



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Wedgewood Wildlife Sanctuary

## Fairbanks Fish & Wildlife Field Office

This project involved the reclamation of a retired 25 acre gravel pit (now known as Wander Lake) in Fairbanks, Alaska east of Wedgewood Resort. Gravel was mined from the site for a number of years, ending some time in the 1990s. The remaining lake was very steep-sided, deep (up to 60') and had no outlet. The gravel banks supported mainly invasive white sweet clover, and there are only three patches of shoreline with aquatic vegetation such as bulrush and cattail. The only birds known to nest immediately adjacent to the lake included spotted sandpiper and semipalmated plover. There was a healthy aquatic insect population already established in the lake.

The goal of this project was to preserve and improve wildlife habitat in an area that's becoming increasingly developed. This was accomplished with the following habitat improvements:

- Extensive transportation of gravel and soil created five acres of shallow littoral zones and a number of islands.



*The steep sides of the former gravel pit were filled and contoured to create shallow littoral zones.*

- Re-contouring of the shoreline in several areas to reduce erosion and promote vegetation growth.
- Sedges and other emergent native vegetation were transplanted into the littoral zones.
- Non-game fish (longnose suckers, lake chub, and Alaska blackfish) have been transplanted into the former gravel pit to attract piscivorous mammals and birds such as ducks, loons, kingfishers, terns, and ospreys.

**To date, staff and youth volunteers have transplanted more than 1,000 native terrestrial and wetland plants and removed thousands of pounds of invasive weeds. Fourteen nesting boxes for swallows, ducks, owls and falcons have also been installed.**

Students in the Youth for Habitat program have worked on habitat improvement projects at the refuge since 2009. Along with removing weeds and transplanting native plants, the students have fenced trees to prevent beaver damage, collected fish to stock the pond, sampled the pond for fish survival



*Students in the Youth for Habitat program help to control the abundant invasive weeds in the sanctuary and replace them with native plants.*



*Rusty blackbirds, a species of concern, have made use of the restored nesting and foraging habitat.*

and reproduction, and monitored bird nest boxes.

A nature trail, observation deck, photography blinds, and interpretive signs were added to the lake's perimeter to enhance visitor experience and provide environmental education about the area's plants and wildlife. In addition to serving visitors from the nearby Wedgewood Resort hotel, the trails are enjoyed by other visitors, including area residents and school children on field trips.

This project has created several new jobs for laborers and project managers. It also provided an opportunity to partner with the Warrior Transition Unit, Company A on nearby Fort Wainwright, a program which provides job training and employment for wounded soldiers.



*Members of the Warrior Transition Unit, Company A, seine for non-game fish species that will be transplanted into the rehabilitated gravel pit and serve as food for piscivorous mammals and birds.*

**The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) designated Wander Lake as a model wetland restoration project for Alaska and uses it as a demonstration site to show other landowners what can be accomplished with old gravel pits.**



*The restored lake and adjacent lands are a haven for wildlife and people in an increasingly urbanized area.*

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