

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

**Use:** Haying for habitat management

**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, 68<sup>th</sup> 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 haying by private individuals for the purpose of habitat management.

Haying is the cutting and processing (typically baling) of grass and forbs, with subsequent removal to an off-Refuge location. Haying will be conducted by third parties on grasslands owned by or managed as part of the Refuge by jurisdictional agreement. Haying of any area is usually conducted as a single event during any one year, but may be repeated periodically to: remove undesirable grasses and forbs; remove accumulated plant biomass; remove or reduce woody vegetation; provide a desired vegetative condition (such as short grass goose browse); reduce vegetation fuel levels where

wildfires are a concern, such as near urban areas; or prepare sites for establishment of desired vegetation, including forest, prairie or wetland communities.

In recent years, little haying has been conducted on the approximately 5700 acres of grassland distributed throughout the Refuge. Typically less than 100 acres total has been cut each year, involving two or three permittees. Some relatively higher areas of the Refuge, such as sand benches and some lands along tributaries, will continue to be managed using haying. The total area on which haying will be permitted during any one year will likely be less than 500 acres.

Administration of haying programs will be conducted in accordance with a Habitat Management Plan. Haying activities will be subject to the terms and conditions of a Cooperative Farming Agreement or Special Use Permit issued by the Refuge Manager. The terms of the Agreement or Permit ensure compatibility through implementation of Service policy and Refuge specific stipulations.

#### **Availability of Resources:**

The needed staff time for development and administration of a cooperative haying program 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 cooperative haying as a management tool will occur as part of strategies developed under specific unit or program habitat management planning. The additional time needed to administer and monitor the needed Special Use Permit or Agreements is relatively minor and within existing Refuge resources.

#### **Anticipated Impacts of the Use:**

Cooperative haying will result in short-term disturbances and long-term benefits to both resident and migratory wildlife using the Refuge. Short-term impacts will include disturbance and displacement by equipment operation. Haying activities will also result in short-term loss of habitat for species using those areas for nesting, feeding, or resting. Long-term benefits are positive due to establishment of desired habitat. The resulting habitat will improve conditions for most of the species adversely affected by the short-term negative impacts. Control of the timing of haying will limit anticipated impacts.

#### **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. Haying will only be allowed after July 1 to minimize disturbance to nesting migratory birds. In normal years, most birds are off the nest by this date.
2. Bales must be removed from the Refuge within 5 days of baling.
3. Windrowed grass left lying to dry should remain on the ground no more than 6 days prior to baling.
4. Haying must meet specific habitat and related wildlife objectives and contribute to the purposes of the Refuge.

**Justification:**

Haying can be an effective technique for providing long-term habitat improvements to grassland. Haying may be a preferred method of vegetation management (removal) where prescribed fire is not practical or wildfire is a concern.

Permitting haying on the Refuge will not materially interfere with the mission of the Refuge System or the purposes for which the Refuge was established because:

1. The total area on which haying will be permitted is a small portion of Refuge grasslands, and total Refuge habitat, thus cause insignificant adverse effects on habitat overall.
2. Haying will be conducted in accordance with a Habitat Management Plan which will identify management units, desired habitat goals/objectives, and management strategies.
3. Short term adverse effects on habitat caused by properly applied haying are typically offset by long term habitat improvement.
4. Constraints regarding location and timing of haying will reduce adverse impacts of haying on affected species and habitat.

Signature:

Refuge Manager:

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

Concurrence:

Regional Chief:

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

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