U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Inside Region 3

March 2013

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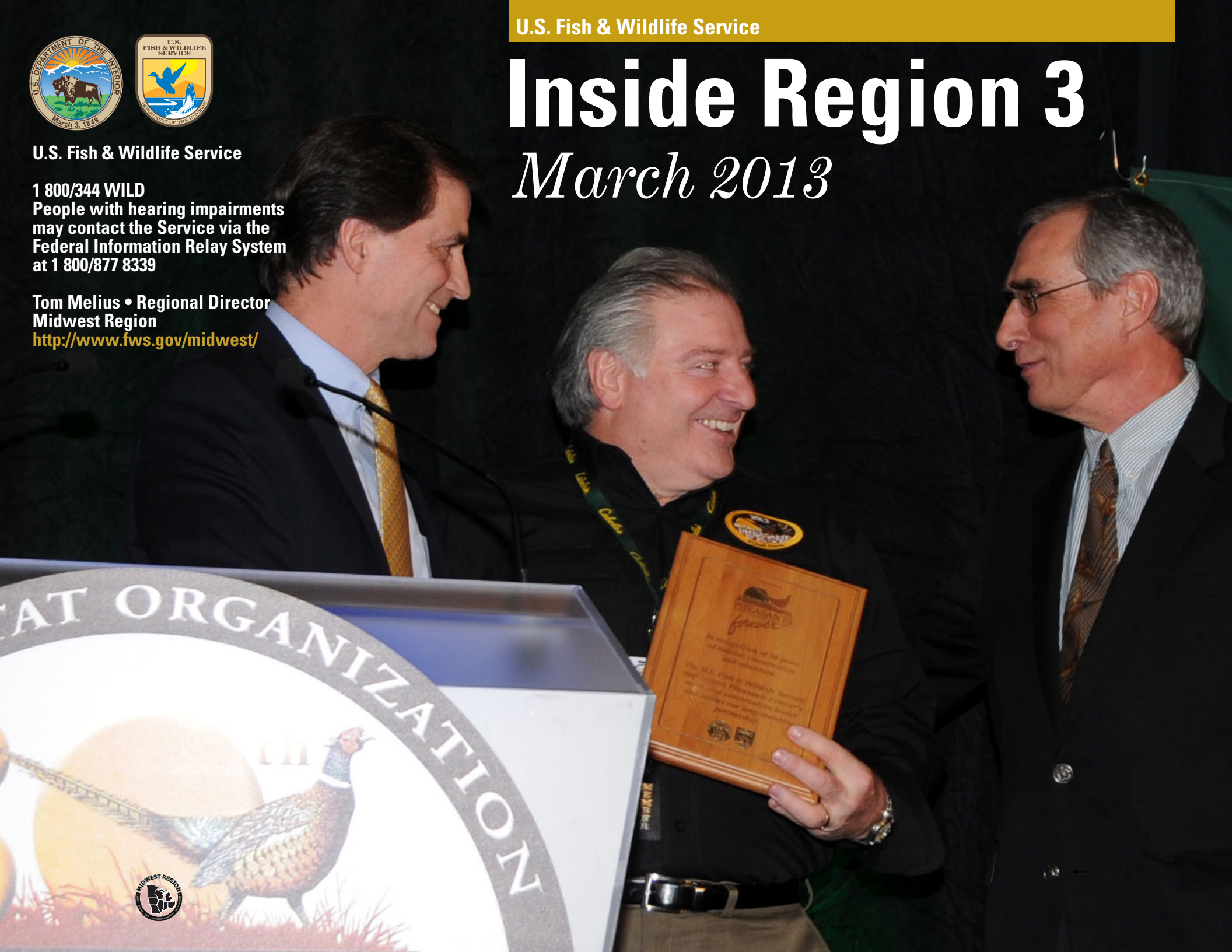

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Celebration and Great Work Through Challenging Times

As we persevere through the seasonal changes of the last gasps of winter and the equally challenging economic climate, I'm pleased to report that the warmth of success continues, thanks to the hard and dedicated work of each of you.

One such warm spot was the recent celebration of a huge milestone -- the 110th anniversary of our National Wildlife Refuge System and the successful launch of newly redesigned websites for all 67 refuge field stations in our region. The launch of these new sites began nearly a year ago and was no small effort -- the result of teamwork and coordination between our refuge field staff and the External Affairs office.

We also celebrated with our Director, Dan Ashe, one of the many fruitful partnerships that are the cornerstone of our success. Dan joined us for a visit to the Regional Office and capped off the trip by attending Pheasant Fest. Pheasants Forever celebrated its 30th Anniversary at this event and our collaborations have brought about conservation to literally thousands of acres of vital habitat for wildlife.

Great Lakes Days also offered us a chance to recognize more successful collaborative work going on through partnerships to enhance fish, wildlife and their habitat across this region. The impacts economically and recreationally for this key resource are tremendous and our success has continued, thanks to dedicated work by so many of our employees in the field. I have great faith in all of you to continue this work and I understand the needs we face through these still challenging times.

Surrogate species continues to draw attention both within and outside of the Fish and Wildlife Service. I remind those of you who have not already provided feedback on the Draft Guidance on Selecting Species for Design of Landscape-scale Conservation, that the deadline has been extended for comments to March 29. Your feedback is valuable to us in guiding our progress to better understand what the surrogate species approach to conservation will look like for the Region and the Service.

We'll be working closely in the coming months with our state partners to identify surrogate species and improve upon our processes along the way with time and patience. And I'm confident our results will be high-value despite limited dollars. This is a work in progress, but one I'm excited about.

As we all press onward despite the many unknowns that have challenged us, from sequester to budget uncertainty, I couldn't be more proud of the professional work and adaptability I see constantly from people throughout the Region. I salute your effort and longstanding ability to step up to these challenges and navigate through change victoriously.

Enjoy this issue of Inside Region 3!

Tom Melius
Regional Director, Midwest Region

Inside Region 3

March 2013

On the Cover
U.S Fish and Wildlife Director Dan Ashe and Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius present Pheasants Forever President and CEO Howard K. Vincent with a special award marking 30 years of conservation.
Chuck Traxler, USFWS.

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Here's to 30 More Great Years, Pheasants Forever!

By Dan Ashe.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Service Director

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe. USFWS

In mid-February, I had the good fortune to visit Pheasant Fest in Minnesota to help Pheasants Forever, one of our key partners, celebrate its 30th Anniversary.

Together with the hunters and conservationists of Pheasants Forever we have accomplished some amazing things. Our collaborations have resulted in the long-term conservation of thousands of acres of habitat for wildlife in the grasslands across the country.

Many experiences can teach people to appreciate and value nature - hiking, nature-watching, photographing the beauty of the outdoors and many others - but perhaps none offers a better way to learn the importance of stewardship and sustainability than hunting.

Although she loves the outdoors, my wife of 33 years has never understood why any sane person would purposefully stand waist-deep in cold water in the midst of winter, waiting for ducks to decoy. Or why spending a day working a rural South Dakota field to flush up some pheasants sounds at least as good to me as a day at the beach.

I know the folks at Pheasants Forever do. And I also know that they share my deep appreciation for wildlife and conservation because they've been there and done that.

They've certainly had time, while waiting for that first flock of ducks or for that first pheasant of the day, to reflect and consider the importance of hunting to conservation.

I know they get it. Our challenge is that much of America doesn't.

Hunters realized more than 75 years ago that if they didn't take a responsible stand for wildlife, they'd better find a new pastime. So they stepped up and opened their wallets - and all Americans have benefitted ever since.

The work of Pheasants Forever continues that legacy. Their dogged conservation work is truly stunning as they work with landowners to restore wetland habitat and dense nesting cover, plant trees and shrubs, and introduce youngsters to upland gamebird hunting.

In Pheasants Forever's 30th Anniversary Year, we celebrate our partnership and congratulate the group on 30 years of giving back to the resource through habitat conservation and education. We know that our partnership will continue for many decades to come.

PHEASANTS forever

A Black Bear cub sits atop a tree branch. After a multi-year investigation, the case known as 'Operation Treed' has come to a close, thanks to investigators from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Courtney Celley, USFWS.

Illegal Trafficking of Black Bears Stopped in Wisconsin's North Woods

By Tina Shaw
External Affairs

Federal and state agents marked the closure of a long-running bear poaching case in Wisconsin recently, as defendants in the case were sentenced. The heart of the case involved illegal guiding and other deceptive practices which were documented over the course of the investigation.

United States Attorney James L. Santelle for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, announced January 29, that John J. Kellogg of Gillett, Christopher Halfmann of Green Bay, Michael Renken of Merrill, and Mark Barlament of Mint Hill, North Carolina, were convicted of violations of the Lacey Act, Title 16, United States Code, Sections 3372(a)(2) and (4) and 3373(d)(1)(B). All of the defendants entered guilty pleas to violations of the Lacey Act related to the trafficking of black bears that were illegally killed in Wisconsin.

"This is a classic case of a few people who are not representative of the hunting community stealing opportunity from law abiding hunters," said Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Chief Warden Randy Stark. "Through the teamwork between the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Wisconsin DNR, and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, these people were brought to justice."

Special Agent in Charge for the Midwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Greg Jackson was pleased with the sentencing and commented, "This case balances the scales in favor of ethical hunting in the Midwest."

Beginning in 2009, and continuing through 2011, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources conducted an undercover investigation into the illegal killing of black bears and other game animals.

In September 2009, Kellogg, Barlament and Halfmann arranged for the illegal sale and transfer of Barlament's Class A bear license (allowing for the shooting and tagging of a bear) to an undercover officer, in violation of Wisconsin law.

Kellogg, Halfmann and others then provided guide services, which resulted in a bear being illegally killed and tagged. Kellogg facilitated the transfer of meat from the bear, as well as a rug made from the bear hide to an undercover officer in another state.

Kellogg, Halfmann and Renken were also charged with a violation of the Lacey Act that had occurred in September 2011. Kellogg again arranged for the illegal sale and transfer of a Class A bear license to an undercover officer, in violation of Wisconsin law. Despite having his hunting privileges revoked by the State of Wisconsin, Kellogg illegally guided others on a bear hunt on September 9, 2011. During the hunt, Halfmann shot and wounded a bear that then attacked him. Kellogg later killed the bear and Renken illegally transferred his Class A bear license to Kellogg to tag the bear. Kellogg directed an undercover officer to transport the bear for processing of the bear meat and the creation of a bear rug.

Kellogg pled guilty to one felony count of violating the Lacey Act and was sentenced on January 23, 2013, to six months in prison. He was also ordered to serve three years supervised release and make a $10,000 contribution to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conservation accounts.

His hunting, trapping and fishing privileges were revoked for 15 years. Kellogg also was ordered to forfeit his hunting dogs, which had been used to facilitate these illegal hunts, as well as a truck, dog tracking equipment and a rifle.

Halfmann pled guilty to two misdemeanor violations of the Lacey Act and was sentenced on January 18, 2013, to three years of probation with conditions, including a $5,000 contribution to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conservation accounts and a six-year revocation of his hunting, trapping, and fishing privileges.

Renken pled guilty to one misdemeanor count of violating the Lacey Act and was sentenced on January 2, 2013, to two years of probation with conditions, including a $3,000 contribution to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conservation accounts and a five-year revocation of his hunting and trapping privileges.

Barlament pled guilty to one misdemeanor count of violating the Lacey Act and was sentenced on September 24, 2012, to one year of probation with conditions, including a $1,000 contribution to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conservation accounts and a five-year revocation of his hunting, trapping and fishing privileges.

In addition to federal violations, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources officials documented multiple state wildlife violations.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney William Roach, of the Eastern District of Wisconsin.

"This is a classic case of a few people who are not representative of the hunting community stealing opportunity from law abiding hunters."

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Chief Warden Randy Stark

Landmark Publication Celebrates 75 Years of Conservation and Partnership Success Through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program

Program Has Generated $14 Billion for Conservation from Hunters and Anglers

By Valerie Rose Redmond
External Affairs

The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service has released a landmark publication celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, the cornerstone of fish and wildlife conservation in North America. This vital program provides more than $700 million each year through the sale of hunting and fishing equipment to support habitat conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the nation.

The anniversary publication– *"Celebrating the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, 75 years of Conservation and Partnership Success"* – comes at the end of a year-long awareness campaign with state fish and wildlife agencies, non-governmental conservation organizations, fish and wildlife agencies, industry partners (including the American Sportfishing Association, the Archery Trade Association, National Marine Manufacturers Association, and the National Shooting Sports Foundation), and friends highlighting the Program, one of the most significant and successful conservation initiatives in history.

"All Americans, whether or not they hunt or fish, benefit from this program. There's a good chance that the trail they hike, the park where they watch birds, and the wildlife they see every day wouldn't exist without the funding provided by hunters and anglers," said Assistant Director Hannibal Bolton, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "In addition to providing conservation benefits, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funds – along with revenue from state fishing and hunting licenses – support local economies and generate thousands of jobs."

"All Americans, whether or not they hunt or fish, benefit from this program. There's a good chance that the trail they hike, the park where they watch birds, and the wildlife they see every day wouldn't exist without the funding provided by hunters and anglers."

Assistant Director Hannibal Bolton

Since its inception in 1937, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program has generated more than $14 billion, which state fish and wildlife agencies use to purchase public land, improve essential wildlife habitat and create additional outdoor opportunities for everyone. It is funded through an excise tax on hunting- and shooting-related merchandise, fishing supplies and boat fuel. In 2011, hunters, anglers and wildlife watchers spent $145 billion on related gear, trips and other purchases such as licenses, tags, land leases and ownership.

For example, the State of Kentucky has used Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funding to re-establish elk in the state. Elk once roamed the hills of Kentucky, but by the mid-1850s, none were to be found. In a true partnership effort, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Shikar Safari Club joined forces to bring this magnificent animal back to its native range. From 1997 to 2002, a total of 1,556 elk were captured from herds in six states and released in Kentucky. The project has been a resounding success. In 2009, the herd reached the project goal of 10,000 elk.

And in Alabama, the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

and Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park have teamed up to offer an aquatic education experience to thousands of school children. Last year, approximately 3,000 children from 23 schools participated in "Creek Kids." With its rolling hills, cold water springs, rapids, pools and a mill dam, Tannehill is the perfect setting to get kids out of the classroom and immersed in nature. Students learn about watersheds and the aquatic environment from wildlife biologists, and get the chance to see firsthand how they can help conserve this unique heritage.

These are just two of dozens of examples of success stories contained in the anniversary publication, which offers an overall description of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program and its role as the economic backbone of state and federal fish and wildlife management and habitat conservation activities across the United States.

Additional publication highlights include:

- Descriptions of successful conservation partnerships involving state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and additional Fish and Wildlife Service partners throughout the country.
- Accounts of diverse fish and wildlife species and outdoor recreation activities that are supported by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program and its partners, as well as the federal grant programs conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- A detailed history of the program from its inception in 1937.

"The success of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program over the past 75 years to restore fish and wildlife populations, open access for outdoor recreation and provide safety education has been the greatest untold conservation story," said Ron Regan, Executive Director of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. "This publication illustrates the trust between America's sportsmen and women; the hunting, shooting sports and angling industry; and state and federal agencies that is the backbone of our users-pay, everyone benefits funding system for fish and wildlife conservation."

Click here to download the publication.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program is a 75-year partnership to benefit fish and wildlife, and provide Americans with access to the outdoors through a self-imposed investment paid by manufacturers and users of gear bought by anglers, boaters, hunters, and shooters and managed by Federal and State fish and wildlife agencies. Fishing and hunting licenses and motorboat fuel tax also support fish and wildlife. For 75 years, the program has provided more than $14 billion for fish and wildlife, supplied jobs for many Americans, and benefited local economies through boating, fishing, hunting, and shooting activities.

After 22 Years of Service La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office Project Leader Pam Thiel Retires

By Katie Steiger-Meister
External Affairs

USFWS

In a career spanning over 40 years, Pam Thiel dedicated her life to aquatic conservation. From her years working for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, to over two decades spent working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pam became both a pioneer and trusted partner in the conservation of mussels and fish in the Mississippi River System.

Over the years Pam has received numerous awards, which are a testament to her dedication to excellence in her professional career. Pam's leadership will be missed by her colleagues, but the Midwest Region wishes her well on her adventures in retirement!

Career Highlights Include:

- 1993 became Project Leader for what is now the La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office
- Formed important partnerships to protect native mussels from the invasive zebra mussel
- Played an instrumental role in Genoa National Fish Hatchery receiving a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to build the "Clam Palace," Genoa NFH's dedicated mussel propagation facility
- Received a Recovery Champion Award from the Service in 2002
- Received Conserving America's Fisheries Award from the Service in 2003.

Addressing the Emerald Ash Borer Problem

Emerald ash borer, USFWS

By Georgia Parham
External Affairs

In late 2012, Dan Sparks, environmental contaminants biologist in the Bloomington Ecological Service Field Office, provided information to the City of Bloomington, Ind., responding to a news story that suggested the use of some pesticides on lawns and trees -- on private and city property -- to control emerald ash borers. Here are excerpts from Dan's response:

When one treats a tree (or a lawn for that matter) with the insecticide neonicotinoid (Imidacloprid or Dinotefuran), it is transported throughout the plant (roots, twigs, stems and leaves) and any insect sucking, chewing or eating portions of that plant could likely get a lethal dose of insecticide. This is great if you want effective treatment coverage, but it also has great potential for non-target species impacts. In this type of treatment, trees are treated at 10 times the level typically found in turf or garden formulations (40g vs. 4g/L). Soil soaking treatments will be taken up by more than just the tree and will be in unintended plants that beneficial insects visit.

Recent laboratory experiments have strengthened the connections between imidacloprid and adverse impacts to honeybees. We concede that imidacloprid has not yet been implicated in woodpecker deaths; however, we would encourage people to consider whether or not lethality is the only outcome that might be worth considering in this regard. The odds of finding sick or poisoned birds at known wildlife mortality incident sites are always very low for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that a sick animal will typically hide if it can. And unfortunately, all species of insectivorous birds, from chickadees to blue jays, could be at risk from insecticide-treated trees because they are treated to be "protected" throughout the tree.

Residues of the insecticides emamectin benzoate and imidacloprid remain in leaves and stems long after leaf fall and many more species of insects are using ash trees besides the emerald ash borer. This could be especially problematic for all the species of aquatic invertebrates that turn leaves into a valuable source of energy for aquatic life in streams.

However, our biggest concern with neonicotinoid insecticides is for insectivorous bats. Research on lethal and sublethal impacts to bats from insecticides is lacking because most bat lifestyles are not easily maintained in captivity. Mice and rat toxicological studies do not adequately address the amazing physiology of the typical bat. For instance, metabolism of a small bat (average weight 7 grams) runs at maximum in the summer months while rearing young and nearly shuts completely off during several months of hibernation. These small bats can have lifespans well in excess of 20 years. The slightest metabolic alteration in these animals could alter hibernation ability and significantly alter hibernation behavior. As with the white-nose syndrome (caused by a recently introduced exotic fungus), anything that alters a bat's ability to hibernate properly can turn a sublethal irritation into widespread lethality.

The endangered Indiana bat (Myotis sodalis), is a very common species here in Monroe County, Indiana, and given the unknown potential for sublethal effects, we would not want to encourage such high dose uses of insecticides. Many of the insects that Indiana bats feed on would be reduced or would carry residues that could accumulate in bat tissues. So, despite inferences in the article, it should be made very clear that a treated ash tree can no longer be considered good for wildlife habitat. An untreated dead ash tree does however provide excellent wildlife habitat for a few years and we would advocate letting dead trees stand where they are not a safety hazard.

The long term likelihood of success against well-established exotic species is questionable. Unfortunately, ash trees are not the first North American trees under attack from foreign invaders: American elm trees (Dutch elm disease, a fungus) and American chestnut (chestnut blight, also a fungus) are other examples. The battle to control the Asian long-homed beetle (which can harm maple, birch, elm, poplar and willow trees) still goes on with some success. The loss of magnificent trees in our neighborhoods and forests is a shame, however, poisons are not an appropriate option for success against the emerald ash borer.

Spying on Bats

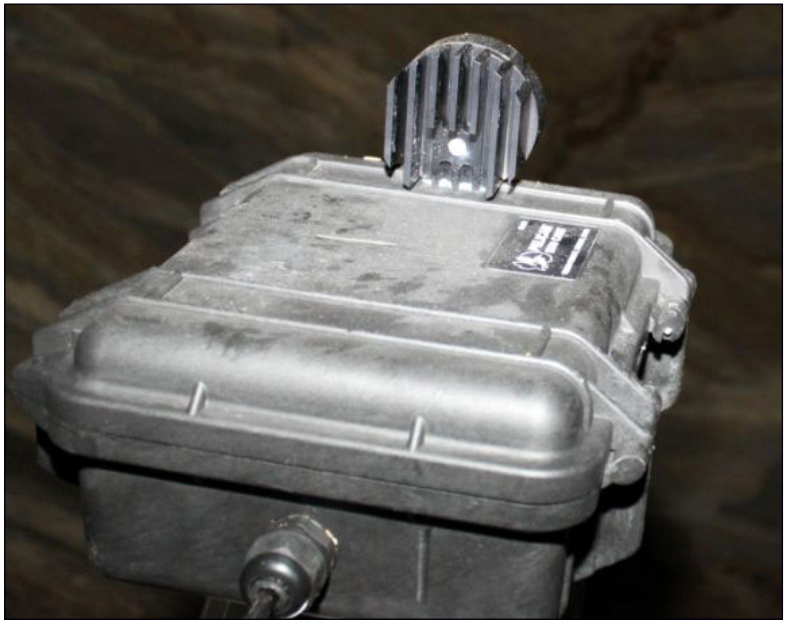
By Lori Pruitt
Bloomington Ecological Services Field Office

Wyandotte Cave in Indiana's O'Bannon Woods State Park is the site of a collaborative study led by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to examine hibernation behavior of bats that roost in sites infected with White-nose Syndrome. The project, funded primarily by the Service's White-nose Syndrome Grants to States, uses multiple technologies to assess behavior of hibernating bats.

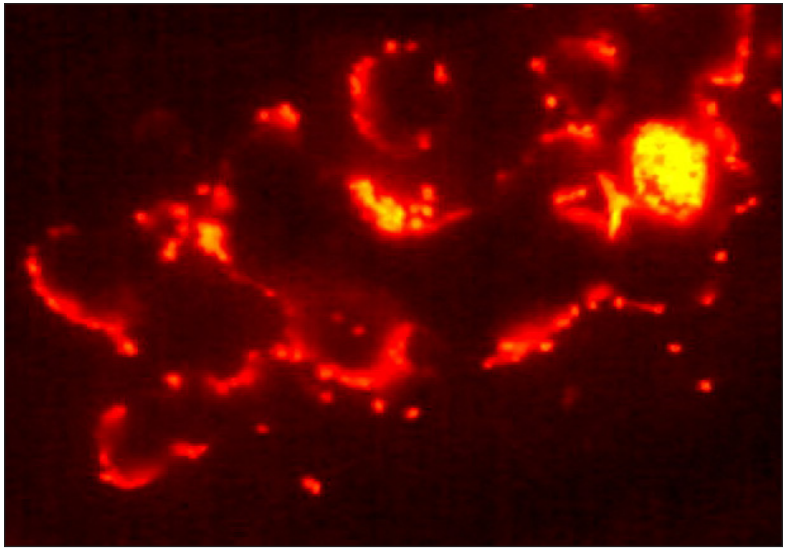
Technologies deployed at the site include near-infrared and thermal cameras to obtain video imagery of hibernating bats, a beam-break gate that detects and records the dates and times that bats enter and leave the site, and an acoustic bat detection system. We are hopeful that data gathered through these multiple passive surveillance systems and analyzed comprehensively will allow for insights into WNS that no single system would provide.

White-nose Syndrome is caused by a newly-described fungus (*Geomyces destructans*) that invades the skin tissue of the nose, ears and wings of cave-dwelling bats during hibernation. While the prolific white fungal growth that forms on the nose may be the most striking sign of infection, scientists believe bat wings may be the most important target. During hibernation, the large surface area of a bat's wings performs critical physiological services such as regulating the animal's body temperature, water balance and gas exchange with its external environment. These life processes, vital to survival, are disrupted when healthy wing membranes are digested by the invading fungus.

WNS-infected bats can exhibit a number of harmful behaviors including, increased activity during hibernation that may include leaving the hibernaculum, even during daylight hours. These behaviors appear to be triggered by their inability to regulate metabolic activities and maintain homeostasis (steady internal conditions). Recording these behaviors is the target of the surveillance systems deployed at Wyandotte.



This thermal/infrared camera was placed in Wyandotte Cave to assist in research. USFWS



An image captured in January 2013 using the thermal/infrared camera in Wyandotte Cave. USFWS

Wyandotte Cave, which was found to be infected with WNS in January 2011, houses the country's largest known winter population of the endangered Indiana bat (60,000 in 2011). The 2012-13 winter marks the second consecutive year of multiple surveillance methodologies at this historic cave.

In February 2013, a team of biologists entered the site to conduct a survey of hibernating bats. This visit will enable us to estimate the current size of the population in the cave, once all the surveillance data are analyzed. Our active WNS surveillance will help us identify abnormal behaviors in hibernating bats, such as bats arousing too often or movements in and out of the cave entrance. Results of this survey will also help to assess how well our passive surveillance systems reflect the status and impact of WNS at this site.

Collectively, the research and surveillance activities at Wyandotte Cave will help scientists define the processes through which dermal infection by *Geomyces destructans* results in the onset of disease and, ultimately, causes mortality. Understanding these mechanisms is critical to efforts to manage WNS-affected sites.

Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative Releases First Annual Report

Progress, Research Priorities and Future Direction Highlighted

By Ashley Spratt
External Affairs

The Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) has released a comprehensive annual report highlighting the accomplishments of more than 30 agencies and organizations across state and international boundaries committed to healthy ecosystems for current and future generations of fish, wildlife and people.

Steering committee and technical committee members representing federal, state and non-governmental entities have worked since 2010 to connect on-the-ground natural resources managers with cutting-edge scientific research on climate change, land-use changes, and other landscape challenges. Click to download annual report as PDF.

In this report, steering committee co-chairs Tom Melius, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Director, and Terry Steinwand, North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director, provide a breakdown on spending, steering committee and technical committee membership, progress on 27 ongoing research projects, communications efforts and future direction.

Since 2010, the LCC has provided nearly $3.5 million in funding to bolster the conservation community's scientific foundation for management of natural resources and the development of tools and frameworks to improve collaboration within the conservation community. LCC partners are working in collaboration to deliver the contemporary science needed to address natural resources challenges within the plains and prairie potholes landscape.

The Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC has capitalized on pre-existing conservation communities and networks to engage with federal, state, non-governmental and tribal groups to ensure an open, two-way dialogue surrounding LCC activities. This annual report offers continued transparency and accountability on behalf of the partnership as the LCC forges ahead in 2013.

Begin Planning Now for Endangered Species Day Events

By Georgia Parham
External Affairs

As the Service celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act throughout 2013, this is the year for Midwest Region field stations to consider marking Endangered Species Day. Programs are encouraged to look ahead to May 17 and prepare to celebrate our endangered species success stories and ongoing efforts.

There are many ways to participate – from field days to open houses and activities for kids. If your field station routinely hosts an event in the spring, consider tying it to an endangered species found in your area, or to work that is being done by your program that directly or indirectly benefits listed plants and animals.

Eastern hellbender,
Jill Utrup, USFWS

Take the opportunity provided by Endangered Species Day to write an article for local media about what your station does to support endangered species – on refuges, at hatcheries, through grants, partnerships and research. Endangered Species Day is a great opportunity to spotlight not only our work with threatened and endangered species, but also what we do for all our trust resources.

If May 17 doesn't work for you, remember that we're celebrating the 40th anniversary all year long. Summer events like National Fishing Day, annual celebrations like National Hunting and Fishing Day or Public Lands Day in the fall are also possibilities for highlighting endangered species efforts.

If you're looking for ideas, check out the Service's 40th anniversary website at http://www.fws.gov/endangered/ESA40/index.html or contact Georgia Parham in External Affairs (Georgia_Parham@fws.gov 812-334-4261 x 1203) or Kim Mitchell in Ecological Services (Kim_Mitchell@fws.gov) 612-713-5337.

Building Bird Conservation Connections in Chicago

By Louise Clemency
Chicago Ecological Services Field Office

Connecting people and nature is a high priority for the Service. The Chicago ES field office is contributing to that goal by supporting the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Audubon Chicago Region, and Eden Place. The groups are working to connect Chicago residents to their forest preserves through bird conservation and habitat restoration. The Chicago Field Office is providing support through the Upper Mississippi and Great Lakes Joint Venture and Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Great Lakes Coastal Program.

One part of the effort is an outreach component, called Wild Indigo Nature Exploration, which is gearing up to take Chicago's south side by storm. Audubon and community partner Eden Place have hired three great part-time outreach workers, and outreach to community groups has commenced. The team is gathering ideas from potential neighborhood partners about ways that outdoor programming could fit into their mission.

Some ideas they are currently exploring, along with the usual birding, nature walk, and habitat restoration activities:

- Walks for vets with PTSD
- Fishing and nature exploration for teens and mentors
- An expedition co-sponsored with Outdoor AFRO

A calendar of events that features local African-American program leaders:

- Paul Mwangi Gitau, avid birder and leader of Kenyan safaris
- Anayansi Ricketts, local artist
- Sherry Williams, Bronzeville historical society
- Jon Woods, IDNR community outreach staff
- Michael Howard, Eden Place Nature Center
- John Kidd, Fishin' Buddies

Indoor and outdoor kickoffs are planned in March. Nature training sessions for local community leaders have been very successful, and partners from four community groups, Faith in Place, Bronzeville Historical Society, Eden Place, and the Illinois DNR, have joined us, along with Audubon outreach workers and local birders and stewards.

Eden Place is an urban oasis and a nature preserve that seeks to introduce the Chicago community to food production and environmental education. Founded in 1997 by Michael Howard, a Fuller Park resident, Eden Place has evolved from an illegal dumpsite to a vibrant environmental learning center offering classes and programs to the surrounding community.

Wood Duck Takes Top Bill at the Minnesota Waterfowl Symposium

By Valerie Rose Redmond
External Affairs

USFWS

Regional Director Tom Melius welcomed a host of attendees to the 16th annual Minnesota Waterfowl Symposium, on February 2, at the Mall of America Ramada in Bloomington, Minn. The event was sponsored in part by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in partnership with the Minnesota Waterfowl Association and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

After thanking the organizers, greeting dignitaries and acknowledging Hall of Fame honorees, Melius reminded the attendees of the Service's Federal Duck Stamp Program and its significant contribution as a vital wetland conservation tool.

The wood duck themed conference prompted Melius to highlight the wood duck's significance to the region and hunters.

"Consistently in the top three for ducks harvested in Minnesota each year," he said, "wood ducks have inspired many conservation efforts throughout the state."

In addition to the wood duck seminars, participants gleaned important information about Pelican Lake, Sandhill Crane Breeding Surveys, telemetry tracking of Sandhill cranes, and decoy history.

Attendees also enjoyed cooking demonstrations, information booths, impromptu chats with the speakers, and the Minnesota Decoy Collector's Association Show. Afterwards, questions on hunting regulations, wood ducks and other waterfowl were answered by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Commissioner, Tom Landwehr.

The evening offered attendees the opportunity to attend the 4th Annual Minnesota Waterfowl Hall of Fame Banquet. The Minnesota Waterfowl Hall of Fame honors individuals for years of dedicated service to the waterfowl conservation cause. This year's honorees included two Service biologists: Grady Mann and Tony Rondeau.

Non-native Species Introductions Can Lead to New Illnesses

By Jenny Finfera
Columbus Ecological Services Field Office

Mention invasive species, and many of us think of Asian carp, zebra mussels or perhaps a plant like Asian bittersweet. But there are other, less recognized examples. Consider West Nile disease, caused by a non-native virus that was first detected in the U.S. in 1999. The virus is believed to have arrived here by the inadvertent transport of an infected mosquito.

White-nose syndrome is another example of how non-native organisms can cause the emergence of diseases new to the United States. White-nose syndrome was first detected in bats in New York, in 2006, and is characterized by the growth of fungal hyphae on the skin of bats. The fungal growths resemble white fuzz on the wings and muzzles of infected bats, giving the disease its name. The fungus causing white-nose syndrome is called *Geomyces destructans* and had not been identified in North America prior to 2006.

White-nose Syndrome on little brown bat. USFWS

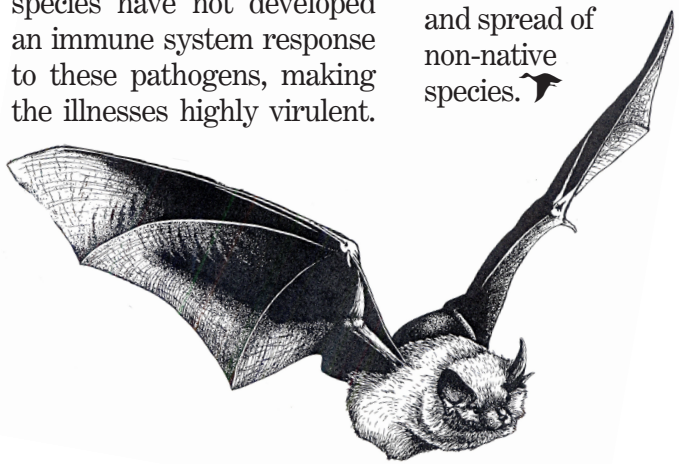
This fungus has been found in bats in Europe, but the bat species there do not suffer the same high rates of mortality. However, the impact of white-nose syndrome on North American bats has been dramatic – the disease has killed an estimated 5.5 million cave-dwelling bats in the eastern half of the country since it was discovered. Mortality in affected hibernacula can reach 90 percent in some species.

Both of the West Nile Virus and *Geomyces destructans* are non-native organisms. They have each had a significant impact on ecosystems. West Nile virus has been detected in over 200 bird species with the deaths of over 40,000 individual birds. White-nose syndrome has been associated with nine species of bats here in North America. As the pathogen spreads, additional bat species may be affected.

Since both of the West Nile Virus and *Geomyces destructans* are new to North America, our native species have not developed an immune system response to these pathogens, making the illnesses highly virulent.

While the impacts to birds from West Nile have lessened, the spread of white-nose syndrome has continued to threaten North American bat species as it spreads across the country. The population declines have been so significant that there is concern that additional bats species may need to be listed under the Endangered Species Act.

While both the fungus that causes white-nose syndrome and the virus that causes West Nile are small invasive species, there are other larger invasive species that also have a significant impact on native ecosystems. National Invasive Species Awareness Week focuses on this in early March, offering an opportunity to look at the threats posed by invasive species and the everyday actions individuals can take to help prevent the introduction and spread of non-native species.



John Rogner Selected To Guide Landscape Conservation Efforts Across Upper Midwest and Great Lakes

Former Illinois DNR Assistant Director selected to serve as LCC Coordinator

By Ashley Spratt
External Affairs

Former Illinois Department of Natural Resources Assistant Director John Rogner has been selected to lead the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) as LCC Coordinator. Rogner has joined LCC and science coordinators from across the country to grow conservation partnerships established by the LCC network, and connect cutting-edge scientific research with on-the-ground natural resources management of the upper Midwest and Great Lakes region.

"John's commitment to protecting the health of our fish and wildlife populations and native habitats is unparalleled," said Craig Czarnecki, assistant regional director of Science Applications with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "His breadth of experience, practical knowledge, and pragmatic perspective on natural resources management will complement and build upon the ongoing mission and vision of the LCC."

LCC Coordinator John Rogner. USFWS

Rogner was appointed in July 2009 as assistant director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Prior to his role with the state of Illinois, he led the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Chicago Ecological Services Field Office as field supervisor. There he directed programs in endangered species conservation, environmental contaminants, conservation planning assistance, habitat restoration and environmental education. During this time he also served as chair of Chicago Wilderness, a coalition of over 240 organizations dedicated to conserving the biodiversity of the Chicago region.

From 1983 to 1991, Rogner worked for the Chicago District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, where he held various positions implementing the regulatory program under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act.

Rogner has undergraduate and graduate degrees in biological sciences from Northern Illinois University. He received the distinction of professional wetland scientist through the Society of Wetland Scientists in 1995, in addition to multiple performance awards from both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC), established in 2010, is focused on a diverse range of fish, wildlife and other natural resources that transcend state and international borders. This includes the Great Lakes (North America's largest freshwater resource), coastal wetlands, boreal forests, major river systems and prairie-hardwood ecosystems. Many of these ecosystems surround heavily populated urban centers creating both resource challenges and opportunities. ***For more information, click here.***

Mentoring the Next Generation of Firefighters

By Tina Shaw
External Affairs

The Midwest Region Torch Award has been passed on to another well-respected individual in the wildland fire profession. Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge Range Technician David Jones was recognized as the recipient of this year's Torch Award in mid-February.

Regional Fire Management Coordinator Dan Dearborn, Regional Director Tom Melius, Deputy Regional Director Charlie Wooley and Regional Chief of Refuges Charlie Blair recognize 2012 Torch Award winner Range Technician David Jones. Garrett Peterson, USFWS

With more than eight years of fire experience at Big Oaks, Jones typifies the Midwest Region fire program's steadfast focus on safety and conservation. The Torch Award recognizes staff dedication to the conservation of wildlife habitat utilizing safe hazard fuel and prescribed fire reduction techniques. Jones follows in the footsteps of past honorees: Chris Mursu of Sherburne Refuge, Mike Belsky of Necedah Refuge, Erik Acker of Port Louisa Refuge, Ben Halverson of Leopold WMD and Eric Nelson of Agassiz Refuge.

The Midwest Region fire program is built on the essential tenets of regional cooperation and interagency collaboration in meeting habitat conservation burning goals. Jones continues to meet this mission by mentoring young firefighters in many aspects of the job, sharing his skills in metal fabricating, engine repair, chainsaw operation and heavy equipment use. Bringing a can-do attitude to everything he does, Jones possesses strong chainsaw skills and has shown leadership in training more than 100 sawyers in the past seven years.

"He possesses all the qualities and skills needed to be a firefighter in this new era," explained Midwest Regional Fire Management Coordinator Dan Dearborn. "While he excels in the field, Dave also possesses the technical skills to help the fire crew to get the task done on the ground."

Jones is committed to Big Oaks and the wider U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fire Management Program. With his leadership and example, the Midwest Region fire program will continue to exceed annual goals and objectives successfully and safely.

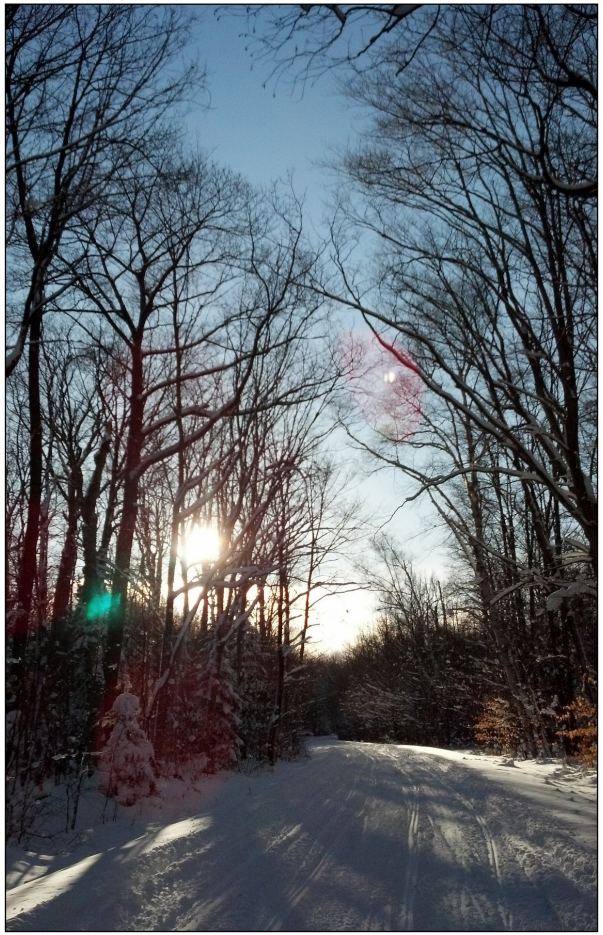
Genoa Kids Ice Fishing Event

Genoa National Fish Hatchery maintenance mechanic, Dan Kumlin, helps a young participant catch a fish at the 2013 Kids Fishing Day event. Ashley Eckes. USFWS

More than 500 children and their parents ventured out to the hatchery, on January 26, to learn ice fishing from the experts before attempting to catch rainbow trout in a stocked hatchery pond. The annual event was sponsored by the Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Fisheries Services and three U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fisheries offices located in the La Crosse, Wisconsin area.

Pendills Creek NFH Snowmobile Open House

Nearly 100 people participated in the snowmobile open house at Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery in Brimley, Michigan, February 2. The event was hosted by the Friends of Pendills Creek Hatchery, who also provided lunch for hatchery guests.



Photos clockwise from top:
Snowmobile recreationalists; visitors view hatchery yearlings; yearlings up close; Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery. USFWS