

Fact Sheet

Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar)

Upper Mississippi River Floodplain Wetlands – Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois

What is a Ramsar Site?

It is a wetland designated as a Ramsar "Wetland of International Importance" under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (often referred to as the Convention on Wetlands or the Ramsar Convention, which was concluded in Ramsar, Iran in 1971). The Convention aims to strengthen public awareness and appreciation of the role wetlands play in sustaining environmental health, economic enterprise, and recreational well-being. The United States became a Party to the Convention in 1987. Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance are designated by Parties based on a set of internationally-approved criteria.

How large and where is the Upper Mississippi River site?

The Wetland of International Importance includes 302,344 acres (122,357 hectares), mainly the floodplain and main channel of the Upper Mississippi River from near Wabasha, MN to north of Rock Island, IL. Of this, about 251,000 acres is federal lands/waters (nearly all refuge) and 51,000 acres is State lands/waters (management areas and parks).

What are the values of designation?

The primary value is to heighten public awareness and appreciation for the unique and precious Upper Mississippi River ecosystem which can often lead to continued protection and enhanced management. Designation is also valuable in conducting outreach and information efforts, in fostering research, when applying for a variety of grants, and when States or Federal agencies put together their own budget initiatives or justifications.

Does designation affect current sovereignty or jurisdiction?

No. State and Federal agencies retain all their current jurisdiction, authorities, and management responsibility. Designation requires a minimal workload. In coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ramsar site owners and managers are asked to promote conservation of the site, inform the Ramsar Secretariat of any actual or pending changes to ecological character, and update an information sheet every six years.

Does designation affect current uses of the Mississippi River and adjacent areas?

No. All commercial and recreational uses currently allowed or allowed in the future are not affected. Designation does not dictate land and water use of any kind.

Who has endorsed the proposal?

The proposal has been endorsed by the Department of Natural Resources of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri; the Corps of Engineers; Wisconsin Wetland Association; Ducks Unlimited; and seven members of Congress from the respective states.

When was the designation? The site was approved by the U.S. through the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service on May 8, 2009. Formal listing on the international register is expected in 2010.