

Compatibility Determination

Use: Trapping of Furbearers

Refuge Name: Big Stone Wetland Management District (WMD)

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) - The Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act, March 16, 1934, (16 U.S.C. Sec. 718-718h, 48 Stat. 452) as amended August 1, 1958, (P.L. 85-585; 72 Stat. 486) for acquisition of "Waterfowl Production Areas"; the Wetlands Loan Act, October 4, 1961, as amended (16 U.S.C. 715k-3 - 715k-5, Stat. 813), funds appropriated under the Wetlands Loan Act are merged with duck stamp receipts in the fund and appropriated to the Secretary for the acquisition of migratory bird refuges under provisions of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, February 18, 1929, (16 U.S.C. Sec. 715, 715d - 715r), as amended.

FmHA fee title transfer properties - Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act 7 U.S.C. 2002.

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. § 742(a)(4)) and (16 U.S.C. § 742(b)(1))
Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C. § 3901(b), 100 Stat. 3583).

Refuge Purposes:

Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) - "...as Waterfowl Production Areas" subject to "...all of the provisions of such Act [Migratory Bird Conservation Act]...except the inviolate sanctuary provisions..." and "...for any other management purpose, for migratory birds."

FmHA fee title transfer properties - "...for conservation purposes..."

National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) Mission:

The Mission of the 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:

The use is defined as the non-commercial trapping of resident furbearers on WPAs in accordance with the State of Minnesota regulations. Trapping is permitted for a wide variety of furbearing species and unprotected species; however, mink, raccoon, muskrat, red fox, and beaver are the primary target species.

This Compatibility Determination does not apply to "commercial" trapping activities where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) awards a contract, or permit, for the reduction of a species to facilitate management (e.g., the Service needs 3,000 muskrats removed from an area to protect a dike system).

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

Trapping of furbearers is an existing use.

Is the use a priority public use?

Trapping is not a priority wildlife-dependent public use of the NWRS, as defined by the Refuge Improvement Act (1997).

Where would the use be conducted?

Trapping could occur in all habitat types (grasslands, aquatic, and forests) that occur on the WMD. However, due to the habitat preferences of the primary target species, most of the use would occur in aquatic habitats.

When would the use be conducted?

Trapping will be conducted every year in accordance with the State of Minnesota regulations, which are updated annually. In general, Minnesota trapping seasons for various species of wildlife run from mid-October through mid-March, with beaver trapping extending until the end of April. Several species of unprotected mammals (i.e., weasel, coyote, striped skunk, gophers, and porcupine) may be trapped on a year-round basis. While the State of Minnesota regulations technically permit such activity, there is no known trapping activity on WPAs for those unprotected species outside of the traditional winter “season”. Minnesota regulations have established trap tending hours of 5:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m.

How would the use be conducted?

Trapping will be open to the public in accordance with the State of Minnesota regulations, relevant regulations within the National Wildlife Refuge Act (50CFR 25 – 32), and the WMD special regulations as defined within 50 CFR 32.42 or otherwise posted in accordance with 50 CFR 26.22 (“Any person entering or using any national wildlife refuge will comply with ... the provisions of any special regulation and any other official notification ...”).

Trappers may utilize leghold traps, snares, and body-gripping (“Conibear” type) traps for the purpose of trapping various furbearers and unprotected species of wildlife. Each method is qualified under state regulation as to trap size and types of allowable sets in order to protect non-target species and provide for the safe use of the area by others.

Access for trapping on WPAs is almost exclusively by foot. Walking and snowshoeing are the primary means of access. When conditions allow, some limited, non-motorized boat access may occur for the purpose of trapping. Travel on WPAs by highway vehicles, All Terrain Vehicles, Utility Terrain Vehicles, and snowmobiles are prohibited, without a valid Special Use Permit (SUP), at all times. Many WPAs have parking lots to facilitate allowed public uses, including trapping.

Why is this use being proposed?

Trapping is a management tool that assists with managing furbearer populations (of which likely has an indirect positive impact on waterfowl production), protects the WMD infrastructure, and provides the public an opportunity for another traditional wildlife dependent use. Annually, furbearers cause damage to dikes and water control structures requiring staff and equipment

resource commitment. Additionally, furbearers are the predominant predators of waterfowl and other ground and low nesting birds. While this activity is a non-priority public use, it is an activity that is a valued form of recreation for visitors to the WMD.

By regulation (50 CFR 31.16), lands acquired as WPAs are open to public trapping unless closed under the authority of 50 CFR 25.21.

Availability of Resources:

What resources are needed to properly and safely administer use?

Under the current structure of the trapping program, sufficient staff exists to oversee the program. Administrative costs to implement and monitor the trapping program are minor. Facilities and staff are currently available to provide information and access.

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

There is no incremental increase in administering this activity, as allowed, above the WMDs general operating costs that can be attributed directly to the public trapping program.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

How does trapping of furbearers affect WMD purposes and the NWRS mission?

Public trapping can potentially impact waterfowl production on WPAs through both direct and indirect impacts. Direct impacts are those where there is an immediate cause and effect relationship between the activity and the resources required to fulfill the WMD purpose of waterfowl production and the NWRS mission. Direct impacts may include the incidental killing or displacing of waterfowl during the pair bonding/nesting season, or destruction of nests by trampling. Indirect impacts are those where the effects of the permitted activity affect other populations or habitats that in turn have direct impacts on waterfowl production and the NWRS mission. Indirect impacts may include catch of target and non-target species that are predators on waterfowl and/or nests, or removal of species that induce habitat change (i.e., beaver). Impacts, either direct or indirect, may be negative, neutral, or positive.

How does trapping of furbearers affect fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats; and the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the WMD?

Due to the temporal separation of trapping activities and waterfowl use of the areas during reproductive activities, direct impacts to waterfowl production by trappers is minimal. Beaver trappers using WPAs after early March, undoubtedly disturb individuals on occasion, and cause temporary displacement of waterfowl from specific and limited areas. These impacts would be occasional, temporary, and isolated to small geographic areas. Any habitat change as a result of the physical impacts of trapping activity (trampling, etc.) is undetectable and insignificant. Indirect impacts to waterfowl production do result from the removal of animals under a trapping program. In many instances these impacts are positive. Many species that may be trapped are predators on waterfowl at various stages of the reproductive cycle. Controlling populations of predators on waterfowl has general positive impacts on the WPA purpose which vary in significance among areas. Timing of the removal of predators, size of the WPA, and adjacent land use all affect the degree to which predator management, through a public trapping program, benefits waterfowl production.

Beaver damming activities may raise water levels in wetland systems. Due to the societal pressures and expectations to manage water levels on WPAs, managing beaver and muskrat populations at reasonable levels through a public trapping program results in positive impacts to waterfowl production and minimizes the need to commit Service resources to the same end.

The removal of plant-eating species such as beaver and muskrat can have both positive and negative impacts on WMD resources. Beaver and muskrat can cause damage to dikes and water control structures and trapping can reduce the repair and maintenance cost to these components. Beaver and muskrat also play an important role in maintaining marsh habitat by consuming many plant species such as cattail (*Typha* sp.) that could otherwise dominate a small wetland. This consumption of plant species provides variability within a wetland and maintains openings that many species need within the wetland community.

Public Review and Comment:

This compatibility determination is part of the 10-year review for Compatibility Determinations in the Big Stone WMD Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Public notification and review will include a 30-day comment period from 13 February 2014 through 7 March 2014. Comments received and agency responses will be included in the final version of this Compatibility Determination.

Determination:

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

1. Trapping activity must be conducted in compliance with existing state of Minnesota DNR regulations.
2. Trappers must comply with existing WPA access and use regulations.

Justification:

Furbearer trapping on the Big Stone WMD is useful in maintaining the balance between furbearers and habitat while safeguarding the WMD infrastructure. The trapping of nest predators can provide a direct benefit to migratory birds including waterfowl. Trapping also benefits management programs by maintaining beaver and muskrat populations to reduce problems with water management activities.

Trapping supports the purpose of providing incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreation. Allowing this use furthers the Mission of the NWRS by providing renewable resources for the benefit of the American public while conserving fish, wildlife, and plant resources on the WMD.

Signature: Project Leader

(Signature and Date)

Concurrence: Regional Chief

(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-Evaluation Date: 2024