

THE WILDSIDE

A newsletter for the supporters of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge

WINTER 2013

INSIDE:

- ***State of the Strait!***
 - ***Hunting in the Refuge!***
 - ***Refuge Gateway News!***
 - ***Calendar of Events!***
- ...and more!***

Photo: Red-breasted Nuthatch • Credit: Rodney Laura



ABOUT DRIWR & IWRA



The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR) is located along the lower Detroit River and western shoreline of Lake Erie. Established in 2001 as the first International Wildlife Refuge in North America, it includes islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals, and waterfront lands along 48 miles of shoreline. Its unique location in a large urban area allows significant opportunities for the public to experience fish, wildlife and plants in their natural habitat. The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization- a "Friends" group that works to support the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in the development of the DRIWR. We invite you to become a supporter of IWRA.

Visit iwralliance.org, www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river and www.drhawkwatch.org for more periodic updates.

IWRA Email: iwr_alliance@yahoo.com
IWRA Office: 734.692.7671

FWS Email: jamie_lanier@fws.gov
FWS Office: 734.692.7649

General Information: 734-265-0219

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Staff

Dr. John Hartig • Refuge Manager
Steve Dushane • Assistant Refuge Manager
Jamie Lanier • Visitor Services Manager
Greg Norwood • Biologist
Anna Cook • Biological Technician
Allison Krueger • Landscape Designer

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Message from the Alliance Chair

People can experience a federal wildlife refuge in a number of ways: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refer to these as the "Big Six".

Recently, a little over 300 acres were opened to hunting in the DRIWR. Thanks to Steve Dushane, Assistant Manager of the Refuge, for his tireless efforts to make this happen not only in the planning stages, but in the marsh-building process at the Brancheau Unit resulting in hunting in the Refuge during the 2012 duck and goose season. *Thanks, Steve!*

Richard Micka, Chair

International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Board



Richard Micka

Visitor Services News

Volunteers are an integral part of any successful Refuge operation, and we're no exception here at Detroit River IWR. An incredible 18,000 hours were donated to the Refuge this year alone – a value of almost \$400,000!

In September, DRIWR celebrated its volunteers at an Annual Appreciation Dinner. This year's event was a real success, with good food, great people, and a lot of laughter. Everyone at the Refuge appreciates all of its volunteers, but two individuals in particular stood out amongst the crowd and were recognized for their contributions.

Mr. Dick Skoglund was recognized for his work on the Refuge's stewardship committee, with outreach and education, and for his phenomenal ability to lead others and get the job done. He is self-sufficient, reliable and an extremely hard worker.

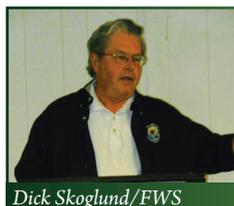
Mrs. Elizabeth Hugel was recognized for her work coordinating and organizing volunteers at the Refuge's Gibraltar Bay Unit. Her efforts to help facilitate the partnership between the Refuge and the Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy make it possible for this unique unit of the Refuge to be opened for public visitation every Sunday, May through October.

Both Dick and Liz are exemplary volunteers and we thank them for their commitment.

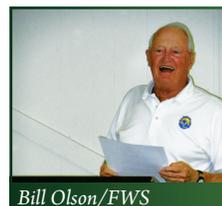
One other award was given out at the Appreciation Dinner to herald a volunteer who by all accounts is a "MacGyver of Maintenance," due to this unique ability to fix almost everything with just about anything. Mr. William "Handyman Bill" Olson is an exceptional treasure and we all thank him for his dedication to the Refuge.

Whether you were able to attend this year's Volunteer Appreciation Dinner or not, we want you to know how much we appreciate all that you do! We simply couldn't do it without you! Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts!

Interested in becoming a Refuge volunteer? Contact Jamie_Lanier@fws.gov or at 734-692-7649 for more information.



Dick Skoglund/FWS



Bill Olson/FWS



Liz Hugel, Jamie Lanier/FWS

From the Refuge Manager...

Priority Natural Area Will Allow The Refuge To Grow In Canada

On September 27th, a historic collaboration agreement for the “Western Lake Erie Watersheds Priority Natural Area” was signed by Canadian partners on BASF’s Fighting Island in LaSalle, Ontario. “The Priority Natural Area initiative will provide federal, provincial, and local partners with a mechanism to work more closely with our U.S. neighbors and to complement progress being made in the U.S. on the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, and other related initiatives,” explained Richard Wyma, General Manager for the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA).

The Priority Natural Area initiative is a Canadian response to the U.S. Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and reflects Canada’s commitment to the Canada-U.S. “Conservation Vision for the Lower Detroit River Ecosystem” that was established in 2001. That binational conservation vision called for the establishment of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Since the conservation vision was signed in 2001, Canadian and U.S. partners have:

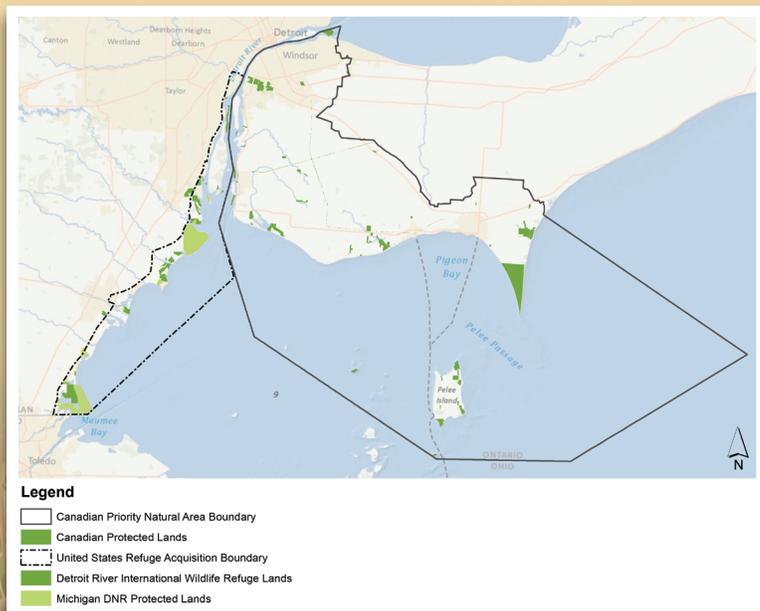
- Convened five biennial State of the Strait Conferences;
- Constructed a sturgeon spawning reef off Fighting Island;
- Completed 46 soft shoreline engineering projects in the watershed;
- Developed a ByWays to FlyWays bird driving tour map;
- Completed the Detroit River-Western Lake Erie Indicator Project; and
- Convened a roundtable on common tern research and management in the watershed.



John H. Hartig, Refuge Manager



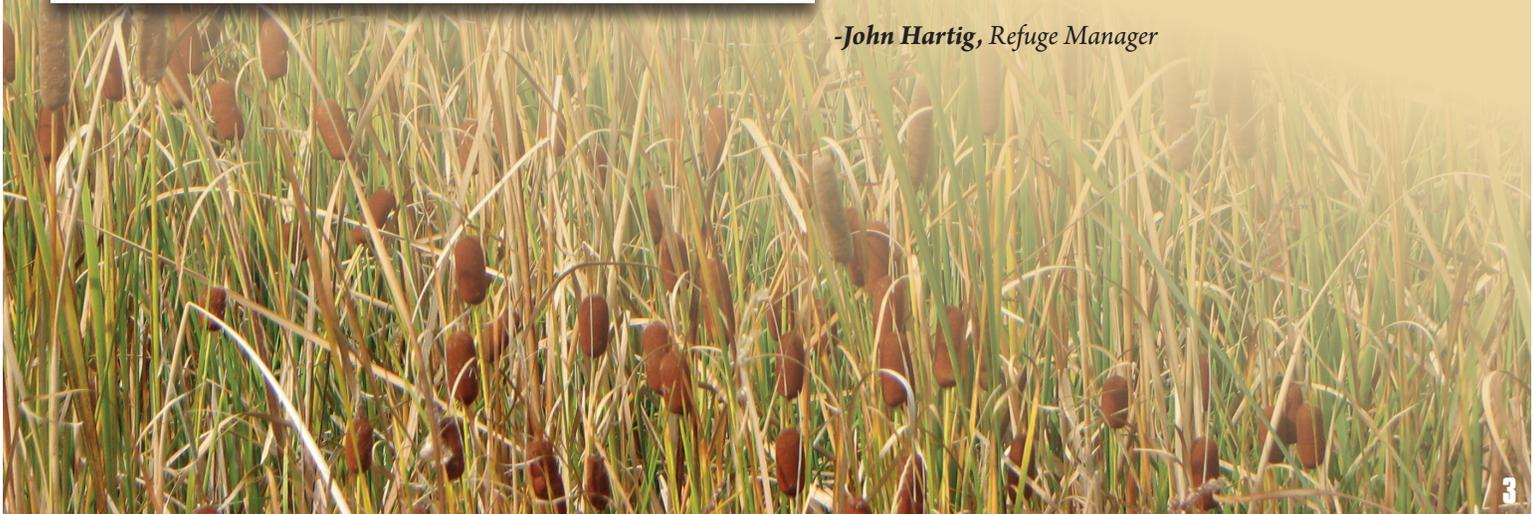
Photo: FWS



The Priority Natural Area initiative builds on this foundation of Canada-U.S. cooperation on conserving natural resources, protecting the environment, and realizing numerous benefits.

Think of the “Priority Natural Area” as the Canadian equivalent of the U.S. refuge acquisition boundary. Canadian partners, including Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Essex Region Conservation Authority, now have a mechanism to grow the refuge in Canada. “It’s a historic day,” noted Jeff Watson, Canadian Member of Parliament. “This agreement is the first of its kind in Canada and can serve as a model for other areas.” Watson credited Congressman John Dingell with having the vision and providing the encouragement that ultimately resulted in this first Collaborative Agreement.

-John Hartig, Refuge Manager



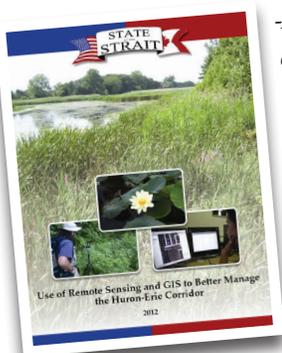


On October 5th, Canadian and U.S. partner organizations released the fifth biennial State of the Strait Conference report titled "Use of Remote Sensing and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to Better Manage the Huron-Erie Corridor." This report is based on the conference held on November 2, 2011 at Eastern Michigan University. More than 200 people from Canada and the United States attended the conference to learn about existing projects that utilize GIS and remote sensing technologies to better manage ecosystems, and to disseminate information on best practices for use in future projects.

Examples of Remote Sensing and GIS projects discussed in this report include monitoring migratory bird stopover sites and habitats, mapping the invasive plant species *Phragmites australis*, and managing and quantifying water quality data. One of the recommendations from the report states that environmental and natural resource managers should plan actions and evaluate the ecological responses of their actions through an adaptive management process, investing appropriately in GIS, remote sensing, and other tools to effectively inform resource professionals and the public, and to improve future decisions. Moreover, this report suggests that management agencies place a high priority on integrating modeling with GIS and remote sensing to better facilitate science-based decision-making and practice adaptive management.

A complete copy of the State of the Strait: Use of Remote Sensing and GIS to Better Manage the Huron-Erie Corridor is available online at www.stateofthestrain.org

-Anna Cook, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Refuge Gateway

Restoration Crew Wraps Up A Successful Season

Penny Richardson-Bristol



The Greening of Detroit Restoration Field Crew has accomplished a great amount over the course of six months. The crew, along with the help of hundreds of volunteers planted over 300 2" caliber trees at the Refuge Gateway. In order to help the trees survive the harsh conditions of this newly restored site, extra care was provided. They made sure to water trees during the dry, hot summer, stake trees to promote healthy root growth and install tree guards to protect them from the deer.

Besides planting trees, the crew has helped with many different projects on the site, including but not limited to, invasive species removal, shoreline stabilization, erosion control, planting native seed, and leading tours of the Refuge. The Crew's success can be attributed to their dedication and passion for working outdoors. They have really enjoyed being able to work alongside and view the wildlife that they worked daily to help build habitat for.

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Last year, we celebrated the approval of \$1.3 million in funding for restoration work at the Refuge Gateway and Humbug Marsh. Funders included the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, US Environmental Protection Agency, and the US Forest Service. Through this funding, we now celebrate the completion of another 3 acres of forest and 7 acres of prairie habitat to realize the goal of restoring 16 acres of coastal wetland and 25 acres of upland habitat at the Refuge Gateway.

In an area where an estimated 97% of wetlands have been lost, this restoration produces a net gain of habitat for our region's wildlife. With the help of the YCC and many local volunteers, we planted over 250 large trees at the Refuge Gateway to 'jump start' the habitat and 100 oaks in Humbug Marsh to ensure oak regeneration. Also completed this summer was the berm restoration across the Monguagon wetland, allowing us to plant critical marsh habitat along the shoreline. Combined, the two sites now contain and protect 454 acres of coastal habitat!

We can't thank our tree planting and stewardship volunteers enough for their hard work donated this year in support of this restoration effort!

We continue to work on securing funding for the boat dock and fishing pier, as well as look to develop trails to access the Monguagon wetland and the river's shoreline at the Refuge Gateway. Look forward to many more changes to come!

-Allison Krueger, Landscape Designer



Photos: FWS

FWS implements a *Phragmites australis* control plan at the Grassy Island Unit of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge

Stephanie Millsap, USFWS Contaminants Specialist

Grassy Island is the oldest unit of the DRIWR as it was made part of the National Wildlife Refuge System by an act of Congress in 1961. Grassy Island is located in the Detroit River, between Wyandotte, MI and Fighting Island. The 72 acre island contains approximately three million cubic yards of contaminated dredge material. Because the island was built without a protective liner or cap, there are concerns regarding exposure of wildlife to the contaminated materials and the potential for contaminant migration off-site. In 2010, an extensive geotechnical investigation of Grassy Island was conducted.

During September 2012, FWS implemented a *Phragmites australis* control plan at the Grassy Island Unit. Although there is still no cap on site, the Service has been collecting groundwater data from the monitoring wells that were installed in 2010. The *Phragmites* over 12' tall and very dense in numerous areas, made access to the groundwater monitoring wells extremely difficult. Therefore, herbicides were applied to *Phragmites* at the site to create pathways allowing biologists to access the wells. We believe the groundwater data being collected will help inform the type of containment needed on the Island as well as provide information about effectiveness of any future containment actions undertaken at the Grassy Island unit.



Photo: FWS

Meet Dick Skoglund, Volunteer



Richard "Dick" Skoglund started as a volunteer at DRIWR in 2010 after learning about volunteer opportunities at a Humbug Open House in August of 2010. The first volunteer days were in the Fall of 2010 doing invasive species removal. At the yearly DRIWR Volunteer Workshop in February of 2011, Dick learned of the need for regular trail maintenance at the Humbug unit and volunteered to take on that responsibility. Since then, Dick has helped Steve Dushane, Assistant Refuge Manager, and Greg Norwood, FWS Biologist, with various projects as well as participating in regularly scheduled volunteer days. Dick also helps with IWRA outreach efforts by working the display booth at the Hawkfest and Waterfowl Festival in addition to other events.

Dick is a volunteer not only because he enjoys the work, but also enjoys seeing the changes which can quickly take place as Refuge land is restored to a more natural state. A good example is the area along the river where European Alders had shaded the ground in Humbug Marsh. These Alders were cut down in early 2012 and by late spring the dormant native seed bed had sprouted. During this summer FWS biologist, Greg Norwood, counted about 12 different plants in a square meter area there.

Dick would like to see more people volunteer as there is so much restoration work that could be accomplished with more volunteer hours. Dick believes that a limiting factor for the pace of restoration is the amount of volunteer hours worked. Therefore, he would like to see more people offer their services as volunteers.

If interested in volunteering your time, please contact the IWRA office through phone or email: 734-692-7671 or iwr_alliance@yahoo.com.

Refuge Biology/Restoration Interns

Three undergraduate students from the University of Michigan–Dearborn served as the 2012 Biology/Restoration Interns for the Refuge. Allison Standafer, Emily Mirowski, and Stephanie Vrabel worked over 100 hours during the summer months assisting with mapping, invasive species management efforts, outreach, and seed collecting. Thanks to them, data entry is up-to-date on everything from spring bird surveys of the Humbug Marsh Unit (now available at <http://ebird.org/ebird/map/>) to collection of standardized photo points within Refuge Units.

They came with a high level of GIS knowledge that was essential in getting things done!

Refuge Stewardship - Remedial Restoration

Greg Norwood, Wildlife Biologist

Many Refuge lands degraded by human activities. These lands require a significant initial investment in restoration from previous farming, grazing, pollution and colonization of aggressive non-native species. Land does not simply restore itself to ecosystem health after generations of intensive agriculture and surrounding urbanization. Restoring farmland in southeast Michigan to forest habitat is challenging because of the lack of an adjacent seed source and altered hydrology that discourages certain native species. Wetland restoration on agricultural lands requires removing drainage tiles and reconstructing how water moves across the land. Historical agricultural practices limited biodiversity to maximize crop yields. This is the polar opposite of the purpose of managing Refuge habitat, which is intended to maximize the number of species, interactions among them and the environment, while promoting essential services people need such as water infiltration and nutrient uptake. This restoration work involves reintroducing native plant species through seeding, incorporating prescribed fire, restoring hydrology, and eliminating non-native species to restore diverse fish and wildlife populations and habitats. Orchestrating these actions for the most effective results is the science and practice of ecological restoration, called for in our Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Sometimes restoration to a desired future state can take decades or more.

Phragmites management continues to be a priority with herbicide treatments conducted within Humbug Marsh, Strong, Ford Marsh (through partnership with the Michigan DNR) and Brancheau units in September and October 2012. A 212-acre prescribed fire was conducted at the Strong Unit in May and all of the treated Phragmites at the Plum Creek Bay Unit was mowed this year. Phragmites was also mowed at the Fix Unit to better provide access to fire fighters for a planned prescribed burn in early 2013. Prescribed fires are also planned for Humbug Marsh and Brancheau units next year.

Finally, the uplands of Humbug Marsh have been prioritized for restoration to link habitat creation completed at the Refuge Gateway in 2012, with the help of volunteer Dick Skoglund and the Greening of Detroit crew. This includes removal of aggressive non-native understory shrubs north of the Handler Drain and removal of over 130 European black alders that have degraded habitats for native species, like blue-joint grasses. Refuge staff and volunteers have also collected local native plant seed to re-introduce in areas where light levels are now more favorable for growth and survival. Please come and visit Humbug Marsh next year and see the return of native species.



Quality wildlife habitat restored after Phragmites management at Plum Creek Bay Unit. The plant "infrastructure" is adapted to the seasonally inundated clay soils and provides diverse nectar for insects, cover for mammals, and is adjacent to numerous wetland habitats for species like soras, virginia rails, muskrat and mink.

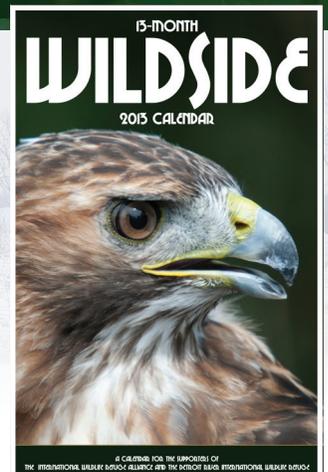


Newly emerged native plants after Phragmites management at the Strong Unit showing bluejoint grass, reed canary grass, sedges, and wildflowers next to an old beach ridge of swamp white oaks, so critical in maintaining a diverse range of wildlife species.

WILDSIDE
2013 CALENDAR

**Limited copies are still
available!**

**Call 734-692-7671
for more information!**



Hunting in the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge

Steve Dushane, Assistant Refuge Manager

It's been a long time coming, but in September, hunters were finally able to "take to the field" hunting on areas of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Hunting is designated as a priority public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the refuge is very proud to finally offer this recreational opportunity to the public.

Hunting opportunities are currently being offered on seven management units of the refuge. Humbug Island, Calf Island, Sugar Island, Strong, and Fix are all open to big game, small game and migratory bird hunting in accordance with state and refuge regulations. A portion of the Plum Creek Bay unit is open to migratory bird hunting only and only has access by boat. The diked portion of the Brancheau Unit is opened to migratory bird hunting and is managed in cooperation with the Michigan DNR out of the Pointe Mouillee State Game Area (PMSGa). Hunting at this unit is on Sunday and Wednesday mornings only and a lottery drawn permit obtained at the PMSGa headquarters is required.

Open water areas around Mud Island, Grassy Island, Humbug Island, Calf Island, Sugar Island, the Strong Unit and the Brancheau Unit are all currently open to migratory bird hunting as well. Hunting from the dikes around the Strong and Brancheau Units is prohibited. There is no hunting allowed on the mainland portion (Jefferson Avenue to the Detroit River) of the Humbug Marsh Unit.

The Refuge Hunting Map and Regulations brochure is available at the refuge office in Grosse Ile, as well as the hunter information kiosks at the Brancheau, Strong and Fix Units of the refuge.



1st ducks at Brancheau Unit/Photo: J. Robison

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Updated program information can be found at
www.iwralliance.org and www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river

Saturday, January 26 • (2) Tours Available

Eagle Tour

Registration Required • Watch for announcement

Friday, February 1

World Wetlands Day

Wednesday, February 20 • 6-8pm

Stewardship Volunteer Workshop

Westfield Center, Trenton, MI

Doors open 5:30 – Registration Required

Wednesday, March 13 • 6-8pm

Outreach Volunteer Workshop

Location TBA

Doors open 5:30 – Registration Required

Sunday, April 21 • 1-4pm

Humbug Marsh Open House Earth Day In The Refuge

Saturday, May 11 • TBA

Humbug Marsh Open House International Migratory Bird Day Celebration

Saturday, May 18 • TBA

8th Annual Benefit Dinner

Edsel & Eleanor Ford House

Tuesday, May 21 • 4-8pm

Humbug Marsh Open House

Saturday, June 1 • 11am-2pm

Humbug Marsh Open House National Trails Day

Saturday, June 8 • TBA

Free Fishing Day In Millican State Park

Tuesday, June 18 • 6-8pm

Outreach Volunteer Workshop

Westfield Center, Trenton, MI

Doors open 5:30 – Registration Required

Thursday, June 20 • 4-8pm

Humbug Marsh Open House

PICK A FISH!

We're getting close to our target goal with just a few weeks left to have funding committed for the **Boardwalk, School Ship Dock and World-Class Fishing Pier** to be built at the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge!

But, we still need your help! If you've been meaning to make a contribution, now's the time. The **PICK a FISH campaign** has begun - twenty benches will be located throughout the 775' boardwalk and 225' fishing pier. Perhaps your family or business would like to sponsor a bench with a \$2,500 donation - then, **PICK a FISH!**

Each bench location will be identified by a fish species you just might catch while visiting the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge in Trenton, MI.

Only 5 Benches left!



International Wildlife Refuge Alliance
9311 Groh Road
Grosse Ile, Michigan 48138
iwralliance.org

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