reasons why preparation of a CCP is needed at this time.

The last comprehensive plan (known as a Master Plan) was completed in 1983 (USFWS 1983). Since then, the Refuge environment has undergone change affecting habitat and wildlife, new laws and policies have been put in place, new scientific information is available, and levels of public use and interest have increased.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires that federal agencies follow basic requirements for major actions significantly affect-

ing the quality of the human environment. These requirements are:

- Consider every significant aspect of the environmental impact of a proposed action.
- Involve the public in its decision-making process when considering environmental concerns.
- Use a systematic, interdisciplinary approach to decision making.
- Consider a reasonable range of alternatives.

The EIS documents met those requirements and provided the necessary information and analysis to the decision-maker.

Finally, the planning process was an excellent way to inform and involve the general public, state and federal agencies, and non-government groups that have an interest, responsibility, or authority in the management or use of certain aspects of the Trempealeau NWR.

## Need

This CCP will help ensure that management and administration of the Refuge meet the mission of the Refuge System, the purpose for which the Refuge was established, and the goals for the Refuge. The mission, purpose, and goals are considered needs. These needs are summarized in the following paragraphs. More detail on issues related to these needs can be found in Chapter 2.

### Need I: Contribute to the Refuge System Mission

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System set forth in the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 is:

“To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

### Need II: Help Fulfill the Refuge Purpose

The purpose of the Refuge comes from the authority under which it was established and in the case of Trempealeau NWR, from the authorities under which subsequent major land additions to the Refuge were made. Purposes for Trempealeau NWR are as follows:

“...a Refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife”

Executive Order 7437, dated August 21, 1936. (Appendix F)

“suitable for-(1) incidental fish and wildlife oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species ...”

Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 U.S.C 460k-460k-4), as amended

“...for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources.”

16 U.S.C. 742f(a)(4)(Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956.)

### Need III: Help Achieve Refuge Goals

**Goal 1: Landscape** – We will strive to maintain and improve the scenic and wild character, and environmental health of the Refuge.

Related needs are to:

- Complete acquisition within the approved boundary with the addition of 12 acres under the Regional Director’s authority.
- Maintain the integrity of the Refuge boundary.
- Ensure integrity of lands designated as Natural Areas or with other special designations.
- Protect archeological and cultural resources and ensure consideration of preservation of historic properties.
- Protect Refuge habitats and facilities during flood events.

**Goal 2: Wildlife and Habitat** – Our habitat management will support diverse and abundant native fish, wildlife, and plants.

Related needs are to:

- Evaluate and manage forest resources.
- Manage non-native trees and downed fuel.
- Restore and enhance wetlands.
- Restore productivity to Refuge pools.
- Prepare for quick response to contaminant spills from train derailments or roadway accidents.
- Reduce sediment, nutrients, and contaminants in waters upstream of the Refuge.
- Restore and enhance prairie and oak savanna habitat.



- Understand and reduce invasive plants and animals.
- Monitor the status of key fish and wildlife.
- Protect and enhance federally listed threatened, endangered, and candidate species and their habitats.
- Manage deer herds to prevent over-browsing and loss of plant diversity.
- Manage beaver and muskrat populations to limit damage to dikes and structures.
- Improve fishery conservation efforts.
- Provide adequate undisturbed areas to meet the nesting, feeding and migration needs of waterfowl.
- Protect and enhance habitat for forest birds.
- Understand and be ready to respond to wildlife disease outbreaks.

**Goal 3: Public Use** – We will manage public use programs and facilities to ensure sustainable, quality hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, interpretation, and environmental education opportunities for a broad cross-section of the public; and provide opportunities for the public to use and enjoy the Refuge for traditional and appropriate non-wildlife dependent uses that are compatible with the purposes for which the Refuge was established and the mission of the Refuge System.

Related needs are to:

- Improve opportunities for wildlife observation and photography.

- Improve opportunities for interpretation.
- Improve opportunities for environmental education.
- Provide diverse, high quality, hunting and fishing opportunities for people of all abilities.
- Provide opportunities for appropriate non-commercial harvest of plant parts.
- Improve opportunities for non-motorized biking.
- Respond to requests for other uses such as horseback riding, dog trials, camping, and special fundraising events.
- Update general public use regulations for clarity and effectiveness.

**Goal 4: Neighboring Landowners and Communities** –

We will communicate openly and work cooperatively with our neighbors and local communities to help all benefit from the aesthetic and economic values of the Refuge.

Related needs are to:

- Improve community outreach.
- Establish a Refuge Friends group.
- Promote an active and rewarding volunteer program.
- Improve communication and cooperation with other agency partners.
- Improve communication and cooperation with adjacent private landowners.
- Coordinate with utilities and transportation departments to minimize impacts of easements and rights-of-way to habitats.

**Goal 5: Administration and Operations** – We will seek adequate funding, staffing, and facilities; and improve public awareness and support to carry out the purposes, vision, goals, and objectives of the Refuge.

Related needs are to:

- Provide year-round access to the Refuge.
- Provide adequate office and maintenance facilities.
- Provide adequate staff to meet resource and public challenges and opportunities.
- Identify operational and maintenance needs.

## The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service

The Refuge is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Interior. The Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. Although the Service shares this responsibility with other federal, state, tribal, local, and private entities, the Service has specific trust responsibilities for migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, certain interjurisdictional fish and marine mammals, and the National Wildlife Refuge System. The mission of the Service is:

“Working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.”

## The National Wildlife Refuge System

The Refuge System had its beginning in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt used an Executive Order to set aside tiny Pelican Island in Florida as a refuge and breeding ground for birds. From that small beginning, the Refuge System has become the world's largest collection of lands specifically set aside for wildlife conservation. The administration, management, and growth of the Refuge System are guided by the following goals (USFWS 2004, Section 601 FW1.8):

The Refuge System's goals are to:

- Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats, including species that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
- Develop and maintain a network of habitats for migratory birds, anadromous and interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations that is strategically distributed and carefully managed to meet important life history needs of these species across their ranges.
- Conserve those ecosystems, plant communities, wetlands of national or international significance, and landscapes and seascapes that are unique, rare, declining, or underrepresented in existing protection efforts.

- Provide and enhance opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation).
- Foster understanding and instill appreciation of the diversity and interconnectedness of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.

## Legal and Policy Framework

Trempealeau NWR is managed and administered as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System within a framework of organizational setting, laws, and policy. Key aspects of this framework are outlined below. A list of other laws and executive orders that have guided preparation of the CCP and EIS, and guide future implementation, are provided in Appendix E.

### Compatibility Policy

No uses for which the Service has authority to regulate may be allowed on a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System unless it is determined to be compatible. A compatible use is a use that, in the sound professional judgment of the Refuge Manager, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the National Wildlife Refuge. Managers must complete a written compatibility determination for each use, or collection of like-uses, that is signed by the Manager and the Regional Chief of Refuges in the respective Service region. Draft compatibility determinations applicable to uses described in this document were included in the Draft EIS/CCP and were available for public review. Compatibility determinations are available for review at Refuge Headquarters.

### Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health Policy

The Service is directed in the Refuge Improvement Act to “ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the NWRS are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans...” The biological integrity policy of 2001 helps define and clarify this directive by providing guidance on what conditions constitute biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health; guidelines for maintaining existing levels; guidelines for determining how and when it is appropriate to restore lost elements; and guidelines

in dealing with external threats to biological integrity, diversity and health (66 CFRIO January 2004).

## **Public Use Natural Area Policy**

The Refuge currently has one Public Use Natural Area, the Black Oak Island Public Use Natural Area. (See “Black Oak Island Natural Area” on page 48). The Service’s Refuge Manual (USFWS 2004), Section 8 RM 11 provides guidance for management, administration and visitor use of Public Use Natural Areas and lists the following objectives of the designations:

- Assure preservation of a variety of significant natural areas for public use which, when considered together, illustrate the diversity of the NWRs natural environments.
- Preserve those environments that are essentially unmodified by human activity for future use.