

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

Use: Special events, non-Refuge sponsored

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:

This use is for special events sponsored by charitable and other non-profit clubs or groups. These events primarily include walks, such as the Crop Walk and the American Volkssport Association, but may include bicycle rides or runs. Other regularly occurring events include river clean-up days. Events are held one to five times, annually, and occur at different times throughout the year. Events may have up to 300 participants, although generally less than 100. Participants use established roads, trails, and boat landings that are already open to the public. Clean-up events may include all portions of the Refuge generally accessible by boat. Participants in clean-ups generally work on shoreline areas or seasonally flooded bottomlands where debris is deposited.

Availability of Resources:

These events generally involve staff time for meeting with sponsors, explaining Refuge regulations, issuing a Special Use Permit, and providing some level of oversight during portions or all of the event. Existing staff are adequate to administer this use depending on number of requests received and the size and scope of the event. Since events are held or based on existing roads, trails, or landings, facilities are deemed adequate. Sponsors are required to furnish any additional facilities needed, such as portable toilets.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

The short term impact associated with these events is human disturbance to wildlife occupying habitat on the Refuge. Most events occur on established trails or areas that already support a moderate level of human activity. Wildlife that occupy habitat in these areas are accustomed to a higher degree of human disturbance. Any alteration of behavior or bird flight would be temporary and localized with wildlife quickly resuming normal activities.

There will be some short term impact to other visitors engaged in wildlife-dependent recreation during the event. Visitors, not engaged in the event, will be permitted to continue their activity. With an increase of public use during walks or runs, an increase of litter is expected. Event coordinators will be required to clean the area when the event is complete. Clean-up events actually reduce litter and debris and thus have a positive impact on the visual character of the Refuge.

Other than the potential for some increase in future visitation to the Refuge, no long-term impacts associated with these events are anticipated.

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

Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. Events must include an educational message that helps further the understanding of the purposes of the Refuge and the mission of the Refuge System.
2. Event sponsors will furnish complete information on event description, date, time, preferred location, number of participants, and logistics for health and safety, so that the manager can make a determination of best area and timing of events when issuing a Special Use Permit. Management reserves the right to deny any proposal that will cause an undue demand on staff or resources, is not related to a charitable or non-profit organization, or does not promote the goals of the Healthier US initiative designed to get Americans outdoors and active on their public lands.
3. Except for clean-ups, events will be scheduled only in areas open to public use and at appropriate times of the year to avoid significant wildlife and visitor disturbance. Events will be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, with no more than one event in the same area and time. All activities will be limited to the designated routes on established trails. Collection of money for the fund raising aspect of the event will be conducted off site.
4. Water or rest stations will be approved by Refuge staff in advance of the event and will be located to avoid any sensitive sites (e.g. areas with high densities of foraging shorebirds, areas where waterbirds, waterfowl, raptors or passerines are nesting, etc.) and to minimize disturbance to wildlife foraging/ perching/loafing in adjacent wetlands and woodlands.
5. Event sponsors will be required to set up and remove all materials necessary for the event. This requirement applies to any tables, chairs, displays, signs, traffic aids, litter receptacles, portable toilets, etc. needed.

