

## **COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION**

**Use:** Issue a Special Use Permit authorizing the burial of existing overhead electric transmission lines and the installation of new buried electric transmission lines on the Rapids Lake Unit to provide service to the new visitor and environmental education center and the intern bunkhouse (Carver, Minnesota).

**Refuge Name:** Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

### **Establishing and Acquisition Authority (ies):**

**Refuge:** Date Established: October 8, 1976, Public Law 94-466

### **Refuge Purpose(s):**

Refuge - The Secretary shall develop and administer ... the refuge, in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Act ... The Secretary may also exercise any other authority available to him for the conservation and management of wildlife and natural resources, the development of wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, wildlife interpretation, and environmental education, to the extent deemed by him to be appropriate ... The Secretary shall construct, administer and maintain, ... a wildlife interpretation and education center ... to promote environmental education and to provide an opportunity for the study and enjoyment of wildlife in its natural habitat.

### **National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:**

“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 of Americans.”

### **Description of Use:**

Authorize a Special Use Permit and allow short-term temporary disturbance to uplands for the burial of an existing three-phase overhead electric transmission line and the installation of new buried electric transmission lines on the Rapids Lake Unit by Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative. Approximately 4,000 feet of existing overhead line would be buried beginning at a point just west of the Refuge parking lot located off of Carver Highlands Drive and continuing east to the western bank of the Minnesota River. Installation of an estimated 300 feet of new buried lines would provide electrical service directly to the new visitor and environmental education center and the intern bunkhouse. All lines would be trenched (three foot width) via heavy equipment to a depth of 36 inches and follow alongside existing roadways. The main east-west trench which would follow the layout of the access road would accommodate the buried Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative line as well as the Center Point Energy natural gas line. This work would involve the temporary disturbance of restored native vegetation and wildlife habitat. All areas impacted by this use would be re-seeded to native vegetation. Burial of existing and new electrical lines would improve the visual quality of the areas proposed for public use facility development.

As part of the Refuge Mitigation Plan for the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, several projects were identified to offset the impacts of commercial over flights on Refuge lands. One project identified consists of the construction of a visitor and environmental education center inclusive of administrative office space. The center would contain static and interactive interpretive exhibits focusing on habitat and wildlife population management and wildlife conservation issues in the Lower Minnesota River Valley. Another component of the Refuge Mitigation Plan includes the construction of an intern bunkhouse capable of hosting sixteen individuals (both interns and volunteers). This facility would support the Refuge’s expanded environmental education and wildlife interpretive program.

This use is not a high priority public use of the Refuge.

**Availability of Resources:**

Since this work is associated with approved Refuge Mitigation projects and would be requested on behalf of the Refuge, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc. will cover the costs of services being provided. Minimal expense is required of the Service for this work. The Service will cover the cost (supplies and staff salary) of habitat restoration (re-seeding). Funds are available to cover these costs.

**Anticipated Impacts of the Use:**

Approximately 0.4 acre of refuge land will be disturbed during the installation of buried electrical lines. The area consists of restored native prairie grass plantings and is considered low quality wildlife habitat due to its immediate proximity to refuge roads. Short term disturbance to wildlife may occur during this activity. The disturbed area will be temporarily unavailable as wildlife habitat. All disturbed areas will be re-seeded with native prairie grasses. The use is not anticipated to have adverse effects on the ability to meet wildlife goals for the Unit.

**Public Review and Comment:**

An open house will be held on July 7, 2005 at the Carver Village Hall from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. to learn of public interests and answer any questions about this proposal. This Compatibility Determination was prepared concurrently with the Draft Environmental Assessment for Proposed Visitor and Environmental Education Center, Outdoor Educational/Interpretive Facilities, and Intern Housing. Public review and comment will be solicited during the NEPA comment period.

**Determination:**

- Use is Not Compatible
- Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

**Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:**

1. Conditions stipulated in a Special Use Permit such as weed control, etc. must be followed to remain a compatible use.
2. Disturbed areas must be restored with native prairie grass.
3. Refuge staff will authorize the specific timing of installation to limit wildlife disturbance to the greatest extent possible.

**Justification:**

This use has been determined to be compatible provided the above stipulations are implemented.

The area to be disturbed is immediately adjacent to Refuge roads and very small in size, and therefore, will not further fragment the restored native prairie grass planting or cause a loss in ecological function. The action will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or Refuge purposes.

**Signature: Refuge Manager:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature and Date)

**Concurrence: Regional Chief:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature and Date)

**Mandatory 15-year Re-evaluation Date:** \_\_\_\_\_