



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Erie National Wildlife Refuge

September 2008 Vol. 1 No. 2

INSIDE Erie



*This insect eating **blue-winged warbler** usually nests on or near the ground in second growth (shrubland) habitat.*

photo by Wolfgang Wander

National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act

The passage of the landmark National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act in 1997 cemented in law, a mission, and clear standards for the Refuge System's management, use, planning, and growth. The System is grounded in the time-proven philosophy of ecosystem and landscape approaches to land management, and to the

stewardship of its fish, wildlife, and plants. The ways in which the System nurtures a diversity of wildlife and the habitat on which it depends is the very foundation of its mission.

Caring for fish, wildlife, and plant populations and their habitat is also the essence of

the science of wildlife management, and the newer and evolving disciplines of conservation biology and ecosystem management. Just as wildlife populations and habitat conditions have changed dramatically since the turn of the century, so has wildlife management within the System.

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National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (cont.)



Water and emergent vegetation are important habitat characteristics for the **sora**.

Starting at Pelican Island, in 1903, simple preservation was the earliest form of wildlife management. In the 1930s, with a Duck Stamp to raise funds, seed money from Congress, and a host of Civilian Conservation Corps camps, the System began an unprecedented crusade for waterfowl and other wildlife through habitat restoration. As the System grew, the concepts of biodiversity, ecosystems, landscapes, watersheds, and conservation biology would begin to creep into the vocabulary of researchers, professors, and refuge staff. An evolution in habitat management occurred – from managing for a few species to managing for many species using more natural processes. Rather than hold water high in impoundments year-round just for waterfowl, levels could be timed to provide habitat for migrant shorebirds. Rather than plant grasses and forbs just for ducks, a full array of native grasses and forbs became available to help rebuild diversity.

Rather than mow and hay lands to set back succession, natural processes like fire could do the work. Rather than farming intensively to provide food for waterfowl, moist soil units provided abundant natural foods. Today, many refuges are focusing more on the amount of land that can be restored to presettlement vegetation conditions than the sheer numbers of a particular species or groups of species that can be attracted. Thus, the population objectives for certain species are being given a clearer link to habitat objectives, with an eye toward maintaining and restoring native plant communities that sustained America's immense species diversity for thousands of years.

To ensure that the System's fish, wildlife, and plant resources endure, the law of the land now clearly states that their needs must come first. Consequently, public uses on a refuge are only to be allowed after they are determined to be compatible with the System mission and with the purpose of the Refuge. The law also lays the foundation for compatible activities which depend on healthy fish and wildlife populations to be recognized as priority general public uses. There are six wildlife-dependent public uses – hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation – and these are, when compatible, legitimate and appropriate uses of the System and receive enhanced consideration over all other general public uses. It is not feasible to provide all wildlife-dependent uses on all refuges. The decision on which compatible activities to allow on

each refuge is a function of refuge purposes, refuge staffing and funding, wildlife and habitat objectives, local demographics, and attributes of the land itself. More specific information about compatibility will be coming in a future issue of INSIDeRie.

Through this newsletter, we will continue to share information with you about the Refuge System and our progress through the CCP process.

(Reprinted in part from Fulfilling the Promise, The National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1999)

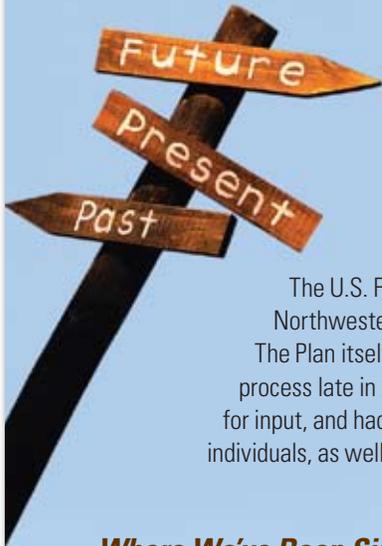


The **2008 Youth Conservation Corp** participants help mark the refuge boundary.

Erie National Wildlife Refuge Draft Vision Statement

Nested in the Upper Allegheny River drainage, Erie National Wildlife Refuge will be an exceptional complex of meandering streams, forested bottomland wetlands and glacially influenced plant and animal communities. These "little river" ecosystems will serve as habitats and corridors for vast numbers of native wildlife, fish, and plants. Management efforts will result in healthy and thriving natural systems that will protect and conserve the rich biodiversity that once characterized Pennsylvania's Western Allegheny Plateau. Management actions will focus on threatened and endangered species and migratory birds including waterfowl, shorebirds, water birds and migratory song birds.

Education, interpretation, and wildlife-dependent recreation activities will be designed to enhance the public's understanding and appreciation of the importance of the refuge's role in the NWRS and in the conservation of natural resources. We will partner with local, state and federal agencies, community organizations and individuals to ensure the protection of these resources.



Our Comprehensive Conservation Plan

We've added many people to our Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) mailing list as a result of information requests from the Crawford County Fair last month. Please bare with us while we take a minute to bring those people up to date:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is preparing a long-term management plan for Erie National Wildlife Refuge in Northwestern Pennsylvania. That Plan will guide the direction of all facets of refuge management for the next 15 years. The Plan itself requires extensive research, data collection, issue analysis, and public input. We started our planning process late in 2007. To date, we've developed a mailing list, sent out an introductory newsletter, held four public forums for input, and had a 6 week public comment period. Our first outreach piece - *INSIDErie* - was mailed in July to over 600 individuals, as well as interested groups and agencies.

Where We've Been Since July

In mid-July, staff from the Refuge met with designated representatives of our State conservation partners at the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Together, we modified the first draft of the Refuge vision statement and goals. We will get together with this group on a regular basis throughout the CCP process.

Also in July, refuge staff and Regional Office Realty staff met with conservation partners interested in land acquisition: the Nature Conservancy, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, French Creek Valley Conservancy, and the Friends of Erie National Wildlife Refuge. The groups all have common interests in protecting lands in the French Creek watershed, and plan to work together in the future when land acquisition opportunities occur.

The Biological Team on the refuge including staff and interns completed work on establishing the measurements to depict

the topography of Pool 9, our largest impoundment. Those measurements will help us to more successfully determine the best way to manipulate that managed-wetland.

Where We're Going...

Our next steps include:

- continuing to brief our local elected officials
- beginning working on writing the background chapters of the Plan
- beginning work on a Visitor Services self assessment in preparation for a full review this winter
- conducting bird surveys through the fall migration period



American goldfinch

Becoming Involved

Please contact the refuge staff if you would like to be added to the mailing list.

In Person or by Mail:
11296 Wood Duck Lane
Guys Mills, PA 16327

By Phone:
814.789.3585

Via the Internet:
Email: fw5rw_ernwr@fws.gov
Website: www.fws.gov/northeast/erie



We continue to do outreach and updates in relation to the comprehensive conservation plan. Is there a question we can answer? What do you think of the newsletter? Seeking information about Erie National Wildlife Refuge? Let us know!

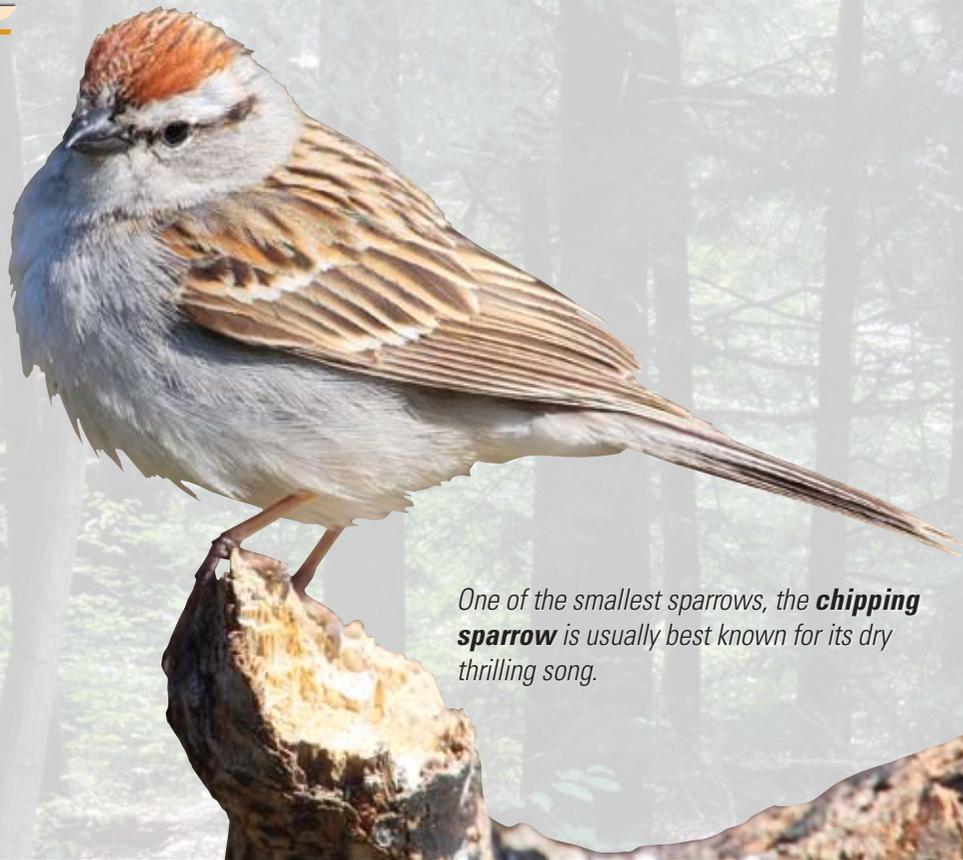
If you wish not to receive these newsletters, please let us know.

INSIDE Erie

Your source for the latest news from
Erie National Wildlife Refuge

*“Wild beasts and birds are
by right not the property merely
of the people who are alive today,
but the property of unknown
generations, whose belongings
we have no right to squander.”*

– Theodore Roosevelt



One of the smallest sparrows, the **chipping sparrow** is usually best known for its dry thrilling song.

