

Appendix A



USFWS

Cooper's Hawk

Wilderness Review

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Introduction

The purpose of a wilderness review is to identify and recommend to Congress the lands and waters of the National Wildlife Refuge System that merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Wilderness reviews are required elements of CCPs, are conducted in accordance with the refuge planning process outlined in the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual (602 FW 1 and 3), and include compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and regulations on public involvement.

Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are areas that meet the criteria for wilderness identified in the Wilderness Act. Section 2(c) of the act gives the following definition:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions, and which 1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; 2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; 3) has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and 4) may also contain ecological, geological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

The wilderness review process has three phases: inventory, study, and recommendation. In the inventory phase, we identify lands and waters that meet the minimum criteria for wilderness as WSAs. In the study phase, we evaluate a range of management alternatives to determine whether a WSA is suitable for wilderness designation or management under an alternative set of goals and objectives that do not involve wilderness designation. In the recommendation phase, we forward a wilderness study report with recommendations on wilderness designation from the Director through the Secretary and the President to Congress. We prepare that report after our Regional Director has signed the record of decision for the final CCP.

We manage any areas recommended for designation to maintain their wilderness character in accordance with the management goals, objectives and strategies in the final CCP, until Congress makes a decision or we amend the CCP to modify or remove the wilderness proposal. If the inventory does not identify any areas that meet the WSA criteria, we document our findings in the administrative record for the CCP and end the study process. We will manage non-wilderness areas following the management direction outlined in the CCP.

Inventory Criteria

The wilderness inventory is a broad look at the planning area to identify WSAs. A WSA is a roadless area of undeveloped Federal land and water that meets the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act.

Minimum Wilderness Criteria

A WSA is required to be a roadless area or an island of any size, meet the size criteria, appear natural, and provide for solitude or primitive recreation.

Roadless — Roadless refers to the absence of improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use. A route maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a road.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the roadless criteria.

- A. The area does not contain improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use.
- B. The area is an island, or contains an island that does not have improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use.
- C. The area is in federal fee title ownership.

Size — The size criteria can be satisfied if an area has at least 5,000 acres of contiguous, roadless, public land, or is sufficiently large that its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition is practicable.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the size criteria.

- A. An area of more than 5,000 contiguous acres. State and private lands are not included in making this acreage determination.
- B. A roadless island of any size. A roadless island is defined as an area surrounded by permanent waters or that is markedly distinguished from the surrounding lands by topographical or ecological features.
- C. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous federal acres that is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, and of a size suitable for wilderness management.
- D. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous acres that is contiguous with a designated wilderness, recommended wilderness, or area under wilderness review by another federal wilderness-managing agency such as the Forest Service, National Park Service, or Bureau of Land Management.

Naturalness — The Wilderness Act, section 2(c) defines wilderness as an area that “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.” The area must appear natural to the average visitor, rather than “pristine.” The presence of historic landscape conditions is not required.

An area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole. In evaluating the naturalness criteria, we also consider significant hazards caused by humans, such as the presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity and the physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities. An area may not be considered unnatural in appearance solely on the basis of the sights and sounds of human impacts and activities outside the boundary of the unit. We considered the cumulative effects of those factors, in conjunction with the size of the land base and its physiographic and vegetative characteristics in our evaluation of naturalness.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating naturalness.

- A. The area appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.

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- B. The area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole.
 - C. The presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity or the existence of other significant hazards caused by humans.
 - D. The presence of physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities.

Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation — A WSA must provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, and does not need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre. Further, an area does not have to be open to public use and access to qualify under this criteria; Congress has designated a number of wilderness areas in the Refuge System that are closed to public access to protect resource values.

Opportunities for solitude refer to the ability of a visitor to be alone and secluded from other visitors in the area. Primitive and unconfined recreation means non-motorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport. These primitive recreation activities may provide opportunities to experience challenge and risk, self-reliance, and adventure.

These two elements are not well defined by the Wilderness Act, but can be expected to occur together in most cases. However, an outstanding opportunity for solitude may be present in an area offering only limited primitive recreation potential. Conversely, an area may be so attractive for recreation use that experiencing solitude is not an option.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive unconfined recreation.

- A. The area offers the opportunity to avoid the sights, sounds and evidence of other people. A visitor to the area should be able to feel alone or isolated.
- B. The area offers non-motorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport.

Supplemental Values — The Wilderness Act states that an area of wilderness may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value. Supplemental values of the area are optional, but the degree to which their presence enhances the area's suitability for wilderness designation should be considered. The evaluation should be based on an assessment of the estimated abundance or importance of each of the features.

Inventory Conclusions

Evaluating Roadless Criteria

The refuge landscape is interlaced and bordered with a number of roads. A major vehicle paved road (Route 63) bisects the refuge north-south, essentially splitting the refuge into two areas. Two other north-south roads that cut through the refuge are Feeder Road and Sour Springs Road. There are a number of other paved roads that also run throughout the refuge. The southwestern border of the refuge is Route 77.

Evaluating Size Criteria

The 10,828-acre Iroquois Refuge does meet the size criteria for a WSA. It is greater than 5,000 acres and its size is sufficient to preserve natural ecological processes. No lands within the refuge are contiguous to other agency-owned lands under review for wilderness areas.

Evaluating Naturalness Criteria

The refuge contains a number of features that preclude it from the Naturalness criteria. Numerous signs of human impact are obvious reminders of the refuge's past uses, including agriculture. European settlers expanded artificial drainage of the area to improve logging and farming operations, but, plagued by high costs, and a cycle of muck fires and floods, the outcome was marginal at best. By the 1950s, landowners were looking to further develop and convert the lands to other uses. Today, Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge is actively managed to provide the best possible habitat for the widest variety of wildlife. Over one half of the refuge is wetlands including marshes, shrub-scrub wetlands and forested wetlands. The remaining habitats are upland and include grasslands, shrublands and forests.

After agricultural development, the refuge area contained approximately 2,000 ha (5,000 acres) that normally was inundated in the spring, but mostly dry by fall, making all but the wettest areas suitable for farming. After refuge establishment, the development of impoundments allowed some degree of management to provide nearly 1,600 ha (4,000 acres) of manageable wetlands. Refuge staff manages 19 water impoundments. These impoundments are enclosed by 18 different dike systems and 30 operating water control structures to manipulate and control water levels.

In addition to water control structures and dikes, refuge infrastructure includes buildings and roadways that require regular maintenance. There are also overlooks, trails, signs, parking areas, and boundaries that are maintained. Facilities currently include the refuge headquarters and adjoining visitor contact station, a divided shed for storage of flammable liquids and grain, a shop/maintenance building, and a hunting check station. There are also three houses owned and maintained by the refuge, one of those houses is due for demolition. Along with storage for flammable liquids, there are above ground, uncovered fuel tanks.

Evaluating Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Criteria

To protect nesting wildlife, all areas of the refuge, except overlooks and nature trails, are closed to the public between March 1 and July 15. The majority of refuge visitors come during the spring, early summer and fall months to take advantage of favorable trail conditions and opportunities for viewing annual spring and fall bird migrations as well as the brilliance of New York fall foliage. March and April are the most popular months during which time the refuge receives nearly half of its annual visitation. Refuge trails and roads are used some during the winter when snow conditions are conducive to cross-country skiing or snowshoeing. The refuge receives more than 28,000 visits on the trails and overlooks each year.

Conclusion

Iroquois Refuge does not meet the criteria for a WSA and should not be recommended for further evaluation of wilderness potential. An inventory of the refuge concluded that while it does meet the size criteria, it does not meet the minimum requirements for wilderness with regard to roads, naturalness, and solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. We will reevaluate this determination in 15 years with the revision of this CCP, or sooner if significant new information warrants a reevaluation. In summary, at this time additional study is not warranted.