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Service to Evaluate Minnesota's Gray Wolf Management Plan

The Service has begun its review of the draft wolf management plan released by the state of Minnesota February 26, to ensure it supports the sustained recovery of gray wolf populations in the Midwest.

"Although we have not yet had a chance to review the plan or the proposed legislation in detail, we are very pleased the draft plan has been completed," said Service Regional Director Bill Hartwig. "The Minnesota plan represents one of the final chapters in a tremendous gray wolf success story, both here and across the nation. The combined efforts of the Service, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other state and tribal conservation agencies have helped wolf population numbers in the Upper Midwest reach the recovery goals set back in 1978. Now we need to ensure the populations stay healthy and that these wolves never need the assistance of the Endangered Species Act again."

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In June of 1998, U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt announced the Service would review the health of gray wolf populations in the conterminous U.S. The purpose of this review would be to determine what, if any, changes to Endangered Species Act protection were needed for the various wolf populations.

Prior to reclassifying or removing the animals from the protection of the Act, the Service must first carefully evaluate the wolf management plans submitted by state and tribal governments to ensure they support the long-term viability of wolves. An extensive public comment period would also be used to gather input from the public and other interested parties following a Service proposal. Any proposal to reclassify or remove gray wolves from the Endangered Species List would be published in the Federal Register.

When gray wolves were listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1974, Minnesota hosted the only remaining population of the animals in the lower 48 states (except for a small, isolated population on Isle Royale, Michigan). Since then, the Service has considered the effective management of gray wolves in Minnesota a critical component in its national gray wolf recovery effort.

The 1978 recovery plan, which was modified in 1992, called for delisting throughout the wolves' eastern range once the Minnesota population stabilized and a second population (outside of Minnesota) of at least 100 wolves became established within 100 miles (or at least 200 wolves if farther than 100 miles). These population levels had to be maintained for at least five consecutive years. Based on the population figures released by the Minnesota DNR today, and population information from Wisconsin and Michigan, it appears these goals are likely to be met this spring.

With a wolf population nearly 10 times that of any other state (except Alaska), Minnesota holds a key to future gray wolf viability. Service biologists did serve as advisors to the Minnesota Wolf Management Roundtable during 1998 and provided background information to the Roundtable during their deliberations. The Service believes the recommendations developed by the Roundtable will promote a viable wolf population in Minnesota for the foreseeable future. A final decision by the Service to remove wolves from the Endangered Species List or change their status will be made only after a complete review of all public comments and wolf management plans, including those related to the management of wolves in the western United States. *(Dan Sobieck, External Affairs)*

Service Participates in News Conference Announcing Wolf Management Plan

The Service participated in a joint news conference with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Feb. 25, 1999, for the announcement of the release of a draft of Minnesota's gray wolf management plan. State census figures and proposed legislation to enact the plan were also discussed during the afternoon news conference which was attended by all major Minnesota media. A news release describing the Service's role Minnesota plan, and copies of a Service newsletter "Wolf Tracks," were distributed during the conference. Service representatives also participated in several media interviews. *(Dan Sobieck, External Affairs)*

Migratory Birds and Endangered Species Gain Ground Through Diverse Service Partnership

Patoka River NWR Adds 463-Acre Cane Ridge Wildlife Management Area

Included in the acquisition is 50 acres of nesting habitat for the federally-endangered least tern. (USFWS photo)

After two years of planning and coordinating among a diverse group of conservation partners in southwest Indiana, the Service recently received title to 463.2 acres wetlands in the Wabash River Bottoms in western Gibson County, Indiana.

The site, known as the Cane Ridge Wildlife Management Area, will be managed as a unit of the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge and Management Area. Funding for the acquisition was provided by a grant from the North American Waterfowl Management Program, a USDA Wetland Reserve Program easement and a donation from Cinergy Corporation. MAPCO Coal, Inc., contributed through a reduced sale price, and by waiving its rights to underground mining on the site. Restoration of this Globally Important Bird Area will include 140 acres of moist soil management units, 50 acres of nesting sites for the federally-endangered interior least tern and over 200 acres of bottomland hardwood plantings.

The site is located near the southwest corner of a 3,000-acre cooling lake used by the Cinergy Corporation's Gibson Generating Station.

Other partners participating in the effort include: Cinergy/PSI Energy, Inc.; MAPCO Coal, Inc.; Old Ben Coal Company; Indiana Department of Natural Resources; Indiana Heritage Trust; Natural Resources Conservation Service and Ducks Unlimited . *(Bill McCoy, Patoka* ***River NWR)***

Great Lakes' Biologists and Researchers Learn Sturgeon Aging Techniques at Service Workshop

The Alpena Fishery Resource Office and Region 3 Federal Aid co-hosted a lake sturgeon age interpretation workshop recently in Sarnia, Ontario. The workshop was instructed by Dr. John Casselman from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' Glenora Research Station. The workshop introduced attendees to Calcified Structure Analysis Software (CSAS), a computer program developed by Dr. Casselman and his associates to standardize methodologies used to interpret age of fishes from their calcified structures. This standardization will allow direct comparison of aging results between agencies working on lake sturgeon in the Great Lakes. Standardization of techniques for collecting and preparing lake sturgeon fin rays were discussed in detail, as were the methods used to interpret age of lake sturgeon. Biologists and researchers from across the Great Lakes attended the workshop. Other partners include Fishery Resource Offices at Green Bay, Ashland, Lower Great Lakes and LaCrosse; Marquette Biological Station; Michigan and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources; Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Ontario Commercial Fishers Association; USGS-BRD-Great Lakes Science Center and Michigan Technological University (*Tracy Hill, Alpena Fishery Resource Office)*

Illinois DNR Examines Trail Accessability at Necedah NWR

Refuge staffer Jennifer Rabuck met recently with a disabled visitor and a representative from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to discuss the challenges of accessibility projects at Necedah NWR.

The Illinois DNR is planning to create a trail in a park near Rockford, Ill., and came to the Refuge to learn more about construction of handicap accessible trails. Necedah has a mile-long accessible trail on the refuge.

The Illinois delegation toured other accessible structures on the Refuge including a fishing pier, trail heads, observation decks and tower, and a look at trail surfaces on site. Accessibility issues discussed included leveling existing trail surfaces, adding accessibility text to refuge literature, correcting access ramps to decks and improvements to trails through wet areas.

The group plans to get together again in April to examine plans for a new fishing pier and to look at the accessible duck blind as well maneuvering on existing trails. *(Jennifer Rabuck, Necedah NWR)*

Television Naturalist's Video on DeSoto NWR Broadcast Nationally

Staff at DeSoto NWR recently previewed a 27-minute video about the refuge produced by Naturalist Rudy Mancke for South Carolina public television. The video was broadcast nationwide in December as part of the television series "Nature Scene." Rudy and co-host Jim Welch did an excellent job of interpreting the subtle aspects of natural history at the refuge. Topics includes Lewis and Clark Expedition, the Missouri River environment, and difficulty of early navigation. In the video, Mancke demonstrates a good appreciation and understanding of the Service mission. Fieldwork was carried out on the Refuge in August 1998. A copy will be sent to the regional office for viewing. *(Bruce Weber, DeSoto NWR*)

Partnership Builds Wildlife Observation Deck

The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) funded the construction of a 20- x 20-foot elevated wildlife observation deck at the Curtis Road parking lot at Shiawasee NWR. The deck has a 40-foot accessible ramp leading to it, and overlooks an area of the Refuge which is attractive to waterfowl and shorebirds. The proximity of the deck to the parking lot will promote its use. The design of the deck was a joint effort between Service engineers and Ducks Unlimited. DU oversaw management of the construction contract, and Refuge maintenance personnel installed benches on the deck. *(Ed De Vries, Shiawasee NWR)*

300 Attend 'Snowfest' at Seney NWR

A brisk wind didn't deter over 300 visitors from participating in Seney NWR's Snowfest on February 6. Visitors took advantage of guided tours of Refuge cross-country ski trails, raced snowsnakes,took horse-drawn sleigh rides, made wildlife snowflakes, vied for prizes in a mystery track game, watched a puppet show and movies, and checked out snowshoes for use on the trails and in a race. Racers competed in 4 age categories; the youngest participant was 4 years old and the oldest was 79 years young! *(Marianne Kronk, Seney NWR)*

Missouri Man Fined For Shooting 'White Goose'

A Reynolds County, Missouri, man paid a $ 750 federal fine for killing a trumpeter swan. The man reported the killing to the local conservation agent, saying that he had seen the "white goose" in a field and walked up to it and it wouldn't fly. He came back later that day to shoot the swan instead of letting coyotes get it. The man went home, breasted out the "white goose" and called the local agent who contacted Service agents.

Witnesses reported the swan had been seen flying earlier and that it had become semi-tame. *(Robert Leapley, St. Peters Law Enforcement Office)*

Task Force Plan Will Restore Aquatic Habitat By Reducing Water Levels on Mississippi's Pool 8

A task force of state and federal fish and wildlife managers, scientists, recreational boaters and commercial navigation interests is recommending water levels in Pool 8 on the Upper Mississippi River near LaCrosse, Wis., be reduced during the summer of 2000 to promote aquatic plant growth and dry sediments along the river's edge.

Among the biological benefits of the plan will be the restoration of between 2,000 to 5,000 acres of aquatic backwater habitat. The plan, which includes pre-dredging of navigation channels, hopes to reverse a documented decline in the amount of aquatic plants and habitat along the the river. The task force considered information gathered from more than 15 public meetings, commercial and recreational surveys, biological and weather information in making its recommendation. The plan will use control points at LaCrosse, and Genoa, Wis., to reduce water levels during the summer months (June 15-Sept. 30) to between six and 18 inches respectively. Keith Beseke of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and Gary Wege of the Twin Cities Field Office represented the Service on the task force. The group's recommendations will be discussed during public meetings held during the first week of March. The task force will then make its final recommendation to the Corps of Engineers for further action. **(*Keith Beseke, Upper Mississippi River NW&FR)***

Lake Trout Clear Second Quality Check Enroute to Great Lakes

The second of three quality checks on lake trout scheduled to be stocked in the Great Lakes this year has recently been completed by staff at the Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery. Fish quality parameters checked during the two-day analysis included fin and gill observations and fat reserves. Results are used to guarantee that the best possible fish are provided for the lake trout restoration effort. The hatchery provides 700,000 five- to six-inch lake trout for stocking in the Great Lakes each year. This year, the lake trout will be stocked at sites in Lakes Michigan and Huron. The sites were selected based on survival criteria. Two fisheries students from Soo College in Ontario, Canada, assisted. *(David Radloff, Pendills Creek NFH*)

Service Partnership Restores 16 Wetlands on 40 Acres in Stearns County

With help from the Farm Service Agency and a $1,000 contribution from the Stearns County Chapter of Pheasant's Forever, the Service's Partner's For Fish and Wildlife Program recently completed construction on 18 earthen dams, reestablishing 16 wetlands on over 40 acres of the Grant Johnson Farm in Stearns County. The basins will be shrouded by more than 60 acres of perennial grasses and trees planted this spring through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

This habitat venture is a tremendous boon for migratory birds, resident wildlife and water quality within the Sauk River Watershed. Thanks to strong partner support, more than 100 wetlands were restored in Stearns County last calender year. (***Todd R. Luke, Litchfield WMD***)

Partners Help Minnesota Valley Restore 436 Acres of Waterfowl Habitat

Partners contributed approximately half the funds needed to restore and enhance more than 436 acres of critical waterfowl habitat on 25 sites located on private lands and refuge lands within the Minnesota Valley NWR. Partners contributing to the restoration efforts include Minnesota Waterfowl Association, Minnesota Pheasants, Metropolitan Council, private landowners, Pheasants Forever, U.S. Army, Bruns Construction Company and Rice County Soil and Water Conservation District. *(Mike Malling, Minnesota Valley NWR)*

Investigation of Missouri Bald Eagle Death Results in 28 Additional Charges Filed for Wildlife Violations

On January 9, 1999, a landowner from Chariton County, Mo. reported a dead bald eagle to Missouri Dept. of Conservation Agent Clay Creech. Through a series of interviews, Creech obtained a confession to the killing of the eagle and two state violations concerning the illegal take of white-tailed deer. Creech then contacted Service Special Agent Dan Burleson in order to prosecute the eagle killing in federal court. Special Agent Burleson interviewed the eagle shooter and his partner again, Feb. 9. After a seven hour interview, the two defendants gave detailed information concerning numerous alledged poaching incidents in Missouri. The information obtained resulted in the filing of 25 additional state charges, including illegal take of deer and turkey, falsifying tags, failure to check kills and loaning of tags. The charges involved wildlife violations by approximately fifteen people, ranging in age from 16 to 23. Conservation officers were able to recover deer meat, antlers, turkey beards and weapons. Charges are pending in federal court on the eagle killing. Many of the animals killed, including the eagle, were killed solely as target practice and the carcasses left to rot. (*Dan Burleson, St. Peters law Enforcement)*

Six of Eight Commercial Musselors Sentenced in Federal Court

Six of eight individuals charged in connection with Lacey Act violations by the Mississippi Valley Shell Company have been sentenced in federal court. Individual sentences stemming from a four year investigation of illegal harvesting and exporting of freshwater mussels by the Muscatine, Iowa, company now totals 32 months in prison, 29 years of probation, $257,750 in fines and $126,000 in restitution. Restitution is paid directly to the States where the illegal mussel harvests occurred. Mississippi Valley Shell was one of the largest exporters of freshwater mussels in the US. In addition to the company itself, six of eight individuals prosecuted have been sentenced to date. Two subjects are awaiting sentencing. The subjects took the mussels from closed waters in six states. *(Walt Kocal, Des Moines Law Enforcement Office)*

Accomplishment Reports Received

The following reports were processed by the Accomplishment Reporting System March 1, 1999.

259. **Great Lakes Biologists Learn Sturgeon Aging Techniques at Service Workshop**
Tracy Hill, Alpena FRO

260. **Coordinators Discuss Nationwide Database to Track Fish Passage**
Tracy Hill, Alpena FRO

261. **Necedah NWR Goes Cross Country Skiing**
Jennifer Rabuck, Necedah NWR

262. **Partnership Builds Wildlife Observation Deck**
Ed De Vries, Shiawasee NWR

263. **Six of Eight Commercial Musselors Sentenced in Federal Court**
Walt Kocal, Des Moines Law Enforcement Office

264. **Task Force Plan Will Reduce Water Levels on Pool 8 to Restore Aquatic Habitat**
Keith Beseke, UMRNW&FR

265. **300 Attend Snowfest at Seney NWR**
Marianne Kronk, Seney NWR

266. **Horicon NWR Hosts Friends and Neighbors Gathering**
Diane M. Kitchen, Horicon NWR

267. **Television Naturalist's Video on DeSoto NWR Broadcast Nationally**
Bruce Weber, DeSoto NWR

268. **Indictment of Paul Asper**
Keri Halpin, Chicago In spection Program

269. **Seized Sturgeon Meat Donated to Food Repository**
Keri Halpin, Chicago In spection Program

270. **Local Cub Scouts Learn About Bluebirds**
Chuck Vukonich, Fergus Falls WMD

271. **Youth Habitat Day in Alexandria**
Jim Piehl, Fergus Falls WMD

272. **Service Partnership Restores 16 Wetlands on 40 Acres in Stearns County**
Todd R. Luke, Litchfield WMD

273. **Partners Help Minnesota Valley Restore 436 Acres of Waterfowl Habitat**
Mike Malling, Minnesota Valley NWR

274. **Partnership Acquires 436 Acres of Wetland Habitat in Indiana**
Bill McCoy, Patoka River NWR&MA

275. **800 Students Participate in Eagle Days Activities**
Carolyn Gregory, Mark Twain NWR

276. **Missouri Swan 'Hunter' Fined**
Robert Leapley, St.Peters Law Enforcement Office

277. **Society of Range Management visits DeSoto NWR**
Marco Buske, DeSoto NWR

278. **Service Participates in News Conference Announcing Minnesota's Gray Wolf Management Plan**
Dan Sobieck, External Affairs

279. **Necedah NWR Interviewed by Country Living Magazine**
Jennifer Rabuck, Necedah NWR

280. **Necedah NWR Interviewed by Wisconsin Trails**
Jennifer Rabuck, Necedah NWR

281. **Community Engaged in Savanna Preservation Effort at Necedah NWR**
Jennifer Rabuck, Necedah NWR

282. **Illinois DNR Examines Accessibility at Necedah NWR**
Jennifer Rabuck, Necedah NWR

283. **Lake Trout Clear Second Quality Check Enroute to Great Lakes**
David D. Radloff, Pendills Creek NFH

284. **Necedah NWR Contacted by Wausau Daily Herald**
Jennifer Rabuck, Necedah NWR

285. **Eagle Investigation Results in Issue of 28 Citations**
Dan Burleson, St. Peters Law Enforcement Office

286. **Details of Mussel Investigations Presented to Iowa Conservation Officers**
Walt Kocal, Des Moines Law Enforcement Office

287. **Detroit Lakes WMD Staffs Booth at Volunteer Fair**
Les Peterson, Fergus Falls WMD

288. **Mussel Investigative Training Provided to State Conservation Officers**
Gary Jagodzinsk, Onalaska Law Enforcement Office

Inside Region 3

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