

Draft Compatibility Determination

Title

Draft Compatibility Determination for Interpretive Kiosks, National Elk Refuge

Refuge Use Category

Environmental Education and Interpretation

Refuge Use Type(s)

Interpretation (NWRS staff)

Associated facilities: entrance road kiosk, headquarters complex kiosk, visitor center kiosk, miller house kiosk, east parking lot kiosk.

Refuge

National Elk Refuge

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

The National Elk Refuge was established in 1912 as a “winter game (elk) reserve” (37 Stat 293, 16 USC 673), and the following year Congress designated the area as “a winter elk refuge” (37 Stat 847). In 1921 all lands included in the refuge or that might be added on the future were reserved and set apart as “refuges and breeding grounds for birds” (Executive Order 3596), which was affirmed in 1922 (Executive Order 3741). In 1927 the refuge was expanded to provide “for the grazing of, and as a refuge for, American Elk and other big game animals” (44 Stat 1246, USC 673a).

“...the establishment of a winter game (elk) reserve...” Stat. 293, August 10, 1912

“For the establishment and maintenance of a winter elk refuge in the state of Wyoming...” Stat 847, March 4, 1913

“...all lands that now or may hereafter be included within the boundaries of...the Elk Refuge, Wyoming...are hereby further reserved and set apart for the use of the Department of [Interior] as refuges and breeding grounds for birds.” Exec. Order 3596, December 22, 1921

“...for use of the Secretary of [the Interior] as a refuge and breeding ground for birds...” Exec. Order 3741, September 20, 1922

“...for grazing of, and as a refuge for, American elk and other big game animals...” Stat 1246, February 25, 1927

“...for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources...” Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956

“...suitable for – (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development. (2) the protection of natural resources. (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species...” 16 USC 460-k-1 (Refuge Recreation Act of 1962)

“...(B) ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the System are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans...” National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended (16 USC 668dd-eee)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, otherwise known as 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?

Yes

Environmental Education and Interpretation were evaluated in a Compatibility Determination in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan in 2015, however, kiosks were not included in that evaluation.

What is the use?

The Service will replace and relocate the National Elk Refuge (NER) entrance road kiosk from the east side of the road to the west side of the road and construct new kiosks in the following additional locations: Headquarter Complex, Visitor Center, Miller House, and East Parking Lot.

The entrance road kiosk was damaged beyond repair in December 2020, when it was struck by a vehicle. Relocating the kiosk to the west side of the road is identified in the National Elk Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (2015, pg. 120) as a strategy to improve safety and visitor experience along the refuge road. The National Elk Refuge Entrance Road Kiosk Replacement Project will include bringing in fill to level the area, construction, and the permanent placement of a replacement kiosk on the west side of the Elk Refuge Road entrance, an accessible parking spot, and moving the refuge fence .03 of an acre.

The new kiosks at the Headquarters Complex, Visitor Center, Miller House, and East Parking Lot will include two post holes and the construction and permanent placement of a one panel kiosk at each location.

Is the use a priority public use?

Yes

Where would the use be conducted?

Entrance road kiosk: west side of the entrance of the Refuge Road.

Headquarters kiosk: out-front of headquarters building by the accessible parking spot.

Visitor Center kiosk: out-front of the visitor center building, next to the parking lot.

Miller House kiosk: Miller House overlook along the Refuge Road.

East Parking Lot kiosk: north end of the parking area, next to the forest service access trail.

When would the use be conducted?

Construction and permanent placement of the entrance road kiosk will occur in the summer of 2022. Construction and permanent placement of the other kiosks will occur as funds and staffing allow.

The kiosks will provide interpretive media and general information to the public year-round.

How would the use be conducted?

Construction and permanent placement of the entrance road kiosk will be completed by a construction contract. Construction and permanent placement of the other kiosks will be by refuge staff or volunteers.

Kiosk access is allowed daily, year-round, during daylight hours.

Why is this use being proposed or reevaluated?

The placement of interpretive kiosks in strategic locations on the National Elk Refuge will provide information and orientation to visitors where they are on the Refuge. Visitors are often confused about how to get around, where to go, and what to see on the Refuge. Having a large three panel kiosk on the entrance road to the Refuge will help orient visitors to Refuge and make them feel welcome in this space. The additional one-panel kiosks will provide a cohesive Refuge experience for visitors, with similar construction and styles which will re-enforce they are on the Refuge in the different locations the kiosks are located.

Availability of Resources

Entrance road kiosk:

The relocation and permanent placement of the entrance road kiosk will entail moderate Service resources at start-up. Expenses will include program management staff resources, kiosk construction, accessible parking spot construction, panel design and ordering, and visitor services program staffing. Estimated costs to construct the kiosk, bring in fill to level the area, add an accessible parking area, move the fence .03 acres, and fabricate the kiosk panels are estimated to be \$92,500 for the first year. Annual maintenance of the kiosk will require less than a 5% increase in visitor services or maintenance staff time.

The direct costs of supporting these activities are summarized as follows:

Facility Cost (Start-up cost)

Construction of kiosk including bringing in fill \$80,000

Accessible parking spot \$5,000

Moving the fence \$2,500

Kiosk panels \$5,000

All other kiosks:

The construction and permanent placement of the Headquarters Complex kiosk, Visitor Center kiosk, Miller House kiosk, and East Parking Lot kiosk will entail moderate Service resources at start-up. Expenses will include kiosk

construction, panel design and order, and visitor services program staffing. Estimated costs to construct each kiosk are estimated to be \$10,000 for the first year. Annual maintenance of the kiosks will require less than a 5% increase in visitor services or maintenance staff time.

The direct costs of supporting these activities are summarized as follows:

Facility Cost (Start-up cost)

Kiosk construction \$5,000

Kiosk panels \$5,000

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use: None

Maintenance costs: Minor and insignificant.

Monitoring costs: Minor and insignificant.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use

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

The construction and permanent placement of the kiosks will result in minor disturbance to wildlife while under construction. These impacts will be short lived and should not significantly affect wildlife or the habitat. They will be designed to be of minimal impact to a limited area. Establishing kiosks in key communication areas of the Refuge will create a welcoming orientation experience for visitors.

Short-term impacts

The construction and permanent placement of the kiosks will result in minor disturbance to wildlife while under construction. These impacts will be short lived and should not significantly affect wildlife or the habitat. They will be designed to be of minimal impact to a limited area. Establishing kiosks in key communication areas of the Refuge will create a welcoming orientation experience for visitors.

There will be some short-term impacts to visitors engaged in wildlife-dependent recreation during construction of the kiosks, particularly with the entrance road kiosk.

Long-term impacts

Other than the potential for some increase in future visitation to the Refuge, long-term impacts associated with these kiosks will be low. Long term impacts to habitat

can be avoided by focusing construction of the kiosks in already disturbed areas.

Public Review and Comment

The draft compatibility determination will be available for public review and comment for 14 days from April 22 through May 6, 2022. The public will be made aware of this comment opportunity through newspapers and other media outlets. A hard copy of this document will be posted at the Refuge Headquarters, 675 East Broadway, Jackson, WY 83001. It will be made available electronically on the refuge website www.fws.gov/refuge/national_elk_refuge. Please let us know if you need the documents in an alternative format. Concerns expressed during the public comment period will be addressed in the final.

Determination

Is the use compatible?

Choose an item.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

Construction and permanent placement of the kiosks will take in the summer to avoid any disturbance to elk. Kiosk access is allowed daily, year-round (seasonally for East Parking), during daylight hours.

Justification

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-57) identifies six priority wildlife-dependent public uses of national wildlife refuges: environmental education, interpretation, hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and wildlife photography. The replacement and relocation of the entrance road kiosk and construction of the new kiosks will provide an accessible and welcoming orientation for the visitor, highlight the wildlife-dependent public uses available on the refuge, and enhance their overall visitor experience at the National Elk Refuge.

Installing interpretive kiosks at the National Elk Refuge is an Appropriate Use because the proposed use is identified in the National Elk Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), the proposed use will help facilitate other appropriate and compatible wildlife-dependent public uses as identified in the CCP, and the proposed use will improve safety and visitor experience along the refuge road. A Finding of Appropriateness of a Refuge Use is available upon request.

Installing interpretive kiosks at the National Elk Refuge will not materially interfere with or detract from the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System or the purposes for which the Refuge was established.

Entrance Road Kiosk

- Replacing and relocating the entrance road kiosk at the National Elk Refuge will have no effect on listed/proposed/candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat of such species as identified in the Section 7 Biological Evaluation Form (available upon request).
- Replacing and relocating the entrance road kiosk at the National Elk Refuge will have no effect on cultural resources as identified in the Class III Cultural Resources Investigation of the Proposed National Elk Refuge Kiosk Replacement and Relocation Report (available upon request).

All Other Kiosks

- The Section 7 Biological Evaluation Form has not been completed for the other kiosks but will be completed prior to any proposed work.
- A Cultural Resources Investigation has not been completed for the other kiosks but will be completed prior to any proposed work.
- The public will be notified when the Refuge proposes to proceed with additional kiosks.

Signature of Determination

Refuge Manager Signature and Date

Signature of Concurrence

Assistant Regional Director Signature and Date

Mandatory Reevaluation Date

2037