

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

Use: Dog Exercising and Training

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 exercising or training of dogs on the Refuge under a specifically designed regulation that protects wildlife and the public. This use occurs sporadically throughout the Refuge but is most common near cities and communities with higher densities of dog owners. This use will occur year-around, with the highest frequency during the summer months. Perhaps half of this use would involve people camping on islands with dogs, and half would be persons working or training hunting retrievers from shoreline areas. This use does not include field trials or commercial/professional dog training, which remain prohibited.

Availability of Resources:

This use does not require additional facilities or added maintenance of existing facilities. Enforcement of regulations governing this use is part of normal law enforcement operations. Thus, no additional resources are needed to administer this use.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Domestic animals can harass and kill wildlife and be particularly harmful to ground nesting birds during the nesting season. Some animals, particularly dogs, can at times become a direct or perceived threat to other persons engaged in recreation on the Refuge. Young children especially can be easily frightened by dogs, and even knocked down and injured by overly friendly dogs. Domestic animals often leave waste at public use sites which many visitors find objectionable.

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 regulations pertaining to dogs 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:

Adopt the following regulation for dog use on the Refuge: No dogs are allowed to disturb or endanger wildlife or people while on the Refuge. All dogs while on the Refuge must be under the control of their owners/handlers at all times or on a leash. No dogs are allowed to roam. All dogs must be on a leash when on hiking trails or other areas so posted. Working a dog in Refuge waters by tossing a retrieval dummy or other object for out-and-back exercise is allowed. However, the above conditions do apply. Dogs are exempt from these conditions while engaged in authorized hunting activities. Owners/handlers of dogs are also responsible for disposal of dog droppings on Refuge public use concentration areas such as trails, sandbars, and boat landings. Field trials or commercial / professional dog training remains prohibited.

Justification:

This objective relaxes the current Refuge System regulation which prohibits unconfined domestic animals on national wildlife refuges, making an exception for dogs. The new regulation provides stipulations for allowing dogs to be free and would allow owners to exercise and train their dogs, but helps protect wildlife and other persons from disturbance or injury. Disturbance to wildlife should thus not be greater than the multitude of other uses occurring during the same time period. The new regulation also helps safeguard other visitors from the real or perceived threat that dogs and other animals can pose by ensuring that dogs are physically restrained at Refuge public use facilities. The prohibition of field trials and commercial or organized dog training would remain in effect and is long-standing Refuge policy. With the new regulation in place, this use is not expected to materially interfere with or detract from the purposes of the Refuge or the mission of the Refuge System.

Signature:

Refuge Manager:

Don Coulter 8/17/06
(signature and date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief:

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

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