

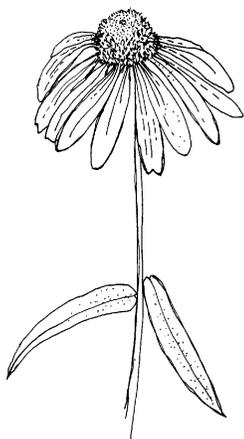
# Refuge Reporter

Volume 11, Issue 2

Spring 2008

## Many Volunteers Needed to Plant Plugs on May 31

By Michelle Vander Haar, Private Lands Biologist



In 2006, the refuge began a partnership with the Michigan Department of Corrections Horticulture program at the Saginaw Correctional Facility in Freeland. Our long-term goal of this partnership is to establish and maintain a native seed/plant base to

be used for the restoration of native grasses and wildflowers at the refuge and surrounding communities. The benefits of this program were realized when JF New was contracted by the refuge to collect local genotype plant species in order to expand the program. A draft report from this collection stated that if we maintained the 50-60 species that were collected, we could restore thousands of acres and save over \$4 million dollars!

This is the second year of production by the correctional facility and we would

like to invite you to participate in a planting event on May 31, 2008, beginning at 9:00 a.m. We will have over 19,000 plugs to plant and need many volunteers, of all ages, to help us accomplish this task! This is a good opportunity to get community service hours for those students and scouts who need them. There will be free refreshments and "door prizes." State and federal representatives who have supported this new partnership will also be invited to participate.

The area to be planted is directly behind Rose Auto Parts on M-13 just south of the City of Saginaw. We are expecting to have 5 or more acres of wetland restored and currently have restored 118 acres of native prairie. Wouldn't it be nice to say I helped to restore a part of the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge?

Please contact Becky Goche at (989) 759-1669 or Michelle Vander Haar at (989) 777-5930 ext. 12 if you have questions, or would like to assist us with this event.

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### Special Points:

- *Information about the 2008 refuge deer hunts will be available on-line in June.*
- *Kids Free Fishing Day is June 7, 2008, during the Free Fishing Weekend. During this weekend anglers across the state can fish on in-land without a license.*

# Free Backyard Wildlife Habitat Workshops Offered in April, May and June

By Michelle Vander Haar, Private Lands Biologist

Shiawassee NWR is partnering with the Saginaw County Conservation District to offer a series of **Backyard Wildlife Habitat** workshops to landowners. In an effort to attract local wildlife to your property, these workshops will help you incorporate all the most important aspects of a native habitat into your own backyard. These workshops will provide information on how to care for your small woodlots and alternative uses for dead or dying ash trees. We will also present information on the importance of water and wetlands and the use of native grasses and wildflowers in your backyard. Any landowner, whether residential, industrial, small business or recreational, who owns land the size of a small lot to 100's of acres will benefit from these workshops.

On **April 21** from 7:00—8:00 p.m., we will offer a presentation on woodlot management and alternative uses for ash trees infected with Emerald Ash Borer. The Conservation District has some fun ideas including turning your ash trees into baseball bats and trim for

your home.

On **May 19** from 7:00—8:00 p.m., we will present information on the importance of water and wetlands in your backyard.

On **June 9**, from 6:00—7:00 p.m., Designs by Nature will present information on the importance of using native plants for landscaping. From 7:00—8:00 p.m. they will offer native plants for sale to anyone who might be interested. All workshops are free and will be held at Green Point Environmental Learning Center, 3010 Maple Street in Saginaw.

Promoting conservation to private landowners is a priority for the Conservation District and the refuge. In a world where the majority of land is privately owned, it is important that we provide the knowledge and information to landowners to assist with wildlife and habitat conservation.

## Shiawassee Refuge's 17th Annual Non-Ambulatory Deer Hunt a Success

By Steve Kahl, Refuge Manager

Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge has implemented a program for non-ambulatory deer hunters since 1991. In fact, it is one of the first such programs initiated in the Refuge System. This program gives many people an opportunity to enjoy the experience of hunting that they otherwise would not be able to do. This year's hunt was conducted November 15 – 18, 2007, with 34 hunters participating. Ten participants were able to kill a deer including one large eight-point buck.

Although this program requires a great deal of staff effort, it would not be possible without the support of many partners. Hunting equipment retailer Ameristep donated hunting blinds. The National Wild Turkey Federation's Wheelin' Sportsmen program, the Michigan state NWTF chapter, and many local chapters have been instrumental in raising funds through an-

nual banquets. Significant funds have also been donated by several local individuals and civic groups. These funds are used to purchase radios, heaters, chairs, handwarmers, and other equipment and supplies. Importantly, these funds also provide a hot lunch for every hunter that participates, which is a real necessity for a late autumn day in the field.

However, it is the contributions of refuge volunteers that cannot be overstated. Each year 30 to 40 men and women help to install the blinds well before the hunt and remove and store them afterwards. The volunteers provide assistance and guidance to the hunters through the day including tracking and field dressing deer. In fact, these volunteers are so passionate about the good will generated by the program that they take time off from work to participate and give up weekend days. Further, since the hunt occurs during Michigan's either sex shotgun season, they give up the most coveted days in the Michigan deer hunter's calendar.

# A Look Back at the Refuge in 2007

by *Steve Kahl, Refuge Manager*

The beginning of a new year is always a time of reflecting upon the year prior. Shiawassee Refuge experienced many successes in 2007, but faces significant challenges in 2008.

One of the most significant accomplishments this past year was acquisition of the 74-acre Kaufmann tract. This was the first land parcel added to the refuge since 2000. The tract is contiguous with the current refuge boundary and provides excellent habitat for nesting waterfowl, grassland birds, and wintering raptors such as short-eared owl. The Kaufmann Tract is also in the area of the refuge that is most threatened by residential development.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service formalized a Memorandum of Agreement with Detroit Edison and The Conservation Fund to improve refuge habitats and acquire lands while sequestering atmospheric carbon to reduce greenhouse gases. DTE and TCF coordinated the planting of 53,000 native tree seedlings on 180 refuge acres. This will consolidate small forest patches into larger blocks to benefit a wide variety of woodland wildlife, including wood duck, barred owl, and American redstart. Further, TCF will manage a land acquisition fund established by DTE to acquire additional lands to be added to the refuge.

Although the primary purpose of the refuge is to provide habitat and sanctuary for migratory birds, the refuge facilitates hunting, fishing, wildlife photography, wildlife observation, environmental education, interpretation, and other outdoors activities when compatible with its primary purpose. Refuge visitation increased again in 2007 to 60,000 visitors. We continue to increase the number of organized events and offered 61 auto tours, walks, programs, and special events this past year. The refuge also started the engineering and design phase for a new 7.5 mile auto tour route, or wildlife drive, with construction to begin in FY2009. This facility has by far been the most requested public use improvement and should increase our visitation substantially.

The refuge had many other wins in 2007. We continue to increase our visibility as an asset to the community

with at least 76 articles about the refuge appearing in newspapers and magazines. Each year our sandhill crane numbers increase and we counted a new record high of 178 in November. We conducted the first annual Shiawassee Refuge butterfly count in July in cooperation with the North American Butterfly Association. We installed beautiful new interpretive signs along Ferguson Bayou Trail so that visitors are much more aware of what we do at the refuge. We also restored a 138 acre soybean field to diverse prairie habitat.

Unfortunately, the refuge faces chronic challenges. Climate change may be yielding warmer winters which decreases ice coverage of the Great Lakes. This reduced ice yields increased evaporation. Consequently, lower Great Lakes water levels severely impair our ability to manage in our wetlands. In fact, four of our most important impoundments were full of quality food and cover plants for migratory birds, but were without water for most of fall migration.

Continued erosion of base funding continues as budgets remain flat while costs increase. To bridge this budgetary gap the Fish and Wildlife Service has to leave positions vacant as employees retire or move to other jobs. Officer Jonathan Friday transferred to another refuge in January 2007 and his position is still vacant. Further, Engineering Equipment operator Marion "Butch" Nowosatko retired after 29 years of federal service at the beginning of 2008. With the previously existing vacancy of our Biological technician position, this brings Shiawassee Refuge staff down from ten positions in 2005 to seven currently. Consequently, the primary focus of the refuge is not to increase or enhance habitats, facilities, and programs, but simply trying to maintain what we have. This simple goal is increasingly difficult to achieve as staff decreases.

Still, I look forward to 2008. With the help of our friends, partners, and volunteers we can continue to make the refuge a better place for people and wildlife.



# 2007 Was an Up and Down Year for Eagles at the Refuge

by *Steve Kahl, Refuge Manager*

Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge provides important habitat for bald and golden eagles. The state-listed endangered bald eagle nests at the refuge, but the greatest numbers occur during winter and migration. Golden eagles are rare but regular at Shiawassee Refuge, with one or two found almost annually from late autumn to early spring. Many positive and negative events occurred for eagles at the refuge in 2007.

The year started with a sour note when a refuge hunter found a sick immature bald eagle in January. With the help of a local wildlife rehabilitator and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agent this bird was captured. However, it died shortly thereafter. Analysis by the Service's National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory determined that the eagle died from lead poisoning after ingesting a lead fragment.

In January and February refuge staff monitored the activity of a pair of bald eagles at a nest near Spaulding Drain. This nest was built the previous year and it appeared promising that the pair would stay to nest. However, refuge staff observed an airboat lingering near the shoreline nest during this period when breeding eagles are especially sensitive to disturbance. Unfortunately, these eagles abandoned the site.

Still more disappointing news came in April. A refuge visitor reported "a large bird" flopping around near Ferguson Bayou Trail. Refuge staff found and captured a golden eagle with a serious wing injury and took it to rehabilitators at the Howell Conference and Nature Center. Unfortunately, the wing was too damaged to be repaired. Further, the injury was above the bird's "wrist." Thus, the wing could not be amputated because this would yield a severe loss of balance for the bird. It is Service policy to euthanize birds in this condition.

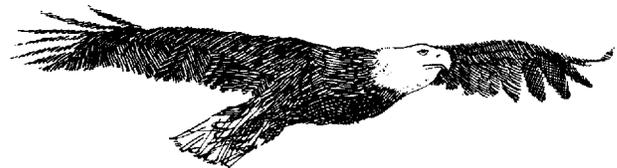
Good news came in April when a refuge neighbor reported that he could see a pair of bald eagles on a nest through his back window. Refuge staff verified this new nest, bringing the refuge total to four, which was a new high. However, May brought bad news when the neighbor called during a windstorm to report that the nest blew down. An immediate search by refuge staff

turned up no eaglets for potential rescue. However, these birds continued to be seen in the immediate area through the rest of the year and it appears promising that they will attempt to nest again in 2008.

Mixed results came in July when the refuge could officially determine the success of its bald eagle nesting pairs. The East Lansing Ecological Services Field Office conducts long term monitoring of environmental contaminants in breeding eagles by collecting blood and feather samples from eaglets as well as prey remains and unhatched eggs. Unfortunately, after a long climb up the nest tree, the refuge's Birch Run Drain nest contained no eggs or young. However, the Eagle Marsh nest contained two healthy eaglets. This was especially good news, since this nest produced no young the previous year after being productive for approximately the previous 15.

The year ended with a positive note in December when refuge staff documented a new daily high count of 91 bald eagles. Isolated stretches of refuge rivers remained open through most of the month while most area waters were frozen. This yielded access to an abundance of fish and concentrated waterfowl in areas removed from human disturbance. Further, these rivers experienced an especially large run of gizzard shad this year, providing more food than usual. The previous high count was 68 recorded in 2004.

The refuge hopes for a good year in 2008. The refuge staff has already observed adult eagles in their nest trees in the early stages of the new nesting season.



# Refuge Enters Thirteenth Year of Monitoring Frogs and Toads

by Steve Kahl, Refuge Manager

Tremendous concern exists over the global decline of amphibians. In fact, it is estimated that one-third of the planet's 5,743 amphibian species are threatened according to the Global Amphibian Assessment. Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge provides quality habitat for ten amphibian species, including eight species of frogs and toads. The refuge has participated in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Frog and Toad Survey since 1996 and the USGS North American Amphibian Monitoring Program (NAAMP) since 2005. These efforts enable the refuge to watch population trends locally while contributing to state and continental amphibian monitoring efforts.

Shiawassee Refuge is one of only nine refuges in the entire Refuge System that participates in the NAAMP. Refuge results may provide further insight into the causes of global amphibian decline. Since the refuge provides an abundance of quality wetland habitat that should be preserved indefinitely, a documented decline would be attributable to other causes such as environmental contaminants, introduced diseases, or invasive species.

Refuge surveys have already yielded interesting results. Importantly, five species, including American toad, eastern gray treefrog, wood frog, northern leopard frog, and green frog have remained common and widespread throughout the refuge for the entire count period. This result is especially encouraging for northern leopard frog because this species has declined dramatically in many areas of North America.

Further, the western chorus frog has increased in abundance and become much more widespread on the refuge, while it appears to be declining overall in Michigan. Conversely, the spring peeper is the most common species found on the Michigan Frog and Toad Survey, but has only been documented once on the refuge's counts. These numbers suggest that the western chorus frog may be exploiting an unoccupied ecological niche not inhabited by the closely related spring peeper, which has never been common at the refuge.

Refuge count results may shed light on other interactions between frog and toad species. The bullfrog first appeared

on the refuge in 2005. Although this species is native and widespread in Michigan, it has been blamed for amphibian declines in areas where it has been introduced. It is the largest frog species in North America and adults eat virtually any amphibian, reptile, fish, small mammal, bird, or invertebrate they can capture and fit in their mouths. If bullfrogs become more common at the refuge, it will be important to record the population response of other frogs.

## Refuge's Local Economic Impact

By Steve Kahl, Refuge Manager

Recreational use at the refuge generated approximately \$1 million in economic activity during fiscal year 2006, according to a report released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The report, titled ***Banking on Nature 2006: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation*** was compiled by Service economists.

Approximately 59,000 people visited Shiawassee Refuge in 2006, supporting 15 private sector jobs and producing about \$427,800 in employment income. In addition, recreational spending by refuge visitors generated over \$180,000 in tax revenue at the local, county, state and federal level.

The report analyzed recreational participation in and expenditures for freshwater fishing, migratory bird hunting, big game hunting and non-consumptive activities, including wildlife observation. Calculation of the total economic activity included money spent for food and refreshments, lodging at motels, cabins, lodges or campgrounds, and transportation. About 87 percent of total expenditures came from non-consumptive recreation (recreation other than hunting and fishing) at the refuge. Fishing accounted for 7 percent of total expenditures, while hunting accounted for 6 percent. Non-residents accounted for 63 percent of the total expenditure.

Shiawassee Refuge is one of 80 national wildlife refuges analyzed in the report. Units with fewer than 1,500 visitors per year and those in Hawaii and Alaska were excluded from the final calculations. Therefore, the Banking on Nature study estimates that 34.8 million people visited wildlife refuges—a tally smaller than the actual visitation figure of more than 37 million reported by all refuges.

# FRIENDS OF SHIAWASSEE NWR MEMBERSHIP PAGE

## Friends of Shiawassee NWR Membership

Renewal                       New membership

General Membership

\$12 – Individual (1) vote.

\$25 – Family (2) votes. (Member, spouse and children under age 18)

- Each membership receives quarterly newsletter - "Refuge Reporter."
- Each membership includes voting rights and opportunity to hold office.

Supporting Levels (includes 1 year individual membership): "Goose" \$50, "Blue Heron" \$75, "Owl" \$100, "Bald Eagle" \$125 & over

No membership at this time, but please accept my contribution.

\*Membership is for calendar year.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to "Friends of Shiawassee NWR", PO Box 20129, Saginaw, MI, 48602.

Contributions to the Friends of Shiawassee NWR, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, are tax deductible according to IRS guidelines.

### Friends' Volunteer Opportunities

### Do you have any of these skills?

\_\_\_\_\_ Staffing Trailhead Store

\_\_\_\_\_ Leading walking tours

\_\_\_\_\_ Helping with workshops

\_\_\_\_\_ Assisting with refuge auto tours

\_\_\_\_\_ Doing outreach events, i.e. fairs

\_\_\_\_\_ Assisting with First Wednesday

\_\_\_\_\_ Writing newsletter articles

\_\_\_\_\_ Writing/developing grants

\_\_\_\_\_ Serving as Committee member

\_\_\_\_\_ Leading children's activities

\_\_\_\_\_ Developing trails

\_\_\_\_\_ Computer skills

\_\_\_\_\_ Photography

\_\_\_\_\_ Carpentry skills

\_\_\_\_\_ Business organizational skills

\_\_\_\_\_ Research

\_\_\_\_\_ Artistic skills

\_\_\_\_\_ Fund raising

\_\_\_\_\_ Grant writing

\_\_\_\_\_ Researching/Ordering merchandise

\_\_\_\_\_ Other – please list:

Board meetings held quarterly, on the second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Green Point Environmental Learning Center, 3010 Maple Street in Saginaw. The annual meeting is held in January of each year. Friends Board of Directors Officers are:

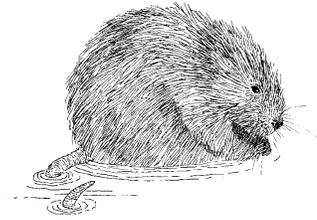
President – Charles Hoover

Vice President – Susan Scott

Secretary – Janet Martineau

Treasurer – Wil Hufton II

# Munching with the Muskrats - A Free Pig Roast Dinner on April 19



The Friends of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge are sponsoring a FREE dinner—**Munching with the Muskrats**—on Saturday, April 19, 2008, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. No, the

group will not be serving muskrat, but rather a pork dinner served in the heart of the refuge. Imagine eating while watching refuge wildlife wander, swim or fly by!

The Friends will be showcasing their Trailer Store, which is a portable bookstore on wheels. They will have items available for sale. In addition, you will learn about the 7-mile auto tour route that the refuge will be constructing.

## Need Your Volunteer Hours

by *Becky Goche, Volunteer Coordinator*

Many people donate time each year helping with various programs and projects on the refuge. Keeping track of all those volunteer hours is important since it can mean more dollars in our budget. Be sure to keep track of your hours and submit them at the completion of your project or at the end of every month if you help out multiple times. I can provide you with a volunteer hours log for you to record your time. If you do not have a time log, contact me at (989) 759-1669 or email me at [Becky\\_Goche@fws.gov](mailto:Becky_Goche@fws.gov) and I will get you one.

### Annual Volunteer Dinner—May 21

Each year we hold a volunteer appreciation dinner where we recognize all the volunteers and Friends of Shiawassee members who donated hours over the past year. This year our dinner will be held on May 21, 2008, at the Old Country Buffet in Saginaw. This is an invitation only event, so please watch the mail for your letter.

In the event of rain, there will be a tent set up to keep you dry. In the event of more severe weather or flooding, the dinner will be moved to a safer location. Please note that you will need to bring your own seating for the dinner.

All past, current, and future Friends members are welcome to attend **Munching with the Muskrats**. You **MUST** reserve your spot by April 9 by calling Becky at Green Point at (989) 759-1669 or emailing [Becky\\_Goche@fws.gov](mailto:Becky_Goche@fws.gov). She will need your name and the number of people who will be attending.

#### REFUGE REPORTER

Published quarterly by the Friends of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge for the refuge.

Volume 11, Issue 2

Editor: Becky Goche

#### Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

Established in October, 1953 and administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Shiawassee NWR provides resting, nesting and feeding habitat for waterfowl and other birds. Its mission is to preserve or manage an undeveloped expanse of floodplain forest, marshes, rivers, and associated habitat within an agricultural and urban landscape through habitat management, encouraging public stewardship, educational programs, and private lands activities.

Refuge Manager—Steve Kahl

Assistant Refuge Manager—Ed DeVries

Biologist—Jim Dastyck

Private Lands Biologist—Michelle Vander Haar

Visitor Services Manager—Becky Goche

Administrative Officer—Mary Ann Gillette

Maintenance Staff—David Peters

#### Friends of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

A nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization established in 1999 to promote the preservation of the natural and historical resources of the Refuge, foster its use and enjoyment by the public consistent with the protection and preservation of its environment, and engage in such educational, scientific and civic activities as will assist the management of the Refuge in carrying out its mandates.

Refuge Website: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee>

Shiawassee NWR  
6975 Mower Rd.  
Saginaw, MI 48601  
Phone: 989-777-5930  
Fax: 989-777-9200  
Hours: M - F, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

We're on the web!

[Http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee)



***"Munching with the Muskrats" FREE Pig Roast Dinner is April 19—see inside back page for more info***

## Federal Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest Deadline Is March 15, 2008

*By Becky Goche, Junior Duck Stamp Coordinator*

The Junior Duck Stamp art contest deadline is fast approaching, but there is still time to enter. All artwork must be post-marked by March 15. Students at the state level are judged in four groups according to grade level: Group I: K-3, Group II: 4-6, Group III: 7-9, and Group IV: 10-12. Three first, second, and third place winners are selected for each group. In addition, 16 honorable mention winners are picked in each group. Judges select the "Best of Show" from the 12 first place winners, which is then submitted to the national Junior Duck Stamp Contest. The first place design from the national contest is used to create the Junior Duck Stamp for the following year.

All entries will receive certificates of participation and winners will receive special ribbons and prizes. All artwork will be returned to the students or schools. The Best of Show entry is included in a national traveling display. In addition,

the top winning artwork in Michigan will travel around the state for up to one year following the contest.

To learn more about the Jr. Duck Stamp Program, download curriculum or get the entry form and rules, visit the website: [www.fws.gov/duckstamps](http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps) and click on the Junior Duck Stamp link. I also can email the 2008 informational brochure to you – either call me at (989) 759-1669 or email me at [Becky\\_Goche@fws.gov](mailto:Becky_Goche@fws.gov).

### **Schedule Your Spring Field Trip Now**

April, May and June are popular times for teachers to bring their students out to Green Point for an educational field trip. Schedule your trip early so that you can get the date you want! A variety of programs are available. Visit our website and click on the Environmental Education link for a listing.

# Calendar of Events

## Free Habitat Workshops

All workshops are free and will be held at Green Point Environmental Learning Center, 3010 Maple Street in Saginaw.

### Woodlot Management

**April 21, 2008, 7:00 p.m.**

A presentation on woodlot management and alternative uses for ash trees infected with Emerald Ash Borer. The Saginaw County Conservation District has some fun ideas including turning your ash trees into baseball bats and trim for your home.

### Wetlands

**May 19, 2008, 7:00 p.m.**

Learn about the importance of water and wetlands in your backyard.

### Using Native Plants in Your Landscape

**June 9, 2008, 6:00 p.m.**

Designs by Nature will present information on the importance of using native plants from 6:00—7:00 p.m. From 7:00—8:00 p.m. they will have native plants for sale to anyone who might be interested.

## Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest

**Deadline is March 15, 2008**

Contest is for students in grades K-12. Judging will take place on March 27, 2008, beginning at 9:00 a.m. at Green Point ELC.

### Junior Duck Stamp Awards Ceremony

**April 26, 2008, 2:00 p.m.**

**Green Point ELC**

This is an invitation only event in which we recognize all first through third place winners of the 2008 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest.

## Munching with the Muskrats – FREE Dinner

**April 19, 2008, 5:00 p.m.**

**Ferguson Bayou Trail at Curtis Road**

The Friends of Shiawassee NWR are hosting a FREE pig roast in the heart of the refuge for all current, past and future Friends members. Reservations are required by April 9. Call (989) 759-1669 to save your spot. This dinner will happen rain or shine.

## Guided Bird Walk

**May 10, 2008, 7:30 a.m.**

**Ferguson Bayou Trail at Curtis Road**

Join Saginaw Valley Audubon Society members Carolyn Szaroletta and Larry Abraham for a guided, 5-mile walk, searching for refuge birds on International Migratory Bird Day. Bring binoculars, water, bug repellent, and wear shoes for walking in wet grass. In the event of bad weather, this walk will be cancelled.

## Girl Scout Clean-up Days

**May 17, 2008, 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

**June 14, 2008, 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

**Backyard Habitat Area at Refuge Headquarters**

Girl Scouts will help restore the Backyard Habitat Area at the refuge headquarters, 6975 Mower Rd. You don't have to be a Girl Scout to help! All are welcome! Bring your gloves, shovels, rakes and other landscaping tools.

For more information, contact Green Point Environmental Learning Center at (989) 759-1669.