

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

Use: Recreational Fishing

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 allows public recreational fishing in accordance with state regulations and seasons and applicable Refuge regulations. Approximately 140,000 acres of water on the Refuge will be open to fishing year around as outlined in the Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Fishing is one of the most popular activities on the Refuge, with 1.3 million fishing visits reported in 2004.

State fishing regulations allow the traditional taking of game fish species with rod and reel from shore or boat, through the ice, and by using trotlines and jugs. Removal of rough fish by spear, archery and dip net is allowed, as well as the taking of limited quantities of mussels, crayfish, frogs, minnows and turtles for personal use. Recreational

fishing is allowed throughout the year but access into certain areas is subject to seasonal or special case restrictions, such as closed areas, voluntary avoidance areas, and catch-and-release only areas below some locks and dams.

Availability of Resources:

Anglers use the existing network of roads to access the various areas of the Refuge for fishing. The Refuge provides numerous parking lots, boat ramps, platforms, signs and other facilities to assist anglers. In addition, winter anglers may use all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, and other motorized craft on water (ice) areas of the Refuge to reach fishing spots. However, no overland travel is permitted. The Refuge provides staff to maintain facilities, disseminate information to visitors, and enforce regulations. Fisheries management is conducted in cooperation with the four states' departments of natural resources (Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota), La Crosse Fisheries Resource Office, and the Corps of Engineers.

Adequate resources are available to manage the existing fishing program at the current level of participation. However, funding for law enforcement staff time and printing of the Refuge Public Use 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 Comprehensive Conservation Plan should help address these funding concerns.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Accommodating this wildlife-dependant use is expected to result in minimal impacts. Although fishing causes mortality to fish, season dates and limits are set with the long-term health of populations in mind. Populations of most species are regularly monitored by state agencies. Survey information indicates that a controlled sport fishing harvest will not adversely affect overall fish population levels. This is also true for the limited harvest of bait fish, mussels, and turtles for personal use.

Disturbance to wildlife may also result from fishing activity. This disturbance is expected to be limited in scope and duration. Because anglers will be asked to practice voluntary avoidance in Waterfowl Hunting Closed Areas during the duck hunting season, disturbance to waterbirds concentrated in these areas should be reduced. All motor vehicle use associated with fishing is restricted to designated roads, trails, and parking areas which reduces disturbance to wildlife. Disturbance to habitat is minimal, although in shallow backwater areas motorized watercraft can damage aquatic plants and increase turbidity. These impacts are generally localized and have little overall negative impact. Undoubtedly some shoreline erosion is caused by boat wakes, but is relatively minor compared to that caused by barge traffic, annual high water events, floods, and wind-driven wave action. There are several no-wake areas to minimize shoreline erosion and to maximize safety to boaters. In addition, Electric Motor Areas and Slow, No Wake Areas

will limit disturbance to fish, wildlife, and other anglers/visitors by reducing speed and noise in these areas.

Anglers occasionally violate regulations, such as exceeding the daily limit. However, these incidents usually have only minor impacts to fish 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 fishing 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

xx 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, recreational fishing 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 applicable special Refuge regulations published in the Public Use Regulations brochure.
2. Waterfowl Hunting Closed Areas include a provision for voluntary avoidance (all closed areas) and no motors (small closed areas) to limit disturbance to large numbers of resting and feeding waterfowl.

Justification:

Fishing seasons and limits are established by the states and adopted by the Refuge. These restrictions ensure the continued well-being of overall populations of fish. Fishing does result in the taking of many individuals within the overall population, but restrictions are designed to safeguard adequate population and recruitment from year to year. On going habitat restoration and enhancement projects are also improving overall fish habitat and increasing the carrying capacity of the Refuge for fish. Specific Refuge regulations address equity and quality of opportunity for anglers, and help safeguard Refuge habitat. Disturbance to other fish and wildlife does occur, but this disturbance is generally short-

