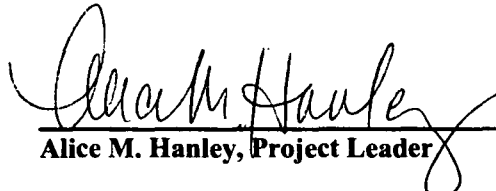


Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge

Hunt Plan January 2011

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I. INTRODUCTION

This Hunting Plan formulates the general concept for hunting opportunities on acquired lands as identified in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the establishment of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (HPA)* dated March 20, 1998, and a Record of Decision dated May 16, 1998.

The HPA encompasses all or portions of 85 counties in western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa (see Figure 1). Lands purchased as conservation easements or in fee title are administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) 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).]

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR was developed to address the loss of America's grasslands and mounting evidence indicating that many grassland species populations had precipitously declined as the prairies had vanished. Estimates place the original northern tallgrass prairie in Minnesota and Iowa at approximately 25 million acres. Studies estimate only 300,000 acres remaining in the two states, representing a greater than 99 percent reduction in the amount of tallgrass prairie habitat (Samson and Knopf 1994). Currently, only a small percentage of these habitats have been permanently protected, making tallgrass prairie one of the most rare and most fragmented ecosystems. The Refuge was established to provide a means of working with individuals, groups, and government entities to permanently preserve and restore a portion of the northern tallgrass prairie.

Conservation easements and fee title lands are managed or overseen by the staffs at existing units of the National Wildlife Refuge System throughout the project area. Oversight and coordination of the entire project is the responsibility of the Project Leader of Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge, Odessa, MN.

The HPA project falls within portions of the Mississippi Headwaters/Tallgrass Prairie and Upper Mississippi River/Tallgrass Prairie Ecosystems. Service priorities for these two ecosystems include:

- Restore, enhance, and protect water quality and quantity that approaches natural hydrologic functions.
- Restore, enhance and protect high quality and rare resources.
- Prevent the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of existing habitats/communities, and restore, enhance, and protect habitats/communities to alleviate such loss, degradation, and fragmentation.
- Improve public understanding of fish and wildlife resources and issues, increase public involvement in fish and wildlife conservation, and increase and improve partnerships to accomplish common resource goals.

- **Protect, restore, and enhance populations of native and trust species and their habitats.**
- **Restore natural ecosystem processes, including hydrology and sediment transport to maintain species and habitat diversity.**
- **Promote environmental awareness of the ecosystem and its needs with emphasis on sustainable land use management.**
- **Promote balance and compatible socioeconomic uses of the ecosystem's resources.**

The first property to become a part of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR is a conservation easement purchased on September 18, 2000 in Renville County, MN. The first fee title property was purchased in Rock County, MN on November 30, 2001. The eight fee title units total 2,803.40 acres, 352.20 acres in Iowa and 2,451.20 acres in Minnesota. The Refuge also has 41 habitat easements, all in Minnesota, totaling 2,386.19 acres. The Refuge is intended to permanently preserve a total of 77,000 acres of native prairie and wetlands within the historic range of the northern tallgrass prairie area of western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa. The Refuge will contribute to goals for ecosystem conservation and restoration, threatened and endangered species recovery, neotropical migrant bird conservation, biological diversity, and wildlife oriented public recreation.

The EIS identified providing compatible wildlife-dependent recreational public uses, such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation, as being a primary goal for the Refuge. In the Record of Decision, the Service selected the preferred alternative which stated that hunting will be permitted on most units of the Refuge in accordance with state seasons. Additionally, hunting was identified in the 1998 Interim Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) as being a priority public use that would be authorized on most units of the Refuge. The Service has determined (i.e., Compatibility Determination included with the 1998 CCP) that this use is compatible with the purpose of the Refuge and the mission statement of the NWR System.

**Northern Tallgrass Prairie
National Wildlife Refuge
Project Area**

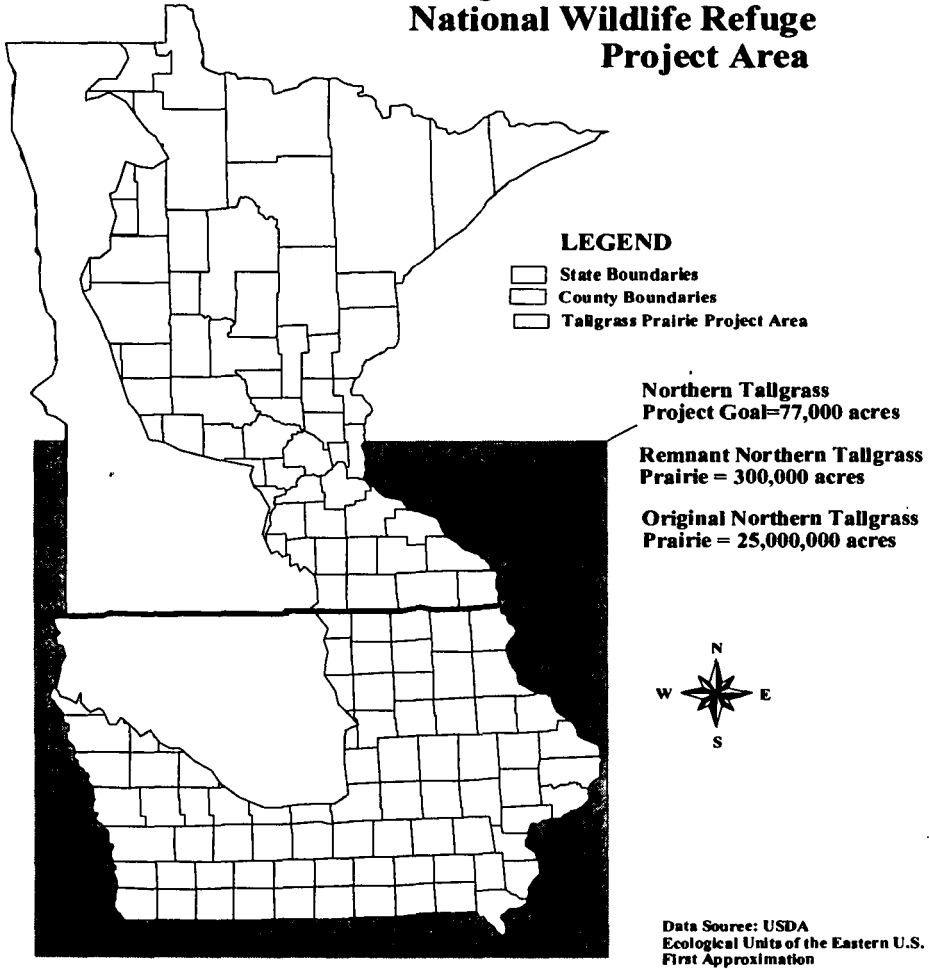


Figure 1 Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Protection Area, Minnesota and Iowa

II. CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITY

This Hunting Plan has been developed to guide hunting on the Refuge in a manner that allows the Service to fulfill the purposes for which the Refuge was established as well as provide wildlife-dependent recreation.

The 1998 EIS identified providing compatible wildlife-dependent recreational public uses, such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation as being a primary goal for the Refuge. In the Record of Decision, the Service selected the preferred alternative which stated that hunting will be permitted on most Units of the Refuge in accordance with state seasons. Additionally, hunting was identified in the 1998 Interim Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) as being a priority public use that would be authorized on most Units of the Refuge. The Service has determined (i.e., Compatibility Determination included with the 1998 CCP) that this use is compatible with the purpose of the Refuge and the mission statement of the NWR System.

Guidance for authorizing public uses on National Wildlife Refuges is provided in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Improvement Act) of 1997 (USFWS 1997). The Improvement Act states, "compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System...through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife." The Improvement Act recognizes that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible, are a legitimate and appropriate use of the Refuge system lands. The Improvement Act states that these specific six uses should receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management. Other uses not listed as priority public uses may be allowed if they are determined to be appropriate and compatible with the purposes for which the Refuge was established.

According to the Improvement Act, when a wildlife-dependent recreational use is determined to be a compatible use and is not inconsistent with public safety, that activity should be facilitated. The term "compatible use" is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge unit that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the Refuge. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Final Compatibility Policy (USFWS 2000) pursuant to the Improvement Act delegates the responsibility of determining compatibility to the Refuge Manager with concurrence by the Regional Office Supervisor.

Hunting on Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR will allow refuge staff to manage wildlife populations at acceptable levels, provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for the public, and promote a better understanding and appreciation of tallgrass prairie habitats and their associated fish and wildlife resources. Implementation of the proposed actions will be consistent and compatible with the Refuge Recreation Act, the Refuge

Administration Act, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the establishments of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area.

Relationship to other Plans and Documents

The first Hunt Plan for Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR was approved in 2003. This Plan, along with accompanying paperwork, opened the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR to hunting on fee title tracts in Minnesota and Iowa. The EIS was used to fulfill the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. It considered the biological, environmental, and socioeconomic effects that implementing the preferred alternative and two other alternatives would have on the issues and concerns identified during the planning process. The preferred alternative included opening the fee title lands to new hunting opportunities. The other two alternatives did not include the Service acquiring new fee title lands, and therefore did not include opening lands to hunting opportunities.

A separate Environmental Assessment (EA) for the hunting program was completed in 2007 to address the cumulative impacts that hunting on refuge units would have on the landscape. This EA included all tracts purchased up to or during 2006.

This Hunting Plan is a step-down plan from the EIS. In the EIS, the Refuge completed compatibility determinations on public uses, including hunting. Hunting was determined to be compatible with the mission of the Refuge. Big game, upland game, and migratory bird hunting, are presented in this Hunting Plan. A list and a detailed description of the hunting opportunities proposed for the Refuge are provided in this document.

Upon completion and adoption of this Hunting Plan, the Service will publish in the Federal Register a Proposed Rule that updates the hunting program on the Refuge. Following the comment period on the Proposed Rule, a determination will be made whether to implement the updated hunting opportunities outlined in this Hunting Plan. Subsequently, a Final Rule will be published outlining hunting on the Refuge.

III. STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

The Refuge was established in September 2000 with the primary purpose being to preserve and enhance the remaining remnant tracts of northern tallgrass prairie and aspen parklands habitats within Iowa and Minnesota.

A secondary purpose is to link existing prairie tracts together (Federal, state, tribal, private organization, and private landowner ownerships) into larger blocks plus buffer remnant prairie. This will establish larger, more viable units of managed prairie and allow travel corridors for wildlife. Prairie restoration used to link existing prairies together would utilize the same techniques used in managing existing prairies. Many federal Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA) within the two states contain native prairie and could be utilized for linking purposes.

Preservation along with some habitat restoration would benefit a diversity of fish and wildlife through islands of wildlife habitat, supporting waterfowl, other migratory and neotropical birds, game species, endangered and threatened plants and animals, and unique communities.

Goals for the Habitat Preservation Area include:

- Preserve remnants of native tallgrass prairie to ensure protection of unique plant communities, native fish and wildlife, and historic and cultural sites.
- Restore native tallgrass prairie, including:
 - Enhancement of some of the best remaining degraded remnants of tallgrass prairie through management practices (burning, grazing, etc.) and inter-planting or seeding of native plant species. Associated natural wetland habitats including prairie wetlands (potholes), fens, wet prairie, and riverine areas could be enhanced as well.
 - Reconstruction of areas of tallgrass prairie using native plant species to buffer or connect remnant native prairie tracts.
- Conserve, manage, and restore the diversity and viability of native fish and wildlife populations associated with tallgrass prairie.
- Provide public areas for compatible wildlife-dependent uses, emphasizing increased public understanding of the tallgrass prairie.

IV. ASSESSMENT

The Service has allowed public hunting and has administered a hunting program on adjacent and nearby WPAs since the early 1960's. Recent estimates show that more than 290,100 people visit Minnesota WPAs and 55,100 visit Iowa WPAs annually for the purpose of hunting. During its history, the Service has not noted any significant adverse effects of this program on the administration of WPAs, and has determined that this use is compatible with the purposes of the WPAs and the NWR System's mission statement. The hunting program for Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR will be similar and consistent with the program administered by the Service for WPAs.

White-tailed deer, waterfowl, waterbirds, aquatic mammals, passerine, and mammalian predators are monitored on the Refuge and surrounding areas by the Service and conservation partners. Fish, amphibians, reptiles, and insects also are monitored, although less frequently.

Recent assessments of species hunted in the vicinity of the Refuge indicate that those species are not facing a general decline. For waterfowl, the annual assessments are based upon the distribution, abundance, and flight corridors of migratory birds. The annual Waterfowl Population Status Report (USFWS 2009) includes the most current breeding population and production information available for waterfowl in North America and is a result of cooperative efforts by the Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service, various state and provincial conservation agencies, and private conservation organizations. According

to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR), the estimated duck population in Minnesota in 2009 was 507,000, excluding scaup (Dexter 2009). This estimate decreased 31% compared to 2008, and was identical to 32% below the 10-year average and 19% below the long-term average. Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) numbers increase 18% compared to 2008. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IADNR) does not release estimates on waterfowl populations.

The mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*) is one of the most abundant species in urban and rural areas of North America. Dove hunting is allowed in Minnesota, but not in Iowa. According to surveys, dove numbers in Minnesota increased 26% from 2008 counts, up 12% from the 10-year average, and only 3% below the long term average. Mourning dove hunting was opened statewide in Minnesota in 2004.

The wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) population in Iowa continued to decrease while MNDNR estimates show the population continuing to increase statewide. Turkeys rely on a combination of forested and open cover for food and roosting sites throughout the year. MNDNR has found that they can thrive in 20% forested areas. Most Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR tracts will not provide high quality habitat for wild turkeys due to the lack of forested areas. Most tracts will consist entirely of native prairie, restored grasslands or a mosaic of grassland and wetlands. Turkeys may be found on these areas at times, but these lands will most likely not be able to support a viable population.

The ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) is one of the most popular upland game birds in Minnesota and Iowa. Both states have managed pheasant hunting for 80-85 years (Iowa since 1925, Minnesota since 1930), with few exceptions. Each state conducts annual population counts and deems this population huntable. The 2009 estimates in both states showed decreases in populations. Recent severe winters, cold, wet nesting seasons, and the continued loss of habitat through loss of lands enrolled in the US Department of Agriculture Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), has contributed to these decreases.

Data for other small (upland) game is collected by the both states during their August roadside surveys. Annual population indices, 10-year averages, and historical information are used to determine hunting guidelines for the species.

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) represent one of the most important big game mammals in Minnesota and Iowa. Although viewed as being important by both hunters and non-hunters, deer also pose serious socioeconomic and ecological challenges for wildlife managers, such as deer-vehicle collisions, crop depredation, and forest regeneration issues (Dexter 2009). In 2009 Iowa deer densities showed declining densities after strong growth for almost a decade (IADNR 2009). The Refuge units in Minnesota are located in the farmland/transition zone which has deer herds which remained fairly stable across the area.

Suitable habitat exists on the Refuge lands to support hunting as proposed. The viability of the game species populations proposed to be hunted is not expected to be negatively

affected by hunting according to State season guidelines. In fact, some hunted species (e.g., white-tailed deer, resident Canada goose) populations have risen substantially and are considered locally overabundant.

V. DESCRIPTION OF HUNTING PROGRAM

Most units of the Refuge support huntable populations of migratory birds, big game, and upland game. Most units of the Refuge are open to the public for some type of recreational use. A comparison of current hunting opportunities and new opportunities for 2011 is presented in Appendix B.

Where allowed, hunting on the Refuge follows the season dates and bag limits in the State regulations. This helps reduce confusion when hunters participate in hunting activities on Service lands. As outlined in the 2003 Hunt Plan, fee title units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR are opened to hunting when they meet the following criteria:

1. The unit is large enough to support the anticipated quantity, frequency, and duration of hunter use without adversely affecting game populations or habitat conditions within the area;
2. Public access to the unit does not require travel across private lands or closed government lands;
3. Sites are available for hunters to park their vehicles legally and in a manner that will not adversely affect the habitat in the unit or existing public travel routes;
4. Public hunting will not have adverse effects on any federally listed or proposed species of concern; and
5. Hunting can be conducted without jeopardizing public safety.

The states of Iowa and Minnesota differ slightly in species that are allowed to be hunted and the regulations that cover these seasons. Table 1 displays these differences. Tables 2 and 3 show the 2010-2011 season dates for Iowa and Minnesota.

Table 1: Hunted Species by State

Species Hunted	Iowa	Minnesota
White-tailed deer	X	X
Wild Turkey	X	X
Ring-necked pheasant	X	X
Gray (Hungarian) partridge	X	X
Ruffed grouse		X
Sharp-tailed grouse		X
Prairie chicken		X
Bobwhite quail	X	
Rabbit (cottontail and white-tailed jack)	X	X
Snowshoe hare		X
Squirrel (fox and gray)	X	X
Groundhog	X	
Raccoon	X	X
Opossum	X	X
Fox (red and gray)	X	X
Badger	X	X
Coyote	X	X
Striped skunk	X	X
Crow	X	X
Ducks and geese	X	X
Common Moorhen (Gallinule)		X
Coots	X	X
Rails (Virginia and sora)	X	X
Common snipe	X	X
Mourning Dove		X

Table 2 : IOWA HUNTING INFORMATION 2010-2011

Deer Hunting			
Season	Season Dates		
Youth Season	Sept. 18- Oct.3		
Disable Hunter Season	Sept. 18 - Oct. 3		
Archery Season-Early Split	Oct. 1 - Dec. 3		
Archery Season-Late Split	Dec. 20 - Jan. 10, 2011		
Early Muzzleloader	Oct. 16-24 - 22		
Late Muzzleloader	Dec. 20 - Jan. 10, 2011		
Shotgun-Season 1	Dec. 4-8		
Shotgun-Season 2	Dec. 11-19		
November Antlerless Season	Nov. 26-28		
January Antlerless Season	Jan. 11 - Jan.30, 2011		
Nonresident Holiday Season	Dec. 24 - Jan. 2, 2011		
Turkey Hunting			
Season	Type of License	Season Dates	
Fall Season	Combination Gun/Bow	Oct. 11- Dec. 3, 2010	
Fall Archery	Archery Only	Oct. 1-Dec. 3 and Dec. 20-Jan. 10, 2011	
Youth Season (Residents Only)	Combination Gun/Bow	April 8-10, 2011	
Season 1	Combination Gun/Bow	April 11-14, 2011	
Season 2	Combination Gun/Bow	April 15-19, 2011	
Season 3	Combination Gun/Bow	April 20-26, 2011	
Season 4	Combination Gun/Bow	April 27 - May 15, 2011	
Season 1 - 4	Resident Archery-Only	April 11-May 15, 2011	
Upland Game Hunting		Furbearer Hunting	
Species	Season	Species	Season
Youth Rooster Pheasant	Oct. 23-24	Coyote	Continuous Open Season
Rooster Pheasant	Oct. 30 - Jan. 10, 2011	Raccoon, Opossum, Badger, Striped skunk	Nov. 6 - Jan. 31, 2011
Bobwhite Quail	Oct. 30 - Jan. 31, 2010	Fox (Red and Gray)	Nov. 6 - Jan. 31, 2011
Gray Partridge	Oct. 9 - Jan. 31, 2011		
Rabbit (Cottontail)	Sept. 4 - Feb. 28, 2011		
Rabbit (Jack)	Oct. 30 - Dec. 1		
Squirrel (Fox and Gray)	Sept.4 - Jan. 31, 2011		
Groundhog	June 15 - Oct. 31		
Crow	Oct. 15 - Nov. 30 and Jan. 14 - March 31, 2011		
Migratory Game Bird Hunting			
Species	Season (North Duck Zone)		Season (South Duck Zone)
Ducks, Mergansers, Coots	Sept. 18 - 22 and Oct. 16 - Dec. 9		Sept. 18-22 and Oct. 23 - Dec. 16
Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days	Oct. 2-3		Oct. 9-10
Species	Season (North Goose Zone)		Season (South Goose Zone)
Canada geese and brant	Sept. 25- Oct. 10 and Oct. 16-Jan. 5, 2011		Oct. 2 -17 and Oct. 23-Jan. 12, 2011
White-fronted geese	Sept. 25-Dec. 5		Oct. 2- Dec. 12
Light geese (white and blue phase snow geese and Ross' geese)	Sept. 25 - Jan. 9, 2011		Oct. 2- Jan. 14, 2011
Special September Canada Goose Seasons			
Canada geese	Sept. 4 - 12 (Only in designated zones around Des Moines, Cedar Rapids/Iowa City and Cedar Falls/Waterloo. Special regulations apply. See Special September Canada Goose Season flyer at select license agents in hunt zones).		
Statewide			
Species	Season		
Light geese Conservation Order (white and blue phase snow geese and Ross' geese)	Jan. 15 - April 15, 2011 (Additional Regulations May Apply)		
Woodcock	Oct. 2 - Nov. 15		
Snipe	Sept. 4 - Nov. 30		
Rail (Sora and Virginia)	Sept. 4 - Nov. 12		

Table 3 : MINNESOTA HUNTING INFORMATION 2010-2011

Deer Hunting			
Season	Zone	Season Dates	
Firearm	200	Nov. 6 - 14	
Muzzleloader	Statewide (except closed areas)	Nov. 27 - Dec. 12	
Archery	Statewide (except closed areas)	Sept. 18- Dec. 31	
Turkey Hunting			
Season	Season Dates		
Fall Season I	Oct. 2-31		
Spring Season I	April 13 - May 26, 2011		
Upland Game Hunting		Furbearer Hunting	
Species	Season	Species	Season
Pheasant	Oct. 16 - Jan. 2, 2011	Raccoon and Red Fox	Oct. 23 - Mar. 15, 2011
Ruffed Grouse	Sept. 18 - Jan. 2, 2011	Badger, Opossum	Oct. 23 - Mar. 15, 2011
Sharp-tailed Grouse (in open zone)	Sept. 18 - Nov. 30	Gray Fox	Oct. 23 - Mar. 15, 2011
Hungarian Partridge	Sept. 18 - Jan. 2, 2011	Coyote, striped skunk, and other unprotected species	Continuous
Prairie Chicken (by special permit only)	Oct. 23 - 27		
Rabbit (Cottontail, Jack, Snowshoe Hare)	Sept. 18 - Feb. 28, 2011		
Squirrel (Fox and Gray)	Sept. 18 - Feb. 28, 2011		
Non-Migratory Small Game by Falconry	Sept. 1 - Feb. 28, 2011		
Migratory Game Bird Hunting			
Ducks, Coots, Mergansers, Moorhens (Gallinules)	Oct. 2 - Nov.30		
Mourning Doves	Sept. 1 - Oct. 30		
Woodcock	Sept. 25 - Nov. 8		
Sora and Virginia Rail	Sept. 1 - Nov. 8		
Common Snipe (Wilson's or Jacksnipe)	Sept. 1 - Nov. 8		
Crow	March 1-31 and July 15-Oct. 15		
Geese (Snow, Blue, and Ross')	Oct. 2- Dec. 25		
White-fronted and Brant geese	Oct. 2 -Dec. 25		
Canada geese Statewide (except Rochester zone) September Season	Oct. 2- Dec. 25 Sept. 4 -22		

Current Opportunities

Generally, the Refuge is open to hunting for migratory birds, upland game, turkey and big game. Minnesota and Iowa differ slightly on specific species of upland game and furbearers that can be hunted and currently, only Minnesota is open to the hunting of mourning dove. Most other species can be hunted on units of the Refuge in accordance with State regulations and subject to refuge specific regulations.

Hunting activities are currently allowed on the following Refuge units (see Appendix A for maps):

- "Touch the Sky" unit in Rock County, Minnesota, tracts purchased in 2001, 2002, and 2003.
- "Prairie Smoke" unit in Kossuth County, Iowa, purchased in 2002.

- “Rengstorf” unit in Otter Tail County, Minnesota, purchased in 2002.
- “Gislason Lake” unit in Lincoln County, Minnesota, purchased 2005.
- “Bittbender” unit in Otter Tail County, Minnesota, purchased in 2005.

The current regulations listed in 50CFR32.42 that govern hunting on the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR units in Minnesota are the following:

A. Migratory Game Bird Hunting. We allow hunting of duck, goose, coot, rail (Virginia and sora only), woodcock, common snipe, and mourning dove in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. Hunters may possess only approved nontoxic shot while in the field (see §32.2(k)).
2. Hunters may construct temporary blinds using manmade materials only (see §27.92 of this chapter). We prohibit hunters from bringing plants or their parts onto the refuge.
3. We prohibit the construction or use of permanent blinds, stands, scaffolds, and ladders.
4. We prohibit hunters from leaving boats, decoys, or other personal property unattended at any time (see §§ 27.93 and 27.94 of this chapter).
5. Hunters must remove boats, decoys, portable or temporary blinds, materials brought onto the refuge, and other personal property at the end of each day’s hunt (see §§ 27.93 and 27.94 of this chapter).
6. We allow the use of hunting dogs, provided the dog is under the immediate control of the hunter at all times during the State-approved hunting season (see §26.21(b) of this chapter).
7. We prohibit the use of motorized watercraft.
8. We prohibit camping.

B. Upland Game Hunting. We allow hunting of ring-necked pheasant, Hungarian partridge, rabbit (cottontail and jack), squirrel (fox and gray), raccoon, opossum, fox (red and gray), badger, coyote, striped skunk, and crows on designated areas in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. Shotgun hunters may possess only approved nontoxic shot while in the field (see §32.3(k)).
2. We allow the use of dogs for upland game bird hunting only, provided that the dogs remain under the immediate control of the hunter at all times, during the State-approved hunting season (see §26.21(b) of this chapter).
3. We prohibit the use of dogs for hunting furbearers.
4. We close the refuge to all hunting from March 1 through August 31.
5. We allow hunting for coyote, striped skunk, raccoon, and fox from 1/2 hour before legal sunrise to legal sunset.
6. Conditions A7 and A8 apply.

C. Big Game Hunting. We allow hunting of deer and turkey on designated areas of the refuge in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

1. We allow the use of temporary stands, blinds, platforms, or ladders (see §27.92 of this chapter). Hunters may construct blinds using manmade materials only. We prohibit hunters from bringing plants or their parts on to the refuge.
2. Conditions A3, A5, A7, and A8 apply.
3. Turkey hunters may possess only approved nontoxic shot while in the field.

The current regulations listed in 50CFR32.42 that govern hunting on the Iowa units are stated as the following: ***Refer to § 32.42 Minnesota for regulations.***

New Opportunities for 2011 and Beyond

In this Hunting Plan, the Service is proposing public hunting opportunities on newly acquired lands and clarification of the refuge specific regulations for both Minnesota and Iowa. The Refuge tries to have its hunting programs duplicate state seasons and regulations where possible. All of the newly acquired lands listed below and proposed to be opened for hunting have been hunted prior to Service ownership.

Revised Refuge Specific Regulations for Minnesota Units

A. Migratory Game Bird Hunting. We allow hunting of ducks, geese, mergansers, moorhens, coots, rails (Virginia and sora only), woodcock, common snipe and mourning dove (*this includes mergansers and moorhens which were previously not specified*) in accordance with State regulations and subject to the following conditions:

A. 1 - 8, no change

B. Upland Game Hunting. We allow hunting of ring-necked pheasant, Hungarian partridge, rabbit (cottontail and jack), snowshoe hare, squirrel (fox and gray), raccoon, opossum, fox (red and gray), badger, coyote, striped skunk, and crows (*this includes snowshoe hare which was previously not specified*) on designated areas in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

B. 1-3 no change

B. 4 remove to be consistent with WPA regulations.

B. 5 remove to be consistent with WPA regulations.

B. 6. no change

C. Big Game Hunting. We allow hunting of deer and turkey on designated areas of the refuge in accordance with State regulations subject to the following conditions:

C.1-2, no change

C. 3 remove to be consistent with state regulations

“Green Muhly” unit

This 21-acre tract in Stevens County, Minnesota was acquired in 2007. The entire unit would be open to hunting according to Federal regulations, State seasons and refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

Mann tract

This 179.56-acre tract is a new addition to the “Touch the Sky” unit in Rock County, Minnesota and was purchased in 2010. The entire tract would be opened to hunting according to Federal regulations, State seasons and refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

“Jessen” unit

This 117.53-acre unit is located in Lincoln County, Minnesota and was purchased in 2010. The entire unit would be opened to hunting according to Federal regulations, State seasons and refuge specific regulations for all specified species.

Revised Refuge Specific Regulations for Iowa Units, except for those units adjacent to Neal Smith NWR.

A. Migratory Game Bird Hunting We allow hunting of ducks, geese, mergansers, coots, rails (Virginia and sora only), woodcock, and snipe on designated areas in accordance with State regulations and subject to the following conditions:

1. Hunters may possess only approved nontoxic shot while in the field.
2. Temporary blinds may be constructed using manmade materials only. Plants or their parts may not be brought onto the refuge.
3. We prohibit the construction or use of permanent blinds, stands, or scaffolds.
4. You may not leave boats, decoys, or other personal property unattended at any time.
5. You must remove boats, decoys, portable or temporary blinds, materials brought onto the refuge, and other personal property at the end of each day's hunt.
6. We allow the use of hunting dogs, provided that the dogs remain under the immediate control of the hunter at all times during the State-approved hunting season (see §26.21(b) of this chapter).
7. We prohibit the use of motorized watercraft.
8. We prohibit camping.

B. Upland Game Hunting. We allow the hunting of ring-necked pheasants, bobwhite quail, gray partridge, rabbit (cottontail and jack), squirrel (fox and gray), groundhog, raccoon, opossum, fox (red and gray), coyote, badger, striped skunk, and crows on designated areas in accordance with State regulations and subject to the following conditions:

1. Shotgun hunters may possess only approved nontoxic shot while in the field.
2. We allow the use of dogs for upland game bird hunting only, provided that the dogs remain under the immediate control of the hunter at all times during the State-approved hunting season (see 26.21(b) of this chapter).
3. We prohibit the use of dogs from hunting furbearers.
4. Conditions A7 and A8 apply.

C. Big Game Hunting. We allow the hunting of deer and turkey on designated areas in accordance with State regulations and subject to the following conditions:

1. We allow the use of temporary stands, blinds, platforms, or ladders. Blinds may be constructed using manmade materials only. Plants or their parts may not be brought onto the refuge.
2. We prohibit the construction or use of permanent blinds, stands, scaffolds or ladders.
3. You must remove boats, decoys, portable or temporary blinds, stands, platforms, and ladders, materials brought onto the refuge, and other personal property at the end of each day's hunt.
4. Conditions A7 and A8 apply.

“Southeast” unit

This 192.20-acre unit is adjacent to the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge in Jasper County, Iowa, and was acquired in 2008. This unit will remain closed to hunting at this time.

To avoid confusion, hunting regulations for Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR units adjacent to Neal Smith NWR will be standardized to match those of the Neal Smith NWR. Neal Smith NWR is currently undergoing the Comprehensive Conservation Planning process. Part of this process is to review all public uses on the Refuge, including hunting. An updated Hunt Plan will be written as a step down plan to the CCP.

This plan and the corresponding NEPA documentation to update the Code of Federal Regulations should be completed by 2012. Therefore this unit will remain closed to hunting until this process is completed and a determination is made on how hunting will be managed on all lands administered and managed by Neal Smith NWR.

Consultation and Coordination with the State

Previous to this 2011 Hunting Plan, the Refuge's hunting program has been developed in coordination with MNDNR and IADNR regional and area managers. This coordination was accomplished through formal and informal meetings as well as the Refuge soliciting MNDNR comments on the EIS establishing the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Protection Area.

The Refuge's consultation with MNDNR and IADNR regional and area managers for the development of this Hunting Plan dates back to 1998 as the Refuge began a series of meetings to develop a vision for the HPA. Since then, the Units managers have continued consulting and coordinating with the states regarding Refuge hunting activities on an informal basis.

MNDNR and IADNR offices responsible for the areas where Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR units are located were sent consultation letters soliciting comments regarding this updated Hunting Plan. Comments have not been received by the end of the public comment period.

Following the adoption of this Hunting Plan, consultation and coordination with the MNDNR and IADNR and others regarding its annual implementation will be a combination of formal and informal activities based upon the nature of the issues to be addressed.

Methods of Control and Enforcement

Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR units are administered and managed by the Refuge or Wetland Management District (WMD) responsible for Service lands in the County where the unit is located. The enforcement of Refuge and State hunting regulations, trespass and other public use violations normally associated with management of a National Wildlife Refuge is the responsibility of commissioned Refuge Law Enforcement Officers for those field offices. Refuge Officers cooperate with, and are assisted, by state conservation officers and county Sheriff Offices. The procedures used for obtaining law enforcement assistance are based on the legal jurisdiction where incidents occur.

Some Unit Managers may also use non-law enforcement staff to manage hunting activities. For example, some staff work on alternate schedules so they are on the Refuge units on weekends during the hunting season. These staff assists hunters and non-hunters to ensure that all Refuge users understand where to locate areas that are open to hunting. Other Refuge staff and volunteers assist with special hunts for youth, hunters with disabilities, and other underserved hunting populations.

Funding and Staffing Requirements

Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR does not receive annual operations funding. The annual costs of enforcing a hunting program on this Refuge comes out of the annual budget for the field station responsible for each unit. Staff and operating expenses for Refuge law enforcement and hunter assistance during the hunting season probably averages between \$5-10 per acre of land per year. This is a broad average and takes into account that the smaller and larger tracts skew the averages. This estimate also includes Refuge staff activities associated with evaluating resources available for hunting (e.g., biological assessments of target species) as well as preparing for (e.g., special signage and access) and monitoring hunting activities.

The Refuge continues to add to its land base. Any increases in annual costs will depend on the number of acres added to the Refuge. Expenses include boundary posting, other signage, parking lot construction, gate installation, brochures, and other hunting specific activities. An increase in law enforcement patrols including vehicle costs and overtime might also be necessary.

VI. MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Biological Conflicts

The Refuge avoids conflict related to biological resources by adopting the “wildlife first” principle explicitly stated in the Improvement Act. Staff monitors species population trends to ensure that target species can be hunted at the Refuge without adversely affecting the species. These monitoring activities include direct observation of populations, consultation with State and Service species specialists, and review of current species survey information and research. Although not proposed in this current plan, the Refuge, in the future, could limit or exclude hunting activities on portions of Refuge units to avoid conflicts related to biological resources. Special hunts could also be used to manage hunting pressure and overall take at appropriate levels.

Public Use Conflicts

In an effort to avoid conflicts with non-hunting priority recreational uses as outlined in the Improvement Act, and for safety, the Refuge enforces a series of refuge-specific hunting regulations.

The boundary of all lands owned by the Service are posted with Refuge boundary signs. Areas administratively closed to hunting will be clearly marked with “No Hunting Zone” or “Area Beyond This Sign Closed” signs.

Administrative Conflicts

Refuge management activities can be accomplished without conflict with hunting activities through the use of administratively closed areas, timing of hunts, and methods of hunt. The most potential for conflict with management activities occurs during the spring and fall prescribed fire season. Occasionally, an area open to hunting is proposed to receive a prescribed fire treatment. Prior to implementing the fire treatment, the

treatment unit is scouted by Refuge fire staff to ensure that no one is endangered by the treatment. Due to the relatively small size of these units, most can be covered well by using this method of contact. Other methods will be utilized for larger units or units that are in more populated areas. These methods include calling all landowners adjacent to the unit; knocking on doors; and posting signs. Burn Plans are completed for each individual unit months in advance and cover what each unit needs to notify the public regarding the prescribed burning activities.

VII. CONDUCT OF THE HUNT

Hunting Regulations

Regulations Pertaining to all National Wildlife Refuge System Lands

Regulations pertaining to hunting on all National Wildlife Refuges are found in 50 CFR 32.2. They state:

§ 32.2 What are the requirements for hunting on areas of the National Wildlife Refuge System?

The following provisions shall apply to each person while engaged in public hunting on areas of the National Wildlife Refuge System:

- (a) Each person shall secure and possess the required State license.
- (b) Each person 16 years of age and older shall secure and possess a Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp while hunting migratory waterfowl.
- (c) Each person shall comply with the applicable provisions of Federal law and regulations including this subchapter and the current Federal Migratory Bird Regulations.
- (d) Each person shall comply with the applicable provisions of the laws and regulations of the State wherein any area is located unless further restricted by Federal law or regulation.
- (e) Each person shall comply with the terms and conditions authorizing access or use of wildlife refuges, including the terms and conditions under which hunting permits are issued.
- (f) Each person must comply with the provisions of any refuge-specific regulations governing hunting on the wildlife refuge area. Regulations, special conditions, and maps of the hunting areas for a particular wildlife refuge are available at that area's headquarters. In addition, refuge-specific hunting regulations for migratory game bird, upland game, and big game hunting appear in §§32.20 through 32.72.
- (g) The use of any drug on any arrow for bow hunting on national wildlife refuges is prohibited. Archers may not have arrows employing such drugs in their possession on any national wildlife refuge.

- (h) The unauthorized distribution of bait and the hunting over bait is prohibited on wildlife refuge areas. (Baiting is authorized in accordance with State regulations on national wildlife refuges in Alaska).
- (i) The use of nails, wire, screws or bolts to attach a stand to a tree, or hunting from a tree into which a metal object has been driven to support a hunter is prohibited on wildlife refuge areas.
- (j) The use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting is prohibited.
- (k) You may possess only approved nontoxic shot while in the field, which we identify in 50 CFR 20.21(j), while on Waterfowl Production Areas, or on certain other areas of the National Wildlife Refuge System as delineated on maps, leaflets and/or signs, available at each refuge headquarters or posted at each refuge, or as stated in refuge-specific regulations. Where we allow turkey and deer hunting, you may use slugs and shot containing lead to hunt these species unless prohibited by refuge-specific regulations and/or State law.
- (l) The refuge-specific regulations (§32.20 through §32.72) may include the items discussed in §32.2(b). Refuge permits and brochures should also include those items and any special conditions allowed by paragraph (f) of this section.

The regulations, as they are published in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), are the official notification to the public. Copies of the CFR can be found in libraries and on the internet.

A general synopsis of regulations relating to hunting on the Refuge units, as well as all other National Wildlife Refuges in Minnesota, is published the Minnesota Hunting and Trapping Regulations Handbook (Handbook). This information is not available in the Iowa Hunting and Trapping Regulations Handbook. Annual updates to Refuge regulations are provided to the MNDNR and IADNR for publication. State hunting regulations applicable to the Refuge, such as seasons, bag limits, and general methods of take also are published in the Handbook.

In addition, a synopsis of Refuge specific regulations will be made available to the public in the Refuge's internet web site.

Accessible Hunts

The Refuge accommodates hunters with disabilities. Hunters with disabilities possessing a MNDNR or IADNR issued permit exempting them from particular state regulations based upon their disability will be eligible to apply for Refuge specific authorization to participate in accessible hunting opportunities on the Refuge.

Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunt

User conflicts between hunting and non-hunting visitors are likely to be minimal as these units are similar to federal WPAs, state Wildlife Management Areas, and other public lands scattered across the landscape.

Most of the non-hunting visitations occur from April through October for bird and wildlife observation. Environmental education and interpretation also occur on these units, but to a lesser degree than wildlife observation. The majority of the environmental education and interpretation activities occur in the spring, summer and early fall. Due to this seasonality, conflicts with hunting are expected to be minimal. Varied public uses have taken place on federal WPAs for 50 years and the Service has experienced few conflicts between hunters and non-consumptive uses such as wildlife observation, environmental education and interpretation.

Hunter Application and Registration

For general hunting activities, no special application or registration process is required. The only current exception to this is on the "Southeast" unit adjacent to Neal Smith NWR refuge where specific regulations require a refuge permit for deer hunting.

Hunters with disabilities who request special access into a particular unit will need to request a Special Use Permit from the field station that manages the unit. Should the Refuge implement other application or registration procedures, it will use the Office of Management and Budget approved forms.

Hunter Selection

For general hunting activities, there is no special hunter selection process. Hunters who are eligible to hunt under Minnesota and Iowa law are allowed to hunt on the Refuge units in those states.

Announcing and Publicizing Hunts

As with previously developed changes to the Refuge hunting programs, this plan will be available for public review for a period of 30 days.

Hunting Orientation and Safety

The Refuge requires no specific orientation or safety training for hunters participating in general hunting activities. The States of Minnesota and Iowa have established hunter education and safety training requirements that have been in effect for several years.

Hunter orientation to Refuge lands and areas open to hunting are provided directly on the Refuge through the use of signs, brochures, and maps.

Entry and Access Procedures

There are no special entry or access procedures for hunters using the Refuge. For specific access questions please contact the unit Managers listed below.

"Prairie Smoke" unit - Kossuth County, Iowa

Project Leader, Union Slough NWR, Titonka, IA 515-928-2523

"Southeast" unit – Jasper County, Iowa

Project Leader, Neal Smith NWR, Prairie City, IA 515-994-3400

“Touch the Sky” unit - Rock County, Minnesota
Project Leader, Windom WMD, Windom, MN 507-831-2220

“Rengstorf” unit - Otter Tail County, Minnesota
Project Leader, Fergus Falls WMD, Fergus Falls, MN 218-739-2291

“Bittbender” unit - Otter Tail County, Minnesota
Project Leader, Fergus Falls WMD, Fergus Falls, MN 218-739-2291

“Gislason Lake” unit - Lincoln County, Minnesota
Project Leader, Big Stone NWR, Odessa, MN 320-273-2191

“Jessen” unit – Lincoln County, Minnesota
Project Leader, Big Stone NWR, Odessa, MN 320-273-2191

“Green Muhly” unit – Stevens County, Minnesota
Project Leader, Morris WMD, Morris, MN 320-589-1001

Hunter Requirements

The Refuge does not impose any special requirements on those wishing to hunt on the Refuge. Hunters who are eligible to hunt under Minnesota and Iowa law are allowed to hunt on Refuge units in their respective states.

The Refuge does not routinely require hunters to report on hunting activities or harvest separately from the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP) requirement. Should an additional reporting program be implemented, the Refuge will use the appropriate form approved by the Office of Management and Budget.

Non-toxic shot must be used to hunt migratory birds and upland game except turkey. Shotgun slugs and muzzleloader ammunition containing lead may be used when hunting big game (deer); shot containing lead may be used when hunting turkey. Possession of toxic shot while hunting other species is prohibited. Hunting dogs may be used for hunting small game and migratory birds; the Refuge may not be used for dog training not associated with an actual hunt. Target shooting is prohibited

Camping on the Refuge is prohibited. Camp fires are prohibited. No motorized vehicles are allowed within the hunting units except at designated parking areas or by Refuge specific authorization.

VIII. REFERENCES

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. Final Environmental Impact Statement Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area. U.S. Dept. of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 3, Fort Snelling, MN.

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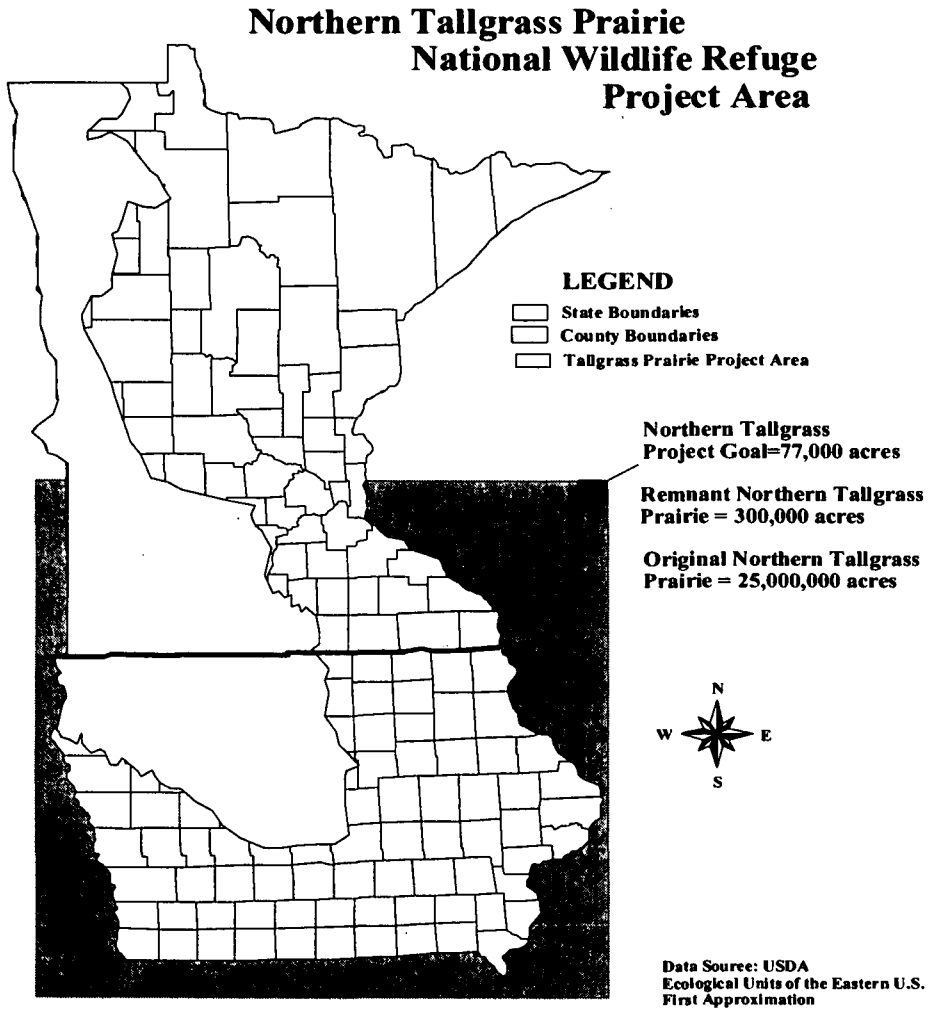
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APPENDIX A – MAPS OF REFUGE AND INDIVIDUAL UNITS



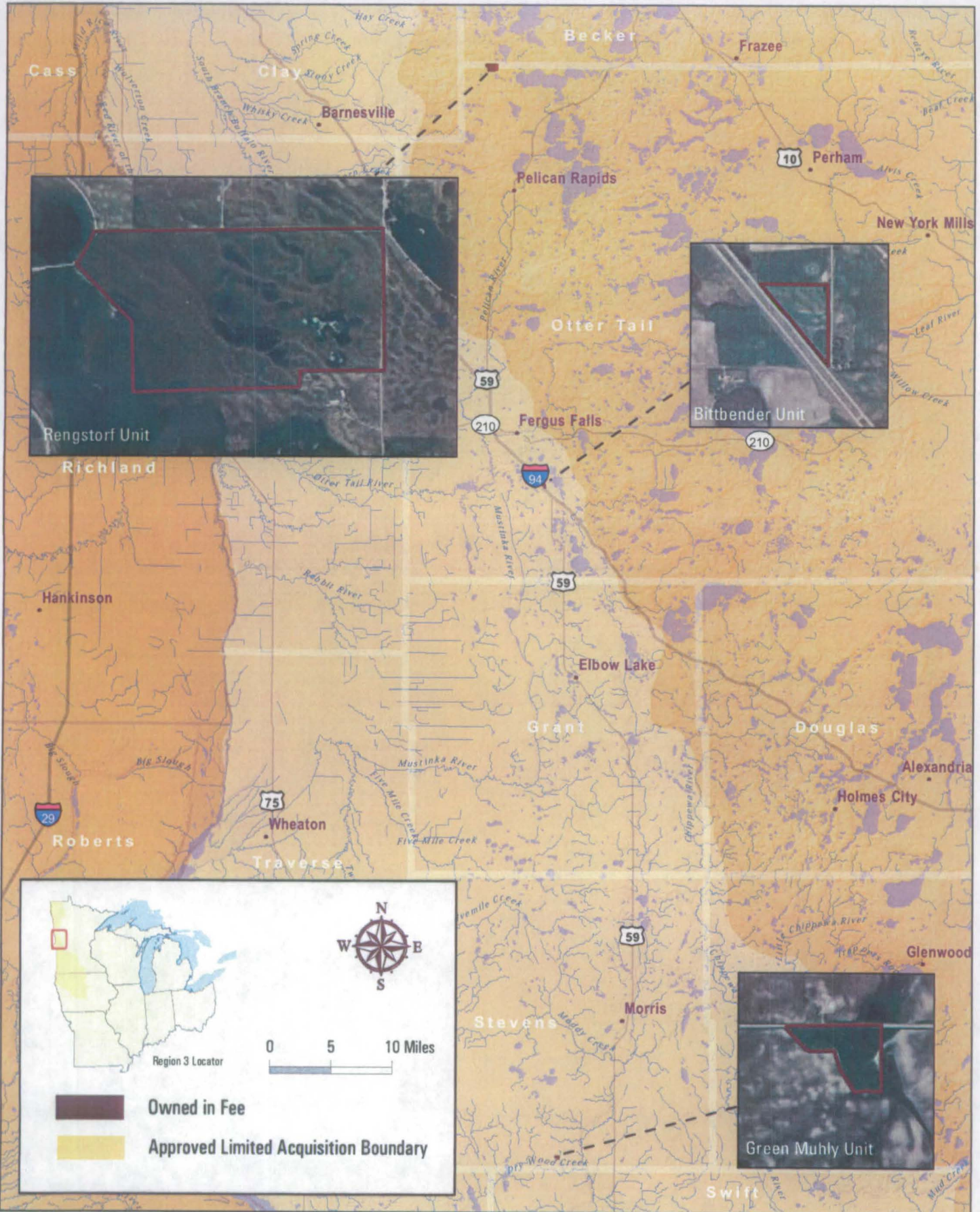


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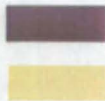
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Minnesota

Fee Tracts



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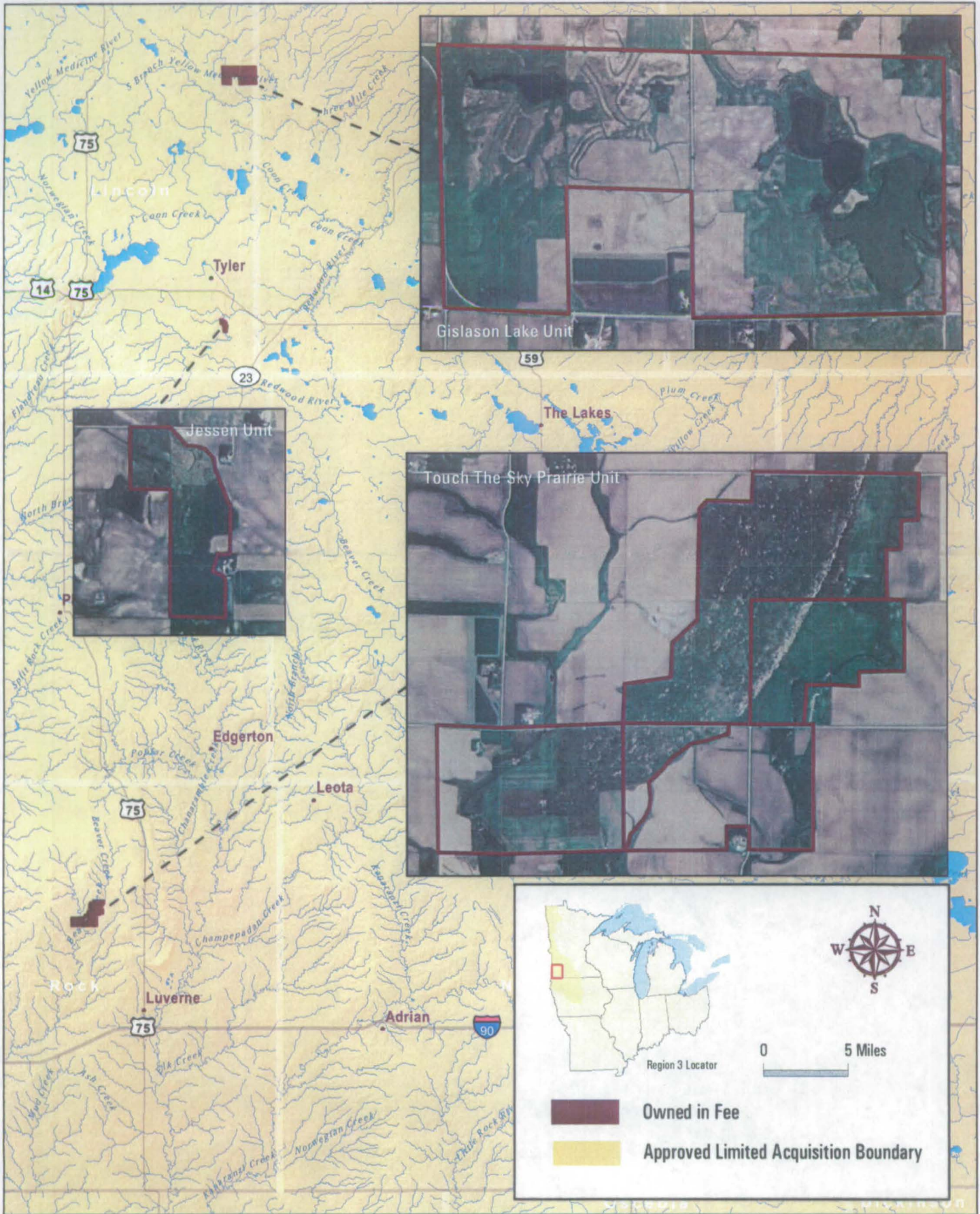


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge

Minnesota

Fee Tracts



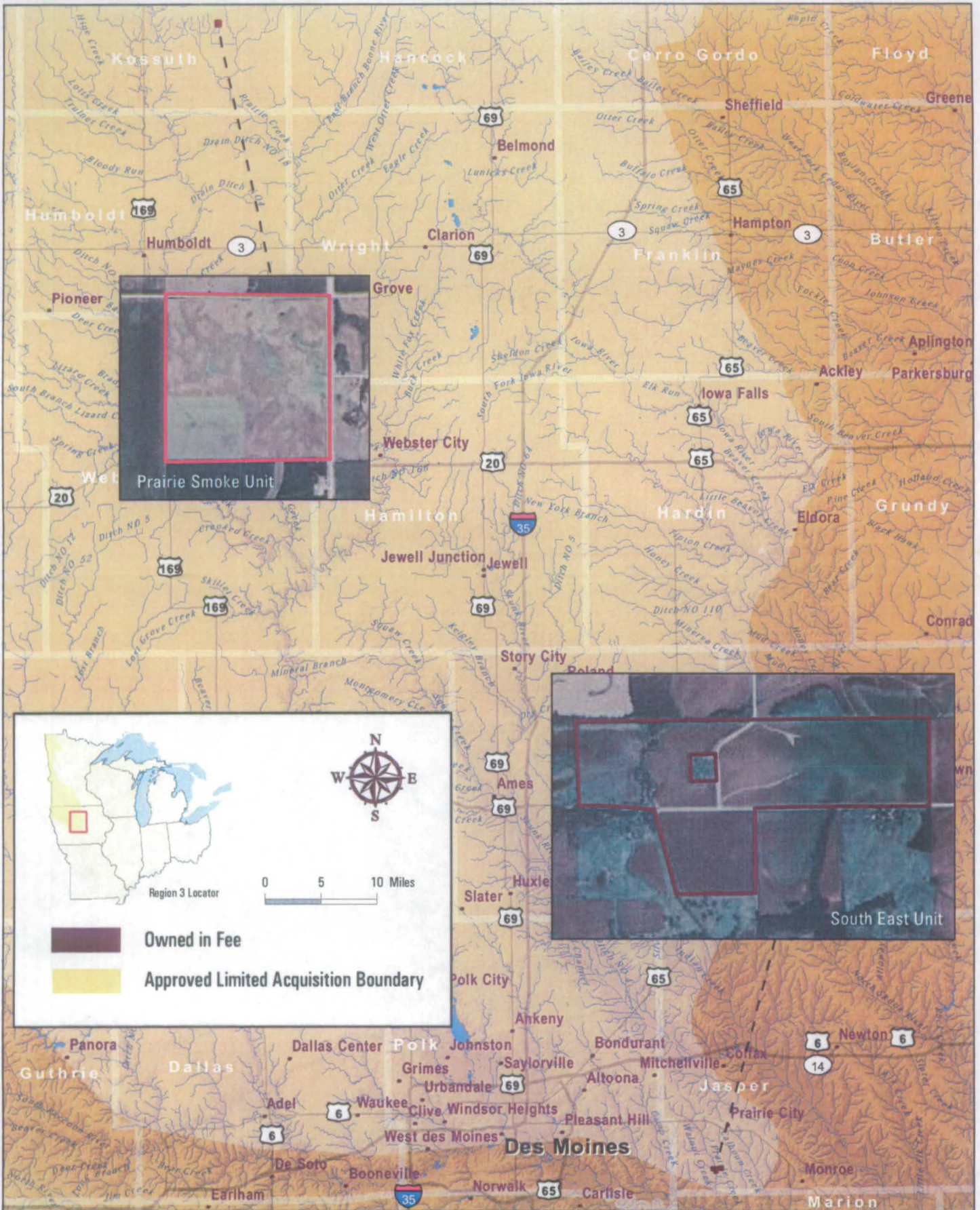


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge

Iowa

Fee Tracts



APPENDIX B – COMPARISON OF CURRENT AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES BY UNIT

Unit	Current Opportunities	New Opportunities for 2011 and Beyond
Prairie Smoke	Open to hunting.	Open to hunting. Iowa Regulations
Touch the Sky	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations
Rengstorf	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations
Gislason Lake	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations
Blttbender	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations
Green Muhly	Closed to hunting	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations
Mann	Closed to hunting	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations
Jessen	Closed to hunting	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations
Southeast	Closed to hunting	Closed to hunting

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Jessen	Closed to hunting	Open to hunting. Minnesota Regulations
Southeast	Closed to hunting	Closed to hunting