

Compatibility Determination

Use: Hunting

Refuge Name: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended by Public Law 93-271,

Refuge Purposes:

... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ... 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

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: Allow refuge visitors to hunt certain wildlife species.

Is the use a priority public use?

Hunting is a priority public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Hunting was originally opened on Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR in the 2003-2004 season and is conducted in accordance with the Refuge Hunting Plan (2011 and 2014).

Where would the use be conducted?

The hunting of certain species is an existing use that occurs on designated areas of the Refuge. Hunting is allowed on most fee title units of the refuge. The Service does not administer or regulate hunting on the conservation easements that are part of the refuge. The easements are privately owned lands and hunting activities are administered by the landowners. This CD also includes the following fee title addition:

Hoffman Tract: This 80-acre tract in Pope County, Minnesota was previously owned by The Nature Conservancy who donated the tract to the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 2016. Now owned by the Service, this tract would be open to hunting according to Federal, State and refuge specific regulations for all species specified in the Compatibility Determination.

When would the use be conducted?

Season dates for authorized species are consistent with Minnesota State regulations, except when more restrictive Refuge regulations apply. Specific dates for hunting seasons vary annually. The following table shows the dates (currently available) for the 2016-2017 season.

2016-2017 Minnesota Hunting Seasons	
09/19/15 - 02/29/16	Small Game - Rabbits, Squirrels season
10/17/15 - 03/15/16	Raccoon, Red Fox, Gray Fox, Badger, Opossum (North) Hunting & Trapping
10/24/15 - 03/15/16	Raccoon, Red Fox, Gray Fox, Badger, Opossum (South) Hunting & Trapping
01/01/16 - 01/15/16	Crow Hunting (1st season)
03/01/16 - 04/30/16	Goose-Spring Light Goose conservation action
03/01/16 - 03/31/16	Crow Hunting (2nd season)
04/13/16 - 04/19/16	SpringTurkey "A" season
04/20/16 - 04/26/16	SpringTurkey "B" season
04/27/16 - 05/03/16	SpringTurkey "C" season
05/04/16 - 05/10/16	SpringTurkey "D" season
05/11/16 - 05/17/16	SpringTurkey "E" season
05/18/16 - 05/31/16	SpringTurkey "F" season
08/06/16 - 08/22/16	August Canada Goose Management Action Hunts
09/01/16 - 11/07/16	Snipe and Rail Hunting season
09/01/16 - 10/15/16	Bear season
09/01/16 - 11/09/16	Mourning Dove season
09/01/16 - 10/31/16	Crow Hunting (3rd season)
09/03/16 - 09/22/16	Early Canada Goose season
09/10/16 - 10/16/16	Sandhill Crane season-NW zone-Tentative
09/17/16 - 12/31/16	Deer Hunt - Archery season
09/17/16 - 01/01/17	Ruffed and Spruce Grouse, Hungarian Partridge season
09/17/16 - 11/30/16	Sharptailed Grouse season
09/17/16 - 02/28/17	Small Game - Rabbits, Squirrels season
09/24/16 - 11/07/16	Woodcock season
09/24/16 - 10/02/16	Prairie Chicken season
09/24/16 - 09/25/16	Take-a-Kid Hunting weekend
10/01/16 - 10/30/16	Fall Turkey season
10/15/16 - 01/01/17	Pheasant season
10/15/16 - 03/15/17	Raccoon, Red Fox, Gray Fox, Badger, Opossum (North) Hunting & Trapping
10/20/16 - 10/23/16	Deer Hunt - Special Youth Deer season
10/22/16 - 03/15/17	Raccoon, Red Fox, Gray Fox, Badger, Opossum (South) Hunting & Trapping
11/05/16 - 11/20/16	Deer Hunt - Firearm season - 1A
11/05/16 - 11/13/16	Deer Hunt - Firearm season - 2A and 3A

11/19/16 - 11/27/16	Deer Hunt - Firearm season - 3B
11/26/16 - 12/11/16	Deer Hunt - Muzzleloader season
11/26/16 - 11/30/16	Fisher and Pine Marten-north of I-94 and US Hwy 10 only
11/26/16 - 01/08/17	Bobcat - Hunting & Trapping-north of I-94 and US Hwy 10 only
12/15/16 - 12/31/16	Crow Hunting (4th season)

* These seasons and dates were acquired from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website. All hunting seasons (i.e., waterfowl) may have not been published at this time. Season dates for authorized species are consistent with Minnesota State regulations, except when more restrictive Refuge regulations apply. Specific dates for hunting seasons vary annually.

How would the use be conducted?

Bag limits and harvest methods for authorized species are consistent with Minnesota regulations, except when more restrictive Refuge regulations apply. Hunting is allowed for the species listed in the table below.

Table 3: Hunted Species by State

Species Hunted	Minnesota
White-tailed deer	X
Bear	X
Elk	X
Wild Turkey	X
Ring-necked pheasant	X
Gray (Hungarian) partridge	X
Ruffed grouse	X
Spruce grouse	X
Sharp-tailed grouse	X
Prairie chicken	X
Bobwhite quail	
Cottontail rabbit	X
Jack rabbit	X
Snowshoe hare	X
Squirrel (fox and gray)	X
Groundhog	
Raccoon	X
Opossum	X
Fox (red and gray)	X
Badger	X
Coyote	X
Striped skunk	X
Bobcat	X
Crow	X
Ducks/geese/merganser	X
Common Moorhen (Gallinule)	X
Coots	X
Rails (Virginia and sora)	X
Common snipe	X
Woodcock	X
Mourning Dove	X
Sandhill Crane	X

Why is this use being proposed?

Hunting is a priority general public use of the Refuge System that is also an important wildlife management tool. The Service recognizes hunting as a healthy, traditional outdoor pastime, deeply rooted in the American heritage (USFWS 2006). Hunting can instill a unique understanding and appreciation of wildlife, their behavior, and their habitat needs. Hunting programs can promote understanding and appreciation of natural resources and their management on lands and waters in the Refuge System. Public hunting opportunities are also available nearby on federal Waterfowl Production Areas and Wildlife Management Areas administered by the Minnesota Departments of Natural Resources (MNDNR).

Availability of Resources:**What resources are needed to properly (considering quality and compatibility) and safely administer use?**

The present Refuge hunting program is designed to be administered with minimal Refuge resources. Refuge regulations mirror State regulations in large part which allows the MNDNR Conservation Officers to assist in law enforcement. There is a small amount of road maintenance, mowing, and other upkeep performed that is funded as part of regular Refuge management activities.

Are existing refuge resources adequate to properly and safely administer the use?

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. Law enforcement services are available through the Regional Law Enforcement Program and Refuge Officers stationed at other refuges and Wetland Management District Offices located near these units. Additionally, the local State Conservation Officers and County Sheriff's Office provide additional assistance when requested.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:**How does hunting affect Refuge purposes and the NWRS mission?**

The Refuge was established to conserve, manage, maintain and protect wildlife resources and their habitat. Hunting does not adversely affect the ability of the Refuge to fulfill this purpose. National Wildlife Refuges are managed first and foremost for wildlife (USFWS 2001). But the focus is on wildlife populations not individuals (USFWS 1992). Hunting causes mortality and wounding of individual animals, but is regulated so it does not threaten the perpetuation of wildlife populations. The effects of hunting on wildlife populations are monitored within the State and across the nation and are considered in setting annual hunting bag limits. Hunting is a priority public use of the Refuge System and allowing hunting on the Refuge helps fulfill the System mission.

How does hunting affect Fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats; and the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge/NWRS?

Resident Game Species

Minnesota DNR annually reviews hunting seasons and bag limits and modifies them to avoid any long-term population declines. Hunting is not expected to adversely impact game populations.

Disturbance

In *Managing Visitor Use and Disturbance of Waterbirds: A Literature Review of Impacts and Mitigations* DeLong (2002) includes a summary of effects on wildlife from disturbance from hunting and other forms of recreation. The author documents that disturbance can alter behavior (e.g. foraging time), population structure, and distribution patterns of wildlife. It is probable that hunting would cause some or all of these effects to some degree on Refuge wildlife. A number of measures mitigate these effects, including closing an area to hunting if conflicts cannot be mitigated. Hunting seasons occur outside the times when most wildlife species are raising offspring and are most sensitive to disturbance. Motor vehicle use is limited to designated road and parking areas that were designed in a manner that effectively reduces disturbance to wildlife. Hunting activity is fairly small due to the limited acreage associated with this refuge. Although hunting pressure may increase slightly over time, it is expected that wildlife disturbance will remain at acceptable levels.

Habitat

Hunting is not expected to adversely affect Refuge habitat.

Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health

Hunting conducted in accordance with State and Federal regulations is not expected to adversely affect wildlife populations that occur on the Refuge and likely assists in maintaining the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge. Some species, such as white-tailed deer, today occur at levels well above those thought to occur under historic conditions. Left unchecked high numbers of such species could adversely affect biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health. Hunting is a closely monitored tool that helps regulate wildlife populations.

Other Uses and Public Safety

Hunting is not expected to adversely affect other Refuge uses or public safety. Dogs are permitted for hunting for retrieving and trailing. At present levels of use dogs used for these purposes are not expected to adversely impact non-target species or conflict with other uses. If public use levels on Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR expand across time, unanticipated conflicts between user groups may occur. The Refuge's Visitor Services programs would be adjusted as needed to eliminate or minimize each problem and provide quality wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities which includes promoting public safety. Experience on many National Wildlife Refuges has proven that time and space zoning (e.g., establishment of separate use areas, use periods, and restrictions on the number of users) is an effective tool in eliminating conflicts between user groups. Overall, the cumulative impacts of hunting on other wildlife-dependent recreation or public safety at Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR are expected to be minor.

Public Review and Comment:

This CD was made available for public notification and review from August 1, 2016 - August, 17 2016. No comments were received.

Determination:

Hunting

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. Hunting must be conducted according to State, Federal, and Refuge specific regulations.
2. Hunting may be more restrictive than State seasons and regulations to ensure compliance with visitor safety and to reduce wildlife disturbance.
3. Hunting is prohibited within identified areas.
4. Motor vehicles access is limited to designated roads and parking areas.
5. The use of snowmobiles and all terrain and utility terrain vehicles (ATV/UTV) is prohibited.

Justification:

In view of the above and with the stipulations previously described, hunting on Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR tracts will not materially interfere with or detract from the NWRS mission or purposes of the Refuge. Given the nature of these lands, disturbance of migratory birds, upland and small and big game, and resident wildlife will be similar as what occurs on the surrounding state Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and federal Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs). The harvest of Refuge wildlife species will be in accordance with Federal regulations and Minnesota state limits. Short term disturbance will occur to non-hunted species as well. This disturbance will also be similar to the disturbance of non-hunted animals experience on state Wildlife Management Areas and federal Waterfowl Production Areas and be minimal and temporary in nature.

Signature: Refuge Manager

(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief

(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-Evaluation Date: October 2031

DeLong, A. K. 2002. Managing visitor use and disturbance of waterbirds — a literature review of impacts and mitigation measures — prepared for Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge. Appendix L (114 pp.) *in* Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge Complex final environmental impact statement for the comprehensive conservation plan and boundary revision (Vol. II). Dept. of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 1, Portland, OR. Available
URL: <http://www.fws.gov/stillwater/litreview.pdf>

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URL: <http://www.fws.gov/policy/723fw3.html>

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U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2001. Biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health. 601 FW 3. National Wildlife Refuge System, Department of Interior. Available
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U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2006. Wildlife-Dependent Recreation: Hunting. 605 FW 2. National Wildlife Refuge System, Department of Interior. Available
URL: <http://www.fws.gov/policy/605fw2.html>