

Chapter 5: Plan Implementation

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the actions, funding, coordination, and monitoring to implement the CCP. As noted in the inside cover of this document, these plans do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition. These decisions are at the discretion of Congress in overall appropriations, and in budget allocation decisions made at the Washington and Regional levels of the Service.

A Word about Priorities

In the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, Congress established a three-tiered hierarchy, or three priorities, for refuge management. As a first priority, every refuge is to be managed to fulfill its purposes and the Refuge System mission, namely conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants. Secondly, refuges are to facilitate wildlife-dependent or “Big 6” public uses, namely hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and interpretation and environmental education. Of lowest priority is managing other uses and activities such as general recreation.

However, setting priorities in a linear or in-order fashion (e.g. implementing from top to bottom on a list of prioritized actions) is generally not realistic when dealing with the complexities and multi-program nature of managing a national wildlife refuge. In practice, especially on this Refuge given its size, length, interface with multiple states and agencies, and visitation levels for both wildlife-dependent and other recreation, a linear approach is not workable. Below are a few of the reasons why some actions identified in this Implementation Plan must



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

be done simultaneously, or why some general recreation actions are done before other resource-related actions.

- # Funding streams from Congress may not follow an established hierarchy. For example, there may be no appropriations for land acquisition or habitat restoration in a given year, but Congress may choose to fund visitor services enhancement packages.
- # A high priority such as habitat restoration is costly on a major river and dependent on funding from other sources, such as the Environmental Management Program administered by the Corps of Engineers. Thus, habitat restoration may be the highest priority for the Refuge, but if the funding is lacking, it cannot be accomplished.
- # The states or Corps of Engineers may have year-to-year priorities which benefit visitors to the Refuge and meets a Refuge objective. An example would be state funding for recreation enhancement such as access development or

beach maintenance which must be spent in a given year or lost. In this case it is an urgent need in a fiscal sense, although a lower priority resource-wise.

- # The public or other units of government may strongly urge actions which may not be high resource priorities, or staff may be confronted with health, safety, or societal needs which must be addressed. Examples include a right-of-way expansion for a utility or highway project, beach maintenance in a certain pool, boat landings and other accesses, and fish float administration.
- # Many actions are integrated with other actions. For example, Waterfowl Hunting Closed Areas are designed first and foremost to offer waterfowl resting and feeding areas during the fall migration. These areas also impact hunting, the quality of hunting, and can impact the resource if a firing line develops along a closed area boundary and leads to increased crippling loss of waterfowl. It is also important to limit disturbance to waterfowl using the closed areas, which leads to guidelines or regulations for public entry during critical times. Thus, many actions must be done simultaneously to achieve multiple objectives.
- # Some actions must be sequenced. For example, Objective 3.7 calls for the Refuge to devise a system for dove-tailing Refuge commercial fishing permitting requirements with the existing states' existing permit systems. Doing this before completing a Fishery and Mussel Management Plan (Objective 3.6) would be premature since the plan would set goals and objectives which would be addressed in permit stipulations.

Given the above, the actions listed below are in two categories: those that can be completed with existing funding and staffing, and those that will take additional resources. Target dates for completion give an indication of the priority and are useful for planning workloads in any given year. Many actions are ongoing as noted, and some of these may also be included in a step-down plan (see list on page 162). If an action has the date of 2021, this means the action will be done no later than 2021, the 15-year planning horizon for the CCP. It is hoped that many of these actions will be completed well ahead of that date. This list is not all inclusive and details in specific objectives, along with all the strategies, will be used as applicable in implementing the CCP.

Actions – Existing Funding and Staffing

The following actions are derived from objectives and strategies in the CCP and represent those actions that can be accomplished with existing resources. Some of these actions reflect current, ongoing efforts, but most require a new initiative and/or redirection of existing Refuge funding and staff effort. This list will help focus annual work planning and performance plan preparation during the 15-year life of the plan. Details of these actions are found in Chapter 4.

Goal 1: Landscape

1. Prepare and print a new Land Use Allocation Plan in cooperation with the Corps of Engineers (2021).
2. Continue modest land acquisition program (ongoing).
3. Explore land exchanges with the states (2021).
4. Continue work with the Department of the Army for land transfers at the Lost Mound Unit (Savanna Army Depot) (ongoing).
5. Complete a management plan for each Research Natural Area (2010).
6. Seek cooperative research/monitoring opportunities in Research Natural Areas (ongoing).
7. Conduct yearly boundary reviews of Research Natural Areas (ongoing).
8. Facilitate nomination package for Wetland of International Importance (2008).



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Goal 2: Environmental Health

1. Increase assistance agreements with watershed partners (ongoing).
2. Continue interagency efforts on watershed partnerships and pool drawdowns (2021).
3. Increase emphasis on water quality through habitat projects, support of state and federal initiatives, public information efforts, and interpretive and environmental education programs (ongoing).
4. Increase cooperation and public education to address invasive species (ongoing).

Goal 3: Wildlife and Habitat

1. Implement Pool Plans to extent possible working with Corps of Engineers and states using funding sources such as the Environmental Management Program (2021).
2. Adopt and use guiding principles for habitat projects (2006).
3. Amend the Wildlife Inventory Plan (2008).
4. Establish a Refuge Research Team and conduct formal coordination meetings with U.S. Geological Survey (2008).
5. Complete an Invasive Plant Control and Management Plan (new, 2009)
6. Complete a Habitat Management Plan (2021).

7. Complete a management plan for each federally-listed threatened and endangered species on the Refuge (2010).
8. Update the Refuge Trapping Plan (2007).
9. Complete a Fishery and Mussel Management Plan, including aquatic invasive animals (2008).
10. Conduct public information and education effort about turtles on the Refuge (ongoing).
11. Continue to use fire for habitat management – implement the Refuge’s Fire Management Plan (ongoing).
12. Conduct more active grassland management; include in Habitat Management Plan (ongoing and 2021).

Goal 4: Wildlife-Dependent Public Use

1. Update the Refuge Hunting Plan (2007)
2. Establish new administrative No Hunting Zones to avoid user conflicts or address safety issues (2007).
3. Modify the Waterfowl Hunting Closed Area System and regulations; post all areas each year (2007, 2009 and ongoing).
4. Monitor waterfowl use and human disturbance in the Waterfowl Hunting Closed Area System (ongoing).
5. Implement waterfowl hunting regulation changes (2007).
6. Complete plan for Gibbs Lake Area, Lake Onalaska, Pool 7 (2006).
7. Phase-out use of permanent waterfowl hunting blinds in Savanna District (2007 to 2009).
8. Modify the Potter’s Marsh managed hunt, Savanna District (2006).
9. Eliminate the Blanding Landing managed hunt, Savanna District (Lost Mound) (2007).
10. Conduct public information campaign (media, leaflets, meetings) and increase law enforcement presence for all hunting-and-fishing-related changes (ongoing).
11. In cooperation with states and Corps of Engineers, and others, develop plan for dove-tailing Refuge permitting requirements for fishing tournaments (2008).

12. Write standards for commercial fish float facilities and operations (2006).
13. Implement consistent process for regulating commercial guiding operations (2008).

Goal 5: Other Recreational Use

1. Implement new policies and regulations related to camping and beach-related uses (2007).
2. Implement new beach maintenance policy and complete beach plans in cooperation with Corps of Engineers and the states (2006 and ongoing).
3. Explore user fee system to off-set maintenance and administrative costs of other recreational uses (ongoing).
4. Establish and post Electric Motor Areas and Slow, No Wake Areas (2007 for most, 2008 for Black River Bottoms and 2009 for Nelson-Trevino).
5. Establish new No Wake Zones (2007 to 2021).
6. Implement new regulation dealing with dogs (2007).
7. Annually review and update as needed public use regulations (ongoing).
8. Conduct public information campaign (media, leaflets, meetings) and increase law enforcement presence for all general recreational use changes (2006 and ongoing).

Goal 6: Administration and Operations

1. Review and update databases for operations and maintenance needs (ongoing).

Actions – New Funding and Staff

The actions shown in goal charts on the following page are derived from objectives and strategies in the CCP and represent those actions that can be accomplished if new funding and/or staffing is allocated to the Refuge. The completion target for these actions is generally 2021 given the unknown nature of funding. Actions in Goals 1 through 3 are the highest priority since they directly support the protection and enhancement of fish and wildlife and their habitat. However, new staff in Goals 4 through

6 also directly support resource-related work. Details of these actions are identified in Chapter 4.

Costs are estimates and will likely be higher or lower based on detailed project planning and timing of implementation. Staff costs reflect 2005 salary and benefit rates at grades normal for the positions described. These needs will be reflected in key Refuge System databases such as the Refuge Operating Needs System, Maintenance Management System, and Service Assessment and Maintenance Management System which provide information used in budget formulation and allocation. The Refuge will also seek other project funding such as cost share agreements with partners, agency grant programs, grants from non-profit groups, and cost-saving or reprogramming measures within existing budget allocations. Implementing Environmental Pool Plans (Goal 3, Action 1) could be partially accomplished through the Corps of Engineers-administered Environmental Management Program and the Navigation and Environmental Sustainability Program (NESP) if authorized and funded by Congress.

Funding Summary

Total funding needs for the 15-year life of the CCP equals the one-time or project-specific costs plus the recurring costs per year times 15 years, or a total of \$227.8 million. Of this total, \$177 million or 78 percent is directly related to habitat restoration and maintenance and land acquisition.

Summary of Step-Down Plans Needed

A list of the step-down plans called for in the CCP or required by Service policy can be found on page 165. The planned completion date is in parenthesis, as well as a notation as to whether the step-down plan is new or a revision of an existing plan. These Refuge-specific plans provide the details of implementing the respective program or initiative described in broad terms in the objectives and strategies, and in this chapter. These plans will be developed in consultation with other agencies, states, and partners. The public will be given ample opportunity for plan review and comment. Environmental assessments or other documentation may also be needed to comply with National Environmental Policy Act or other requirements.

Goal 1: Landscape

Action	Short-term or project-specific costs (thousands)	Recurring cost per year (thousands)
1. Re-survey and post Refuge boundary where problems are greatest in cooperation with the Corps of Engineers		\$50
2. Acquire an average of 1,000 acres per year within approved Refuge boundary (Land and Water Conservation Fund funding)		\$1,500

Goal 2: Environmental Health

Action	Short-term or project-specific costs (thousands)	Recurring cost per year (thousands)
1. Hire private lands biologist or technician for each of the Refuge's four districts to work in watersheds		\$ 280
2. Establish Access Trust Fund for recreational access work to facilitate pool drawdowns	\$3,000	
3. Hire temporary, seasonal technicians to complete invasive plant inventory	\$ 250	
4. Write invasive plant control and management plan	\$ 25	
5. Hire fishery biologist to coordinate invasive animal control and management		\$100

Goal 3: Wildlife and Habitat

Action	Short-term or project-specific costs (thousands)	Recurring cost per year (thousands)
1. Implement at least 30 percent of Refuge-priority Environmental Pool Plan actions	\$150,000	
2. Hire a biologist for Districts without (2) to coordinate wildlife and habitat monitoring and management		\$200
3. Monitor all federally-listed threatened and endangered species, assist with state-listed species		\$20
4. Hire permanent, part-time receptionist/permit specialist at each District to handle inquiries and permits related to both fish and wildlife and various commercial uses		\$120
5. Develop cooperative agreements with states for sharing commercial fishing permittee and catch information (fishery biologist responsibility, costs already captured)		N/A
6. Initiate 3-5 year turtle ecology study; complete turtle management plan	\$100	
7. Complete, with Corps of Engineers, Forest Inventory of the Refuge	\$75	
8. Hire Refuge Forester; complete Forest Management Plan		\$100

Goal 3: Wildlife and Habitat (Continued)

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| 9. Annual maintenance needs for constructed habitat projects through EMP or other sources | \$360 |
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Goal 4: Wildlife-Dependent Public Use

Action	Short-term or project-specific costs (thousands)	Recurring cost per year (thousands)
1. Construct 3 new fishing piers or docks	\$ 100K	
2. Construct a variety of observation decks and trails to foster wildlife observation and photography	\$ 500K	
3. Hire visitor services specialists at McGregor and Winona Districts to increase programs and services, and one to be stationed at the National Miss. River Museum in Dubuque (3 total, Districts highest priority).		\$ 240K
4. Develop and print updated maps of the Refuge, by pool, for public distribution	\$ 50K	
5. Develop and install interpretive exhibits at offices	\$ 100K	

Goal 5: Other Recreational Use

Action	Short-term or project-specific costs (thousands)	Recurring cost per year (thousands)
1. Annual funding needs to support signing, posting, leaflets, Leave No Trace program, law enforcement, permit administration, and other aspects of managing recreation on the Refuge.		\$100
2. Hire 4 additional full-time law enforcement officers, one for each District, to enforce Refuge recreation and wildlife regulations	\$100 (vehicles/ equip)	\$300

Goal 6: Administration and Operations

Action	Short-term or project-specific costs (thousands)	Recurring cost per year (thousands)
1. Construct offices in support of overall Refuge administration, management, and public use (Winona, La Crosse, McGregor, Lost Mound Unit, and Headquarters)	\$10,000	\$100
2. Construct maintenance shops and equipment storage buildings at all Districts and Lost Mound Unit	\$3,500	
3. Hire 3 maintenance staff for stations either without or to increase District capability for habitat and facility work		\$150

Goal 6: Administration and Operations (Continued)

Action	Short-term or project-specific costs (thousands)	Recurring cost per year (thousands)
4. Construct new boat landing and other accesses and parking areas	\$500	
5. Hire public information specialist to improve communication with public and media on Refuge programs and services		\$100
6. Hire part-time receptionist at Headquarters to handle public inquiries and assist with permit management		\$40
7. Hire additional staff (3) for the new Lost Mound Unit (9,715 acres) to support biological, public use, and maintenance needs		\$200

New Funding Summary by Major Category to Fully Implement the CCP

Action	Short-term or project-specific costs	Recurring cost per year
1. Land Acquisition within approved boundary		\$1.5 million
2. Environmental Pool Plan habitat restoration and enhancement projects in lieu of other funding such as EMP or pending Navigation/Ecosystem initiative	\$150.0 million	
3. Access Trust Fund for pool drawdowns	\$ 3.0 million	
4. Office and maintenance building construction	\$13.5 million	\$.1 million
5. General operations and maintenance	\$ 1.9 million	\$2.36 million
Total	\$168.4 million	\$3.96 million

Summary of Step-down Plans Needed

# Land Use Allocation Plan (revise, 2021)	# Visitor Services Plan (new, 2008)
# Research Natural Area Management Plan (new, 2010)	# Trapping Plan (revise, 2007)
# Wildlife Inventory and Monitoring Plan (revise, 2008)	# Law Enforcement Plan (new, 2006)
# Habitat Management Plan, including grasslands (new, 2021)	# Plans or guidelines for:
# Invasive Plant Control and Management Plan (new, 2009)	Gibbs Lake Area, Pool 7 (new, 2006)
# Threatened, Endangered and Candidate Species (new)	Commercial fish floats (new, 2006)
# Fishery and Mussel Management Plan, including invasive aquatic animals (new, 2008)	Fishing tournaments (new, 2008)
# Fire Management Plan (revise as needed)	Beach management with Corps of Engineers and states (new/revise, 2006 and ongoing)
# Forest Management Plan (new, 2010)	Guides and guiding (new, 2008)
# Hunting Plan (revise, 2007)	
# Fishing Plan (new, 2008)	

Near-term Implementation (3 years)

CY 2006 Actions

- # Complete and/or plan drawdowns and EMP projects
- # Law Enforcement step-down plan
- # Gibbs Lake Area Plan
- # Begin drafting Trapping Plan
- # Public and media outreach on recreation changes
- # Publish new regulations for 2007 recreation changes
- # Design new signs for closed areas, electric motor areas, slow, no wake areas, etc.
- # Write and design new information leaflets
- # Design new kiosk maps
- # Outreach for Savanna District hunting changes
- # Guidelines for fish float operations and maintenance
- # Initiate beach planning on select pools with Corps of Engineers and state

CY 2007 Actions

- # Complete and/or plan drawdowns and EMP projects
- # Implement new guidelines and regulations dealing with closed areas, electric motor areas, slow, no wake areas, beach use, dogs, permanent blinds, etc.
- # Begin process for establishing No Wake Zones with local units of government
- # Revise Hunting Plan
- # Complete Trapping Plan

CY 2008

- # Complete and/or plan drawdowns and EMP projects
- # Complete a Wetland of International Importance designation package (RAMSAR)
- # Revise Wildlife Inventory Plan
- # Establish Refuge Research Team
- # Complete Fishery and Mussel Management Plan
- # Complete Recreational Fishing Plan
- # Complete fishing tournament guidelines
- # Complete commercial guiding guidelines



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Monitoring and Evaluation

Objectives and strategies implemented will be continually monitored and evaluated during the 15-year life of the plan. The wildlife inventory and monitoring plan update will be critical since fish and wildlife are important barometers of habitat condition and health. Many of the objectives in the plan deal directly with better monitoring and evaluation, and in this regard, adequate staffing and continued partnerships with the Corps of Engineers, states, U.S. Geological Survey, and others will be important. Many actions inherent in the plan are new directions and monitoring will help understand the effects of the actions on habitat, fish and wildlife populations, and public use patterns and levels. There will also be a growing need to understand the impacts of recreation on fish, wildlife, and habitat as use levels increase and means of use change. In addition, the Mississippi River and its watershed will certainly change, and likely in ways unforeseen. Land use changes, invasive species, floods, disease outbreaks, and climate may alter expected outcomes, and monitoring will be critical to detecting and reacting to such change.

Plan Review and Revision

As noted above, environmental change and unforeseen effects may call for changes in the plan. The Refuge will practice adaptive management, using monitoring, evaluation, and experimentation to learn and change aspects of the plan as needed. For example, a change in the size and distribution of Waterfowl Hunting Closed Areas is proposed to achieve a better distribution of feeding and resting areas for fall migrants. Weekly aerial surveys in the



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

fall will provide necessary waterfowl use data to gauge effectiveness of the changes, and along with impacts from human disturbance, form the basis for any needed boundary and regulation modifications.

Since the CCP will be a constant reference and guide for Refuge staff, internal review will be continuous. In addition, it is expected that the public and partners will offer continuous feedback. At least every 3 years, representatives of the Corps of Engineers, states, other agencies, and non-profit and citizen groups will be invited to meet and provide more formal input into what is working, what is not, and possible changes the Refuge should consider. Revisions will be undertaken as needed by amendments to the CCP. There will be an opportunity for public review and comment prior to making any substantive changes. A major plan review and re-write will occur after 15 years.

Partnerships

Refuge staff works closely with the departments of natural resources of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois in designing and carrying out projects and programs. The Corps of Engineers is a critical partner due to its dominant role in navigation, water level management, forestry, and the planning and construction of environmental restoration projects. Much of the habitat restoration and enhancement work is done through the Environmental Management Program administered by the Corps, and this work could accelerate should Congress approve and fund the Navigation and Environmental Sustainability Program (NESP).

The U. S. Geological Survey, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Agriculture, and

state-level counterpart agencies all play a role in biological monitoring, research, environmental regulation, and policy making on the river, and thus the Refuge. Other U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service programs such as fisheries and ecological services also play a key role, both as leaders for certain projects and programs, and in support. The Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program will continue to play a critical role in working with private landowners to improve the watersheds of the Refuge.

Conservation organizations are active in policy issues and/or land acquisition affecting the Refuge and include Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, Izaak Walton League, and American Rivers. A host of local conservation and sporting organizations like the La Crosse County Conservation Alliance are active. Lastly, many citizen conservationists help the Refuge as volunteers and as members of the Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Refuges, a citizen support group.

The forum for bringing together such a diversity of partners, who often have different missions and agendas, is both formal and informal. Established associations, commissions, committees, and working groups bring people together; plans, planning, and public meetings allow input from everyone. Specific projects and events let citizens lend a helping hand. These partnerships will remain an important part of plan implementation, both in gaining and maintaining public and partner understanding and support, and through the joint funding of specific actions.

Figure 36: Refuge Staffing

