

Uihlein Waterfowl Production Area

By Julia Lambert, USFWS Administrative Technician

Uihlein Waterfowl Production Area, in [Winnebago County](#), Wisconsin, is the largest of 57 WPAs managed by Leopold Wetland Management District.

The WPA is 2,171 acres. It's known for duck hunting and is adjacent to Rush Lake. Rush Lake is one of the largest prairie pothole lakes in Wisconsin. These lakes and marshes are formed as a result of receding glaciers and now store flood water and spring ice melt.

Uihlein WPA is known for yellow-headed blackbirds, black terns and many secretive marsh birds. Six impoundments allow water level control that creates different types of habitat favorable to diverse plants, waterfowl, songbirds, and other wildlife and vegetation.

Visitors hunt, fish, hike, watch birds and nature, collect nuts and berries, and take photographs. Duck hunting has long been a favorite sport at

Rush Lake. In October 1989, the first parcel for the WPA was purchased by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, a federal agency that is part of the Department of Interior.

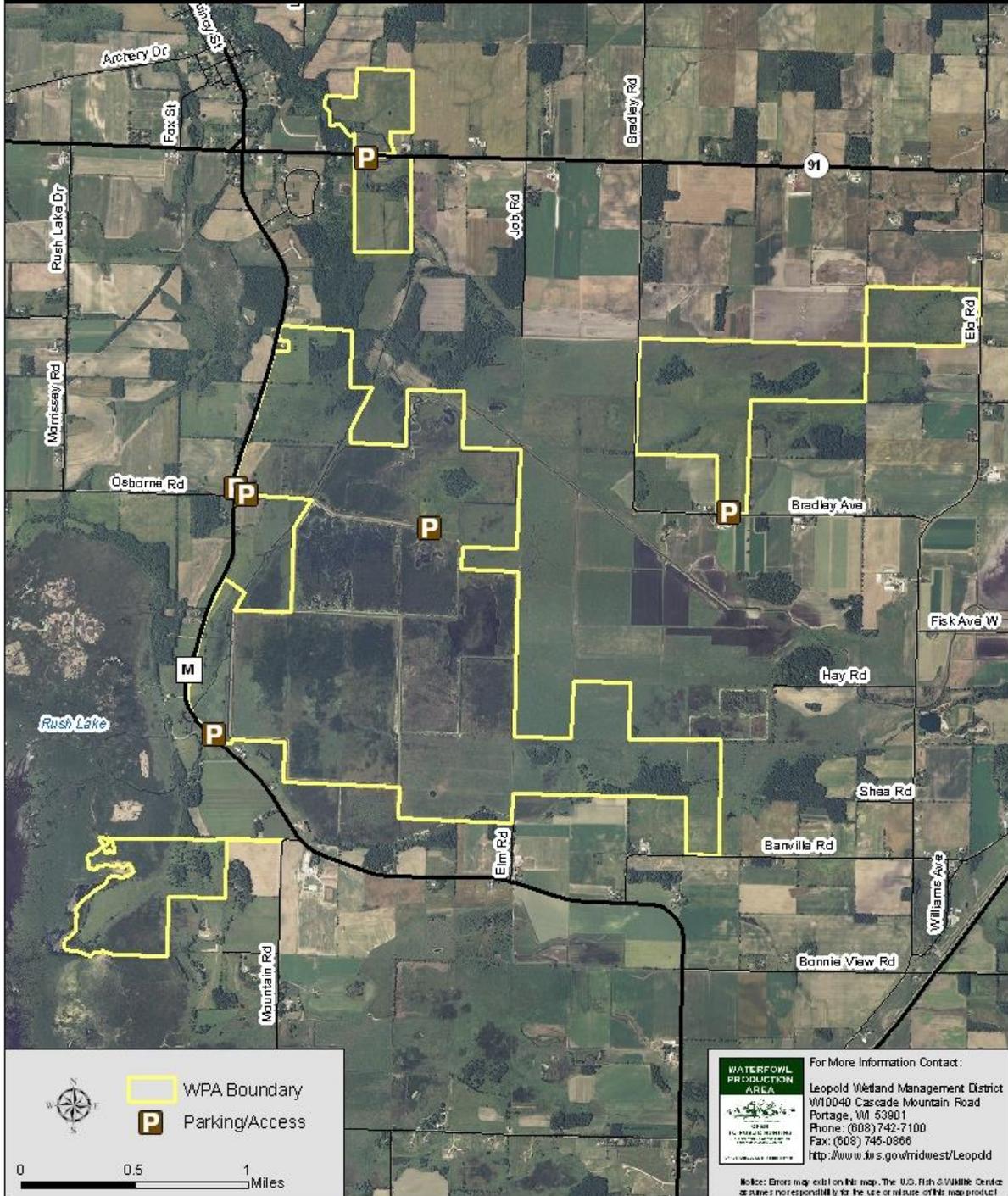


See the *Wider View* of Winnebago County
(<http://www.fws.gov/nwrs/threecolumn.aspx?id=2147578213>)



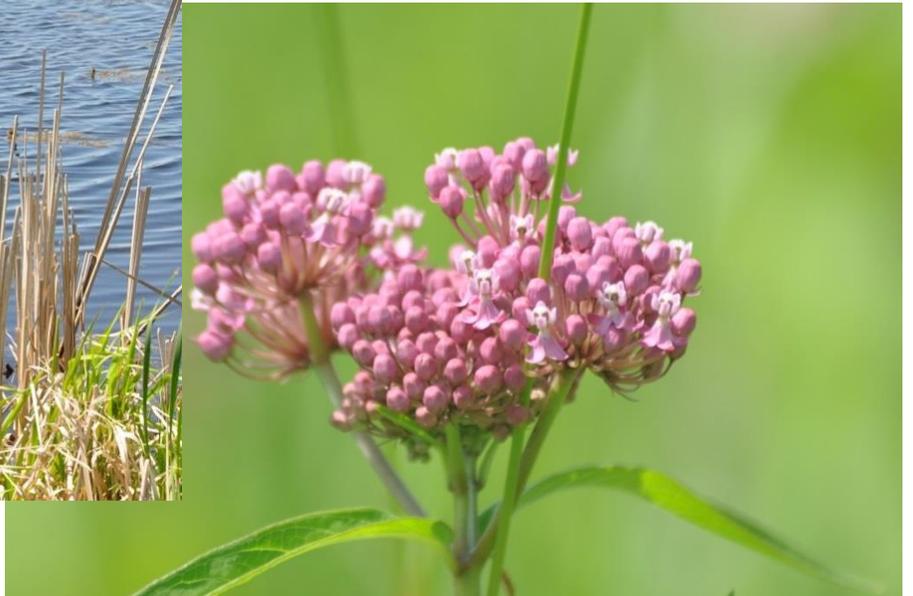
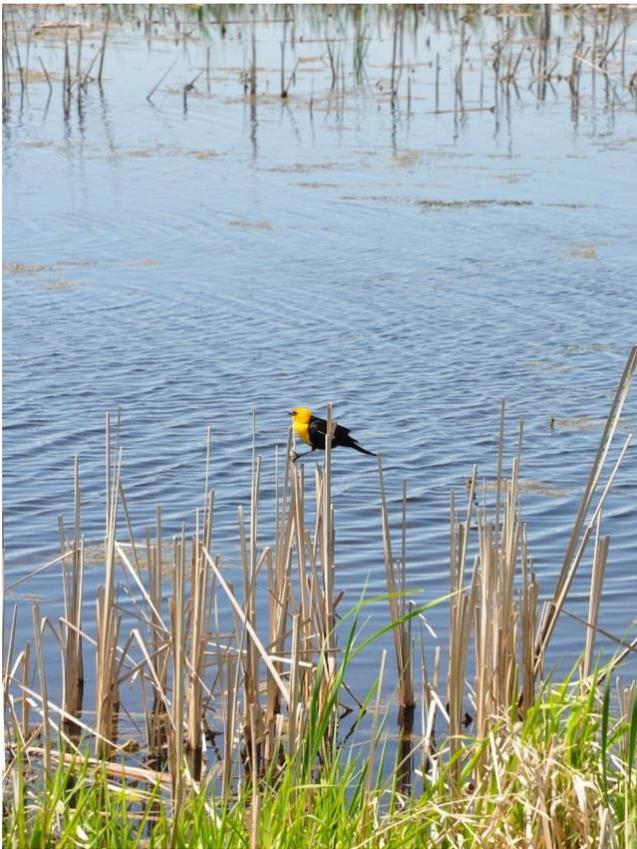
**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Leopold Wetland Management District**

**Uihlein WPA
County: Winnebago
Acres: 2171
DMU: 66
TMZ: 3**



Highlights

Uihlein WPA has a variety of habitat, such as upland and marsh, leading to a variety of aquatic and other animal species, vegetation and birds. A special effort is made to provide habitat for monarch butterflies.



Left: A yellow-headed blackbird sits atop grasses. Piping plover and black terns are also unusual birds seen at Uihlein WPA.

Right: Swamp milkweed. Monarchs lay eggs on only milkweed. The diversity of native plants also feeds monarchs, other pollinators and other beneficial insects.

Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid. Leopold staff and Wisconsin Partners for Fish & Wildlife

Biologist Jim Lutes: The Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid is a Federally Threatened, State Endangered plant of wet meadows. Populations of the EPFO have declined more than 70% in the U.S. In Wisconsin, the orchid, originally found in 17 counties of the south and southeast portions of the state, now only occurs as 13 populations in prairie and sedge communities of eight counties. The greatest threats to the EPFO are drainage and development of its habitats and the invasion of reed canary grass which dominates a site and shades out the EPFO.

Additionally, the orchid is dependent on a certain species of moth, the hawkmoth, for pollination.

The Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid was first documented on Uihlein WPA in the early 1970s, almost 20 years before USFWS acquisition, and in the early 1980s, there were “hundreds” reported growing there. Searches for the remnants of the population found nothing until the July of 1996, when three specimens were found.

Since 1996, water-level control and prescribed burning, plus the help of dedicated volunteers, has resulted in the reemergence of hundreds of orchids.



Management

Uihlein WPA has wetlands and prairie, home to a diversity of wildlife.

Not just waterfowl and wildlife benefit from restoration efforts. These habitats also benefit people by filtering pollutants from water, replenishing groundwater supplies, and providing flood storage during storms. Improved water quality directly benefits fish and wildlife and increases the recreation and commerce opportunities that wetlands provide locally, regionally and globally.

Various projects done by Leopold WMD staff and partners in wetlands include: waterfowl habitat, recreation, flood storage, groundwater recharge, fish habitat, water quality and biodiversity

(http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Leopold_WMD/what_we_do/resource_management.html.)

On Uihlein WPA, water level control and annual prescribed burning, for example, deter but don't eliminate invasives such as reed canarygrass. Management projects on Uihlein WPA have resulted in a dramatic increase in native species such as prairie cordgrass, big bluestem, lobelia, black-eyed Susan, yellow coneflower, tick trefoil, iris, and prairie dock.



In grasslands, projects provide: nesting habitat, grazing and fire, economic benefits, carbon storage, wildlife habitat, soil conservation and biodiversity.

For more information about types of habitat in the District:

http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Leopold_WMD/wildlife_and_habitat/index.html

The WPA has:

- Six managed impoundments
- 10 miles of dikes
- 12 water control structures
- 7,000 gpm pump station
- Water management capabilities on more than 1,000 acres



Prescribed burning, mechanical removal of invasives, water management and other tools are used.

Impoundments are used to mimic natural conditions such as drought and higher water. This benefits waterfowl that flourish in dry and wet conditions, especially with Uihlein's numerous impoundments that can be in different stages of drawdown or at full level.

See more about water management here:

<http://www.fws.gov/nwrs/threecolumn.aspx?id=2147578124>.



Challenges



Reed Canary Grass.

Left: 2000

Below right: 2014



Non-functional waterflow creates lots of invasives and overgrown habitat, leading to less open water and fewer species of plants and wildlife.

Biologist Jim Lutes: Dedicated water management and twenty years of semi-annual prescribed spring burning has generally reduced robustness (height/flowering) of canarygrass and increased diversification of the floral community, including the Federally Threatened Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid, in areas that were initially dominated by reed canarygrass.

Projects

In 2013, Ducks Unlimited completed wetland enhancement work on the Island and Elm pools at the WPA. Wisconsin DU (<http://www.ducks.org/wisconsin>) has a long history of partnering with USFWS and Leopold Wetland Management District to conserve waterfowl habitat. This project put the finishing touches on nearly two decades of



combined efforts to enhance all of the managed wetlands at this 1,926-acre WPA.

Construction work, conducted by Krause Excavating, included the installation of three water-control structures and the rehabilitation of approximately 20,000 feet of existing dike. These efforts enhanced 321 acres of shallow emergent

wetlands and restored the USFWS's ability to manage water levels and aquatic vegetation for breeding and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and other wetland-dependent wildlife. In cooperation with the USFWS, DU conducted a topographical survey, developed an engineering design, and managed project construction. Funding was provided by the USFWS–Leopold Wetland Management District, the USFWS Coastal Program–Great Lakes, the Fox River–Green Bay Natural Resources Trustee Council, and DU.

The project was also supported by the Coastal Program – Great Lakes, according to Ted Koehler of Ashland Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office. Uihlein WPA is located within one of the premier migratory bird areas of the Lake Michigan watershed and is managed by the National Wildlife Refuge system. It is part of the Winnebago System Focus Area of the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture (UMR&GLR) and the Rush Lake Complex Initiative identified in the Wisconsin Plan. The Winnebago System Focus Area was designated as a high priority in the UMR&GLR Joint Venture Implementation Plan and the entire project area has been classified as Priority I habitat in the Wisconsin Plan.

Uihlein WPA offers exceptional waterfowl breeding, nesting, and migration habitat that is open to the public for a variety of outdoor recreation. Service staff conducting annual waterfowl surveys at the WPA have documented use by a host of waterfowl species including mallards, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, American wigeon, redhead, scaup, northern shoveler, northern pintail, wood duck, Canada geese, and American black ducks. The WPA is also home to a large population of the federally threatened and state endangered eastern prairie white-fringed orchid. USFWS management of the area has resulted in a steady annual increase in the number of plants. Additional wildlife benefiting from the project include Forester's, common, and black terns, great egrets, black-crowned night herons, American bittern, least bittern, yellow headed blackbird, bald eagles and osprey, several species of shorebirds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals (including river otter), and grassland songbirds.

On-the-ground work started in 2010 with survey and design work. Over the next few years, planning, coordination and construction took place to restore the 321 acres of habitat within the Uihlein WPA. Construction activities included levee coring and grading, water control structure installation, and hunter/public access improvements.

A dedication was held Oct. 24, 2013 by Ducks Unlimited.

"We're gathering to dedicate the Island and Elm pools, but this is just the most recent celebration of DU's ongoing partnership with the James E. Dutton Foundation," said DU Director of Development Steve Kass. "Their commitment to wetlands conservation is making important changes on Wisconsin's landscape."

The James E. Dutton Foundation began supporting DU's work at Uihlein WPA in 2009. In addition to the foundation, DU's partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Leopold Wetland Management District and Great Lakes Coastal Program and the Fox River/Green Way Natural Resources Trustee Council made this celebrated restoration possible.

Uihlein WPA's 1,926 acres is composed of managed wetlands that support breeding and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds and other wetland-dependent wildlife.

"The project we're dedicating this weekend is a perfect example of the sort of work we do in the Great Lakes," said Brian Glenzinski, regional biologist for Ducks Unlimited in Wisconsin. "It started with a rigorous topographic survey and engineering design work, and then we moved some dirt to create wetlands that staff can manage easily and productively."

2004:

On Thursday, Oct. 14, Lynn Scarlett, Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of the Interior, was at Rush Lake, southwest of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to meet with partners in the effort to restore Rush Lake and present a \$1 million North American Wetland Conservation Grant Award check to Ducks Unlimited

History:

The largest of the WPA's tracts, the Derber tract, was purchased by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in 1989. This tract was a muck farm that contained a system of dikes, ditches, tile lines, and pumping stations that served to drain 800 acres of Waukau Marsh.

Over the years, a variety of partners and funding sources have contributed to water management improvements and repairs. Not noted earlier are other contributors, such as the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program. These partnerships have provided for the construction/ rehabilitation of more than 22,000 feet of dikes, as well as other WPA improvements noted above.