

DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

USE: Commercial Trapping

REFUGE NAME: Necedah National Wildlife Refuge

ESTABLISHING AND ACQUISITION AUTHORITY(IES): Necedah National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1939 under the authority of the Executive Order 8065 (March 14,1939) and the Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

REFUGE PURPOSE(S):

· ... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife..."(Executive Order 8065)

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

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION: "The mission of the 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" (National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105-57).

DESCRIPTION OF USE:

What is the Use? This compatibility determination evaluates the commercial trapping of beaver, muskrat, raccoon, skunk, opossum, weasel and mink. Trapping will occur by private individuals operating under a "Commercial Use" refuge Special Use Permit (permit). Commercial trapping is considered a refuge management economic activity or economic use. Commercial trapping is not a priority public use, as defined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, but rather serves as a management instrument for ensuring priority habitat objectives are being addressed and infrastructure that supports wildlife dependent recreation and management stays intact. The decision to use trapping as a management tool occurred as part of objectives and strategies developed under the Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Trapping was first found compatible in 2002 during the comprehensive conservation planning process.

Where is the use conducted? Trapping may occur anywhere on the refuge where beaver or muskrat are negatively impacting refuge infrastructure (dikes, roads, structures) or refuge habitats (forested wetlands, marshes). Trapping of raccoons, skunk, opossum, weasel, and mink may also occur on areas where negative effects to ground nesting birds and cavity nesting birds are observed or when the population is deemed too high to meet conservation goals.

When is the use conducted? Trapping would primarily occur during the established State of Wisconsin trapping seasons for each species. Trapping will also be allowed outside of established State of Wisconsin seasons if a refuge need arises and will be scheduled to not

conflict with other public uses. The seasons for 2019/2020 are listed below as a guideline. Trapping seasons are updated annually per state regulations.

Beaver – November 2, 2019 – March 31, 2020

Muskrat – October 26, 2019 – March 8, 2020

Raccoon – October 19, 2019 – February 15, 2020

Mink-- October 26, 2019 – March 8, 2020

Skunk – No season limits, via permit we will use Raccoon trapping dates

Weasel – No season limits, via permit we will use Raccoon trapping dates

Opossum– No season limits, via permit we will use Raccoon trapping dates

How is the use conducted? Trapping is conducted under the terms and conditions of the permit issued by the refuge manager. Prior to the permit being issued, an application will be completed by the requesting individual and submitted to the refuge manager for review. A limited number of qualified individuals will be permitted as needed to remove animals annually. The refuge will generate a list of qualified individuals from applications submitted by interested trappers. The list will be used sequentially and without prejudice when a need has been identified.

Refuge staff will advise on the specifics of the permitted activity, including trapping method, targeted species, location and duration of the activity in each individual Special Use Permit. Each trapping method will follow State of Wisconsin trapping regulations, specifically related to trap size and types of allowable sets in order to protect non-target species. Selected trappers will be allowed to target animals within predefined areas on Necedah National Wildlife Refuge as identified by maps at the time the permit is issued authorizing removal.

Why is the use being proposed?

Beavers cause substantial issues/damage on Necedah National Wildlife Refuge. Damage includes undermining roads, girdling trees, plugging water control structures, killing trees, flooding refuge roads, flooding private land, etc. Refuge staff regularly observe beavers plugging culverts, stop log structures, or building dams, preventing the flow of water through these structures and negatively affecting water and habitat management. Beavers also cause substantial issues for private landowners. Dams built or structures plugged on the refuge will cause impounding water on private land. The refuge has a responsibility to manage water that does not cause flooding issues to private land. When damage on the refuge or private land is documented commercial trapping of nuisance beaver will be allowed.

Muskrat often burrow into roads, ditches and levees causing holes and cave-ins along refuge roads/levees. This damage increases maintenance costs, creates safety hazards to staff and the public and negatively affects water management. Muskrats can also feed on native vegetation and cause significant damage when they occur in high numbers. When damage on the refuge or adjacent private land is documented commercial trapping of nuisance muskrat will be allowed.

While these mammals are all important to the refuge ecosystem, it is necessary to have the option to trap raccoons, skunk, opossum, weasel, and mink to keep the population at a healthy level. Further, the high mammalian predator populations have a negative effect on ground nesting birds and cavity nesting birds. Commercial trapping is not considered a wildlife dependent use, but is required for the refuge to fulfill its purpose and mission.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:

There is insufficient staff and funding available to provide commercial trapping on the refuge in its traditional manner. The new commercial trapping program will have refuge personnel determine if there are sites needing trapping, selecting trappers, and preparing the special use permit. All refuge staff track potential problem areas throughout the year so it takes minimal time to determine if trapping will be needed and, if so, what sites need to be trapped. Selecting a trapper and preparing the permit will typically take less than two days, including an on the ground tour of areas to be trapped, if necessary. The trapping program will no longer have zones, rather the entire refuge will be open to trapping and the same number of trapping permits will be issued. Normally, a total of two to three days is spent monitoring trapping by the refuge law enforcement officer or other biological staff. Another day will be spent at the end of the year compiling all of the trapping data and determining success or impacts of the program. On average, approximately 40 – 50 hours of staff time would be dedicated on an annual basis administering the commercial trapping program. No station funds, other than salary, will be needed to administer the program.

- Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use: funded through regular management activities, no additional funding is needed.
- Maintenance costs: funded through regular management activities, no additional funding is needed.
- Monitoring costs: Staff monitor usage of the district through current funding capacity, no additional funding is needed.
- Offsetting revenues: none

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE:

Impacts of public trapping on the purposes of the refuge and mission of the Refuge System can be either direct or indirect and may have negative, neutral, or positive impacts on refuge resources.

Short and Long-term Impacts:

Potential effects will vary annually depending on the amount of trapping or trappers necessary. This will be determined based on resource conditions and management objectives. Generally, commercial trapping will have minimal impacts to non-target species and to short-term habitat conditions. Typically, the trapping is concentrated in easily accessible areas such as roadways, which limits and concentrates the disturbance impact and provides plenty of resources for disturbed animals to find respite. Trapping activities may disturb non-targeted fish and wildlife and their habitats. For example, the presence of trappers can cause waterfowl to flush from

resting and feeding areas, cause disruption to resident wildlife or negatively affect habitat through ground disturbance.

To reduce short-term negative effects, trappers will be limited in number, area and season of use through the issuance of a Special Use Permit. Each trapper will be given information on restrictions such as time of entrance, location of access routes, entrance techniques, length of trapping season and number of by-catch individuals allowed. Some level of disturbance is expected from trappers, especially if trappers enter areas closed to the public. However, disturbance (including altered behavior) of non-targeted species is expected to be localized and temporary in nature. Trapping activities can cause compaction of soils and the trampling of vegetation. The establishment of temporary foot and boat trails through vegetation and impacts to levee-tops from vehicle use is expected and will be minimized through guidance provided in the permit. Noise from vehicle use may temporarily disturb wildlife.

Long-term, positive benefits to refuge resources through the reduction in targeted species is expected. The reduction in beaver and muskrat populations is expected to reduce impacts to refuge infrastructure such as roads and levees. Reducing beaver population in specific areas will improve forest health by allowing better water management on the refuge. Reduction of mammalian predator populations could have a positive effect on ground nesting birds and cavity nesting birds. These long term positive impacts better allow the refuge to meet its purpose to provide breeding habitat for waterfowl due to a reduction in predators and allow the refuge to provide inviolate sanctuary for waterfowl by protecting infrastructure crucial to meeting that purpose.

There will likely be minor direct impact to the local and regional economy. In the 2004 Comprehensive Conservation Plan it was estimated that furbearer trapping plays a minor role in the overall regional economy, accounting for only \$7,000 of regional economic output and less than one job.

Trappers are encouraged to follow trapping best management practices and participate in the Wisconsin Trapper Education Program. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Best Management Practices for trapping can be found at:

https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/5015/2104/8473/Introduction_comp.pdf

Indirect and Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulative impacts may occur by trapping on the refuge. Trapping of raccoons may impact raccoon populations which is expected. No negative cumulative impacts are expected as the refuge manager can minimize the potential for cumulative impacts through issuance of permits and monitoring. The refuge manager retains the option to prohibit trapping on the refuge if it does not contribute to the purposes of the refuge or the mission of the Refuge System, is not needed to reach resource goals or causes undo resource disturbance or harm. The refuge manager may limit trapping occurring in a particular habitat, season, location, and/or relative to a single species or species group to mitigate long-term and cumulative impacts.

Cumulative impacts would occur if over-trapping or other uses were occurring that influence the same resources at the same time or if the duration of the trapping is long-term. No cumulative impacts are expected as the refuge manager can minimize the potential for cumulative impacts through the Special Use Permit. Managers retain the option to prohibit trapping on the refuge that causes undo resource disturbance or harm. The refuge manager may limit the amount of trapping occurring in a particular habitat or relative to a single species or species group to mitigate long-term indirect impacts.

Other refuge or visitor activities in the same area as trapping could cause cumulative disturbance to wildlife. However, overlapping activities can be controlled in time and space with the use of a Special Use Permit.

Indirect impacts are expected to be a general improvement over time. A reduction in the long-term degradation of infrastructure and forested habitat by the removal of beaver and muskrats is expected.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:

The draft Compatibility Determination will be available for public review and comment for 15 days from January 13 to January 28, 2020. A press release will be sent to local media outlets on January 8, 2020 notifying the public of the comment period. The determination will be posted at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge office at N11385 Headquarters Road, Necedah, WI 54646, Necedah Public Library at 217 Oak Grove Drive, Necedah, WI 54646, and made available online at <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Necedah>. Please let us know if you need the documents in an alternative format.

Written comments will be accepted by mail to N11385 Headquarters Road, Necedah WI 54646, dropped off at the Visitor Center between 9:00 am and 3:30pm Monday – Saturday or by email at necedah@fws.gov until close of business Tuesday, January 28th, 2020. Concerns expressed during the public comment period will be addressed in the final draft.

DETERMINATION:

- Use is not compatible
- Use is compatible with the following stipulations

STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:

1. Wisconsin trapping laws apply.
2. Commercial trapping will only be conducted for management purposes as determined by the refuge manager or his/her designee.
3. Commercial trapping will occur via special use permit issued to qualified trappers.
4. Special conditions will address unique local conditions. Maps will be issued as necessary.

5. All permits will be issued to meet specific habitat and wildlife objectives and contribute to purposes of the refuge.
6. All applications will be evaluated and only individuals considered expert will be issued a permit.
7. Traps must be set to minimize interference with visitors.
8. Traps must be checked daily.
9. The take of any other animal than approved in the special use permit must be reported to refuge management on the same day.
10. Trappers will be required to provide a summary of catch after trapping is completed.

JUSTIFICATION:

Commercial trapping has been determined to be compatible provided the above stipulations are implemented. This use provides an activity that is otherwise not offered on the refuge. This use is critical for the refuge to meet goals and objectives regarding water management and habitat management. It is also a viable management tool for reducing damage to infrastructure including levees, dams, roads, water control structures and ensuring compliance with adjacent private landowner drainage concerns. This use does not materially interfere with or detract from the Service's ability to meet the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Commercial trapping follows all applicable laws, regulations and policies, including: Title 50 Code of Federal Regulations, National Wildlife Refuge System manual, National Wildlife Refuge System goals and objectives, and refuge goals and objectives. This activity is compliant with the purpose of the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Signature:

Refuge Manager:

X

(Signature and Date)

X

(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: **Regional Chief:**

Mandatory 10 or 15-year Re-evaluation Date: 2029