

Partnership Restores Wetland at Shiawassee Refuge

April 28, 2009

The 153-acre Sawatski tract was added to Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge in 2003. At that time a visitor here would find a large soybean field and little if any wildlife. In 2006, the refuge planted 130 acres with a diverse mix of native prairie plants including Indiangrass, big bluestem, black-eyed-susan, and yellow coneflower. This habitat has attracted a diversity of wildlife including such breeding grassland birds as horned lark, savannah sparrow, vesper sparrow, and grasshopper sparrow. In fact, the latter was previously unrecorded on the refuge.



*A flock of mallards takes off from the Sawatski Tract wetland restoration.
Steven F. Kahl/USFWS; 9/2008*

In 2008, 15 acres of the tract were restored to wetlands, including emergent marsh and sedge meadow. Wetland hydrology was brought back by disabling tile and building berms. Wetland vegetation was facilitated through planting of native species such as swamp milkweed, New England aster, swamp oval sedge, Virginia wild rye, sawtooth sunflower, blue flag iris, marsh purslane,

monkey flower, wild bergamot, and many others. Thus, optimum waterfowl brood habitat was created adjacent to a large block of nesting cover.

The transformation of the Sawatski Tract is due to a cooperative effort among several organizations. A North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant funded the prairie seed purchase and most of the wetland construction. Ducks Unlimited administered the grant and provided matching funds. Thousands of seedlings were planted during an American Wetlands Month event participated in by Saginaw County Master Gardeners, Friends of Shiawassee NWR, refuge volunteers, representatives of the Saginaw Correctional Facility (SCF), and members of the general public. The seedlings were grown through a unique partnership with the Michigan Department of Corrections and SCF's horticulture program. This program was funded by the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Challenge Cost Share Grant. The refuge and the Michigan Private Lands Office coordinated the project. Refuge staff also completed the 138-acre prairie seeding, conducted follow up maintenance, and planted wetland seedlings.



Planted swamp oval sedges are doing well. Steven F. Kahl/USFWS; 9/2008

In future years, the transformation at the Sawatski tract will continue and the value of this area to wildlife will increase as the prairie and wetland plants become better established.