

Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge Archery White-Tailed Deer Hunting Plan

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Introduction

The Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) is located in Bayfield County in Northern Wisconsin along Lake Superior (Figure 1). The purpose of the Refuge is for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources. The Refuge will protect and restore coastal wetland and stream habitats that are utilized by migratory trout and salmon from Lake Superior and by migratory birds. The Refuge will protect, restore, and manage coastal wetland and spring-fed stream habitat. Up to 540 acres of coastal wetland and upland will be acquired in fee title and up to 1240 acres will be protected through conservation easements in the Whittlesey watershed.

The Refuge is adjacent to the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and its administrative offices are housed there. The Center is a regional visitor center for tourists, as well as a platform for area environmental education and interpretation. The Refuge is also adjacent to the Fish Creek Sloughs Management Area, owned and managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Altogether, these agencies protect and manage approximately 1000 acres of coastal wetlands and streams on the south shore of Lake Superior. These coastal areas are significant habitats for many fish and wildlife of Lake Superior and its watershed.

The Refuge was established in 1999 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who is acquiring lands, planning for and providing public use, and restoring habitat. As of December 2005, about 210 acres of the 540 authorized acres have been acquired (Figure 1). Some of these tracts are large enough to provide archery deer hunting. This hunting plan proposes to allow archery white-tailed deer hunting on Refuge (Service-owned) property.

Conformance With Statutory Authorities

The Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge was established under the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 USC 742(a)-754) for the purpose of:

“... the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources.”

Our purpose at Whittlesey Creek will be fulfilled by protecting, restoring, and managing the Refuge’s stream habitat and coastal wetlands within one of the largest and very important coastal wetland complexes on Lake Superior.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act mandates that compatible, wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation are priority public uses. Archery deer hunting at the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge will help fulfill that mandate.

Minimal resources will be needed to administer archery deer hunting. Current staff will inform the public about this proposed use. No federal permits will be required by hunters and no additional facilities are needed.

Statement of Refuge Goals and Objectives

Goals for the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge include working with individuals, groups, and government entities to achieve the following:

- Restore watershed and stream hydrologic functions that improve fish and wildlife habitat within the stream and the refuge, with an emphasis on native species.
- Plan and implement a project to reintroduce coaster brook trout, under the guidance of the Lake Superior Brook Trout Rehabilitation Plan (Newman et al. 1999).
- Contribute to the restoration of natural species diversity of migratory birds that use coastal wetlands and stream floodplain habitats.
- Reduce sediment loads into Whittlesey Creek to historic (pre-European settlement) range of variability.
- Restore to the extent possible historical hydrologic conditions in the coastal wetlands and floodplains of the Refuge.
- Manage for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses, including environmental education, hunting, fishing, wildlife-observation, and interpreting and demonstrating restoration and management techniques.
- Conduct all management activities with an ecosystem approach in cooperation with agencies that manage adjacent and nearby lands and facilities.

The general philosophy of public use on the Refuge, including archery deer hunting, is to provide an opportunity for public participation and to teach/encourage environmental stewardship. Opening designated areas of the Refuge to archery deer hunting is compatible with Refuge goals and the above stated philosophy, because:

- 1) it will provide an opportunity for hunters to participate in use of the Refuge, which will help build support for the Refuge and the Service's mission,
- 2) it will have minimal impact on the resources of the Refuge,
- 3) it is positive result of the proper protection and management of important upland and stream systems,
- 4) it is a traditional use on Refuge lands and provides priority wildlife-dependent recreation.

Assessment

We do not have Refuge-specific population information on state-managed white-tailed deer. However, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WI DNR) estimates the white-tailed deer population for Deer Management Unit 3 (see deer zone map, figure 2) to be 26 deer per square mile. The population density varies, with higher populations in the upper part of the watershed. The summer population increases by 35 to 40 percent with fawn recruitment (Naas, T, Wildlife Biologist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Ashland, WI, personal communication, September 2005).

We are not aware that there is competition between White-tailed deer and other wildlife on the Refuge, however, deer browsing affects many of the Refuge's native plants' ability to grow and sustain themselves. Most strongly affected are trees and shrubs. A habitat restoration objective within the Refuge is to restore riparian and floodplain forests. Deer browsing affects our ability to grow trees. We do not expect that the number of deer harvested will have a significant effect on slowing deer browsing. However, we expect a small reduction in browsing impacts.

The Supplemental Environmental Assessment to Public Use Plan for Archery Deer Hunting has additional information about the natural resources of the Refuge and potential impacts the hunting program will have on these resources.

Description of Hunting Program

Archery deer hunting will be allowed to take place on Refuge lands owned by the Service that constitute contiguous tracts greater than 20 acres. Hunters will be required to follow all State laws and regulations for archery deer hunting, except no baiting will be allowed. The Refuge's archery hunting season will follow the State's season. Wisconsin's 2005 deer hunting regulations opens archery hunting from September 17, 2005 through January 3, 2006, excluding the deer gun season.

Ground blinds or any elevated device on Refuge lands may be used only if they do not damage live vegetation, including trees, and are completely removed from the property each day at the close of hunting hours. The cutting of shooting lanes and use of screw-in tree-stands or steps are considered damaging and are illegal. Ground blinds may be constructed entirely of dead vegetation from on the property.

We will establish a no-hunting buffer around the Coaster Classroom and the boardwalk trails of

the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center. Hunting and no hunting zones will be updated annually and will be available from refuge staff.

The Service does not plan to limit use or require Refuge-specific permits unless high demand creates safety concerns. We anticipate that most archery deer hunters respect spacing needs between hunters and blinds and will essentially self-regulate themselves. We will, however, encourage archery hunters to obtain a packet of information about Refuge hunting, and to report deer harvested.

Measures Taken to Avoid Conflicts with Other Management Objectives

Biological Conflicts - Endangered Species, Section 7 consultation has been completed and a supplemental environmental assessment to the Refuge Public Use Plan is written to include archery deer hunting. There will be no effect on threatened or endangered species. We anticipate minimal effect on the local deer population. We expect a very small decrease in local population after each season, but it should be self-sustaining within the overall deer management unit. Archery deer hunting will not affect other fish or wildlife populations.

Public Use Conflicts - We anticipate very minimal user conflicts between archery hunters and non-consumptive users such as hikers and bird watchers. Hunting will not be allowed near the Coaster Classroom site and the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center's boardwalk trail, where most public use conflicts would likely occur. If conflicts occur that are not manageable, we will make adjustments to our hunting program.

There should be no conflicts with waterfowl hunters because they hunt in different habitats. Waterfowl hunting, on the refuge, is only allowed on Service owned land east of Highway 13.

Private landowners within and adjacent to the refuge boundary might experience additional trespass on their lands if a hunter wounds and tracks a deer onto their lands. It is considered trespass if a hunter does not have permission from the landowner to track a deer onto the landowner's land. The landowner would be responsible to reporting trespass violations on their property.

Administrative Conflicts - There will be minimal administrative conflicts.

Conduct of the Hunt

Refuge-specific Hunting Regulations

- Archery deer hunting will be allowed to take place on Refuge lands owned by the Service that constitute tracts greater than 20 acres.
- Ground blinds or any elevated device on Refuge lands may be used only if they

- do not damage live vegetation, including trees.
- The following are considered damaging and are illegal:
 - cutting of shooting lanes
 - screw-in tree-stands or steps
- Ground blinds and any elevated devices must completely be removed from the Refuge each day at the close of the hunting hours.
- Ground blinds may be constructed entirely of dead vegetation from on the property.
- No hunting will be allowed within a buffer around the Coaster Classroom site and boardwalk of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center.
- No baiting will be allowed.
- Motorized vehicles are allowed only on public roads and parking areas.

Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunt - Hunters who traditionally used this land before it became a refuge will be supportive. Other hunters will also be supportive. Some members of the public will be surprised or disappointed, because there is the perception that a “refuge” means no hunting (see public comments received regarding public use in the Whittlesey Creek NWR Public Use Plan, dated April 6, 2001). Adjacent private landowners might be concerned that hunters who might wound a deer will trespass on their land to track a deer.

Hunter Application and Registration Procedures - Not applicable.

Description of Hunter Selection Process - Not applicable.

Media Selection for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunt - A public notice will be sent to all local newspapers in Ashland, Bayfield, Iron, and Douglas Counties, including the Bayfield County Journal and the Ashland Daily Press. Information will be posted on the Whittlesey Creek NWR internet home page. We will post notices at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and local Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources offices.

Description of Hunter Orientation, Including Pre-hunt Scouting – We will encourage hunters to come to Refuge headquarters before they hunt to receive a packet of information about the archery hunt. The packet will include maps and regulations, and request that hunters notify us of harvested deer. No other orientation of pre-hunt scouting will be provided by staff. Hunters are encouraged and welcome to scout Refuge lands during daylight hours before hunting.

Hunter Requirements

- 1) Age - Same as required by state regulations
- 2) Allowable equipment - Same as required by state regulations
- 3) Use of open fires (for cooking, warmth) - None allowed

- 4) License and permits - Wisconsin state license required. No Refuge-specific permits will be required or issued.
- 5) Reporting harvest - Same as required by state regulations. Hunters will also be encouraged to report harvested deer on refuge lands to refuge staff.
- 6) Hunter training and safety - Same as required by state regulations.

References

Naas, T., Wisconsin DNR wildlife biologist, Ashland, WI. Personal communication in September 2005.

Newman, L.E. and R.B. Dubois. 1996. Status of brook trout in Lake Superior. Prepared for the Lake Superior Technical Committee by the Brook Trout Subcommittee. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ashland, Wisconsin; and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Brule, Wisconsin.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2001. Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge conceptual plan for public use. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fort Snelling, Minnesota.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2001. Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge environmental assessment for conceptual plan for public use. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fort Snelling, Minnesota.

**Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge
Lands Acquired As Of December 2005**

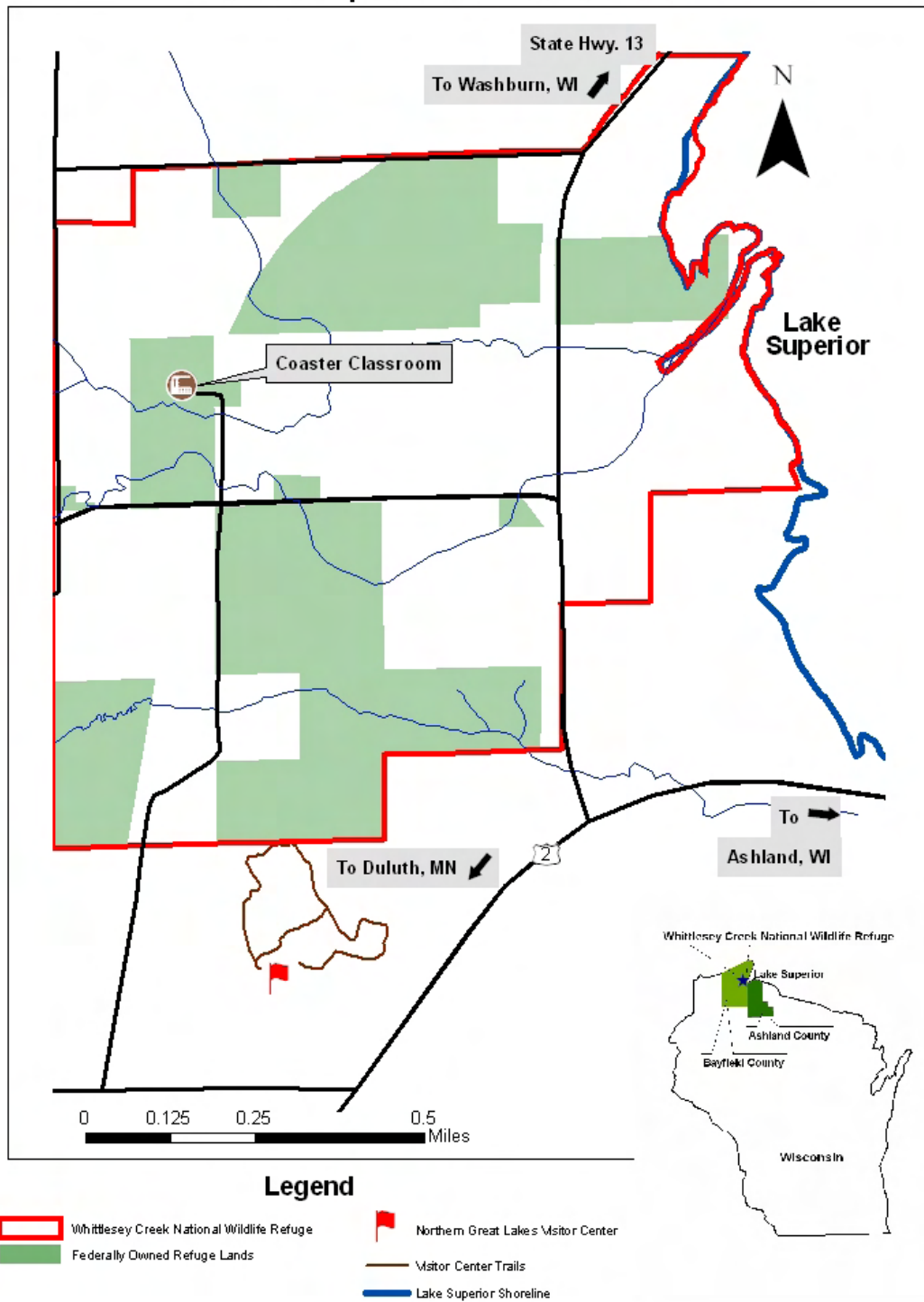


Figure 1. Location of Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge and Refuge Boundary

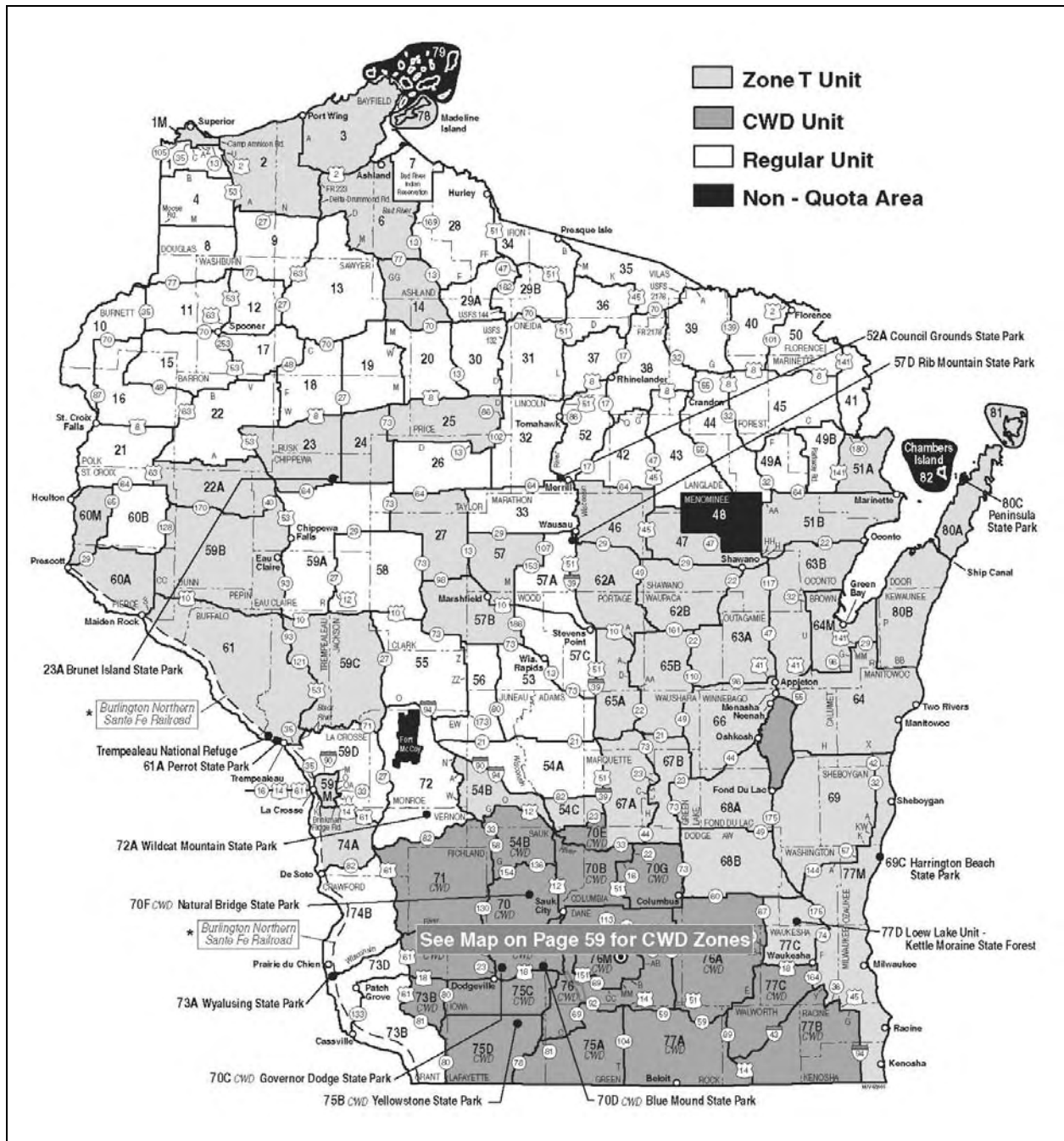


Figure 2. Wisconsin DNR deer management units. The Refuge is located within Unit 3.

Compatibility Determination for Archery Deer Hunting

Use

The use proposed is to allow archery deer hunting on the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge, as provided in the Conceptual Public Use Plan, dated April 6, 2001 and the Archery White-tailed Deer Hunting Plan, dated December 5, 2005.

Refuge Name

Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Establishing and Acquisition Authority

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended by Public Law 93-271

Refuge Purposes

The Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge was established under the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. 742f(a)(4); "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. 742f(b)(1).

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

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposes to allow archery deer hunting to take place within Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), as described below.

Because the Refuge has not been open to deer hunting, we have no data to base an estimate of number of days that hunters will use the Refuge. The Refuge's archery hunting season will follow the State's season. Wisconsin's 2005 deer hunting regulations opens archery hunting from September 17, 2005 through January 3, 2006, excluding the 10-day deer gun season. We expect that most users will be landowners within and near the Refuge boundary.

Habitat that will be utilized through the proposed public use include coastal wetlands, uplands, forested wetlands, forested shrublands and riparian areas.

Hunting

General guidelines for hunting on refuge lands require that in general, the Service will follow all regulations of the State of Wisconsin on lands it owns except baiting is not allowed. The following general guidelines are followed for hunting on Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge:

- Hunters will be required to follow all State laws and regulations. This includes no shooting within 100 yards of a residence without permission of the resident.
- The Service does not allow baiting on any refuge system lands, so baiting will not be allowed on the Refuge.
- Ground or elevated blinds may be used if they do not damage live vegetation and are completely removed from the property each day at the close of the hunting hours.
- Ground blinds may be constructed entirely of dead vegetation from on the property.
- Nontoxic shot is required for all shotgun use on the refuge. A no-hunting buffer on Service-owned lands adjacent to the Center will be established for visitor safety needs.

Archery Deer Hunting Specific Requirements:

- Archery deer hunting will be allowed to take place on Refuge lands owned by the Service that constitute tracts greater than 20 acres.
- Ground blinds or any elevated device on Refuge lands may be used only if they do not damage live vegetation, including trees.
- The following are considered damaging and are illegal:
 - cutting of shooting lanes
 - screw-in tree-stands or steps
- Ground blinds and any elevated devices must completely be removed from the Refuge each day at the close of the hunting hours.
- Ground blinds may be constructed entirely of dead vegetation from on the property.
- No hunting will be allowed within a buffer around the Coaster Classroom site and boardwalk of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center (Figure 1).
- No baiting will be allowed.
- Motorized vehicles are allowed only on public roads and parking areas.

Archery hunters will be encouraged to check-in at Refuge headquarters, but no Refuge-specific permit will be required or issued. Tagging of harvested deer must follow state regulations, but the Service will request that hunters notify us of harvested deer.

Availability of Resources

Current staff will inform the public about archery deer hunting annually through press releases. Information packets that include maps and regulations will be available at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center (Refuge headquarters). No additional facilities are needed.

Law enforcement and monitoring hunter use will require additional resources. The Refuge does not have any law enforcement personnel at the station; a zone law enforcement officer is stationed at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in central Wisconsin. We utilize this officer to

meet Refuge law enforcement needs. Whittlesey Creek Refuge staff will be expected to watch for abuse by hunters who use live vegetation for blind construction, who impact vegetation with tree stands, and who don't remove their stands each day. Portable stands will be confiscated and turned over to state wardens or Service's law enforcement personnel. All tree stands and blinds that remain overnight will be removed. Staff will continue to work with our Zone law enforcement officer and state wardens to ensure hunter compliance.

We will monitor hunter use by the number of packets that are provided to archery hunters. We will monitor harvest when hunters volunteer to provide harvest information.

We anticipate about 2 percent of a full-time equivalent will be required to implement this use.

Anticipated Impacts of Use

The environment of the Refuge and potential impacts from public use are described in detail in the document: "Environmental Assessment for the Public Use Plan, Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge Bayfield County, Wisconsin" dated April 6, 2001. The document is on file at the Whittlesey Creek NWR headquarters office in Ashland, Wisconsin. A summary of potential impacts specific to archery deer hunting follow.

Fish and Wildlife Populations

The Service's ability to reach its fish and wildlife population goals would not be negatively affected.

Archery deer hunting will have a minimal effect on the deer population in both the Refuge and within the DNR's deer management unit 3. We anticipate that at most, 10 deer will be harvested from Refuge lands. Concurrently, the deer population should not be negatively harmed by harvest of a few deer within the Refuge. However, we expect a minimal drop in impacts from deer browsing on trees and shrubs.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat

The proposed use would not affect the Service's ability to reach habitat goals established for the Refuge.

User Conflicts

Conflicts could occur between non-consumptive users and archery hunters, especially in September and early October when visitation remains high at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and in the Coaster Classroom. The Service will manage public use to avoid conflicts as much as possible by prohibiting archery hunting within a buffer near the Visitor Center's boardwalk and around the Refuge's Coaster Classroom site.

Archery hunters are very inconspicuous and will shoot a deer only when it is within about 30 yards or less. Their mode of operation will in itself minimize impacts. However, other users could disrupt the experience for a hunter when they are not aware that the hunter is in her/her blind/stand. We are not proposing to control these situations; hunters will have to accept the

potential for interference from other users.

Private landowners within and adjacent to the Refuge might experience additional trespass on their lands if a hunter wounds and tracks a deer onto their lands. It is considered trespass if a hunter does not have permission from the landowner to track a deer onto the landowner's land. The landowner would be responsible to reporting trespass violations on their property.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Archery deer hunting should not affect nesting piping plovers or bald eagles. Gray wolf travel through and possible hunt within the Refuge. Canada lynx are not known to use the Refuge. The Service will track all sightings of threatened and endangered.

Public Review and Comment

Determination (check one below)

- Use is not compatible
 Use is compatible with the below stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

Hunters will be required to follow all State laws and regulations, as well as Refuge specific regulations. The Service does not allow baiting on any refuge system lands, so baiting will not be allowed on the Refuge.

Justification

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act mandates that compatible, wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation are priority public uses. This compatibility determination will allow archery deer hunting to take place at the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge, in fulfillment of that mandate. These uses will help fulfill one of the goals of the Refuge's Interim Comprehensive Conservation Plan to: "Manage for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses, including environmental education, hunting, fishing, wildlife-viewing, and demonstrating restoration and management techniques."

Hunting of resident wildlife on the Refuge is not considered a means to manage regional population goals established by the WI DNR. Rather, hunting resident wildlife are considered for their compatibility with Refuge goals. This use is compatible with Refuge goals.

Archery deer hunting will have minimal impact on the resources of the Refuge. Public use of this Refuge will help build support for the Refuge and the Service's mission.

Signature:

Refuge Manager

Date

Concurrence:

Regional Chief

Date

Mandatory 10- or 15-year Re-evaluation Date: _____