

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Inside Region 3

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RD Tom Melius visits with Blair Schools students at DeSoto NWR. USFWS photo by Tina Shaw.

Midwest's Hot Secret: Winter Fun

The work and play lifestyles of people in the Midwest do not come to a screeching halt during the winter season. It's a common misconception—reduced to consoling themselves with sedentary indoor activities during the winter; Midwesterners are simply missing out. Not true. One of the greatest myths about winter in the Midwest is that the workforce, particularly those people that work heavily in the outdoors, like in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have nothing to do but explore the great indoors and wait with quiet desperation for spring. Let me take this opportunity—mid-winter—from the most northern state in the lower 48, to set the record straight. Despite what many outside the region may think, winter in the Midwest is not a time to hunker down in a cabin. It's a time when Midwesterners get out and recreate. It's a time when the Service gets out and makes a difference.

In each of the eight states that make up the Midwest Region there continues to be a flurry of activity in the winter. In Minnesota,

Below: Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius teaches fourth and fifth graders from Arbor Park School about frost heaves at DeSoto NWR. USFWS photo by Tina Shaw.



royal coronations take place amid ice sculptures, treasure hunts, fireworks and a torchlight parade at the coolest celebration on Earth, the St. Paul Winter Carnival. In Missouri, residents are excited by the hottest new thing: ice grass sledding, where locals slide down hills atop a carpet laden ice block. In Michigan, snowmobiling is all the rage. Illinois features snow sculpting competitions. And all over the region, ice skating both indoors and outdoors is always a staple.

At our many refuges and wetland management districts in the region ice fishing, hunting, snowshoe hikes, bird-watching treks, cross country skiing, and winter photography are just some of the activities available to the public. Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge features an auto tour that gives the public the opportunity to see waterfowl, deer, grouse, bear and other wildlife, as well as hiking and skiing trails. Minnesota Valley NWR features among other activities, winter stories with a hot cup of cocoa and Owl Prowl, an outdoor evening event where people can learn about fascinating predators. Desoto NWR offers ice fishing and the Great Backyard Bird Counting, a winter bird event. Swan Lake NWR hosts snow geese and eagle tours. Emiquon NWR is open during hunting seasons.

Shiawassee NWR offers an ice fishing clinic and snowshoeing. Genoa National Fish Hatchery is hosting a kids ice fishing event on Feb. 5. At the Upper Mississippi River National



Wildlife and Fish Refuge winter is an opportune time to view bald eagles. Ottawa NWR recently featured a program entitled, "Winter Ecology: How Animals Survive the Winter," that explored survival and adaptation. Horicon, Two Rivers, and Muscatatuck NWRs all feature winter wildlife observation and photography opportunities. And Sherburne's Winterfest is always an arctic blast. I'll be heading up there myself in a few days as part of my winter tour.

There are a lot of recreation activities going on in the region in the winter, but field activities for our Service facilities continue to operate. Our hatcheries and refuges continue to host visitors and events. I've just returned from Iowa where I met with partners, including the new Director of Iowa's Department of Natural Resources, Roger Lande.

I watched bison and elk enjoy the winter habitat, learned how staff are preparing native grass seeds for spring planting at Neal Smith NWR. I also toured the visitors center, viewed Bertrand artifacts, and joined local youth for some birding at DeSoto NWR.

When it comes to winter in the Midwest, I am happy to dispel the myth. It's a great time to get outdoors! I love it and Midwesterners are loving it too. I encourage you to come join us.

--Tom Melius
Midwest Regional Director,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Regional Director's Iowa Tour

Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius visited Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge on Jan. 19 to learn more about the important management activities happening in the winter season. He also learned that for the staff and community schools, there is no better time of the year!

Neal Smith NWR is an emulation of historic tall grass prairie and savanna ecosystems as they existed 170 years ago. Located 20 miles east of Des Moines, Iowa, it is the first prairie reconstruction of its scale and scope, and thus is an important prototype.

Below: Regional Director Tom Melius and Neal Smith NWR Maintenance Worker Steve DeBruin at oak savanna restoration site. Right: Tree shearer equipment has helped refuge staff in oak savanna restoration work through the winter months. USFWS photos by Tina Shaw.



Above: Regional Director meets with Norwoodville fourth and fifth graders and refuge staff at Neal Smith NWR. USFWS photo by Tina Shaw.



Melius also visited with Pauline Drobney, USFWS Restoration Scientist for the Service Land Management and Research Demonstration program based at Neal Smith NWR. Drobney discussed program goals for fiscal year 2011 for the continued efforts in tall grass prairie and savanna reconstruction, restoration and management at Neal Smith NWR and across the Midwest Region.

Melius' trip gave him the opportunity to field questions from fourth and fifth graders and parents. DeSoto NWR and Blair Schools have been working together for more than five years to inspire students with interdisciplinary, relevant educational programming.

Visit: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwsmidwest/sets/72157625871544702/> for more photos of the tour.

--Tina Shaw, External Affairs



Balancing Use and Conservation of Protected Birds: The Migratory Bird Permits Program

Below: Jason Mercado, legal instruments examiner, Midwest Region Migratory Bird Permits Office. USFWS photo.

Jason Mercado has always had an affinity for the outdoors, whether playing sports during his eight years in the military, or hiking Minnesota's trails. But he never knew his love of outdoor hobbies would ever lead to a career in conservation.

"My degree was actually focused in communications and sociology, nothing in the natural sciences," Mercado said. But after an injury caused him to transfer from the military to the civilian sector, he accepted a position with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Program. "I thought, what a great opportunity to contribute to wildlife and the natural resources I love to spend time enjoying," he said.

After two years as an administrative assistant, Mercado progressed to the world of permits. "My experience working with administrative tasks moved me to apply for a position in the Midwest Region's Migratory Bird Permits division, although I must admit I knew little about the division itself," he said. That's a common perception among many people both internally, and externally of the Service. So I asked Mercado the question, "What does the Permits division do to help migratory birds?"

Since 2008 when he became a permanent staffer with the division, he's learned the answer. "Without permits, there would be a wild West situation out



there. We allow people to be in line with the law. We give people the ability to do what they need to do in education, business, and outdoor recreation while enforcing the Migratory Bird Treaty Act," Mercado said.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which has since been amended to include agreements with Canada, Russia, Mexico and Japan, implemented a convention between the United States and Great Britain to protect migratory birds (today some 800 species) from hunting, capture, and sale. It is the responsibility of the Migratory Birds Permits program to provide a means to balance use and conservation of these protected species. Permits enable the public to engage in legitimate wildlife-related activities that would otherwise be prohibited by law and ensure that such activities are carried out in a manner that safeguards wildlife. Additionally, some permits promote conservation efforts by authorizing scientific research, generating data, or allowing wildlife management and rehabilitation

activities to go forward.

Mercado says bird rehabilitation is a prime example. Birds that are injured and not able to be released into the wild need rehabilitation facilities. "You don't need a permit to pick up a bird in distress if it is taken directly to [a] rehabilitator - that's what we call the Good Samaritan Clause," he said. The Permits division works side by side with bird rehabilitators across the region. "I'm amazed with what these people do," he said. Mercado told me about a rehabilitator in Illinois who works 20 hours a day, running 3 rehabilitation facilities in the Chicago area. "The rewarding part of the job is being able to take a bird that is injured, and not able to be released into the wild, and find it a home and a job. In a sense we're a job placement agency for birds."

For more information about the Midwest Region's Migratory Bird Permits program, visit <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/MidwestBird/permits.htm>

--Ashley Spratt, *External Affairs*

Keystone Hatcheries Plead Guilty to Lacey Act Violation

Keystone Hatcheries agreed to plead guilty to one count of violating the Lacey Act in the U.S. District Court, Northern District of Indiana, for illegally transporting fish into Indiana after a documented outbreak of whirling disease at their facility. Based in Richmond, Ill., KSH is the hatchery division of Robinson Wholesale, Inc. of Genoa City, Wis.

In addition to the guilty plea, KSH has agreed to pay \$75,000 for the Lacey Act violation, of which, \$35,000 will go to the state of Indiana to monitor watersheds where KSH knowingly stocked fish and look for potential whirling disease outbreaks. The remaining \$40,000 will be paid to the Lacey Act Reward Fund.

Whirling Disease is a chronic, parasitic infection of hatchery-raised and wild salmonids (salmon

and trout) that was accidentally introduced into the United States around 1955 through Brown Trout, and is currently found in 25 states. Whirling Disease is caused by a microscopic parasite known as *Myxobolus cerebralis*, causing nerve and cartilage damage which results in the outward signs of whirling disease. It is common for fish carrying the disease to be symptom-free, but severe whirling disease infections can kill salmonid fish.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries Biologist Corey Puzach of the La Crosse Fish Health Center explains that “Whirling Disease is an extremely devastating parasite and controlling its spread is important in the protection of rainbow trout and other native salmonids.” The public can help slow the spread of whirling disease by always disinfecting fishing gear and never moving or transporting fish, water, mud or aquatic plants to new locations.

This pending court action is a result of a joint-investigation by the Service and Indiana Department of Natural Resources, with critical assistance from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Tim Santel, resident agent in charge for Illinois and Missouri noted that the success of this case is “rooted in the strong partnerships our agents have with

our state counterparts” and that “they are essential in stemming the tide against the spread of such diseases.”

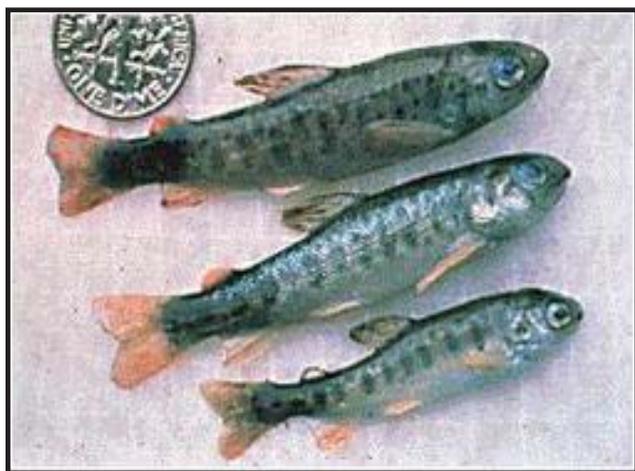
After a 2008 whirling disease outbreak in rainbow trout was identified at KSH in Richmond, Ill., a 2009 permit from the Indiana DNR was issued which restricted KSH from stocking in 15 Indiana counties with trout populations. Shortly after the issuance of the restricted permit, KSH’s parent company applied for an amended INDNR permit to haul fish for those areas. This amendment added the fish species to the RWI permit for which KSH was restricted to transport in Indiana. Such a transport was a violation of the federal Lacey Act. KSH’s Lacey Act violation is a Class D felony and could have had a maximum corporate fine of \$500,000.

On Dec. 2, 2010, David Robinson, vice-president of RWI, representing KSH, plead guilty to violating the Lacey Act in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Indiana. As set forth in the pre-indictment plea agreement, KSH has agreed to pay \$75,000 for the Lacey Act violation, of which, \$35,000 will go to the state of Indiana to monitor watersheds for whirling disease where KSH knowingly stocked fish. Final sentencing for this case will be on June 21.

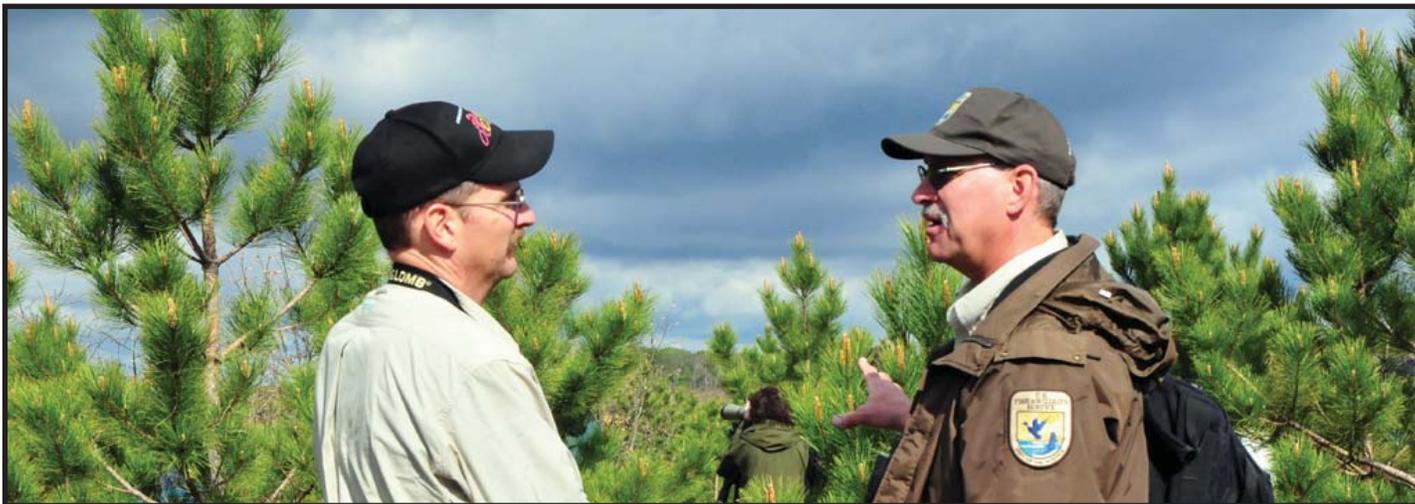
For more information about whirling disease, visit: <http://whirlingdisease.montana.edu>

--Tina Shaw, External Affairs

Below: Whirling Disease is a chronic, parasitic infection of hatchery-raised and wild salmonids (salmon and trout) that was accidentally introduced into the United States around 1955 through brown trout, and is currently found in 25 states. Photo by Silvia Murcia/Courtesy of Whirling Disease Initiative.



Service Employees Invited to Share Thoughts on ESA Implementation



Above: Joel Trick of the Green Bay ES Field Office talks to visitors at a Kirtland's warbler nesting tour in Wisconsin. USFWS photo.

For the past year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries, as administrators of the Endangered Species Act, have been engaged in an effort to identify areas of Endangered Species Act implementation that could be refined or improved. Since early December, Service employees have had the chance to read and comment on four issues in this first round of ESA regulatory guidance and review. Those issues papers, posted on the Service's InsideFWS intranet site, include discussions on critical habitat/adverse modification; incidental take; landowner tools; and federal conservation (Section 7). Other stakeholders, including state fish and wildlife agencies – through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies – have also been asked to share feedback on the issue papers.

Service and NOAA Fisheries refine the issues, and in February, you will again have the opportunity to review and comment on these revised documents. Efforts to gain

feedback will broaden as well, with input sought on the revised papers from state and tribal governments, other federal agencies, government organizations, non-government organizations and other stakeholders. By late spring, the Service and NOAA will begin assessing input; the agencies plan to propose specific changes in ESA regulations with opportunity for further public comment.

All Service employees are encouraged to follow this effort by reading the issue papers and providing input. The ideas and experiences of career agency staff will play an important part in how the Service implements the ESA in the future.

Visit <https://inside.fws.gov/go/post/Improving-ESA-Home> to stay up to date with the progress of this effort. Comments may be made to esaparticipation@fws.gov



Above: Indiana bat with radio transmitter. US-FWS photo.

This input is helping the

*--Georgia Parham
External Affairs*

Pilot Eagle Reporting System Developed by Midwest Eagle Team and External Affairs

Below: Matt Stuber, member of Eagle Team at East Lansing Ecological Services Field Office with eagle chick in nest.
Photo courtesy of Dr. Tim Kaufman, Emergency Medicine, Saginaw, Mich.



With the assistance of External Affairs, this winter the Midwest Region's Eagle Team, comprised of Ecological Services and Migratory Birds staff, implemented a pilot system to report bald eagles along or near roadways in Michigan. Bald eagle mortality rates due to vehicular collisions in Michigan have risen in the last six years, accounting for 222 out of 774, or 29 percent, of recorded eagle mortalities between 1987 and 2008.

"A recent analysis of data from Michigan indicates that collisions with vehicles are a significant cause of eagle mortality," said Jack Dingleline, deputy field supervisor of the East Lansing Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The bald eagle tells one of our nation's most revered conservation success stories, and although

this species has recovered to sustainable levels, we must keep in mind that as numbers rise, so does the risk for mortality due to human interactions."

Members of the public can submit observations of live or dead eagles on the ground or scavenging on road-kill near a roadway in Michigan at the following Web address: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/eastlansing/eagleform.htm>. The site was developed by the External Affairs team using templates from whooping crane and other migratory bird observation reports. This information will help biologists at the East Lansing Ecological Services Field Office determine where management actions are most needed and the appropriate steps to reduce future collisions in these areas.

A 2006 survey estimated 482 eagle pairs in Michigan, up from about 174 pairs in 1990.

In addition to catching and eating fish, eagles commonly feed on dead animals. Road corridors often attract eagles, which will scavenge on large road-kill such as deer, coyote, fox or raccoon. Scavenging behavior tends to increase during the winter months when ice develops on lakes and rivers, making foraging for fish more difficult.

"There is no one solution that will completely eliminate vehicle-caused mortality in Michigan," said Dingleline. "But efforts from all sides, including help from the driving public, can reduce vehicle-caused eagle mortality."

--Ashley Spratt
External Affairs

A Conservation Success Story for the Midwest Region's Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Coastal Wetlands Conservation program, funded by taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels, awarded a \$1 million grant that will help pay for the conservation and restoration of Clough Island (above). Located where the St. Louis River meets Lake Superior, the island is a haven for the lake sturgeon, migratory birds and native wildlife.

“Coastal wetlands are a high priority for the Fish and Wildlife Service because of their invaluable contributions to the Great Lakes ecosystem,” said Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius. “They protect against flooding, support good water quality and provide habitat for a diverse range of birds and other wildlife. Not only do these coastal environments have ecological importance, but they also support the more than \$7 billion Great Lakes economy fueled by commercial and recreational fishing and tourism.”

With the help of the Service's NCWC program grant, The

Nature Conservancy acquired the 358-acre estuary, protecting it from development and ensuring its preservation for conservation and outdoor recreation.

--Ashley Spratt
External Affairs

populations and habitats across the state of Illinois over the past century. The publication was supported by the State Wildlife Grant Program.

“The long term data collected by these surveys provides the information necessary to evaluate changing bird distributions,” said Tom Melius, Midwest Regional Director of the Service. ‘Illinois Birds: A Century of Change’ is a benchmark in bird research that

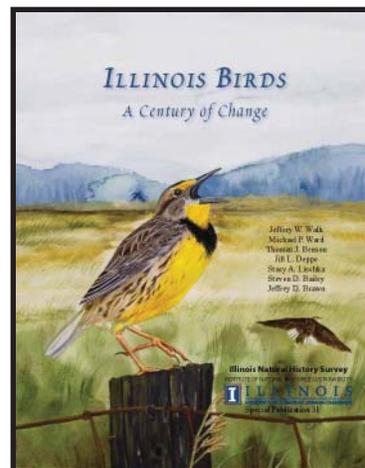
will inform current and future bird conservation priorities, and serve as a model for bird research across the United States.”

“Illinois Birds: a Century of Change” is a 230-page, full-color book, published by the University of Illinois. Visit: <http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/GrantPrograms/SWG/SWG.htm> for information.

--Ashley Spratt
External Affairs

Illinois Birds: A Century of Change

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program in the Midwest Region this winter celebrates the release of the “Illinois Natural History Survey’s Illinois Birds: A Century of Change,” a publication summarizing changes to bird



“Illinois Birds: A Century of Change” (above) is available for \$25.00 plus shipping from the Illinois Natural History Survey.

The Midwest Region's Dive Team Gets Into Gear

The temperature is in the teens and there is snow on the ground, but that won't stop the Midwest Region's dive team from getting in the water. On a chilly January day, members of the dive team got 2011 started by logging some pool training hours at Logan High School in La Crosse, Wis. Drills began out of the water with the set up and use of oxygen tanks in emergency situations. Afterwards, the lecture moved into the pool.

Divers reviewed important skills such as underwater communication through the use of common hand signals. Many of the skills focused on increasing diver comfort with the use of their dive gear. Equipment removal drills give divers the opportunity to remove their gear and then put it back on while underwater. The exercise trains divers on how to calmly react to entanglement or other emergency situations when diving in the field. The process includes removing the dive mask, weight belt, buoyancy compensator device, tank, and fins. The morning



The Midwest Region dive team in a practice session. USFWS photo by Katie Steiger-Meister.

concluded with diver rescue skills including diver tows where dive team members practiced the proper way to swim with exhausted, injured, or unconscious divers.

Pool time might sound like fun, but diving in the field is hard work. "When the water's really cold you're cold," said outgoing Regional Dive Officer Nick Rowse of the Twin Cities Ecological Services Field Office. "The rivers are more energetic systems and you have to take safety precautions because of the currents to stay safe."

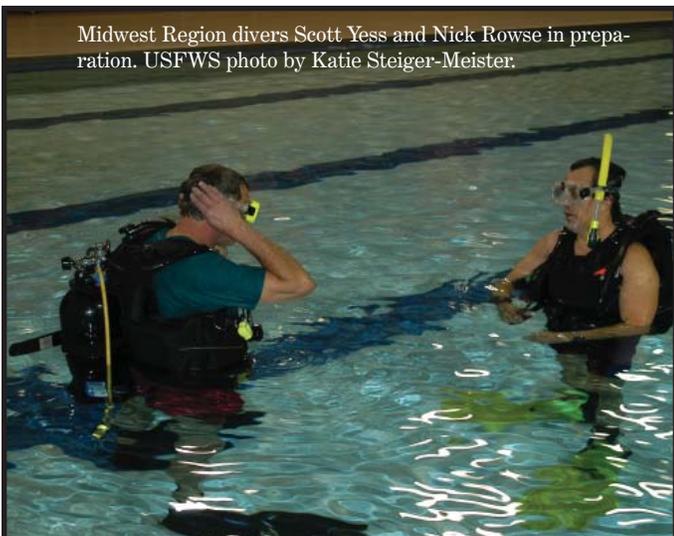
Incoming Regional Dive Officer Scott Yess of the La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office agrees. "[The

dive team] brings another tool and capability to the Service," said Yess, "in that we have the opportunity to get into the habitat, the natural environment, and see the conditions first hand. But keeping our divers safe is a primary goal."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Midwest Region dive team was re-established in 2000 after over a decade of inactivity. The Midwest Region's eight authorized divers are involved in several projects, the majority of which focus on mussel research including invasive zebra mussels and endangered Winged Mapleleaf and Higgins' Eye mussels.

To learn more about the Midwest Region dive team, please visit: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/lacrossefisheries/diving.html>

--Katie Steiger-Meister
External Affairs



Midwest Region divers Scott Yess and Nick Rowse in preparation. USFWS photo by Katie Steiger-Meister.

Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge Manager Maggie Anderson Recognized by Wildlife Society

Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge Manager Maggie Anderson was recognized by the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society for her contributions to the field of conservation. She received the 2010 Minnesota Award at the 2010 Society meeting Dec. 10, 2010.

Presented to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to Minnesota's wildlife and natural resources, the Minnesota Award is the Chapter's highest honor and has been given to Minnesota's lead conservationist annually since 1958.

A 1973 graduate of the University of Maine at Orono, Anderson started her conservation career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a part of the Atlantic Salmon Investigations team and then went on to work as the assistant refuge manager at Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge in Maine, where she worked until 1977.

Taking leadership roles across the country—from the Lansing District-Pool 9 on Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and Seney NWR on Michigan's Upper Peninsula to Lee Mecalfe NWR in Montana

and Petit Manan NWR in Maine—Anderson has made mentoring young biologists and investing in sound science a priority for more than three decades.

In 1995, Anderson returned to the Midwest as the manager at Agassiz NWR where she continues to define the standard of refuge



Above: Margaret Anderson is presented with the 2010 Minnesota Award by last year's recipient, Dr. John Toepfer of the Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, at the Minnesota Chapter of the Wildlife Society meeting Dec. 10, 2010. Photo courtesy of John Loegering, past president and professor at University of Minnesota, Crookston.

management today. During her tenure at Agassiz NWR, Anderson has elevated moose research and the importance of outreach in advancing the understanding and protection of moose in northern Minnesota. Partnering with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Anderson brought the

Adopt-a-Moose program to the web and area schools.

Anderson has also shepherded research projects on wolves, American bittern, least bittern and Franklin's gull, as well as landscape-level projects on sedge meadow habitat and sediment studies. She continues to employ new management endeavors at the refuge, like prescribed burning for cattail and willow control, as well as large-scale aspen removal in an effort to restore historic open areas.

With an eye on the future of her profession and the wider success of the conservation community, Anderson has always placed great value on the role that volunteers and young biologists play in her research partnerships. Throughout her career, Anderson has folded volunteers and students into research projects with the broader goal of providing mentoring opportunities.

For these and countless other endeavors, the chapter proudly welcomed Anderson to the ranks of past recipients: Walter Breckenridge (1967), Grady Mann (1969), Art Hawkins (1973), Gordy Gullion (1979), Carl Madsen (1985), L. David Mech (1986), Harvey Nelson (1992) and Gary Huschle (2006).

--Tina Shaw, *External Affairs*



U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/>

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Above: Dam removal project completed this past December on Euclid Creek, part of a metropolitan watershed in the Cleveland, Ohio area. The multi-partner project was partially funded by the Service's R3 Fish Passage Program. Watch the narrated video of the project in our Region 3 Newsroom at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/News/index.cfm>

USFWS photo.

Thank you for entering your journal reports and photographs in the Fish and Wildlife Journal (aka. ARS)
<http://ars.fws.gov>.