



**U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

# **Inside Region 3**

*July 2012*



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The Regional Director chooses paddling event to kick off summer 2012.

*By Tom Melius*



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*By Katie Steiger-Meister*



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*By Drew Becker*

### On the Cover:

#### Master Master Turning

*A very adaptable tool, the Marsh Master is used on many national wildlife refuges to fight wildland fire and respond to emergencies. Here, the instructor (r) demonstrates to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius (l) how to turn the vehicle on water at the latest regional heavy equipment safety training at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. Service photo by Tina Shaw.*



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Eric Nelson accepts "The Torch Award" from Regional Fire Management Coordinator, Dan Dearborn.

*By Lynda Knutsen*



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USGS Northeast Climate Science Center and Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative collaborate.

*By Ashley Spratt*

## FLY BYE



Above: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius paddling the Quad Cities Water Trail on June 7 during the America's Great Outdoors Summer of Paddling Event. Service photo.

It seems that the summer is just flying by. Already it's the fourth of July. Perhaps it's speeding by because June has been a very busy month. I was recently in Chicago meeting with other federal executives in the Midwest Region to discuss ways on which we can collaborate on shared efforts. Our group, known as the Midwest Natural Resources Group, looks for activities that allow us to leverage our resources to gain a better return. It was collaboration at its finest. I also spent a few days in Wichita, Kan., at the annual Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. In addition to talking about Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and other conservation issues, we also discussed the role of social media in the outdoors and conservation community. I met with all of our state DNR directors and gave them an update on significant natural resource issues such as Asian Carp.

I also had the opportunity to meet up with instructors and staff from across the region for the latest regional heavy equipment safety training at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. It's really great to see our instructors helping others become more knowledgeable about these unique pieces of equipment to help keep all of our employees safe.

In late June, I visited Madison, Wis., to participate in an International White-Nose Syndrome Symposium. And Charlie Wooley has also been on the go--to Russia where there is a 16 hour time difference. You can read about his trip on page 4. Both Charlie and I had the opportunity to attend some fabulous America's Great Outdoors events in Illinois and Indiana last month.

I was also in Washington D.C. for a couple of days helping to develop early season waterfowl hunting regulations. Our process brings together representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the states. Another great example of collaboration. And at the time of your reading, I will have returned to Washington D.C. in the acting capacity for now retired Deputy Director Greg Siekaniec, which will make the summer whisk by even faster. I am, however, looking forward to coming back July 14 for the Duck Stamp Event.

Have a safe and happy Fourth of July!

*Tom Melius*  
Midwest Regional Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom O. Melius".



Left: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius noodles a big catfish. Service photo.

# Conservation in a Global Context: The Importance of the Amur River

Since 1972, the United States/Russia Environmental Agreement has been a mechanism for cooperative conservation efforts between the two countries. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wildlife Without Borders Russian Program coordinates implementation of the conservation component of the Agreement.

This past May, Midwest Deputy Regional Director Charlie Wooley ventured to Russia to talk about the importance of free flowing rivers in international conservation. Wooley was joined by Steve Kohl, East Asia Branch Chief for the Service's International Affairs program, and Chuck Lane from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Research and Development. This small delegation has flown across the world four times in the past eight years to meet with government officials and biologists from China and Russia to discuss important conservation issues of the Amur River.

The Amur River, which forms much of the border between southeastern Siberia and China, is one of the longest free-flowing rivers in the world. The river and its adjacent wetlands provides vital habitat for many important species including oriental white stork, Japanese crane, eastern white stork and Kaluga sturgeon.

Wooley, Kohl and Lane flew into Blagoveshchensk, Russia and traveled to the Khingansky Reserve to meet with representatives from Russia and China. There they listened to what conservation activities the two countries are undertaking to protect the Amur River. Wooley, Kohl and Lane were in turn able to share with the group the types of challenges confronted by the U.S. with river restoration projects.



Chuck, Steve, Charlie, Slava and Misha at the Khingansky Reserve Headquarters Building in Khingansky, Russia. Service photo.

“Experiences like these sharpen our resolve to do the best that we can to protect what we have left in the U.S.,” said Wooley. “It also reminds us that there are still important global resources left to protect.”

Wooley credits Steve Kohl's exemplary diplomacy skills, including fluency in Russian and Chinese, as building the foundation for the Service's presence in talks on the Amur River. At a professional level, Wooley feels that the trio's experiences in Russia and China over the years has demonstrated the importance of trust and rapport in building credibility with Russian and Chinese biologists.

Wooley, Kohl and Lane also attended an international scientific and

practical conference on the Ecological and Biological Wellbeing of the Animal World during their visit to Russia.

The attendance of Americans at the conference was noted with great interest by the local television and print media. Though the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service primarily works with natural resources in the U.S., experiences like Wooley's trip to Russia highlight the role of the Service abroad.

“I really appreciate that the Service gives us the latitude to think globally,” said Wooley, “and in a small but significant way, making the world a better place for all of us.”

--By Katie Steiger-Meister  
*External Affairs*

# A Diverse Perspective

Necedah National Wildlife Refuge would like to introduce you to their newest volunteer, Aaron Konsitzke. Konsitzke started working with refuge staff in April 2012 and has already learned a great deal about facilities management and maintenance, as well as visitor services work. The article below, written by Aaron, provides insight into his duties.

Hello everyone! My name is Aaron Konsitzke. I'm 23 years old and I'm a volunteer at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Necedah, Wis. I have many duties and jobs when I volunteer at the refuge. Some days I work outside cleaning the trails. Among other things, I clean trails by looking for trash on the ground or by clearing goose droppings off the sidewalks. I see if the brochures by the front kiosk are empty and then restock them. I also maintain outside restrooms and check if the bubbler water pressure is correct. If it is not, I inform the manager at the refuge.

The Necedah Refuge visitor center is amazing and a great place to visit! Many of my tasks are done inside the center. Another thing that I do is clean the interactive display screens and windows. Many of the young visitors always want to touch the windows, which is why this job has to be done after each group comes to visit.

I think the refuge is an amazing place to work because I get to feed the two turtles that are in Ranger Kara's office. Feeding turtles is no easy job. First, I put the turtle being fed inside a separate tank. I put fresh water in their tank, and have to give them fresh worms or a tablespoon of dog food to eat. Then I have to wait about 20 minutes for each turtle to finish their



Above: Volunteer Aaron Konsitzke orients visitors at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge visitor center. Service photos.

food. Every Thursday, I pick up all the old apple pieces inside their tank. I have to remember which one is which, because the boy is not very friendly to other people. The boy has red eyes and the girl has black eyes.

Some days, my duties take me outside where I help take care of the butterfly garden. I am given a stack of old newspapers in a bucket. I head over to the shaded side of the picnic table and rip the paper in half twice. They use this paper to put over the weeds on the ground. Although, I am not really sure why this is done.

One of my other jobs is to help greet and welcome people and answer any questions that they may have about the refuge and the wildlife here.

During this experience at Necedah Refuge, I have made friends from all over the world and they all seem very happy to meet me. Many people come to see whooping crane, as this is one of the only places in the world you can see wild whoopers

We get many buses here every summer with lots of children on their school trips, too. These visitors get to see many different types of birds, snakes, trees, bugs, fish, deer and other wild animals all in their natural habitat! Visitors appreciate their experiences on the refuge.

I enjoy helping out the wildlife refuge and I am happy that the people I work with are very nice to me and easy to get along with. All of them accept me for who I am and for what I can do!

There is one thing that I forgot to tell you about myself - I have cerebral palsy and use a motorized wheelchair to get around. I have had this condition since I was a baby. Some might describe me as a "technological" kind of person, as I'm always using the computer at home or an iPod or my new iPad! My favorite hobbies are playing basketball and texting.

-- Aaron Konsitzke  
Volunteer

# Partners Protect Chicago Area Eagles from Power Lines

The Service's Rock Island and Chicago field offices, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, and Commonwealth Edison, partnered this spring to protect bald eagles at Tampier Slough Woods, a Forest Preserve

of shapes, sizes and colors, but they all serve the same function: to make the line more visible to birds. Two helicopters were used to install the diverters. The installation was a success, and the eagles at Tampier

Slough should now be able to safely avoid the line.

The simple fact that bald eagles are nesting so close to the City of Chicago speaks volumes for the conservation efforts taking place in Cook County, as well as the value local residents place on wildlife. The Endangered Species Act brought bald eagles back from the brink of extinction, and the efforts of the Service and its partners continue to aide bald eagles in their recovery.

*--Drew Becker  
Rock Island ES Field Office*



Helicopters are used to install diverters to help eagles avoid power lines. Photo by ComEd.

property. A high-voltage power line transects Tampier Slough Woods near a nesting pair of bald eagles, and the partners were concerned for the eagles and their offspring. While the lines carrying electricity were large enough in diameter for birds to detect while flying, the group feared the eagles, especially young eagles, would not be able to avoid the small static wires, which bleed lightning surges off the power lines during a storm. ComEd worked with the Service to design a plan to ensure the long-term viability of this nesting location. ComEd stepped forward with a strategy to reduce the risks of eagles colliding with the line by installing bird diverters onto the line. Bird diverters come in a variety



Workers prepare to install a bird diverter to protect nesting eagles near Chicago. Photo by ComEd.

# The Passing of the “Torch”

Regional Fire Management Coordinator, Dan Dearborn made a trip to Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota this spring to present the 2011 Region 3 “Torch Award.”

The Region 3, Refuges -Fire Management Program has long recognized that its most important resource is its personnel. Dedication to conserving habitat and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service mission is a tradition in our Region. The Torch Award, presented annually, recognizes personnel who exemplify the “best of the best.”

As with any program of this magnitude and complexity, no one person is responsible for its success or failure. We succeed or fail collectively. But, within any successful organization, a few individuals stand out and go above and beyond what’s normally expected of an employee. In 2011, Eric Nelson was one of those individuals. Nelson is a career seasonal range technician with the Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge fire program. He has worked at Agassiz for six years. His expertise in operating equipment safely has saved the station time and money, whether working on small equipment



Above: Eric Nelson (left) accepting “The Torch Award” from Regional Fire Management Coordinator, Dan Dearborn (right). Service photo.

or larger tracked vehicles. Eric makes good sound decisions in the field both on prescribed fires and wildfires. He is a knowledgeable, patient teacher.

Below is an excerpt from Eric’s award nomination:

“In this time of budget cuts and reduced staffing, Eric has stepped up and filled the void. Agassiz has not lost any burn days due to equipment or burn units not being

ready. In addition to the normal work load Agassiz also experienced a prescribed fire-turned wildfire that has lasted over six months. Nelson’s assistance during this time was invaluable. Keeping equipment operational during less than ideal conditions assisted in containing a peat fire in a very short time with minimal impact on the landscape. Nelson...has the heart and soul of the type of individual that we need more of.”

Nelson will be recognized officially at the next Midwest Region Fire Management meeting.

*Lynda Knutsen,  
Agassiz NWR*

# Scientists Speak on Climate Change

More than 40 scientists from across the Midwest conservation community gathered this May to establish science priorities as part of a five-year science plan under development by U.S. Geological Survey's Northeast Climate Science Center. The session was led by Rachel Muir, interim director of the recently established USGS Northeast Climate Science Center, and coordinated by the Illinois Natural History Survey, and the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative, a complimentary natural resources partnership dedicated to identifying and addressing landscape scale stressors on conservation, protection and restoration activities in our nation's "cornbelt".

The USGS Northeast Climate Science Center was established to generate research and science-based understanding that would better equip natural resources managers and decision makers to respond to impacts of climate change on natural resources. The Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative takes a similar, but broader approach to identifying science needs in relation to large scale stressors across specific Midwest ecosystems. Both partnerships are focused on natural resources issues in the Midwestern United States, although the LCC focuses its energy on the heavily agricultural landscape that stretches from southwest Ohio westward across to eastern Kansas, Oklahoma and Nebraska, and segments of Iowa, South Dakota and Minnesota.

"Still in its infancy, the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative,

used this opportunity to jump-start the conversation about landscape level stressors to the natural resources of our agricultural communities, rivers and streams, grasslands, forests, and urban areas," said Glen Salmon, coordinator of the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative. "Working alongside Illinois Natural History Survey and USGS Northeast Climate Science Center, we were able to create an open dialogue that will help not only identify science needs in relation to climate change, but also help the LCC identify its own priorities and concentrate the partnership's efforts in a strategic way."

Landscape Conservation Cooperatives address large scale natural resource challenges that transcend political and jurisdictional boundaries and require a networked approach to conservation. One that is holistic, collaborative, and grounded in science – to ensure the sustainability of America's land, water, wildlife and cultural resources. LCCs collectively form a national network of land, water, wildlife, and cultural resource managers, scientists, and interested public and private organizations— within the U.S. and across our international borders—that share a common need for scientific information in conservation.

--Ashley Spratt,  
*External Affairs*



Above: Rachel Muir, Northeast Climate Science Center Interim Director welcomes scientists from across the Midwest to discuss science priorities for the USGS Northeast Climate Science Center. The discussion also set the foundation for the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative to develop science need priorities for the natural resources that make up the nation's "cornbelt" region. Service photo.

# Building Our Regional Directorate Team



Above: The Midwest Region welcomes Craig Czarnecki as the newest member to the Regional Directorate Team. Service photo.

The Midwest Region welcomes Craig Czarnecki as the newest member to the Regional Directorate Team. As Assistant Regional Director for Science Applications, Czarnecki will join colleagues across U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service programs to refine science priorities and help guide our response to landscape stressors. Utilizing adaptive resource management and structured decision making, Czarnecki will also supervise Midwest Region Landscape Conservation Cooperative coordinators and play a critical role in cross-programmatic collaboration within the Service and across natural resource agency boundaries and jurisdictions.

For the past two years, he has served as coordinator of the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative. Prior to this position,

Craig served as the field supervisor of the East Lansing Ecological Services Field Office in Michigan where he developed long-lasting relationships with natural resource agencies, and state and academic partners vested in Great Lakes and Midwest conservation issues. Czarnecki's early experience as both legislative aid and senior staff biologist for the Fisheries Program in Washington, D.C., also equips him with a working knowledge of natural resources issues at a national level. Please welcome Craig Czarnecki as the Midwest Region's Assistant Regional Director for Science Applications!

--Ashley Spratt  
*External Affairs*



Above: Joe Hautman's award-winning work.

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Federal Duck Stamp  
Hometown Ceremony

**JULY 14**

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Hometown  
Duck Stamp  
Ceremony  
to celebrate  
Joe Hautmann's  
winning duck stamp  
for 2012-13.

South St. Paul  
Gun Club

# Remediation to Restoration in the St. Louis River

The St. Louis River, which flows between Duluth, Minn., and Superior, Wis., is the focus of two “Remediation to Restoration” projects funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Remediation involves removing pollution or contaminants from the environment, often from soil or waterway sediment. Restoration usually involves restoring the affected area in terms of water quality but also in terms of physical structure and quality of fish and wildlife habitat. Often, the two steps are conducted separately and sequentially with the goal of first removing the contamination and then repairing damage done by contamination. Remediation to Restoration is an effort to tie

remediation efforts to restoration goals. Using this process, we can fine-tune remediation by customizing the methods based on site-specific characteristics. This process also improves efficiency by ensuring that if opportunities for restoration become available during remediation, they can be capitalized on at the time without having to wait until the remediation is completed.

There are two ongoing Remediation to Restoration projects in the St. Louis River. For both projects, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partners are preparing an Ecological Design Report that will characterize current conditions at project locations based on sediment

chemistry, vegetation community, benthic invertebrate community and substrate type. The Ecological Design Report will also include possible design scenarios using a Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Modeling program that the Service and local partners are developing. The Ecological Design Report will help the ongoing projects as well as future planning for continued work in these locations that will ultimately lead to remediation of contaminated sediment and the restoration of fish and wildlife habitats in the most efficient way possible.

*By Zachary Jorgenson  
Twin Cities ES Field Office*

Remediation to Restoration ties remediation efforts in contaminated areas to restoration goals and takes advantage of restoration opportunities during remediation activities (Ohio). Service photo.



# Species Spotlight: The Service Partners to Understand the Declining Golden-Winged Warbler

Cutting edge technology in radio telemetry reveals that the Golden-winged warbler travels into mature forests more consistently and much farther than ever documented on the declining bird, according to an ongoing study headed up by the Minnesota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. Until now, researchers believed the survival of this songbird was dependent on early successional forests and wetlands.

The research is crucial because the Golden-winged warbler, a tiny 4-inch long elusive bird, is being considered for protection under the Endangered Species Act due to its rapid decline across its range in the United States. On the east coast alone, the species has experienced more than a 20 percent population decline. Many factors have contributed to this steep population drop, including the loss of early successional forests, wetland drainage, human development, and hybridization with Blue-winged warblers. The sharp drop in population sparked an ongoing movement for conservation.

The movement led to a cooperative effort to study the bird on behalf of the U.S. Geological Survey, University of Minnesota and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Led by Dr. David Andersen and Dr. Henry Streby, the Unit is discovering that there is more to this bird's story. To this end, both Migratory Birds and Wildlife Sport and Fish Restoration programs have granted funding to support this ground breaking research.

Funding from the Migratory Bird program supported the study's preliminary findings from 2011-2012,

which utilized radio telemetry to track the warblers. These new findings challenge traditional ideas that the Golden-winged warbler only uses successional forest or brushy wetland habitats. Instead, the birds use a variety of habitats during breeding season, suggesting that management considerations for Golden-winged warblers need to include more than early successional forest. The Unit is producing some of the best available biological research with a "focus on comparing ecology and the birds' population dynamics in managed forests versus shrubby wetlands," said Andersen.



Female Golden-Winged Warbler with a radio telemetry device. Service photo by Mike Sweet.

In addition to MB program funding, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program has provided State Wildlife Grant funds to continue this valuable research in 2012-2013 at Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota. The SWG Program provides federal grants to states to develop and implement programs that benefit wildlife and their habitats. In addition, priority is placed on projects that benefit species

of greatest conservation concern. According to wildlife biologist Tom Will, "Nearly half of the total global breeding population of Golden-winged Warbler resides in Minnesota," making the state a perfect venue for the research while fitting the Service's conservation initiative.

WSFR biologist Mike Sweet is one of those responsible for reviewing grant proposals and ensuring they meet the necessary criteria to receive grants. Sweet said the grant process is about "making sure the public's money is being appropriately and wisely used." The purpose of Minnesota's State Wildlife Action Plan is to maintain the state's native fauna and flora and to ensure that no additional species are lost.

Andersen and Streby both emphasize the importance of maintaining dynamic forests with all stages of forest succession represented. Most species are generalists and diverse forests support those needs. "Early successional forest is certainly a critical component of this species habitat, but when you consider the entire season, I would call it a diverse forest bird," said Streby.

Several other partners are instrumental in making this research happen including the State of Minnesota, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Service/USGS Science Support Partnership, and the Service's Midwest Region. These new findings will inform future population assessments of the Golden-winged Warbler and conservation management plans.

--Joanna Gilkeson  
*External Affairs*



## U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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

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