

COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

Use: Hunting of Migratory Birds and Resident Game

Refuge Name: Great River National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):

Refuge – Date 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)

FSA Fee Title Transfer Properties – Authority: 7 U.S.C. § 2002 (Consolidated Farm and Rural Development 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 Coordination 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

“...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: This Compatibility Determination updates and supercedes the Compatibility Determination developed concurrently with the refuge’s Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and authorized in 2004. This Compatibility Determination will allow public hunting for wildlife on Great River National Wildlife Refuge lands.

The Service is opening fee title land transferred from the Farm Service Agency to hunting; restricting hunting on certain lands for safety reasons and/or restrictions outlined in purchase agreements; and looking for opportunities to broaden Refuge-specific special hunts.

Hunting season dates, bag limits and harvest methods will be consistent with Illinois and Missouri state hunting seasons and regulations on all game species, unless more restrictive refuge regulations apply or management of the specific area requires a special hunt outside of state seasons and regulations.

Illinois and Missouri state seasons and limits would apply for all Refuge specified species on designated areas of the Refuge.

Those game species are as follows (species may vary depending on individual state regulations):

- A. Migratory Game Birds: waterfowl (i.e., geese and ducks), coot, rails (Sora and Virginia), woodcock, common snipe, dove (mourning, Eurasian collared and white-winged), and crow
- B. Upland Game: ring-necked pheasant, gray partridge, Northern bobwhite quail, gray and fox squirrel, rabbit (cottontail and swamp), woodchuck, raccoon, opossum, gray and red fox, coyote, bobcat, badger and striped skunk
- C. Big Game: white-tailed deer and turkey

Certain Refuge units and parts of units would be open only to restricted hunts. A restricted hunt is restricted to certain hunting methods. These restricted hunts will correspond to the state season but will restrict the number of hunters and types of weapons used.

These restricted hunts will primarily be used to improve safety and ensure a high quality recreational experience for hunters and adjacent property owners and users. Additional restricted hunts may be used to better manage game species. Future Refuge land acquisition restricted hunts will not be determined under this Hunting Plan.

Hunting activities allowed on specific Refuge units:

Fox Island Division

- Migratory Birds
 - Closed to hunting migratory birds.
- Upland game
 - Refuge is closed to upland game hunting from October 16 through December 31.
 - Outside of the specified dates, upland game hunting is allowed in accordance with State seasons and regulations.
 - Refuge is only open from one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.
 - Only non-toxic shot allowed when using shotgun.
- Big Game (Deer and Turkey)
 - Open to hunting deer during the statewide archery deer and special state-managed hunts.
 - Open to turkey hunting during state spring season, including youth season, and the fall archery season only.
 - Only non-toxic shot is allowed for turkey hunting.

Long Island Division

- Migratory Birds
 - Open to migratory bird hunting during state seasons in accordance with state and federal regulations.
 - Waterfowl hunting is allowed only from blinds constructed on sites posted by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.
 - Only non-toxic shot allowed.
- Upland game
 - Open to upland game hunting is allowed in accordance with State seasons and regulations.
 - Refuge is only open from one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.
 - Only non-toxic shot allowed when using shotgun.
- Big Game (Deer and Turkey)
 - Open to deer hunting in accordance with State seasons and regulations.
 - Open to turkey hunting in accordance with state seasons and regulations
 - Only non-toxic shot allowed for turkey.

Delair Division

- Migratory Birds
 - Closed to hunting migratory birds.
- Upland game
 - Closed to hunting upland game.
- Big Game (Deer and Turkey)
 - Open only to special state-managed deer hunts.
 - Closed to turkey hunting.

FSA Lands

Cherry Box Unit

- Migratory Birds
 - Closed to hunting migratory birds.
- Upland Game
 - Open to upland game hunting with shotgun only in accordance with state seasons and regulations.
 - Refuge is only open from one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.
 - Only non-toxic shot allowed.
- Big Game (Deer and Turkey)
 - Open to archery deer hunting only in accordance with state seasons and regulations.
 - Open to turkey during the state spring season, including youth season, and the fall archery seasons only.
 - Only non-toxic shot allowed for turkey.

Hickory Creek Unit

- Migratory Birds
 - Closed to hunting migratory birds.
- Upland Game
 - Open to upland game hunting with shotgun only in accordance with state seasons and regulations.
 - Refuge is only open from one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.
 - Only non-toxic shot allowed.
- Big Game (Deer and Turkey)
 - Open to archery deer hunting only in accordance with state seasons and regulations.
 - Open to the state spring season, including youth season, and the fall archery seasons only.
 - Only non-toxic shot allowed for turkey.

Canton Unit

- Closed to hunting.

A high priority for the Refuge is to provide compatible wildlife-dependent public uses such as hunting. Providing access for youth and persons with disabilities to Refuge programs and facilities is another high priority. Accommodating individuals with disabilities typically entails granting exemptions to Refuge regulations for the purpose of enabling those persons to engage in compatible activities on the Refuge. The most common type of exemption given will be authorizations of limited duration which allow the use of motorized vehicles on existing roads and trails.

Availability of Resources:

The hunting program is designed to be administered by utilizing existing refuge resources. At the present level of hunting use there are adequate refuge resources to implement the hunting program. Law enforcement is the primary tool necessary to ensure proper and safe administration of this use. Great River NWR has one full-time Land Management Law Enforcement Officer, whose salary is funded through the annual Refuge budget. Additionally, the local State Conservation Officers and County Sheriff's Office provide additional assistance when requested.

Hunters use the existing network of roads to access areas open to hunting. Parking lots, restrooms, leaflets, and signs are provided by the refuge for use by hunters. The refuge also provides staff and volunteers to maintain these facilities and disseminate information to hunters.

Additional expenses include boundary posting and other signage, maintenance of parking lots and gates, and other hunting specific activities.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Staff monitors species population and harvest trends with assistance from the Missouri Department of Conservation and Illinois Department of Natural Resources to ensure that target species can be hunted at the refuge without appreciably adversely affecting populations. These monitoring activities include direct observation, consultation with State and Service species specialists, and review of current species survey information and research. Recent assessments of species hunted in the vicinity of the Refuge indicate that those species are not facing a general decline. For waterfowl, the annual assessments are based upon the distribution, abundance, and flight corridors of migratory birds. Hunting seasons, including dates, bag limits and methods are determined by the Federal Framework, Flyway Council recommendations and the State of Illinois and Missouri. Each state manages resident game across broad landscapes and allows harvest of annual surpluses through recreational hunting. Although hunting causes mortality and temporary disturbance to waterfowl and other wildlife, harvesting populations within the carrying capacity of existing habitat insures long-term health and survival of the species.

The Refuge restricts or excludes hunting activities on portions of certain Refuge units. Relatively small areas of the Refuge are not hunted due to safety concerns. Special managed hunts could be used to manage hunting pressure and overall harvest at appropriate levels should future conditions warrant. Special managed hunts will be allowed on Delair and Fox Island Divisions of Great River NWR. Conditions that might precipitate discussion for the need to employ additional managed hunts include but are not limited to changes in game species populations or distribution, increased participation leading to safety or quality of experience concerns, or public requests for additional recreational activity.

The Refuge is open during the hunting season to other priority public uses such as fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation. In

order to safely provide both hunting and non-hunting recreational uses, the Refuge enforces a series of Refuge-specific hunting regulations. Hunting is restricted on certain units or portions of units to provide for public safety. On units that do support hunting, hunters may be restricted to specific types of hunting devices or hunting locations to minimize risk to the public in high public use areas or areas with concentrations of private residences nearby.

Refuge management activities can be accomplished without conflict with hunting activities through the use of administratively closed areas, timing of hunts, and methods of hunt.

Public Review and Comment:

The Service solicited public comments for a Draft 2014 Hunting Chapter of the Visitor Services Plan for Great River National Wildlife Refuge and its supporting draft Environmental Assessment that described the hunting activities in this Compatibility Determination. A 30-day review period began August 18, 2014 through September 18, 2014. In addition, the draft Compatibility Determination was out for a 14-day public review beginning September 4, 2014 through September 18, 2014. Copies of the documents were posted on the Refuge website and were available upon request. News releases announcing the availability of the documents for review were sent to numerous local media outlets, post offices and libraries. Letters were sent to other federal and state agencies and state and local officials.

Determination:

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. All applicable State and Federal Regulations will apply.
2. Hunting is allowed on most of the refuge. Restrictions apply only in designated areas.
3. For authorized hunting activities, the refuge is open one-half hour before legal shooting time to one-half hour after legal shooting time.
4. Archery and firearms are allowed for hunting on designated areas of the Refuge.
5. Refuge specific authorization is required for all special hunts.
6. All personal property must be removed at the end of each day. Exceptions are made for stands, provided they meet all regulations for marking, removal and attachment to trees.
7. No motorized vehicles are allowed within the hunting units except at designated parking areas and roads or by Special Use Permit.

Justification:

In view of the above and with the stipulations previously described, hunting will not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes of the refuge or the mission of the Refuge System.

Hunting seasons and bag limits are established by the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and are generally adopted by the refuge. These restrictions ensure the continued well-being of overall populations of game animals. Hunting does result in the taking of many individuals within the overall population, but restrictions are designed to safeguard and maintain adequate breeding populations from year to year. Specific refuge regulations address equity and quality of opportunity for hunters, and help safeguard refuge habitat. Disturbance to other fish and wildlife does occur, but this disturbance is generally short-term and adequate habitat occurs in adjacent areas.

The special state-managed deer hunts contribute to the removal of a portion of the deer herd and will help control the population at a level to ensure habitat protection from over-browsing and maintain the health of the herd. The deer herd is studied regularly through survey methods and to not continue with current harvest rates may cause appreciable damage to refuge habitat. The existing deer population can support the removal of deer by hunting and still maintain the herd stability and provide a recreational opportunity.

Conflicts between hunters are localized and are addressed through law enforcement and continuous review and updating to State and refuge hunting regulations. Conflicts between other various user groups are minor given the season of the year for hunting, and the location of most hunting. Currently hunters, bird watchers, wildlife observers, hikers, anglers, and photographers can equally enjoy recreational activities in a safe manner.

The stipulations listed above will ensure proper control of the means of use and provide management flexibility should detrimental impacts develop. Allowing this use also furthers the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System by providing renewable resources for the benefit of the American public while conserving fish, wildlife, and plant resource on the refuge.

Signature: _____
Jason Wilson, Refuge Manager (Signature and Date)

Concurrence: _____
Charles W. Blair, Regional Chief (Signature and Date)

Mandatory 15-year Re-evaluation Date: August 2029

Compatibility Determination

Regional Office Review Documentation and Routing Slip

Compatibility Determination forms, and appropriate NEPA documentation, are completed by the Project Leader in accordance with policy and following suitable public review and comment. Project Leader will sign the compatibility determination.

Are CDs part of a CCP? Yes No X

Route to	Title	Responsibility	surname/date
1	Refuge Historic Preservation Officer:	Reviews for NEPA compliance, cultural resource protection issues, and completeness of documentation.	
2	Chief, Visitor Services and Outreach:	Reviews for consistency with public use policies, and consistency with station public use management plans. Alerts Supervisor if precedent setting.	
3	Regional Refuge Biologist:	Reviews for biological soundness and consistency with principles of fish and wildlife management, and consistency with station habitat and wildlife management plans.	
4	Refuge Supervisor:	Reviews for overall consistency with Refuge Purpose, Mission, Goals and Objectives, and for overall clarity of reasoning and sound professional judgment.	
5	Division of Conservation Planning	If draft CDs are part of a draft CCP, hold signed CDs; then forward them with the final CCP to the Regional Chief.	
6	Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System:	Reviews for overall compatibility with Refuge System Mission, Regional consistency, and adherence to Service Policies. Alerts Regional Director to sensitive or potentially controversial decisions.	Signs CD
Last	Regional Historic Preservation Officer:	Signed original is returned to field station. Copy is filed with RFO files.	Files copy of CD

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