

## **Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge**

**Established 1935**

### **Compatibility Determination**

**Use: Commercial and Non-Commercial Timber Harvest**

**Refuge Name:** Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

**Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:**

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established Red Rock Lakes Migratory Waterfowl Refuge (later named Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge on July 19, 1961) under Executive Order 7023, signed on April 22, 1935, "as a refuge and breeding ground for wild birds and animals."

On September 4, 1935, President Roosevelt enlarged the refuge under Executive Order 7172, "provided, that any private lands within the areas described shall become a part of the refuge upon the acquisition of title or lease thereto by the United States." The refuge currently encompasses over 51,000 acres fee title and 9,400 acres leased.

**Refuge Purpose(s):**

"As a refuge and breeding ground for wild birds and animals." (Executive Order 7023)

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

"For (a) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (b) the protection of natural resources, (c) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species." (Refuge Recreation Act, 16 U.S.C. 460k-1)

"The conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions." (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act, 16 U.S.C. 3901)

"For the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources." (Fish and Wildlife Act, 16 U.S.C. 742f)

"For the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave [wilderness areas] unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character, and for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness." (Wilderness Act, 16 U.S.C. 1131a)

### **National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:**

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), 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 (CD) evaluates the use of Commercial and Non-Commercial Timber Harvest to meet refuge hazard fuel reduction and habitat management goals.

Commercial and non-commercial timber harvesting by mechanical means via Special Use Permit is needed to conserve, restore, and rehabilitate forest types and their associated composition and structure for wildlife benefit while also reducing hazard fuel loads.

One of the management goals identified in the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is to "create and maintain aspen stands of various age classes within a mosaic of coniferous forest and shrubland for cavity-nesting birds, and other migratory and resident wildlife." Another management goal stated in the CCP is "to provide wildland-urban interface (WUI) protection around Lakeview..." and to "...develop a fire management plan that will use prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to thin conifer stands and reduce hazardous fuels, minimizing threat to life and property."

Forest management by mechanical means is required as one of a number of potential tools to conserve, restore, or rehabilitate forest stands that together currently comprise 3,780 acres of the Refuge. Due to the cost, it is not reasonable for the refuge to acquire the proper equipment, personnel and training to complete work in-house. Mechanical equipment, including but not limited to, hand tools, chainsaws, feller-bunchers, loaders, harvesters, skidders, log trucks, helicopters and other specialized forestry equipment may be utilized. Both track and wheeled equipment may be used.

### **Is the use a proposed new use or an existing use?**

This is a new use.

### **Where would the use be conducted?**

This use would be conducted in any of the forested habitats on Red Rock Lakes NWR where authorized by the completion of appropriate NEPA processes and documentation.

### **How and when would the use be conducted?**

The use would be conducted using best management practices and restricted to occur when they would not adversely impact wildlife and other ecosystem processes (e.g., water and soil quality, etc.)

**Why is this use being proposed?**

The Refuge surrounds the town site of Lakeview, MT, an area considered a high risk Wildland-Urban Interface. Lakeview, MT contains private residences in addition to the Refuge Headquarters and a University of Utah Environmental Humanities Education Center. Allowing commercial timber harvest would minimize catastrophic wildland fire risk while improving habitat and promoting biological diversity, including aspen restoration. This use, planned and regulated, is beneficial to wildlife habitat.

**Availability of Resources:**

Work would be funded by either utilizing Hazard Fuels Reduction funding or by selling the marketable timber for projects to be self-sustaining with little to no direct budget costs. Costs are undetermined when projects are not self-sustaining, but may average \$2,500 per acre treated.

**Anticipated Impacts of the Use:**

Commercial timber harvest could cause unwanted disturbance to the soil, invasive plant species establishment, insect and disease outbreaks, altered visual aesthetics and temporary disturbance to wildlife and vegetation and ecosystem processes. Disturbance is expected to be of short duration, with work expected to be completed within one harvest season. Wildlife disturbed generally can utilize similar and abundant habitat on adjacent areas of the refuge and other bordering and nearby public and private lands.

Any commercial timber harvest will be allowed via Special Use Permit (SUP) which will include specific special conditions. These special conditions will be adapted to individual projects to minimize impacts to vegetation, wildlife, and ecosystem processes and ensure that the use is consistent with goals of the refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

**Public Review and Comment:**

This CD was posted for 14 days at the refuge office as well as on the refuge website.

**Determination:**

Use is not compatible

Use is compatible with the following stipulations

### **Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:**

To ensure compatibility with National Wildlife Refuge System and refuge goals and objectives and to minimize or exclude adverse impacts as described above, the activity can only occur under a number of stipulations:

1. All applicable state and federal regulations apply. The permittee is responsible for acquiring or renewing any state or federal permits prior to beginning or continuing their project
2. A SUP will be issued to the commercial timber harvesting business or owner. Conditions within the SUP will minimize disturbance to refuge resources.
3. The refuge manager will provide requirements to reduce impacts to plants, wildlife, and refuge visitors and address these in the special conditions of the SUP.
4. Contractor shall carry a copy of the SUP when conducting work on the refuge, and display it upon request of refuge officials.
5. Stream crossings will be limited as much as practical; proper state permits will be obtained to ensure minimal impact.
6. Mechanical equipment (large equipment and vehicles) would:
  - a) not be employed in highly sloped portions of the treatment areas (> 35% slope),
  - b) would be restricted in operations to when soil is dry (<20% soil moisture), frozen, or snow covered (12" depth if packed or 18" depth if not packed)
  - c) would not be employed within 100 feet of surface water resources.
7. Mechanical work will be completed as quick and efficiently as reasonably possible to lessen noise and other disturbance to wildlife.
8. Thinning activities would avoid old growth large trees.
9. At least 15 % of any project area must be left untreated.
10. Steps must be taken to control invasive species and reduce risk of disease and insect outbreaks, specifically mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*), Douglas-fir beetle (*Dendroctonus pseudotsugae*) and spruce budworm (*Choristoneura occidentalis*).

### **Justification:**

In accordance with the missions of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the refuge, and the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act, this use has been determined compatible provided the above stipulations are implemented. This commercial use will allow for the conservation, management,

and restoration of the wildlife and plant resources and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans by promoting ecological integrity and historic forest conditions that are now poorly represented. This project also minimizes risks of a catastrophic wildland fire from reaching the town of Lakeview.

**NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision (check one below)**

- Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Assessment
- Categorical Exclusion and Environmental assessment
- Environmental Assessment and Record of Decision
- Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

Signature: Refuge Manager: \_\_\_\_\_  
(signature and date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief: \_\_\_\_\_  
(signature and date)

Approval: Regional Director: \_\_\_\_\_  
(signature and date)

Mandatory 10- or 15 year re-evaluations date: \_\_\_\_\_