

Chapter 1: Vision, Introduction and Background

A Vision for Rydell National Wildlife Refuge

Through innovative partnerships with multiple State and Federal agencies, conservation organizations and private individuals, Rydell National Wildlife Refuge will enhance habitat and populations of waterfowl, fish and other wildlife species; provide wildlife-dependent recreation; and demonstrate wildlife and natural resource conservation techniques. The majority of Refuge wetlands,



uplands, and woodlands will be restored and managed to reflect the original natural character of the landscape. Selected lakes will be managed to support waterfowl and fish. Trails, observation decks, a visitor center, a headquarters office and other facilities will be designed to provide enjoyable, informative and barrier-free wildlife-dependent experiences for people of all ages. The U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service and local citizens have charted a course of management for the Rydell National Wildlife Refuge that is designed to benefit wildlife and people well into the 21st century.

The charted course is described in this plan.

Introduction

Located in Polk County in northwestern Minnesota, Rydell National Wildlife Refuge is a 2,120-acre refuge that was established in 1992 on property donated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by the Richard King Mellon Foundation.

The Refuge was established to protect wildlife habitat and diversity, to encourage waterfowl and other migratory bird production, and to promote environmental education and recreation. In addition, the Refuge was established to demonstrate sound fish and wildlife management and wise land and water stewardship.

This Comprehensive Conservation Plan, or CCP, will guide the development and management of the Refuge for the next 15 years (2001 through 2016).

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 established clear legislative mandates for refuge management and planning, including:

- Wildlife has first priority in the management of refuges.

- Wildlife-dependent recreation involving compatible hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, or environmental education and interpretation are the priority public uses of the Refuge System.
- Other uses have lower priority in the Refuge System and are only allowed if they are compatible with the mission of the Refuge System and with the purposes of the individual refuge.

Specifically, this Comprehensive Conservation Plan accomplishes the following objectives for Rydell National Wildlife Refuge:

- Provides a clear statement of the desired future condition of the Refuge.
- Ensures that management of the Refuge is consistent with the goals and policies of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- Provides Refuge neighbors and partners with a clear understanding of the reasons for management actions on and around the Refuge.
- Provides for long-term continuity in Refuge management.
- Provides a basis for Fish and Wildlife Service staffing and for operation, maintenance, and capital improvement budget requests.
- Identifies potential projects for cost share and partnership contributions.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (PL 105-57)

By law and treaty, the Service has national and international management and law enforcement responsibilities for migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, fisheries and many marine mammals. The Service assists state and tribal governments and other Federal agencies in helping to protect America's fish and wildlife resources, and the National Wildlife Refuge System plays an important role in fulfilling many of these responsibilities.

The National Wildlife Refuge System

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System 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.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of more than 525 refuges encompassing 93 million acres of lands and waters, 41 wetland management districts that are responsible for 2.4 million acres of Waterfowl Production Areas,

and 50 coordination areas covering 317,000 acres that are managed by State fish and wildlife agencies under cooperative agreements. Refuge System lands span the continent from Alaska's Arctic tundra to the tropical forests in Florida and from the secluded atolls of Hawaii to the moose-trodden bogs of Maine.

National wildlife refuges are established for different purposes. Most refuges have been established for the conservation of migratory birds while some have been established to provide habitat for endangered species; others have been formed to protect and propagate large mammals such as bison, elk, and desert bighorn sheep. Refuge habitats consist of a great diversity of plants and animals.

Within Minnesota, the Service manages 12 national wildlife refuges – Agassiz, Rydell, Hamden Slough, Crane Meadows, Tamarac, Big Stone, Rice Lake, Mille Lacs, Northern Tallgrass Prairie, Sherburne, Minnesota Valley, and Upper Mississippi River – and approximately 180,000 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas. (See Figure 1.)

Purpose of Rydell National Wildlife Refuge

The purpose of the Refuge arises from legislative authority. The Service acquired the property and established the Rydell National Wildlife Refuge under authority of the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended, and the Recreational Use of Conservation Areas Act of 1962, as amended. Relevant sections from this legislation that establish the purpose of the Refuge include:

“... for the development, advancement, management, conservation and protection of fish and wildlife resources... 16 U. S. C. 742f (a) (4) “... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ...” 16 U. S. C. 742f(b) (1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, 16 U. S. C. 742(a) -754, as amended).

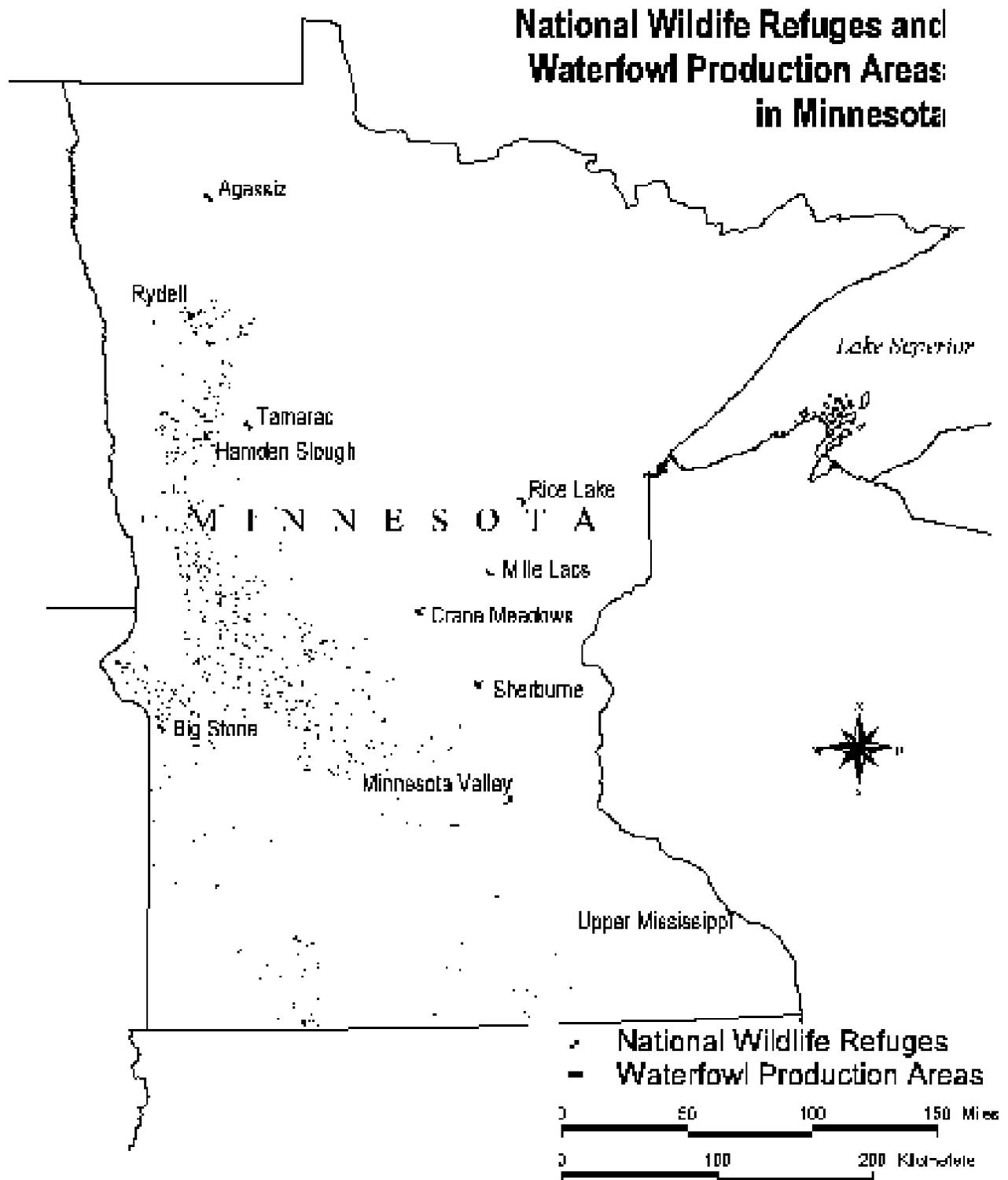
The Preliminary Management Plan, which accompanied the Environmental Assessment of the establishment of the Refuge, identified the Refuge's primary goal “ to increase mallard, northern pintail, wood duck, redhead, canvasback, ring-necked duck and Canada goose production. Goals for these species are included in the Regional Resource Plan and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Other migratory birds, endangered species, resident wildlife and associated habitats would also benefit from the broad based, diverse habitat management program (biodiversity).”



The Preliminary Management Plan identified the Refuge's secondary goal as a wildlife and fish management demonstration area “to provide the visiting public with opportunities to learn about effective fish and wildlife habitat management practices and land and water stewardship.”

The Preliminary Management Plan raised the possibility of conducting aquaculture or fish hatchery operations for interpretative and educational purposes.

Figure 1: National Wildlife Refuges and Waterfowl Production Areas Within Minnesota



Since the Refuge was established, the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 has further clarified the purposes of the Refuge System and refuges. The Act specifies that “each refuge shall be managed to fulfill the mission of the System, as well as the specific purposes for which the refuge was established.” The Act further specifies that “compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System.” Further, the Act establishes compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses of hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation as the priority general public uses of the System.

Existing Partnerships

Beginning with the Richard King Mellon Foundation’s gift of the land and continuing through a variety of programs being offered today, partnerships have been a vital part of Rydell National Wildlife Refuge. The Friends of the Rydell Refuge Association, which formed in 1996, assists the Service with management, public use and fund raising activities. Other partners play a vital role in offering educational programs at Rydell. These organizations include:

- Options Resource Center for Independent Living
- Maple Lake Improvement District
- Union Lake Sarah Improvement Association
- Agassiz Environmental Learning Center
- East Polk County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Former landowners continue to contribute to Refuge management and programming and are an invaluable asset to Rydell National Wildlife Refuge.

Legal and Policy Guidance

In addition to the Refuge’s establishing authority legislation and the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, several Federal laws, executive orders, and regulations govern its administration. See Appendix G for a list of the guiding laws and orders.