

Chapter 1: Purpose and Need for Action

In this chapter

- 1.1 Purpose
- 1.2 Need for Action
- 1.3 Conserving Wildlife and Serving People: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- 1.4 Public Involvement
- 1.5 Decisions
- 1.6 Legal Compliance
- 1.7 Establishing Authority
- 1.8 Goals of the Proposed Hackmatack NWR

1.1 Purpose

The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS, Service) is proposing the establishment of a national wildlife refuge (NWR, refuge) in McHenry County, Illinois and Walworth County, Wisconsin. This Environmental Assessment (EA) provides the public and agency decision makers with an analysis of the range of options to restore, enhance, and protect wetlands and upland habitats within a new refuge in McHenry County, Illinois and Walworth County, Wisconsin (Figure 1). The EA also publicly discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of each strategy on the quality of the human environment, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (P.L. 91-190, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, January 1, 1970, 83 Stat. 852 as amended by P.L. 94-52, July 3, 1975, 89 Stat. 258, and P.L. 94-83, August 9, 1975, 89 Stat. 424). The Conceptual Management Plan found in the appendix presents a blueprint for management practices and public recreational opportunities on the proposed Hackmatack NWR.

The purpose of the Refuge is to contribute to the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS, Refuge System) by:

1. Protecting and enhancing habitats for federal trust species and species of management concern, with special emphasis on migratory birds and species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973.
2. Creating opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation, while promoting activities that complement the purposes of the Refuge and other protected lands in the region.
3. Promoting science, education, and research through partnerships to inform land management decisions and encourage continued responsible stewardship of the natural resources of the region.

Alternative C, Cores and Corridors, is the Service's preferred action alternative. After reviewing the analysis in this document, including the attached appendices and any public comments, the Regional Director will determine whether to formally recommend to the Director of the Service that a refuge be established. At that time, the document, including any revisions, will be submitted to Service's Director for final review and approvals.

1.2 Need for Action

Several grassland bird species are declining throughout their range. The Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving these species. Recent research has shown that large blocks of grasslands such as those proposed in this Refuge project may be key to reversing the downward trend. The proposed Refuge could eventually restore and connect a landscape that includes large blocks of grasslands, wet prairies, and natural stream watercourses.

The Service seeks to provide Refuge visitors with an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife resources through environmental education and interpretation and through wildlife-oriented recreational experiences to the extent these activities are compatible with the purposes for which a Refuge is established. The official Service land acquisition policy for urban Refuges is to acquire lands and waters in or adjacent to metropolitan statistical areas to protect fish and wildlife resources and habitats that will provide the public wildlife-oriented recreation, education, and interpretation opportunities. The primary purpose for establishment of new urban Refuges will be to foster environmental awareness and outreach programs, and to develop an informed and involved citizenry that will support fish and wildlife conservation.

In addition, the proposed Refuge would contribute to a long-standing vision held by conservation organizations across the Greater Chicago metropolitan area. These partners have worked to identify key lands for conservation, open space, and greenways aimed at providing a way to connect urban and suburban residents with nature. The establishment of a refuge would provide an anchor for this broad-based conservation and environmental education initiative.

1.3 Conserving Wildlife and Serving People: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Refuges are administered by the Service. The Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. It oversees the enforcement of federal wildlife laws, management and protection of migratory bird populations, restoration of nationally significant fisheries, administration of the Endangered Species Act, and the restoration of wildlife habitat. The Service also manages the NWRS.

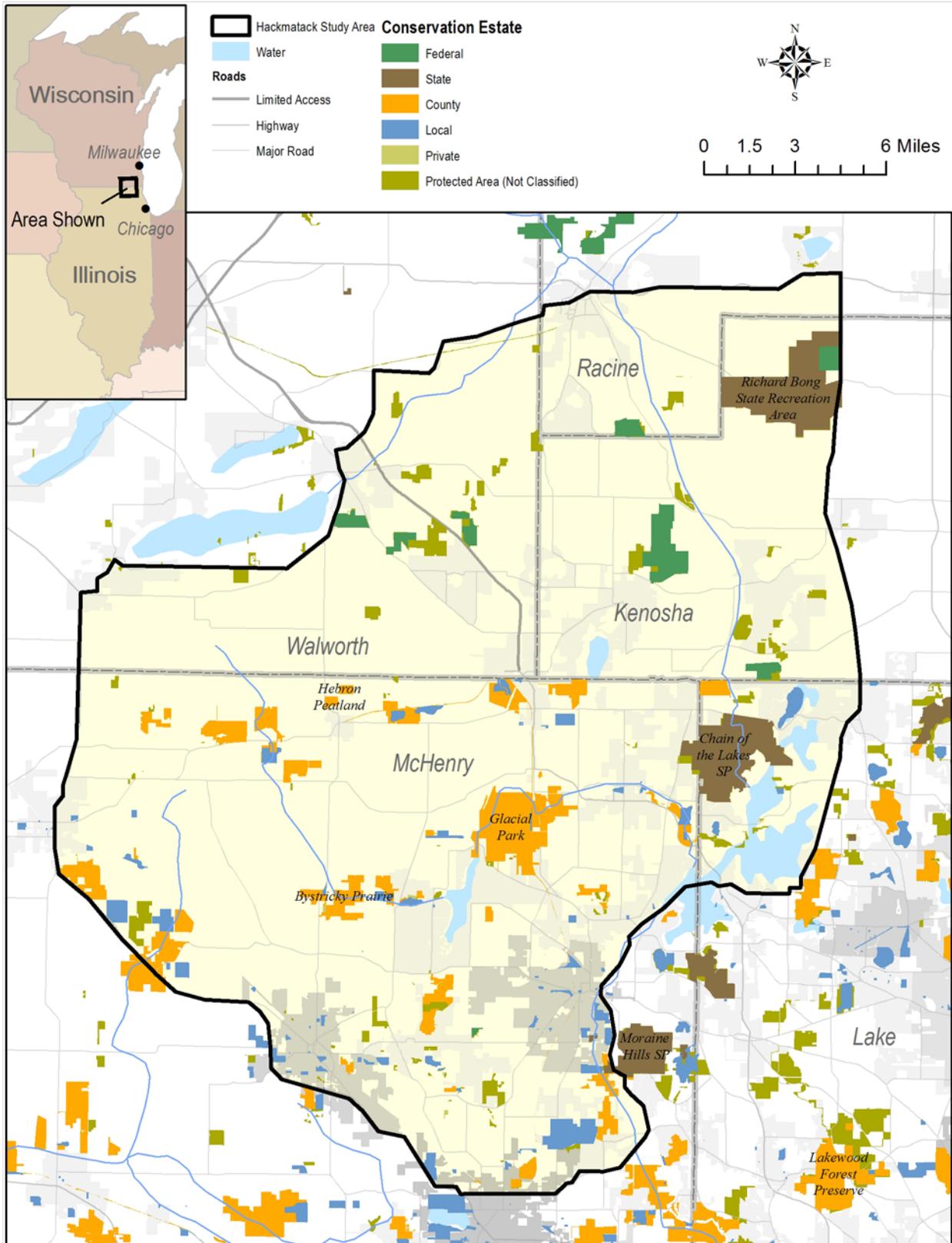
1.3.1 The National Wildlife Refuge System

Refuge lands are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS, Refuge System), which was founded in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated Pelican Island in Florida as a sanctuary for Brown Pelicans. Today, the system is a network of 555 refuges and wetland management districts covering over 150 million acres of public lands and waters. Over half of these lands and waters (51 percent) are in Alaska, with approximately 16 million acres located in the lower 48 states and several island territories, and the balance in submerged areas of the Pacific Ocean.

The Refuge System is the world's largest collection of lands specifically managed for fish and wildlife. Overall, it provides habitat for more than 5,000 species of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and insects. As a result of international treaties for migratory bird conservation and other legislation, such as the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929, many refuges have been established to protect migratory waterfowl and their migratory flyways.

Refuges also play a crucial role in preserving endangered and threatened species. Among the most notable is Aransas NWR in Texas, which provides winter habitat for the highly endangered Whooping Crane. Likewise, the Florida Panther Refuge protects one of the nation's most endangered predators. Refuges also provide unique recreational and educational opportunities for people. When human activities are compatible with wildlife and habitat conservation, they are places where people can enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and environmental interpretation. Many refuges have visitor centers, wildlife trails, automobile tours, and environmental education programs. Nationwide, approximately 30 million people visited national wildlife refuges in 2004.

Figure 1: Location of Study Area



The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 established several important mandates aimed at making the management of refuges more cohesive. The preparation of Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs) is one of those mandates. The legislation directs the Secretary of the Interior to ensure that the mission of the Refuge System and purposes of the individual refuges are carried out. It also requires the Secretary to maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System.

The goals of the Refuge System are to:

- Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats, including species that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
- Develop and maintain a network of habitats for migratory birds, anadromous and interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations that are strategically distributed and carefully managed to meet important life history needs of these species across their ranges.
- Conserve those ecosystems, plant communities, wetlands of national or international significance, and landscapes and seascapes that are unique, rare, declining, or underrepresented in existing protection efforts.
- Provide and enhance opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation (e.g., hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation).
- Foster understanding and instill appreciation of the diversity and interconnectedness of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.

1.4 Public Involvement

Involvement by local government officials, organizations, landowners and other interested citizens is integral to planning for any new refuge. Proposals that involve land acquisition by a government agency can be controversial. Open communication with all parties is essential throughout the planning process. Starting in September 2010, the Service had provided and sought information through news releases, media interviews, open house events, a project website, letters to specific organizations and one-on-one discussions. A website (<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/planning/Hackmatack/index.html>) has been developed to share information with the public in a timely manner.

1.4.1 Background

A Preliminary Project Proposal for a refuge within the Study Area was developed by Service biologists in January 2010. The purpose of this report was to brief the Director of the Service about the resource conservation opportunities of the area and to obtain permission to conduct a study of the merits of the proposal. The proposal was approved by the Director on April 5, 2010.

An interagency Planning Coordination Team was formed in May 2010 that includes representatives from state, local, and regional governments, as well as the Service.

Beginning with a public announcement in September 2010 and extending through August 2011, the Refuge project planning staff have held four public open house events, placed or received hundreds of e-mail messages and phone calls, and have given several radio and newspaper interviews concerning the

Refuge proposal. Several non-profit conservation groups and individuals have also given presentations on the Refuge concept before and after this planning period.

Two open houses were held in Illinois. The first was on Tuesday, Oct. 12, 2010 at the McHenry County Government Center Administration Building, which is located at 667 Ware Road in Woodstock, IL. The second open house in Illinois was on Wednesday, Oct. 13 at the Lost Valley Visitor Center in Glacial Park, Route 31 and Harts Road, Ringwood, IL.

Two open houses were also held in Wisconsin. The first was on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2010 at the Bristol Municipal Building, which is located at 19801 83rd Street in Bristol, WI. The second open house in Wisconsin was held on Thursday October 21, at the City of Lake Geneva City Hall, at 626 Geneva Street in Lake Geneva, WI.

All open houses were held from 4-8 p.m. and interested citizens were encouraged to stop by any time and stay as long as they wished to speak with Service staff or submit comments. Comment forms were available so that written comments could be submitted onsite or mailed in later.

These events drew more than 530 people who provided their reaction to the idea of a refuge and identified issues and opportunities that they felt needed to be addressed during the planning process.

The Environmental Assessment was released for public review March 21, 2012; the comment period lasted 37 days and ended April 27, 2012. During the comment period the Refuge hosted two open house events to obtain comments. The first open house was held on Tuesday, April 3, 2012, from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Lost Valley Visitor Center in Glacial Park, Route 31 and Harts Road, Ringwood, Illinois. The second open house was held Wednesday, April 4, 2012 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. in Genoa City, Wisconsin at the Brookwood Middle School, 1020 Hunter's Ridge Drive. Over 400 people attended one or both of these events.

By the conclusion of the comment period the planning team received over three thousand written responses by organizations and individuals. Approximately, 2500 of these responses were from an internet write-in campaign by a non-governmental organization. In response to all comments we made a number of minor edits to the final document. A response to comments section has been added to this EA chapter.

1.4.2 Issues, Opportunities and Concerns

The Service received about 360 letters, comment forms, postcards and e-mail messages from people during the initial scoping process in 2010. Comments were received primarily from local residents, non-profit organizations, and governmental offices.

Issues and concerns identified during scoping helped the Service identify and evaluate strategies for the proposed action (Table 1). Individual comments expressed during the open houses or received in writing have included the following themes:

Table 1: Summary of Public Scoping Comments

Category	Topic	Percent of Comments
Habitat/Species		80%
	General Concern for the Environment	
	Wetland Preservation/Restoration is Needed	
	Grassland Preservation/Restoration is Needed	
	Habitat Fragmentation Exists/Linkages are Needed	
	Conservation of Biodiversity is Desirable	
	Endangered Species Would Benefit	
Recreation/Education		12%
	Increased Recreational Opportunities are Desirable	
	Snowmobile Support	
	Horseback Riding Support	
	Hunting Support	
	Hunting Opposition	
	Environmental Education Support	
Societal Issues		8%
	General Opposition to Government	
	Fear of Increased Government Control	
	Avoid Sand/Gravel Deposits & Consider Restoration	
	Economic/Tourism Boost will Benefit Area	

These issues will be discussed as an integral part of the Alternatives and Environmental Consequences chapter in this EA. In addition, we have included a list of frequently asked questions in the Appendix.

1.4.3 Summary and Response to Comments on the EA

The EA was released for public review March 21, 2012; the comment period lasted 37 days and ended April 27, 2012. During the comment period the Refuge hosted two open house events to obtain comments. By the conclusion of the comment period we received over three thousand written responses by organizations and individuals. Approximately, 2500 of these responses were from an internet write-in campaign by a non-governmental organization. In response to all comments we made a number of minor edits to the final document.

Nearly all respondents endorsed the selection of Alternative C.

The following is a summary of the comments received on the EA and how the issues are addressed.

Comments Received	How Issues are Addressed
Several thousand individuals and dozens of organizations endorsed the EA as written and recommended establishment of a refuge.	Comments acknowledged. The Service appreciates this endorsement of its proposed plan.
Approximately 30 individuals wrote to express concern that a refuge would result in the closure of existing snowmobile trails.	The issue of snowmobile trails was discussed in the EA and in an e-mail message or letter sent to 60 snowmobile clubs. Motorized vehicles on national wildlife refuges are

	<p>generally permitted only on designated roads during specified times of the year. Off-road vehicle use, including ATVs and snowmobiles, is generally not permitted due to impacts on vegetation, disturbance to wildlife and other Refuge users, and safety and liability issues. However, the Service's objective is not to eliminate or interrupt existing snowmobile trails.</p> <p>It is possible that at some time in the future a landowner would offer land for sale to the Refuge that contains a portion of an existing snowmobile trail. We do not expect this situation to occur very often. The Service would work with the landowner and snowmobile clubs to either reroute the trail or encourage a third party to obtain a permanent trail easement prior to the federal purchase. McHenry County has expressed an interest in working with landowners and the Service to secure trail easements if the situation arises. The Department of Natural Resources in Illinois and Wisconsin, the respective county governments, and local snowmobile clubs may also choose to be involved to secure an existing trail.</p> <p>Please see the EA for a map of known snowmobile trails and more information on this subject.</p>
<p>Several organizations and dozens of individuals asked the Service to consider expanding the Refuge boundaries. Ideas for expansion included connecting corridors to specific conservation lands in Kenosha County, Wisconsin and into Lake County in Illinois. However, the most repeated request was taken from the following letter excerpt:</p> <p>"We recommend the following additions to Concept C:</p> <p>Expand the westernmost core area to include all of the Nippersink Headwaters subwatershed, an area where many conservation-minded private landowners have already banded together to protect the beauty and integrity of the highest glacial landscape in McHenry County.</p> <p>Add the land north of Peterkin Pond which is shown as part of the refuge in Concept B to the preferred option (Concept C) boundaries. This will capture the West Branch of Nippersink Creek in Walworth County. Make use of Nippersink Creek corridors to extend the refuge to build another core area in Wisconsin around the existing Four Seasons Preserve (owned by city of Lake Geneva), Bloomfield Wildlife Refuge and Big Foot Beach State Park (owned by the WI DNR)."</p>	<p>The boundaries of the Core Units and potential connecting corridors in Alternative C were drawn based on soil types, historic natural vegetation, and existing wildlife habitats. The planning team tried to include large blocks of historic prairie soil types in order to enhance the prairie and oak savanna restoration potential. The presence of residential and commercial developments and existing roads also were important in drawing a manageable refuge boundary.</p> <p>The High Point area west of the Preferred Alternative C northwest corner is an area that historically was primarily forest with some smaller areas of mixed forest/prairie and prairie. The area is higher in elevation than the majority of Alternative C areas and is generally well drained to moderately well drained. This reduces the potential areas of wetland or wet prairie found there. Since much of our interest in the Hackmatack area is focused upon grassland birds and wetland associated birds, from a biological standpoint the High Point area does not rank high as judged against our selection criteria. That is not to say that it is not of high biological value.</p> <p>However, with the high level of citizen conservation interest in the area and the presence of McHenry County Conservation District lands, we believe that there is already a good formula in place for conservation gains in that area. It would certainly compliment the Service's Hackmatack conservation proposal if the High Point area were connected to the proposed Refuge area. However, we feel that it is more consistent with our priorities to not include that area in the preferred alternative and instead support private and county conservation efforts there as opportunities arise.</p>

	<p>There are several reasons the area north of Peterkin Pond is not included in the proposed Refuge boundaries. The corridor along County H from Genoa City to Lake Geneva is projected to see substantial residential housing development by 2030 in comparison to the majority of the areas identified under Alternative C. This could potentially bisect corridors connecting Big Foot Beach State Park with Four Seasons Preserve or Bloomfield Wildlife Refuge and the main body of the Refuge identified near Peterkin Pond. Extending the authorize boundaries north would also potentially impact a segment of snowmobile trail crossing east-west through Peterkin Pond and adjoining lands.</p> <p>While much of the area falls within historic prairie, other areas within Alternative C already ensure good representation of this habitat within the proposed Refuge. The area north of Peterkin pond has much less wet soils compared to other areas of the proposed Refuge, which means less opportunity to restore wet prairie or wetlands, habitats of interest for the project. The Service does not feel the area in question is necessary to achieve the proposed Refuge objectives. However, acknowledging the value of the area and in particular the preservation and enhancement of water quality in the West Branch of the Nippersink Creek that flows through the area, the Service does encourage private, local, and state conservation activity there and may be able to assist in restoration efforts through the Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.</p> <p>The Service and most of our non-governmental organization partners recognize that Refuge land acquisition will not be the sole tool to achieve conservation success for the Hackmatack project. Everyone concerned with habitat conservation in the area will need to contribute to the goal. Government budget constraints, the presence of willing landowners, and the potential speed of commercial development are all factors in this project. The Service and the proposed Refuge will do its part to aid wildlife, habitat and people in this region.</p>
<p>The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources requested that we include trapping of furbearing animals as an allowable use on a new refuge.</p>	<p>In general, trapping may be conducted as a wildlife management tool on many national wildlife refuges for furbearers, like muskrat and beavers, which damage infrastructure, and mammalian predators that may negatively impact nesting waterfowl. Trapping is usually conducted by permittees on a sustainable, relatively small scale. Trapping data must indicate that there is no adverse direct effect on the long-term populations of target species or indirect effect on related prey species. As with hunting, trapping is suspended when the populations of target species appear to be low. We will add a paragraph on trapping to the Conceptual Management Plan.</p>
<p>One national organization and several individuals asked us to consider the impact of light pollution on the future Refuge environment.</p>	<p>Comments acknowledged. This will be mentioned in the Conceptual Management Plan and will serve to remind future Refuge managers to consider light pollution and starlight preservation in future Refuge developments and programs.</p>

<p>Several regional organizations endorsed the plan based on the increase in recreational opportunities for local tourism and businesses.</p>	<p>Comments acknowledged. However, it may take many years to build a sufficient land base for some wildlife-dependent recreational activities. Refuge land acquisition will be conducted on a willing seller and available funding basis.</p>
<p>The Forest County Potawatomi Community (FCPC) submitted a letter with substantial information about the ongoing Potawatomi connection to land in the proposed refuge. We identified three major topics in their comments:</p> <p>The desire to “supplement the Draft EA’s ‘Archeological and Cultural Resources’ section....”</p> <p>The intent to “demonstrate the continuing significance of the lands within the Proposed Refuge to FCPC....”</p> <p>And A “request that FWS consult with FCPC to ensure (1) that future actions related to the Proposed Refuge do not adversely impact culturally sensitive areas or items and (2) that the environmental education and interpretation activity explain the historic Native American stewardship and interdependence on the natural habitat and species within the Proposed Refuge.”</p>	<p>We have made edits to the Archeological and Cultural Resources section in the EA to reflect these comments and wrote a response letter to the Potawatomi Community.</p>

1.4.4 Conservation Plans and Initiatives Guiding Planning

The conservation goals and objectives of existing ecosystem plans for the landscapes in which refuges are located are important. They help to determine the manner in which a refuge can best contribute to overall conservation efforts and to the functioning of the ecosystems in that area. The Service must coordinate refuge planning with other units of government, other government agencies and nongovernmental organizations and to the extent practical to make refuge plans consistent with the fish and wildlife conservation plans of the state. The Service also endeavors to make refuge planning consistent with the conservation programs of the tribal, public and private partners within the ecosystem. The following plans were considered during the development of this document.

Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture (2007). A primary goal of the Joint Venture is to integrate continental migratory bird priorities into conservation actions at regional and state levels. Bird Conservation Regions 22 and 23 are both within the Hackmatack Study Area. The Joint Venture Plan integrates conservation visions from the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, North American Landbird Conservation Plan, United States Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan. The goal of the Joint Venture Plan is deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally-based, biologically-driven, landscape-oriented partnerships. It utilizes 70 “focal” or priority bird species from which habitat conservation recommendations are based. Over half (36 of 70) of the focal or priority species identified on Joint Venture Implementation Plan breed within the boundary of proposed Refuge.

USFWS Climate Change Strategic Plan - Five Year Action Plan (2010). The USFWS Five Year Action Plan, designed to implement the Climate Change Strategic Plan, includes the promotion of habitat connectivity and integrity. The Hackmatack Study Area, with its rich conservation estate of protected but disconnected lands, offers an opportunity to implement habitat connectivity at a significant scale, specifically the north-south landscape linkage between the Kettle Moraine State Forest complex in Wisconsin and the Fox River watershed in Illinois.

State of Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan (2005). The Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan identified a number of general management recommendations for the Southeast Glacial Plains Landscape. These include increasing publically-owned lands to accommodate recreational needs; protect, link, and restore oak forests; restore and manage wetlands that provide important ecological functions, and protect and restore rivers and riparian zones.

State of Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (2005). The Illinois Wildlife Action Plan places special importance on assembling and protecting large blocks of habitat (grasslands, forests, and wetlands) that support a number of wildlife species in greatest need of conservation. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has identified the Lake McHenry Wetlands Complex Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) within the proposed Refuge Study Area. COA's are locations with significant existing wildlife and habitat resources, where partners plan for and implement conservation plans, where financial and human resources are available, and where conservation is motivated by an agreed-upon conservation purpose.

Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan (1999). This plan identifies the actions necessary to preserve the region's biodiversity including the vision of a network of protected lands and waters that will preserve habitat for a complete spectrum of the region's natural communities. It calls upon federal, state and local units of government to work cooperatively with private landowners to restore and manage the region's rich natural heritage of land, water and wildlife. The plan identifies conservation targets for both terrestrial and aquatic communities, provides recovery goals with action plans and a role for key players, identifies threats to communities, charts adaptive management strategies that include research and monitoring, and acknowledges the value of education and communication with the public. Many of the species and communities within the Hackmatack Study Area are important components of this plan.

Chicago Wilderness Green Infrastructure Plan (2004). Chicago Wilderness (CW) is a consortium of over 250 conservation organizations, museums, businesses, public agencies and nongovernmental organizations focused on regional approaches to conservation in the tri-state region of Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. The CW Green Infrastructure Plan was developed to provide "a visionary, regional-scale map of the Chicago Wilderness region that reflects both existing green infrastructure – forest preserve holdings, natural area sites, streams, wetlands, prairies, and woodlands – as well as opportunities for expansion, restoration, and connection." The overall goal of this plan is to develop a sustainable system of conservation lands, both public and private that can support the rich biodiversity of plants and wildlife native to the region.

McHenry County Green Infrastructure Plan (2011). This plan, currently under development by McHenry County, brings together stakeholders from various groups to identify important landscape features and natural resources, including the Hackmatack Study Area, that are of paramount importance in future planning related to growth. The plan identifies important elements of "green infrastructure" that include present and future open space, private conservation initiatives, ecosystem restoration opportunities, and where elements of conservation design should be incorporated into future development.

McHenry County Conservation District Natural Areas Protection Plan (2006). The Natural Areas Protection Plan calls for the protection and management of significant natural resources of the county; including natural areas, wildlife, geologic features of significance, endangered and threatened species, and high quality aquatic systems including Nippersink Creek and its tributaries.

McHenry County Conservation District Oak Ecosystem Inventory (2005). The Oak Ecosystem Inventory documents the loss of oak-dominated ecosystems from 1837 through 2005 across the entire county. With loss of these ecosystems at nearly 90 percent and fragmentation of the remaining blocks into small units generally less than 25 acres in size, the plan's recommendations for future conservation are

comprehensive. They include protection of remaining savanna and woodland blocks through acquisition and private easements, management of existing oak stands and replanting of oak dominated ecosystems.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Lespedeza Leptostachya Recovery Plan. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Twin Cities, Minnesota (1988). This plan was developed by the Service to guide recovery efforts for prairie bush clover, a midwestern endemic grassland species, whose original midwestern range includes both northern Illinois and southeastern Wisconsin. Protection and management of known lespedeza populations is a recommendation of the recovery plan. Populations of this species are known to occur in both Wisconsin and Illinois, within or in close proximity to the Study Area. Suitable habitat is present within the Study Area for the species.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid Recovery Plan. Fort Snelling, Minnesota. (1999). This plan was developed by the Service to guide recovery efforts for the eastern prairie white fringed orchid, a midwestern grassland species, whose original midwestern range includes both northern Illinois and southeastern Wisconsin. Protection and management of known orchid populations is a recommendation of the recovery plan. Several populations of this species occur in the Hackmatack Study Area. Suitable habitat is present that may support additional populations that have yet to be discovered.

Natural Areas Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin (Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission [SEWRPC], 1997). This plan identifies actions to protect and manage critical habitats for plants and animals and improve ecosystems. The plan maps important environmental corridors, critical habitats, and natural areas of statewide significance and calls for the protection of these areas as future development occurs within the southeastern Wisconsin region.

America's Great Outdoors Initiative. This national initiative seeks to increase American's access to outdoor recreation and identifies projects in all fifty states with the potential to do so. In Illinois, the proposed Hackmatack NWR was identified as one of those projects. The Refuge would also provide outdoor education opportunities to the estimated 3.5 million people that live within 60 miles of the project area.

1.4.5 Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

The Service established the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in 1987 to work beyond the boundaries of refuges with landowners and other partners to improve habitat on private lands for fish and wildlife. The program is voluntary, relies heavily on a partnership approach, and leverages both ideas and funding from a variety of sources. Cost sharing agreements and technical assistance are important components.

The overall goal of Partners Program projects is to return a site to the ecological condition that likely existed prior to loss or degradation. Priority ranking is given to proposed projects that meet these conditions:

- Improve habitat for migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, interjurisdictional fish, marine mammals, and other declining species.
- Complement activities on Refuge System lands, or contribute to the resolution of problems on refuges that are caused by off-refuge practices.
- Address species and habitat priorities that have been identified through Service planning teams (with our partners), or in collaboration with state fish and wildlife agencies.

- Reduce habitat fragmentation or serve as buffers for federal or state conservation lands.
- Result in self-sustaining systems that are not dependent on artificial structures.

Service biologists work one-on-one with landowners to plan, implement, and monitor their projects. This level of personal attention and follow-through is a significant strength of the Program.

1.5 Decisions

This EA is an important step in the Service's formal decision-making process. In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Regional Director, Midwest Region, will consider the information presented in this document to select one of the alternatives.

The Regional Director will determine whether the preferred alternative will or will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment and issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or a Decision of Significant Impact. A FONSI means that the preferred alternative is accepted and can be implemented in accordance with other laws and regulations. A Decision of Significant Impact would indicate the need to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a rejection of the project proposal.

1.6 Legal Compliance

The Service planning process, land acquisition, and management are done in accordance with authority delegated by Congress and as interpreted by Department of the Interior and agency regulations and guidelines. Land acquisition authority includes the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929, Endangered Species Act, Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, and the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956. Land management authority, including comprehensive conservation planning, is directed primarily by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. Other relevant Acts and Executive Orders are listed in the Appendices.

This EA was prepared by the Service and represents compliance with applicable federal statutes, regulations, Executive Orders, and other compliance documents, including the following:

- Administrative Procedures Act (5 U.S.C. 551-559, 701-706, and 801-808) as amended
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (42 U.S.C. 1996)
- Antiquities Act of 1906 (16 U.S.C. 431-433)
- Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (16 U.S.C. 470)
- Bald Eagle Protection Act of 1940 (16 U.S.C. 668-668d) as amended
- Clean Air Act of 1972 (42 U.S.C. 7401 et seq.) as amended
- Clean Water Act of 1972 (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.) as amended
- Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) as amended
- Executive Order 11593: Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment (issued in May 1971)
- Executive Order 11988: Floodplain Management (issued in May 1977)
- Executive Order 11990: Protection of Wetlands (issued in May 1977)

- Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations (issued in February 1994)
- Executive Order 13112: Invasive Species (issued in February 1999)
- Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. 742a et seq.)
- Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958 (16 U.S.C. 661 et seq.) as amended
- Fish and Wildlife Improvement Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 7421)
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-712) as amended
- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) as amended
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.) as amended
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.) as amended
- National Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee) as amended
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (25 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.)
- Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act of 2006 (16 U.S.C. 3771)
- Purpose, Policy, and Mandate for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500 et seq.)
- Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 (16 U.S.C. 2001-2009) as amended

Further, this EA reflects compliance with applicable State of Illinois, State of Wisconsin and local regulations; statutes, policies, and standards for conserving the environment and environmental resources such as water and air quality.

1.7 Establishing Authority

Lands acquired by the Service for the proposed Hackmatack NWR would be purchased under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929, the Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, and the Emergency Wetland Resources Act of 1986.

1.8 Goals of the Proposed Hackmatack NWR

The following goals for the proposed Hackmatack NWR were developed within the framework of the Refuge System's mission statement, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, the Refuge's primary purposes, and other Service policy and directives. The goals are intentionally broad statements that describe desired future conditions and would guide the management of the Refuge in the interim period and the development of management objectives and strategies for the CCP.

- Protect and enhance habitats for federal trust species and species of management concern, with special emphasis on grassland-dependent migratory birds and protection of wetlands and grasslands.

- Create opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation, while promoting activities that complement the purposes of the Refuge and other protected lands in the region.
- Promote science, education, and research through partnerships to inform land management decisions and encourage continued responsible stewardship of the natural resources of the Hackmatack NWR.