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**FINAL PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**FOR**

**VOLUNTARY PUBLIC ACCESS – HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAM**

**STATE OF WISCONSIN**

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**United States Department of Agriculture**

**Farm Service Agency**

**February 2011**

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**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
VOLUNTARY PUBLIC ACCESS PROGRAM  
AND  
HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAM  
STATE OF WISCONSIN**

**MAY 2011**

**INTRODUCTION**

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency proposes to implement a new program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill) in the State of Wisconsin. The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) provides grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. The VPA-HIP is administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant funds.

The State of Wisconsin, through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds to launch a new public access program to provide the public with new opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping, and other wildlife-dependent recreation. The new program will complement the current Public Hunting Ground (PHG) lease program in southern and southeastern Wisconsin and will add three focus areas. Two of these focus areas will be in the Northeast and West-Central portions of the state. The third new focus area will be in southwestern Wisconsin, focusing on stream and fishing access. Additionally, all of the proposed focus areas will overlap with Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) eligible counties. WDNR has chosen to focus the program near population centers in Wisconsin to maximize recreational use. The establishment of focus areas will allow for more effective implementation and will alleviate pressure on any one property. Further, creating blocks of properties or access sites will ensure a suitable concentration of habitats and fish and wildlife populations for recreational opportunities.

**PROPOSED ACTION**

The Proposed Action consists of two main components: (1) expand the PHG lease program to four focus areas encompassing 37 counties; and (2) restructure the compensation schedule for the PHG lease program.

**REASONS FOR FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

In consideration of the analysis documented in the Programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) and in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations 1508.27, the preferred alternative would not constitute a major State or Federal action affecting the human and natural environment. Therefore, this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been

prepared and an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This determination is based on the following:

1. Long-term beneficial impacts and short-term localized beneficial impacts would occur with the preferred alternative. Neither of these impacts would be considered significant.
2. The preferred alternative would not affect public health or safety.
3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area (cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, and ecologically critical areas) would be preserved with implementation of the preferred alternative.
4. The potential impacts on the quality of the human environment are not considered highly controversial.
5. The potential impacts on the human environment as described in the Programmatic EA are not uncertain nor do they involve unique or unknown risks.
6. The preferred alternative would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
7. Cumulative impacts of the preferred alternative in combination with other recent, ongoing, or foreseeable future actions are not expected to be significant.
8. The preferred alternative would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
9. The preferred alternative would have short-term beneficial impacts to wildlife and their habitats, including endangered and threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.
10. The preferred alternative does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law imposed for the protection of the environment.

## **DETERMINATION**

On the basis of the analysis and information contained in the Programmatic EA and FONSI, it is my determination that adoption of the preferred alternative does not constitute a major Federal action affecting the quality of the human and natural environment. Barring any new data identified during the public and agency review of the Final Programmatic EA that would dramatically change the analysis presented in the Programmatic EA or identification of a significant controversial issue, the Programmatic EA and this FONSI are considered Final 30 days after date of initial publication of the Notice of Availability



APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_ May 10, 2011  
Signature Date

## **Cover Sheet**

**Proposed Action:** The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the State of Wisconsin have agreed to implement a new Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). USDA is provided the statutory authority by the provisions of the Food Security Act of 2008, and the Regulations at 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1410. VPA-HIP provides grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and trapping. The VPA-HIP is administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant funds.

**Type of Document:** Programmatic Environmental Assessment

**Lead Agency:** USDA, FSA

**Sponsoring Agency:** Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

**Comments:** The Programmatic Environmental Assessment was prepared in accordance with USDA FSA National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) implementation procedures found in 7 CFR 799, as well as the NEPA of 1969, Public Law 91-190, 42 United States Code 4321-4347, 1 January 1970, as amended.

A Notice of Availability was released on June 1, 2011 announcing a 30-day public comment period. A copy of the document can be found on the USDA FSA website: [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) . Comments will be accepted until July 1, 2011. Comments may be submitted via e-mail to: [Melissa.Sparrow@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Melissa.Sparrow@wisconsin.gov) .

Or via mail to the following address:  
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c/o Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
1155 Pilgrim Road  
Plymouth, WI 53073

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency proposes to implement a new program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill) in the State of Wisconsin. The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) provides grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. The VPA-HIP is administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant funds.

The State of Wisconsin, through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds to launch a new public access program to provide the public with new opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping, and other wildlife-dependent recreation. The new program will complement the current public hunting ground lease program in southern and southeastern Wisconsin and will add three focus areas. Two of these focus areas will be in the Northeast and West-Central portions of the state. The third new focus area will be in southwestern Wisconsin, focusing on stream and fishing access. Additionally, all of the proposed focus areas will overlap with CREP eligible counties. We have chosen to focus the program near population centers in Wisconsin to maximize recreational use. The establishment of focus areas will allow for more effective implementation and will alleviate pressure on any one property. Further, creating blocks of properties or access sites will ensure a suitable concentration of habitats and fish and wildlife populations for recreational opportunities.

### **Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action consists of two main components: (1) expand the Public Hunting Ground (PHG) lease program to 4 focus areas encompassing 37 counties; and (2) restructure the compensation schedule for the PHG program.

### **Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to use VPA-HIP grant funds to increase public access on private land in the state of Wisconsin. The need for the Proposed Action is to: increase the value realized by private landowners for wildlife populations inhabiting their property, and increase the types and amounts of public access on qualified private land.

### **Environmental Consequences**

This Programmatic Environmental Assessment has been prepared to analyze the potential environmental consequences associated with implementing the Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative) or the No Action Alternative. Under the Proposed Action, WDNR would utilize VPA-HIP funds to expand the existing Public Hunting Ground (PHG) lease program. Under the No Action Alternative, the PHG program would continue as currently administered. The PHG program would not be expanded to other areas of the state as proposed. The potential environmental consequences of implementing the Proposed Action would be

beneficial overall to the natural environment and increase wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities in the state. A summary of environmental consequences is provided in Table ES-1.

***Table ES-1 Summary of Environmental Consequences***

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)</b>	<b>No Action Alternative</b>
Biological Resources (Game species of fish/wildlife and non-game/protected species)	No direct impacts to any biological resources are expected from increasing public access to private lands.	Expansion of the Wisconsin PHG program would not occur. The current public access program would remain in place.
Recreation	Long-term beneficial impacts to recreation are expected from increasing hunting, trapping fishing, and other wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities.	Expansion of the Wisconsin PHG program would not occur and there would be no use of VPA-HIP funding to expand or improve wildlife-related recreational opportunities in Wisconsin. Current public access programs would continue as is.
Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice	Slight beneficial impacts to the local economy from PHG program expansion and increased compensation. Utilization of the land for wildlife-dependent recreation would also be slightly beneficial due to purchases (lodging, meals, and goods) from traveling sportsmen and sportswomen accessing the land. There would be no impacts to minority or low income populations; therefore, there are no environmental justice concerns.	Expansion of the Wisconsin PHG program would not occur and there would be no VPA-HIP grant funding. No direct negative impacts would occur to local economies. Any beneficial impacts from the spending of VPA-HIP funds locally would not be realized. No Environmental Justice impacts would occur.

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Figure 1. *VPA-HIP Focus Area Boundaries, current Wisconsin Public Hunting Ground Leases, and CREP Project Areas.*

## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CREP	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
EA	Environmental Assessment
EO	Executive Order
FSA	Farm Service Agency
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PEA	Programmatic Environmental Assessment
PHG	Public Hunting Ground
U.S.	United States
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USCB	U.S. Census Bureau
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USEPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
WDNR	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
VPA-HIP	Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

## **CHAPTER 1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) proposes to implement a new program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill) in the State of Wisconsin. The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) provides grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. The VPA-HIP is administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant funds.

The VPA-HIP is a competitive grants program that is only available for state and tribal governments. The grant funding may be used to expand existing public access programs or create new public access programs, or provide incentives to improve wildlife habitat on enrolled lands. Applicable program objectives in the State of Wisconsin are to:

- Maximize participation by landowners;
- Ensure that land enrolled has appropriate wildlife habitat;
- Strengthen habitat improvement efforts on land enrolled in CREP;
- Supplement funding and services from other Federal, state, or tribal government or private resources; and
- Inform the public about the location of public access land.

The State of Wisconsin, through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds to expand its existing public access program to provide the public with more opportunities to hunt, fish, trap, watch wildlife, and enjoy other wildlife-dependent recreation on private lands.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

One of the strategic objectives of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources 6-year fish and wildlife plan (WDNR 2007) is to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. Specifically, WDNR has indicated a goal of continuing and expanding our current public hunting ground lease program to meet outdoor recreation needs and demands of Wisconsin citizens. Further, state and national surveys consistently show that lack of access to public land close to home is a barrier to hunting and fishing recruitment and retention. Having a place to recreate and connect with the natural world is a key element in passing on the conservation ethic. This is particularly true in areas proximate to urban centers - so people have opportunities to connect to the natural world near their place of residence. Wisconsin sportsmen and conservation partner groups have consistently encouraged the WDNR to provide additional hunting and fishing access opportunities throughout the state.

The Land Division within Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has the public trust responsibility for managing the state's wildlife resources including habitat work on public and private lands and providing public hunting/fishing/trapping on private lands (Public Act 451). Furthermore, the Land Division is the administrating unit for the Public Hunting Ground Program which leases private lands throughout the state for public hunting/fishing/trapping. The Department of Natural Resources is responsible for the conservation, protection, management, and accessible use and enjoyment of the state's environment, natural resources, and related economic interests for current and future generations.

The overall objective of the proposed Wisconsin VPA-HIP is to provide wildlife-dependent recreation access in four primary focus areas throughout Wisconsin, which overlap with CREP eligible counties, and to offer technical assistance to landowners who enroll in the Wisconsin program in order to facilitate wildlife habitat management improvement where feasible.

This program will complement Wisconsin's existing public hunting ground lease program. The current program has been in operation since 1952 and currently exists in 16 Wisconsin counties on approximately 16,000 acres. Wisconsin currently spends approximately \$35,000 of state dollars annually on its public hunting ground leasing program in 16 counties primarily in southern and southeastern Wisconsin. Approximately \$25,000 of those dollars is paid directly to landowners for leasing their land to the state. The balance accounts for dedicated staff time, travel, and materials (e.g., signs and posts, outreach, maps). A WDNR wildlife biologist or representative evaluates all land or water to be enrolled in the program to ensure habitat is suitable and hunting and fishing access is desirable. Some basic requirements of the current program are:

- Hunters and anglers can hunt or fish on the property.
- Annual compensation is based on the type of habitat and amount of acreage enrolled.

Federal funding will allow the program to expand into new areas in east-central, west-central and southwestern Wisconsin, and compensate landowners in a total of appropriately 37 counties including most CREP eligible counties in Wisconsin.

## **1.2 THE PROPOSED ACTION**

With VPA-HIP grant funds and supplemental state funds, the WDNR proposes to expand the PHG program; and restructure the PHG compensation schedule.

## **1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION**

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to use VPA-HIP grant funds to increase public access on private lands in the State of Wisconsin. The need for the Proposed Action is to: increase the value realized by private landowners for wildlife populations inhabiting their property; and increase the types and amounts of public access on qualified private land.

## **1.4 REGULATORY COMPLIANCE**

This Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Public Law 91-190, 42 United States Code 4321 et seq.); implementing regulations adopted by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508); and FSA implementing regulations, Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA (7 CFR 799). The intent of NEPA is to protect, restore, and enhance the natural and human environment through well-informed Federal decisions. A variety of laws, regulations, and Executive Orders (EOs) apply to actions undertaken by Federal agencies and form the basis of the analysis presented in this PEA.

## **1.5 ORGANIZATION OF EA**

This PEA assesses the potential impacts of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative on potentially affected environmental and economic resources.

- Chapter 1.0 provides background information relevant to the Proposed Action, and discusses its purpose and need.
- Chapter 2.0 describes the Proposed Action and alternatives.
- Chapter 3.0 describes the baseline conditions (i.e., the conditions against which potential impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives are measured) for each of the potentially affected resources and the potential environmental impacts to those resources.
- Chapter 4.0 describes potential cumulative impacts and irreversible and irretrievable resource commitments.
- Chapter 5.0 discusses mitigation measures utilized to reduce or eliminate impacts to protected resources.
- Chapter 6.0 contains a list of the persons and agencies contacted during the preparation of this document.
- Chapter 7.0 contains references.
- Chapter 8.0 lists the preparers of this document.
- Appendix A provides agency correspondence.

## **CHAPTER 2.0 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES**

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### **2.1 PROPOSED ACTION**

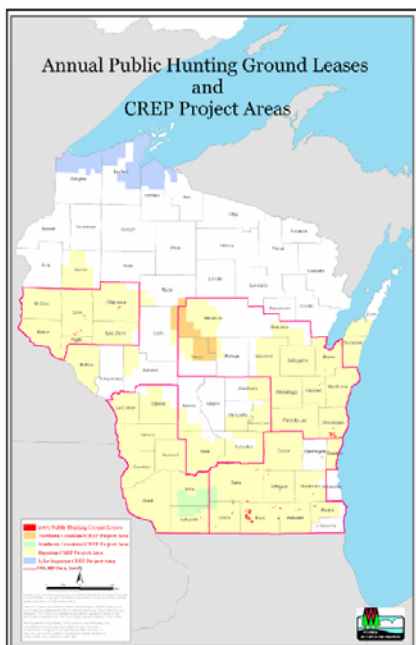
The WDNR proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds totaling \$3,205,135 (\$936,040 awarded in 2010; remainder to be awarded over next two years) and a supplemental \$35,000 annually in state funds to expand its existing public access program to provide the public with more opportunities to hunt, fish, trap, watch wildlife, and enjoy other wildlife-based recreation on private lands. Specific objectives include:

- Expand the PHG lease program in Wisconsin to four (4) focus areas encompassing 37 counties.
- Hire a dedicated private land access coordinator and 4 temporary staff to make landowner contacts and provide technical assistance.
- Increase landowner compensation in the PHG program, and offer three-year contracts instead of one-year contracts.
- Target 20% of funding for stream/fishing access specifically targeting land enrolled in CREP.
- Enhance the WDNR website to provide up-to-date, in-depth information about lands enrolled in VPA-HIP, while also providing additional information through WDNR hunting, fishing, and trapping regulations, press releases, GovDelivery, and through social networking services.

These objectives can be consolidated into two main Proposed Action components: expand the PHG program and restructure the PHG compensation schedule. These components are discussed in more detail in sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

#### **2.1.1 Expand the PHG Program**

This program will complement Wisconsin's existing public hunting ground lease program. The current program has been in operation since 1952 and currently exists in 16 Wisconsin counties on approximately 16,000 acres. Federal funding will allow the program to expand into new areas in east-central, west-central and southwestern Wisconsin, and compensate landowners in a total of approximately 37 counties including most CREP eligible counties in Wisconsin (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** VPA-HIP Focus Area Boundaries, current Wisconsin Public Hunting Ground Leases, and CREP Project Areas.

Under this proposal, WDNR will provide new hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities for all game species, following current state and federal hunting and fishing regulations. Private landowners will be paid annually between \$3-15/acre, on a sliding scale depending on habitat conditions, for leasing their land for public hunting, fishing, trapping and other wildlife-dependent recreation. Estimated enrollment will be 60,000-80,000 acres of forestland, wetlands, grasslands, and agricultural lands annually in 37 counties. This will result in the participation of between 2,000-4,000 landowners depending on tract size.

WDNR Wildlife Management staff will ensure lands enrolled for public access have appropriate wildlife habitat and will offer wildlife habitat technical assistance to landowners who enroll into the leasing program. Landowners with acres enrolled in CREP will be targeted with a special emphasis on stream and fishing access in Southwestern Wisconsin where CREP sites provide for improved water quality, thus improving trout and small-mouth bass habitat as well as providing improved wildlife habitat.

To provide focused and dedicated implementation, WDNR proposes to hire a dedicated private land access coordinator as well as four temporary staff dedicated to landowner contacts and technical assistance. These positions will coordinate with existing WDNR Wildlife Biologists to implement the new program. In addition, WDNR will collaborate with conservation organizations and sportsmen's groups to promote the access program to both landowners and outdoor recreationists.

To date eleven statewide organizations and agencies have pledged their support and assistance for Wisconsin's access proposal. They include: The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Ruffed Grouse Society, Trout Unlimited, Wisconsin Bowhunters Association, Wisconsin Conservation Congress, Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, Wings Over Wisconsin, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, and Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association.

WDNR will publicize the location of lands enrolled in the program through the WDNR website, printed brochures, state fishing, trapping and hunting regulation inserts, and public service announcements directing the public to additional information. In addition, we will be seeking cooperation of conservation organizations to promote the program to landowners and outdoor recreationists through various newsletters and meetings with landowner groups. Monitoring will be completed on land enrolled in VPA-HIP by hunter and landowner surveys to determine hunter use, participant satisfaction, number of acres enrolled, etc. This will be included in annual reports.

### **2.1.2 Restructure the PHG Compensation Schedule**

Landowners participating in the current PHG lease program receive annual payments for allowing the public to access their lands for hunting and fishing. Leases are renewed annually and participants receive tiered payments based on the quality of the habitat they enroll. The current payment structure pays \$1.00 per acre for cropland and \$3.00 per acre for non-cropland or pasture offering adequate cover.

A tiered payment structure will be used for enrolling lands under the VPA-HIP program that would include all forms of hunting, fishing, trapping, and other compatible wildlife-dependent recreation. Annual lease payments will be on a per acre basis and determined by the habitat type on the landscape and prevailing market conditions. The proposed payment structure will be three tiers: \$15 per acre for forest or woodland habitat, \$10 per acre for grassland or wetland habitat, and \$3 per acre for cropland. These values are an estimate and could change depending on market conditions. WDNR reserves the right to adjust these rates to maximize landowner participation in VPA-HIP. The tiered payment structure will be merged with Wisconsin's current public hunting ground (PHG) lease program. In addition to the tiered payment structure listed above, 20% of the funding would be set aside for stream/fishing access specifically targeting land enrolled in CREP. Preference will be to develop contracts with landowners for three years at a time with flexibility depending on market conditions and landowner preference.

## **2.2 ALTERNATIVES**

CEQ regulations (40 CFR §1502.14) require the lead agency to identify all reasonable alternatives for implementing a Proposed Action. The Federal Register notice announcing the rule for VPA-HIP (Vol. 75(130), page 39135) explicitly states the purpose of VPA-HIP is to provide grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. Each VPA-HIP application received by USDA FSA underwent a selection screening process to identify those proposals that met the program objectives (listed in Introduction Section 1.0).

The WDNR considered other alternative strategies for the VPA-HIP in which expansion of the PHG program would not occur. However, these alternatives were eliminated from further analysis since they clearly did not meet the overall purpose and need of the program to increase public access for wildlife-

dependent recreation.

Expanding the service area of the PHG program would greatly increase opportunities for private landowners of smaller farms and woodlots to enroll in public access programs. Expanding the geographic scope of the PHG program could represent a new incentive for additional landowners to enroll in the program. Given the overall program goals, the only reasonable action alternative is the Proposed Action.

## **2.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Under the No Action Alternative, the VPA-HIP would not be implemented in the State of Wisconsin. Expansion of the PHG program into additional areas of the state and the proposed adjustments in the payment schedule would not occur. The public access program as currently administered would continue to be available. The No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need of the Proposed Action, but is being carried forward in accordance with CEQ regulations to serve as the baseline against which potential impacts of the Proposed Action are measured.

## **2.4 RESOURCES ELIMINATED FROM ANALYSIS**

CEQ regulations (40 CFR §1501.7) state that the lead agency shall identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not important or which have been covered by prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues in the document to a brief presentation of why they would not have a dramatic effect on the human or natural environment.

As described above, the Proposed Action consists of two main components: expanding the PHG program and restructuring of the PHG compensation schedule. These two components are primarily administrative and have minimal potential for environmental impacts. Thus, from a programmatic level, the Proposed Action would have little to no impact on the following resource areas:

*Air Quality* Air quality in the U.S. is governed by the Clean Air Act. National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) have been established for criteria air pollutants regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA): ozone, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxide, lead, and particulate matter. The NAAQS are used as thresholds to determine if local air quality is within acceptable thresholds (in “attainment”) or exceeds the thresholds (“non-attainment”).

Impacts to air quality would be considered significant if the action resulted in a violation of air quality regulations, resulted in a permanent increase of criteria pollutants, or affected the attainment status of the local area.

The Proposed Action would have no potential for impacts to regional air quality as increasing the land available for enrollment in the PHG program would not require any activities that would impact air quality.

*Water Resource* The Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Water Quality Act are the primary Federal laws that protect the nation's waters including lakes, rivers, aquifers, and wetlands. Impacts to water resources would be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action resulted in violating laws or regulations established to protect water resources, or actions resulted in major deterioration of water quality.

The Proposed Action would have no potential for impacts to water resources as increasing the land available for enrollment in the PHG program would not require any activities that would impact water resources.

*Soils* A variety of soils occur throughout the State of Wisconsin. The differences in geology, topography, and climatic conditions within the state have led to the development of many different soils with unique characteristics and distributions. Impacts to soils would be considered significant if activities resulted in increased erosion and sedimentation to a level that could not be avoided or minimized with appropriate management practices or mitigation measures.

The Proposed Action would have no potential for impacts to soil quantity or quality as increasing the land available for enrollment in the PHG program would not require any activities that would impact soils.

*Noise.* The Proposed Action would not create any new permanent sources of noise to the environment. Expanding the PHG program to include additional focus areas and counties of the state may introduce gunfire noise on lands where public hunting may not occur. Experience with the current PHG program indicates that most landowners participating in the program already allow some type of hunting on their property or hunt the property themselves. Therefore the additive effect of gunfire noise will be minimal. This noise would be intermittent and occur during daylight hours during specified hunting seasons. Wisconsin State Statute 941.20 (1) (d) prohibits a hunter while on the lands of another from discharging a firearm within 100 yards of any building devoted to human occupancy situated on and attached to the lands of another without the express permission of the owner or occupant of the building. Thus this statute further mitigates the likelihood of additional noise unless the building occupant gives that permission.

*Human Health and Safety.* No components of the Proposed Action would directly impact human health or safety. The goal of the Proposed Action is to increase public access to privately-held land that supports an abundance of wildlife, thereby allowing hunting, fishing, trapping and outdoor recreation. While hunting does pose a slight safety risk, this activity would occur on private land with controlled access. Wisconsin hunting regulations require hunters to receive the appropriate education and meet minimum age requirements before a hunting license can be issued. Additionally, Wisconsin State Statute 941.20 (1)(d) as mentioned above prohibits the discharge of a firearm within 100 yards of any building devoted to human occupancy without permission.

*Land Use.* The Proposed Action would not result in any changes to land use designations. The Proposed Action would occur on private lands on a voluntary basis and would not require the alteration of land use.

*Transportation.* No aspect of the Proposed Action entails any alteration of the current transportation system in the State of Wisconsin. Increasing acreage available for enrollment in the PHG program could cause an increase in the number of vehicles traveling to a new PHG area; however, it is highly unlikely this would be considered an impact to the transportation system, but rather a redistribution of vehicular traffic.

*Cultural Resources.* The Proposed Action would not directly or indirectly impact any cultural resources, either architectural or archaeological. WDNR is highly aware of the importance of cultural resources, and no aspect of the Proposed Action would allow for purposeful destruction of any cultural resources. Therefore, no impacts to cultural resources would occur.

*Coastal Zones.* Wisconsin has 820 miles of Great Lakes coastline along the west side of Lake Michigan and along the south side of Lake Superior. Wisconsin is contributing to the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration with the other Great Lake states by following Wisconsin's Great Lakes Strategy (WDNR 2009) to protect this valuable resource.

The Proposed Action would have no potential for impacts to coastal zones as increasing the land available for enrollment in the PHG program would not require any activities that would adversely impact the coastal zones.

*Other Formally Classified Lands.* The Proposed Action can only be implemented on privately-owned lands. The only formal classification applicable on private land would be Prime and Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. The Proposed Action would not include removing these lands from agricultural production. Therefore, there would be no impacts to any other formally classified lands.

## **CHAPTER 3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

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This chapter provides a description of the existing environmental conditions that have the potential to be affected from implementation of the Proposed Action and the potential environmental impacts that may occur to those resources. Resource areas potentially impacted by the Proposed Action and covered in this PEA include:

- Biological Resources (Game species of fish/wildlife and non-game/protected species)
- Recreation
- Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

As described in Chapter 2, this PEA describes the potential impacts from implementing VPA-HIP funds in the State of Wisconsin on a programmatic level. The programmatic level analysis provided in this PEA serves as the full NEPA documentation.

Environmental consequences to each resource area are described for the Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative) and the No Action Alternative:

- **Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative):** utilize VPA-HIP funds to expand and enhance existing public access programs.
- **No Action Alternative:** continuation of existing public access programs as they are currently administered. No expansion or additional financial incentives for enrollment would occur.

### **3.1 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

Biological resources are any characteristic or feature of the natural environment that adds to the intrinsic value of the local area. In this PEA, biological resources include game species of fish and wildlife as well as non-game and protected species. Biological resources are included in this PEA because expanding the public hunting ground program and increasing hunting, trapping, fishing and other wildlife-dependent opportunities may increase the potential for impacting fish and wildlife populations.

#### **3.1.1 Affected Environment**

The Proposed Action covers 37 counties in Wisconsin; however, the biological resources discussed in this PEA focus on those primary resources where expanding public access could impact wildlife or fisheries populations. A very brief overview of game species of fish and wildlife is presented in Section 3.1.1.1, and non-game and protected species are described in Section 3.1.1.2.

### 3.1.1.1 Game Species of Fish and Wildlife

Throughout Wisconsin's history, the sustainability of its people has been closely tied to the health of its natural resources. Specific information and objectives relevant to fish, wildlife, and habitat management are addressed under the WDNR's Six-Year Fish and Wildlife Plan (WDNR 2007). Wisconsin offers a variety of opportunities for the harvest of many bird, mammal, fish, and herptile species within the guidance of structured regulations. Through these regulations, the state is responsible for coordinating and promoting regulated harvest opportunities in ways that are also consistent with protection of the environment. The WDNR's authority to manage fish and wildlife populations is found in State Statute 29.011 and 29.014. There are additional specific authorizations throughout Chapters 29 and 23. Administrative rules affecting fish and wildlife are found in NR 1, NR 10 (game) and NR 20 - 26 (fishing). Additional authorizations are found in NR 10 through NR 27 and NR 45 (WDNR 2007).

### 3.1.1.2 Non-game and Protected Species

Wisconsin has a diverse and extensive assemblage of fish and wildlife species. The WDNR's Wildlife Action Plan (WDNR 2006b) identifies animal species within the state that are most in need of attention due to declining populations or habitat availability and suggests conservation actions to ensure that Wisconsin's native species are preserved. Those species in need of attention are identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). There are 284 native bird species for which Wisconsin provides important breeding, wintering, or migratory habitat, 84 (30%) of which have been identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Wisconsin (WDNR 2006b). Twenty-four of these are currently listed as Threatened or Endangered in Wisconsin and two are listed as federally Threatened or Endangered.

There are 69 native mammal species in Wisconsin, 14 (20%) of which have been identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Wisconsin (WDNR 2006b). Two of these species are listed as Threatened or Endangered at the state or federal level.

There are 147 native fish species in Wisconsin, 30 (20%) of which have been identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Wisconsin (WDNR 2006b). Thirteen are currently listed as Threatened or Endangered in the state.

There are 56 native herptile species in Wisconsin, 24 (43%) of which have been identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Wisconsin (WDNR 2006b). Ten of these species are listed as Threatened or Endangered at the state level.

### 3.1.2 Environmental Consequences

Impacts to biological resources would be considered significant if activities resulted in reducing the wildlife or fisheries populations to a level of concern or if activities affected non-game and protected species which resulted in incidental take of a protected species.

### 3.1.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)

Under the Proposed Action, opening land for public access under the VPA-HIP, similar to what is currently done by WDNR under its existing PHG lease program, would occur on privately-held lands throughout a 37 county area in Wisconsin. These leases would be consistent with the overall strategies to conserve habitat and wildlife important to the state of Wisconsin as described in the Six-Year Fish and Wildlife Management Plan (WDNR 2007). The Department's authority to manage fish and wildlife populations is found in State Statute 29.011 and 29.014. There are additional specific authorizations throughout Chapters 29 and 23. Administrative rules affecting fish and wildlife are found in NR 1, NR 10 (game) and NR 20 - 26 (fishing) (WDNR 2007). Additional authorizations are found in NR 10 through NR 27 and NR 45. Leasing private lands for public access would result in no or minimal, short-term impacts, which may include disturbance to the local vegetation and fish and wildlife species. Programmatic-level impacts to game, non-game, and protected species of fish and wildlife are described below.

#### *Game Species of Fish and Wildlife*

WDNR goes to great lengths to ensure hunting a game species does not negatively affect the status of the species. All game species are managed for the long-term viability of the populations. Each year WDNR determines the population health, population size, and the conservation objective for each species. WDNR then factors in the harvest success for each species and determines the appropriate number of licenses or permits to issue for each species based on the carrying capacity of that area. Expanding participation in the current PHG lease program and increasing hunting opportunities would not result in adverse impacts to game species' populations given the existing WDNR control through the permit process.

#### *Non-game and Protected Species*

The WDNR's Wildlife Action Plan (WDNR 2006b) identifies animal species within the state that are most in need of attention due to declining populations or habitat availability and suggests conservation actions to ensure that Wisconsin's native species are preserved. Those species in need of attention are identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). The following wild animals are designated protected and have no open season: badger, Canada lynx, cougar, flying squirrel, moose, American marten, gray wolf, white/albino deer, woodchuck, wolverine, black rat snake, bull snake, timber rattlesnake, yellow-bellied racer, all song birds, and any other species designated endangered or threatened. Threatened and endangered species are afforded protections under state (Wisconsin State Statute 29.604) and federal (Federal Endangered Species Act) laws. Under the Proposed Action, expanding the current PHG lease program by opening additional acreage to public access does not put these species at risk. Fish and wildlife species may benefit from expansion of the current PHG lease program by setting aside additional acreage available as habitat.

### 3.1.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the current public access program would continue to be available, but the PHG program would not be expanded to other areas in Wisconsin.

## 3.2 RECREATION

Wisconsinites are active participants in most forms of outdoor recreation. Recreation participation rates within Wisconsin are higher than most other regions of the country (WDNR 2006a). This may be attributed to the combination of Wisconsin's abundant recreation resources as well as the state's four season climate, a resource that allows for recreating in every season. The 2005-2010 Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) lists 95 outdoor activities enjoyed by Wisconsin residents, more than have been used in any previous Wisconsin SCORP (WDNR 2006a). For this PEA, recreation focuses on hunting, trapping and fishing opportunities and other wildlife-related recreational activities available to the public in the State of Wisconsin.

### 3.2.1 Affected Environment

#### *Hunting*

Hunting in the State of Wisconsin is regulated by WDNR and a valid hunting license is required to hunt within the state. These licenses are valid for one year after the date of purchase, and can be used to hunt deer, bear, small game, including most waterfowl and upland game. Licenses and permits can be obtained online, through a WDNR office, or at local retail stores.

Actual license sales for 1996-2006 show the number of hunters varied from a low of 714 thousand in 2005 to a high of 813 thousand in 1996 (WDNR 2007). The higher figure in 1996 was due to a change in the way hunters were counted in that year and an early deadline for bonus permit sales. As a percentage of the population, participation in hunting remained stable during the 1990's, with approximately one-fourth of Wisconsin's adult population participating in hunting each year.

#### *Fishing*

Like hunting, fishing is also regulated by WDNR. Wisconsin residents who are 16 years old or older need a fishing license to fish in any waters of the state. Residents need a fishing license to take rough fish by hand, hook and line or to spear fish where allowed. Residents do not need a fishing license to take smelt, rough fish, or minnows with nets, traps, and seines of legal size (WDNR 2010a).

Fishing licenses are sold at DNR Service Centers, License Sales Agents, or for an additional fee, over the phone at 1-877-WILICEN (1-877-945-4236) or online at [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov). Groups of disabled persons on fishing excursions conducted by nonprofit organizations may not need fishing licenses. The most common types of fish that can be fished for in Wisconsin are bass, bluegill, catfish, crappie, lake sturgeon, musky, northern pike, perch, pumpkinseed, salmon, trout, and walleye (WDNR 2010).

Actual license sales for the last twenty years show that though sales vary from year to year by as much as three to five percent, total numbers are expected to decline slightly (WDNR 2007). Resident angler participation rates, as measured by seven separate random surveys, remained stable over the period between 1992 and 2002 with no discernable trends, and averaged 47.9% of the age 18+ Wisconsin population. The results of a 2005 statewide outdoor recreation survey show that 40.7% of the age 16+ population fishes. Survey results also show slightly more anglers than actual license sales.

### *Trapping*

Trapping is a time-honored tradition going through resurgence in Wisconsin partially due to serious education programs for trappers, biologists, and the public. The department recognizes that furbearers are significant from an ecological, biological, cultural and economic standpoint. The WDNR supports regulated trapping as a legitimate outdoor activity which is:

- necessary in modern-day, furbearer management. Regulations are strictly enforced by Wisconsin Conservation wardens.
- valued and important as wildlife increases annually. Humane restraint is essential as we manage endangered and threatened species, reintroduced native fauna, and abundant furbearer populations.
- critical in the reduction of wildlife damage to crops and property and can help to reduce or relocate nuisance animals.
- helps reduce the spread of certain wildlife diseases, such as mange, canine distemper, and rabies.

The furbearing species trapped in Wisconsin include, beaver, bobcat, coyote, fisher, gray fox, mink, muskrat, otter, raccoon, and red fox (WDNR 2010b).

No age restrictions apply to trapping. All trappers must obtain a trapping license regardless of age. A minimum age of 12 years is recommended for successful completion of a Trapper Education program. All first time trappers must complete the Wisconsin Trapper Education course prior to purchasing a license (WDNR 2010b).

### *Wildlife viewing*

Other wildlife-dependent recreational activities in the State of Wisconsin include wildlife viewing and photography. Nationwide data from the National Recreation Survey for the period between 1982 and 1995 shows that bird watching was the fastest growing outdoor recreation activity. It is estimated that currently about 46% or 1.8 million Wisconsin adults participate in bird watching or nature study activities. General wildlife viewing is also very popular, with an estimate of almost 60% or 2.3 million Wisconsin adults participating (WDNR 2007).

### **3.2.2 Environmental Consequences**

Impacts to recreation would be considered significant if they drastically reduced, increased, or removed available public lands designated for recreation or significantly degraded the quality of the recreation. Impacts to environmental conditions such as air, water, or biological resources within or near public recreational land in such a way to affect its use would also be considered significant.

#### **3.2.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)**

The Proposed Action has the potential to provide long-term, beneficial impacts to recreational resources in the State of Wisconsin. Expanding the PHG program in Wisconsin would create more opportunities for citizens in the area to enjoy the recreational activities associated with the program. Expansion of the program would allow more opportunities and venues for hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife viewing on private property. Therefore, the Proposed Action would have long-term, beneficial impacts to recreational resources in Wisconsin.

#### **3.2.2.2 No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, the PHG program would not be expanded on private lands utilizing the VPA-HIP funding. There would be no use of VPA-HIP funds for expansion of recreational opportunities in Wisconsin; therefore, under the No Action Alternative there would be no impacts to recreational resources. The current public access program would continue as currently administered.

### **3.3 SOCIOECONOMICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

Socioeconomics for this PEA includes an investigation of population and demographic statistics as well as a discussion on the potential income from leasing public hunting rights to the state.

EO 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, requires a Federal agency to “make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing as appropriate, disproportionately high human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.” A minority population can be defined by race, by ethnicity, or by a combination of the two classifications.

According to CEQ, a minority is defined as being one of the following groups: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, not of Hispanic origin, or Hispanic. A minority population is defined as one of these groups exceeding 50 percent of the population in an area or the minority population percentage of the affected area is meaningfully greater than the minority population percentage in the general population (CEQ 1997). The United States Census Bureau (USCB) defines ethnicity as either being of Hispanic origin or not being of Hispanic origin. Hispanic origin is further defined as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central America, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (USCB 2001).

Each year the USCB defines the national poverty thresholds, which are measured in terms of household income and are dependent upon the number of persons within the household. Individuals falling below the poverty threshold are considered low-income individuals. USCB census tracts where at least 20 percent of the residents are considered poor are known as poverty areas (USCB 1995). When the percentage of residents considered poor is greater than 40 percent, the census tract is considered an extreme poverty area.

### **3.3.1 Affected Environment**

#### **3.3.1.1 Population and Demographics**

The State of Wisconsin had an estimated population of 5.66 million as of 2009 (USCB 2011). According to the USCB (2011), Wisconsin ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in the nation with a population growth rate of 5.4 percent from 2000 to 2009, as compared to a growth rate of 9.1 percent for the U.S. as a whole. Long-term projections for the population of the state show a population of 6.15 million by the year 2030 (USCB 2011).

The State of Wisconsin's population according to 2009 estimates from the USCB (2009) is:

- 89.4% White
- 6.2% Black
- 2.2% Asian
- 1.0% American Indian or Alaska Native

In responding to the 2000 U.S. Census of Population, for the first time individuals were given the opportunity to identify themselves as being of more than one race. About 1.2% of Wisconsin's population selected multiple races. (Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau 2009). Hispanics can be of any race and are included in the applicable race categories above. USCB (2009) estimate of the Hispanic population in Wisconsin in 2009 was 5.3%.

In 2008, Wisconsin ranked 38<sup>th</sup> in the nation with an individual poverty rate of 10.4 percent (USCB 2011). Of the current population in Wisconsin, 89 percent have attained a high school degree with 25.7 percent of persons over 25 having attained a bachelor's degree (USCB 2011).

### 3.3.1.2 Private Landowner Income from Public Hunting Ground Leases

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Wisconsin was 7.5 percent as of December 2010 (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development 2011) and the state ranked 16<sup>th</sup> overall in the nation for unemployment (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011). Wisconsin ranked 21<sup>st</sup> in the nation with a household median income of \$52,094 in 2008 (USCB 2011). However, the state was 27<sup>th</sup> in the nation with a per capita personal income of \$37,767 (USCB 2011). Wisconsin landowners have readily demonstrated their willingness to provide public access in exchange for financial or technical benefit. As an example, landowners who enroll in the Wisconsin Managed Forest Law (MFL) program offer their lands for public access and in return receive a tax break on their forestland. Currently, approximately 2.9 million acres are enrolled in the MFL program. More limited enrollment (16,000 acres) occurs within the state-run Public Hunting Ground lease program, primarily in the southern third of the state.

Wisconsin's proposed VPA-HIP structure will meet broad acceptance among private landowners by offering a market-driven, competitive financial incentives for opening their lands to public access. Incentives would be offered on a tiered payment structure based upon habitat type. This tiered payment incentive would be a considerable increase from what is currently available (\$1-\$3/acre) and offered through the state-run Public Hunting Ground lease program. Increasing the financial incentive has been shown to motivate landowners to enlist in similar programs and current enrolled landowners have indicated the current payment structure is too low to remain in the program.

Under sec. 895.52 of the Wisconsin Statutes, landowners are generally immune from liability for injuries received by individuals recreating on their lands. Wisconsin Courts have consistently interpreted this statute for this purpose and also to encourage landowners to allow others to recreate on their lands. Having this language in place will add a layer of security for landowners considering opening their lands to public access.

In addition to financial incentives and liability protection, landowners can also benefit from interacting with the public and from managing wildlife on their lands. For landowners wishing to avoid the pressures of leasing their land to just one hunting party, this proposed program would offer them the ability to do so. Landowners enrolled in the program also will be providing a benefit to youth hunters and youth hunting programs by opening their lands to access by youth hunters. Private landowners in Wisconsin have demonstrated willingness to open their lands to youth hunting events in the past, and this program would offer an extension of that willingness.

### 3.3.2 Environmental Consequences

Significance of an impact to socioeconomics varies depending on the setting of the Proposed Action, but 40 CFR 1508.8 states that effects may include those that induce changes in the pattern of land use, population density, or growth rate.

Environmental justice is achieved when everyone, regardless of race, culture, or income, enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and has equal access to the decision-making

process. Significant environmental justice impacts would result if access to decision-making documents was denied or if any adverse environmental effects occurred that would disproportionately affect minority or low-income populations.

#### 3.3.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)

Under the Proposed Action, a total of \$3,205,135 in VPA-HIP funds from USDA FSA (\$936,040 awarded in 2010; remainder to be awarded over next two years) and \$105,000 of supplemental funding from WDNR (\$35,000 annually over three years) would be used to expand the current Wisconsin PHG lease program and increase the monetary compensation schedule for PHG payouts on privately-held land enrolled in public access lease programs in Wisconsin. The VPA-HIP funds would also be used to hire a dedicated private land access coordinator and four (4) to five (5) temporary staff to make landowner contacts and provide technical assistance to landowners in the four focus areas of the expanded PHG access program.

Ultimately, some of the increased money paid out to private landowners and the hiring of additional staff would have a slight beneficial impact on local economies in the vicinity of the expanded lease program. Increasing hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities or allowing access to previously inaccessible private lands could also bring indirect economic benefits through traveling sportsmen and women needing lodging, meals, and other goods.

Under the Proposed Action, there would be no disproportionate impact to minorities or low income populations in Wisconsin. The public access program is voluntary and would only target landowners with eligible lands. WDNR's public access program actually could provide new opportunities to lower income hunters by creating additional public access to favorable fish and wildlife habitat provided by private landowners.

#### 3.3.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, WDNR would not receive funding under the VPA-HIP. WDNR would not be able to hire personnel to support this program or provide technical assistance. The No Action Alternative would not allow for any of the positive economic impacts from the introduction of the VPA-HIP funding into the economy, nor would it allow for the expansion of hunting opportunities on private lands, which also brings economic benefit via lodging and purchase of goods and supplies.

## **CHAPTER 4.0 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES**

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### **4.1 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

CEQ regulations stipulate that the cumulative impacts analysis within an EA should consider the potential environmental impacts resulting from “the incremental impacts of the action when added to past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions” (40 CFR 1508.7). Recent CEQ guidance in considering cumulative impacts involves defining the scope of the other actions and their interrelationship with the Proposed Action. The scope must consider geographical and temporal overlaps among the Proposed Action and other actions. It must also evaluate the nature of interactions among these actions.

Cumulative impacts are most likely to arise when a relationship or synergism exists between the Proposed Action and other actions expected to occur in a similar location or during a similar time period. Actions overlapping with or in proximity to the Proposed Action would be expected to have more potential for a relationship than those more geographically separated.

In this PEA, the affected environment for cumulative impacts includes the 37 counties within the State of Wisconsin in which the public access programs are available. In addition to VPA-HIP, several other Federal and state programs in Wisconsin focus on conservation. Federal programs include the Conservation Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Grassland Reserve Program, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program, and the USFWS Partners for Wildlife Program. Wildlife conservation in the State of Wisconsin benefits from a coordinated effort among a host of conservation partners and federal agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and US Fish and Wildlife Service. Partners listed in Chapter 6 of this document are just a few of the agencies and organizations whose combined efforts improve conservation delivery in Wisconsin.

Increasing public awareness of the presence of important fish and wildlife species and minor activities they can do to improve habitat on their land would create an environment to support sustainable fish and wildlife populations. Therefore, cumulative impacts are expected to be beneficial to the natural environment.

### **4.2 IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES**

Irreversible and irretrievable commitments are related to the use of nonrenewable resources and the effect that the use of these resources has on future generations. Irreversible effects primarily result from the use or destruction of a specific resource that cannot be replaced within a reasonable time frame. Irretrievable resource commitments involve the loss in value of an affected resource that cannot be restored as a result of the action. Under the Proposed Action, long-term beneficial impacts are expected to wildlife populations, sportsmen and women and there would be no irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

## **CHAPTER 5.0 MITIGATION MEASURES**

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The purpose of mitigation is to avoid, minimize, or eliminate significant negative impacts on affected resources. CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1508.20) state that mitigation includes:

- Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action.
- Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation.
- Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment.
- Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action.
- Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

CEQ regulations state that all relevant reasonable mitigation measures that could avoid or minimize significant impacts should be identified, even if they are outside the jurisdiction of the lead agency or the cooperating agencies. This serves to alert agencies or officials who can implement these extra measures, and will encourage them to do so. The lead agency for this Proposed Action is FSA. The state partner agency is WDNR.

There are no expected long-term, significant negative impacts associated with implementation of the VPA-HIP in Wisconsin.

## **CHAPTER 6.0 PERSONS AND AGENCIES CONTACTED**

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Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection

Ducks Unlimited

Pheasants Forever

Ruffed Grouse Society

Trout Unlimited

Wisconsin Bowhunters Association

Wisconsin Conservation Congress

Wisconsin Waterfowl Association

Wings Over Wisconsin

Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association

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