



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Silvio O. Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge

Newsletter -- January, 2003

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Father of the Refuge System: Theodore Roosevelt, at Breton Island, Louisiana, the second wildlife refuge, with Audubon Game Warden Sprinkle (middle) and the Governor of Louisiana. Inset photo: The pelican is just one of many species protected on national wildlife refuges. *USFWS photos*

National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial

March 14, 2003 marks a milestone in the history of wildlife conservation in America. One hundred years ago, President Theodore Roosevelt set aside tiny Pelican Island on Florida's east coast as a refuge for birds to protect them from commercial hunters. From this beginning grew the National Wildlife Refuge System - now more than 530 refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas, spanning nearly 94 million acres across the United States and its territories.

To celebrate, time capsules are being filled and buried at national wildlife refuges across the country, to be opened 100 years hence. We have been considering what to put inside of our small capsule. What will survive for 100 years? What will have meaning to those who come after us?

What is much more important is what we choose to leave *outside* the capsule. Will those endangered species in the pictures in the capsule still exist? Will there be salmon in the river and eagles in the sky? We certainly don't often consider such weighty matters, or think of such a distant future. However, consciously or unconsciously, every day we make decisions about what we are preserving as a legacy.

I hope that, in 100 years, the natural diversity and healthy ecosystems we are working so hard to protect today may still exist. I know those that follow will appreciate the gift.

We invite you to join us at our headquarters on March 17th for a ceremony to fill our capsule and celebrate the centennial. Also, look for our centennial float in the Holyoke St. Patrick's Day Parade on March 23! Most importantly help us leave a healthy and whole natural world as our legacy.

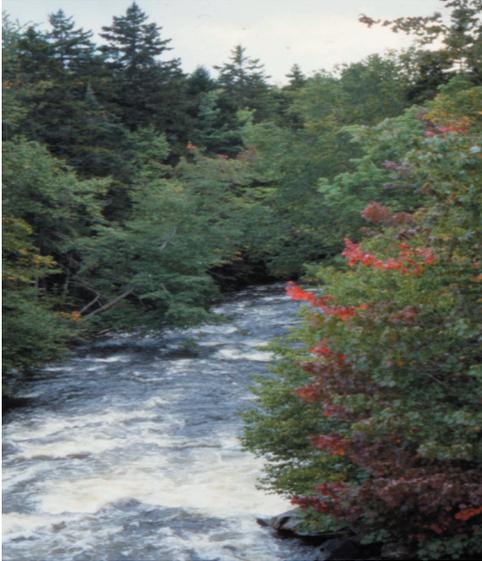
Beth Goettel
Refuge Manager

A reminder of our vision for the future.....

The health and integrity of the watershed's many native species, habitats and ecosystems depend on the vigilance of an educated citizenry that holds natural diversity conservation as a high priority and recognizes and actively solves local problems. Our vision is that we can help guide and support the citizens of the watershed in this endeavor.

Assisted by our leadership, the citizens of this watershed will act wisely to preserve, undiminished, the wide diversity of healthy habitats and the abundance of native species that characterize this watershed. They will be able to continue to enjoy the special nature of the New England landscape, and pass this distinctive legacy on to their children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren.

Environmental Education and Outreach



The Connecticut River: The river is the subject of a documentary by Vermont Public Television premiering in March, 2003.

USFWS photo



First Refuge Manager: Paul Kroegel, a local man, was hired to watch over Pelican Island, acting as the first refuge manager. *USFWS photo*

Challenge Cost-Share Program

Congress has not yet passed the Interior Appropriations Bill, so we do not yet have a budget. Due to this budget uncertainty, and the fact that the exhibits at Great Falls Discovery Center are still incomplete and require funds, we have decided to suspend the Challenge Cost-Share Program once again this year.

Refuge Staff Assists with Vermont Public Television Special on the Connecticut River

Vermont Public Television is at work on "Connecticut River Stories" (working title), a new one-hour documentary that will provide a window on the turbulent mixing of cultures that occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries. Hosted by New England storyteller Willem Lange, "Connecticut River Stories" will explore historic connections between the upper river, forming the border between New Hampshire and Vermont, and the lower river, flowing through Massachusetts and Connecticut. The Connecticut River Valley cradles New England's longest river. From the Algonquian peoples who fished its waters and farmed its banks for thousands of years to the first European settlers of the 1600's, this 410-mile-long national heritage landmark has transported, fed and gathered people together. The program will also highlight the inspirational clean-up that has taken place over the past 40 years, including refuge staff and volunteers removing the invasive aquatic plant, waterchestnut. Viewers will discover fresh historical perspectives through powerful stories of New England's past.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Turns 100!

The Conte Refuge is looking forward to the 100th anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System coming in March 2003. Perhaps the most special event for the Refuge staff this year will be our participation in the St. Patrick's Day Parade (www.holyoke.org/PattiesDay/Index.htm) in Holyoke, Massachusetts on Sunday, March 23, 2003. Our Centennial float, a birthday cake accompanied by 2-3 large, over-sized, street puppets, and Irish Music. Mark Dannenhaur, a local Massachusetts-based theater art and puppet specialist, will lead volunteers through a 3 day workshop to construct large puppets of a bald eagle and Atlantic salmon. The media coverage of this annual event and the over 300,000 parade-goers who will see our street display, make this effort worth while. If you would like to participate in the puppet making workshops on February 9, 16 and 23, contact Carolyn Boardman, Outdoor Recreation Planner at 413/863-0209 x3.

Be sure to visit, <http://refuges.fws.gov/centennial/index.html> to find out more about the Centennial Celebration and where other exciting events and activities may be happening near you.

Conte Refuge Education Centers

Conte Refuge opened two centers this spring: the Great North Woods Interpretive Center, in Colebrook, New Hampshire and the Conte Refuge Visitors Center, at the Montshire Museum of Science in Norwich, Vermont. A combined total of 29,000 visitors enjoyed these new facilities during July-September.

The Great North Woods Interpretive Center offers exhibits about the Service, the Refuge System, the Centennial, Conte Refuge, the Nulhegan Basin Division, Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge and the conservation of grasslands birds. The New Hampshire Department of Transportation provides staff during the summer. This year, volunteers from the local community are hosting the center during the winter, a busy time in snow country. For hours of operation call 603/ 237- 5390.

At the Montshire Museum of Science, the themes of biodiversity, habitats and native species are blended with the many science-based exhibits. You can visit The Watershed Explorer exhibit at <http://www.montshire.org/watershedexplorer/>

Environmental Education and Outreach Continued...



Great Northwoods Interpretive Center:

Agricultural lands, like the one depicted in the Colebrook exhibit above, have provided home and sanctuary to grassland birds for hundreds of years. *USFWS photo*



Celebrating Conservation: Leaders of the partnership group that saved the former Mount Tom Ski area celebrated this major conservation victory last summer. *USFWS photo*



Federally Endangered Dwarf Wedgemussel:

Zebra mussels in the Connecticut River pose a serious threat to this rare species. *USFWS photo*

noflash.html. This site offers a more in depth look into biodiversity, migration, habitats, endangered species, and much more. The Montshire Museum of Science is a hands-on museum offering dozens of exciting exhibits relating to the natural and physical sciences, ecology, and technology. The building is located on a 110-acre site near the Connecticut River, and the museum's outdoor environment is a large part of the visitor experience. A Conte interpreter is at the museum on Thursdays to offer school programs (grades 5-9) on migratory fish and birds and on Saturdays for public and special audience programming. Visit www.montshire.net for extensive museum information.

We still await the completion of the Great Falls Discovery Center here in Turners Falls. Work on dioramas and exhibit lighting continued last year. Aquaria will be installed this winter. The three fish tanks will provide three river perspectives: headwater native species, warm water species of impounded waters, and the mainstem species. Major work on the grounds and landscaping are also slated for this summer.

Habitat Management

The Mountain is Saved

The Conte Refuge recently acquired 140 acres of the former Mount Tom Ski Area in Holyoke, Massachusetts. This purchase was a coordinated effort with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, The Trustees of Reservations, and the Holyoke Boys and Girls Club. Together, the groups purchased almost 400 acres adjacent to the Mount Tom State Reservation.

The Conte Refuge parcel is located primarily along the abandoned ski slopes. Unfortunately, a substantial amount of debris is left on this part of the mountain, left over from snow-making activities. This summer, the Conte Refuge will be hosting clean-up days to help scour the mountainside for hoses, metal scraps, ski poles, and whatever else we might find. If you or your group are interested in helping out, contact Barry Parrish, Assistant Refuge Manager at 413/863-0209 x7.

Stop the Zebras!!

Zebra mussels are an invasive species that were first discovered in North America fourteen years ago. Since then, they have spread to 22 states and have caused an estimated \$3,000,000,000 of damage in the Great Lakes alone. While the Connecticut River watershed is currently un-infested, zebra mussels are already as close as the Twin Lakes in northeastern Connecticut and Lake Champlain in Vermont.

The Conte Refuge is examining the Connecticut River watershed for the most likely places to become invaded. Using GIS (Geographic Information System) computer mapping software, we are analyzing boater use and access, proximity to existing infestations, the possibility for infesting large areas, hydrological connectivity, and water quality parameters. This effort will result in a map of priority areas for outreach and education to help stop the potentially disastrous invasion of this species.

While this assessment will serve as a tool to target resources, the success of defending the Connecticut River against the impending threat of zebra mussels will depend upon coordinated strategic efforts of a regional coalition of state and federal agencies,

Habitat Management

continued...



Federally Threatened Puritan Tigerbeetle: Spending most of its life underground, tiger beetles are so named because of their “tiger-like” hunting strategy of chasing down prey and capturing victims. *USFWS photo*



What's in That Hole?: Volunteers remove Puritan tigerbeetle larva from their burrows in Connecticut, which can be over 24 inches deep. The larvae are then relocated to the Massachusetts site. These efforts increased adult numbers three-fold this past summer. *USFWS photo*



Be on the Lookout! Mile-A-Minute, an invasive plant not yet found in Massachusetts, will be highlighted in NIPGro's next newsletter. *Photo by Les Mehrhoff*

water-based utilities, boating organizations, lake/pond/watershed organizations, and researchers. The Conte Refuge proposes to initiate and coordinate this effort. If you have any questions or know of zebra mussel sightings, contact Michelle Babione, Conte Refuge Wildlife Biologist, at 413/863-0209 x5.

Tigers Get a Boost

Puritan tiger beetles, one of the world's rarest bugs, are doing better this year thanks to a little help from their human friends. In 2002, the Massachusetts population has increased from an average of 35 adults to 112, thanks to three years of adding young beetles from a larger population in Connecticut.

The Puritan tiger beetle is a federally threatened animal found in only two places in the world: along the Connecticut River in New England, and a small part of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. The species has already disappeared from most of its historic range in New England, and is in imminent danger of being extirpated from Massachusetts.

For the last six years, the Conte Refuge has funded research on the Connecticut River population of Puritan tiger beetles. Each summer, enthusiastic volunteers spend time on sunny Connecticut River beaches looking for these beautiful but elusive insects. If you think you might enjoy helping out, call Michelle Babione, Conte Refuge Wildlife Biologist, at 413/863-0209 x5.

Invasive Plant Activities in New England

An exciting new invasive plant program in New England is underway and there are opportunities to become involved! Last year, the New England Wild Flower Society trained 122 volunteers to collect data on invasive plants within New England. People from all walks of life are involved. The information they collect is being entered into a database overseen by the University of Connecticut and will be available on the Internet. The website for this “Invasive Plant Atlas of New England” or “IPANE” will ultimately provide photographic images, distributional maps and biological information for nearly 100 species. This information will be used to better understand trends and form the basis for a system to alert land managers about new invaders so they can be controlled before they have a chance to become entrenched. An additional 150 volunteers are being sought for 2003. Training sessions will be conducted in all New England states. If you are interested in volunteering for the Invasive Plant Survey, contact Bryan Connolly, Invasive Plant Survey Coordinator, 76 Warrenville Rd., Mansfield Center, Connecticut 06250, phone 860-423-8305, email bconnolly@newfs.org or connollybryan@hotmail.com. Applications and additional information about the Invasive Plant Atlas of New England are available online at www.newfs.org/ipane.htm and <http://invasives.eeb.uconn.edu/ipane/>.

As another component to the project, the Conte Refuge is networking those concerned about the invasive plant issue by coordinating the New England Invasive Plant Group (NIPGro). Anyone can join the network and receive electronic newsletters and updates on invasive plant projects in the region. On September 19-20, 2003, a conference will highlight new findings from the Invasive Plant Atlas of New England and other university research within the region, as well as programs being undertaken to manage invasive plant species. If you would like more information about the New England Invasive Plant Group, contact coordinator Cynthia Boettner at the Conte Refuge at 413-863-0209 x6 or Cynthia_Boettner@fws.gov.

Habitat Management

continued...



Waterchestnut Removal in South Hadley,

Massachusetts: Students that participated in last year's Environthon, a national environmental competition, removed 2 tons of waterchestnut from Cove Island Cove. *USFWS photo*



Public Use at Nulhegan: Visitors enjoy bird watching on the Mollie Beattie Bog Interpretive Trail. *USFWS photo*



Road Upgrades at Nulhegan: Refuge staff coordinate with partners to plan for the Lewis Pond road upgrades. *USFWS photo*

The IPANE and NIPGro programs are possible thanks to a four-year grant from the United States Department of Agriculture.

Waterchestnut Removal in the Connecticut River Watershed

Volunteers are the reason water chestnut control has been successful the past four years, and this year the amount of contributed work was amazing! We estimate that more than 840 hours of labor or 105 work days were donated by Refuge volunteers to remove nearly 42,000 pounds of water chestnut. To honor all of the hard work contributed by our volunteers, Conte Refuge hosted a volunteer appreciation day at Audubon's Arcadia Sanctuary in November. Special recognition was given to Youth Build Holyoke, Laurel and Steven Carpenter and the Town of Easthampton for their outstanding contributions in 2002.

Eradicating water chestnut from the Connecticut River watershed is a long-term proposition that only can be achieved with the assistance of dedicated volunteers. If the volunteer effort in 2002 is any indication, there is good reason to be optimistic. Thanks again to all our water chestnut volunteers. If you would like to help in 2003, call Barry Parrish, Assistant Refuge Manager at 413/863-0209 x7.

Nulhegan Basin Division

New Visitor Service Plan for the Nulhegan Basin Division

A Visitor Services Plan (VSP) for the Nulhegan Basin Division was implemented in July 2002. In conjunction with the development of the VSP, Compatibility Determinations were issued for Pedestrian, Vehicular and Snowmobile Access, and for Wildlife Observation/Wildlife Photography/Environmental Education/Interpretation. Additionally, an Environmental Assessment and a Compatibility Determination for construction of a Headquarters/Visitor Contact Station in the Town of Brunswick were completed. All of these documents were developed with extensive opportunities for public input, review and comment. Under the VSP, public use activities previously authorized by the former landowner, Champion International, were continued and no new uses were authorized. All uses are administered to ensure compatibility with Refuge purposes. The VSP will serve as interim guidance for public use activities and management on the Refuge until the implementation of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, for which the planning process is scheduled to begin in 2005.

Lewis Pond Road Upgrade

Thanks to a grant through the Public Lands Highway Program, public access to the Refuge from Highway 105 on the east side of Island Pond to the lower Lewis Pond Road will be enhanced by a road improvement project that will be performed this summer. The project will be managed, in coordination with Refuge staff, by the Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division of the Federal Highway Administration and will involve repairing and improving approximately 7 miles of degraded roadway on Henshaw and Four Mile Roads. Although the road surface and drainage will be improved, the single-lane, "woods road" character of this public thoroughfare will not be substantially transformed. In addition to Refuge lands, the project will be conducted on lands owned by Essex Timber Company and Trust for Public Lands.

New Refuge Office Space

This summer, a temporary office will be constructed on the site of the former Bear Mountain Inn in the Town of Brunswick. The 19-acre parcel on Highway 105 was

Nulhegan Basin Division continued...



Up In Smoke!: The Diego Motel was burned to allow space for a temporary office for the refuge staff. *USFWS photo*

purchased from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in February 2002. The Bear Mountain Inn had been removed by TNC in the fall of 2001. The Diego Motel was removed this past summer with the aid of the Brighton Fire Department, which used the building for structural fire suppression training exercises prior to burning it for demolition and clearing. Both of these buildings were slated for removal based on a Condition Assessment performed by an engineering consulting firm that revealed that renovation of these buildings would not be cost-effective. A four-bedroom modular structure with an attached 3-car garage will be erected over a full basement on the site of the Diego Motel. This building will serve as office and storage space for refuge staff until funding can be secured for construction of a permanent Headquarters/Visitor Contact Station on this same parcel. When the permanent facility is occupied, the modular building will be converted to residential quarters for seasonal staff, interns and researchers. Currently, the office is located in the historic Train Station on Highway 105 in Island Pond.

Seasonal Refuge Officer at Nulhegan

Michael Kujala joined the Refuge staff as a seasonal Refuge Officer in October 2002 and will serve in that capacity until April 2003. Mike's duties on the Refuge include visitor safety activities, enforcement of hunting, fishing, trapping, and motor vehicle regulations (including snowmobiles), and collecting public use data. In addition, Mike performs a vital role in public outreach and education. He has previous law enforcement experience with the National Park Service in Glacier National Park, Montana Big Horn Canyon National Recreation Area and Acadia National Park in Maine. He is a certified Emergency Medical Technician. Mike hails from Waitsfield, Vermont and has a B.S. in Wildlife Management from University of New Hampshire.



Officer Kujala: A new Nulhegan staff member until April 2003, Officer Kujala will be busy throughout the winter. *USFWS photo*

General News and Updates

Eagle Update: Nest Season 2002

What a successful year! It couldn't have been more perfect. The camera worked flawlessly, the tree didn't collapse and the eagles raised two healthy chicks. Changes in the local access TV contracts resulted in Greenfield Community TV (GCTV) taking over responsibility for broadcasting the eagles. High quality images were shown to over 11,000 local cable viewers all summer long in Greenfield and Turners Falls, Massachusetts. Educational messages about eagles were delivered with the live broadcast to the community.



Viewing Eagles on the Web: Thousands of people enjoyed viewing last year's eagles as they successfully raised two chicks. *USFWS photo*

The tree that the eagles nest on continues to be a source of concern. It is very unstable, continues to rot and is supported primarily with the assistance of guy ropes. In September, the Eagle TV partners agreed to remove two of the three guy ropes with the hope that winter weather could be forceful enough to take down the tree. The partnership decided on this course of action to hopefully avoid the unsteady tree falling during the nest season. In the event that the tree falls, the birds would most likely pick another nest nearby that they have used in the past. As of this writing, the ropes have been resecured.

The web page where the world can view the images from the nest every five minutes was very successful again this year with over 100,000 visits each month. Northeast Utilities developed streaming video for in-house testing with hopes to expand the site to the general public during nest season 2003. Check the web page, www.nu.com/eagles/default.asp for updates.

General News and Updates

continued...

Conte Refuge SCEP Student

Joe Smith began with the Refuge in the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP). Joe is currently working on his masters degree at George Mason University. He has extensive field experience with migratory songbirds. He will be returning to the refuge this summer.



Conte Staff Members Receive Awards:

Fran Plauskys (left), Cynthia Boettner (right) and Keith Weaver (not shown) receive awards from the Chief of National Wildlife Refuges, Tony Leger. *USFWS photo*

Employee Appreciation 2002 Awards Ceremony

On August 13, 2002 at the Regional Office in Hadley, three refuge staff members were recognized for their contributions to the Service and the Conte refuge. Keith Weaver, Refuge Manager at the Nulhegan Basin Division, and Fran Plauskys, Office Manager, at the Turners Falls office, received "Regional Director's Eagle Awards" for exemplary accomplishments.

Cynthia Boettner, Invasive Plant Control Coordinator at the Turners Falls office, received the "Promoting our Natural Resources Award" for her demonstrated leadership on tough issues, and the formation of the forty-five member New England Invasive Plant Group (NIPGro). All three are highly productive and valued employees that do great work! Congratulations!

We've Moved!

In late December of 2001, the staff moved from the "Old Cumberland Farms" building at 38 Avenue A to the newly-renovated historic "Crocker Building" at 52 Avenue A. Our tenancy was instrumental in saving this historical building. A dedication and open house was held January 7, 2002. Guest speakers at this event included Massachusetts State Senator Stanley C. Rosenberg; Congressman John Olver; State Representative Stephen Kulik; Anthony Leger, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Ms. Patricia Allen, Chair, Montague Select Board, and Paul H. Douglas, President Crocker Cutlery, Inc. After the ribbon cutting ceremony there was an open house and the public was invited to tour our new office. Please make a note of our new address.

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