DRAFT Compatibility Determination

Use: 5K Fun Run (Wild Goose Chase)

Refuge Name: Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies): Established October 21, 1953

Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, the refuge) was established as part of a dedicated wildlife area in the floodplain area of central Saginaw County. The area consisted of two units, the Shiawassee NWR administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the Shiawassee River State Game Area administered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Establishment of the Shiawassee Project was authorized by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission in May of 1953. Federal acquisition authorities used to acquire the Federal portion of the dedicated wildlife area were the:

Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 714-714r)

Funds for acquiring the Federal lands were primarily derived from Federal duck stamp sales.

Refuge Purpose(s):

Shiawassee NWR was established under the dual authorities listed above with the following purposes:

“... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or any other management purpose, for migratory birds.

... for (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, [and] (3) the conservation of endangered and threatened species....”

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

“The mission of the National Wildlife 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.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? This Compatibility Determination is for public running/walking events held on the refuge which may or may not include fundraising. The refuge occasionally receives requests from external organizations, including the Friends of the Shiawassee NWR, to have events involving recreational fun runs such as the previously held 5k Wild Goose Chase fun run/walk. The Wild Goose Chase has been held on the refuge for a couple of years as a fund raiser for the Friends of the Shiawassee NWR. This event was previously determined compatible because of the conservation-related nature of the event as well as the timing, location, and educational components associated with the event. This Compatibility Determination will address future Wild Goose Chase runs and other possible requests for running and walking events to be held on the refuge.
Future such events would only occur on established roads or trails in the refuge. The Wildlife Drive and Ferguson Bayou Trail provide the best location for such events because they are safe routes with a good running surface, have controlled access, and minimize wildlife disturbance if conducted at the right time of year and time of day. The number of participants, time of year and time of day would be limited through issuance of a special use permit. Other portions of the refuge either do not have adequate facilities, appropriate running surfaces, or such events would cause unacceptable disturbance to wildlife or their habitat.

Running events would only occur from June 1 until September 30 from sunrise to sunset as this time of year and time of day would have the least disturbing impacts to sensitive wildlife. Running events would be of short duration (a few hours). Flooding and maintenance activities may limit our ability to issue event-specific special use permits on the refuge.

All running events would be administered by an outside organization and permitted through a refuge special use permit. However, refuge staff would be involved in the planning of the event and would likely be present during the event to ensure compliance with stipulations contained in the special use permit (such as appropriate parking, trash collection, port-a-johns, etc.). Administrators of the event will be responsible for all participants’ safety, such as on-site first aid resources, and adherence to stipulations in the special use permit. All running events will include wildlife observation, environmental interpretation or education as part of their event. This may include such things as displays or programs for the participants and their observers that describe the mission and purpose of the refuge.

Events may be requested from various organizations and fun runs are typically held as fundraising events. Commercial enterprises related to running events are not allowed on the refuge. Fundraising that is not for profit will be allowed on the refuge as long as the fundraising is related to the refuge mission such as supporting conservation purposes, environmental education or the Friends of the Shiawassee NWR for furthering the mission of the refuge. Events that are held to raise funds for other than environmental purposes such as cancer benefits or other similar causes would not be allowed on the refuge. Requests for running events will be evaluated on a case by case basis, but it is not anticipated that more than one or two events will be allowed per year.

Where is the use conducted? All events would occur on refuge roads or trails; particularly the Ferguson Bayou Trail (4.5 miles) and the Wildlife Drive (a 6.5 mile one-way loop). Parking and other event staging areas would likely occur in the Ferguson Bayou trailhead parking lot or other hardened surface location.

When is the use conducted? Running events would occur between June 1 and September 30 and between sunrise and sunset to minimize disturbance to wildlife.

How is the use conducted? All events will be coordinated and conducted by the special use permittee for the event. Refuge staff would provide oversight for consistency with special use permit stipulations and to monitor how well the permittee conducts the event if the organization requests to hold another such event in the future. The organizer/permittee will be responsible for all set up, race day coordination, safety, compliance with stipulations in the special use permit and clean up after the event.
**Why is the use being proposed?** Past events have been successful in both raising funds for conservation purposes as well as introducing people to the mission and purpose of the refuge. We know, at a minimum, the Friends of the Shiawassee NWR would like to host the Wild Goose Chase 5K run to raise money for their organization on an annual basis for the foreseeable future.

**Availability of Resources:**

No new infrastructure would be built to accommodate running events.

Law enforcement and administrative monitoring are the primary tools necessary to ensure proper and safe administration of these events/special use permits. At the anticipated level of permitted events (which is considered low) there are adequate refuge resources to oversee such events. Administrative costs for administering special use permits for commercial guiding will be minimal due to the small number of permits that will be allowed.

**Anticipated Impacts of Use:**

The potential short-term impact to wildlife is disturbance in the immediate vicinity of the run/event. The event will be limited to only a few hours on one day and will not occur during periods of peak wildlife use. Past events on the refuge have been held in September when much of the refuge is dry and wildlife use of wetlands and other habitats along the path of runners is low. By restricting events from June through September we miss the periods of time when wildlife use of the refuge is at its peak and when wildlife are generally less susceptible to disturbance or may be able to move safely away from the disturbance for the duration of the event. There may still be some disturbance to wading birds, raptors, song birds, reptiles and amphibians. Reptiles and amphibians are anticipated to be avoided by the runners. Raptors, song birds, water birds and other wildlife are accustomed to activity on the Wildlife Drive and trails. All events would be of short duration, thereby causing only temporary disturbance to such wildlife. Repeated runs, such as for track team practices or relays, are deemed to be too disturbing to wildlife; these types of events are not considered compatible with refuge purposes and, therefore, will not be allowed.

The Wildlife Drive is also a refuge maintenance road and is open to the public for wildlife observation and photography, walking, and bicycling from June 1 until September 30. Therefore, the Wildlife Drive receives a moderate level of human activity throughout the year. One event for a few hours during low wildlife use time periods should not disturb wildlife along the route to an undesirable level. The potential area of disturbance to wildlife is small compared to the remainder of the refuge that is closed to public use.

Most of the concentrated use for organized events will be for registration, parking and displays which will likely occur at the Ferguson Bayou Trail parking lot or similar location. The parking lot receives frequent public use during the summer and is located where human disturbance is already present from the adjacent county road, active farms and residences. Wildlife have already adapted to human activity in this location. The parking lot is also where portable bathrooms and trash facilities would be located during the event. The parking lot is situated on the periphery of the refuge and is well screened and buffered by woodlands from the wetland and grassland habitat interior of the refuge. Little disturbance to wildlife in wetlands and interior habitats is expected. Therefore, disturbance to wildlife from people congregating at the parking lot will be low.

There are no expected impacts to facilities that are outside of normal public use. The Wildlife Drive
and Ferguson Bayou trail surface is gravel and can withstand the amount of foot traffic expected from a running event. The main entrance road receives a high amount of vehicle use throughout the season. If it is wet, then the number of cars for this one-time event may cause some ruts, but generally the gravel surface holds up well to traffic.

No long-term or cumulative impacts are expected as long as these types of events are infrequent. Events such as the Wild Goose Chase provides a venue for educating people about the refuge and conservation in general, as well as the wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities on the refuge.

**Public Review and Comment:**

This draft Compatibility Determination evaluates the compatibility of “fun run” events and the mission and purpose of the refuge.

A public review and 14 day comment period has been extended to August 3rd, 2017. Solicitations for comment will be distributed via a news release. Comments will also be requested on the refuge's Facebook page and website. Paper copies of the document will be available at the refuge headquarters (6975 Mower Road, Saginaw, MI 48601).

**Determination:**

[ ] Use is Not Compatible

[X] Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations:

**Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:**

To ensure compatibility with National Wildlife Refuge System and Shiawassee NWR CCP goals and objectives the activities can only occur under the following stipulations:

1. A Special Use Permit will be issued to the organization hosting the event.
2. Recreational run events will be limited to designated routes on established roads or trails on the refuge.
3. Sites of congregation such as registration or water stations will be coordinated in advance of the event to avoid sensitive areas and minimize wildlife disturbance.
4. The organization hosting the event will arrange for any safety needs such as a first aid station or EMT on site and shall carry appropriate liability insurance.
5. The organization hosting the event will arrange for needed facilities such as portable bathrooms or trash containers and will ensure facilities are returned to the condition they were in prior to the event.
6. The number of attendees and the number of events will be limited by the refuge manager to avoid excessive wildlife or habitat disturbance.

7. Events will include environmental interpretation and education as well as information about the Shiawassee NWR for all attendees.

Justification:

This use will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of Shiawassee NWR. Events will be regulated through a special use permit, and limited in scope, number, and location. Concentrated activities associated with the event will be limited to refuge facilities that are already developed and have some level of disturbance from allowed public uses. The event will take place on established roads or trails away from sensitive habitats and at times that reduce wildlife disturbance. Events will include environmental interpretation and education which are priority wildlife dependent uses under the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act and are included in the goals of the refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Environmental interpretation and education as part of running events will allow the visiting public to experience and learn about wildlife and conservation. The temporary nature and short duration of this type of event reduces the likelihood of adverse short or long term impacts to plant and wildlife resources.

Signature:  Refuge Manager:  __________________________________________________________________________

Signature and Date

Concurrence:  Regional Chief:  __________________________________________________________________________

Signature and Date

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-evaluation date: 2027