



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2022 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2022-240

**Proposal Title:** Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Deborah Loon

**Organization:** Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust Inc

**Office Telephone:** (612) 801-1935

**Email:** dloon@mnvalleytrust.org

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Internships and apprenticeships on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge will introduce 52 diverse young people over two years to careers in the conservation field.

**Funds Requested:** \$708,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** December 31 2024

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Environmental Education (C)

#### Project Location

**What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?**

Statewide

**What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?**

Statewide

**When will the work impact occur?**

During the Project and In the Future

## Narrative

**Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.**

As one of just 14 urban wildlife refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District is charged with engaging the next generation of youth who, for a variety of reasons, are not connected to outdoors and nature. This is critical to ensuring a future constituency passionate about protecting our public lands, as well as encouraging a diversity of youth to consider conservation careers.

The Refuge offers vast opportunities for Twin Cities residents to connect with wildlife, learn about their habitats and enjoy nature-based recreation. Given its location and varied habitats, the Refuge and District is able to serve as a learning laboratory and training site for future conservationists, natural resource biologists and environmental educators. Currently, this is done through a handful of low-paid internships every year. However, with the rising costs of a college education and intransigent economic disparities, many students cannot afford unpaid internships. This is especially true for young people of color and low-income. Students often must take jobs outside of their chosen field to pay for college or help support their families. Without good internships, they do not gain experience and connections needed to compete for quality jobs.

**What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? i.e. What are you seeking funding to do? You will be asked to expand on this in Activities and Milestones.**

We will build an extensive program of internships and apprenticeship opportunities on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District. This grant program will attract high school students, college students and recent graduates with diverse backgrounds, introduce them to the conservation field and provide mentorship and job skills to these future resource professionals. The participants will be given paid positions and the opportunity to work side-by-side with and learn from USFWS professionals and other conservation partners. They will design and deliver environmental education programs, plan and co-lead wildlife interpretive and nature-based activities, assist USFWS personnel with habitat restoration and enhancement projects, conduct biological surveys, develop and maintain visitor use amenities, and explore conservation-related career options. Some of the participants will experience outdoor activities like fishing, paddling, orienteering, birding and hunting for the first time.

**What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?**

This internship and apprenticeship program will introduce 52 young people to careers in the conservation field over two-three years. They will explore conservation career options, then be able to compete for post-secondary education and employment opportunities. Through mentorship, we will build a diverse pool of conservationists who will contribute long-term to protecting, restoring and enhancing Minnesota's natural resources. During the project, their 40,000 hours of service will improve the habitat conditions of over 450 acres of prairie, wetland and forest, and introduce thousands of children to the wonders of the natural world through environmental education and nature-based activities.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: 4 Full-Time Apprentices will work alongside USFWS personnel and gain hands-on experience in Biology, Operations, Visitor Services and Community Outreach

**Activity Budget:** \$300,000

**Activity Description:**

4 recent college graduates at a time will have full-time paid apprenticeships with the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District for 2 years each. They will work with and be mentored by USFWS professionals. The Refuge Biology Apprentice will build skills in biological monitoring, habitat restoration and enhancement planning and implementation, visitor engagement, and balancing needs of wildlife and visitors. The District Operations Apprentice will do biological monitoring, plan and implement habitat restoration and enhancement projects, and develop, construct and maintain visitor use amenities. The Visitor Services Apprentice will increase visitor trips to and experiences on the Refuge through strategic communications and marketing, improved visitor experience tools (e.g., interpretation, education, equipment) and enhanced signage. The Community Outreach Apprentice will develop and present engaging outreach programs to urban and suburban youth and families on the Refuge and in the community, develop new partnerships to reach urban youth, and attend community events and festivals to engage urban audiences in nature-based activities. The apprentices will be paid \$16.50-\$17.00/hour as full-time employees, provided benefits and covered by workers compensation.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Completion Date
4 Apprentices complete 12 months	December 31 2023
4 Apprentices complete 12 months	December 31 2024

### Activity 2: 4 Full-Time Teaching Practicum Interns each year will build their environmental education teaching skills through internships on the Refuge

**Activity Budget:** \$282,000

**Activity Description:**

4 recent college graduates at a time will have one-year paid Environmental Education Teaching Internships on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (8 total interns over 2 years). They will learn from and be mentored by USFWS professionals, design and deliver quality environmental educational programs to over 6,000 children, teachers and families who visit the Refuge from schools throughout the Twin Cities metro area, and lead interpretive programs for the public on the Refuge. The interns will be paid \$15.50-\$16.00/hour as full-time employees, provided benefits and covered by workers compensation insurance.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Completion Date
4 Environmental Education Teaching Interns complete year 1	August 31 2023
4 Environmental Education Teaching Interns complete year 2	August 31 2024

### Activity 3: 12 High School Students will have Year-Round Internships on the Refuge's Green Team

**Activity Budget:** \$75,000

**Activity Description:**

12 high school students from under-represented communities in the Twin Cities will have internships on the Green Team of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge each year (24 students over 2 years). Members of the Green Team will participate in a monthly hands-on, nature-based activity through the school year, then have a full-time internship on the Refuge during the summer. They will be guided by our full-time Intern Coordinator to plan and co-lead environmental education and recreation programs on the Refuge and in the community, design and staff information booths and activities at community festivals, assist the Refuge's Urban Biologist with habitat restoration projects in the community, and participate in career discovery across the Refuge. Student interns will be recruited by partners, including StepUp Achieve (Minneapolis), Right Track (St. Paul), Hispanic Access Foundation and SEAK / Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center. The interns will be paid \$14.00-15.00/hour.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Completion Date
12 High School Interns complete year 1 on the Green Team	August 31 2023
12 high school interns complete year 2 on the Green Team	August 31 2024

## Activity 4: 2 Full-Time Summer Interns will work with the Refuge and Wetland Management District Biologists

**Activity Budget:** \$28,000

**Activity Description:**

2 high school students, college students or recent college graduates pursuing a career in natural resources will have full-time internships on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District for 14 weeks in the summer (4 total over 2 years). Interns will work side-by-side with, learn from and be mentored by USFWS Biologists as they conduct plant and bird surveys, pollinator surveys, invasive species mapping and removal, water level monitoring and management, public education, habitat assessments and restoration, boundary posting, mowing and seeding. The interns will be paid \$14.00-\$15.00/hour.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Completion Date
2 Biology Summer Interns complete 14 weeks	August 31 2023
2 Biology Summer Interns complete 14 weeks	August 31 2024

## Activity 5: Intern Coordinator will coordinate the Refuge Internship and Apprenticeship Program, lead and mentor high school interns

**Activity Budget:** \$1,000

**Activity Description:**

The new, full-time Intern Coordinator at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is funded by the Refuge and Minnesota Valley Trust. This position will ensure all interns and apprentices have a robust work and learn experience. The Intern Coordinator will plan and lead all activities of the high school interns, including the year-round Green Team and summer interns, assist all Refuge programs in recruiting a diverse set of intern and apprentice candidates, coordinate the onboarding and training of interns and apprentices, ensure a high level of collaboration across all Refuge program areas in intern projects and activities, and increase the Refuge's connections with and support of local partner organizations, especially those engaging and supporting under-represented communities.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Completion Date
Intern Coordinator will ensure robust experiences for all interns and apprentices	December 31 2024

## Activity 6: 2 High School Students will have Summer Internships with the Refuge Community Outreach and Urban Biology Program

**Activity Budget:** \$21,000

### Activity Description:

2 high school students recruited by StepUp Achieve Minneapolis will have full-time, paid summer internships on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge each year (4 interns over 2 years). These youth will be guided by our full-time Intern Coordinator as they participate in nature-based outdoor activities (often for the first time in their lives), plan and co-lead environmental education and outdoor recreation programs both on the Refuge and in their community, design and staff information booths and activities at community festivals, assist the Urban Biologist with habitat restoration projects in the community, and participate in career discovery with staff across the Refuge. The interns will be paid \$14.00-\$15.00/hour.

### Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
2 High School Interns complete year 1	August 31 2023
2 High School Interns complete year 2	August 31 2024

## Activity 7: 4 College Students will have FWS-Sponsored Summer Internships on the Refuge

**Activity Budget:** \$1,000

### Activity Description:

The USFWS will fund 4 summer internships each year for college students and recent college graduates on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District. The interns will work with FWS professionals as they explore careers and gain hands-on experience in Biology, Visitor Services, Environmental Education and Operations. The interns are recruited by partner organizations, including the Hispanic Access Foundation, as well as the FWS Director's Fellowship Program.

### Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
4 College Summer Interns complete 12 weeks	August 31 2023
4 College Summer Interns complete 12 weeks	August 31 2024

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Sarena Selbo	Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge & Wetland Management District	Supervise, support and engage the interns and apprentices as they design and deliver environmental education programs, plan and co-lead wildlife interpretive and nature-based activities, assist USFWS personnel with habitat restoration and enhancement projects, conduct biological surveys, improve visitor facilities, and explore conservation-related career options.	No

## Long-Term Implementation and Funding

**Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this be funded?**

The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust and Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge & Wetland Management District are committed to maintaining this robust internship and apprenticeship program for the long-term. Future funding will be sought through philanthropic efforts with foundations, corporations, civic organizations and individuals by the Trust and Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends, as well as through other state and federal sources of funds (e.g., workforce grant programs).

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Metro Conservation Corridors Phase VIII - Priority Expansion of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge	M.L. 2015, Chp. 76, Sec. 2, Subd. 09g	\$500,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Deborah Loon

**Job Title:** Executive Director

**Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.**

Deborah Loon has served as the executive director of the Minnesota Valley Trust almost since its inception in 2001. In that role, she is the liaison with the USFWS and is the primary contact with all partners, landowners, local communities and grantmaking organizations. She provides support to the Trust Board of Directors, implements the Strategic Framework and provides overall management of the organization, including grants management. Loon brings extensive experience in project management and organizational leadership for both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. She has served on the staff and boards of directors for numerous nonprofit organizations since 1984, including in the executive director role since 1999. Loon holds a BA in political science from St. Olaf College.

**Organization:** Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust Inc

**Organization Description:**

The Minnesota Valley Trust, Inc. is a 501c3 nonprofit corporation that assists the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in making the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District a premier urban wildlife refuge that:

- Protects, restores, and enhances large blocks and corridors of habitat to provide sustainable landscapes for people and wildlife and improve water quality in the Minnesota River
- Provides opportunities for Twin Cities residents to access the Refuge and connect with wildlife, plants and the Minnesota River in a diversity of ways meaningful to them
- Increases connections with a diversity of residents in the Twin Cities through outreach programming that meets residents of all ages and backgrounds in their communities, introduces them to the natural world and draws them to visit and experience the Refuge themselves
- Engages a diversity of people as volunteers, interns and employees to improve Refuge habitat, meet Refuge educational objectives and build a conservation ethic throughout the community
- Introduces children to the wonders of the natural outdoors through educational and interpretive programming, thereby building a pool of future conservationists, employees, volunteers, advocates and philanthropists.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Refuge Community Outreach Apprentice		1 Apprentice for 2 years (1-2 year position) will work with the Refuge Community Outreach team to connect urban and suburban youth and families with nature through programs on the Refuge and in the community.			0%	2		\$75,000
Refuge Visitor Services Apprentice		1 Apprentice for 2 years (1-2 year position) will work with the Refuge Visitor Services team to increase public use and enjoyment of the Refuge through strategic communications and marketing, enhanced public use materials and tools, and improved signage.			0%	2		\$75,000
Refuge Biology Apprentice		1 Apprentice per year for 2 years (1-2 year position) will work with the Refuge Biologist to conduct biological monitoring, assist with designing and implementing habitat restoration and enhancement activities, and engage with volunteers.			0%	2		\$75,000
District Biology Apprentice		1 Apprentice per year for 2 years (1-2 year position) will work with the Wetland Management District Specialist to conduct biological monitoring, assist with designing and implementing habitat restoration and enhancement activities, and develop, construct and maintain visitor use amenities.			0%	2		\$75,000
Environmental Education Teaching Interns		4 Interns per year for 2 years will work with the Refuge Environmental Education team to design and deliver environmental education programming to 6,000 students, teachers and parents each year, as well as interpretive programming to the public.			0%	8		\$282,000
Summer Community Outreach High School Interns		2 Interns each summer for 2 years will work with the Refuge Community Outreach and Urban Biology Program to plan and co-lead nature-based education and recreation programs on the Refuge and in the community, co-staff information booths and activities at community festivals, assist with design and implementation of habitat restoration projects in the community, and participate in career discovery across the Refuge.			0%	0.36		\$21,000



Summer Biology Interns		2 Interns each summer for 2 years will be introduced to conservation careers as they work with USFWS biologists to do plant, bird and pollinator surveys, invasive species mapping and removal, water level monitoring and management, public education, habitat assessments and restoration, boundary posting, mowing and seeding.			0%	0.5		\$28,000
Intern Coordinator		1 Intern Coordinator (funded by MVT and FWS) will lead and mentor the high school interns through the year-round Green Team and summer StepUp internships. Coordinator also will assist all Refuge program areas in recruiting a more diverse set of intern candidates, manage onboarding, training and other administrative requirements of all in-coming interns, increase collaboration across all refuge program areas in youth intern projects and activities to provide a robust experience, and build a collaboration framework with other local organizations.			0%	2		\$1,000
Green Team - Year-Round High School Interns		12 urban high school youth will participate in this conservation-based work and learn program that includes one activity monthly through the school year and a 9-week paid Refuge internship each summer.			0%	2.5		\$75,000
Summer College Internships		4 college students each summer for 2 years will participate in FWS-funded internships on the Refuge.			0%	1		\$1,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$708,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-

Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$708,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.	The Minnesota Valley Trust will cover all employee benefits and workers compensation expenses for the full-time Apprentices and Environmental Education Teaching Interns, as well as 30% of the total employment cost of the Intern Coordinator.	Secured	\$113,500
In-Kind	US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 3 Division of Refuges Youth Internship Program	We anticipate 4 of the summer internship positions each year will be fully-funded at the Refuge through the USFWS Region 3 Youth Internship Program.	Pending	\$46,000
In-Kind	US Fish & Wildlife Service, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge & Wetland Management District	The Refuge will provide office space, equipment, local travel and supplies for all interns and apprentices. The value of supervision and mentoring of the interns and apprentices by MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District staff is not included in the in-kind estimate.	Secured	\$60,000
Cash	US Fish and Wildlife Service, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District	USFWS will fund 70% of the total employment costs of the Intern Coordinator and 50% of the stipends and other costs for the Green Team interns.	Secured	\$162,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$381,500</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$381,500</b>

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [1a0aef3f-e92.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

The attachment is a map showing the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District boundaries and units....

#### *Financial Capacity*

File: [c84b0ee9-bdd.pdf](#)

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Board Resolution	<a href="#">676f48ad-2bc.pdf</a>

## Administrative Use

**Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**

No

**Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?**

No

**Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?**

N/A

**Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?**

N/A

**Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?**

No

**Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?**

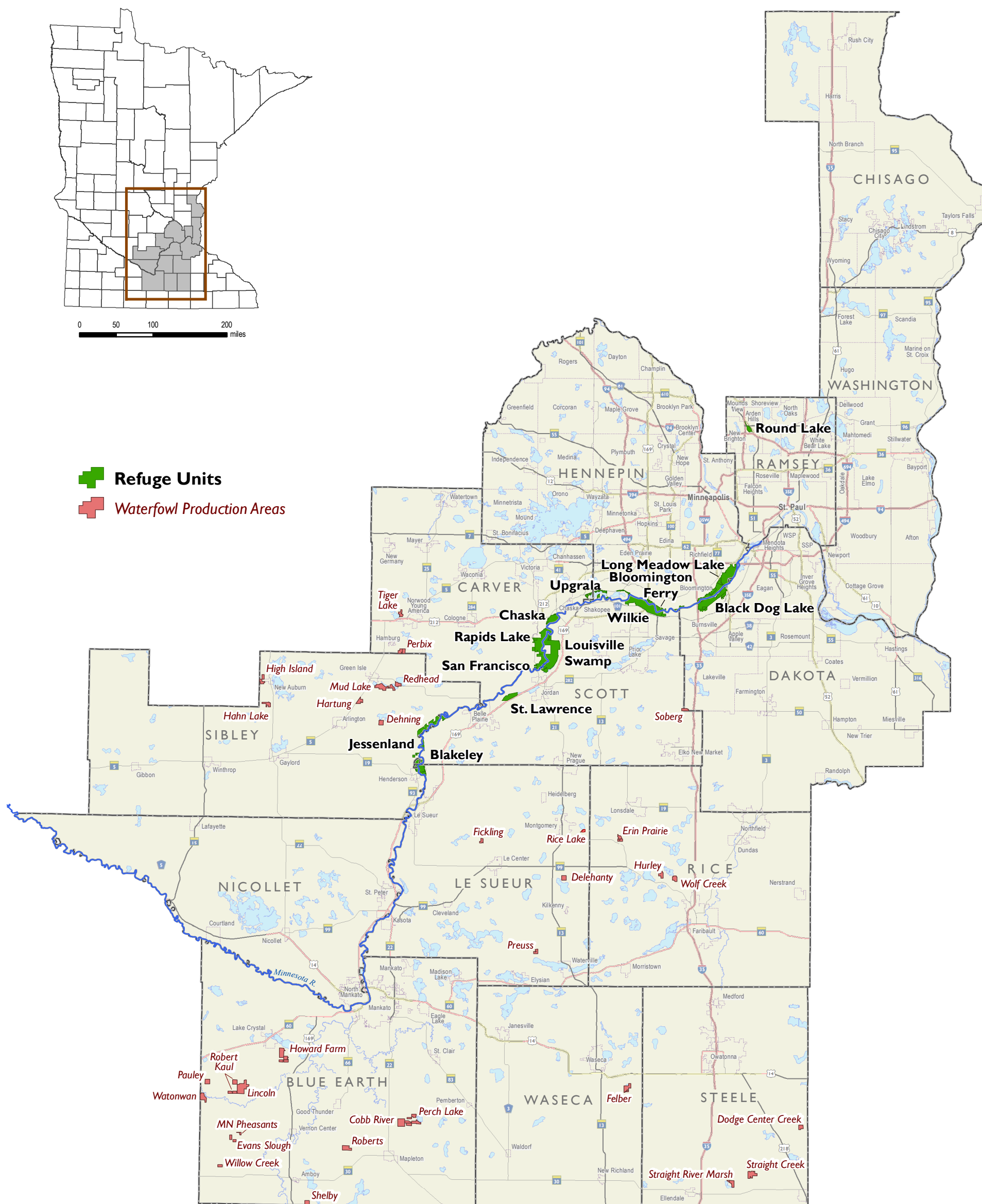
No



# Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Bloomington, Minnesota

## *Wetland Management District*



A horizontal scale bar with tick marks at 0, 5, 10, and 20 miles. The bar is black with white text and a white line at the 10-mile mark.

