



U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Inside Region 3

February 2014

It's a cold day in Iowa. Richard C Hager/USFWS.

RD Corner

From the Polar Vortices to Surrogate Species

It doesn't seem like it when you look out of your windows, but spring is just around the corner; despite the ground hog's predictions. January's "polar vortices" behind us, we can look ahead to what has traditionally been an extremely busy season for us.

I was pleased to host the 2013 Region 3 year in review. It is great to see all the outstanding work that's being done throughout the region. We definitely have a dedicated and passionate staff working on behalf of the American public for the benefit of wildlife conservation. If you haven't seen our 2013 Year In Review video, please take a few minutes to watch it.

As we are in the early months of 2014, it's nice to see that we have our budget challenges addressed. An appropriations bill delivered from Congress will help as we start moving forward with implementation of a number of our programs. As we move further into the year we have to make sure that we are spending those dollars on the highest conservation needs.

I want to also encourage, as our Director Dan Ashe did (during his recent all-employee broadcast), that folks have to go beyond just doing good work. We have to be looking strategically at the best--the greatest needs that our resources have. And one way of doing that is to think broadly on a large landscape scale and efficiently via our surrogate species. Thinning down all the species to a handful of surrogate species allows us to be more efficient with targeting our activities.

So I hope that as we continue this year to refine surrogate species that not



Regional Director Tom Melius/USFWS.

only will everyone get engaged but will contribute through their voices to help us as we move forward. This year we are going to be looking more strategically at directing our efforts and that's not to say that the work that is going on in the Service is not good work, but we have to redirect it. We have to "work smart" in these times. The expectations of the public and the Congress demand it so. We have to make sure that we are strategically spending those dollars for the conservation of those natural resources.

One way to look at it more strategically is to look at it through the lens of large landscapes. We have to determine within those landscapes what are the most important conservation actions

that we can implement to help a number of species. One way to do that is to look at it through the lens of surrogate species.

You can learn more about surrogate species by visiting <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/science/surrogatespecies/>

T.O.M.

Recapping the 2013 Sea Lamprey Control Field Season – Adult Assessment and Barriers

The 2013 Sea Lamprey Control Program field season came to a close in November 2013. We would like to highlight the remarkable work accomplished by our staff over the past field season. This year, sea lamprey control staff out of the Marquette and Ludington biological stations worked around the clock, many working 10 days straight, to reduce the destructive impacts of the invasive sea lamprey within the Great Lakes ecosystem.



Service employee Dan Kochanski sexing a sea lamprey at the Cheboygan River in Michigan/USFWS.

Our employees work in one of three program areas of sea lamprey control: larval assessment, lampricide control, and adult assessment and barriers. Each area has a different role contributing to the control of sea lampreys in the Great Lakes; however it is the collective effort of all of our staff to control the sea lamprey population that keeps this voracious fish-killing parasite at bay.

The adult assessment and barriers unit is an integral component of the Sea Lamprey Control Program, and their responsibilities are two-fold. In the early months of the field season, April to June, the adult assessment unit is responsible for estimating adult sea lamprey abundance in Great Lakes tributaries. Estimates of adult sea lamprey in each stream are developed through mark-recapture techniques, estimates of trap efficiency, or a sophisticated mathematical model. The unit uses traps to capture adult sea lampreys as they migrate upstream

to spawn. The traps are often set-up close to barriers, and capture thousands of adult sea lampreys each season. The stream-specific estimates are used to develop lake-wide population estimates. Lake-wide estimates of adult sea lamprey abundance serve as the primary metric used to evaluate how effective various control actions have been in controlling the invasive parasite. In addition, many of the captured adult sea lampreys are provided to researchers who are investigating new control techniques and to biological supply companies who use the lamprey for educational purposes.

The barrier unit is also responsible for monitoring barriers in the Great Lakes basin and facilitating the repair of barriers that fail to block the upstream migration of adult sea lampreys. These barriers, such as dams, are critical in controlling sea lamprey populations because they block adult sea lampreys from critical spawning and nursery habitat in Great Lakes tributaries. In

the second half of the field season, July through September, barriers are inspected to determine whether they are in good condition and functioning properly. The examination of barriers helps us to determine which barriers are critical to sea lamprey control, if and when these critical barriers need repair, and to prioritize and facilitate the repair of barriers

that are not blocking sea lampreys or those that are degrading and in need of repair.

By the numbers, here is just a brief glance at what the adult assessment and barriers unit was up to during 2013:

- Number of streams trapped: 54
- Number of adult sea lampreys captured in 2013: 20,000+
- Number of adult sea lampreys provided to researchers in 2013: 14,000
- Number of barriers located in the Great Lakes Basin: 10,000+
- Number of barrier sites inspected in 2013: 700+
- Number of barriers repaired in 2013: 3
- Number of employees on the adult assessment and barrier team: 15 (Marquette Biological Station)
- Geographic area of coverage in the Great Lakes: 8 states

Continued on next page.

Testing the Waters: Impacts of Contaminants on Imperiled Mussels

Freshwater mussels are sometimes called silent sentinels because of their sensitivity to changes in water quality, including those caused by environmental contaminants.

Recent laboratory investigations have shown that juvenile mussels are among the most sensitive organisms ever tested for ammonia, copper and major ion toxicity. Biologists from the Twin Cities, Green Bay, and East Lansing field offices and the Regional Office are investigating how these contaminants may be limiting the recovery of endangered and threatened mussel species. Investigations are underway, which include collecting water (surface water and pore-water) from rivers in Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota, where threatened and/or endangered species occur or have historically occurred.

In 2013, biologists from the Service's Environmental Contaminant and Endangered Species programs collected pore water and overlying water from three Michigan Rivers (Belle, Grand and Black Rivers) with support from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative. Additional testing sites will be chosen based on proximity to known point and non-point sources of contaminants.

The investigation is led by Elissa Buttermore at Twin Cities, Steve Choy at Green Bay and Jeremy



Freshwater mussels are extremely sensitive to environmental contaminants. Georgia Parham/USFWS

Moore at East Lansing. The biologists will identify and prioritize threats to freshwater mussels, conduct a risk assessment comparing levels of contaminants in the field with laboratory derived toxic threshold values, and add information to the Midwest Region Freshwater Mussel Threats Geospatial Database, which will demonstrate mussel threats in an easily assessable and interpretable manner.

This project is serving as a preliminary survey to provide information on possible limiting factors to listed mussel populations and will help guide recovery efforts by identifying threats and potential restoration and relocation sites. Two additional rounds of sampling are currently being planned for the summer of 2014.

By Annette Trowbridge, Ecological Services-Regional Office

Sea Lamprey Continued

The adult assessment and barrier unit estimates adult sea lamprey populations and inspects and evaluates barriers in each of the Great Lakes. All of this work happens during the yearly field season spanning from April to October. In addition, we work closely with Fisheries and Oceans Canada Sea Lamprey Control Centre, who assesses adult sea lamprey populations and inspects and evaluates barriers in Canada. Estimates of adult sea lamprey abundance and the inspection and evaluation of barriers are critical components of the integrated program to control sea lampreys in the Great Lakes. The adult assessment and barrier unit works closely with numerous partners, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, state and tribal agencies, and private land owners. Adult sea lamprey assessment and barrier evaluations are certainly a team effort and are a critical component of sea lamprey control in the Great Lakes.

*By Joanna Gilkeson
External Affairs*

Saxhaug, Kulm WMD, Friends Group Earn Realty Awards

A savvy supervisor in Minnesota, a persistent wetland management district staff in North Dakota, and a highly cooperative Friends organization in New England are recipients of the 2013 National Realty Awards. Midwest Region supervisory realty specialist John Saxhaug received the Rudolph Dieffenbach Award. The award is given annually to a realty employee for significant contributions to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's land acquisition systems, operation or mission.

During Saxhaug's decade-long tenure in the Midwest, the region has acquired and conserved more than 100,000 acres. In particular, his work with The Nature Conservancy and the state of Minnesota has helped the Service acquire more than 18,000 acres at Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge for a bargain price. He was cited for developing partnerships that "have helped to maximize land acquisitions while minimizing the amount of time required to complete purchases."

The staff at North Dakota's Kulm Wetland Management District—including project leader Mick Erickson, biological technician Ryan Shively and private lands biologist Wes Weisenberger—received the Land Legacy Award for significant contributions to the Service's mission. The award is given annually to Service



John Saxhaug received the Dieffenbach Award for his work as Midwest Region supervisory realty specialist. Patrick Carroll/USFWS.

employees or volunteers who do not work in the realty function.

The staff members were recognized for their targeted, persistent and systematic approach to identifying willing landowners interested in receiving wetland easement offers on their properties. The approach involved sending letters that included estimated easement payments to landowners whose properties were of particularly high conservation value and following up with phone calls if needed. The approach also included field-checking hundreds of properties to identify wetland basins to protect and making GIS (geographic information system) shape files for each property. As a result, 7,331 wetland acres were conserved on or near Kulm WMD in fiscal year 2012.

"Hundreds of phone calls were made, and most of the calls had to occur after hours when landowners weren't working in the field," the Bismarck Wetlands Acquisition Office said.

"Kulm WMD showed great teamwork when they developed this system of initiating landowner contacts, field-checking properties and making spatial information. By calling the landowners who did not respond to the mailings, more interest was generated. This approach identified which landowners have

no interest in an easement offer, and the WMD will not waste time re-contacting that same landowner." The Friends of the Silvio O. Conte Refuge received the National Land Protection Award. It is given annually to private citizens, groups, organizations, corporations, public agencies and their employees or volunteers outside the Service—for contributions to land protection for fish and wildlife resources in partnership with the Service.

The Friends group—an association of about 50 organizations from the conservation, education, recreation and economic sectors—was honored for creating a framework that accents "the true relevancy and value land conservation actions have on recreation, education and economic opportunities" and for "integrating the grassroots agenda into the national agenda."

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Conservation Partners Come Together to Benefit the Fish, Wildlife and People of the Mississippi River Basin and Beyond



Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers LCC Steering Committee and staff in St. Louis, Mo. Ashley Spratt/USFWS.

Midwest natural resource leaders came together in St. Louis, Mo., this week to strategize collaborative conservation efforts to benefit both wildlife habitat

and water quality across the Mississippi River basin.

As part of the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC), federal, state, non-governmental and tribal partners have been working side-by-side to reduce nutrient runoff from agricultural communities while improving habitat for fish, wildlife and native prairie systems.

The 800-million acre Mississippi River basin provides vital habitat for fish and wildlife, and also supports more than 400,000 farms and large urban populations from Chicago to Des Moines.

High nutrient runoff from agricultural communities in the Mississippi River basin contributes to hypoxic (or oxygen-less) waters that pour into the Gulf of Mexico, and, thus declines in commercial and recreation fisheries in the Gulf region.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Deputy Regional Director and LCC co-chair Charlie Wooley, said, “By working

together we can be more effective in our efforts to improve habitat for fish and wildlife here in the Midwest, and at the same time, benefit our neighbors along the Gulf Coast.”

The Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers LCC also [released its 2013 Year in Review this week](#), a collection of the partnership’s accomplishments over the past year. For more information

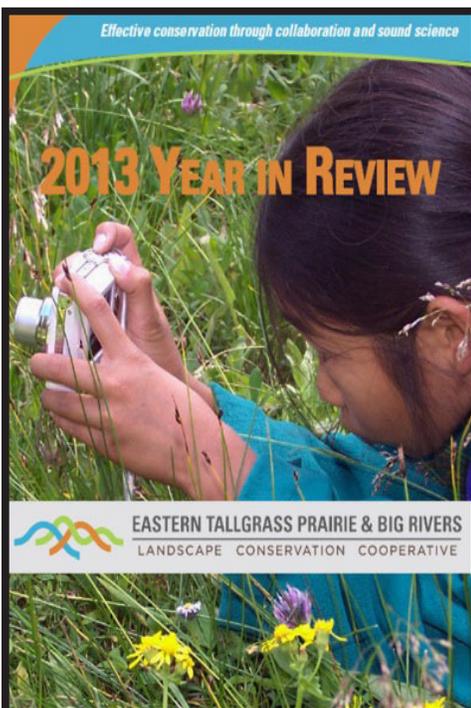
about the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers LCC visit <http://tallgrassprairieecc.org>

By Ashley Spratt

Saxhaug continued.

The acquisition boundary of Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut encompasses the Connecticut River watershed.

*Republished with permission
Refuge Update January/February
2014*



Exploring nature. Photo courtesy of U.S. Forest Service.

Paws on the Ground

Dogs that work with federal wildlife officers need the capabilities of a top-notch police service dog—and more. They must be able to “work all day around gunfire and still make a compliance check with a waterfowl hunter, or work a beach with 300 people and still be ready to assist with an emergency arrest,” says Darryn Witt, national coordinator of the National Wildlife Refuge System canine program and an officer in Illinois at Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

The Refuge System has eight canine officers, each assigned a dog because they expressed interest. The Refuge System is aiming to add one to two canine teams each year. “We need continuity among our individual canine teams,” says Witt, “as well as consistency in dog selection, training and the way the dogs are deployed.” New canine teams will be established based on officer and field station interest, funding and local need.

Canines are taught to protect officers and locate contraband—from narcotics to antlers, ginseng and waterfowl or game over the limit or out of season. “If we have to search for something, I can do it in a fraction of the time with a dog compared to four or five officers,” says federal wildlife zone officer Eddie Brannon in Florida, the first refuge law enforcement officer to request a dog in the 1990s. Brannon says he and German shepherd A.J. have helped



Canines like Rudi, whose handler is federal wildlife officer Darryn Witt at Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, are skilled at protecting officers and sniffing out contraband. Eric Tomasovic/USFWS.

locate lost hunters, children and people with Alzheimer’s disease.

Witt’s canine, Rudi, can smell marijuana in a tackle box; he can also sniff out heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine. Division of Refuge Law Enforcement deputy chief Rich Johnston says groups of narcotics smugglers have abandoned their drugs and run in the presence of a dog. Dogs also have detected illegal, hidden lead shot.

Protecting Officers

Federal wildlife officers usually work alone and often in remote areas. Dogs can be a force multiplier. “If I show up alone,” says Witt, “I have my own presence. When I bring Rudi with me, it’s a different level of officer presence. People have a lot of respect for the canines.”

Most law enforcement dogs used in the United States are bred in Europe. German and Dutch shepherds and Belgian malinois are considered the best all-around breeds. Refuge System dogs are purchased from American vendors that provide training with handlers after the dogs’ initial law enforcement

training. Dog and handler attend 40 hours of refresher training each year. The dogs are certified annually by national accrediting organizations. They must be high-energy but also playful enough to perceive the search for evidence as a

game with a possible reward. They are trained to work in extreme heat and cold, in boats and on rugged terrain.

Law enforcement dogs develop a relationship with their handlers. “It’s 24/7 care of a very expensive piece of government equipment,” says Witt. He refutes the presumption that these are “edgy dogs waiting for a fight. They can be friendly, but on command, they can apprehend someone.” In fact, Witt says, Rudi can be extremely social, so he insists that all those friendly people on the beach not pet Rudi so the dog knows he is working.

Johnston calls the canine program “a field initiative that needs to be supported by Headquarters. It directly helps protect the officers and the natural resources of the Refuge System.” And he quotes Refuge System Chief Jim Kurth: “If we can’t put more boots on the ground, we can put more paws on the ground.”

*By Karen Leggett
Refuge System Branch of
Communications*

Transforming Theory into Practice: Surrogate Species and the Midwest Region

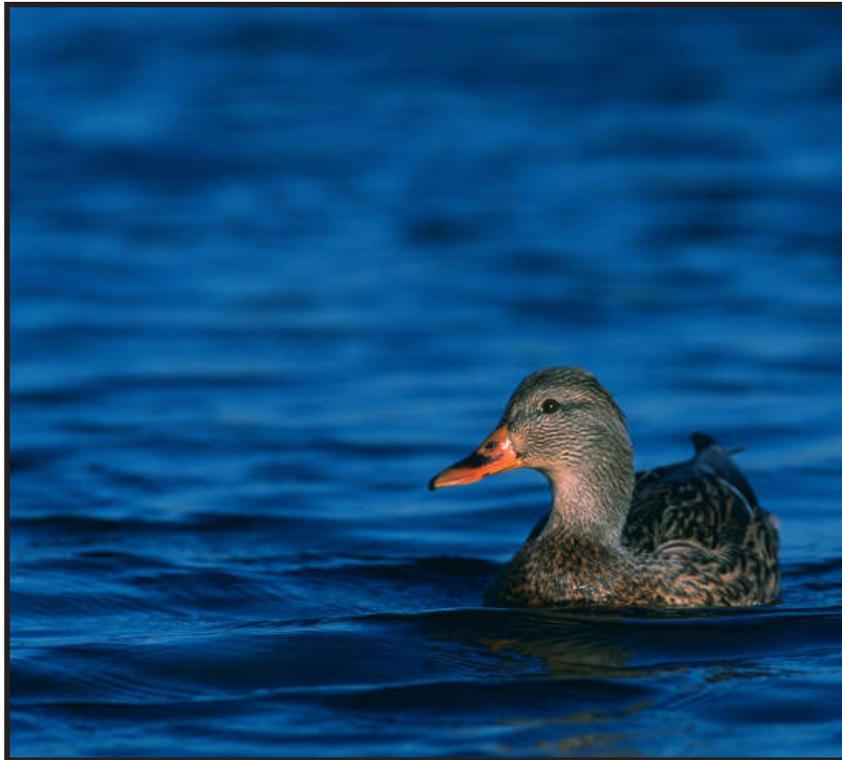
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is implementing the surrogate species approach to help us more efficiently and effectively fulfill our mission. The approach allows us to prioritize our conservation actions by strategically directing our resources and people to benefit multiple species across a landscape.

Midwest Region staff has had time to think critically about the surrogate species approach to strategic habitat conservation. In July 2012, Service staff were asked to review and submit comments on the surrogate species approach and draft technical guidance. The Midwest Region hosted four workshops, numerous smaller meetings, conference calls and informal discussions for staff and partners. Comments were accepted through March 2013.

Selecting Species

Starting in spring 2013 the Midwest Region's Surrogate Species Technical Team, comprised of representatives from all Service programs, worked with state partners to use the draft guidance as a basis for developing a process for selecting surrogate species. The team's work resulted in a preliminary surrogate species list called "Version 1.0."

Version 1.0 only identifies surrogates species for the geographic area of the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and



Mallard hen. The initial selection process for surrogate species in the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative is complete!/USFWS.

Big Rivers (ETPBR) Landscape Conservation Cooperative.

Implementing Surrogate Species

Work on Version 1.0 will continue in 2014 as we follow the SHC framework to implement the surrogate species approach. The Midwest Region will continue to evaluate Version 1.0 to determine whether it should be revised in any way.

Continuing Forward

Regional leadership will continue to engage staff, state agencies, tribal governments, conservation partners and the American public to improve the surrogate species selection development and implementation process.

In 2014 the region will initiate the surrogate species selection process for the Upper Midwest Great Lakes LCC geography. The selection process will be informed by the process used for the ETPBR geography. As in development of the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers LCC Version 1.0 list, representatives from all Service programs and select partners will be asked to participate.

To view the Surrogate Species Version 1.0 summary report

for the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers LCC, visit: www.fws.gov/midwest/science/surrogatespecies/.

*By Katie Steiger-Meister
External Affairs*

Sixty-Minute Seminars Offered in RO



Jennifer Kaufmann, a certified financial counselor with LSS Financial Counseling Service, begins the January 2014 60-Minute Seminar on Identify Theft, for a gathering at the Regional Office/USFWS.

Wills, Trusts and Estate Planning

The Regional Office Human Resources division played host to a pair of 60-minute Seminar programs with potentially more to come. The first 60-minute seminar on “Wills, Trusts and Estate Planning” was held in November 2013, and was very well attended. The most recent seminar, “Identity Theft: Ounce of Prevention and Pound of Cure”, was held on January 8, 2014, to another large turnout. Region 3 is committed to providing access to the training sessions for all interested employees and plans to continue this series as interest warrants. Future programs will be announced by email in the ABA news notes.

*By Larry Dean
External Affairs*

Sharing Our Story with Tribes and Pow Wow Guests

Region 3 was invited to host an information table by Pow Wow sponsors the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College.

Native Americans from all tribes were invited to participate in the Pow Wow and the general public was invited to observe. Approximately 1,020 people attended the Pow Wow and representatives from 28 public local, city, state and Federal land conservation and community service organizations participated in the event.

The Service representatives provided those stopping by with information about the mission and work of the Service, career and volunteer



Ashland Fishery Resource Office hosted a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service information table at a traditional Pow Wow at the Black Bear Casino's Otter Creek Event Center in Carlton, Minnesota. Chuck Traxler/USFWS.

opportunities, and overviews of each Program Area.

*By Larry Dean
External Affairs*

Crops, Ducks and Climate Change

The Perfect Storm of Changes May Cause the Duck Factory to Move West

The northern Great Plains – one of the most diverse, intact grasslands left on the planet – provides habitat for a variety of sagebrush and grassland birds, some of which are threatened or of special conservation status, including the long-billed curlew, piping plover, mountain plover and greater sage-grouse.

The Prairie Pothole Region at the eastern boundary of the northern Great Plains is the most productive water bird area in North America, producing up to 6.5 million ducks each year that migrate as far away as Arkansas.

In collaboration with the Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC), the University of Wyoming, World Wildlife Fund and Ducks Unlimited, Inc., produced a model of the likelihood of converting grassland to cropland and potential impacts on waterfowl populations in the northern Great



Pintail ducklings/USFWS.

Plains. The model projects that under current economic and climate conditions, grassland in North Dakota is most at risk of being converted.

By 2030, if crop prices continue to increase, North and South Dakota will lose three million acres of additional grassland, while grassland acres in Montana, Wyoming and Nebraska will remain relatively constant.

Removing all government payments decreases the average probability of conversion by an average of three or 30 percent in areas dominated by cropland. Under climate change, the likelihood of conversion increases in areas with a high chance of conversion and decreases in areas with a low chance of conversion.

Climate change may shift 10 to 20 percent of the waterfowl that previously settled in North Dakota to Montana and South Dakota.

“Across all the climate and economic scenarios we considered, grassland habitat and waterfowl production are most at risk in North Dakota,” said lead author Dr. Ben Rashford with the University of Wyoming. Under all climate change scenarios, North Dakota will still hold a significant percentage of breeding waterfowl. However, if climate change shifts some waterfowl westward, the importance of wetlands in Montana and South Dakota may also increase in the future. Thus, devising a strategy that will protect waterfowl across the wetland habitats

of the northern Great Plains will be essential to ensuring resilience in a changing future.

This recently completed research provides relevant data for decision-makers who must balance the need to produce food and fuel with the desire to protect habitat for important grassland and wetland species.

Click to read the [fact sheet](#) or [full report](#).

For more information about the efforts of the Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC to promote effective conservation through collaboration and sound science, visit <http://plainsandprairiepotholeslcc.org>

By Anne Schrag, World Wildlife Fund and Ashley Spratt, External Affairs



Conversion to cropland in western South Dakota. Photo courtesy of Day's Edge Productions.

The 17th Annual Minnesota Waterfowl Symposium A Success

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Birds and State Programs staff, in partnership with the Minnesota Waterfowl Association and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, hosted the 17th annual Minnesota Waterfowl Symposium, February 1, in Bloomington.

A host of hunters, outdoor enthusiasts and natural resource managers attended the day-long event to celebrate Minnesota's waterfowl and wetland resources and discuss issues surrounding this year's highlighted species: blue-winged teal and wild rice. The Minnesota Waterfowl Symposium is geared toward giving Minnesota's waterfowl hunters and enthusiasts the opportunity to interact with waterfowl biologists and managers representing various conservation agencies and organizations.

"Blue-winged teal is an important species to Minnesota hunters and wild rice is an important food for both people and migrating waterfowl," said David Scott, Assistant Regional Director for Migratory Birds and State Programs. "This event gave us a great opportunity to share information as important issues are nearing decisions like whether the abundant 7-million plus blue-winged teal population warrants a special season for hunters in Minnesota."

The day was filled with a host of great presentations, including Steve



Hunters, outdoor enthusiasts and natural resource managers settle in at the 17th Annual Minnesota Waterfowl Symposium before the host of presentations begin featuring blue-winged teal and wild rice issues/USFWS.

Cordts, a waterfowl biologist with the Minnesota DNR, and Ron Gatti, Wisconsin DNR, presenting information about the biology, ecology and harvest management of blue-winged teal. Peter David, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, and Ann Geisen, a shallow lakes specialist with the Minnesota DNR, were also on hand to discuss the ecology and restoration of wild rice and what management is currently occurring in Minnesota.

Organizers scheduled a variety of other interesting presentations throughout the day to appeal to a wide audience. Renowned wildlife photographer Michael Furtman gave a presentation about photographing waterfowl and capturing in photos your hunting experiences. U.S. Geological Survey Wildlife Researcher Josh Stafford discussed using weather radar to track duck migrations and antique decoy collector Robert Sauer gave a presentation about collecting decoys for profit and pleasure. The day concluded with a question-and-answer session with

Minnesota DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr.

In addition to the presentations, the symposium featured a series of informational and demonstration booths covering topics such as waterfowl carving, cooking with wild rice and wild game, gun repair and fitting, and various habitat management projects going

on throughout the state. Attendees also had the opportunity to check out the Minnesota Decoy Collectors Association Annual Decoy Show hosted across the hall at the same location.

Following the symposium, the Minnesota Waterfowl Association held its 5th annual Minnesota Waterfowl Hall of Fame Banquet where significant contributors to Minnesota's waterfowl legacy were recognized.

--Larry Dean
External Affairs



U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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

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