

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge
Established 1924
Compatibility Determination

Use: Canoeing, kayaking, and sailing

Refuge Name: Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Refuge)

Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):

The Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge was established by Public Law No. 268, 68th Congress on June 7, 1924. This act authorized acquisition of lands for Refuge purposes. Additional lands acquired in fee title by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are managed as part of the Refuge under a 1963 Cooperative Agreement between the Department of the Army and the Department of the Interior.

Refuge Purpose(s):

“The Refuge shall be established and maintained (a) as a refuge and breeding place for migratory birds included in the terms of the convention between the United States and Great Britain for the protection of migratory birds, concluded August 16, 1916, and (b) to such extent as the Secretary of the Interior by regulations, prescribe, as a refuge and breeding place for other wild birds, game animals, fur-bearing animals, and for the conservation of wild flowers and aquatic plants, and (c) to such extent as the Secretary of the Interior may, by regulations, prescribe a refuge and breeding place for fish and other aquatic animal life.”

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:

This use involves the silent water sports such as canoeing, kayaking, and sailing. These uses are at times and end in and of themselves, or means to enjoy wildlife observation, fishing, hunting, and other recreational activities. The 2003 boating study on Pools 4-9 by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources found that 2 percent of boats were non-motorized. This percentage may be low since surveys were conducted at main access points and canoers and kayakers have a wide range of access options. In 2004, the Refuge estimated nearly 13,000 non-motorized boating visits.

Canoeing and kayaking occur mainly in the side channels and backwaters of the Refuge. Sailing occurs mainly on Lake Onalaska, Pool 7, La Crosse District. The main season for canoeing, kayaking, and sailing is April through October, with peak use occurring June through August.

Availability of Resources:

Little oversight of this use is needed, and staffing and funding is adequate. The Refuge maintains 4 marked canoe/kayak trails and plans 15 more. New trails take some investment for signs, installation, and periodic inspection. Existing resources should be adequate for this work, and volunteers will likely be available. Existing boat landings, both Refuge and other, are available to support these silent sports.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Disturbance to wildlife, such as the flushing of feeding or resting birds, is inherent to these activities. Disturbances are generally less than motorized activities due to the silent nature of canoeing, kayaking, and sailing, and generally low volume of use in any given area. This disturbance is temporary and generally localized. Fisheries, emergent and submergent vegetation, and other aquatic species will not generally be impacted. Designated canoe and kayak trails, and Electric Motor Areas and Slow, No Wake Areas, may increase the volume of visits locally, but this increase should not markedly change impacts overall given the size of the Refuge and relatively small percentage of the Refuge in these designations (approximately 8 percent of the water area). Sailing on Lake Onalaska has the potential to disturb waterfowl in the Waterfowl Hunting Closed Area and Voluntary Avoidance Area.

Public Review and Comment:

A draft of this Compatibility Determination was included in the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released May 1, 2005 for a 120-day comment period. It was also available during a subsequent 90-day review period on a supplement to the EIS released December 3, 2005. Public notification included notices in the Federal Register, media announcements, and 31 public meetings and workshops attended by more than 3,700 persons. Several comments on canoeing and kayaking were received and are found in Chapter 7 of the EIS, with a Service response. However, no comments specific to this determination were received.

Determination:

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. Canoe and kayak trail layout and design will continue to ensure adequate adjacent cover for wildlife and avoid sensitive wildlife areas or habitat.

Justification:

Disturbance to wildlife is limited by the silent nature of this use, modest numbers of visits, and the size and remote nature of large parts of the Refuge. Wildlife displaced has ample alternative habitat given the size of the Refuge. Also, many species have grown more tolerant of human presence due to railroads, highways, and river traffic adjacent to or through the Refuge. Disturbance is also generally short-term and only temporarily displaces wildlife, and adequate adjacent habitat is usually available for wildlife. Although sailing in Lake Onalaska has the potential to disturb waterfowl using the Waterfowl Hunting Closed Area, a Voluntary Avoidance Area helps protect the core of the closed area and most sailing occurs before peak bird use. This use is not expected to materially interfere or detract from the purposes of the Refuge for fish, wildlife, and plant conservation.

Signature:

Refuge Manager:

Alan Ouellet 8/17/06
(signature and date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief:

Nita M. Zuber 8/21/2006
(signature and date)

Mandatory 10- or 15 year Re-evaluations Date: 2016