

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

Use: Grazing, controlled

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:

The Refuge will allow limited grazing by privately owned domestic livestock for the purpose of habitat management. Livestock will be chiefly cattle, but may include other domestic livestock. Grazing will occur on specified areas to improve or maintain grassland and wet meadow habitat. For example, grazing may be used to stimulate growth of desirable grass species, reduce woody vegetation or other undesirable invasive plant species.

We anticipate that up to approximately 2000 acres of the Refuge may be subject to grazing. The largest area on which grazing may be used as a management tool is the Lost Mound Unit (Savanna District) of the Refuge.

Grazing may take place anytime from April through November. Most commonly, we will use short duration grazing periods, lasting four to eight weeks. The time period and frequency of grazing will depend on desired outcome as established in unit grazing management plans.

Grazing unit fencing and other measures required to manage livestock will be the responsibility of the cooperating private party. Grazing fees will be charged based on annual review of local market rates conducted by the Refuge Manager, in consultation with area U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) specialists or reports; or as determined by permittee selection using a best bid basis. Grazing fees will typically be assessed using the Animal Unit Month (AUM) method. Grazing fees may include market rate deductions for special circumstances; such as, atypical fencing or water requirements, required cattle movement, or other factors limiting economic return for permittees. Frequency of grazing on any unit will be based on site-specific evaluation of the grassland unit being managed.

Some areas of the Refuge may be subject to grazing by domestic livestock when adjacent land owners graze their land and local conditions preclude construction, or effectiveness of boundary fences. Every possible means will be used to eliminate these circumstances, but frequent floods and dense vegetation provide conditions where control of livestock using adjacent areas is not feasible. Where this condition exists, livestock owners will be charged proportionate fees for such use based on land area, Service policy, and applicable state law.

Administration of grazing programs will be conducted in accordance with a Habitat Management Plan. Grazing activities will be subject to the terms and conditions of a Special Use Permit issued by the District Manager. The terms of the Permit ensure compliance with Service policy and achieving habitat objectives while safeguarding Refuge resources.

Availability of Resources:

The needed staff time for development and administration of grazing programs is available. Most of the needed work to prepare for this use would be done as part of routine management duties. The decision to use grazing as a management tool would occur as part of strategies developed under specific habitat management plans. The additional time needed to coordinate issuance and oversight of the needed Special Use Permit or Agreements is relatively minor and within existing Refuge resources. Most grazing costs (fencing, monitoring herd health, etc.) are assumed by the permittee.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Grazing by domestic livestock has severe short-term effects on grassland communities. Many of these effects are desirable and are designed to maintain and improve healthy grassland/wet meadow communities. Some of these effects include removing standing

vegetation, trampling of other vegetation, and reducing populations of pioneering woody plants. Other effects, such as areas where livestock may frequently concentrate, are more harmful but generally short-lived. Grazing in the spring can cause direct loss of grassland bird nests due to trampling and loss of standing vegetation. Grazing at any time of year creates an aesthetic issue of concern for some people who enjoy using the Refuge; seeing public land being grazed by domestic livestock reduces the appeal of the visit for many people.

Grazing livestock can create minor direct disturbance of wildlife, such as causing nearby birds to take flight. There is a slight potential for conflict between members of the public and livestock or the permittee.

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. Grazing will not occur more frequently than three out of every five years on any tract without the preparation of a site-specific compatibility determination.
2. All fencing, water supply, and other livestock management costs will be borne by the permittee.
3. No insecticides will be used.
4. No supplemental feeding will be allowed.
5. Grazing must meet specific habitat and related wildlife objectives and contribute to the purposes of the Refuge.

Justification:

Grazing can be an effective technique for providing long-term habitat improvements to grassland, and a useful alternative to haying or prescribed fire in certain circumstances.

