

Shiawassee Refuge Private Lands Biologist Earns Distinguished Service Award

March 10, 2009

The Saginaw Bay Resource Conservation and Development Area presented the 2008 Distinguished Service Award to Michelle Vander Haar in recognition of distinguished and dedicated service to improving the quality of life in the Saginaw Bay Watershed.



*Private Lands Biologist Michelle Vander Haar doing good things for wildlife.
Edward P. De Vries/USFWS; 1/2007*

As the Private Lands Biologist at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, Michelle has made many significant contributions to the preservation, restoration, and enhancement of wildlife habitat and water quality in the watershed. Michelle has coordinated the restoration of hundreds of acres of wetland and grassland and miles of riparian habitat through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Further, she has formed a multitude of partnerships and leveraged resources to secure North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grants and Service Challenge Cost Share Grants. In addition to improving

wetlands, grasslands, and riparian habitats, these grants have gone toward removing fish barriers and eradicating invasive species.

A project of particular pride to Michelle has been working with schools to connect children with nature. Michelle has worked with several schools to restore small wetlands on their property. These wetlands serve as laboratories and study sites to support delivery of the school's curriculum as well as places for individual nature study and exploration. This project also provides trunks of study materials, including ID guides, binoculars, magnifying boxes, dip nets, curriculum guides, and more to make the sites true outdoor learning centers.

Michelle has served on several coalitions. She contributed substantially in the formation and rapid development of the Cass River Greenway program and has been awarded for her contributions to the Rifle River Watershed Restoration Committee. She has served for several years on the Wildlife Task Group of the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network. Michelle also provides technical assistance to the USDA – Natural Resource Conservation Service toward implementing the Conservation Reserve Program and Wetland Reserve Program.

Michelle also makes important contributions right at Shiawassee Refuge. She has been instrumental in developing a unique partnership with the Michigan Department of Corrections to create a source of native plants of local genotype and ecotype for refuge habitat restoration projects. Through this partnership, seed was collected from 52 species of wildflowers, grasses, and sedges from the refuge. This seed was processed and propagated by inmates at the Saginaw Correctional Facility's horticulture program. As a result, over 40,000 seedlings were produced in 2008. Michelle also coordinated the restoration of 138 acres of prairie and 13 acres of wetland on the Sawatski Tract. Further, she lends a hand during refuge events such as the annual Open House, Kids Free Fishing Day, the Junior Duck Stamp competition, and the goose hunt.