



The Nature Conservancy
Upper Mississippi River Program
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March 6, 2006

Mr. Don Hultman, Refuge Manager
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge
Room 101
51 East 4th Street
Winona, Minnesota 55987

Subject: Support for Alternative E: Comments on Supplement to Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Alternative E, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

Dear Mr. Hultman:

The Nature Conservancy (Conservancy) has reviewed the supplement to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Refuge). This supplement describes Alternative E, developed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to address the many comments received on its original preferred alternative concerning proposed changes in public use in the refuge to protect the natural resources of this important river-floodplain ecosystem and improve safety. The Conservancy supports Alternative E because it contains important and needed goals and objectives to protect and restore native biodiversity of the Refuge, including the restoring the river processes on which they depend.

As you know, we submitted comments on the original CCP in a letter dated August 30, 2005. Because we had prepared our comments after the Service announced its intention to develop a new preferred alternative, our comments focused on the elements that we considered to be important for inclusion in the new alternative to address the needs of native biodiversity in the Refuge. As we stated in our previous letter, we view the CCP as an important opportunity to create the framework and provide the support necessary for the Service and its partners to undertake actions needed to restore and conserve the floodplain-river ecosystem that makes up the Refuge.

We want to reiterate the elements we listed in our previous letter because we consider them to be critical for achieving a healthy ecosystem for the Upper Mississippi River.

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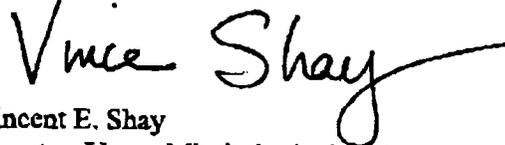
1. Restore bluff-floodplain mosaic (i.e., the ecosystems extending from the main river channel through the floodplain and up to the bluffs), including functional interaction with the rivers that run through them by
 - restoring ecological function to the floodplain,
 - restoring more natural flows to the river and floodplain, and
 - addressing the threat of invasive and nuisance species.
2. Restore the stability and integrity of tributary streams to naturalize flows and reduce sediment, nutrient and chemical loads ultimately being delivered to the Upper Mississippi River.
3. Protect and restore bluffland and terrace habitats adjacent to the Upper Mississippi River.

We are pleased to see that Alternative E contains numerous goals and objectives addressing these elements. These changes are based on sound science, and we are optimistic that the implementation of Alternative E would greatly benefit the health of the ecosystem and biodiversity.

The Conservancy is a global organization focused on the conservation of the plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. Currently, we have more than 100,000 members in the five states bordering the Upper Mississippi River. We have a strong interest in the protection of the freshwater biodiversity of the Upper Mississippi River and its basin and have been working to protect and restore important natural areas across the basin since the 1960s. Because the Conservancy and Service have many common goals for the ecosystem of the Upper Mississippi River, we look forward to continuing to be a partner with you as you implement the final CCP.

We hope these comments help you as you complete the CCP and thank you for considering them. Please call me at (402) 342-0282, ext. 1004, or Catherine McCalvin at (608) 534-6514 if you have any questions or want to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,



Vincent E. Shay
Director, Upper Mississippi River Program

VES:pmm

cc: Catherine McCalvin
Karen Spiller