

COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

Use: Farming

Refuge Name: Great River National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):

Refuge Established: August 1, 1958

Refuge Authorities: 16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act); 16 U.S.C. § 664 (Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act); 16 U.S.C. § 460K-1 (Refuge Recreation Act); 16 U.S.C. § 460K-2 (Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. § 460K-4), as amended); 16 U.S.C. § 3901b, 100 Stat. 3583 (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act, 1986); 16 U.S.C. § 668dd(a)(2) (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act)

Refuge Purpose(s):

“...for uses as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds.” 16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)

“...shall be administered by him [Secretary of 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 Conservation Act)

“...suitable for – (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreation 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)

“...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-4), as amended)

“...the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits that provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions...” 16 U.S.C. § 3901b, 100 Stat. 3583 (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act, 1986)

“...conservation, management, and...restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats...for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans...” 16 U.S.C. § 668dd(a)(2) (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act)

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? Conventional agricultural activities (i.e. row cropping) will be used as a habitat management tool to assist in meeting refuge purposes. Through the use of Special Use Permits, farming will be used to remove encroaching woody vegetation and other undesirable plant species (i.e. noxious and/or invasive species).

Where is the use conducted? Farming will be allowed on Delair Division of Great River National Wildlife Refuge.

When is the use conducted? Seasonally, the use will be conducted during the growing season, typically between April and November of each year.

How is the use conducted? Farming will be conducted by cooperative farmers through a Special Use Permit. Specific terms and conditions will be outlined and consistent with Region 3 guidance. The use of genetically modified crops, and neonicotinoid treated seeds will not be permitted. The cooperative farmer will provide all necessary inputs to fulfill the obligations of the permitted activity.

Why is the use being proposed? This is an existing economic use that is beneficial to remove noxious and invasive vegetation for habitat enhancement.

This Compatibility Determination updates and supersedes the Compatibility Determination developed concurrently with the refuge’s Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and authorized in 2004.

Availability of Resources: Funds have been available to maintain existing program level. Since the program is being greatly reduced additional funds or staff are not necessary to conduct farm program activities. However, the managed habitats that replace coop farming will require a

greater degree of staff and fiscal resources to replace the values associated with the farm program.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use: Little or no erosion or degradation of the environment is expected to take place; the areas available for farming are flat fields and moist soil units with little gradient. Vegetation growth will be enhanced by farming operations and provide quality fee/cover for a variety of wildlife. All farming field operations will be timed so as to minimize disturbance to wildlife species, especially the nesting bald eagles, and to other forms of public use, such as wildlife viewing/photography, tours, etc.

Public Review and Comment:

Determination:

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility: The following stipulations are required to ensure compatibility:

1. Farming must meet specific habitat objectives and contribute to the purposes of the refuge.
2. Cooperative farmers will be subject to Service policy and regulations regarding use of chemicals. Herbicide and pesticide use will be restricted by type and amount applied.
3. The use of genetically modified crops will not be permitted.
4. The use of neonicotinoid treated seed will not be permitted.
5. Special use permits will outline specific refuge/regional guidance.

Justification: Use is in compliance with the Mark Twain NWR Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plan, contributes to the achievement of the purposes of the Great River NWR and furthers the goals and mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Farming is a vital and cost-effective management tool that efficiently controls succession and promotes desirable plant growth in moist soil units, controls succession, and prepares sites for further habitat restoration, such as reforestation.

The activity of farming on portions of the refuge has resulted in no adverse effects to other refuge programs of wildlife populations. Appropriate signing and, at times, the complete closure of the refuge unit to all entry, will prevent disturbance to or disruption of activities/programs/populations.

