

ALPENA FWCO NEWSLETTER

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, 480 W. Fletcher St., Alpena, MI 49707
<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/alpena> Alpena@fws.gov 989-356-5102

Woodcock Habitat Improved through Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

By Heather Rawlings

Woodcock populations are in decline throughout the eastern United States. Based on 45 years of monitoring, biologists have found population declines stem from reduction or elimination of their habitat due to development, lack of management in their remaining habitat, and an absence of natural events that create early successional forest habitat, such as fire. Woodcock require early successional forested habitat, and forests are only utilized by woodcock for the first 20 years following a cut.

A pilot project was initiated in February 2012 on Canada Creek Ranch (Ranch), a large tract of private land (10,000+ acres) located in Montmorency County, MI. Alders growing along the floodplain of Canada Creek were mature and had not been disturbed for years, making the habitat unusable by most wildlife. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program matched Ranch funding to contract mechanical removal of the alders. Blocks of mature alders were clear-cut in 100 ft. swaths perpendicular to the creek. Healthy cedars and pines were left standing to provide habitat for other species. A total of six acres were cut the first year.

During the 2012 summer months, wildlife was observed using the newly cut site including deer, elk, black bear, many songbird species, ruffed grouse and at least two woodcock. Ranch members were pleased with the results of the cut, and additional blocks (totaling approximately ten acres) were successfully cut March 1, 2013. This is a multi-year project scheduled to continue for a minimum of three more years, with a total of over 100 acres of alder and aspen habitat to be cut to allow regeneration of early successional forests.

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*The tag alder immediately following the cut, March 2013.
Image credit: USFWS.*



Tag alder the summer following the February 2012 cut, heavily browsed by deer and elk. Inset photo-Tag alder re-growth the summer following the February 2012 cut. Photo credits: Canada Creek Ranch.

Bat Hibernacula Workday

By Heather Rawlings

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in conjunction with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, Eastern Michigan University, Friends of Rockport State Recreation Area, and Alpena Public Schools have teamed up to protect a man-made bat hibernacula located at an old quarry site north of Alpena, Mich. This site, along the Lake Huron shoreline, became a part of Rockport State Recreation Area in 2011. Three species of bats (big brown bat, little brown bat, and tricolored bat) were located on-site in 2010 by Eastern Michigan University staff. This is one of only two known bat hibernacula in the lower peninsula of Michigan and the only site on Lake Huron. The two hibernacula are each 10-foot by 12-foot concrete tunnels commonly called surge tunnels, which were used to transport gravel through the quarry when the area was being actively mined.

The group has joined forces to protect both the public and the bats by sealing off the surge tunnels with the exception of one gated area that can be used by bats and bat researchers to access the tunnels. The tunnels, with the exception of the gated area, will be covered with five to 10 feet of overburden (on-site gravel), which will help insulate the tunnels to create a slightly warmer and more favorable environment for the overwintering bats. Alpena High School students will be fabricating and attaching the metal gates to the surge tunnels to secure the winter hibernacula. They will also be building and mounting bat houses that will provide summer roosting habitat. Construction is planned for late May.

A small subgroup met on-site at the northern surge tunnel on March 28 to dig out a small section of the tunnel that had been filled in with gravel by accident in the late fall, November 2012. Our fear was that bats had been trapped in the surge tunnel by this fill and our goal was to dig out enough gravel to open up tunnel access for the bats. This was the first time the ground had thawed enough to allow us to try to open up the site. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists Anjanette Bowen and Heather Rawlings, Michigan Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation staff David Deckett and Eric Braun, Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative Americorps intern Helen Ann Prince, and Friends group member Bill Grigg dug for about an



Biologist Heather Rawlings digging in the surge tunnel to open up passage for bats. Photo credit: USFWS.



After the digging was completed a small opening is apparent. Photo credit: USFWS. Inset photo—Group photo at the end of the workday, left to right: Heather Rawlings (USFWS), Anjanette Bowen (USFWS), Eric Braun (MDNR), Helen Ann Prince (GLSI, Americorps) and David Dekett (MDNR). Photo credit: Bill Grigg, Friends of Rockport State Park.

hour to clear an opening the circumference of a five gallon bucket. Our hope is that the bats will be able to fly or crawl out of the tunnel to gain their freedom this spring. The tunnel openings will be completely uncovered later this spring, the gates fitted, and a permanent solution will be found to protect this site.

One exciting aspect of this project is that none of the Michigan bat populations have acquired White-Nosed Syndrome to date. If and/or when the fungus makes its way to these populations, there is potential for this man-made site to undergo annual disinfection to keep future generations healthy.

Alpena Habitat Biologists Find a Game Camera to be a Useful Tool for Monitoring Habitat Improvement Projects

By Joseph Gerbyshak

For the past two field seasons, biologists from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) have used a game camera to monitor habitat improvement projects. Using the game camera to take daily images from a fixed location has proven to be a useful tool for documenting project progression and capturing ecological responses to restoration actions over time. The game camera also has GPS transmission capabilities, allowing biologists and interested partners to view daily photos from their desktop and remotely monitor the status of the project in real time. This allows biologists to oversee the development of a project, alert them to complications, and determine when a site visit is warranted, saving countless trips to the project site by both biologists and interested partners. This is a time saving feature since most of the aquatic habitat restoration projects the station is involved with are located a distance from the office. Once the project is complete, the daily images can be easily made into a slide show or time-lapse video with free software available online, resulting in a concise synopsis of the project activities.

During the 2011 field season, the game camera was used to document a small dam removal on Miller Creek, a cold-water tributary to the Thunder Bay River in northeast Michigan. The camera documented the dewatering and revegetation of the impoundment, channel formation, dam removal, and installation of a fish friendly culvert. One unanticipated benefit of the game camera was that it captured many different species of wildlife using the former impoundment and newly formed riparian zone. Over the 2012 field season, the game camera was used to remotely monitor a culvert removal and bridge replacement project on the Black River in Alcona County, MI. Biologists and project partners were able to monitor project status and document removal of an undersized culverts and the assembly of a new timber bridge. Throughout the 2013 field season the camera will be used to monitor the installation of a rock ramp (designed for fish passage) at the Frankenmuth dam on the Cass River. The game camera is an ideal tool for monitoring this project because the construction will take place over several weeks and is located a great distance from the field office.



The impoundment on Miller Creek prior to dam removal. Photo credit: USFWS.



Dewatering the impoundment. Photo credit: USFWS.



Channel formation. Photo credit: USFWS.



Left: Revegetation of the former impoundment. Middle: Removal of the remaining dam structure and installation of the new, bottomless culvert. Right: Miller Creek – post dam removal. Photo credits: USFWS.

Status of Lake Trout in Lake Huron Presentation Given to the Alpena Rotary Club

By Chris Olds

On March 4, 2013, Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) Fish Biologist Chris Olds spoke to a group of about 50 Alpena Rotary Club members about the status of lake trout in Lake Huron. The status update included a brief overview of how the lake trout stocking program has evolved from the early 1950's to the present day, with stocking now being conducted off the M/V Spencer F. Baird. Olds also

highlighted the assessment work being conducted around Lake Huron by the different partner agencies. The Rotarians really enjoyed the historical stocking photos provided by Paul Haver (Jordan River National Fish Hatchery) and were intrigued by the increasing numbers of wild lake trout being documented in Lake Huron.

Alpena FWCO Invited to Talk with Students at Wilson School

By Adam Kowalski

Fisheries biologists Adam Kowalski and Steve Gambicki were invited to talk to 3rd grade students at Wilson Elementary School in Alpena, MI. Since the students were currently learning about animal adaptations, Kowalski and Gambicki presented information about some local animal adaptations, including some exotics, as well as human adaptations. The students were very willing to learn and had a good time working on worksheets that reinforced their understanding of adaptations.

This activity was given to two 3rd grade classes of about 25 students each. Alpena has been working with Wilson School for several years and has been a great program getting the children involved in the outdoors and allowing Alpena staff to share their knowledge.

The Friends of the Lake Huron Watershed group meets at the USFWS-Alpena FWCO office on the third Wednesday of each month at 4:30 p.m. All are welcome to attend!

Bat Presentation

By Heather Rawlings

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in conjunction with the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (GLSI), Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Eastern Michigan University (EMU), Friends of Rockport State Recreation Area, and Alpena Public Schools have teamed up to protect a man-made bat hibernacula located at an old quarry site north of Alpena, MI. This site along the Lake Huron shoreline became a part of Rockport State Recreation Area in 2011. Three species of bats (big brown bat, little brown bat, and tricolored bat) were located on-site in 2009 by EMU staff. This is one of only two known bat hibernacula in the lower peninsula of Michigan and the only site on Lake Huron.

The group has teamed up to protect both the public and the bats by sealing off the surge tunnels with the exception of one gated area that can be used by bats and bat researchers to access the tunnels. Alpena High School students are in the process of fabricating and attaching the metal gates to the surge tunnels to secure the winter hibernacula. They are also building and mounting bat houses that will provide summer roosting habitat. Construction is planned for late May.

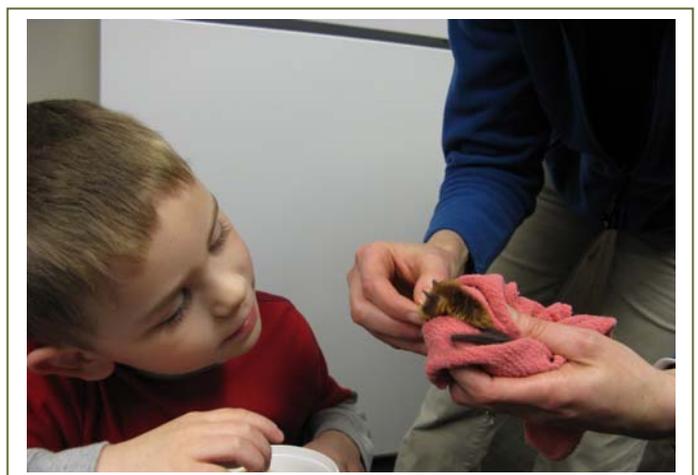
To promote this restoration project and educate both the students and project partners, the Service and GLSI sponsored a speaker from the Organization for Bat Conservation (OBC) to travel to Alpena on April 9 and give two presentations. One presentation was held at the Alpena High School for teachers and students involved with the project and one was held in the evening for the general public at NOAA's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center. Heather Rawlings (Service biologist) introduced the speaker and gave a brief overview of the local bat hibernaculum project. Michelle Maust (OBC) brought four live bats: a native big brown bat, a Jamaican leaf-nosed bat, an African fruit bat, and an Egyptian fruit bat. Participation was solid at both presentations, with approximately 90 students and teachers at the first presentation and 50 members of the general public at the evening program. People quickly became enthusiastic about the bats once they realized how small and nonthreatening our native bats are and many questions were asked. The MDNR was so pleased with the quality of the program that they have requested OBC to return for the Rockport State Recreation Area open house scheduled for June.



An African fruit bat. Photo credit: USFWS.



Michelle Maust, OBC, allowing the students a close look at an African fruit bat. Photo credit: USFWS.



James Rawlings searching for mealworms to feed the big brown bat, the largest native bat in Michigan. Photo credit: USFWS.

Invasive Species in the Classroom

By Steven Gambicki

For four years, staff from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) in Alpena, MI have been involved in teaching students about environmental topics that meet their science curriculum. This school year, Alpena FWCO staff adopted two classes of third grade students at Wilson Elementary School (Alpena Public School System) located in Wilson Township, MI. Interaction with Alpena FWCO's staff provides students with unique hands on science experience, and insights from professionals in the conservation field. Students enjoy the presentations and change of pace from their daily routine. One student, who could have missed a day of school due to a painful dental procedure, made his mom drive him to school so he wouldn't miss the presentation.

This spring, Alpena FWCO biologists Steven Gambicki and Heather Rawlings instructed the third graders about invasive species found in the Great Lakes region. Invasive species have been causing severe environmental and economic losses in the Great Lakes for many years. Over 180 non-native aquatic species from around the world are currently found in the Great Lakes ecosystem. Informing the public about invasive species is important to help stem the spread and introduction of new invasives. Students learned that a species is designated as invasive when it is not native to an ecosystem and its introduction has caused harm to the economy, human health, or environment of that ecosystem. Once established, it is extremely difficult to control the spread of invasive species.

Students were shown preserved samples of select invasive species including purple loosestrife, round goby, rusty crayfish, zebra mussels and sea lamprey, and were informed about the harm these species can do to native plants and animals. They also learned how invasive species are spread, and some of the things that they can do to help stop that spread. The highlight of the afternoon involved showing students live sea lampreys at each stage of their life cycle - ammocoete (larval stage), transformer and adult. Students were able to touch and have an up-close view of the live sea lampreys. Andrea Miehl, Hammond Bay Biological Station, provided the live



Students enjoyed the hands on approach of the presentation. Photo credit: USFWS.



Steven Gambicki, Alpena FWCO, demonstrates how a sea lamprey attaches to its prey. Photo credit: USFWS.

lampreys for the presentation. Students were given a quiz to reinforce what they had learned during the presentation, they were then asked to name the adult sea lamprey. Some of the more creative names submitted by the students were Big Bad Bill, Big Mama and Killer.

What do Accountants, Doctors, Lawyers, and a Fish Biologist Have in Common? A Chosen Path Towards Their Career!

By Chris Olds

That is what a group of Fairview High School students heard on March 20, 2013. A group of individuals from different professions took time out of their day to talk about the steps they have taken to allow them to work in their chosen field. Chris Olds spoke to a group of 30 students about a day in the life of a fisheries biologist at the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO). Chris gave an overview of his background with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and why he decided to become a fisheries biologist. He outlined some of the

curriculum required for obtaining a degree in biology and spoke about the universities where he earned his degrees. He also outlined his work schedule and the salary range for Fish and Wildlife Service Biologists. After discussing current programs at the Alpena FWCO, Chris opened the conversation up to questions from the students. Many of them wanted to know about sea lamprey and zebra mussels in the Great Lakes and where the best fishing spots were on Lake Huron.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Alpena FWCO
480 W. Fletcher Street
Alpena, MI 49707

Phone:
989-356-5102

Fax:
989-356-4651

E-Mail:
alpena@fws.gov

"Our Mission is working with others to protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

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