Compatibility Determination - Firewood Cutting and/or Firewood Removal on Felsenthal NWR

**USE:** Firewood Cutting and/or Firewood Removal

**REFUGE NAME:** Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

**DATE ESTABLISHED:** 1975

**ESTABLISHING AND ACQUISITION AUTHORITY:**
- 16 U.S.C. 664 (Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act)
- 16 U.S.C. 460k-1 (Refuge Recreation Act)

**REFUGE PURPOSES:**

- "shall be administered by him [Secretary of the Interior] directly or in accordance with cooperative agreements ... and in accordance with such rules and regulations for the conservation, maintenance, and management of wildlife, resources thereof, and its habitat thereon" 16 U.S.C. 664 (Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act).

- "the Secretary ... may accept and use ... real ... property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors" 16 U.S.C. 460k-2 (Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. 460k-460k-4), as amended).

- "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 U.S.C. 460k-1 (Refuge Recreation Act).

**NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION:**

The mission of the Refuge System, as defined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, 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:

(a) What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

The refuge will allow firewood cutting and/or removal of firewood from fallen trees within the Refuge by private individuals for personal (non-commercial) use. This use will be permitted via individually issued, Special Use Permits (SUP). Only downed trees may be utilized; no cutting of standing live trees permitted. Access is restricted to existing designated roads or trails open to motorized vehicle use at the time of the permit request. No fee schedule is established for this activity. Firewood cutting and firewood removal are not priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

(b) Where would the use be conducted?

The scope of the activity and necessary equipment will be dependent on the amount and type of wood available for removal. Wood removal will be authorized within campsites, along existing roads and trails, and in other areas on the refuge where fallen trees are encroaching easily accessible public areas.

(c) When would the use be conducted?

Firewood cutting and removal activities may be authorized throughout the year. Wood cutting will not be allowed during periods when the activity will cause occasions of unusual or critical conditions affecting land, water, vegetation, wildlife populations or public safety.

(d) How would the use be conducted?

Only downed trees may be utilized; no cutting of standing live trees permitted. Access is restricted to existing designated roads or trails ordinarily open to motorized vehicle use. Equipment used for harvest and site clean-up may range from chainsaws and axes to more traditional equipment such as hand saws. Access may be by car and trailer, pick-up truck, ATV or UTV. Differences in scope and necessary equipment will occur depending on the amount and type of wood available for removal. Permitted activities will be limited to 14 consecutive days and may be extended due to inclement weather through administrative processes.

(e) Why is this use being proposed?

Firewood cutting is a historic use. The removal of firewood (downed trees) along roads and trails and their associated right-of-ways saves staff time, reduced wear and tear on government equipment, and improves visitor access. Historically, firewood collection has been opened to public use since it was acquired. With the Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Assessment process in 2010, the refuge included appropriate use and compatibility determinations facilitating the approval of firewood cutting and/or firewood removal. The mandatory 10-year Re-evaluation date is September 21, 2020.
While there are a relatively small number of refuge visits associated with this use each year, these visits result in people connecting with nature and increasing support of the refuge and refuge system. This activity only occurs where the Service has determined that minimal to negligible impacts exist to remove wood.

**AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES**

*Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:* Other than minor amounts of compliance checks, Felsenthal NWR staff will not be involved in the collection of firewood. The Refuge has 3 personnel on staff which administers 5 to 10 SUPs annually for firewood cutting and monitors the operations. These functions are performed as part of their normal duties.

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

*Monitoring costs:* Planning, issuing permits and monitoring firewood cutting and removal would require a minimal commitment of staff hours. It is estimated that no more than 20 FTE hours will be required per year for this activity. Much of this work is discussed as management decisions are made during work planning efforts. All harvest sites are mapped by Refuge staff and detailed permit conditions are added to the SUP for each site in order to protect the local identified resources.

*Offsetting Revenue:* None

**ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE:**

*Short-term Impacts:* Collection of firewood for personal use under the conditions stipulated will have minimal to negligible short term, long term and cumulative impact on forest and wildlife resources. Minor amounts of potential habitat for insects that routinely colonize down/rotting forest debris and the fauna that feeds on this insect life may be lost. However, within floodplain forest communities, this is absolutely not a limiting factor in that the forest floor is routinely heavily littered with downed/decaying wood from the stand overstory. No adverse impacts are anticipated at the current level of use and with the stipulations of the special use firewood cutting permit. (USFWS 2010)

Firewood cutting results in limited disturbance of wildlife. Some impacts on wildlife can be minimized by timing the removal operations to avoid periods when critical activities such as nesting and wintering take place. Impacts should be minimal overall because the extent of activity will be limited to a small portion of the available habitat. Vehicle access to firewood cutting areas is normally along a paved road or improved road so ground disturbance should be minimal. Access for the purpose of removing wood may impact habitat by rutting soils, destroying ground cover, creating weed seed beds, and increasing sedimentation due to runoff in nearby wetlands. These impacts will be minimized by adjusting seasonal schedule for the permitted activity.

*Long-term Impacts:* No adverse, long term or cumulative impacts are anticipated at the current level of use and with the stipulations of the SUP. If the use increases it will be reevaluated.
PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:

A Notice of Availability for Comment on the Draft Compatibility Determination was posted at the Refuge Complex headquarters and visitor center at Felsenthal NWR for public review and comment starting on Date for a period of 15 days ending at close of business on Date. Copies of the Draft CD and press release were made available to local media as well. A copy of the Notice and Draft CD was also posted on the Refuge website.

DETERMINATION (CHECK ONE BELOW):

____ USE IS NOT COMPATIBLE

_X_ USE IS COMPATIBLE WITH FOLLOWING STIPULATIONS

STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:

A specified time limit to cut/collect firewood is clearly stated on each special use permit (normally 14 days).

- All wood removed must be for personal (non-commercial) use only.
- Only tops or downed trees in designated areas may be removed.
- Vehicles may be driven off of designated roads and trails to remove firewood only with site specific authorization by the refuge manager (vegetation and ground conditions present at any given time/place will determine appropriateness so as to minimize any rutting or forest vegetation damage).
- Wood may be removed during daytime hours only.
- All refuge regulations apply and will be strictly enforced.
- Failure to comply with any condition of the special use permit may result in immediate revocation, prosecution and fine, and be cause for refusal of future refuge permits.
- All debris must be removed from roads, road shoulders, and ditches. Permittee may place debris inside the tree line directly adjacent to the road/trail right-of-way if not collected.
- Maximum volume removed without charge will be three cords per permittee per year.

JUSTIFICATION:

Properly regulated firewood cutting and removal allows the use of a renewable natural resource. It can potentially assist staff with maintaining visitor access and can result in positive public relations for the refuge. Impacts to refuge resources are neither negligible nor is there the potential for developing a use activity which could lead to long-term impacts given the stipulations listed above.

Firewood cutting provides fuel for a small number of local citizens and often removes trees from along roads helping to maintain safe conditions for visitors, thus it indirectly supports the Refuge’s legislated recreation purpose.
NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision: Place an X in appropriate space.

__X__ Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Statement

___ Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Statement

___ Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

___ Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

This compatibility determination can be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis under 40 CFR §1508.4, and the following DOI and/or FWS Categorical Exclusions:

516 DM 8, 8.5 (7) Minor changes in the amounts or types of public use on Service or State-managed lands, in accordance with existing regulations, management plans, and procedures.

Further, the actions do not trigger an extraordinary circumstance as outlined under 43 CFR §46.215. The firewood cutting/removal use is consistent with the 2010 Comprehensive Conservation Plan and associated Environmental Assessment (USFWS 2010) and Finding of No Significant Impact (USFWS 2010) for the Refuge. Environmental conditions and firewood cutting/removal have not changed substantially since that analysis. This compatibility determination updates and replaces the 2010 compatibility determination for firewood cutting and removal.

LITERATURE CITED:

Approval of Compatibility Determination:

Refuge Manager/Project Leader
Felsenthal NWR  
Signature  Date

Refuge Supervisor
Area 1, Southeast Region  
Signature  Date

Regional Compatibility Coordinator, Southeast Region  
Signature  Date

David Viker,
Regional Refuge Chief
National Wildlife Refuge System
South Atlantic-Gulf and Mississippi Basin Regions  
Signature  Date

Mandatory 10/15 year Reevaluation Date: