RON KIND
THIRD DISTRICT, WISCONSIN
CHIEF DEPUTY WHIP

1406 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5506 FAX: (202) 225-5739
TTY: (202) 226-1772

WEBSITE: www.house.gov/kind

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

BUDGET COMMITTEE

EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE COMMITTEE

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

March 13, 2006

Mr. H. Dale Hall
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Mr. Bill Hartwig
Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Mr. Don Hultman
Refuge Manager
Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge
51 East Fourth Street, Room 101
Winona, MN 55987

Subject: Alternative E of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

Dear Gentlemen:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my comments regarding Alternative E of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

As you know, unlike other federal and state legislative officials who commented on your work prior to the close of the public comment period, I and my staff have taken a balanced approach, attending and speaking at various public meetings and conducting numerous meetings ourselves in an effort to develop a consensus CCP that addresses the Refuge's short-term and long-term needs and maintains the essential public-private partnerships in managing this important resource.

By listening and considering more than two thousand comments and holding various public listening sessions, your agency should be commended for your openness to public opinion and willingness to adjust the plan in light of public input. As reflected by the public comments in this issue, the people of this region recognize the Refuge's economic, recreational, and culture importance.

LA CROSSE OFFICE
205 5TH AVENUE SOUTH, SUITE 226
LA CROSSE, WI 54601
(608) 782-2558 FAX: (608) 782-4588
TTY: (608) 782-1173

DISTRICT TOLL FREE NUMBER
1-888-442-8040
TTY: 1-888-880-9180

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

EAU CLAIRE OFFICE
131 SOUTH BARSTOW STREET, SUITE 301
EAU CLAIRE, WI 54701
(715) 831-9214 FAX: (715) 831-9272

Personally, as someone who has grown up near the Refuge and enjoyed the many wonders of the Mississippi River, I am proud to call myself a "river rat." I understand how important a healthy river system is, not only to our region's economy but also to our quality of life. As a boy, I would spend countless hours a day exploring the Mississippi or the vast stretch of Refuge territory. In the years since, I have had the great pleasure of raising two river rats of my own, taking them out as often as possible to enjoy everything from boating and swimming to hunting and fishing.

Recognizing that a healthy river system is important, not only to our region's economy, but to our quality of life, I have worked consistently to promote land conservation and strengthen river habitat in the refuge. In fact, those individuals who have criticized the CCP's efforts in not addressing sedimentation are encouraged to join my efforts in reforming federal agriculture conservation policy. As founder and co-chair of the bipartisan Upper Mississippi River Basin Congressional Task Force, I have fought hard for full funding of the award-winning Environmental Management Program that has become a model of interagency and interstate cooperation. I also authored legislation that aims to reduce excessive nutrients and sedimentation in the Upper Mississippi and cosponsored a bill to fight harmful invasive species.

While I commend your agency efforts in developing Alternative E, it is my hope that any final CCP will take the following into consideration:

Reducing Sedimentation, Enhancing Habitat Restoration, and combating Invasive Species – With the Refuge limited by its boundaries, additional efforts need to be undertaken to implement policies that reduce nutrients and sediment flows from adjacent lands. Basin-wide efforts to restore habitat and fight invasive species must also be developed.

Enhancing Public-Private Partnerships – Due to Refuge's immense size and scope, it is important to preserve and build upon the strong partnerships that have been established on this Refuge. Any successful CCP plan must have broad community support to ensure Refuge protection and future viability.

Working with appropriate Wisconsin agencies in developing regulations – Because the USFWS shares Refuge management responsibilities with state of Wisconsin, it is important that future management decisions are harmonized and accepted by both parties. Due to the historically large federal budget deficit, the USFWS requires cooperation with state and local authorities as well as private entities in managing this resource.

Maintaining Access for all Users – With the passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Congress recognized that the Refuge must be accessible for all users, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation, boating and canoeing. While your agency should be complimented for its efforts in ensuring access for all active and passive Refuge users, any future plan must coordinate with state law.

Voluntary Compliance – To ensure adoption of the final CCP, FWS must recognize existing state laws regarding the regulation of various means of navigation such as slow, no-wake areas, electric motor areas and closed areas. Since these proposed changes have caused alarm by some state officials, I strongly encourage your department to adopt "voluntary compliance" methods in place of the more restrictive slow, no-wake areas, electric motors areas and closed areas concept and then monitor the impact at these areas on other users and wildlife.

Thank you, again, for your efforts during this process. The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is a multi-use, large resource. It is clear that many individuals and groups care passionately about its management. It is equally clear that no final plan can be all things to all people so we all must recognize that it has to balance the needs of the various users as well as wildlife.

I commend your agency for your open and inclusive approach throughout the development of your plans and look forward to working with you as we move forward on developing a final plan as well as future Mississippi River and Refuge issues.

Sincerely,

Ron Kind

Ron Kind
Member of Congress

Cc:
The Honorable Jim Doyle, Governor
The Honorable Peg Lautenschlager, Attorney General, Department of Justice
Scott Hassett, Secretary Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
State Representative Jennifer Shilling
State Representative Lee Nerison
State Representative Mike Huebsch
State Representative Barbara Gronemus
State Representative Gabe Loeffelholz
State Representative Kitty Rhoades
State Senator Dan Kapanke
State Senator Dale Schultz
State Senator Robert Jauch
State Senator Ron Brown
State Senator Sheila Harsdorf
Steve Doyle, La Crosse County Board Chair
Mark Johnsrud, Mayor City of La Crosse