

DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

USE: Fishing (commercial)

REFUGE NAME: Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge

ESTABLISHING AND ACQUISITION AUTHORITY(IES): Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge was established by Executive Order 7437, dated August 21, 1936.

REFUGE PURPOSE(S): The purposes come from the authority under which Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge was established and from authorities under which subsequent major land additions to the refuge were made. Purposes for Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge are;

"... a Refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife"

(Executive Order 7437, dated August 21, 1936)

"suitable for-(1) incidental fish and wildlife oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species ..." (Refuge Recreation Act(16 U.S.C 460k-460k-4), as amended)

"... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources." (6 U.S.C. 742f(a)(4)(Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956.)

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION: "...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:

What is the Use?

This use describes the removal of rough fish and bullheads by commercial fishers. Rough fish include those species designated by the Wisconsin Inland Rough Fish Contract, and include carp, buffalo, sheephead, suckers, quillback, gizzard shad, mooneye, dogfish, and garfish. Bullheads are considered a sportfish in Wisconsin but removal from Trempealeau waters is allowed by agreement with the State of Wisconsin. The Refuge Fishery Management Plan (1991) provides recommendations and strategies for commercial fishing. Commercial fishing will be regulated by special use permit and subject to all State regulations and permitting. The refuge will receive daily copies of the catch report required by the Wisconsin Inland Rough Fish Contract. Commercial fishing has previously been found compatible through the Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process. This compatibility determination is being completed as a renewal to continue this use on the refuge. An appropriate use form was completed as part of this process as well. No changes are needed to amend the Comprehensive Conservation Plan of the Refuge Fishery Management Plan as a

result of this process. While fishing is a priority public use under the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, commercial fishing activities are not and are required to be reviewed for compatibility because they are a refuge management economic activity. A refuge management activity on a national wildlife refuge that results in generation of a commodity which is or can be sold for income or revenue or traded for goods or services.

Where is the use conducted?

Commercial fishing for rough fish and bullheads will be permitted in Pool A and Pool B. See attached map. This area is about 1000 acres of the 6800 acre refuge, although actual fishing will occur on just a few acres where the fish congregate.

When is the use conducted?

Commercial fishing will preferably coincide with the drawdown of Pool A and will be permitted the winter before and during the drawdown. Commercial fishing may be authorized at other times during the year upon refuge manager approval to fit a habitat management need.

How is the use conducted?

Seining will be the primary method to collect fish although other methods may be permitted as allowed by State law. A crew of 5-6 people load the fish for transportation. Storage of boats and crates is permitted at locations specified by the refuge manager. The amount of fish harvested will be determined at the time of issuing a special use permit. When the last harvest was conducted approximately 200,000 pounds of fish were harvested.

Why is the use being proposed?

The objective of commercial fishing is to improve water clarity and aquatic habitats to promote the germination of submersed and emergent plants in order to better meet refuge purposes and management goals. Submersed plants like pondweeds, elodea, and wild celery provide an important food source for migrating birds and are important in the lifecycle of many aquatic invertebrates. Emergent plants like arrowhead, cattail, bulrush and lotus are important for forage and shelter to a variety of wildlife species. Vegetation sampling in 2003, indicated very low occurrence of submersed plants, and an examination of aerial photographs reveals that the amount of emergent vegetation has decreased dramatically over the life of the refuge. The negative impacts of large populations of rough fish, particularly carp, on aquatic habitats in lakes and marshes has been thoroughly documented.

Fishery surveys from the 80s and 90s estimated carp, buffalo and bullheads accounted for 80-90% of the standing crop of fish in Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge waters. In 1984, surveys reported the standing crop of fish to be about 2,000,000 pounds. Prior to Refuge establishment, the Delta Fish and Fur Farm removed in excess of 200,000 pounds

of carp and buffalo annually. In 2000, commercial fishing netted 21,000 pounds of fish. In 2001, approximately 200,000 pounds were taken.

All of the refuge pools are shallow impoundments and lack of oxygen frequently causes winter fish kills. The few game fish that do overwinter and maintain small populations are northern pike, yellow perch, largemouth bass, and bluegills.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:

No special equipment or facilities are needed for this activity. Some administrative costs will be incurred for implementing the bid process, oversight of the program and reporting. Funding for this activity comes from annual operations and maintenance funding for the Refuge and is deemed adequate given the current Refuge involvement.

- Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use: funded through regular management activities, no additional funding is needed.
- Maintenance costs: funded through regular management activities, no additional funding is needed.
- Monitoring costs: staff may monitor commercial recorders to ensure compliance. This is expected to be covered by the refuge's current funding capacity, no additional funding is needed.
- Offsetting revenues: none

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE:

Short and Long-term Impacts:

Surveys conducted by the La Crosse Fisheries Resource Office (FWS) show a large population of carp and bullheads in all refuge pools. Commercial fishing in conjunction with a drawdown will significantly reduce rough fish numbers. Bullheads may not be large enough to be commercially valuable and their populations may not be impacted by commercial fishing. Northern pike may be captured by seining. The release of Northern pike and all adult game fish will be required, although some mortality may occur. Mortality of game fish is likely to occur from winter kill regardless of commercial fishing activities.

The reduction of rough fish will improve the growth of aquatic and emergent plants. Some stumps and plants may be displaced by dragging the seines, but impacts are temporary and plants should easily recover during the next growing season.

Indirect and Cumulative Impacts:

Rough fish and bullhead population in refuge pools will decline overtime, making non-commercial fishing less successful especially in combination with drawdown efforts. The reduction of these fish will improve water quality over time, stimulating the growth of aquatic and emergent plants, benefiting migrating populations of waterfowl and other birds.

Indirect effects of commercial fishing could lead to economic gain by individuals that are permitted to fish. It is unlikely that this economic gain would have major effects on the local economy; however, there is a likely economic benefit to the individuals.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:

The draft Compatibility Determination will be available for public review and comment for 15 days from August 31st, 2020 to September 15th 2020. A public notice will be sent to local newspapers, as well as a press release, on August 31st, 2020 notifying the public of the comment period. The compatibility determination will be made available online at <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/trempealeau/>. You can contact the refuge at 608-539-2311 x. 6 or [Stephanie edeler@fws.gov](mailto:Stephanie_edeler@fws.gov) to request either printed or electronic copies. 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 draft.

DETERMINATION:

- Use is not compatible
- Use is compatible with the following stipulations

STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:

1. All applicable State and Federal regulations apply.
2. Commercial fishing will occur only during November through March.
3. All adult game fish will be returned to the water.
4. A Special Use Permit is issued to all commercial anglers. A harvest report is required to identify the total number of pounds of fish caught by species.

JUSTIFICATION:

This use will not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes for which the Refuge was established with the above stipulations in place. Commercial fishing is primarily limited to the harvest of what are generally considered rough fish. The removal of rough fish improves habitat for many other species of native fish, plants and wildlife. Commercial fishing is a primary method of control for invasive and exotic common carp and Asian carp species, and as such, directly contributes to the purposes of the refuge for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants. Refuge-specific regulations and stipulations ensure that commercial fishing is sound biologically and has limited adverse impacts on refuge fish, wildlife, and habitat. This activity will not interfere or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the refuge.

SIGNATURE:

Refuge Manager Signature and Date

CONCURRENCE:

Regional Refuge Chief Signature and Date

Mandatory 10 or 15-year Re-evaluation Date: 2030

W I S C O N S I N



M I N N E S O T A

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge

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|--|------------------------------|---------------|
| Refuge Boundary | Boat/Canoe Launch | Parking |
| Refuge Land | Fishing Platform | Refuge Office |
| Refuge Water | Interpretive Hiking Trail | Restroom |
| Railroads | Information Kiosk | |
| Refuge Access (non-motorized use only) | Observation Deck | |
| Prairie View Tour Loop | Great River State Bike Trail | |

