



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

# **Inside Region 3**

*September 2009*

## **Secretary Salazar Visits Minnesota Valley**



### **Plus:**

**Deputy Director Rowan Gould Visits the RO**

**Congressman Keith Ellison Reiterates His Support**

**Congressman Ron Kind Attends Refuge Visitor Center Ground Breaking Ceremony**

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## *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](mailto:valerie_redmond@fws.gov) with your Let's Go Outside! and Kids Corner articles, photos, journal entries and poems.

*On the Cover:* Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar (left) address the crowd at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge with Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius (right). USFWS Photo.

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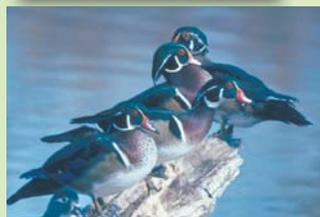
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## The Science of Leadership

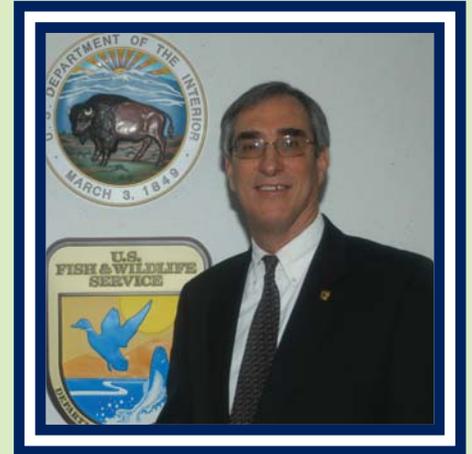
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is built on a foundation of sound science. That foundation extends once again to our leadership with the recent confirmation of Sam Hamilton as our new Director.

In Latin, “scientia” means knowledge. A more than 30-year veteran of the Service, Sam is a leader with that and more. He has a precise vision and the expertise, skill, and practical experience to employ it. “Sam has the proven experience in developing innovative conservation initiatives, resolving complex and controversial environmental issues and delivering significant wildlife conservation across the U.S.,” President Obama wrote in his nomination of Sam Hamilton. “Sam’s long-stretching career with

the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as his vast and varied experience make him an excellent candidate for Director, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.”

I couldn’t agree more. I have served with Sam on several FWS committees, including the Directorate’s Oversight Committee on Climate Change, where Sam’s contributions on key conservation and management policies were invaluable. His dedication is echoed in his long and distinguished career.

Sam comes to the Directorship from the Southeast Region where he oversaw Service facilities including, 112 national wildlife refuges covering more than 3.1 million acres, 19 national fish hatcheries, 4 fishery assistance offices, 15 ecological services field offices, and 28 law enforcement offices. He served with the Service for seven years in Mississippi and Alabama early in his career. In 1986, he was named Alabama Wildlife



Federation’s Water Conservationist of the Year Award for efforts associated with restoring historic river flows and fisheries to the Coosa River.

“As an avid hunter and angler, I love the outdoors and strongly believe we must conserve our fish and wildlife for the enjoyment of all Americans,” Sam said.

To take action to conserve fish and wildlife in the face of climate change, we need strong leadership, leadership with experience, leadership with innovative ideas and solutions that we face in these challenging times. We need leadership with a strong foundation. I know Sam Hamilton will fill that need. As we move forward into the next decade, I am certain that he will lead with great vision and professionalism. Under his watch we will be prepared to meet our resource management challenges, particularly, that of climate change.

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



Above: Newly confirmed Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sam Hamilton.



# The Buzz

## Columbia FWCO completes fourth year of partnership with City of Columbia

For the fourth year in a row, the Columbia FWCO participated in a local job placement program for high school students called Career Awareness Related Experience (CARE). Josh Tharpe and Riaz Helfer are students at Hickman High School in Columbia. These students are paid by the city of Columbia but gain valuable experience working for local businesses.

The two young men learned many new skills during their employment. They were able to assist in boat and truck maintenance, mend nets, organize electronic files and learn fish sampling techniques on the Missouri River. In previous years, students were rewarded by taking them fishing on their last day. This year they were taken out for some river fishing. Trotlines were set on a Monday afternoon and they

returned to pull them the following day. Unfortunately only two catfish were caught on the lines that were set. They tried some rod and reel fishing, but the warm July morning probably wasn't the best time for trophy catfish angling. Despite the slow fishing, all had a great time and enjoyed the river fishing trip.

The CARES program has allowed the office to show many young people the work we do on the Missouri River. Because many young people are not exposed to outdoor activities, we hope that the job experience from this summer sparks an interest in the natural resources. This day was a great way to thank the students for their hard work this summer, while also getting them outside to enjoy the Missouri River. --Andrew Plauck

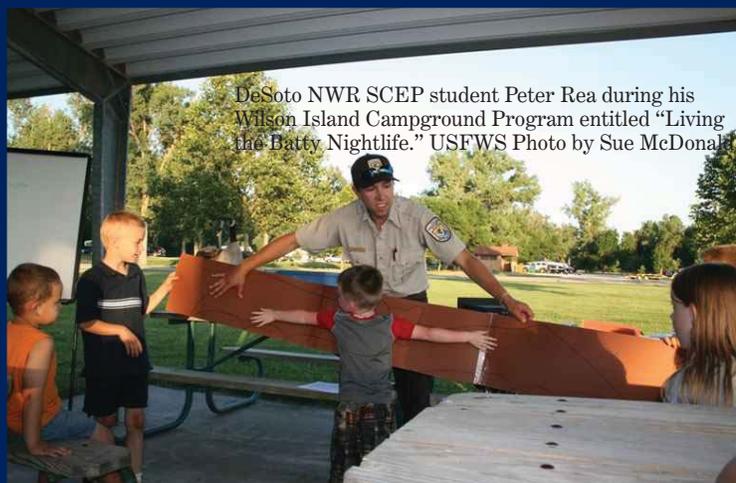


Above: Josh Tharpe (left) and Riaz Helfer hold their catch from a Missouri River trotline. USFWS Photo.

## Teaming with the DNR

This summer marked the second season of a partnership between DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. The Iowa DNR hosts a 135 campsite State Recreation Area that is located adjacent to the refuge. The DeSoto NWR staff used these Iowa DNR campgrounds as a venue for their Interpretive Programs. Every Saturday evening starting at 8:00, a staff member presented a "Campground Program." The topics included "Living the Batty Nightlife," "Leave it to Beavers," "Snakes Alive!" and "Who-who's Out There." While each staff member had a special connection

with their specific topic, they were all working for a much bigger and broader goal. That goal was to get the participants interested and curious about nature, while also educating visitors about the refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System. Overall, both sides of the partnership are excited about the success of the "Campground Programs." This summer there were nine programs offered with a total attendance of nearly 400 people. --Peter Rea



DeSoto NWR SCEP student Peter Rea during his Wilson Island Campground Program entitled "Living the Batty Nightlife." USFWS Photo by Sue McDonald

# Whittlesey Creek NWR adds Visitor Services Manager

Kevin J. Lowry has been appointed as visitor services manager for the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge. Lowry recently reported for duty and is stationed at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center near Ashland, Wis. The refuge is next door to the visitor center. A portion of the refuge now abuts visitor center's property. Together, the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge and the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center offer an abundance of wildlife viewing opportunities and outdoor activities.

"The Refuge is pleased and very excited to add Kevin's diversified experience to the staff," said project leader, Tom Kerr. Lowry hails from New York and previously worked at several high profile refuges in the Northeast and Midwest regions. These include: Middle Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge in southern Illinois and southeast Missouri; Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut; Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey and Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in upstate New York.

Kevin is responsible for developing, planning,

implementing and managing the refuge's entire visitor services program. refuge staff also assists the visitor center with education, outreach and hosting special events. Lowry holds a degree in Natural Resources Conservation and certification in Outdoor Recreation from State University of New York at Finger Lakes CC. Additionally, he holds a degree in Wildlife Management from the State University of New York College of Agriculture and Technology at Cobleskill. Furthermore, Lowry earned his masters in Recreation and Leisure Studies - Outdoor and Environmental Education with a concentration in Environmental Interpretation from Cortland State University.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established the Refuge to protect and restore the lower portion of Whittlesey Creek and coastal wetlands along the lakeshore of Chequamegon Bay in Lake Superior. Within the Refuge is a complex of uplands, streams and wetlands that have enormous value, not only to the fish and wildlife that use this area, but also to the residents and visitors of the Chequamegon Bay area. This is the first unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System in northern Wisconsin.



Kevin Lowry, visitor services manager, of Whittlesey Creek NWR. Photo by John Van Niel.

Staff members continue to work on conservation and restoration issues on the refuge, but are also here to help landowners interested in improving the management of their land for fish and wildlife by assisting them with forest, wetland and stream restoration projects. Visitor services will play a key role in the future success of the Refuge.

# Secretary Salazar Tours Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

On August 9, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar highlighted more than \$286,000 in projects at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) funded under President Obama's economic recovery package that will create jobs and economic growth in Minnesota. Overall, the Department of the Interior is investing more than \$11 million across Minnesota in projects in wildlife refuges, national park units, and on tribal lands.

"Under the president's economic recovery package, we are providing good jobs for Minnesotans during these difficult economic times while undertaking important conservation and construction work at the refuge that will make it a better place for both people and wildlife," Salazar said.

Investment in the Minnesota Valley NWR under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act signed earlier this year by



Above: Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar (left) presents a partnership award for Steve Sutter (center), president of Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends, Inc. Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius (right) joined the Secretary and others for a tour of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge on Sunday morning. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photo).

the president includes \$35,000 to replace a deteriorating loading dock at the refuge's headquarters, \$151,000 to replace a pedestrian bridge on a popular trail that was washed out by flooding five years ago, and \$100,000 to reduce fuel loads in refuge woodlands in partnership with the Minnesota Conservation

Corps dedicated to employing youth in the outdoors while gaining life skills.

Salazar also emphasized the many opportunities at the refuge for young people to get outdoors, recreate and learn about nature.

"Because it is so close the city, this beautiful refuge offers parents and families a way to connect with nature and get exercise," he said. "Every child should have the opportunity to experience a place as special as this."

The refuge initiated a new environmental education program in 2006 that emphasizes long-term learning for students and their teachers. This initiative provides teachers and students with multidisciplinary, standard-based curriculum that includes hands-on, real-life experiences with plants and wildlife, as well as recreational

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Above: Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius (left) Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar (center) and Deputy Regional Director Charlie Wooley and Assistant Secretary Tom Strickland (far right). USFWS Photo.

# Service Law Enforcement at Work

## Illinois Man Pleads Guilty to Shooting Bald Eagle

Jerry Kronable, 26, of Hardin, Ill., pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court, in East St. Louis, Ill., to one violation of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act yesterday. Kronable was sentenced to pay a \$5,000 fine, serve one year probation, and forfeit the rifle he used to shoot the eagle.

Kronable admitted that on Jan. 17, he noticed a bald eagle feeding on a deer carcass in a field on Degerlia Hollow Road, near the intersection of Illinois Route 100, in Hardin, Ill. Kronable stopped his vehicle and shot at the eagle, from his vehicle, with a .22 caliber rifle. The eagle was struck by at least one .22 caliber bullet. The eagle was able to fly to a nearby tree limb, but died soon after, and fell onto the roadside where it was discovered.

In an unrelated case, the mutilated carcass of another bald eagle was found about 60 miles south of Hardin, Ill., a week earlier. Because it was not known if these killings were connected, a \$10,000 reward was offered for information on either killing.

The Calhoun County Sheriff's Office, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began an investigation of both killings and received many tips from the public. "This case shows how valuable information from the public can

be," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agent Jason Bak. "We likely would not have solved this case without public involvement."

While several individuals came forward with the information needed to identify and sentence Kronable, none of them wanted any reward. The second bald eagle killing is still an open investigation.

Although the bald eagle was removed from the federal Endangered Species List in 2007, eagles are still protected by other state and federal laws. One of those laws is the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, a federal law that prohibits the taking or possession of bald and golden eagles.

--Charles Traxler, *External Affairs*

## Local man convicted and sentenced for snare case at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge

Through the combined efforts of Federal Refuge Officer John Below and Wisconsin DNR Wardens Ben Nadolski, April Dombrowski and Heather Gottschalk, a local man was convicted and sentenced for illegal hunting of deer on Horicon National Wildlife Refuge.

Mark J. McRobert of Waupun, Wis., was sentenced in the Wisconsin Circuit Court to 60 days in jail, \$2,108.00 in fines and restitution and revocation of his



hunting and fishing privileges for three years.

A complaint was initially reported on November 28, 2008 that snares were placed along the Rock River on the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge. Refuge Officer John Below and DNR Wardens Ben Nadolski and April Dombrowski searched and located two snares that appeared to be set to catch deer. McRobert became a suspect after being seen in the area where the snares were found. In January of 2009 Refuge Officer Below and DNR Warden Heather Gottschalk interviewed McRobert who admitted to setting the snares to catch deer.

Attempts to find more snares resulted in locating two more snares: one on the Horicon NWR in the proximity of the previously located snares and one found entangled around the antlers of a deer that had broke free of the snare but was shot the last day of the early bow season by a legal hunter.

This case is an excellent example of how interagency assistance can produce great results. This conviction would never have occurred with out Wisconsin DNR Wardens and Federal Refuge Officers working together.

--Diane Kitchen

# Washington Support Congressman Ellison Opens Up



Congressman Keith Ellison, a long time environmental policy advocate and children's rights champion, in a conversation with External Affairs' Valerie Rose Redmond, opened up on his thoughts about children and nature, the overheating of the planet and energy renewal.

**Redmond:** Thank you for taking time out to visit with us Congressman Ellison. I really appreciate it.

**Congressman Ellison:** I'm happy to be here. It's really great.

**Redmond:** And thank you also for lending us a quote last year for the photo exhibit. That was really nice of you. I really appreciate that, as well.

**Congressman Ellison:** I'm your humble servant.

**Redmond:** (Laughs); So I wanted to talk to you a little bit about your passion for children and the environment.

**Congressman Ellison:** Oh yeah.

**Redmond:** Where did that come from? Was there some specific thing that happened in your past that caused the passion to happen?

**Congressman Ellison:** Well, you know, not really. I've always felt our natural world is a gift from the Divine. And it needs to be cared for and embraced and that this world is not our property. But it's just a trust. And so, I didn't grow up in a household where my dad took us camping much, but when I got to be an adult I started just doing it. And so I got my kids into it and then I got involved with environmental policy advocacy. And [I] got involved with the Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota. And it's just sort of a passion. I think that a healthy well child lives life free of toxins in their food, in their air and in their water. And so it's our commitment, our obligation to try to make it so.

**Redmond:** So where do you guys go camping?

**Congressman Ellison:** Well, if we have a weekend, we might run out to some of the campgrounds in Minnesota or Wisconsin. Like there's the Wild River campground that's right close. We go over night there and go canoeing there. And then there's some campgrounds in Wisconsin that we go to. And then of course, I've camped in the Isle Royale and backpacked and stuff like that. Of course, we've gone on boundary water canoe trips and stuff like that. So I love it. I just absolutely love it. In my next life I'm going to be a park ranger.

**Redmond:** Is that right?

**Congressman Ellison:** Yeah.

**Redmond:** OK. Have you ever been to any of our national wildlife refuges, at all?

**Congressman Ellison:** Yes, I have! And I have enjoyed it. I think it's wonderful that we are trying to preserve the natural world. And I thank the people who make it possible.

**Redmond:** Now, one of our highest priorities in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is connecting people with nature, particularly, people of color and urban dwellers. So what do you think we can do as an agency to attract people to nature?

**Congressman Ellison:** Well, I think that one thing that we can do is show people the nature that is right around them. The fact is there are opportunities right here in the urban area to take advantage of, like for example right here in Minneapolis we are lucky to have several lakes in the city, several parks and these things, we've got to invest in them. We've got to make them walkable. Right near north Minneapolis is Theodore Wirth Park. And we've got to make it so that if you live in north Minneapolis and you feel like walking down to the park, you can do that. We've also got to make transportation accessible so that people can get there and take full advantage. And we've got to make it so that our school children can go on outings there and see the natural world right close to their school. I think that one of the things that we should not do is say that the natural world is somewhere a long, long,

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# Washington Support Continued

## Congressman Keith Ellison Continued

long way away from here. We've got to make it close. We've got to show people what a grasshopper (is), and of course all the plants close by, and show kids the wonders of the plants that are close to them—that there are medicinal purposes for the plants and the beauty of the plants. (Let them) look at them under a microscope and see the complexity of them. Help children understand the importance of how we get oxygen and essential things for human life that come from these plants. And how the original people of America—the Aboriginal people—the Indians use to know every single plant in the forest and all the value of it and all the uses of it, and how fascinating it could all be.

See the full interview online at : <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/justescape/episodes.htm>



Secretary Salazar (left) takes a stroll with USFWS Midwest Region Director Tom Melius. USFWS Photo.

## Secretary Visit Continued

opportunities to immerse students in nature throughout the seasons. It reaches a wide audience of students with an emphasis on diverse, inner-city youth.

In addition, in September 2008, the refuge opened a second Education and Visitor Center with state-of-

the-art facilities focusing on education and getting people out onto the refuge.

Nationwide, the Department of the Interior is investing \$3 billion in projects on public lands to stimulate the economy and provide jobs to Americans.

Secretary Salazar has pledged unprecedented levels of transparency and accountability in the implementation of the Department of the Interior's economic recovery projects. The public will be able to follow the progress of each project on the recovery web site and at <http://www.interior.gov/recovery>. The website includes an interactive map that enables the public also to follow where and how the department's recovery dollars are being spent.  
--Chuck Trasler, External Affairs

Below: Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar (l) presents a partnership award for Steve Sutter (c), president of Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends, Inc. Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius (r) joined the Secretary and others for a tour of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge on Sunday morning. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photo) .



# Congressman Ron Kind Tours Site & Attends Ground Breaking Ceremony

## Congressman Ron Kind and Staff with Senators Kohl and Feingold Tour Aquatic Habitat Restoration Site and Attend Refuge Visitor Center Ground-Breaking Ceremony

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in coordination with the Wisconsin DNR and Trout Unlimited, hosted Congressman Ron Kind (WI-3) and congressional staff with Senators Kohl (WI) and Feingold (WI) on a tour of an aquatic habitat restoration project at Big Spring Branch in southwestern Wisconsin (Iowa County) on August 25, 2009. Prior to restoration activities, heavy agricultural pressure had contributed to severe erosion of stream banks and high sediment loads to the stream, which negatively impacted habitat quality and the local trout fishery.

The partnership restoration project is a direct application of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP), a national investment strategy to maximize the impact of conservation dollars on the ground. During the site visit, Mr. Kind and congressional staff learned how efforts to improve land

management practices in recent years have led to improvements in groundwater recharge, water quality and the local fishery. As part of the Driftless Area Restoration Effort (DARE), the Service and its partners continue to plan and implement projects



Above: Congressman Ron Kind (WI-3) (Left) and USFWS Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius (Right) discuss a recently completed partner-based aquatic restoration project in southwestern Wisconsin. USFWS Photo.

to stabilize eroding banks, install natural structures in-stream to scour out pools, increase stream velocity and sinuosity, and provide diverse habitat for fish, amphibians and reptiles.

Under NFHAP, Federal, State, Tribal, and privately-raised funds are leveraged through regional partnerships to address the nation's biggest fish habitat challenges. Congressman Kind introduced the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act of 2009

in the House of Representatives in May of 2009, and this legislation aims to conserve the Nation's fish and aquatic communities through partnerships that foster fish habitat conservation and would act as organic legislation for the NFHAP program.

Later in the same week (August 27), Congressman Kind and staff with Senators Kohl and Feingold also attended an unveiling of the architectural design and a ceremonial ground-breaking for a new visitor center at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge. Congressman Kind, who has played a key role in helping to obtain funding for the new visitor center, praised the ecological values of the refuge and emphasized the economic and educational benefits that the new facility will offer residents of the area and visitors from outside the region.

Construction of the visitor center will be funded in part by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

The ground-breaking ceremony was also attended by Rowan Gould, the Service's Acting Director, and Tom Melius, the Service's Midwest Regional Director. The event included a light lunch provided by the Friends of Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and was attended by approximately 150 members of the public.

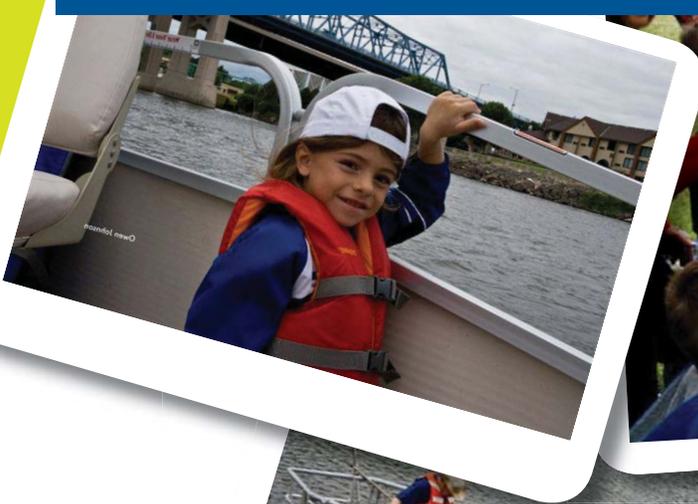
--Ryan Aylesworth  
*External Affairs*

# Let's Go Outside

Below: Kids enjoy the first annual Youth Fest in La Crosse. USFWS Photos.



The first annual Youth Outdoor Fest was held on July 18. The event was organized by La Crosse Park & Rec and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) La Crosse National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office with much needed help from the Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services and Youth Enrichment Association (La Crosse). The event featured electrofishing demos, hands-on casting (both regular and fly rods), archery, environmental crafts and games, trout fishing, live fish identification, informative booths on emerald ash borer, fisheries backpack program, aquatic invertebrates, freshwater mussels, turtles, bass fishing, bow fishing, ice fishing, fly fishing, law enforcement, exotics, pontoon rides, kayaking and canoeing, among other activities. --Heidi L. Keuler  
La Crosse National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



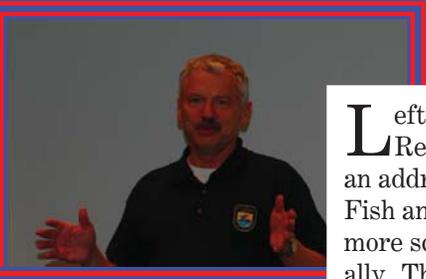
# Around the Region



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that the Science Museum of Minnesota in St. Paul will host the 2010 Junior Duck Stamp Contest on April 23, 2010. This is only the second time in the program's history that the event has been held outside of Washington D.C.

"The Midwest Region is proud to host the Junior Duck Stamp Contest in 2010," said Tom Melius, Midwest Regional Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. "This is not just an art contest; it's a program that can help instill environmental stewardship in young minds."

"The Science Museum of Minnesota is thrilled and honored to be chosen as the site of the 2010 Junior Duck Stamp Contest," said Mike Day, senior vice president at the Science Museum of Minnesota. "It's a privilege to be associated with the Junior Duck Stamp Program, as it's one of the most successful wildlife conservation programs in the nation."  
--Ashley Spratt, *External Affairs*



Left: Deputy Director Rowan Gould visited the Regional Office on Wednesday, August 26. In an address as part of his visit, he said that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is well poised for more scientific excellence, both fiscally and functionally. The Service, he said, will soon erect scientific research laboratories termed Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) across the country. The LCCs will give more control of the science to the regions. The budget, he told the audience, facilitates the Service's ability to more effectively address key priorities and new challenges in a new world, such as climate change.

--Valerie Rose Redmond, *External Affairs*



Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar highlighted more than \$286,000 in projects at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge funded under President Obama's economic recovery package that will create jobs and economic growth in Minnesota. Overall, the Department of the Interior is investing more than \$11 million across Minnesota in projects in wildlife refuges, national park units, and on tribal lands.

Above: Minnesota Valley NWR Assistant Manager Jeanne Holler traded Secretary Salazar a Friends of Minnesota Valley hat for his cowboy hat. - DOI photo by Tami A. Heilemann

# Strategic Conservation in Action Bringing Back the Ducks

## Strategic Conservation in Action Bringing Back the Ducks A Strategic Approach to Wetland Conservation in the Prairie Pothole Region

The Prairie Pothole Region of the upper Midwest is a 10,000 year-old landscape remnant of the Glacial Period, and today is considered one of the most endangered habitats in North America. Due to agricultural draining, more than 70 percent of its native wetlands have been lost.

Conservationists, waterfowl hunters and migratory bird experts call the expanse of scattered shallow water pockets the “Duck Factory” because more than 200 species of waterfowl and migratory birds use the region for spring breeding. Crossing portions of western Minnesota, Iowa, Montana, the Dakotas and central Canada, the 300,000 square mile landscape also provides habitat for a wide range of resident and seasonal wildlife.

A team of researchers and biologists have dedicated their careers to restoring and preserving this critical habitat to ensure sustainable populations of waterfowl and wetland and grassland wildlife for the future.

The Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET), stationed in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, conducts scientific evaluation and monitoring projects to support strategic

conservation efforts in the Prairie Pothole Region. The team collects and analyzes scientific data that informs on-the-ground conservation action not only by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), but also partner agencies including U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, state natural resources agencies, and non-governmental organizations.



“HAPET provides cutting-edge research that can be adapted and expanded upon to estimate breeding potential in certain habitats for other species, like those that are threatened or endangered,” said Tom Melius, Midwest Regional Director of the Service.

HAPET biologist Dan Hertel uses a scientific model called the “Restored Wetlands Pair Calculator” to estimate duck-pair potential, or breeding potential, within 40-acre tracts of land. Using the data collected from annual waterfowl surveys and historical

data on species populations, the team is able to estimate production potential of a landscape, both before and after restoration.

“I refer to this as a landscape potential project,” said Rex Johnson, Fergus Fall HAPET Office Field Supervisor. “We examine the potential of a specific tract of land for successful waterfowl breeding, which helps us as an agency determine where we should be focusing our restoration and management efforts.”

“We essentially can determine where the pair values are highest, and can analyze the cost to benefit ratio between actual land values, habitat restoration costs and forecasted waterfowl production rates,” Hertel said.

The National Wildlife Refuge System uses the data analysis provided by HAPET to strategize land acquisition opportunities. Refuge Supervisor Jim Leach testifies to the importance of this data for refuges located in the Midwest Region: “From this technology, our refuges stay informed on which pieces of land are most valuable in terms of waterfowl breeding habitat, which can then guide our decisions on the piece of land that is going to give us the biggest conservation return.”

In particular, the Service’s Small Wetlands Acquisitions Program benefits breeding waterfowl through the acquisition of small wetlands and associated upland habitats. These Waterfowl Production Areas, or WPAs,



## Quote of the Month

I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in. --George Washington Carver

In addition to conservation easements, are selected for restoration and conservation efforts, based on the integrity of their existing wetland complexes as well as predicted landscape level nest success.

In late spring and early summer, HAPET coordinates a survey of wetland conditions and waterfowl species on more than 250 four square miles plots and 1800 ponds, to assess how National Wildlife Refuge lands are doing in terms of supporting waterfowl production. The survey generates the *Breeding Pair and Production Estimate Report*, which informs science-based decision making on hunting regulations, restoration and enhancement efforts and management issues on National Wildlife Refuges.

The upper Midwest is known for its strong outdoor ethic – hunting, fishing and outdoor recreations – are all important elements of the Midwestern lifestyle. The team not only contributes to science-based conservation, but also contributes to the long-term sustainability of the outdoor tradition that defines the region.

“We want to ensure that generation after generation can continue to participate in the outdoor hobbies they enjoy, whether that be photographing wildlife, hunting, birding, or just being immersed in natural surroundings,” said Johnson.

In addition to assessing waterfowl production capabilities on certain tracts of land, HAPET biologists also determine the effect of on-the-ground management activities predicted to benefit others birds of concern, like American bittern, Marbled godwit, and Piping plover. HAPET researcher Diane Granfors leads studies that examine the effects of woody vegetation removal on grassland nesting birds.

“We survey the number of birds in a particular area prior to and after tree removal activities,” Granfors said. “Grassland birds are declining more rapidly than any other bird group, so understanding the effectiveness of tree removal is critical. We are finding in most cases that the Service’s management activities are working, and are improving habitat for those species.”

HAPET also contributes to the region’s conservation ethic by providing opportunities for children to become “citizen scientists.” The team bands upwards of 1,000 ducks annually, and recruits the help of students to get the job done. Duck banding alongside HAPET biologists engages children in the principles of natural resources management and scientific design, while giving them a hands-on opportunity to learn wildlife biology.

“The natural resource profession will be responsible for addressing the conservation issues affecting the Prairie Pothole Region for many years into the future,” Johnson said. “Educating future generations on how sound science can help save a species is critical. They will have our jobs one day, and the more experience we can provide them early on the better.”

Restoration of the wetlands and grasslands of the Prairie Pothole Region remains a top priority for the Service. As a practitioner of strategic conservation, HAPET works closely with multiple conservation partners to expand the knowledge base to address conservation challenges in the Prairie Pothole Region. From strategic planning and evaluation for migratory birds, to monitoring for wetland waterfowl, the team conducts key data collection and analysis to help inform landscape level decision making by other Service and partner programs.

“Efficiently restoring habitat complexes demands a targeted and coordinated approach to conservation,” Johnson said. “The technical assistance that HAPET provides to the Service and its partners strengthens our scientific credibility. The data that comes out of this office directly benefits the species and habitats that require our efforts to survive.”

--Ashley Spratt, *External Affairs*

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