

# Executive Summary

This Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) will guide the administration and management of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Refuge) for the next 15 years and meets a requirement in the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997.

The Refuge was established by act of Congress in 1924 for the purpose of providing a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds, fish, other wildlife, and plants. The Refuge encompasses approximately 240,000 acres in four states in a more-or-less continuous stretch of 261 miles of Mississippi River floodplain from near Wabasha, Minnesota to near Rock Island, Illinois.

This CCP is the result of four years of extensive public involvement and planning. A Final Environmental Impact Statement was released July 11, 2006 and a Record of Decision was signed August 24, 2006. That decision selected Alternative E, Modified Wildlife and Integrated Public Use Focus, as the CCP for the Refuge.

This CCP contains 43 measurable objectives and many associated strategies that will be carried out over the next 15 years. The objectives are designed to help the Refuge achieve its purposes and contribute to the mission and policies of the National Wildlife Refuge System, while being sensitive to the needs of partner states and agencies, conservation organizations, communities, and the general public. Below is a summary of the major objectives of the CCP.

- # Acquire from willing sellers 15,000 acres of land within approved boundary.
- # Seek protection for 13 bluffland areas within the approved boundary.
- # Improve water quality and reduce and/or address sedimentation.



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- # Complete pool-wide drawdowns on as many pools as practicable to enhance habitat.
- # Inventory and reduce invasive plants 10% by 2010, work with others on invasive animals.
- # Complete \$150 million worth of habitat restoration and enhancement projects or \$10 million per year compared to \$2.7 million per year on Refuge from the Environmental Management Program.
- # Increase wildlife monitoring and research efforts to guide management.
- # Increase emphasis on fishery and mussel management in cooperation with the states and Corps of Engineers.
- # Complete an inventory of the 51,000 acres of Refuge forest and begin management actions.
- # Maintain abundant hunting and fishing opportunities, and increase opportunities for wildlife observation, photography, interpretation and environmental education.
- # Adjust the system of Waterfowl Hunting Closed Areas established in 1958 to meet the food and



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rest needs of migrating waterfowl. This means deleting some closed areas, adding some, and adjusting boundaries on others. Total acres will drop from 44,544 acres to 43,652, although a special hunt area, no open water hunting area, and administrative no hunting zones will increase overall acreage that has some restrictions.

- # Reduce human disturbance to waterfowl and other wildlife using closed areas with a blend of voluntary measures and targeted regulations.
- # Help ensure a quality hunting experience for the broadest cross-section of the public by eliminating permanent blinds in Pools 12-14 and addressing crowding/behavior issues on a portion of Pool 7.
- # Better manage commercial-type activities on the Refuge such as guiding services, fish floats, and fishing tournaments in cooperation with the states and Corps of Engineers.

- # Fine tune existing beach-related uses such as camping and general recreation to safeguard both wildlife and people.
- # Establish 5 electric motor only areas totaling 1,852 acres (1 exists now) and 8 seasonal slow, no wake areas totaling 9,720 acres to reduce disturbance to fish and wildlife in backwater areas and provide alternative experiences for Refuge visitors. These areas represent about 8% of the water area of the Refuge, and less than 5% of the entire Refuge.
- # Establish a new and relaxed dog policy that allows owners to exercise and train their dogs while safeguarding other visitors and wildlife.
- # Improve Refuge boat, canoe, and walk-in accesses.
- # Replace or construct 4 new offices and 5 new maintenance facilities to replace rental space or aging facilities.
- # Increase public information efforts and programs.
- # Increase staff to minimum levels to increase stewardship capabilities for private lands work, fisheries, forestry, biological monitoring, maintenance, visitor services, and law enforcement.
- # Estimated cost over 15 years if every objective/strategy funded: \$227.8 million, of which \$177 million (78%) is habitat restoration, maintenance, and land acquisition.