

### 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.	<p>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 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>
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	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

<p>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>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</p>
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	<p>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</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>

<p>'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>	
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