

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

Use: Hunting, big game, upland game and furbearer game animals

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 public hunting for big-game (white-tailed deer and wild turkey), upland game (ring-necked pheasant, ruffed grouse, bobwhite quail, grey and fox squirrel, and cottontail rabbit), and furbearing game animal hunting (coyote, fox, and raccoon). Approximately 80% of the Refuge is open to hunting for these species. Season dates, bag limits, and harvest methods are generally consistent with state regulations, with a few Refuge-specific regulations. To increase wildlife observation opportunities during the hunting season or to minimize conflict between user groups, several administrative No Hunting Zones, eventually encompassing 3,845 acres per the Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), have been designated for health and safety reasons. A Refuge Hunting Regulations brochure is available to inform the public of hunting opportunities and Refuge regulations.

Availability of Resources:

The designated areas open to public hunting are open in accordance with state and Refuge regulations and do not require preparation and administration of special hunts. An estimated 31,200 visits were made to the Refuge in 2003 to hunt big game, upland game, and furbearing game animals. Except for localized areas on the opening day of firearms deer season, crowding has not been an issue as sufficient resources appear to exist to accommodate the current level of participation and provide a quality hunting experience.

Hunters use the existing network of roads to access areas open to hunting. Parking lots, boat ramps, restrooms, docks, leaflets, information kiosks, and signs are provided by the Refuge for use by hunters. The Refuge also provides staff and volunteers to maintain these facilities and disseminate information to visitors. Additional parking lots and boat ramps are provided by other agencies, local units of government, or private interests. Hunters residing next to the Refuge boundary are often able to access open hunting areas from their property. Refuge law enforcement officers, Service special agents, and state conservation officers/wardens enforce state and Refuge hunting regulations.

Adequate resources are available to manage the existing hunting program at the current level of participation. However, funding for law enforcement staff time and printing of the Refuge Hunting Regulations brochure is lacking some years, calling for a redirection of existing Refuge funding. This redirection is often at the expense of other Refuge programs such as monitoring, maintenance, and other public use programs. Proposals in the Refuge CCP should help address these funding concerns.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Accommodating this wildlife-dependant use is expected to result in minimal impacts. Although hunting causes mortality to wildlife, season dates and bag limits are set with the long-term health of populations in mind. Populations of certain species, for example white-tailed deer, are monitored by state agencies. Survey information indicates that a limited harvest will not adversely affect the overall deer population level. Without harvest, deer will quickly overpopulate an area causing degradation to the quality and quantity of vegetation. Therefore, deer hunting promotes a healthier, more robust, and diverse Refuge plant community. Deer hunting may also reduce the number of deer/car collisions on adjacent highways.

Disturbance to wildlife may also result from hunting activity. This disturbance is expected to be limited in scope and duration. Because hunting is not permitted in Refuge closed areas during the duck hunting season, this use is not a source of disturbance to waterbirds concentrated in these areas. All motor vehicle use is restricted to designated roads, trails, and parking areas which reduces disturbance to wildlife. Disturbance to habitat is minimal given the nature of this hunting and restriction of vehicle use.

Hunting or possession of firearms is prohibited on the Refuge between March 15 and the opening of the state fall hunting seasons, usually in early September, except that wild

turkeys can be hunted during the state spring turkey season. This regulation reduces the potential for conflicts between the various Refuge user groups.

Hunters occasionally violate regulations, such as exceeding the daily bag limit, using permanent tree stands, or hunting in the wrong area. However, these incidents usually have only minor impacts to wildlife populations or Refuge resources.

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. Many comments on hunting 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:

To ensure compatibility with Refuge purposes and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, migratory bird hunting can occur on the Refuge if the following stipulations are met:

1. This use must be conducted in accordance with state and federal regulations, and special Refuge regulations published in the Refuge Hunting Regulations and Public Use Regulations brochures.
2. Administrative Closed Areas are closed to all hunting and reduce conflicts between hunting and non-hunting users groups. Waterfowl Hunting Closed Areas, by default also reduce conflicts since they are closed to hunting during waterfowl seasons but open to most other public uses, although the public is asked to avoid the areas.
3. To minimize potential conflicts between user groups, no hunting should occur on the Refuge prior to September 1 of each year and all hunting should end March 15, except for spring wild turkey hunting, and squirrel hunting on the Illinois portion of the Refuge.
4. This use is subject to modification if on-site monitoring by Refuge personnel or other authorized personnel results in unanticipated negative impacts to natural communities, wildlife species, or their habitats.

5. Changes outlined in the CCP dealing with closed areas, permanent blinds, managed hunts, and hunting regulations, when approved, could have some effect on hunting covered in this determination. Changes will be incorporated in a new Refuge Hunt Plan. A new compatibility determination will be prepared at that time. In addition, Electric Motor Areas and Slow, No Wake Areas, although open to hunting, are likely to affect the quality of the hunt and use levels in these areas.

Justification:

Hunting seasons and bag limits are established by the states and generally adopted by the Refuge. These restrictions ensure the continued well-being of overall populations of game animals. Hunting does result in the taking of many individuals within the overall population, but restrictions are designed to safeguard an adequate breeding population from year to year. Specific Refuge regulations address equity and quality of opportunity for hunters, and help safeguard Refuge habitat. Disturbance to other fish and wildlife does occur, but this disturbance is generally short-term and adequate habitat occurs in adjacent areas. Loss of plants from boat or foot traffic is minor, or temporary, since hunting occurs mainly after the growing season.

Conflicts between hunters are localized and are addressed through law enforcement, public education, and continuous review and updating to state and Refuge hunting regulations. Conflicts between other various user groups are minor given the season of the year for hunting, the location of most hunting away from public use facilities, and the system of Administrative Closed Areas.

Stipulations above will ensure proper control of the means of use and provide management flexibility should detrimental impacts develop. Allowing this use also furthers the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System by providing renewable resources for the benefit of the American public while conserving fish, wildlife, and plant resources on the Refuge.

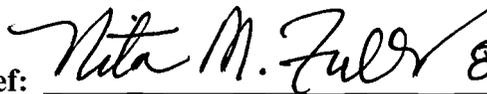
Signature:

Refuge Manager:

 8/17/06
(signature and date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief:

 8/21/2006
(signature and date)

Mandatory 10- or 15 year Re-evaluations Date: 2021