

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

Use: Fruits of the Soil Harvest (e.g. berry and mushroom picking)

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:

Allow the public to collect fruits of the soil from the Refuge for personal use.

Some plants growing on the Refuge produce edible products such as fruits and nuts. Examples of these products include blackberries, raspberries, grapes, plums, choke cherries, hazelnuts, walnuts, pecans, and hickory nuts. Harvest is typically during a stretch of several days in summer and fall as particular fruits or nuts ripen. These foods are hand harvested by picking the products from the plant or gathering what has fallen to the ground. Mushrooms and asparagus are examples of plant parts that are collected and consumed. These are picked or cut by hand in the spring. Harvest is during daylight hours and generally involves individuals or small groups.

Nearly all of the Refuge has been open to collecting of fruits of the soil since it was acquired. Recent exceptions include the following areas which are closed to all entry from October 1 through the close of the respective state duck hunting season:

Spring Lake Closed Area in Pool 13
Guttenburg Pond portion of the twelve-mile Island Closed Area in Pool 11
Pool Slough Closed Area in Pool 9

Access to harvest sites is typically accomplished by walking from a parking area, boat landing, or public roadway. Access may also be by boat.

For some people, this is a traditional, family-oriented activity which provides an opportunity for those participating to collect wholesome foods while enjoying the natural environment. It may also take place in conjunction with other activities that are wildlife-dependent such as wildlife observation while hiking, and photography.

Availability of Resources:

Access trails, parking lots, boat landings, signs, and other facilities are in place to support this use. Staff is also available to maintain these facilities, enforce Refuge regulations, and provide information to the public. Administering this use can thus be done with existing resources for on-going operations, maintenance and public information.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Historically, public participation in the collection of plant food products on the Refuge has been low, and future participation is also expected to be low. The quantity and frequency of plant food products removal is not expected to significantly diminish wildlife food sources or jeopardize wildlife survival.

Disturbance to wildlife may occur from people engaged in these activities, but the disturbance will be local, short-term, and not affect overall feeding, resting, and reproduction activities of wildlife. Wildlife is expected to move to ample adjacent habitat during the activity, and return shortly thereafter. Thus, this activity should not result in long-term impacts that adversely affect fish, wildlife, and plant resources of the Refuge.

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. No comments specific to this use or determination were received.

Determination:

___ Use is Not Compatible

xx Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. No threatened or endangered species may be harvested or cut.
2. Digging of plants on their roots is prohibited.
3. Plant products are for personal use only and cannot be sold or traded.
4. Damaging trees, shrubs or any other vegetation is prohibited.
5. Cutting or removing plants or their parts such as vines or blossoms for ornamental use is prohibited unless specifically authorized by Special Use Permit.

Justification:

The use has little impact to wildlife or habitat since it is non-motorized, involves few visitors, and disturbance is local and short-duration. Little harvest occurs in late fall which is the peak of the waterfowl migration. Due to the relatively small number of visitors for this activity and the personal use only stipulation, the amount of plants or parts harvested will not create any shortage of wild foods for any particular wildlife species. Refuge infrastructure (parking areas, boat landings, etc.) and law enforcement staff already in place will be sufficient to facilitate and administer this use into the future.

In view of the above, fruits of the soil picking, with the stipulations previously described, will not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes of the Refuge or the mission of the Refuge System.

Signature:

Refuge Manager:

Wendy Culter 9/17/06
(signature and date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief:

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

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