

Compatibility Determination

Use: Access to State Trail through the Refuge via Snowmobile and Horseback

Refuge Name: Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) was established by Public Law No. 94-466, 94th Congress on October 8, 1976. The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Act authorized acquisition of lands for refuge purposes.

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. § 742(a)(4)) and (16 U.S.C. § 742(b)(1)).

Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C. § 3901(b), 100 Stat. 3583).

National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, 16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee (Refuge Administration Act).

Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, 16 U.S.C. 460k-460k-4 (Refuge Recreation Act).

Refuge Purposes:

The Secretary shall develop and administer ... the refuge, in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Act ... The Secretary may also exercise any other authority available to him for the conservation and management of wildlife and natural resources, the development of wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, wildlife interpretation, and environmental education, to the extent deemed by him to be appropriate ... The Secretary shall construct, administer and maintain, ... a wildlife interpretation and education center ... to promote environmental education and to provide an opportunity for the study and enjoyment of wildlife in its natural habitat.

The purposes of the refuge “are to (1) provide habitat for a large number of migratory waterfowl, fish, and other wildlife species; (2) to provide environmental education, wildlife recreational opportunities, and interpretive programs for hundreds of thousands of Twin City residents; (3) to protect important natural resource areas from degradation; and to (4) protect the valley’s unique social, educational, and environmental assets.”

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?

Allow public to access the Minnesota Valley State Trail via snowmobile and horseback via a designated route within the Louisville Swamp Unit.

Where would the use be conducted?

Historically, the snowmobiling and horseback riding public have accessed the Minnesota Valley State Trail (State Trail) via a Service Road\Trail beginning at the main parking lot at the west end of 145th Street SW located approximately 4.5 miles south of Shakopee, Minnesota west off U.S. Highway 169. A trail/service road approximately one mile in length crosses the Refuge along the north property line of the Louisville Swamp unit of the Refuge (T 115N, R23 W, S ½ Section 29, Louisville Township, Scott County) before intersecting with the designated State Trail administered by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

When and how would the use be conducted?

Frequently, visitors park horse/snowmobile trailers in the Refuge parking lot at the terminus of 145th St. NW. Use of the access via horseback occurs from early spring to late fall. Use is considered light with peak use occurring during the spring and fall. Use of this access via snowmobiles from this parking lot ranges from very light to heavy depending on the snow conditions. Visitors on snowmobiles mostly use the access from late November through early March.

Why is this use being proposed?

The parking lot at the trailhead and the trail/service road to the State Trail off 145th St. NW are on Service fee-title lands. A route across Refuge lands needs to be designated and maintained for visitors wishing to access the State Trail from this location.

Is the use a priority public use?

This use is not a high priority public use.

Availability of Resources:

Currently the staffing levels and facilities required for Refuge public use programs and accessibility do not meet Service public use standards. The Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (2004) details the needed funds and staff to bring these programs up to Service standards. A summary of these needs include eight additional full time equivalent (FTE's) positions including a deputy manager, two more refuge law Enforcement Officers , two maintenance positions, and two park rangers (education and outreach). The additional staff time and equipment required for maintenance of this access trail (mowing once every 3-4 weeks throughout the growing season May – September) may not be completed in some years due to work load.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Use of this access via snowmobiles from this parking lot ranges from very light to heavy depending on the snow conditions. Short-term disturbance to wildlife may occur during these activities, but will be insignificant.

Use of the access via horseback is light. Because the area soils overlay sandstone with few saturated soil areas, erosion resulting from soil disturbance caused by horse hooves is not expected to be a long-term effect. Short-term disturbance to wildlife may occur during these activities, but will be insignificant. The presence of horse and human scent may limit the use of habitat by resident wildlife immediately adjacent to the trail.

Wildlife tend to habituate to the noise of snowmobiles. However, they probably do not use the habitat areas adjacent to the trail as often as they would when motorized vehicle are absent as the noise may deter them from crossing the road. The presence of human scent may also limit the use of habitat adjacent to the trail. Air quality will be lowered in the area adjacent to the trail due to engine exhaust emissions. Other users such as cross-country skiers, snowshoers and hikers may see less wildlife on nearby trails and the quietude will also be compromised for a considerable distance from the trail.

In our professional judgment, these disturbances do not have enough negative cumulative impact to prevent wildlife from maintaining healthy viable populations.

Public Review and Comment:

This compatibility determination is part of the 10-year review for Compatibility Determinations of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Public notification and review will include a comment period from September 6, 2016 to September 20, 2016

Determination:

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. The use of snowmobiles and horses are restricted to designated trails.

Justification:

This use will have limited and localized impacts when conducted within the stipulations above. Administration of the use will require little to no administrative time or funding. This use will not restrict the attainment of the primary purposes of the Refuge.

Signature: Project Leader: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10-year Re-evaluation Date: _____2026_____