Spring 2016

THE WILDSIDE

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

PHOTO CREDIT: JERRY JOURDAN

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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 fi rst 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 allowssignificant opportunities for the public to experience fish,wildlife and plants in their natural habitat.
Th e International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization- a "Friends" organization 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.

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IWRA Office: 734.692.7671

DRIWR Office: 734-362-7736

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John Nicely • Maintenance Mechanic
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Robert Primeau • Landscape Designer

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A Message from the Alliance Chair

There is something "mystical" about the Detroit River. From time immemorial it has coursed its way through the orals of history and the works of man. Now, we enter another phase of this remarkable sojourn as girders rise above the remains of an old landfill along the Trenton Channel outlining the form of a structure dedicated to the preservation of fish and wildlife.

Richard G. Micka, Chair
International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Board

Meet Erica Pozner

Urban Refuge Intern

For the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge

After volunteering for the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge a couple times, I knew I wanted to do more to be a part of it. So, when I learned about the visitor service internship I knew I had to apply for it. When I received the news that I got the internship I was ecstatic, I couldn't wait to start. Everyone here at the DRIWR so nice and I am glad to be part of the team.

Visitor Services have a variety of responsibilities, one of which includes providing opportunities for a wide variety of the public to participate in priority wildlife-dependent and other recreation activities. Right now with my visitor services internship I am helping Jennie and Jody come up with new ways to get more communities out to our refuge, as well as coming up with scout programs to host at the refuge.

A little about myself

I live in the city of Gibraltar, and have lived in Michigan my whole life. Currently I am enrolled at Monroe County Community College to get my associates in Biology. After that I plan on transferring to another school to further my education in environmental science or zoology. My favorite animal would have to be the wolf, including subspecies like the grey wolf, red wolf, and the Mexican wolf. A dream of mine is to one day work with wolves and help come up with new ways to preserve them and their habitat. This internship is helping me take a step in the right direction and has taught me so much. I look forward to what more this internship has in store for me.

Can you guess "Where Steve is"?

Hint: This DRIWR unit is commonly used for hunting of deer and waterfowl. Can you spot the hunter that Steve is pointing towards? Email your answer to iwr_alliance@yahoo.com. The first correct guess will receive a Nature Store tote bag!

From the Refuge Manager

John Hartig

Realizing the Dream!

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We pride ourselves in working with others for the benefit of all people and all wildlife. There are probably few better examples of this than the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

What we are doing together at the Refuge Gateway and Humbug Marsh is creating a strategically-planned destination of choice consistent with the philosophy of Abraham Lincoln who said:

The best way to predict the future is to create it!

Together, the waters of the lower Detroit River, Michigan's only Wetland of International Importance called Humbug Marsh, 3.5 miles of trails, three wildlife obsevation decks, a kayak landing, and a Visitor Center and the boat dock and fishing pier at the Refuge Gateway will create a destination of choice in southeast Michigan and southwest Ontario. Our goal has been to conserve continentally-significant habitats, create a unique outdoor place that provides an exceptional conservation experience, and do it in a fashion that grows hope and inspires the next generation of conservationists and sustainability entrepreneurs.

We also currently have 50 miles of greenway trails coming from the south that end at the Refuge Gateway. When Trenton constructs the missing greenway connection between Wayne County's Elizabeth Park and the Refuge Gateway in 2016, this will open up another 50 miles of greenways from the north that will end at the Refuge Gateway.

This unique project has been described as transformational for southeast Michigan in that it has cleaned up and restored habitats at an industrial brownfield, thereby expanding the ecological buffer for Michigan's only Wetland of International Importance – Humbug Marsh, improving close-to-home outdoor recreation for nearly seven million people in a 45-minute drive, enhancing quality of life, and helping businesses attract and retain employees.

We are so excited to share with you two photos of major progress on the Visitor Center and boat dock and fishing pier. And we hope you are as excited as we are. Thank you for your help and passion in making this possible. We are getting very close to realizing the dream.

Visitor Service News

We have the BEST volunteers!

DTE Energy Company had a group of hard working and enthusiastic volunteers come out to the Refuge for a workday on November 13, 2015. For the second time this year, these volunteers helped install split-rail, remove old chain-link fencing and assist with the decking of a new overlook. They worked like a well-oiled machine as they finished each task quickly and with proficiency. The refuge is grateful to these volunteers for sharing with us their time and skill as we prepare our refuge units for future visitation.

Speaking of volunteers, we have the annual volunteer numbers! We had a total of 330 volunteers contribute their time and talents to the refuge. Their hours combined equal 8,434. The volunteer value in Michigan is $22.13 per hour. This means that volunteers contributed $186,644 to the refuge in just this past year. However, we don't put a price on our volunteers, they are all priceless and we are lucky to have them at the refuge working for wildlife. To those of you who have volunteered for the refuge, we thank you!

As we move forward toward the future of an open refuge and visitor center our volunteer needs will increase. To find out how you can volunteer please contact Jody DeMeyere at jody_demeyere@fws.gov or by calling 734-692-7649.

Volunteers from DTE work together to build a new overlook and split rail fence at the Gibraltar Bay unit.

We also invite you to our next Volunteer Outreach Event at the Gibraltar Community Center on Thursday, March 10th from 6:00pm-8:00pm. Come learn about the volunteer opportunities at the refuge.

5,540 sharp-shinned hawks were counted in 2015. Photo: Andrew Sturgess

Detroit River Hawk Watch 2015 Season Summary

Greg Norwood, USFWS Biologist

This year monitored the passage of seventeen species totaling 159,510 migratory birds-of-prey (i.e., hawks, eagles, falcons, vultures).

This information is deposited at hawkcount.org with a daily narrative each night during the season. The program has corroborated other information that documents the region's increase in migratory bald eagles and turkey vultures (219 and 73,601, respectively in 2015) and contributed trend data for species of concern, such as red-shouldered hawk, American kestrel, and osprey (763, 816, 81, respectively, in 2015).

This year marked relatively high years in species showing cycles of high and low breeding success, which almost exclusively occurs in Ontario and Quebec for those birds migrating at Detroit River. This included northern harrier (632) and American kestrel (816), whose previous long-term averages are 472 and 932, respectively.

The season's complete summary is available here: **http://www.drhawkwatch.org/Publications** The website includes many resources related to the migration such as why it occurs here, how to identify the birds, and where they come from in Canada.

The group of volunteer counters/interpreters was led by Jonathan Stein who returned for his fifth season as primary counter.

Meandering the Marsh: An Ecological Interpretation

Brad Slaughter

In summer 2015, Brad Slaughter of the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI), a program of Michigan State University Extension, and University of Michigan Herbarium Research Investigator Mike Penskar conducted surveys at the Humbug Marsh Unit of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge in order to determine the array of ecosystems present on the property and the conservation significance of the site. The Humbug Marsh property has a long and well-documented history.

In the 1830s, Giles B. Slocum, a local businessman and dignitary, acquired a large land holding in the area and began to carve away the dense forests that characterized the region, eventually developing what was by the mid-1800s the largest wool farm in Michigan. Agricultural uses including animal husbandry continued into the late 1900s, after which most of the property was allowed to succeed to shrub thickets and young forests which have been periodically disturbed by attempts at development and other manipulations. These dogwood thickets and forests cover much of the site today and are the focus of restoration efforts by USFWS biologists and partners.

The plant communities at Humbug Marsh, including early successional old fields and shrub thickets, remnant oak – hickory forests, and Great Lakes marsh along the Detroit River, are all situated on dense layers of calcareous (limy), seasonally wet clay soils that restrict drainage and thus permit the development of wetland vegetation over much of the property, even on higher ground.

Although we did not document any relatively unperturbed natural communities or remnants of globally rare ecosystems such as lakeplain prairie and lakeplain oak openings, Humbug Marsh supports a large number of native plant species, including two species on Michigan's list of endangered, threatened, and special concern species. Over the coming years, land managers will be able to utilize our survey results to help shape a conservation management plan for Humbug Marsh that will maintain and improve the significance of the site for local biodiversity conservation and environmental education.

Humbug Marsh provides habitat for several plant communities, including species that are threatened, endangered, or of special concern in Michigan. Photo: Brad Slaughter

Understory Restoration Takes a New Turn at the Humbug Marsh Unit

Robert Primeau, DRIWR Landscape Designer

The stewardship crew prepares a portion of the forest at Humbug for seeding. Photo: Robert Primeau

The next step in transformative restoration work has begun at the Humbug Marsh Unit of the DRIWR, with new work focused on improving the forest understory in what will be the most heavily visited portions of the Unit.

Humbug Marsh is the only portion of the Detroit River to remain undeveloped; its forests date back to times before European settlement of North America. As a result the site features impressive Hickories and massive Oaks, many of them 300 years old or older. Though it was never developed, its character in the last centuries has changed dramatically.

When settlers first arrived in North America, they described a park-like forest environment, with open grasses under a mature canopy of trees. This environment was the result of centuries of Native American forest management practices such as prescribed burns on the forest understudy. Such fires killed off shrubs and young plants growing below them while fertilizing the soil with ash. As a result, the only understory plants 'allowed' to grow were tender shade tolerant grasses and forbs favored by deer and other game animals. This was a strategy for maintaining and maximizing hunted resources for food and material.

Such practices faded away as Native American land use was replaced with European agriculture, cities, and much later, industry. The forests that remained were allowed to develop without regular fire events, which in turn created dense and impassable monocultures of non-native plants such as Buckthorn (*Rhamnus spp.*) and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera spp.*).

When Humbug Marsh was acquired by the DRIWR in 2004, it inherited a forest in just this condition. While its Oak and Hickory trees were ancient and pristine, its understory was choked with generations of Buckthorn and Honeysuckle. Work to improve the Humbug Unit's ecological character began in 2007. Over the course of the next 8 years, the Stewardship Crew began removing invasive shrubs from the forest. Today large portions of the forest are open and shrub-free.

With the forest floor clear, what comes next? Refuge staff and volunteers have embarked on a new chapter of restoration at Humbug's Orange Trail area. The once shrub-choked understory has given way to a dense clay soil that could be easily recolonized by the same invasive shrubs we have worked so hard to remove. To combat this, it is time to take a cue from those earlier forms of management and create a sustainable new landscape.

This fall the Stewardship Crew spent days mowing away dead vegetation and raking leaf litter to expose the understory's bare dirt. Next, Refuge staff will seed this area with grasses such as Bottlebrush Grass (*Hystrix patula*) and Virginia Wild-Rye (*Elymus virginica*). These plants both thrive in deep shade and clay soils. To increase the diversity of the forest floor, areas with existing native plants and sunlight exposure will be seeded with Beebalm (*Monarda didyma*), Woodland Sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*), and Culver's Root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*).

Over time, it is the grasses that will facilitate future restoration. Through years of root growth and seasonal die-off these grasses will break up and enrich the heavy clay soil. These grasses can also support controlled burns, further enriching the soil for future growth of a more diverse palette of shade-tolerant Michigan-native plants.

Through these activities, future Refuge visitors to the Orange Trail will see not only a recovering landscape, but also one that begins to resemble the park-like managed forests of the region's past. Using techniques inspired by earlier forms of forest management and enacted by the efforts of staff and volunteers, this portion of the Refuge will ultimately feature a more diverse and resilient plant community, with the potential to inspire and inform emerging trends in landscape management.

STATE of the STRAIT

By: Anna Cook, Detroit River IWR

On December 9th, the binational tradition between the United States and Canada continued with the State of the Strait Conference held at Eastern Michigan University. The U.S. and Canada alternate hosting the conference every two years.

The theme of the 2015 conference was "Coordinating Conservation in the St. Clair-Detroit River System." More than 100 people attended, including students, scientists, researchers, managers, and concerned citizens.

Participants heard talks on various topics, including blue accounting framework, fish habitat restoration efforts, linking biological inventories to wetland management, and an update on the American and Canadian status of beneficial use impairments.

Key issues discussed included defining how to prioritize restoration, monitor effectiveness, and adaptively manage coastal systems throughout the St. Clair-Detroit River System. Also, ways to amplify effectiveness and cohesiveness among agencies, NGO's, and universities were explored. A report will be released in late 2016. You can learn more about the State of the State Conference at www.stateofthestrait.org.

Visitors Prowl Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge for Owls

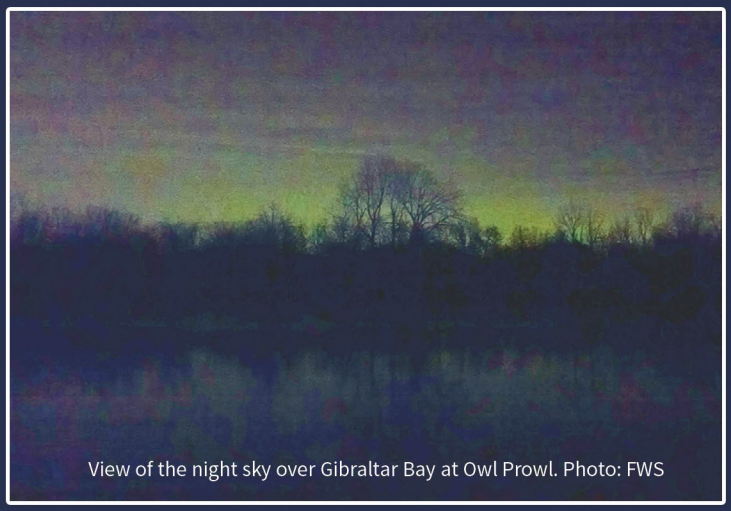
Jennie Braatz

The gargled trill of an eastern screech owl made its way to the perked ears of a quiet group of visitors at the Gibraltar Bay Unit of Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Patiently waiting, a group of 20 moved as one through the young forest and prairie grasses as refuge volunteer naturalist, Dorothy McLeer, "spoke" the language of owl.

We were on the "prowl" for two types of owls, first the eastern screech owl (*Megascops asio*) and then the great horned (*Bubo virginianus*). McLeer explained to the group the reason we called first for the eastern screech owl, because the great horned owl finds the little screech is a tasty meal and if we call the great horned first, then the screech will have no desire to make any noise. Much to the delight of McLeer and the group on the very first try, her imitation of the whinny and trill of the screech was met with the cool and collected monotonic trill of a real screech owl. We stood in silence smirking at one another in our dreamy night vision daze, aware that we were lucky this night.

We walked to the edge of the unit overlooking the Gibraltar Bay. The moon reflected off the waters and we called some more. Nothing. It appeared that we had used up all our luck at the beginning of the prowl. We headed down a trail surrounded by towering cottonwoods in search of our next owl, the great horned. The first few calls that McLeer belted out, "Hooo Hooo HOO HOO" were met with quacks from the ducks on the water and the ever looming presence of the lack of owl voices. At last a few of the visitors and McLeer were the first to hear a duet out in the woods; it was soft and distant at first.

Everyone got close together as if we would be able to hear better if we put our ears in a shared space, after all, two minds are better than one, surely 40 ears will be able to hear the most aloof owl! McLeer pointed out that one of the owls was "saying more" than the other, thus most likely it was a male and female pair in conversation. One young visitor tried his own "owl voice" and surprised us all at his accurate rendition. We each filled our ears with the song of the great horned owl before it was time to turn back and head home.



View of the night sky over Gibraltar Bay at Owl Prowl. Photo: FWS

On the walk back to the parking lot the group marveled at the triumph of the evening. A beautiful clear sky, the black silhouettes of trees on the night sky, the owls calling back to us and finally, the good company of a group of people all bonding over their love for a natural space.

Calendar of Events

FEBRUARY THROUGH MAY 2016

February 6, Saturday
Shiver on the River Shiver 10am – 3pm
Presented by Friends of the Detroit River on Belle Isle, Detroit, MI.
www.detroitriver.org
The Belle Isle Aquarium, Belle Isle Conservatory, Belle Isle Nature Zoo, Belle Isle Boat Club, Coast Guard Station, and Dossin Museum will be open. Don't miss family entertainment and environmental exhibits at the Casino and an ice rescue demonstration at 2pm at the Coast Guard Station.

March 10, Thursday
Volunteer Outreach Event 6pm – 8pm
at Gibraltar Community Center
An open house event for those interested in being a part of the growth of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. There will be information on how you can put your time, skills and passion to use for the refuge. A great way to get involved and learn before we open our doors to the public and participate in the first days of the refuge's openings. Come experience wildlife as a volunteer!

March 19, Saturday
Ducks Unlimited Banquet 4pm – 8pm at MBT Expo Center
Plan on joining us for a fun filled evening and make a commitment to wetland conservation! A Live Auction! • Silent Auction! • Bucket Drop Raffles! • Quick Draw Raffles! Drinks, Appetizers, & a Full Buffet Dinner!

April 23, Saturday
Monroe County Earth Day Expo
10am – 2pm at MBT Expo Center
This year marks the 11th anniversary of the Monroe County Earth Day Expo event with the theme, "Healthy Planet, Healthy You".
www.monroemi.gov/events/

April 5, Tuesday
Film Screening and Discussion at the Trenton Village Theater 7:00 pm

April 23, Saturday
Lower Detroit River Litter Clean Up 9am – 2pm
at Trenton Rotary Park
Presented by Friends of the Detroit River
Volunteers will be ferried out to various islands and shorelines in the Lower Detroit River to collect the debris that has accumulated over the past year. The Cleanup gives volunteers the opportunity to help make the river cleaner, as well as to get out on the river and to appreciate the need for stewardship of this valuable resource. Volunteers and the trash collected are returned to the park, where lunch is served.
www.detroitriver.org

May 14, Saturday
Open House at Humbug Marsh 12pm – 3pm
Includes naturalist led early morning (7:30am), mid-morning (10:00 am) and mid-day (12:00 pm) bird hikes with family friendly bird activities (12:00 – 3:00 pm). The first open house of the season is an extra special day with guided tours highlighting and celebrating the migration of nearly 350 species of migratory birds as they return to their nesting habitats in North America after their tropical winter vacation.

May 14 Saturday
11th Annual International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Benefit Dinner
5pm – 10pm at Ford Yacht Club
Reservations can be made through the orange DONATE button at www.iwralliance.org

May 20, Friday
Guided Birding Program (Gibraltar Bay Unit, Grosse Ile) 5pm – 7pm
Join the Visitor Services Team on the Gibraltar Bay Unit for a guided birding event. Walk the trails and discover the beauty of this refuge unit! Come for a portion or the entire event.

May 20-22, Friday, Saturday and Sunday
Grosse Isle Island Fest
Islandfest is a time to celebrate the beginning of summer and enjoy some small town fun. The weekend-long event features arts & crafts, a fine arts show, children's activities, a midway, live music featuring 50 Amp Fuse, parade, car show, Friday evening fireworks, historical tours, aircraft displays and rides, a variety of foods and beverages for all ages, monster truck rides, and so much more. Islandfest is a free, fun, family oriented event where all are welcome. Come join the fun!
www.islandfestgrosseile.com/

Announcing Facebook Blue Goose Mondays!
We have a facebook page! Be sure to check us out online for a lot of fun and look out for Blue Goose Mondays! **www.facebook.com/DetroitRiverIWR** **www.facebook.com/IWRA**

Save The Date: May 14, 2016

Ford Yacht Club, Grosse Ile, MI

11TH ANNUAL
DETROIT RIVER INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE BENEFIT DINNER

WWW.IWRALLIANCE.ORG
IWR_ALLIANCE@YAHOO.COM

An evening to share with Friends. Enjoy the majestic waterfront on the southern tip of the island of Grosse Ile, MI at the FORD YACHT CLUB

Enjoy the evening with music, Fun & Food
Entertainment with award winning DJ Joe Maroon
Dinner provided by the Ford Yacht Club

Live and Silent Auctions with over 150 Items!
Raffles Galore - Photo Booth fun for those memories to share!
All with your Friends along the waterfront of the Detroit River.

Reservations now being taken through the IWRA website atwww.iwralliance.org or contact the office at 734-692-7671
iwr_alliance@yahoo.com

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