U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Inside Region 3

July 2010

Hot on the Refuge Trail

Special Fire Edition

what's inside

Editor's Note:

Connecting with nature does not look the same for everyone. Connecting with nature means different things to different people. For some, it's hunting and fishing. For others, it's walking in the woods or on the beach. What does your nature encounter look like? We want to know. To that end, we have added a regular section called Let's Go Outside!

We invite you to submit personal nature encounters as experienced by you and your children, as well as innovative ideas on how to connect with nature. We will run your accounts in this feature segment.

Please submit your youngsters' stories and photos to our regular section: Kid's Corner. Kid's Corner features the nature writing and photographic pieces by the children of regional employees.

E-mail: valerie_redmond@fws.gov with your Let's Go Outside! and Kids Corner articles, photos, journal entries and poems.

On the Cover:

Title of Photograph: A Day at the Office; Pictured Cliff Berger Zone FMO.
Photo by: Don Wiley- Zone Fire Program Specialist, USFWS, South Zone Fire;

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Hot Topics

This month I want to highlight the success of our fire program. Recognizing fire as an effective wildlife management tool and underscoring its numerous benefits balances out misconceptions that can and sometimes do become subjects of hot contention.

Managing fire safely and cost-effectively on our lands is critical to our conservation mission. The Midwest Region's team of fire management professionals is top-notch organization. It must be commended for the outstanding work and courageous efforts of its members.

Our national wildlife refuges, special management areas, and national fish hatcheries experience greater health because our fire program successfully mitigates the potential of damaging fire, which benefits not only the land, but the wildlife that inhabits it, and the public that recreates on it.

Our fire professionals deserve our respect and admiration. They face many hazardous conditions and dangerous circumstances, and with rapid response requirements, they have to be prepared and ready to mobilize at a moment's notice. Our fire program is a successful program because of the brave men and women who stand behind it.

That's why I applaud its many efforts to advance the cause, including that of Erik Acker of Port Louisa NWR, who is the 2009 recipient of the Third Annual Region 3 Torch Award. His efforts go above and beyond what is called for to ensure success of our prescribed fire program (page 11).

The Midwest Region is only region in the Service to receive ARRA funding for biomass utilization. These improvements will allow the Service to provide hazardous fuel reduction to aid in fire suppression efforts and help to protect neighboring homes in the event of a wild land fire (page 7).

At a recent open house, the Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service jointly celebrated the opening of the new Illinois Interagency Dispatch Center. I encourage you to read more about the dispatch center (page 9) and the Midwest Region fire program. Steve Jakala, the Midwest Fire Program Chief, details at length how this region has been a leader in the Fish and Wildlife Service's fire management program on page 5.

The fire program was not alone in blazing the trails in the region with notable successes in the region. Limited real estate, however, dictates that I only highlight a few in this brief address.

I am very excited over recent Whooping Crane news. For only the third time in over a century, naturally produced whooping cranes have hatched in the wild in the Midwest (Necedah National Wildlife Refuge).

With equal enthusiasm, I am happy to report that the Lake Erie watersnake once threatened with extinction has rebounded to the point that the Service is proposing to remove the snake from the list of federally endangered and threatened species.

As well, we are developing an Environmental Impact Statement to evaluate the effects on endangered Indiana bats of issuing an incidental take permit under the Endangered Species Act for a wind energy project in Champaign County, Ohio.

In closing let me just say that the importance of our work is also being highlighted with the tragedy in the gulf. Conservation efforts directed towards our waters are critical for the habitats of not only fish, birds and other wildlife, but to humans, as well. I take this time to thank the many volunteers from the region who went down and plan to go down to the area to offer their services and expertise. You make a difference and you should know that. I am very proud of all of your efforts.

Warm Regards,

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

Shane Otto taking care of business.
Photo editing by Samantha Redmond.
USFWS Photo.

Midwest Region Fire Program

Region 3 has been a leader in the Fish and Wildlife Service's fire management program since the 1970's. It began with the 1976 Walsh Ditch Fire on Seney National Wildlife Refuge in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. This fire spurred Congressional interest in implementing a fire management program for the Fish and Wildlife Service. The 2000 National Fire Plan increased fire funding within federal land management agencies and formalized an interagency fire management policy and guidance. The influx of fire management funding has enabled Region 3 to build a safe and efficient fire program to meet the Service mission.

Today the regional refuge fire program employs 67 permanent and career seasonal positions, a number that swells to 115 with seasonal positions during the fire season. This workforce annually completes over 60,000 acres of prescribed burns while supporting wildfire suppression activities throughout the United States. In recent years fire specialists from the region have been called upon to support all-risk incidents (floods, hurricanes, oil spills) due to their expertise in the Incident Command System, the management system mandated for use by all federal agencies responding to natural or human caused disasters.

The region has implemented the first interagency fire program in the eastern United States with establishment of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan Interagency Fire Management Officer position. This position provides oversight for fire programs on Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and National Forest lands in the UP of Michigan. This cooperation has improved efficiencies within the agencies, standardized fire operations, and provided significant cost savings for the three agencies.

Above: Steve Jakala, hot on the refuge. USFWS Photo.

In Illinois, we cooperate with the Forest Service in locating and operating the Southern Illinois Interagency Dispatch Center in Crab Orchard NWR. This center provides emergency response to incidents on federal and state lands. Combining resources with other agencies eliminates duplication of programs while reducing costs and improving response to public safety.

Through operating agreements and memorandums of understanding, we've increased our ability to work hand-in-hand with state DNR's and non-governmental land managers who use prescribed fire for hazard fuels reduction and habitat management. This includes managing trust species habitat on private lands.

To insure that the current and future fire program remains focused on regional refuge needs, a R3 Fire Management Council was formed in 2008 to provide a forum for information sharing and open discussion regarding issues affecting the Region 3 Refuges Fire Management Program. The Council is a sounding board and advisory group for monitoring the direction in which the fire program is moving and acts as point of contact for regional fire staff and project leaders regarding fire management operations.

From the watershed event of the Walsh Ditch Fire in 1976, to present day cooperation with federal, state, and non-government agencies, the Region 3 Refuge Fire Management Program continues to support the mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service and provides expertise in prescribed burning and disaster management.

--Steve Jakala
Midwest Region
Fire Program Chief

All Risk Assignments What Could This Mean?

Above: The team of sawyers that made FWS saw crew. Photo by Eric Acker.

For some, "All Risk Assignments" could mean helping with the recovery of the Space Shuttle Discovery, Hurricane Katrina, or maybe a Flood event along the Mighty Mississippi River, but for our crew it was a May 8, 2009 wind event at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in Southern Illinois. Meteorologists' refer to this type of storm as a Derecho, meaning - a widespread and long-lived, violent convectively induced straight-line windstorm that is associated with a fast-moving band of severe thunderstorms. The storm lasted 45 minutes to an hour with average wind speeds of between 70-90 mph and a high wind recorded of 106 mph.

Needless to say, the derecho left behind a path of destruction. Trees were down everywhere, it looked like pick up sticks in many places. Power lines were down, travel on all roads was restricted, many had to cut there way out just to get to a main road. The communities affected by this ruthless storm worked together to bring in utility workers to restore power. The Forest Service initiated a Type 3 Team to work on the areas of the Shawnee National Forest that were affected, and for the Service, the call went out for saw teams. Fire folks responded from many refuges for a chance to help and hone their saw skills. For the next three weeks saw teams worked on clearing roads, trails, parking areas, and the main campground at Crab Orchard Lake. A goal they were striving for was to have the main campground open and available for campers in time for Memorial Day weekend. A typical day started at with the morning briefing at 7:00 am, then off to a new location, such as a trail or road to start clearing debris. When possible we tried to have a backhoe or excavator working with the saw teams to speed up the operation. This type of work was very challenging physically, extremely dangerous, but for most of us, the most rewarding project completed last year.

Many Midwest Region refuges provided assistance with storm cleanup, including, Big Oaks, Big Stone, Cypress Creek, Illinois River, Mingo, Neal Smith, Necedah, Port Louisa, Squaw Creek, Two Rivers, and Union Slough. Iowa and Morris Wetland Management Districts and the South Zone FMO Office served, as well.

In all, 14 stations and six states contributed the time of 22 employees and various pieces of equipment. Contractors removed 357 tons of pulpwood and 17,800 board feet of saw timber. A total of $300,000 of station funds were spent on the storm cleanup up, including 424 acres of refuge public roads, service roads, hiking trails, and campgrounds, and 33 acres of prescribed burning units.

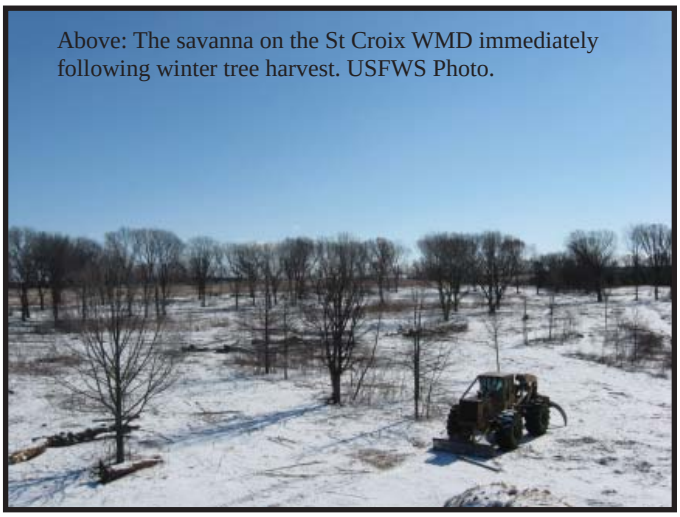
--Cliff Berger
Fire Management Officer
R3's South Zone
(Iowa, Missouri, & Illinois)

Stimulus Funding to Reduce and Utilize Biomass on National Wildlife Refuges in the Midwest is Funded $1 Million

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed earlier this year gave $3 billion to the Department of the Interior. Of that amount, $280 million in funding goes to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Midwest Region is only region in the Service to receive ARRA funding for biomass utilization. These improvements will allow the Service to provide hazardous fuel reduction to aid in fire suppression efforts and to help to protect neighboring homes in the event of a wildland fire. "Removing woody vegetation for hazard fuel reduction not only aids in less fuel for wildfires thus increasing the easiness of extinguishing them, it provides landscape restoration for native plant communities," said Valdo Calvert, Midwest Region Wildland/ Urban Interface Coordinator.

Projects will be conducted on seven WMDs and NWRs throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin. Wisconsin is receiving $771,000 and Minnesota $242,000 in ARRA funds.



Above: The savanna on the St Croix WMD immediately following winter tree harvest. USFWS Photo.

Projects will utilize the removed woody vegetation for biomass consumption. Most of the biomass is being hauled as woodchips to facilities such as District Energy St. Paul Inc., St. Paul, Minn. St. Paul's system is unique as it's the largest, most successful, biomass-fueled hot water district heating system in North America.

In recent years, woody biomass utilization markets have expanded to the degree that we are now able to take on restoration/fuel reduction projects that were not feasible before.

Chip pile from an 18-acre savanna restoration project on the St Croix WMD. USFWS Photo.

Biomass utilization projects on the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge alone will produce over 40,000 tons of woody biomass to be converted to energy, mulch, animal bedding and other products. Mechanical fuel reduction projects are typically very expensive and can easily cost upwards of $1000 per acre. At Sherburne, the value of the woody biomass offsets contractor costs and projects are completed at $60 per acre, a 94% savings to the refuge!

Projects by Refuge/WMD

The following sites will benefit from biomass utilization improvements:

- Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge
- Leopold Wetland Management District
- Litchfield Wetland Management District,
- Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- Necedah National Wildlife Refuge
- St. Croix Wetland Management District
- Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge

--Joel Kemm, Prescribed Fire Specialist at St. Croix Wetland Management District

Research, Research and More Research

Prescribed fire can be implemented on the landscape using different seasons, different ignition strategies, different fuel loads, and different weather conditions. These variations offer unique opportunities to explore uncertainties by using adaptive management to examine the impact on habitat conditions and wildlife. Region 3 continues to make excellent progress with prescribed fire studies.

Japanese Stiltgrass

At Big Oaks NWR, fire dominates fuel and habitat management and offers a unique opportunity to research fire impacts. Currently, we have four studies in progress that will help us answer many management questions. First, we are studying the interactive effects of prescribed fires and invasions of the non-native annual grass Microstegium vimineum (Japanese stiltgrass) conducted in collaboration with Luke Flory, Keith Clay (Indiana University) and Sarah Emery (University of Louisville). The objective of the project, funded by the Joint Fire Science Program, is to determine if Japanese stiltgrass invasions change prescribed fire behavior, including peak fire temperatures, flame heights, and percent area burned, and if differences in fire intensity alter the effects of fires on native plants, tree regeneration, and nutrient-cycling processes. In addition, because fires may promote or inhibit Japanese stiltgrass invasions, understanding the effect and the timing of fires on invasions will inform management and restoration practices at Big Oaks NWR and other natural areas in the region.

Above: Henslow's sparrow making a call. USFWS Photo.

Fire Scars

Second, a dendrochronology study entitled "The Effect of Fire on Multiple Arboreal Species in the Eastern Deciduous Forest" (Principal Investigator, Dr. James Speer, Indiana State University) is documenting fire scars in the eastern deciduous forest environment. Many eastern tree species have an unknown fire scarring morphology and Big Oaks NWR offers an opportunity to utilize fire scars and tree ring history from fallen trees due to the storm damage of 2008 (Hurricane Ike). This study will help decipher how different deciduous trees record fire scarring and fire history.

Fire Regimes

Third, a 2-year study was completed by Big Oaks NWR seasonal firefighter, Paul Killian, examining how prescription of various fire regimes impacted the mortality of early successional trees that had encroached on the grasslands. Killian examined the effects of early-spring dormant-season fires, late-fall growing season fires, head fires, flanking fires, backing fires, and fire temperatures on the mortality of common early successional trees (e.g., red maple, sweet gum). Late growing season fires were more effective in killing early-successional trees than dormant early spring prescribed fires. Staff at Big Oaks are using these results to increase management effectiveness by prescribing more late growing season burns to help fight the invasion of early-successional tress.

Henslow's Sparrow

Finally at Big Oaks; Refuge Biologist Perry Williams, Refuge Manager Joe Robb and former Refuge Biologist Jason Lewis have a paper in preparation entitled: "Henslow's Sparrow Population Response to Prescribed Fire in Southeastern Indiana." Their study examined Henslow's sparrow response to fire at 32 grassland patches on the refuge from 1998-2009. Breeding Henslow's sparrows were monitored for 12 years to examine how the length of time since the area was treated with prescribed fire influenced population density. The data suggests that Henslow's sparrow populations respond positively to prescribed fire in disconnected grasslands and that maintaining a three-year burn cycle at these grasslands may provide the largest number of birds.

Oak Savanna

Sherburne NWR conducted a study entitled "Age Structure

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Illinois Interagency Dispatch Center Holds Open House

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service jointly celebrated the opening of the new Illinois Interagency Dispatch Center through an open house held on March 24. This was the first opportunity for many who were instrumental in visualizing and planning the facility to see the final product, which was created to meet the emergency dispatch needs of multiple agencies. IL-IDC is located at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, Marion, Ill., in a newly renovated facility.

Nearly 50 people were present to tour the building, view the renovations, and participate in a brief awards ceremony. Representatives from each of the four agencies which share space in the facility were present, as well as Golconda Job Corps Center Director David Floyd, a congressional staffer, and representatives from John A. Logan College and Williamson County Emergency Management Agency.

During the ceremony, Crab Orchard NWR Manager Dan Frisk, spoke briefly about the success of this joint venture and thanked all parties for their part in completing the project. Mr. Frisk commented that this joint project is, "An example of where we have worked together to maximize our dollars and maximize resources for the common good." Additionally, Shawnee National Forest Supervisor Allen Nicholas acknowledged his pleasure with recent developments and the relationship building that has been fostered by the hard work of all involved agencies. IL-IDC not only provides efficient and effective response to local wildland fires, but also to nationwide wildfire events and other natural disasters, such as hurricanes and floods.

Above: New directional sign advertising the new Interagency Dispatch Center. USFWS Photo.

Nicholas presented certificates of appreciation to the following persons: David Floyd, Greg Walker, Mike Damattei, and Tim Wilson (renovation classes faculty), for their hard work and for providing a training opportunity for students who worked on the IL-IDC; Steve Fike, Bruce Whitecotton, Harlan Lucas, Fred Laska, and Eric Modgun, for coordinating efforts and working with multiple agencies to complete renovations; Tom Wilson (IDNR Fire Supervisor) and Cliff Berger (FWS Zone Fire Management Officer) for their partnership efforts in developing a more efficient and effective fire management program for southern Illinois.

Additional IL-IDC Services and Products:

Daily Dispatching

• Dispatch receives daily staffing from Illinois Resource Management agencies (both Federal and State) and makes it available to all fire managers so that they are aware which resources are staffed and available.

• Crab Orchard NWR staff (fire and collateral) track with dispatch via radio when going in service on the refuge to perform project work, prescribed burns and initial attack.

• In order to establish situational awareness for fire and collateral staff, dispatch transmits on the refuge repeater every morning the weather and Fire Staffing for Crab Orchard NWR and Shawnee NF.

• Dispatch transmits on refuge repeater every afternoon the weather, Burn Index and Staffing Level for the current and next operational periods.

Prescribed Fire Support

• Refuge staff submits weather observations to dispatch and dispatch submits a Spot Forecast Request to the National Weather Service. Once the forecast is complete, dispatch reads the forecast to the burn boss.

• Dispatch notifies contacts such as the Zone FMO, refuge visitor center, municipal police and fire departments and adjacent land owners.

Logistical Support

Continued on page 10

Historically, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has been challenged to meet the prescribed fire elements of their habitat management objectives within Region 3. They were detached from daily fire operations, training came at the expense of regularly scheduled duties, they had little opportunity to achieve supervisory qualifications which left them without a dedicated burn boss and few squad bosses, and they relied on neighboring stations and NGO's to provide equipment.

The Region 3 Partners program decided the solution was to fund a dedicated Prescribed Fire Specialist. A veteran of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Nature Conservancy, Terry Severson was an ideal candidate because of his extensive prescribed and wildfire experience,

Severson reviews burn plans, leads the burns, and acquires and maintains equipment and daily connections with the regional and national fire program to keep up with changing rules and regulations. He also seeks out training opportunities for Partners Program staff as well as opportunities to increase qualifications and experience by being dispatched to suppression assignments.

Although located in Madison, Wisc., the position is a Regional Private Lands asset, servicing eight states. Initially the focus is to refine and standardize current burn programs within a few core states, and then expand into those states without fire programs. Severson has already acquired equipment for other Partners programs through excesses, including a type six engine, a UTV, communication equipment, and various fire tools. The over arching goal is to grow a safe and biologically driven RX burn program throughout the Midwest.

According to Central Zone Fire Management Officer Tom Zellmer, "It's created a consistent system to address the planning, review, and approval process, along with some oversight to help ensure that operations are carried out within U.S Fish and Wildlife Service parameters."

"Last spring the Wisconsin Private Lands Program was able to burn 13 units in five different counties, the Ohio program burned five units (with the assistance of Brian Winters and the crew from Big Oaks NWR), and Missouri and Iowa burned four units," Severson said, describing the success of the program thus far. "The need for burning on private lands to manage critical habitat is unlimited. Our ability to meet that need is still developing, but we are making progress." The Partners for Fish and Wildlife burn program and the position continue to evolve. If successful, this model may be emulated in Partners programs across the country.

--Paul Charland and Terry Severson

Dispatch Center Continued.

• Dispatch generates IQCS Incident ID numbers for the refuge's wildland and prescribed fires so that Region 3 fire and collateral staff can maintain experience records.
• Dispatch generates IQCS ID numbers for interagency training such as Annual Fire Refresher and Eastern Area Engine Academy so that Region 3 fire and collateral staff can maintain training records.
• The dispatch radio tower supports the Crab Orchard repeater antenna and the repeater is located within the dispatch building.

Training
• Refuge staff have presented and participated in training sessions and meetings located at the dispatch conference room.
• Dispatch provides support to Annual Fire Refreshers, Work Capacity Tests and NWCG S and L courses that South Zone fire and collateral staff have attended.

Interagency Cache
• Eric Pfeilschifter, Crab Orchard NWR Engine Module Leader, has his office located in the interagency dispatch center.
• Once renovation is complete, the dispatch building will share space with the interagency cache which is where Crab Orchard NWR, Shawnee NF and IL DNR fire vehicles and equipment will be stored. Completion of cache is scheduled for Summer/Fall 2010.

--Paul Charland and Terry Severson

Third Annual Torch Award Presentation

The Torch has been passed on to another well-respected individual in the fire profession. Erik Acker of Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge is the 2009 recipient of the Third Annual Region 3 Torch Award. Erik was presented with the award in February at the Regional Fire Management Officers Meeting.

Erik, the Fire Management Specialist at Port Louisa NWR, goes above and beyond to ensure success of the prescribed fire program. He is self-motivated, exhibits a strong work ethic, and is a team player - always willing to help out where needed. For example, after the devastating wind event that took place last May at Crab Orchard NWR, Eric and his crew were one of the first groups to assist with tree removal. Erik is known for keeping his equipment in good working condition, and is always ready to go when duty calls. Safety is a top priority for him, as it should be in any fire program, and Erik does an excellent job of conveying this to his fire staff.

South Zone Fire Management Officer Cliff Berger spent two weeks with Erik on a severity detail in South Texas this past summer. Cliff was impressed with Erik and said, "He does a great job working with others and keeping his crews motivated and ready to go."

Above: Rick Schultz, Regional Refuge System Chief (left), presents Erik Acker (right) with the Region 3 Torch Award. USFWS Photo.

Meeting spring burning objectives in 2007 and 2008 at Port Louisa NWR was especially challenging due to flooding of the Iowa River. During this time, Erik did a great job getting the prep work and planning completed, so when burn conditions were appropriate, his crew could act on it. In 2009, Erik and his crew had a record-setting prescribed fire season, completing 40 prescribed burns and treating a total of 4,703 acres of habitat in the process.

The Prescribed Fire Program in Region 3 is consistently regarded as one of the best in the Service. The success of our program is no accident. The dedication and professionalism of the Region's core fire staff and the support of refuge staff continues to ensure the success of the program.

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 from the crowd, going above and beyond what's normally expected of an employee. In 2009, Erik Acker was one of those individuals.

Past Torch Award recipients are Chris Mursu of Sherburne NWR (currently stationed at Big Stone NWR), and Mike Belsky of Necedah NWR.

--Brian Winters, Prescribed Fire Specialist at Big Oaks NWR in Madison, Ind.

Midwest Region Fire Program Helps Keep Marines in Iraq Safe

Long before Clint Eastwood's used the phrase, "improvise, adapt and overcome" in the movie Heartbreak Ridge, it had been an unofficial mantra of the United States Marine Corps. The phrase originally came about because of the Marine Corps ability to find creative ways to succeed with fewer resources than their better funded U.S. military counterparts. A recent cooperative venture between the Marines and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service demonstrates that the Marine Corps still lives by this mantra today.

Marines fighting in Iraq were finding that insurgents were using vegetation that grows along rivers and canals as hiding place for weapons and improvised explosive devices (IED). This tall, thick vegetation allowed insurgents to conceal their weapons and their movements and made it even more dangerous for Marines travelling along the roads and waterways.

"Once we discovered they were using these reeds to store materials to make IEDs, we needed a way to clear the vegetation and deny the enemy a place to hide their weapons," said U.S. Marine Corps CW5 Randy McCrumb. The Marines knew what they needed to do, now they needed to find a way to do it.

The search led them to a place as far away, and as different, from Iraq as you can get: Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge in northern Minnesota. Fire staff at Agassiz NWR had been using a piece of equipment called a Terra-torch in their prescribed burning program for decades. "The torch allows us to get a very hot ignition source to effectively burn wetland grasses," said Agassiz NWR Fire Management Officer Larry Anderson. While the location couldn't be more different, the vegetation was surprising similar. "The reeds they needed to burn in Iraq are very similar to the wetland reeds and grasses we have here at Agassiz," added Anderson.

Above: (Left to Right) Larry Anderson, Brian Winters and Darrin Franco prepare for a live fire exercise at a training facility in Vicksburg, Miss. The three worked together to train U.S. Marines on safe and effective prescribed fire techniques. USFWS Photo.

After getting approval from the Regional and National offices, Anderson, along Darrin Franco from Agassiz NWR, and Brian Winters from Big Oaks NWR quickly developed the needed training materials. At the same time, the Marine Corps was working the ground torch manufacturer to get the equipment ready for duty in Iraq.

Midwest Regional Fire Management Coordinator Steve Jakala fully supported the project from the beginning. "Even if the Marines hadn't funded the costs of the program, we would have done it," said Jakala. "If we can save even one Marine's life because of this, it is worth any cost."

Less than eight months from when the threat in Iraq was identified, Anderson, Franco and Winters had develop the training program and were in Vicksburg, Miss., training a team of Marine Corps engineers how to properly use the equipment to address the issue and make it safer for U.S. and Iraqi personnel.

Actually using the equipment was just one part of the training program. "Conducting a safe and effective prescribed burn is a very complex undertaking," explained Anderson. "We wanted to ensure these Marines had all the skills they needed to do this correctly, quickly and safely."

The training in Vicksburg included classroom sessions covering prescribed burning techniques, hands-on operations and maintenance sessions and culminated with a day of live "fire" exercise where the Marines were able to put all the training to use and conduct a prescribed fire.

While the full details of where, when and how these prescribed fire systems are employed in Iraq is not public information, Anderson

Continued on page 14.

"Route Sanitation" along supply roads near Bagdad. USFWS Photo.

Removing thick vegetation prevents insurgent attacks during patrols and convoy operations. USFWS Photo.

TERRA TORCH TRAINING

Removing vegetation along supply routes to prevent insurgents from hiding Improvised Explosives Devices. USFWS Photo.

Removing Pharagmities and Cattails. USFWS Photo.

History Making Spring Burn at Horicon NWR

Horicon National Wildlife Refuge has its Most Successful and Safe Spring Burning Season in 20 years!

Horicon National Wildlife Refuge finished another successful and most importantly, safe prescribed burn season in spring of 2010. Twenty-four burns were completed on the refuge, for a total of 3,967 acres. In addition, five burns were completed at the 1,054 acre Fox River National Wildlife Refuge for a total of 246 acres. The burning was conducted under the guidance of the lead Refuge Range Technician, Sean Sallmann, who does an outstanding job with the fire program. In addition, the fire crew included seasonal Range Technicians Ryan Wilson and Jared Fallon, STEP Range Technician Wendy Meier, and permanent Range Technician (Brad Bergman). Trained refuge staff and seven ADs (Brent Rahn, Dan Bell, Jon Johnson, Lori Wienke, Dan Machotka, Chris Olson, and Roy Stern) also assisted with the burning. Staff and equipment resources were shared among Leopold Wetland Management District, Wisconsin Private Lands Office, Winona District of the Upper Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Refuge, Nature Conservancy, and Necedah National Wildlife Refuge.

--Diane Kitchen
R3-Horicon NWR

One of twenty-four burns that were completed on the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge during the spring of 2010. USFWS Photo.

Iraq Continued

and his team have stayed in contact with some of the Marines they helped train and have been told the training and equipment has been effective. So effective in fact, that the U.S. Army also contacted Anderson and his team to help the Army implement a counter-vegetation system. Anderson summed up the feeling of everyone who worked on the project. "Knowing that the work we did has saved the lives of Soldiers and Marines is the greatest reward we could have hoped for," he said. "I'm proud our agency was a part of it." A short video highlighting the project is available on-line at: http://midwest.fws.gov/fire

--Chuck Traxler
External Affairs

PRESCRIBED BURN

A prescribed burn is a managed fire conducted under a special set of guidelines for weather and safety, called a prescription, designed prior to the burn.

Homeless Children and Families Enjoy a Carefree Day at Crab Orchard NWR

The Williamson County Board of Education works with homeless children and their families all throughout the school year. They provide school supplies and tutoring sessions to help the kids succeed in school. As the end of the school year approached the School Board wanted to provide the children with a field trip that was both educational and fun. A phone call to Crab Orchard NWR secured a willing partner.

The staff and volunteers at the refuge were happy to provide the families with a pond ecology program in the morning and a free fishing experience in the afternoon. Kids and their parents both delighted in catching tadpoles and crawfish and learning about the pond food chain. With rods, reels and tackle on loan from the Illinois DNR Little Grassy Fish Hatchery and bait donated by a local shop, the kids were excited to try their hands at fishing. Age, inexperience and noise levels, likely contributed to a small catch, but big fun was had by all while fishing from the refuge's Wolf Creek Causeway.

Above: Families enjoy and afternoon of fishing at Crab Orchard NWR. USFWS Photo.

Above: The cool water is as much fun as the fishing at Crab Orchard NWR. USFWS Photo.

Below: Fishing from the dock at Wolf Creek Causeway, Crab Orchard NWR. USFWS Photo.

Refuge staff and volunteers look forward to partnering with the board of education again next year for this fun and rewarding program.

--Kimberly King-Wrenn
R3-Crab Orchard NWR

Proposed Rule to Delist Lake Erie Watersnake

The Lake Erie watersnake, a harmless species once threatened with extinction, has rebounded to the point that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to remove the snake from the list of federally endangered and threatened species. Lake Erie watersnakes inhabit offshore islands in western Lake Erie in Ohio and Ontario.

In a proposed rule published June 1 in the Federal Register, the Service said the Lake Erie watersnake has responded well to measures aimed at restoring its population and eliminating or reducing threats to the snake. Recovery efforts included protecting the snake's habitat and conducting outreach to island residents and visitors about the snake.

Lake Erie watersnakes were listed as threatened – defined as at risk of becoming endangered under the Endangered Species Act – in 1999. Threats to the species included intentional killing and loss of its shoreline habitat to development.

A recovery plan, developed by a range of agencies and interest groups, was finalized in 2003. The plan called for protecting habitat and providing outreach to reduce threats to the Lake Erie watersnake. Recovery criteria include a combined population of at least 5,555 snakes on the U.S. islands, sustained for six years, and protection of key habitat.

Above: USFWS employee holding the Lake Erie watersnake. USFWS Photo.

Through habitat protection and public education, the Lake Erie watersnake population grew to about 8,600 in 2008, and has exceeded the minimum recovery level since 2001. About 300 acres of inland habitat and 11 miles of shoreline have been protected for the snake since it was listed.

Partners in the efforts to recover the Lake Erie watersnake include the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Northern Illinois University, Lake Erie Islands Chapter of the Black Swamp Conservancy, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Put-in-Bay Township Park District, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, and The Ohio State University Stone Laboratory.

The ESA requires that a species be monitored for a minimum of 5 years after delisting, to ensure that the species remains stable after the protections of the ESA are removed. The Service is issuing a draft Post-delisting Monitoring Plan for public and peer review and comment, concurrent with the proposed rule to delist the Lake Erie watersnake.

The Service is seeking comments on the proposed rule and the draft post-delisting monitoring plan. Comments may be submitted by August 2, through the Federal eRulemaking Portal: http://www.regulations.gov. Follow the instructions for submitting comments. Comments are also accepted via U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R3-ES-2010-0039; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

The Service will evaluate information received from the public and, based on the best available scientific information, make a final decision within one year on whether to delist the Lake Erie watersnake.

For the complete proposed rule to delist the Lake Erie watersnake and the draft post-delisting monitoring plan, visit www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered

--Megan Seymour
R3-Reynoldsburg FO

Around the Region
At Home at Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge

As Administrative Technician for Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Kim Farah is responsible for balancing the refuge budget, working with employees on their timecards and travel. She is the contact from the refuge that works with HR on hiring students and is a warranted contracting officer for an area of refuges. Farah is the primary contact for visitors to the refuge and assists with preparing for special events.

Farah started working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2003 as a temporary, office automation clerk at Rice Lake NWR. She was hired to assist refuge visitors during the busy summer season and worked on some centennial projects for the refuge.

After working for the summer at Rice Lake NWR, she fell in love with the mission of the Service. Farah says she went to work each day excited and went home from work feeling grateful to be a part of something bigger and knew immediately that an opportunity like she had was rare.

Farah was mentored by Administrative Assistant Sharon Young and supervised by Refuge Manager Mary Stefanski. She was asked to participate in the Student Career Experience Program. Mentors that she worked with at Rice Lake guided her to her career with Service. Farah says she often wonders why they saw something in her. Something, she says, that she didn't even see in herself. At the time, she was in college at St. Cloud State University studying for a degree in business management.

The mission of the Service inspired Farah. She signed the mobility statement that came with the SCEP experience. Farah says she was nervous about that part because she did not want to move too far away from her family at the time. But she weighed her options and knew that the Service was the place for her. "I also knew that I would regret it for the rest of my life if I didn't just try it", she says. She was temporarily stationed at Big Stone NWR while she completed her schooling and eventually joined Sherburne NWR when a full time position was vacated. Sherburne was a perfect fit for her, she says, because she was in a familiar area and was able to see a new side to refuges. "Sherburne is far bigger than I was used to, so I was able to participate in things I had never imagined I would do," Farah says, "like working with the biologists on surveys and duck banding, working with the fire professionals on wildfire and prescribed burning

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Above: Farah on Mille Lacs NWR as a student at Rice Lake NWR with a Common Tern. USFWS Photo.

Below: Farah working at Sherburne as a prescribed fire team member. USFWS Photo.

At Home at Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge

operations, learning about the wetland restoration program and the service it provides to landowners…"

Farah says the days in the field are the ones that make mountains of paperwork worth every minute.

Farah's job offered a wide variety of experiences. Despite the mountains of paperwork, she says it was all a blessing. Her supervisor, Anne Sittauer was always willing to provide new opportunities and would challenge her to take on more. This lead to Farah's desire to be involved with everything! The staff was patient, as she learned her way. They taught her many things in the process. "A wonderful staff is the key to a good administrative officer," she says.

Above: Farah on Mille Lacs NWR as a student at Rice Lake NWR with a Common Tern. USFWS Photo.

A native of McGregor, Minn., a small town north of Minneapolis/ St. Paul, Farah says that while Sherburne was a very worthwhile experience, she was happy to come home to Rice Lake. "McGregor is the kind of community that pitches in to help no matter what the situation is," she says, "and volunteers are the key to the community's success. It is a great place to live."

Farah says the administrative position at Rice Lake is the perfect thing for her because of the wide variety duties that it has. "The job has provided me with a new set of challenges that have refreshed my spirit…"

Below: Farah on a tour with the Rice Lake Refuge Manager, Walt Ford. Ford showed her a spot on the refuge where a few Woodpeckers have been frequenting the "woodpecker tree." USFWS Photo.

Around the Region
NADWS Meeting

The Native American Fish and Wildlife Society held their National Conference in Cloquet, Minn. June 7-10. The conference was hosted by the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and was a great opportunity to share lessons learned, discuss tribal fish and wildlife management activities, enjoy traditional foods, and reconnect with colleagues from across the country.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service participated in many ways. Charlie Wooley delivered a welcome address as part of the opening ceremony and a presentation on LCCs and Climate Change. The Law Enforcement Program provided much appreciated classroom training on feather identification and an overview of federal fish and wildlife conservation laws; and Region 3 National Fish Habitat Action Plan Coordinator Maureen Gallagher organized a symposium focusing on NFHAP and opportunities for aquatic habitat restoration on tribal land. Many other Service employees delivered presentations or participated in other ways as part of the various symposiums at the conference. USFWS Photos. -- *Tim Patronski, External Affairs*

Visitors Help Refuge Officers Nab Convicted Felon

Quick response and thorough detective work by refuge officers and Missouri Department of Conservation agents built a case that ended March 23 with the conviction and sentencing of Raymond J. Trice, age 26, on federal firearms charges.

Above: Refuge Officer Ryan Seward, a day at the office. USFWS Photo.

Refuge Officer Ryan Seward was first on the scene after visitors reported that shots were fired along the wildlife loop of Mingo National Wildlife Refuge on April 10, 2009. Seward said that public involvement was key to the success of the case. Seward describes Mingo NWR as a community-based refuge with a dedicated population of regular and repeat visitors that come to enjoy wildlife observation, hunting and fishing. "The more friends you have, the better off you are going to be," explains Seward, thinking of the people that he welcomes week in and week out to the refuge.

After interviewing witnesses, Seward discovered fresh nine millimeter cases in the area reported by the visitors and along the roadway at several spots throughout the refuge. Thanks to timely and effective interviewing, Seward obtained key witness and crime scene information that was central to tracking down, arresting and convicting what turned out to be a felon "well-known by federal law enforcement agents for other possible offenses, such as armed robbery," explains Geoff A. Donaldson, Zone Law Enforcement Officer for Region 3.

Also key to the case was quick coordination with Missouri State Agent, Mic Plunkett, of the Missouri Department of Conservation. Seward said that Agent Plunkett was instrumental in building the case and "played an essential role in traveling to Arkansas with refuge officers to interview the subject." Subsequent interviews lead investigators to the subject's place of work in Arkansas, Donaldson reports, and later the subject confessed to the crime and relinquished the loaded handgun to authorities.

Donaldson, reflects on the case's uniqueness, saying that what started as a wildlife crime of shooting at deer and turkey on a quiet Missouri refuge, "took us to a small farm house in Arkansas that ended with a federal firearms charge, but its roots are in the relationship-building that the Service has with the public." The success in this case, and many others like it that refuge officers successfully investigate across the region, is based on making connections with people and enlisting them in protecting our wild places.

Donaldson goes further to say that because of Officer Seward's initiative and quick response in surveying the extent of the shooting, "The Service was able to provide the U.S. Attorney's Office with more extensive wildlife crime violations and the perpetrator plead out to the firearm charge."

--Tina Shaw
External Affairs

of a Remnant Oak Savanna in the Sherburne NWR" which was completed and the final report received in June 2009. This study established the age class distribution and vegetative structure in a remnant native oak savanna. The results provided a working knowledge of the recent past (200 years) and presented the tree species composition in the oak savanna. Their initial goal for the project was to establish the historic fire regime. Unfortunately, this proved impossible due to the limited number of fire scarred trees which did not provide a valid sample size for analysis. However, their results did provide an initial baseline for the Sherburne NWR savannah, thanks to Dr. Kurt Kipfmueller of the University of Minnesota.

Pollen Analysis

The completion of Sherburne's vegetative study and the unanswered questions surrounding historic fire regimes and fire return intervals in this oak savanna led directly to their follow-up research project. Beginning May 2010, they will begin the "Sherburne NWR paleoenvironmental history project." This will involve conducting a lake pollen core study on natural lakes within the Sherburne NWR. This project, conducted in conjunction with the Department of Geography, University of Utah, will involve sampling and analyzing pollen, macroscopic charcoal, plant and insect microfossils, and other variables to determine the vegetative and fire history of this area dating back approximately 10,000 years. These data will hopefully tell them how this vegetation changed through time and give insight on how fire regimes might have interacted as disturbance patterns in this grassland.

Kirkland's Warbler

Seney National Wildlife Refuge was successfully awarded Joint Fire Science Program funding this spring, for "Integrating Fuels Reduction and Pine Barrens Restoration in Endangered Kirtland's Warbler Habitat Management." The overall objective of this project is to understand how Kirtland's warbler habitat management and jack pine barrens restoration might be integrated with landscape level fuel treatments and fire management in northern Lower Michigan by emulating the pre-EuroAmerican settlement spatial arrangement of jack pine forest ecosystem types. This study will provide meaningful information for the management of the magnificent Kirtland's Warbler. The principle investigator on this project is Greg Corace, Forester at Seney NWR.

Fire Science

Region 3 was successfully funded this spring, by the Joint Fire Science Program for "Developing a Fire-Science Network for the Northern Lake States." This consortium, headed by the Ohio State University School of Environment and Natural Resources, will provide for outreach and educational training and information dissemination to fire managers and practitioners across the northern lake states area. Fire has played a prominent role in the development of the ecosystems across this region and the need to provide a medium for managing and restoring these fire-dependent forest ecosystems is great. This consortium will play a key role in fulfilling this need. Partners on this project will include Seney NWR, the regional office and the U.S. Forest Service.

Reed Canary Grass

Additional fire related research on-going within Region 3 includes the reed canary grass project. This adaptive management study seeks to generate the information needed for refuge managers to make good and defensible decisions about when, where, and how to treat reed canary grass for purposes of maintaining or restoring target communities and the wildlife they support. Fire is a treatment method that will be studied as a possible control measure in the reduction and elimination of the invasive reed canary grass. The transition from a reed canary grass monoculture back to native meadows, grasslands and forests is a particularly difficult task and biologically defensible control measures as obtained from this study are very much needed.

Emphasis on publishing these results of these studies will certainly lead to improved application of fire treatments and illustrate how monitoring and adaptive management can improve how we implement prescribed fire on the landscape.

--Brian Winters

Basin-Wide Fisheries Management: Mass Marketing in the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes are one of our most valuable and treasured landscapes. They provide not only diverse habitats for freshwater fishes, but their coasts and tributaries also support a wide range of migratory birds and other wildlife, including many of the threatened and endangered species our agency works to protect.

Twenty-five to thirty million fish are stocked in the Great Lakes annually by tribal, state and federal fishery programs on the U.S. side alone. An additional 10 million are stocked by the Ontario Ministry of Fisheries Resources. However, there has never before been a multi jurisdictional-coordinated program across the Great Lakes basin for evaluating these fish in terms of their performance in the wild or their effects on the ecosystem.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) recently initiated a mass marking program to coded-wire tag and mark (finclip) state and tribal hatchery-reared fish, in addition to those fish stocked by the FWS in the Great Lakes. This technique that has been successfully used in the Northwest for marking hatchery-reared Pacific salmon, and is known as "mass-marking" since millions of fish are rapidly tagged and marked each year.

The mass-marking initiative began as the brain-child of the Council of Lake Committees, a group of policy makers for each of the Great Lakes, under the auspice of the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission. They saw what mass marking was doing for salmon management in the Pacific Northwest, and wanted to bring that same capability to the nation's most valuable freshwater resource, not only for salmon but for native species like lake and brook trout.

Above: USFWS biologist explains how mass marking can provide valuable information on fish movements, survival and performance in the Great Lakes. USFWS Photo.

In 2003 the Council of Lake Committee initiated an implementation task force, co-chaired by Marianne Daniels from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Fish and Wildlife Service's Chuck Bronte, to develop cost, equipment, and manpower estimates to implement mass-marking in the Great Lakes, as well as the associated data recovery and analytical capabilities.

"The Service already implements a basin-wide sea lamprey control program and lake trout restoration program, and was well-suited to lead the basin-wide mass marking initiative," said Bronte, a fishery biologist and data analyst from the FWS's Green Bay National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office.

The FWS's Fisheries program already uses coded wire tags to evaluate the performance of lake trout raised in federal fish hatcheries; however, the idea behind the mass marking initiative was to equip the Service with capabilities to also tag State and Tribal hatchery fish.

Coded wire tags are small pieces of metal with numerical codes inserted into the nose of fish that, when recovered, allow fish biologists to look at movements, post release mortality, levels of natural recruitment, wild production and other key factors that influence fisheries management.

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Basin-Wide Fisheries Management: Mass Marketing in the Great Lakes Continued

"It's important for managers to know how many wild fish are out there, gauge the impact of the stocked fish, and balance forage availability with the number of salmon and trout that are out there," said Bronte. "It's also a way to manage non-native species that are naturalized and part of the system, and consider them in relation to native species management like lake trout and brook trout."

The implementation task force visited each hatchery across the Great Lakes, to determine species and production schedules with the intention of mapping out equipment profiles.

The task force determined that the use of Northwest Marine Technology's computer operated automated marking trailers would have the capability to mark 60,000 fish in an eight-hour day, amounting to an overall cost savings of 11 percent over manual methods. The automated trailer also provides better tag retention, more consistent tag placement, and easier tag recovery in the laboratory.

Above: Automated marking trailers have the capability to mark 60,000 fish in an eight-hour day, amounting to an overall cost savings of 11 percent over manual methods. USFWS Photo.

A Great Lakes Regional Marking Committee was established to oversee mass marking activities, and includes members from the States, Tribes, Province of Ontario and FWS. The Great Lakes Regional Marking Committee approved this year a project to mark all Federal lake trout in Region 3 (around 5 million fish) and assist with a validation study that examines natural reproduction by tagging 1.2 million of those fish with oxytetracyclene. The FWS also funded a Chinook salmon tagging study by New York Department of Environmental Conservation, which will evaluate the relative survival of pen-reared fish versus those grown out in the hatchery and released from trucks.

This spring the FWS, working with state hatchery personnel, tagged and marked 370,000 Chinook salmon from Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery, and 750,000 Chinook salmon at Platte River State Fish Hatchery, operated by Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The goal for the mass marking program is to reach more than 20 different facilities across the Great Lakes basin.

"Tribal treaty fisheries, inter-jurisdictional fisheries management, and native species restoration and conservation strategies rely on the exchange of information among management jurisdictions," said Bronte. "Mass marking will improve our knowledge of fish movements, survival, performance and other valuable information about Great Lakes trout and salmon, and will promote cooperative strategic fisheries management."

--Ashley Spratt
External Affairs

Retirement News

Ken Kaseforth Moving On

Ken Kaseforth started his federal career in the Air Force in 1972 as a ground radio equipment repairman. In 1974 Ken became a military historian. During his pursuit of a law degree in 1977, he was a law clerk for the Veteran Affairs. Kaseforth also worked for the INS, the U.S. Postal Service, the Department of Justice and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. In 2001, Kaseforth joined the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a contract specialist.

Above: Kaseforth with wife, Bonnie, enjoying the days festivities. Left: Kaseforth receives a framed gift signed by co-workers. USFWS Photo by Valerie Rose Redmond.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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

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