



News Release

Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region External Affairs Office

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FOR YOUR INFORMATION
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Safety Concerns Prompt Changes in Access to Former Bureau of Mines Center in Fort Snelling.

Citing increasing safety and vandalism concerns, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is taking steps to protect the public and federal property at the former U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Mines Twin Cities Research Center located in Fort Snelling, Minnesota. Effective Monday, August 8, 2005, the public may enter the federal property grounds only by submitting a special-use permit application and entering the site during the specified hours on the approved permit. The Service manages the Center pending completion of a public process to determine disposition of the property.

The Service's action was prompted by results of a recent safety assessment conducted at the Center, which formerly housed the now-disbanded Bureau of Mines research facility. An assessment of the site's 11 buildings and 27-acre grounds found a number of serious hazards.

"We realize this area is important to some members of the community, and we want to find a way to accommodate that interest," said Barbara Milne, Assistant Regional Director of the Service's Midwest Region. "We also have a strong obligation – one that we must uphold – to ensure the safety of this community while protecting federal property. With limited funds and staff, this is the most balanced way to meet these needs."

The National Park Service is currently working with the public to develop an Environmental Impact Statement under the National Environmental Policy Act to address possible future disposition of the site. The draft EIS, expected to be released in early 2006, will contain alternatives for disposition and potential impacts of possible future uses of the Center on natural, historic, and cultural resources.

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For more information on entering the former Bureau of Mines Twin Cities Research Center, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 612-713-5306. For information on the National Park Service's planning process and Environmental Impact Statement, contact Kim Berns, 651-290-3030 x 244.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.