COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

Use: Special Events, Non-Refuge Sponsored

Refuge Name: Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Refuge).

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities: The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge was established by Public Law No. 268, 68th Congress on June 7, 1924. This act authorized acquisition of lands for Refuge purposes. Additional lands acquired in fee title by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are managed as part of the Refuge under a 1963 Cooperative Agreement between the Department of the Army and the Department of the Interior.

Refuge Purpose(s): The Refuge shall be established and maintained (a) as a refuge and breeding place for migratory birds included in the terms of the convention between the United States and Great Britain for the protection of migratory birds, concluded August 16, 1916, and (b) to such extent as the Secretary of the Interior by regulations, prescribe, as a refuge and breeding place for other wild birds, game animals, fur-bearing animals, and for the conservation of wild flowers and aquatic plants, and (c) to such extent as the Secretary of the Interior may, by regulations, prescribe a refuge and breeding place for fish and other aquatic animal life.

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.

Goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System:

a. To fulfill our statutory duty to achieve refuge purpose(s) and further the System mission.
b. Conserve, restore where appropriate, and enhance all species of fish, wildlife, and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
c. Perpetuate migratory bird, interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations.
d. Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants.
e. Conserve and restore, where appropriate, representative ecosystems of the United States, including the ecological processes characteristic of those ecosystems.
f. To foster understanding and instill appreciation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their conservation, by providing the public with safe, high-quality, and compatible wildlife-dependent public use. Such use includes hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

Description of Use:

What is the use? The Refuge would allow special events sponsored by charitable and other non-profit clubs or groups.

Where is the use conducted? Participants use established roads, trails, and boat landings that are already open to the public. River clean-up events, where volunteers pick up trash, garbage or other debris from the Refuge, may include all portions of the Refuge generally accessible by boat, along shorelines, and public use facilities such as parking lots, boat ramps and trails. Small-scale charity fishing events often occur on the ice and do not require a fishing tournament permit from the State(s).

When is the use conducted? Events are held one to five times, annually, and occur at different times throughout the year. Events may have up to 300 participants, although generally less than 100.

How is the use conducted? Special events primarily include walks, such as the Crop Walk and the American Volkssport Association, but may include bicycle rides or runs. Other regularly occurring events include river clean-up days and small scale charity fishing events. Participants in clean-ups generally work on shoreline areas or seasonally flooded bottomlands where debris is deposited. Some events, such as charity fishing tournaments occur on the ice.

Why is this use being proposed? The Refuge provides a scenic backdrop for many communities along the Mississippi River. Charitable and non-profit groups within these communities frequently request the use of the Refuge for various events. Some of these groups place a high value on the Refuge and volunteer time and service to assist the Refuge with maintaining the scenic qualities and beauty of the Refuge.

Availability of Resources: These events generally involve staff time for meeting with sponsors, explaining Refuge regulations, issuing a Special Use Permit, and providing some level of oversight during portions of or throughout the event. Existing staff are adequate to administer this use depending on number of requests received and the size and scope of the event. Since events are held or based on existing roads, trails, or landings, facilities are deemed adequate. Sponsors are required to furnish any additional facilities needed, such as portable toilets if none are already provided by the Refuge. Often, the Refuge is responsible for trash removal from a central location and hauling. This may be accomplished by staff hauling the trash in a government vehicle or rental of temporary trash containers like dumpsters.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use: The short term impact associated with these events is human disturbance to wildlife occupying habitat on the Refuge. Most events occur on established trails 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 or bird flight would be temporary and localized with wildlife quickly resuming normal activities. Because this use requires a Special Use Permit, the Refuge can regulate the timing and location for these events and direct them away from areas of high wildlife use or during seasons when disturbance may be detrimental.

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 result in reduced litter and debris and thus have a positive impact on the visual character of the Refuge.

Other than the potential for some increase in future visitation to the Refuge, no long-term impacts associated with these events are anticipated.

Public Review and Comment: This Compatibility Determination is a re-evaluation of an existing determination which was included in the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released May 1, 2005 for a 120-day comment period. It was also available during a subsequent 90-day review period on a supplement to the EIS released December 3, 2005. Public notification included notices in the Federal Register, media announcements, and 31 public meetings and workshops attended by more than 3,700 persons. No comments specific to this use or determination were received.

A draft of this re-evaluation was released on August 5, 2016 for a 30-day comment period. Public notification of the availability of this CD included media announcements and posting on the Refuge's website. One commenter noted that small scale charity fishing events should be included in this compatibility determination. Small-scale charity fishing events often occur on the ice and do not have the same potential to displace or impact recreational fisherpeople. A description of small scale charity fishing events was added to the Description of Use section of the final compatibility determination.

Determination:

_____ Use is Not Compatible

_XX_ Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. Events must include an educational message that helps further the understanding of the purposes of the Refuge and the mission of the Refuge System.

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 on the 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 the designated routes on established trails. Collection of money for the fund raising aspect of the event will be conducted off site.

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 as well as undue disturbance to other Refuge users.

5. Event sponsors will be required to set up and remove all materials necessary for the event. This requirement applies to any tables, chairs, displays, signs, traffic aids, litter receptacles, portable toilets, etc. needed.

6. Event sponsors will be required to adhere to all special conditions in the Special Use Permit including insurance, emergency responders, cleanup, and fees that may be necessary.

Justification: Disturbance to wildlife and habitat will be minimal since this use will occur on existing roads and trails, be periodic, and relatively short duration. Wildlife disturbed will be displaced during the event, but should return to the areas affected quickly. Adjacent habitat is abundant for wildlife to use when disturbed. Stipulations in place will minimize disturbance, ensure control of the events, and contribute to the mission of the Refuge System by requiring an interpretive or environmental education component. This use will also expose large numbers of people to the Refuge and help them gain a better understanding and appreciation of the Refuge. These events are also consistent with the Healthier US initiative to promote increased physical fitness in America through the use of public lands. The number of events, and their size and scope, remains under the control of District Managers through the requirement of a Special Use Permit.

Refuge Manager: Sabra Chandler 1/3/17
Signature Date

Regional Chief Concurrence: [illegible] 1-26-17
Regional Chief Date

Mandatory 10 or 15 year Re-evaluation Date: 2027