

Compatibility Determination

Research

Research by a third party.

Refuge Use Category

Research and Surveys

Refuge Use Type(s)

Research, Scientific Collecting, Surveys

Refuge

Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Purpose(s) and Establishing and Acquisition Authorities

“... a preserve and breeding ground for native birds.” (EOs 1461, 1642, 3256)

“...to effectuate further the purposes of the of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act...”
(EO 7301)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, otherwise known as 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 (Pub. L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1252).

Description of Use

Is this an existing use?

Yes

What is the use?

The Refuge may permit scientific research on a variety of biological, physical, and social issues to inform Refuge management and address broader conservation related questions. Studies may be conducted by federal, state, and private entities.

Is the use a priority public use?

No

Where would the use be conducted?

Research study sites may be located throughout the Refuge

When would the use be conducted?

Research may be conducted throughout the year.

How would the use be conducted?

Various types of research may be conducted on the Refuge. Past research has included: bison and elk studies, water quality monitoring, aquatic invertebrate and wildlife assessments, bat inventories, bird inventories, burying beetle monitoring and various vegetation assessments.

Access to study sites is by foot, truck, UTV/ATV, and canoe. Research may also include aerial activities to assess vegetation or wildlife. Limited collection of plant materials and capture/handling of animals may occur.

A special use permit is required.

Why is this use being proposed or reevaluated?

This use was last evaluated in association with the 1999 Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

Availability of Resources

Currently, existing staff resources are adequate to manage this use at anticipated levels. Staff time primarily involves phone conversations, written correspondence, proposal review, and interaction with researchers. Field work associated with administer ring the program primarily involves monitoring compliance with the terms of the special use permit. Total staff time required is less than 5 days per year. Additional facilities (e.g., boat ramps, storage areas) or additional maintenance activities will not be necessary to support the use.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use

Short-term impacts

Research and investigations will often temporarily disturb or displace fish and wildlife (e.g. prairie grouse are temporarily displaced during lek surveys). Sampling activities and off-road travel to survey sites may cause temporary compaction of

soils and the trampling of vegetation. Overall impacts to habitat and wildlife are anticipated to be minor and temporary in nature. Impacts to the public will be negligible since research activities are not typically conducted in public use areas.

Long-term impacts

Generally, third-party research and investigations are short-term projects, and no long-term or indirect impacts are anticipated. All third-party research requests will be reviewed by the refuge manager and will include stipulations regarding the locating, timing, and frequency of disturbance to ensure that long-term and cumulative negative impacts are avoided.

Public Review and Comment

Determination

Is the use compatible?

Yes

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

1. Prior to conducting investigations, researchers will obtain a special use permit from the Refuge that contains specific stipulations related to the research activity.
2. The permittee is responsible for ensuring all persons working under the authority of the special use permit are familiar with and adhere to the conditions of the special use permit.
3. The permittee must possess all necessary state, federal and local permits.
4. The use of off-road vehicles is prohibited unless specifically authorized in the special use permit.
5. In accordance with the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 470aa), the removal or disturbance of archaeological or historical artifacts is prohibited. The excavation, disturbance, collection, or purchase of historical, ethnological, or archaeological specimens or artifacts is prohibited.
6. Research involving collection of plant material or capture of animals will require approval by the refuge manager.

Justification

Research and investigations into the biological, physical, archaeological, and social components of the Refuge provide a means to analyze management actions and gain a better understanding of the Refuge environment. Adverse impacts of research that cause wildlife disturbance or localized vegetation trampling are short-term and will be minimized through stipulations in a special use permit. When conducted as

outlined in this compatibility determination, research and investigations will not materially detract from meeting Refuge purposes or the mission of the Refuge System.