Compatibility Determination

Use: Non-District Sponsored Special Events

Refuge Name: Fergus Falls Wetland Management District (WMD)

Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):

Waterfowl Production Areas - Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act of March 16, 1934 as amended by section 3 of the Act of August 1, 1958 (72 Stat. 486, 16 U.S.C. sec. 716 d(c), authorized the Secretary of Interior to acquire small wetland or pothole areas suitable as Waterfowl Production Areas.

FmHA fee title transfer properties - Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act 7 U.S.C. 2002.

Refuge Purpose(s):

Waterfowl Production Areas - "...as Waterfowl Production Areas" subject to "...all of the provisions of such Act [Migratory Bird Conservation Act]....except the inviolate sanctuary provisions..." and "...for any other management purpose, for migratory birds."

FmHA fee title transfer properties - "for conservation purposes..."

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 use is for special events sponsored by charitable groups, non-profit groups or other natural resource agencies. The use primarily includes community sponsored events including birding festivals and chamber tours, but may include other activities such as bike rides, fun runs, photography/art workshops, river or trail clean up days and youth scouting events. Events are held numerous times annually and would occur at different times throughout the year. Events may have up to 200 participants, although generally less than 50. Participants use established roads, trails, visitor centers, boat landings and other facilities that are already open to the public. Clean-up events may include all portions of WPAs adjacent to rivers that are generally accessible by boat.

Is the use a proposed new use or an existing use?
This is an existing use.

Is the use a priority public use?
No, non-refuge sponsored special events are not a priority public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Where would the use be conducted?

Most events will take place at the office, visitor center or shop facilities where the hiking trail, deck, displays, conference room, spotting scopes, restrooms and other public use facilities are available. Some events may take place at individual WPAs throughout the District depending on the use.

When would the use be conducted?
These events could possibly take place throughout the year, but most likely will occur during the spring, summer, and fall time periods. Care will be taken so these events do not conflict with priority public uses or other priority station activities such as during hunting seasons. Safety of both hunters and event goers must be evaluated to avoid conflicts.

How would the use be conducted?
The events will be conducted as per the sponsors, but with conditions agreed upon by the District.

Why is this use being proposed?
WPAs are open to the public so no additional disturbance is created by allowing this use, though the intensity of the use may increase slightly for a short period of time. The intensity of the use must be evaluated to determine if a use is compatible or not. These special events allow the public to build a connection to the District lands through personal outdoor experiences that engage the senses and foster an appreciation of the outdoors. It also engages the public in the District resources and helps garner their support for the NWRS.

Availability of Resources:

What resources are needed to properly (considering quality and compatibility) and safely administer use?
These events generally involve staff time for meeting with sponsors, explaining District regulations, issuing a Special Use Permit, and providing some level of oversight during portions or the entire event.

Are existing refuge resources adequate to properly and safely administer the use?
Existing staff may be adequate to administer this use depending on the number of requests received and the size and scope of the event. Events will need to occur during staffed hours. If staff or volunteers are unavailable during the time of the event, the event may not be permitted. Events are held or based on existing roads, trails, landings, or other facilities that are deemed adequate. Sponsors are required to furnish any additional facilities needed, such as portable toilets.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:
How do non-District sponsored special events affect District purposes and the NWRS mission?
These special events do not adversely affect District purposes and help fulfill the mission of the NWRS by allowing visitors to build a connection to the District through personal outdoor experiences that engage the senses and foster an appreciation of the outdoors. It also engages the public in the District resources and helps garner their support for the NWRS.

How do non-refuge sponsored special events affect Fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats; and the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge/NWRS?
The short term impact associated with these events is human disturbance to wildlife occupying habitat on the WPAs. Most events occur on established trails and roads or at existing facilities or areas that already support a moderate level of human activity. Wildlife that occupy habitat in these areas are accustomed to a higher degree of human disturbance. Any alteration of behavior would be temporary and localized with wildlife quickly resuming normal activities. Wildlife habitat impacts will be evaluated for each request. If habitat will likely sustain damage during the event, mitigation measures must be in place to reduce the impact on that habitat or the event will not be permitted.

There will be some short term impact to other visitors engaged in wildlife-dependent recreation during the event. Visitors, not engaged in the event, will be permitted to continue their activity. With an increase of public use during walks or runs, an increase of litter is expected. Event coordinators will be required to clean the area when the event is complete. Clean-up events actually reduce litter and debris and thus have a positive impact on the visual character of the WPAs. Scouting events often include service projects, so the events are also likely to have a positive impact on refuge facilities or habitats.

Other than the potential for some increase in future visitation to the District, long-term impacts associated with these events will be low. Long term impacts to habitat can be avoided by ensuring that multiple events do not occur in the same areas repeatedly. District staff will ensure that adequate time is allowed between events for the areas impacted to be replenished from any disturbance.

Public Review and Comment:
This compatibility determination was available for public review from April 14 to May 5, 2014 on the District website. A news release was issued to inform the public of this opportunity to provide comments.

Determination:

Non-Refuge Sponsored Special Events

____ Use is Not Compatible

__x__ Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. Events must include a Service message that helps further the understanding of the purposes of the District and the mission of the Refuge System. Private parties, weddings, and other non-mission orientated events will not be permitted.
2. Event sponsors will furnish complete information on event description, date, time, preferred location, number of participants, and logistics for health and safety, so that the manager can make a determination of best area and timing of events when issuing

a Special Use Permit. Management reserves the right to deny any proposal that will cause an undue demand on staff or resources, is not related to a charitable or non-profit organization, or does not promote the goals of the Healthier US initiative designed to get Americans outdoors and active on their public lands.

3. Except for clean-ups, events will be scheduled only in areas open to public use and at appropriate times of the year to avoid significant wildlife and visitor disturbance. Events will be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, with no more than one event in the same area and time. All activities will be limited to designated routes on established roads, trails and public use facilities. Collection of money for the fund raising aspect of the event will be conducted off od Federal property. No gambling or merchandise sales are allowed on Federal property.
4. Water or rest stations will be approved by Refuge staff in advance of the event and will be located to avoid any sensitive sites (e.g. areas with high densities of foraging shorebirds, areas where waterbirds, waterfowl, raptors or passerines are nesting, etc.) and to minimize disturbance to wildlife foraging/ perching/loafing in adjacent wetlands and woodlands.
5. Event sponsors will be required to provide all personnel, materials, and supplies necessary to run the event. This requirement applies to any tables, chairs, displays, signs, traffic aids, law enforcement, litter receptacles, portable toilets, etc. needed.

Justification:
These types of events will at most cause short term disturbance to wildlife and their habitats. Events will not be permitted in sensitive areas or where wildlife habitat will be destroyed. These special events allow the public to build a connection to District lands through personal outdoor experiences that engage the senses and foster an appreciation of the outdoors. Events must include an educational message, which helps further the understanding of the purposes of the District and the mission of the Refuge System, or they will not be permitted.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-Evaluation Date: March 2024