

Draft Compatibility Determination

Use: Missouri Hunter Education & Safety Courses at Swan Lake NWR

Refuge Name: Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities: Executive Order 7563 established Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge on February 27, 1937.

Refuge Purposes:

“... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife: ...” Executive Order 7563, dated Feb. 27, 1937

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

“... particular value in carrying out the national migratory bird management program.” 16 U.S.C. § 667b (An Act Authorizing the Transfer of Certain Real Property for Wildlife)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission: The Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) 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 includes conducting *Missouri Hunter Education and Safety Courses* at Swan Lake NWR.

Is the use a priority public use?

The *Missouri Hunter Education and Safety Courses* fall under one of the Big Six priority public uses, because it is an example of environmental education and interpretation. Students learn how to safely interact with the environment while hunting as set forth by uniform guidelines that are utilized in Hunter Education programs in all 50 states. In addition to hunter safety, there is a conservation component and environmental ethics that is part of the course.

Where would the uses be conducted?

This use is conducted inside the Visitor Center and at the Refuge. These are identified in the approved Swan Lake CCP Objective 3-6, Strategy 1 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2011: 44) as suitable sites for environmental education and interpretation. This use is conducted at times approved by the Refuge Manager, and when it does not interfere with other activities.

When would the use be conducted?

This use will be conducted during a three-hour time slot on a weekday evening or on a Saturday. The Refuge typically hosts two *Missouri Hunter Education and Safety Courses* annually, but may offer additional courses if the need arises and resources are available.

How would the use be conducted?

The *Missouri Hunter Education and Safety Courses* will be taught by certified hunter education instructors. The maximum number of students allowed to attend a given course will be capped at 50. Besides covering basic hunter safety procedures through the dissemination of information, the course offers students hands-on experience handling dummy guns and ammunition. All guns are painted bright orange and have their firing pins removed. Moreover, all ammunition is dummy ammunition that cannot actually be fired. Students and instructors are prohibited from bringing either their own guns or ammunition. At least one member of Refuge staff will be present when this use is occurring.

Why is this use being proposed?

The use corresponds to the environmental education and interpretation portion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Big Six Priority Uses. Moreover, having the courses at Swan Lake NWR provides a valuable, close to home opportunity for hunters that live in the isolated rural area to be instructed in safe hunting techniques. Hosting the *Missouri Hunter Education and Safety Courses* at Swan Lake NWR offers another opportunity to build connections with the community, increasing their stake and investment in the Refuge and USFWS more generally. Consequently, besides benefiting the public this use provides long-term benefits to the USFWS.

This use fulfills the findings in Section 2 (2) and (6) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (U.S. Congress 1997), in support of the big six priority public uses on a national wildlife refuge.

Since this use is conducted in partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation it complies with 601 FW 7 of the Service Manual “Coordination and Cooperative Work with State Fish and Wildlife Agencies” 7.3 A (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008).

This use helps to enhance a component of hunting, therefore it fulfills Executive Order 12996 (1996) Management and General Public Use of the National Wildlife Refuge System Section 2. (a), and Executive Order 13443 (2007) Facilitations of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation Section 1 and Section 2. (a).

This use helps to accomplish goals and objective listed in the Refuge CCP, particularly, Strategy 5 of Objective 3-6 Environmental/Conservation Education (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2011: 44).

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

Educational materials such as videos, documents, dummy guns, and dummy ammunition are required. Further, audio and visual equipment is needed to play such videos. Additionally, a sufficient number of tables and chairs are needed. Finally, the allocation of 6 hours per year will be required from Refuge staff.

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

Current Refuge resources can ensure that this use will be adequately, properly, and safely administered. All educational resources are provided by the Missouri Department of Conservation. These include instructional videos, documents, dummy guns, and ammunition. Swan Lake NWR has the audio and visual equipment needed to play the instructional videos. Moreover, Swan Lake NWR has the proper seating and table arrangements needed to properly conduct the course. At current levels of staffing Swan Lake NWR can meet the 6 hour per year staffing commitment.

Accessibility: The Visitor Center, amphitheater, restrooms, and nature trail overlook all meet accessibility standards requirements. There is accessible parking located in the visitor center parking lot.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

How does the Activity affect Refuge purposes and the NWRS mission?

The Refuge was established to provide for the needs of migratory birds and other wildlife. Educational programs such as this do not adversely affect the ability of the Refuge to fulfill this purpose. This activity falls under Environmental Education and Interpretation Use, which is a priority general public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Consequently, it supports the goals the NWRS. The activity also offers the potential to build broader constituencies of users who will learn more about the mission of Swan Lake NWR and the National Wildlife Refuge System by coming to Swan Lake NWR. Additionally, this allows the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to foster a relationship with Refuge partners such as the Missouri Department of Conservation. Going forward, this facilitates a cooperative relationship that could be utilized for the betterment of trust species. All together then, the use supports the goals of the USFWS in the short and long-term.

How does this activity affect fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats; and the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge/NWRS?

Migratory Birds

This activity is not expected to adversely affect migratory bird populations that occur on the Refuge. There is no take involved, and the activity occurs in a developed area that provides little habitat benefit to migratory birds.

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 by various forms of recreation. The author documents that disturbances can alter behavior (e.g. foraging time), population structure, and distribution patterns of wildlife. It is highly unlikely that the hunter education course would cause some or all of these effects in any significant manner at Swan Lake NWR. A number of measures have been undertaken to mitigate these effects, and they are not expected to occur at levels that would interfere with the purposes of the Refuge. The area most directly impacted would be the environmental education site located in and around the Refuge Visitor Center, which has been discussed in the approved CCP (pg.44). Areas adjacent to access roads would be affected by the

increased traffic, but these roads are already open to the public. Consequently, additional impact would be minimal.

Habitat

Activities from this use would cause little or no habitat disturbance, since they will take place in areas already open to public use that provide little habitat benefit to Refuge wildlife.

Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health

Activities from this use are not expected to adversely impact the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge. These activities occur only a few days a year for short durations, and do not occur at peak wildlife migration times in areas heavily used by Refuge wildlife. An Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation for listed Endangered Species present on the Refuge has been conducted for the site where this use will occur. Species and determinations include Least Tern (*Stemula antillarum*), Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalis*), and Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) with a “No Effect” determination. A “Not Likely to Jeopardize candidate or proposed species/critical habitat” determination was made for the Proposed Northern Long-Eared Bat (*Myotis spetentrionalis*) found in the areas around the Refuge.

Other Uses and Public Safety

This use will be scheduled by the Refuge Manager so that it does not conflict with other uses. Public safety issues are addressed by following hunter safety course guidelines such as only utilizing dummy guns and ammunition that are clearly marked as such. All classroom supplies are maintained and provided by the Missouri Department of Conservation Hunter Education Program. Safety is further ensured by a certified instructor conducting the training. This activity will be evaluated each time it is utilized to make sure unforeseen changes don't cause negative impacts upon other uses or the safety of Refuge visitors. In addition to the above considerations, the cumulative impact of this activity on other wildlife-dependent recreation or public safety at Swan Lake NWR is expected to be minimal because it only occurs twice a year at a site on the Refuge that has been designated as appropriate for educational purposes.

Public Review and Comment:

Public notification and review includes a 30-day comment period with local media announcements and postings at the Refuge Visitor Center, Sumner Post Office and Chillicothe Public Library. Comments received will be included with this document in the final Compatibility Determination.

Determination (check one below):

- Use is Not Compatible
 Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. This use must be approved by the Refuge Manager prior to being conducted.

2. Only certified instructors will conduct the courses at the designated sites during the designated times.
3. The guns and ammunition utilized in this course will only and always be dummy guns and ammunition that are incapable of firing which are provided for this purpose by the Missouri Department of Conservation Hunter Education Program.

Justification:

In lieu of the considerations above, and with the stipulations previously described, the *Missouri Hunter Education and Safety Courses* will not materially interfere with or detract from the NWRS mission or purposes of Swan Lake NWR. Environmental education and interpretation is a priority public use of the Refuge System. Consequently, providing this activity contributes to achieving USFWS goals. Well-designed environmental education and interpretation programs can be effective resource management tools that provide an opportunity to influence visitor attitudes about natural resources, refuges, the Refuge System, and the Service. Consequently, the short and long-term objectives of Swan Lake NWR and USFWS are supported by this use.

Signature: Refuge Manager _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-Evaluation Date: _____

References

- 16 U.S.C. *United States Code, 2010 Edition: Title 16 – Conservation, Chapter 7 – Protection of Migratory Game and Insectivorous Birds*. The U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved February 6, 2014 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2010-title16/html/USCODE-2010-title16-chap7.htm>)
- 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)*. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 1, Portland, OR. Available online (www.fws.gov/stillwater/litreview.pdf).
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- Exec. Order No. 13443. 2007. Retrieved February 7, 2014 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2007-08-20/pdf/07-4115.pdf>)
- U.S. Congress. 1997. *National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997*. Passed October 9, 1997. Retrieved February 6, 2014 (<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/downloads/NWRSImprovementact.pdf>)
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- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. *Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge: Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment*. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 3, Bloomington, MN.