

# News Release

## *National Wildlife Refuge System*



### **Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge**

La Crosse District  
N5727 County Road Z  
Onalaska, WI 54650

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
September 17, 2015

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### **Draft Environmental Assessment for Root River Tract Habitat Project Available for Public Review and Comment**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced the release of an environmental assessment that evaluates a proposed habitat restoration/enhancement project. The project is located on the Root River Tract, an 825-acre block of land along the Root River east of Highway 26 in Houston County, Minn.

The Root River Tract is managed by the Service as part of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Refuge).

Four alternatives were evaluated in the environmental assessment. Each alternative addresses habitat enhancement and restoration activities, habitat management activities, and wildlife-dependent recreation. Alternatives include “no action” (Alternative A), implement passive drainage improvements (Alternative B), implement active drainage improvements (Alternative C), and the proposed action – restore natural topography and drainage patterns (Alternative D).

Under each of the four alternatives, the Root River Tract would remain open to all current public uses authorized on the Refuge.

Expanding the existing 695-acre Root River Slow-No Wake Area to 1,634 acres is proposed under Alternatives B and D. Most of the Root River Tract would be included in the expanded slow-no wake area.

Funding for activities that enhance or restore habitat on the tract is being provided by Minnesota’s Outdoor Heritage Fund, created under the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment, and the Service.

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When privately owned, much of the Root River Tract was managed as a shooting preserve, complete with a system of large wetland impoundments. Water levels in the impoundments were manipulated through the use of a pump and water control structures to provide habitat for waterfowl. The dikes, ditches, and water control structures required to support this water management system have been largely unused for many years and are now in poor, or failing, condition.

Copies of the environmental assessment are available on the Refuge's website at [http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Upper Mississippi River/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Upper_Mississippi_River/) or by contacting the La Crosse District Office at (608) 779-2399. Hard copies will be available for review at the La Crosse District Visitor Center located at N5727 County Road Z, Onalaska, Wisconsin or La Crescent Public Library located at 321 Main Street, La Crescent, Minnesota 55947.

Written comments will be accepted through Friday, October 30, 2015. Comments should be addressed to Tim Miller, La Crosse District Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, N5727 County Road Z, Onalaska, Wisconsin, 54650. Comments can also be emailed to: [Tim\\_A\\_Miller@fws.gov](mailto:Tim_A_Miller@fws.gov)

A public meeting to discuss the project is scheduled for Wednesday, October 21, 2015 in the meeting room at the fire station in Hokah, Minn. The meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m. with an open house followed by presentations beginning at 6:30 p.m. The fire station is located at 9 Mill Street. Written comments will also be accepted at the meeting.

For more information, contact the Refuge's La Crosse District Office at (608) 779-2399.

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*The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is the most visited refuge in the United States. The refuge extends 261 miles along the Upper Mississippi River from Wabasha, Minn. to Rock Island, Ill., protecting and preserving habitat for migratory birds, fish, and a variety of other wildlife. This 240,000 acre refuge was established in 1924.*

*In addition to being the most visited refuge in the country, the "Upper Miss" Refuge has the added complexity of a major navigation system, including 11 locks and dams, within its boundary. It is also a world-class fish and wildlife area which harbors 306 species of birds; 119 species of fish; more than 300 active bald eagle nests; thousands of heron and egret nests; spectacular concentrations of canvasback ducks, tundra swans, and white pelicans; and several threatened or endangered species*