

## COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

**Use:** Boating, Canoeing, and Kayaking

**Refuge Name:** Mingo National Wildlife Refuge

**Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):** Mingo National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1944 under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act and the Refuge Recreation Act.

### **Refuge Purpose(s):**

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

“...suitable for – (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreation development, (2) protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species...” 16 U.S.C. 460K-1 (Refuge Recreation Act)

An additional purpose for the refuge was identified when Congress designated the 7,730 acre Mingo Wilderness in 1976.

“...prioritizes public uses that are recreational, scientific, educational, scenic, or of conservation or historical value as primary refuge objectives permit.” Public Law 88-577 (Wilderness 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 supersedes the Compatibility Determination developed concurrently with the Refuge’s Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) authorized in 2006. This Compatibility Determination will provide for legitimate boating, canoeing, and kayaking use on waters of the Mingo National Wildlife Refuge.

The refuge has over 2,000 acres of seasonally available open marsh habitat and over 60 miles of ditches, sloughs, river ways and other tributaries. During high water, much of the bottomland forest habitat can be flooded creating a more extensive network of waterways. Boating, canoeing, and kayaking on the Refuge is associated with fishing, hunting, interpretation, environmental education, wildlife viewing and photography of the Mingo Wilderness, Old Mingo River, Stanley Creek, and marsh habitats.

Presently, approximately 2,000 visits per year are associated with boating, canoeing, and kayaking. Main access points for boat use are Stanley Creek, Flatbanks, Lower Mingo River Boat Ramp and Monopoly Marsh. The refuge hosts annual paddle ride events in the spring, summer and fall open to the public.

All waters of the Refuge are open to use from March 1st until September 30th. Boating, canoeing, and kayaking are offered year-round on Ditch Channels 1, 2, 3, 10, and 11; and on the waterways of the Mingo River, Stanley Creek, Kentucky Slough, Binford Unit, May Pond, Fox Pond, and Red Mill Pond. The waterways between and including Ditch 4 and Ditch 6, Monopoly Marsh, Gum Stump Pool, Rockhouse Marsh, and all moist soil units are closed to all use from October 1st until March 1st. Electric motors are allowed outside the Wilderness Area. Gas powered boat motors can be possessed, but not used, outside the Wilderness Area. Entry on all or portions of individual areas may be temporarily suspended by posting upon occasions of unusual or critical conditions affecting land, water, vegetation, wildlife populations, or public safety.

Boating provides access to fishing, wildlife observation and wildlife photography, which are all priority public uses. Since fish and wildlife observation and fishing are an integral part of the boating experience, it is considered a wildlife-oriented activity.

**Availability of Resources:** Resources involved in the administration and management of the use includes personnel time associated with administration and law enforcement. Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use include boat ramp, brochures, signs, parking lot, and access roads.

Every 3-5 years the annual maintenance costs may increase in order to provide gravel for parking lots and roads and to replace signs. Maintenance costs of the facilities to support these activities include law enforcement patrol and launch maintenance (gravel placement) at Flat Banks, May Pond, and Fox Pond. Existing staffing and funding are adequate to support these activities. Occasionally, volunteer assistance is used for litter clean up and keeping the canoe route open.

Minimal costs are associated with monitoring the consequences of the public having access to the refuge, such as degree of littering and vandalism.

The refuge has an entrance fee, which is collected at all refuge entrances and at the Visitor Center. Funds from entry fee money could be used to offset some of the costs associated with maintaining the facilities for this activity.

**Anticipated Impacts of the Use:** Boating, canoeing and kayaking on Mingo are typically by single individuals or small groups. No gasoline boat motors are permitted for use throughout the refuge and electric trolling motors are only permitted for use outside the Wilderness Area. For these reasons habitat damage is negligible.

Some temporary disturbance does occur to wildlife due to human activity on the water, however use is sporadic and limited. Restricting boating, canoeing, and kayaking by establishing time and location restrictions avoids conflicts with peak waterfowl migration periods. Allowing only paddles or electric trolling motors, minimizes noise disturbance. Any unreasonable harassment would be grounds for the manager to close the area to these uses or restrict the uses to minimize harm.

Short-term impacts to facilities, such as boat ramps, signs or access roads, are not expected.

Restricting area use based on peak waterfowl migration periods and only allowing electric trolling motors outside the Wilderness Area are expected to reduce wildlife disturbance, be of short duration, and minimize disruption of natural processes as required by the Wilderness Act. Long-term impacts are not anticipated; however, plants and wildlife will be monitored.

No cumulative impacts are anticipated; however, the program can be modified in the future to mitigate unforeseen impacts.

**Public Review and Comment:** The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper, social media, website, and other relevant media outlets. Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

**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. All motors including electric trolling motors can not be used inside the Wilderness Area.
2. All regulations pertaining to watercraft use on the Refuge must be abided by as printed in the Refuge regulations governing watercraft activities.
3. Controlled access and seasonal stipulations may be adjusted when necessary to ensure protection to migratory waterfowl.

**Justification:** The use of boats, canoes, and kayaks can provide an appreciation of the natural character of the Refuge. This activity provides viewing and photography opportunities of wildlife and the associated habitats. Paddling and use of electric trolling motors is less evasive to wildlife and the environment than gas-powered motors. This activity enhances the connection and appreciation of wildlife and wild lands by the Refuge visitors and provides an environmental education opportunity. With current timing and location restrictions, migratory waterfowl are protected from negative impacts of this use during the waterfowl peak usage period of the Refuge.

**Refuge Manager:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature and Date)

**Regional Chief Concurrence:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature and Date)

**Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-evaluation Date:** 2026