

COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

Use: Grazing (controlled)

Refuge Name: Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Refuge).

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities: The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge was established by Public Law No. 268, 68th Congress on June 7, 1924. This act authorized acquisition of lands for Refuge Purposes. Additional lands acquired in fee title by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers are managed as part of the Refuge under a 1963 Cooperative Agreement between the Department of the Army and Department of the Interior.

Refuge Purpose(s): The Refuge shall be established and maintained (a) as a refuge and breeding place for migratory birds included in the terms of the convention between the United States and Great Britain for the protection of migratory birds, concluded August 16, 1916, and (b) to such extent as the Secretary of the Interior by regulations, prescribed, as a refuge and breeding place for other wild birds, game animals, fur-bearing animals, and for the conservation of wild flowers and aquatic plants, and (c) to such extent as the Secretary of the Interior may, by regulations, prescribe a refuge and breeding place for fish and other aquatic animal life.

National Wildlife System Mission: The National Wildlife Refuge System mission is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee).

Goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System:

- a. To fulfill our statutory duty to achieve refuge purpose(s) and further the System mission.
- b. Conserve, restore where appropriate, and enhance all species of fish, wildlife, and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
- c. Perpetuate migratory bird, interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations.
- d. Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants.
- e. Conserve and restore, where appropriate, representative ecosystems of the United States, including the ecological processes characteristic of those ecosystems.
- f. To foster understanding and instill appreciation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their conservation, by providing the public with safe, high-quality, and compatible wildlife-dependent public use. Such use includes hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

Description of Use:

What is the use? The Refuge will allow limited grazing by privately owned domestic livestock for the purpose of habitat management. For the purposes of this document, grazing is considered the removal of vegetation, including grasses, forbs, and woody plants from a given area by domestic livestock. Domestic livestock that could be utilized include, but may not be limited to,

cattle, horses, goats, and sheep. Grazing will occur on specified areas to improve or maintain grassland and wet meadow habitat. For example, grazing may be used to stimulate growth of desirable grass species, reduce woody vegetation or other undesirable invasive plant species.

Where is the use conducted? Grazing would be conducted by third parties primarily on grassland/wet meadow habitat types on the Refuge. There are approximately 4,072 grassland acres and 9,081 wet meadow acres on the Refuge, however not all of these acres are suitable for grazing use as a management tool. We anticipate that approximately 2,000 acres annually will be grazed on the Refuge. The largest area on which grazing may be used as a grassland management tool is in the Lost Mound Unit of the Savanna District.

When is the use conducted? The time period and frequency of grazing will depend on the desired outcome as established in unit grazing management plans. Short duration grazing strategies may be most appropriate in some instances whereas longer-duration grazing strategies may be most appropriate in other instances as determined by management objectives. Similarly, management objectives will determine whether grazing occurs during the dormant season, or in the early, middle, or late growing season, or during the entire growing season.

How is the use conducted? Grazing permittees are selected through the process outlined in the Region 3 Grazing and Haying Program Guidance (2014) by one of the following methods:

1. Competitive Bid Process
2. Lottery Process
3. Priority System

Once selected, permittees are allowed to graze the designated management unit for the specified time period (Competitive Bid Process). If the permittee is selected based on the Lottery or Priority System, the Refuge Manager, in consultation with area U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) specialists or reports will determine the appropriate market value of the grazing use. Grazing fees will be assessed using the Animal Unit Month (AUM) method. Permittees notify the Refuge Manager of the date, number, sex and age of animals when they are moved into and out of the grazing unit. These dates are used to calculate the total grazing bill. Some units may have deductions for special circumstances such as special fencing or water requirements. These deductions will be identified up front in any of the selection processes.

Grazing use will be administered in compliance with the Region 3 Grazing and Haying Program Guidance (2014) and the Region 3 Pollinator Guidance for Grassland Management Activities.

Why is the use being proposed? Refuge grassland habitat may be managed using various tools including grazing to achieve desired plant community composition and structure for wildlife use. Grazing may be used as a management tool: to manage and control undesirable grasses and forbs (exotic or invasive plants), provide a competitive advantage to desired grasses and forbs, remove accumulated plant biomass, reduce woody vegetation encroachment, provide a desired vegetative structure and condition (such as short grass for goose browse), reduce fuel loading and wildfire risks near urban environments, or prepare sites for future habitat restoration including forestry work, prairie seeding, and wetland communities.

Availability of Resources: The needed staff time for development and administration of grazing programs is available. Most of the needed work to prepare for this use would be done as part of routine management duties. The decision to use grazing as a management tool would occur as part of strategies developed under specific habitat management plans. The additional time needed to coordinate issuance and oversight of the needed Special Use Permit or Agreements is relatively minor and within existing Refuge resources. Most grazing costs (fencing, monitoring herd health, etc.) are assumed by the permittee.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use: Grazing by domestic livestock has severe short-term effects on grassland communities. Many of these effects are desirable and are designed to maintain and improve grassland/wet meadow communities and habitats. Some of these effects include removing standing vegetation, trampling of other vegetation, and reducing populations of pioneering woody plants. Other effects, such as areas where livestock may frequently concentrate, are more harmful but generally short-lived. Grazing in the spring can cause direct loss of grassland bird nests due to trampling and loss of standing vegetation. Grazing at any time of year creates an aesthetic issue of concern for some people who enjoy using the Refuge; seeing public land being grazed by domestic livestock reduces the appeal of the visit for many people.

Grazing livestock can create minor direct disturbance of wildlife, such as causing nearby birds to take flight. There is a slight potential for conflict between members of the public and livestock or the permittee.

Grazing will be in compliance with the Region 3 Pollinator Guidance (2015) and Region 3 Grazing and Haying Guidance (2014), ensuring the needs of nesting birds, and pollinators are appropriately considered when grazing management plans are written and executed.

Public Review and Comment: This Compatibility Determination is a re-evaluation of an existing determination which was included in the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released May 1, 2005 for a 120-day comment period. It was also available during a subsequent 90-day review period on a supplement to the EIS released December 3, 2005. Public notification included notices in the Federal Register, media announcements, and 31 public meetings and workshops attended by more than 3,700 persons. No comments specific to this use or determination were received.

A draft of this re-evaluation was released on August 5, 2016 for a 30-day comment period. Public notification of the availability of this CD included media announcements and posting on the Refuge's website. No comments specific to the draft re-evaluation were received.

Determination:

Use is not compatible.

Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. Grazing must meet specific habitat and related wildlife objectives and contribute to the purposes of the Refuge.
2. Grazing will not occur more frequently than three out of every five years on any individual tract unless there is a specific management objective identified in an approved plan or otherwise approved by the Area Supervisor.
3. A goal of 30-50% of similar habitat type in the management unit or adjacent areas will be left un-grazed when feasible to serve as refugia for pollinators and other wildlife.
4. Consider the needs of pollinators and other wildlife when placing range improvements on the landscapes, such as salt/mineral blocks, watering tanks and holding corals.
5. All fencing, water supply and other livestock management costs will be borne by the permittee.
6. The application and use of insecticides or other pesticides on Refuge lands will be minimized.
7. An approved pesticide use proposal (PUP) is required for every pesticide applied on refuge lands. The PUP must be provided to the permittee prior to application.
8. The Refuge Manager may require a permittee to provide notification prior to all pesticide applications.
9. Permittee(s) must report pesticide use(s) to the Refuge Manager.
10. Livestock vaccines do not require a Pesticide Use Proposal (PUP).
11. No supplemental feeding will be allowed.
12. Refuge Grazing Program must be administered using the Region 3 Grazing and Haying Guidance (2014).

Justification: Grazing can be an effective technique for providing short- and long-term habitat improvements to grasslands and wet-meadows, and a useful alternative to haying or prescribed fire in certain circumstances.

Permitting grazing on the Refuge will not materially interfere or detract from fulfilling the mission of the Refuge System or the purposes of the Refuge because:

1. Grazing will be conducted in accordance with a Habitat Management Plan and unit-specific grazing management plans which will identify management units, desired habitat goals/objectives, and management strategies. Grazing will be administered in compliance with the Region 3 Grazing and Haying Guidance (2014) and the Region 3

