

News Release

*National Wildlife
Refuge System*



Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

La Crosse District
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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October 6, 2009

Voluntary Waterfowl Avoidance Areas Begin October 15

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reminds boaters that beginning October 15, three voluntary waterfowl avoidance areas will be in effect again this fall on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge within Navigation Pools 7 and 8.

The purpose of the voluntary restraint program is to reduce disturbance to resting and feeding waterfowl using Refuge closed areas during fall migration. Waterfowl are sensitive to human activity occurring near their resting and feeding areas. Even relatively distant boating activity may be enough to cause the birds to flush and burn-up valuable energy reserves. Boaters, who voluntarily throttle down and avoid concentrations of waterfowl, wherever they occur, will help these birds accumulate fat reserves required for the remainder of their long migration.

The location and details of each area follow:

Lake Onalaska Voluntary Waterfowl Avoidance Area (Navigation Pool 7): Established in 1986, the 3,356-acre avoidance area covers a portion of the lake used by large numbers of migrating waterfowl, including canvasbacks. Dates of the program are October 15 through mid-November. The boundaries of the Avoidance Area are marked with white buoys.

All boaters using Lake Onalaska for fishing, hunting, sailing, or other activities are asked to detour around the area marked with buoys to prevent unnecessary disturbance to waterfowl.

The Avoidance Area continues to be successful as measured by waterfowl use and boater compliance with the program. In late October 2008, nearly 100,000 waterfowl were counted on Lake Onalaska, including about 43,000 canvasbacks.

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In addition to the many individual boaters who have made this program successful since its inception, program partners include the Lake Onalaska Protection and Rehabilitation District, La Crosse County Conservation Alliance, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geological Survey, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Goose Island No Hunting Zone (Navigation Pool 8): Established in 2007, all boaters are being asked to voluntarily avoid entering the 984-acre Goose Island No Hunting Zone. Dates of the program are October 15 through the end of the state duck hunting season (December 6). To further reduce human-caused disturbance to waterfowl concentrated in this no hunting zone, the use of motors on watercraft is also prohibited during the same timeframe. Buoys will be placed at popular boat access points to alert boaters.

In mid-November 2008, more than 15,000 tundra swans, Canada geese, and puddle ducks were counted in the Goose Island No Hunting Zone.

Wisconsin Islands Closed Area (Navigation Pool 8): With the exception of a travel corridor in the Raft Channel that provides access to a business and five boathouses, all boaters are asked to voluntarily avoid entering this 6,538-acre closed area. The dates of this year's program are October 15 through December 6, the end of the state duck hunting season. Buoys will be placed at commonly used access points to alert boaters.

The six islands completed this summer through the habitat restoration project and both islands under construction are located within the Wisconsin Islands Closed Area.

Peak counts of about 2,900 mallards, more than 10,000 tundra swans, and nearly 42,000 diving ducks, including 29,000 canvasbacks, were concentrated in the Wisconsin Islands Closed Area in fall 2008.

Maps showing the location of the voluntary avoidance areas are available at many area sporting goods stores, motels, and the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Office located at 555 Lester Avenue in Onalaska, Wisc. A card describing the Lake Onalaska Voluntary Waterfowl Avoidance Area is also available at many of the same locations.

Refuge Office hours are 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and the telephone number is (608) 783-8405. Maps and other information are also available on-line at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/UpperMississippiRiver/>

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The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is the most visited refuge in the United States. The refuge extends 261 miles along the Upper Mississippi River from Wabasha, Minn. to Rock Island, Ill., protecting and preserving habitat for migratory birds, fish, and a variety of other wildlife. This 240,000 acre refuge was established in 1924.