



STATE OF IOWA

THOMAS J. VILSACK, GOVERNOR
SALLY J. PEDERSON, LT. GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
JEFFREY R. VONK, DIRECTOR

July 12, 2001

Mr. Dick Tolbers
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building
1 Federal Drive
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056

RECEIVED
JUL 16 2001
OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

RE: Federal Aid Project W-4(191)-L

Dear Mr. Tolbers:

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been approached by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DOT) about trading land to help facilitate the Highway 60 Ashton bypass project in Osceola County. The proposed bypass project will impact about 2.5 acres of the Ashton Pits Wildlife Area. I am writing to initiate consultation concerning this project. Both DNR and DOT support this trade proposal.

DNR records show that the 33 acre Ashton Pits Wildlife Area was purchased in 1965 with federal aid funding through Project W-4(191)-L. The Ashton Pits Wildlife Area consists of former gravel pits surrounded by grassland and woody habitat. Primary management objectives are wildlife production and harvest. Secondary benefits include fishing and a limited amount of trapping.

DNR and DOT explored three alternatives for the Highway 60 bypass project which are labeled as Bypass A, B, & C on Exhibit A. Bypass A was eliminated for environmental reasons. This Bypass alternative would impact a small portion of the Ashton Pits WA. More importantly, it would require channelization of Otter Creek, a high quality warm water stream with a good mussel population. It would also destroy some pool and riffle complexes within the stream. Both Bypass B & C have been designed so that channelization of Otter Creek will not occur. Bypass B & C will also impact the least amount of wetland habitat (see Table 1). Bypass C represents the least environmentally damaging alternative, but was rejected by the DOT and the community of Ashton because of increased costs and unacceptable distance from the city limits.

DOT is proposing to replace the acreage to be impacted on the Ashton Pits Wildlife Area with a borrow located immediately adjacent to the area and totaling approximately nine acres. This borrow will be used as fill material for the Highway 60 bypass project. This borrow will be designed and constructed in cooperation with DNR Biologists to provide fisheries habitat and wetland habitat. This land will then be traded to the DNR in exchange for the Ashton Pits Wildlife Area land.

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Conditions of the trade will be:

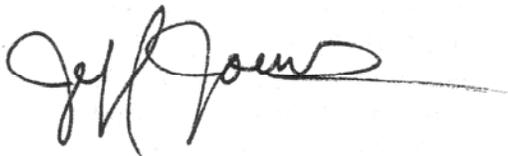
1. DOT will perform cultural resource surveys on both properties to assess impacts to cultural resources. Preliminary evaluation suggests no impacts.
2. DOT will inventory both properties for state and federally listed threatened and endangered species. Preliminary evaluation by DNR biologists suggests no impacts.
3. DOT will appraise both properties to determine fair market value. DNR will receive land of equal or greater value.

I have discussed this proposed trade with DNR Fisheries and Wildlife Biologists responsible for managing this area. From a fisheries perspective, the pits receive low priority and are not considered a viable resource. Greater fisheries potential exists in the borrow site. From a wildlife perspective, the area to be impacted consists of primarily cottonwood and willows interspersed into brome grassland. The gravel pit provides some waterfowl production. The wildlife habitats on this area can be easily replaced. DNR field staff are assisting DOT staff with the borrow design in an effort to maximize fish and wildlife habitat.

The Highway 60 Bypass project is still six months to a year away from implementation. Once the appraisals and surveys are completed, I will then provide you with an amendment to the W-4-L grant proposal and a new grant agreement along with NEPA Checklist, Section 7 Evaluation Form, copies of SHPO clearance, copies of appraisals for both parcels, and State Clearinghouse letter. Let me know if I have forgotten anything.

Your approval to proceed with this trade as proposed is requested.

Sincerely,



JEFF JOENS
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
WILDLIFE BUREAU

✓ CC: Stephen G. Larson, Iowa DOT

TABLE 1

**Ashton By-Pass Impacts
(From 230th St. to N. End of By-Pass)**

	By-Pass A	By-Pass B	By-Pass C
Wetland Impacts (ha)	2.64	2.15	2.14
Stream Channelization (m)	195	0	0
Stream Channel Lost (m)	100	0	0
Pool/Riffle Complexes Destroyed	3	0	0
Wetland Size (ha) (South to North)	0.26	0.16	1.41
	0.20	0.57	0.73
	1.00	0.24	
	0.24	0.24	
	0.44	0.44	
	0.50	0.50	
TOTALS (ha)	2.64	2.15	2.14