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# **Appendix A: Finding of No Significant Impact**



# Finding of No Significant Impact

## Environmental Assessment and Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Mingo, Pilot Knob, and Ozark Cavefish National Wildlife Refuges, Missouri

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to identify management strategies to meet the conservation goals of Mingo, Pilot Knob, and Ozark Cavefish National Wildlife Refuges. The EA examined the environmental consequences that each management alternative could have on the quality of the physical, biological, and human environment, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The EA presented and evaluated four alternatives for Mingo National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and two alternatives each for Pilot Knob NWR and Ozark Cavefish NWR for managing fish, wildlife, and plant habitats, as well as visitor services, on the Refuges over the next 15 years.

### Mingo NWR

#### **Alternative 1: Current Management Direction (No Action)**

Current management is focused on improving drainage within the Refuge by removing sediment from a portion of the ditch network. Wetlands are actively managed to benefit migratory birds, especially waterfowl. Grassy openings, cropland, and food plots are concentrated around the perimeter of the Refuge. There are opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental interpretation, environmental education, horseback riding, canoeing, and several other activities.

#### **Alternative 2: Expanded Public Use**

This alternative would augment visitor services and expand public use facilities and opportunities on the Refuge above current levels. In pursuing the habitat goal, Alternative 2, like the No Action Alternative (1), would generally manage habitats as they are managed at present, except in cases where changes in habitat management are directly related to proposed changes in public use. One example is that efforts to improve drainage within the Refuge would be expanded to include more of the ditch network.

#### **Alternative 3: Expanded Habitat Management and Reduced Visitor Conflicts**

This alternative would emphasize expanding habitat management and reducing visitor conflicts on the Refuge generally by curtailing the amount and extent of public use below present levels. The bottomland forest would be actively managed and would slightly increase because of the conversion of some open marsh and all grassy openings, cropland, and food plots. Efforts to improve drainage within the Refuge would be expanded above present levels to include more of the ditch network. Management of some units would be altered to attract nesting marsh birds.

#### **Alternative 4: Balanced Expanded Public Use and Habitat Management (*Preferred Alternative*)**

Alternative 4 would pursue both expanded public use and habitat management in a balanced approach that would seek to increase the benefits of the Refuge in all respects. Under Alternative 4, Mingo NWR would increase opportunities for a number of recreational activities particularly hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and horseback riding. The bottomland forest would be

actively managed and would slightly increase because of the conversion of some open marsh, grassy openings, cropland, and food plots. Efforts to improve drainage within the Refuge would be expanded above present levels to include more of the ditch network. Management of some units would be altered to attract nesting marsh birds.

### **Pilot Knob NWR**

#### **Alternative 1: Current Management Direction (No Action)**

Under current management direction, law enforcement activities at Pilot Knob NWR would remain infrequent. Public access would be limited to specific authorized visits associated with research, education, or historic interpretation. Repair and maintenance of fencing and boundary signs would continue.

#### **Alternative 2: Expanded Species Protection and Opportunities for the Public (*Preferred Alternative*)**

The preferred alternative for Pilot Knob includes increased community outreach to improve communication with local residents, seasonal guided public access to the summit of Pilot Knob, and developing a formal agreement with the Missouri Department of Conservation to share law enforcement duties.

### **Ozark Cavefish NWR**

#### **Alternative 1: Current Management Direction (No Action)**

Under current management direction, the Refuge would continue to provide protection to the surface outlet of Turnback Creek and Hearrell Springs. There would be no active habitat management on the Refuge, and it would continue to be closed to the public. Boundaries would be posted and maintained, but law enforcement inspections would be infrequent.

#### **Alternative 2: Expanded Species Protection and Opportunities for the Public (*Preferred Alternative*)**

The preferred alternative for Ozark Cavefish includes opening the Refuge to compatible wildlife dependent recreation, working with surrounding land owners to improve water quality, assessing and managing habitat, and developing a formal agreement with the Missouri Department of Conservation to share management activities at this remote site.

The alternative selected for implementation is Alternative 4 for Mingo NWR, Alternative 2 for Pilot Knob NWR, and Alternative 2 for Ozark Cavefish NWR. The strategies presented in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) were developed as a direct result of the selection of these alternatives. Managing and expanding bottomland hardwood forest will benefit a variety of wildlife species identified as Resource Conservation Priority species by the Service. Habitats will be managed for nesting and migrating water and land birds. Visitors to the Refuges also will benefit from expanded recreational opportunities, especially fishing, hunting, and wildlife observation.

For reasons presented above and based on an evaluation of the information contained in the Environmental Assessment, we have determined that the action of adopting Alternative 4 for Mingo NWR, Alternative 2 for Pilot Knob NWR, and Alternative 2 for Ozark Cavefish NWR as

the management alternatives is not a major federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of Section 102 (2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Additional Reasons:

1. Future management actions will have a neutral or positive impact on the local economy.
2. A cultural resource inventory completed prior to this CCP included recommendations for the protection of cultural, archaeological and historical resources.
3. This action will not have an adverse impact on threatened or endangered species.

Supporting References:

Environmental Assessment  
Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Robyn Thorson APR 17 2007  
Regional Director Date

