

Compatibility Determination

Use: Wildlife Observation Overlook (Nature Trail)

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 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:

Is the use a priority public use?

Wildlife observation is a priority public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System and this overlook will enhance wildlife observation opportunities at the Refuge.

Where would the use be conducted?

The wildlife observation overlook will be located along the existing nature trail on the south shore of the Swan Lake Impoundment just east of the Refuge Visitor Center. This location is outside of the flood impacted area of the Refuge.

When would the use be conducted?

The nature trail is open to foot traffic all year long so the overlook would be available all year as well.

How would the use be conducted?

The overlook would be available for users of the nature trail and will be wheelchair accessible.

Why is this use being proposed?

This use is being implemented to improve wildlife viewing opportunities on the existing nature trail. It will provide a better view of the Swan Lake impoundment which holds numerous birds during the migration periods. This will give visitors a viewing experience with minimal to no disturbance to birds utilizing the impoundment. It is also the location where the local Audubon group conducts their annual Big Sit program and will enhance that event as well as the Refuge First Friday program and other events.

Availability of Resources:

Facilities and staff are currently available to provide access and maintain the trail leading and overlook. Most of the maintenance occurs during the summer months and is conducted by the station YCC crew. Funding from the station budget is available for construction of the project as well as from the Friends of Swan Lake NWR.

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

Wildlife observation does not adversely affect Refuge purposes and helps fulfill the mission of the NWRS. The addition of this overlook will enhance visitor use facilities and improve the quality of experience by refuge visitors and help people better appreciate the refuge's purpose.

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

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 various 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 wildlife observation and photography would cause some or all of these effects to some degree on Refuge wildlife. This overlook will enhance the nature trail experience for visitors and help keep visitor use patterns more consolidated to the existing visitor facilities such as the nature trail and nearby visitor center. Wildlife observation and photography are expected to increase over time and this facility will help to accommodate for this increase use. In the future measures may be necessary to ensure wildlife disturbance are kept to acceptable levels.

The cumulative disturbance caused by the addition of this viewing overlook is not expected to adversely affect fish and wildlife populations or their habitats. A number of factors including: suitable site conditions, presence of facilities, access limitations, and seasonal restrictions or other regulations tend to concentrate uses.

Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health

Wildlife observation and photography conducted in accordance with Refuge regulations is not expected to adversely affect fish and wildlife populations or the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge as it is defined in Service policy (USFWS 2001).

Other Uses and Public Safety

Wildlife observation on the nature trail and use of this overlook is not expected to adversely affect other Refuge uses or public safety. As public use levels on Swan Lake NWR expand across time, unanticipated conflicts between user groups may occur. 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 impact of this use on other wildlife-dependent recreation or public safety at Swan Lake NWR is expected to be minor.

Public Review and Comment:

This compatibility determination was posted at the refuge for a 30-day comment period and disturbed through local media announcements. No comments were received.

Determination:

Wildlife Observation and Photography

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. Interpretive signs will include messages on minimizing disturbance to wildlife.

Justification:

This use has been determined compatible because the level of use is moderate and helps to consolidate uses to the developed public-use areas (nature trail). The associated disturbance to wildlife is temporary and minor. Wildlife observation and photography are priority public uses and provide visitors with opportunities to enjoy and learn about our lands and wildlife. These uses also help fulfill the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Wildlife viewing and photography would not materially interfere with or detract from Refuge purposes

Signature: Refuge Manager Steve Linto 11-10-11
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief Rick Scholz 2/23/12
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-Evaluation Date: 2025

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>

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2001. Biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health. 601 FW 3. National Wildlife Refuge System, Department of Interior. Available URL: <http://policy.fws.gov/601fw3.html>