

## **DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION**

**Use:** Expansion of Existing Stratford Road Easement to allow Replacement of the Existing Wastewater Lift Station

**Refuge Name:** Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

**County:** Morgan, Alabama

**Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):**

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge located in Madison, Morgan, and Limestone counties of Alabama was established July 7, 1938 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order 7926. The Refuge is overlaid on the middle third of the Tennessee Valley Authority’s Wheeler Reservoir.

**Refuge Purpose(s):**

“... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wild life: ...” Executive Order 7926, dated July 7, 1938

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

“... suitable for— (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species ...” 16 U.S.C. § 460k-1 “... the Secretary ... may accept and use ... real ... property. Such acceptance may be accomplished under the terms and conditions of restrictive covenants imposed by donors ...” 16 U.S.C. § 460k-2 (Refuge Recreation Act (16 U.S.C. § 460k-460k4), as amended).

**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.”

**Description of Use:**

The project would involve expansion of the existing right-of-way for construction of a new, larger wastewater lift station adjacent to an existing lift station. Due to increased development and population growth in the area of influence, the existing lift station is currently at capacity and will not be capable of handling the amount of wastewater flow in the future.

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An approximate 62' x 34' above and below ground station housing wastewater pumps and electrical components, consisting of a concrete wet well for the pumps and a building to house the dry cell and electrical equipment, would be constructed. A paved access road from the end of Stratford Road to the lift station would be required.

A 0.98-acre permanent right-of-way expansion across the Refuge would be required for construction and maintenance of the wastewater lift station and associated facilities. Within the proposed 0.98-acre right-of-way expansion, approximately 0.12 forested acres would be cleared and maintained for: a 24" PVC sewer line connecting to the existing sewer line; a 4" PVC water line connecting to an existing gate valve; and a 18' x 350' asphalt access road.

Once construction of a new lift station is complete and in operation, the existing lift station would be demolished and removed; all mechanical and electrical components, including pumps, valves, fittings, and conduit would be removed; all paving, concrete, sidewalks and fences would be removed; six inches of clean topsoil would be placed over previous impervious surfaces; and, native forest vegetation would be restored in areas affected by demolition.

## **Availability of Resources:**

No additional resources would be required to administer this use. Monitoring and compliance could be handled within existing resources, programs, and staff time.

## **Anticipated Impacts of the Use:**

The following anticipated impacts were identified and evaluated based on professional judgment.

Short-term Impacts: Minor short-term adverse impacts to fish and wildlife and their habitats would be expected. Impacts resulting from demolition of the existing lift station and construction of the new lift station could include: soil erosion; temporary sediment transport into adjacent areas; and, wildlife disturbance. The use of Best Management Practices during construction would significantly limit these short-term impacts.

Long-term Impacts: Minimal long-term adverse impacts to fish and wildlife and their habitats within the project area would be expected during the life of the project. Construction of the new facility would result in the permanent loss of approximately 0.12 acres of forested habitat and 0.68 acres of farmland. Once the new lift station is in operation, the existing lift station would be demolished and approximately 0.1 acres of forested habitat would be restored, resulting in a net loss of approximately 0.02 acres of forested habitat within the project area.

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts to refuge resources resulting from this use would be expected due to the number of like uses permitted in the past.

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## **Public Review and Comment:**

This Draft Compatibility Determination (CD) is being made available for public review and comment before preparation of the Final CD. An analysis of comments received during this 30-day public comment period will be included in the Final CD.

## **Determination (check one below):**

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations

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

The use of Best Management Practices during demolition and construction would be required to limit soil erosion and sediment transport to adjacent areas. Pre-construction natural land contours would be re-established. Native forest vegetation would be re-established in areas affected by demolition activities.

## **Justification:**

The location of Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge within a rapidly expanding urban area results in a significant number of right-of-way requests. Each right-of-way request is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Concern that ROW developments were threatening the integrity of the Refuge through habitat fragmentation led to the development and approval of a Refuge Right-of-Way Policy in 2000. That policy, approved by the Regional Director, was circulated to all county and municipal governments in the three counties surrounding the Refuge. The policy generally provides that a ROW permit will be considered only when: no other reasonable alternative is available other than to cross Refuge lands and/or waters; the need for the ROW is clearly in the public interest; and, existing ROW corridors can be used.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge extends along both sides of the Tennessee River for approximately 19 river miles. Municipalities adjacent to the Refuge that require access to existing facilities are limited to crossing Refuge lands. In this instance, there are no other reasonable alternatives, the need is clearly in the public interest, and an existing ROW corridor is being used. Consequently, the right-of-way would not diminish the primary purpose of the Refuge or the conservation and management of natural resources, nor would it interfere with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission.

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**Prepared by:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Submitted:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Project Leader/Refuge Manager Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Review:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Compatibility Coordinator Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Review:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Refuge Supervisor Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Concurrence:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Chief  
National Wildlife Refuge System  
Southeast Region Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Mandatory 10 or 15-year Re-Evaluation Date:** \_\_\_\_\_