

Draft Compatibility Determination

Title

Draft Compatibility Determination for Natural Resource Development, Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Use Category

Natural Resource Development

Refuge Use Type(s)

Water Extraction

Refuge Purpose(s) and Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies)

“to effectuate further the purposes of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (45 Stat. 1222)” (Executive Order 7417, July 17, 1936)

“as an inviolate sanctuary for migratory birds” (Migratory Bird Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 715-715d)

Acquisition History:

Executive Order (E.O.) 1032, February 25, 1909, established several reservoir sites, including the Minidoka NWR as “preserves and breeding grounds for native birds.”

E.O. 1486, February 21, 1912, enlarged the Refuge to include all of Lake Walcott.

E.O. 5375, June 23, 1930, enlarged the Minidoka Bird Reservation.

E.O. 7417, July 17, 1936, superseded, through revocation, E.O.s 1032, 1486, 5375; withdrew lands “as a refuge and breeding ground for birds and other wildlife...The greater part of the land herein reserved has been withdrawn for reclamation purposes in connection with the Minidoka Irrigation Project...The reservation of such land as a wildlife refuge is subject to the use thereof by said Department for irrigation and incidental purposes.”

E.O. 8600, November 26, 1940, changed the name of the Refuge from “Minidoka Wildlife Refuge” to “Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge” and added 360 acres (withdrawn for reclamation purposes) to the Refuge boundary.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (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 (Pub. L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1252).

Description of Use

Is this an existing use?

No

What is the use?

We propose to allow the Raft River Recharge Group (RRRG) to install, operate, and maintain a portion of the Raft River Flood Protection and Groundwater Recharge Project (Project) within Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in order to reduce the frequency and severity of flooding events along the Raft River and tributaries; reduce sedimentation and improve water quality within the Snake River; provide groundwater recharge to a designated Critical Ground Water Area (CGWA); and provide a reliable and sustainable agricultural water supply for RRRG members and agricultural producers. Completion of the project would enable RRRG to reduce overall pumping from the Raft River Aquifer by substituting a portion of their groundwater use with water from the Snake River per existing Water Right Permit 1-10644. The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) has the primary withdrawal authority for irrigation and incidental purposes and therefore would issue the right-of-way (ROW) permit to RRRG once the Service finds the use compatible.

Is the use a priority public use?

No

Where would the use be conducted?

The proposed use would be located on the south side of the Snake River upstream of the confluence with the Raft River and downstream of the Gifford Springs boat ramp (Fig. 1). The new intake suction lines, fish screens, and associated infrastructure would be installed generally north-south within the Refuge along the riverbed. The lines would terminate in the Snake River and extend approximately 250 feet south to the riverbank to connect below-grade with a new pumphouse located on a privately owned parcel adjacent to the Refuge.

When would the use be conducted?

Construction of the RRRG project is planned to occur between winter 2026 and winter 2027. In-water work and work requiring access to Refuge lands would last approximately 4-5 months, while upland work adjacent to Refuge lands would last approximately 6-8 months.

RRRG would operate the pumphouse and intake suction lines an average of 50 days during irrigation season (generally April – October), up to a maximum of 125 days per

year when flow allows. Routine inspections and maintenance of the intake suction lines and fish screens would occur several times per year and as needed following storm events or other circumstances generating a higher level of debris.

How would the use be conducted?

In-water construction activities on the Refuge would include directional boring, trenching, dredging, coffer dam installation and removal, assembly and installation of a suction line, attaching eight fish screens to the suction line, securing the suction line to the riverbed with anchors and steel piles, backfilling, and recontouring/regrading. RRRG would conduct in-water work during a pool drawdown coordinated with the BOR in order to reduce the overall time spent in-water, and to minimize the potential for sediment plumes and other impacts to water quality and aquatic wildlife.

For a complete description of the proposed means, methods, and sequencing of the construction activities within and in the vicinity of the Refuge, please see the Draft Watershed Plan and Environmental Assessment prepared for the Raft River Flood Protection and Groundwater Recharge Project (USDA-NRCS 2026) which is incorporated here by reference.

Operation and maintenance activities conducted by RRRG, its authorized agents, or contractors would be communicated to and coordinated with the Refuge and other USFWS staff per an established communication plan and protocol.

RRRG would reduce the volume of water pumped from the Raft River Aquifer by substituting a portion of their groundwater usage with valid, legal, and available storage water or rented water from the Snake River through the new intake suction pipes for irrigation and recharge per existing Water Right Permit 1-10644. Water rights and water use (including curtailments) in Idaho are managed by the Idaho Division of Water Resources, and the conditions under which RRRG could pump water are when the rate of flow in the Snake River exceeds 2,700 cubic feet per second (cfs) and senior water rights are satisfied. When available, 100 cfs (70 cfs for groundwater recharge and 30 cfs for irrigation) would be pumped through the intake suction lines and into RRRG's agricultural water management pipeline to recharge basins and irrigation end users.

The intake suction line, screens, and other in-water infrastructure associated with the RRRG's pumphouse operation are located within a portion of the Refuge which is closed to the public and in which boat use is prohibited. A Special Use Permit (SUP) must be obtained from the Refuge Manager, or USFWS staff member acting on their behalf, in order to enter or access the Snake River for operation and maintenance activities, or any other reason, in this portion of the Refuge.

As a condition of the SUP, any watercraft, conveyance, or equipment that has or will touch water must possess a valid Invasive Species sticker issued by the Idaho State

Department of Agriculture to indicate successful inspection and (as applicable) decontamination has occurred prior to entering Refuge waters.

Each request for a SUP will be evaluated for impacts to wildlife, habitats, Refuge resources, priority public uses, cultural resources, and as appropriate, wilderness character. Conditions may be added to the SUP on a case-by-case basis to minimize the anticipated impacts to resources, and to ensure that any impacts which cannot be avoided, minimized, or mitigated remain temporary and negligible. Some requests may require further analysis of the impacts of the proposed activity on special status species or cultural resources, which may require additional compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and consultation under any other relevant laws.

If the use conflicts with Refuge resources, Refuge management programs, or priority wildlife-dependent uses, the RRRG and/or its authorized agents and contractors must identify in advance the methods/strategies required to minimize or eliminate the potential impacts(s) and conflict(s). If unacceptable impacts cannot be avoided, then a SUP would not be issued.

Why is this use being proposed or reevaluated?

Proposed uses are evaluated in accordance with Service policy, 603 FW 2.9A.

Availability of Resources

To comply with the Refuge Recreation Act (Public Law 87-714), the Project Leader must determine whether sufficient resources—financial, staffing, facilities, or other infrastructure—are available to support the proposed use without materially interfering with the Refuge purpose(s) or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. This determination should be informed by a review of current capacity and, where applicable, the refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP).

Assessment of current resources and capacity

In general, the Refuge will incur no expense except for the administrative costs to review the application, issue SUPs, and the staff time to review contractor-supplied NEPA documents, conduct a supplemental environmental analysis, and complete a finding of appropriateness (FOA) and Compatibility Determination (CD). RRRG and its authorized agents or contractors will oversee the installation of the intake suction pipes, fish screens and associated infrastructure, and will be responsible for coordinating access and communication with Refuge staff for all operation and maintenance activities.

The cost to review the request, coordinate, and process a SUP would require 4 staff approximately 58 hours: \$2,250.00. The cost to review and revise contractor-prepared environmental analyses, prepare FOA, CD, and FONSI would require 3 staff

approximately 300 hours: \$25,000.00.

Impacts of changes to resources and capacity

The availability of resources is subject to change and the level of use provided may vary based on current staffing, partner support, funding, or infrastructure conditions. Costs may increase over time, in relation to changes in the costs for equipment, maintaining facilities, etc. A substantial increase to the number of requests may also create the need for additional resources to administer the use. The Project Leader will use sound professional judgment in evaluating whether the refuge or its partners can develop, operate, and maintain the use in a compatible manner.

If resource conditions shift such that the Refuge can no longer sustain the use in a compatible manner, the Project Leader may modify or suspend the use pursuant to 50 CFR 25.21-22. The public will be notified of any changes to Refuge uses, including temporary modifications or suspension, re-evaluation of compatibility and/or discontinuing of Refuge uses.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use

This CD includes the written analyses of the environmental consequences on a resource only when the impacts on that resource could, absent relevant stipulations, materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the national wildlife refuge.

For a complete description of the environmental impacts, and mitigation measures associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of the project, please see the Final Environmental Assessment and FONSI prepared with the Watershed Plan for the Raft River Flood Protection and Groundwater Recharge Project (NRCS 2026) which are incorporated here by reference.

Potential impacts of a proposed use on the Refuge's purpose(s) and the Refuge System mission

The Refuge has determined that without stipulations and permit terms and conditions to protect Refuge resources in place, the following construction, operation, and maintenance activities and elements of the proposed project within lands and waters already administered for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats would degrade the ecological integrity of the refuge and therefore materially interfere with or detract from the Refuge system mission and Refuge purposes:

- In-water work would cause temporary and permanent disturbance to aquatic habitat and riverbed inhabited by fish, microorganisms, and macro and

benthic invertebrates and submerged aquatic vegetation used by foraging waterfowl.

- Pipe installation, vegetation removal, and grading would permanently remove nesting and breeding habitat along the Snake River bank. Detailed evaluations of the environmental impacts on affected resources and the stipulations necessary to ensure compatibility are described below.
- Construction activities upstream of the Refuge along the Raft River, Heglar Creek, Cassia Creek, and the new 13-mile pipeline could introduce new noxious weeds and invasive plants via seeds or plant material on construction equipment and materials brought into project areas, or by activating dormant seedbanks of noxious weeds during soil disturbance and vegetation removal.
- Construction, operation, and maintenance activities could introduce invasive aquatic organisms via boats, vehicles, equipment, or material carrying individuals from other infested bodies of water.
- Perimeter fencing, transmission lines, guy wires, and associated infrastructure could create obstacles for birds entering and leaving the Refuge (depending on the height of fencing and pumphouse proximity to shoreline).
- New transmission towers adjacent to the Refuge could serve as perches for predatory birds and potentially increase predation on nesting and breeding waterfowl and migratory birds.
- Permanent perimeter fencing could create new locations for the accumulation of dry brush and other debris, increasing the risk of wildfire.
- Pump operation noise would disturb birds, bats, and other wildlife, rendering nesting, foraging, breeding, and loafing habitat in the vicinity of the pumphouse unusable depending on the season, time of day, and the affected animals' sensitivity to the timing, frequency, duration, and intensity of the noise.
- Routine maintenance of in-water infrastructure would require regularly recurring in-water work activities, including dredging, screen cleaning, and repair which would reduce the quality and quantity of water resources and aquatic and riparian habitat available for aquatic and terrestrial wildlife.

Impacts to resources are discussed in detail below, followed by design and construction specifications, permit terms and conditions, and stipulations to ensure compatibility.

Short-term impacts

Water Quality & Water Resources

Disturbance from excavation, river bed soil removal, suction line placement, and

associated in-water construction activities have the potential to cause short-term impacts to water quality and water resources in the vicinity of, and downstream from the project area. Impacts could include localized changes in velocity, flow, and circulatory patterns around the in-water work area, and construction-related turbidity and potential sediment plumes. The proposed riverbed material removal and suction line installation would temporarily suspend small quantities of fine sediment that would manifest as a turbidity plume near the in-water work area. The increased amount of suspended solid sediment would occur within a 100-foot radius of the in-water work areas, depending on river flow. Water quality conditions would be degraded temporarily during construction, which could inhibit safe passage of fish and aquatic organisms adjacent to the in-water work area. During construction, a small proportion of fine sediment deposition outside of the proposed placement footprint would occur for a period of hours to days before it is gradually dispersed into the main channel. Although the proposed sediment placement would degrade conditions for fish and aquatic organisms, the construction-related turbidity would be temporary, diluted by high flows, and monitored during construction to ensure background levels are in accordance with the National Marine Fisheries Service tolerances. RRRG would conduct in-water work during a pool drawdown coordinated with the BOR in order to reduce the overall time spent in-water, and deploy coffer dams and other BMPs to minimize the amount of sediment disturbance and the potential for sediment plumes and other impacts to water quality and aquatic wildlife. The amount of sediment would be negligible relative to the vast area, high dilution levels, and existing sediment loading of the Snake River, and adverse impacts to water quality and water resources would therefore be temporary and low.

Noxious Weeds and Invasive Species

Roads and trails often function as conduits for movement of nonnative, invasive plant species (Benninger-Truax et al. 1992; Hansen and Clevenger 2005). Propagules of nonnative plants can be transported into new areas on boots, clothing, vehicles, and equipment. Once established, invasive plants can out-compete native plants, which alters habitats and indirectly impacts wildlife. The project area would be monitored to prevent the direct establishment of noxious weeds and invasive plant species during and post-construction. A Noxious Weed Management Plan would be developed and BMPs would be established to prevent the introduction and establishment of noxious weeds and invasive species. All boats, watercraft, vehicles and equipment would be inspected and decontaminated prior to entering the refuge or upstream construction area per Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) protocol. All disturbed areas would be reseeded to encourage the re-establishment of native vegetation. Invasive plants would continue to be controlled and monitored as part of the Refuge's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, and in coordination with RRRG's and Flood District's existing noxious weed control

programs. RRRG shall monitor all reclaimed areas for at least three years and include timed surveys (at least twice per year; once in the late spring and again in the fall) to qualitatively and quantitatively record total ground cover, presence of noxious weeds, erosion, soil compaction, and any revegetation failure. With the implementation of monitoring efforts, interagency coordination on prevention and treatment, and other BMPs described below, adverse impacts from the introduction of noxious weeds and invasive species would be temporary, localized, and low.

Aquatic invasive macroinvertebrates such as the quagga mussel could also be introduced to the Refuge during construction, operation, and maintenance activities via the use of equipment, tools, materials, vehicles, or watercraft harboring individuals from other infested work sites or waterways. The project area would be monitored in accordance with the Refuge's Inventory and Monitoring Program (IMP) (USFWS 2020) and ISDA protocol to prevent the direct introduction of aquatic invasive macroinvertebrates during and post-construction. All motorized and non-motorized watercraft, vehicles, conveyances, and any other equipment that has or will touch water must possess a valid Invasive Species sticker issued by the ISDA to indicate successful inspection and (as applicable) decontamination has occurred prior to entering Refuge waters. The introduction of aquatic invasives would continue to be monitored for and prevented as part of the Refuge's IPM program, and in coordination with the BOR's and ID Parks & Recreation's existing programs. With the implementation of monitoring efforts, interagency coordination on prevention, and other BMPs described below, adverse impacts from the introduction of aquatic invasive macroinvertebrates would be negligible.

Potential Impacts to Priority Public Uses

The intake suction line, screens, and other in-water infrastructure associated with the RRRG's pumphouse operation are located within a portion of the Refuge which is closed to the public and in which boat use is prohibited. The pumphouse itself would be located on a private parcel adjacent to the Refuge. Although construction activity and noise may be audible and/or visible from a distance for some users (e.g. anglers, wildlife observers, and photographers), these uses would not be reduced in quality or quantity. The Refuge would provide information about construction scheduling on signs, the Refuge website, and kiosks to inform members of the public in advance.

Long-term impacts

Water Resources & Water Quality

Operation and maintenance of the intake suction line, fish screens, and other in-water infrastructure would require routine in-water and/or riverbed disturbing activities including cleaning or repairing fish screens, dredging by the intake terminus, and other infrastructure repair. Boats would be required to operate in the Refuge multiple times per year within posted no-boating zones, and Refuge staff

would need to expend valuable time and effort for each excursion to prepare and issue SUPs and monitor the maintenance activities. The in-water operation and maintenance activities, and riverbed disturbance would cause impacts to water quality and water resources in the vicinity of, and downstream from the intake suction line terminus similar to those as described above (see ‘Short-term impacts’), albeit multiple times per year on a long-term, recurring basis. Repeated dredging, turbidity, and flow disruption would cause fish and aquatic life to avoid area of the Refuge and preclude the reestablishment of submerged aquatic vegetation. This portion of the Refuge would therefore have reduced potential to provide forage and habitat for migratory birds, thereby degrading the Refuge’s ecological integrity and compromising the Refuge’s ability to fulfill its purposes. In cooperation with the Service, the project proponent has introduced substantive design changes to alter the nature and location of operation and maintenance activities which, if implemented with the stipulations below, would minimize or eliminate long-term impacts to water and water quality from operation and maintenance activities. The location of the fish screens has changed from the intake line terminus (in the Snake River) to inside the pumphouse (off of Refuge lands), which would obviate the need for in-water work to clean fish screens or for recurring boat use in a boat-restricted zone. The intake suction line dimensions, installation depth, terminus location and configuration have been altered to yield a slower intake velocity and overall smaller footprint on the riverbed, which will require less frequent dredging in a comparatively smaller area. As described above, RRRG would conduct in-water work during a pool drawdown coordinated with the BOR in order to reduce the overall time spent in-water, and deploy coffer dams and other BMPs to minimize the amount of sediment disturbance and the potential for sediment plumes and other impacts to water quality and aquatic wildlife. Since the amount of sediment would be negligible relative to the vast area, high dilution levels, and existing sediment loading of the Snake River, long-term adverse impacts to water quality and water resources from operation and maintenance activities would therefore be low.

Noise

Operation. RRRG would operate the pumphouse and intake suction line an average of 50 days during irrigation season (generally April – October), up to a maximum of 125 days per year when flow allows. When operating, the proposed pumps would emit up to 108.6 dBA, would not exceed 88 dBA at the Refuge border, and would drop to 60 dBA 0.25 away. For reference, a lawnmower emits 100 dBA, traffic noise is approximately 80 dB, and ambient office noise is 60 dB (Ecology 2016). This level of noise has the potential to disturb birds, bats, and other wildlife within 0.25 mile of the pumphouse site, and potentially render nesting, foraging, breeding, and loafing habitat in the immediate vicinity of the pumphouse unusable depending on the season, time of day, and the affected animals’ sensitivity to the timing, frequency, duration, and intensity of the noise. The project proponent has collaborated with the

Refuge on landscape design principles and practices, building materials, and construction methods to minimize and mitigate the transmission of pump operation noise. The target dB levels at the Refuge border and 0.25 mile away are 55 dBA, and 41 dBA, respectively. In addition, the project proponent would conduct all pump operation and maintenance outside of April-May and August-October, to the extent practicable, to avoid disturbance to migratory birds and waterfowl during critical nesting, breeding, and rearing time periods. Although some portions of the refuge may remain unused by certain wildlife over the long-term due to the pump operation noise, the comparatively large size of the refuge and presence of similar habitat alternatives would provide suitable locations for affected wildlife to use or relocate to. With the stipulations described herein, long-term adverse impacts from operation noise would remain localized and low, and would not cause population-level impacts on wildlife species.

Maintenance. In cooperation with the Service, the project proponent has introduced substantive design changes which, if implemented with the stipulations below, would minimize or eliminate long-term noise from vehicles, boats, and equipment required for maintenance activities on Refuge lands. The location of the fish screens has changed from the intake line terminus (in the Snake River) to inside the pumphouse (off of Refuge lands), which would obviate the need for in-water work and recurring boat use in a boat-restricted zone. The intake suction line dimensions, installation depth, terminus location and configuration have been altered to yield a slower intake velocity and overall smaller footprint on the riverbed, which will require less frequent dredging in a comparatively smaller area. Long-term noise from maintenance activities would be infrequent, temporary, and localized, and would have low to negligible impacts to Refuge resources.

Wildlife & Wildlife Habitat

Many of the wildlife species that frequent Minidoka NWR rely on both emergent and submerged aquatic vegetation. Minidoka NWR is an important nesting and brood-rearing site for western and Clark's grebes (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*, *A. clarkii*), both Tier 2 Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Idaho. There have been steep declines in breeding colonies of these species at all sites in Idaho that are monitored (IDFG 2017). In-water work would temporarily disturb up to 16,000 square feet of riverbed, and permanently remove approximately 1,600,000 square feet of riverbed inhabited by fish, microorganisms, and macro and benthic invertebrates and submerged aquatic vegetation used by foraging waterfowl. In order to ensure no net loss of habitat or habitat values, the project proponent will procure a carp barrier in coordination with the USFWS and the Refuge to promote recovery of submerged aquatic vegetation and habitat in a Refuge-owned impoundment downstream of the project area. (Carp barriers are specialized systems designed to stop invasive carp from spreading into new waterways, primarily utilizing electric arrays, acoustic sound, or bubble curtains.) With this stipulation, adverse impacts to aquatic habitat

and submerged aquatic vegetation would be temporary and habitat values would be maintained or improved over pre-construction conditions.

Construction activities required for suction line installation, pumphouse construction, vegetation removal, and grading would temporarily disturb approximately 1.3 acres of potential nesting and breeding riparian and upland habitat. With post-construction regrading, reseeding, replanting, and rehabilitation per the BMPs below up to 8,000 square feet of potential nesting and breeding riparian habitat along the Snake River would remain permanently disturbed. In order to ensure no net loss of habitat or habitat values, the project proponent will identify, restore, and rehabilitate riparian habitat on Refuge-owned lands along Raft River Bay in coordination with the USFWS and the Refuge. With this stipulation, adverse impacts to riparian habitat would be temporary and habitat values would be maintained or improved over pre-construction conditions.

New transmission towers, conductor, guy wires, and pumphouse perimeter fencing have the potential to act as an obstacle for birds entering and leaving the Refuge (depending on height of fencing and pumphouse proximity to shoreline) which could kill or injure nesting and breeding waterfowl and migratory birds. This new infrastructure could also act as a perch for predatory birds and potentially increase predation on birds entering or leaving the refuge. The pumphouse building and perimeter fencing also have the potential to accumulate dry brush and other debris which would increase the risk of wildfire. The project proponent has altered the design by eliminating the perimeter fence, thereby removing the potential for aerial collisions or predation, and reducing the potential for dry brush to accumulate on site and pose a fire risk. To connect the pumphouse to the electrical grid, Raft River Electric Cooperative has also agreed to install a new underground transmission line which will approach the pumphouse from the south from existing Raft River Electric Co-Op infrastructure. These design changes would eliminate potential aerial obstacles and predator perches and therefore have no effect on wildlife or wildlife habitat.

Public Review and Comment

The draft compatibility determination will be available for public review and comment for 14 days following the day the notice is published. The public will be made aware of this comment opportunity through any or all of the following: newspapers, radio, television, postings at local libraries, letters to potentially interested people such as adjacent landowners, states, and tribes, public meetings, federal register, or other places/media outlets. States and Tribes have been asked to review and comment on the draft compatibility determination.

A hard copy of this document will be posted at the Refuge Headquarters at 961 East Minidoka Dam Road, Rupert, ID 83350-9414. It will be made available electronically on the Refuge website <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/minidoka> and in the Federal

Register as part of the Proposed Rule. Please let us know if you need the documents in an alternate format. Concerns expressed during the public comment period will be addressed in the final CD.

Determination

Is the use compatible?

Yes

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

The following list of stipulations is not an exhaustive list of all mitigation measures and BMPs to be implemented as part of construction, operation, and maintenance of the project. Please see the Final Watershed Plan and Environmental Assessment prepared for the Raft River Flood Protection and Groundwater Recharge Project (USDA-NRCS 2026) which is incorporated here by reference.

1. The project proponent shall coordinate and collaborate with the Refuge and BOR on the specific timing and methodology for construction activities, including lowering the pool level of Lake Walcott for construction.
2. Access to the Refuge will be coordinated with Refuge personnel prior to completing pre-construction surveys.
3. A qualified biologist shall perform pre-construction surveys for migratory birds and raptors in all areas where vegetation removal will occur outside of already disturbed, active agricultural land. These surveys should occur no more than 7 days before vegetation removal and disturbance, when these activities would occur during the breeding and nesting season of migratory birds(March-September) or eagles (December-August). Repeat surveys if construction and vegetation removal are paused and resumed, or at the biologist's or Refuge's discretion.
4. The intake suction line and other in-water infrastructure associated with the RRRG's project are located within a portion of the Refuge which is closed to the public and in which boat use is typically prohibited. A Special Use Permit (SUP) must be obtained from the Refuge Manager, or USFWS staff member acting on their behalf, in order to enter or access this portion of the Snake River for construction, operation, and maintenance activities, or any other reason.
5. The permittee and all associated personnel agree to conduct activities in a safe manner, in compliance with all Refuge regulations and policies, and with precaution to avoid damage to resources, property, or personnel. Refuge staff will not be held responsible for loss of, or damage to equipment.

6. A copy of the SUP must be in the permittee or associate's possession at all times while exercising the privileges of the Permit. A copy of the SUP must be shown to any USFWS employee or Federal law enforcement officer upon request.
7. Failure to abide by any part of the SUP; violation of any Refuge-related provision or Code of Federal Regulations; or violation of any pertinent state regulation (e.g., fish or game violations) will, with due process, be considered grounds for revocation of the permit and could result in denial of future permit requests for lands administered by the USFWS. This provision applies to all persons under the authority of the permit.
8. Develop a Noxious Weed Management Plan to monitor and maintain native plant communities and control non-native and invasive plants; implement the plan in coordination with RRRG's and Raft River Flood District's existing noxious weed control programs. Identify appropriate mechanical and chemical treatment methods for non-native species in coordination with the USFWS and the Refuge.
9. All equipment and vehicles, including boats or other watercraft and all gear required for in-water work will be cleaned of mud and other debris to avoid noxious weed or seed dispersal within or near the Refuge and to avoid introducing invasive animal species to the Snake River.
 - a. Before arriving at the Project Area, pressure wash equipment to remove soil, plant parts, or other materials that may carry invasive and noxious weed seeds. Ensure this cleaning occurs each time equipment is brought into the Project Area from a different location.
 - b. Ensure the contractor provides the site inspector with the opportunity to inspect the equipment before unloading at the construction site. If upon inspection, dirt, debris, and seeds are visible, ensure the contractor immediately removes the equipment from the Project Area and rewashes it, and it is re-inspected.
10. All motorized and non-motorized watercraft (including but not limited to boats, kayaks, paddle boards, and other flotation devices), conveyances (including but not limited to duck decoys, waders, fishing tackle, and life jackets), and any other equipment that has or will touch water must possess a valid Invasive Species sticker issued by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to indicate successful inspection and (as applicable) decontamination has occurred prior to entering Refuge waters.
11. All work will be completed within the designated project area during established daytime working hours. Construction equipment will use properly functioning equipment mufflers to minimize temporary noise impacts during

daytime working hours.

12. Restore, replant, and rehabilitate all temporarily disturbed areas on the Snake River riverbed immediately following construction activities. For portions of the riverbed permanently impacted, procure a carp barrier in coordination with the USFWS and the Refuge to promote recovery of submerged aquatic vegetation and habitat in a Refuge-owned impoundment in order to maintain or improve submerged habitat values over pre-construction conditions. (Carp barriers are specialized systems designed to stop invasive carp from spreading into new waterways, primarily utilizing electric arrays, acoustic sound, or bubble curtains.)
13. Restore, reseed, and rehabilitate all temporarily disturbed riparian areas along the Snake River immediately following construction activities. To ensure no net loss of habitat values from permanently disturbed riparian areas, identify, restore, and rehabilitate riparian habitat on Refuge-owned lands along Raft River Bay in coordination with the USFWS and the Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge to maintain or improve riparian habitat values over pre-construction conditions.
14. The project proponent will establish a communication plan and protocol to ensure ongoing coordination and communication between Raft River Recharge Group, Raft River Cooperative, the Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge, BOR, and USFWS, as applicable, regarding infrastructure operation and maintenance activities. RRRG shall provide the following notifications to the Refuge:
 - a. 2-week notice for normal pumping operations
 - b. 1-3-day notice for storm events
 - c. 2-week notice for maintenance activities (including entering or accessing the Snake River for any reason)
15. Conduct all pump operation and maintenance outside of April-May and August-October, to the extent practicable, to avoid disturbance to migratory birds and waterfowl during critical nesting, breeding, and rearing time periods.
16. Avoid the installation of permanent fencing to minimize potential wildfires from accumulation of dry brush, and to minimize the potential for death or injury to migratory birds, waterfowl, or raptors posed by aerial obstacles and hazards.
17. All reclaimed areas shall be monitored for at least three years and include timed surveys (at least twice per year; once in the late spring and again in the fall) to qualitatively and quantitatively record total ground cover, presence of noxious weeds, erosion, soil compaction, and any revegetation failure.

- a. Semi-annual monitoring reports with photo logs of surveys as well as an annual report on the overall state of the reclaimed area, proposed changes to revegetation strategies, if necessary, and ongoing stabilization efforts shall be kept on record for five years.
 - b. Reclaimed areas shall continue to be monitored and surveyed until stabilization efforts reach 70% of pre-disturbance ground coverage for at least one year.
- 18. If unacceptable impacts to resources or conflicts arise or are documented by Refuge staff, then the Refuge Manager can suspend, modify conditions of, or terminate an ongoing project already permitted by SUP(s) on a Refuge.
- 19. Any activities involving ground disturbance may require historic preservation consultation with the Regional Office and/or State Historic Preservation Office.
- 20. At any time, Refuge staff may accompany partner agency employees, contractors, authorized representatives, support staff, and other visitors in the field
- 21. All visitors to the Refuge will follow all Refuge-specific regulations that specify access and travel on the Refuge.
- 22. Off-road travel by vehicles, ATVs/UTVs, and horses is prohibited.
- 23. Boating, in areas closed to boating, other than the use of float tubes, is prohibited.
- 24. The landing of aircraft and the use of helicopters or UAS (i.e. drones) are prohibited, except if specifically authorized by refuge-specific condition(s) on a case-by-case basis.
- 25. The collection and removal of any archaeological or historic artifacts (including Native American artifacts, such as arrowheads), samples, mementos, and natural objects (including plants, animals, minerals, antlers, and feathers) from the Refuge is prohibited. If cultural resources, or archaeological or historic artifacts are encountered, leave the item(s) in place and contact the Refuge Manager or nearest USFWS employee.
- 26. An inadvertent discovery plan shall be prepared for the construction phase of the project. If construction activities uncover any materials of cultural or historic significance, construction will halt and coordination with the SHPO, THPO, and Idaho County Sheriff will occur.
- 27. A NRCS Cultural Resources Specialist will monitor the pipeline excavation near the eligible cultural site to ensure the site is avoided during construction activities.

28. A Cultural Resources Monitor will be onsite during the excavation and placement of the intake suction line within the Refuge. The selection of the Cultural Resources Monitor will be coordinated with the Service.

Justification

By following established plans, agreements, memoranda, and implementing stipulations, this project will not interfere with the Refuge achieving its purpose of “a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.” It is anticipated that wildlife populations will find sufficient food resources and resting places such that their abundance and use of the Refuge will not be measurably lessened from allowing the project to occur on the Refuge. The relatively limited number of individuals expected to be adversely affected due to the project will not cause wildlife populations to materially decline, the physiological condition and production of wildlife species will not be impaired, their behavior and normal activity patterns will not be altered dramatically, and their overall welfare will not be negatively impacted. Based on available science and best professional judgement, the Service has determined that the installation, operation, and maintenance of a portion of the Raft River Flood Protection and Groundwater Recharge Project within Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge, in accordance with the stipulations provided here, would not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purpose of the Refuge.

Signature of Determination

Refuge Manager Signature and Date

Signature of Concurrence

Assistant Regional Director Signature and Date

Mandatory Reevaluation Date

2036

Literature Cited/References

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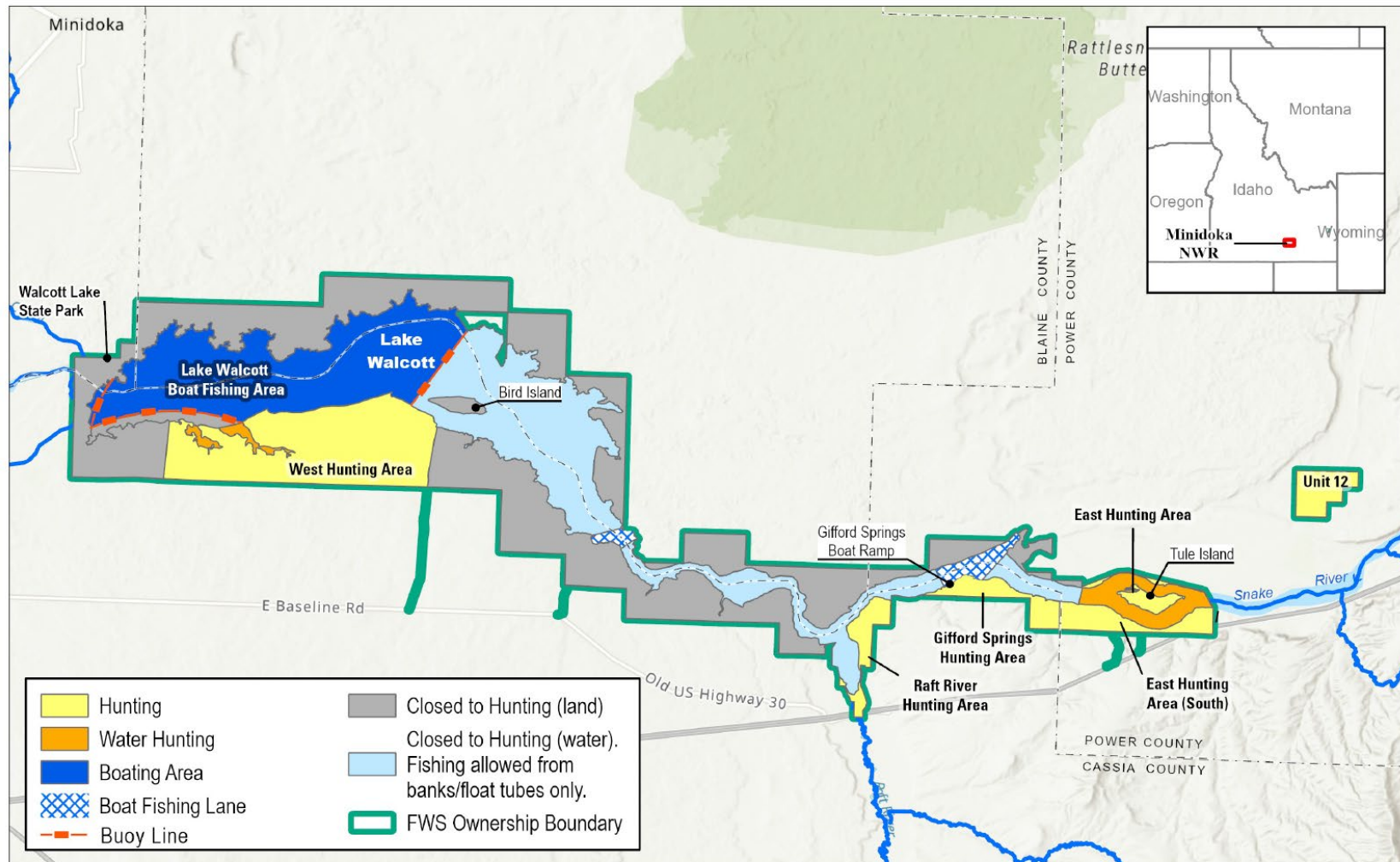
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Figure 1. Raft River Recharge Group Project Map

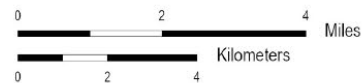


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge

Hunt Units



Produced by the Pacific Region,
National Wildlife Refuge System Program
Map Date: 1/20/2026
Basemap: USDA NAIP Imagery Service
File: R1_NWRS_FY26_205



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