

DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

USE: Boating (human-powered), specifically canoeing, kayaking and paddle boarding

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 entails the silent boating water sports canoeing, kayaking and paddle boarding. These secondary refuge uses are a means to enjoy wildlife observation, fishing, and photography, which are priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Canoeing, kayaking, and paddle boarding have 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 as a result of this process.

Where is the use conducted? Access to refuge waters is available at two maintained boat launch areas, but is not limited to such areas because watercraft that is hand carried can be portaged along any shoreline. Boating using human-powered means can occur on all waterbodies of the refuge. Visitor launch mainly occurs at the boat ramps in Pools A and B, and on the Trempealeau River. Reference the refuge website or office for the most up to date map.

When is the use conducted?

The main season for canoeing and kayaking is April through October when waterbodies are not iced over, with peak use during the summer months. Sometimes hunters and anglers use canoeing and kayaking into November so long as the waterbodies are not frozen outside of the typical main season to support hunting and fishing activities on the refuge.

How is the use conducted? Visitor launch mainly at the boat ramps in Pools A and B, and on the Trempealeau River. Access in places where there is not a boat launch requires human-powered boat operators to put-in from the shoreline. Canoeing, kayaking and paddle boarding are considered human-powered boating activities as these boats are powered by paddling water using human strength and oars. Electric or gas powered motors used on these types of boats is not being evaluated in this use. Canoeing, kayaking and paddle boarding can be used as vehicles for the public to enjoy priority wildlife-dependent uses such as wildlife observation, photography, hunting and fishing. If disturbance to wildlife is determined to be too high, management will close some areas to access, though use in the past has been such that this is not anticipated.

Why is the use being proposed? By providing another means of access, this use increases opportunities for the public to participate in and enjoy priority wildlife-dependent uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife photography and observation.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:

Minimal management of this use is needed and staffing and funding is adequate. The refuge maintains existing boat landings, roads, and parking lots to support this activity, and posts areas when outbreaks of blue-green algae occur. Law Enforcement personnel may be needed to monitor the activity or address issues with the visiting public in the area of the activity.

- 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:

Disturbance to wildlife, such as flushing of feeding or resting birds, is inherent, but would not lead to significant impacts. Disturbances are generally less than motorized activities due to the silent nature of canoeing, kayaking, and paddle boarding. Use is generally light and sporadic. This disturbance is temporary and generally localized. Fisheries, emergent and submersed vegetation, and other aquatic species will be not generally be impacted

directly. If use increases creating more disturbance, refuge management may close sensitive areas to all access. Invasive species could be introduced on trailers and boats that are not properly cleaned before entering refuge waters. Impacts to shorelines, compaction, vegetation loss, and erosion are all possible from visitors repeatedly launching at sites other than boat landings. However, these impacts have not been observed and are not anticipated due to majority of this use taking place at the boat landings. Refuge management may close areas due to impacts from high use.

Indirect and Cumulative Impacts:

The visiting public may become more active and healthy over time if they regularly participate in these activities. Little or no cumulative impacts to wildlife are anticipated. Fisheries and game birds may be indirectly impacted due to secondary uses such as fishing and hunting from a hand-powered boat.

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 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. The refuge manager reserves the option of closing specified areas for short times to minimize disturbance to over water nesting birds, eagle nests, large flocks of migrants, or other sensitive species.
2. The refuge manager reserves the option of closing areas for public health reasons, including, but not limited to, blue-green algae outbreaks.
3. Closures or other temporary restrictions will be clearly posted at landings and will be published in area newspapers.

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. Disturbance to wildlife is minor due to the nature of these silent sports activities and the limited number of this type of user. Wildlife displacement is generally temporary and short-term and there is adequate alternative resting areas given the wide open Refuge pools. Human-powered boating activities support priority wildlife-dependent uses. This use has previously been found compatible and no changes to the use is planned to occur as a result of this renewal

SIGNATURE:

Refuge Manager Signature and Date

CONCURRENCE:

Regional Refuge Chief Signature and Date

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