WINTER 2014

THE WILDSIDE

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

Inside: Visitor Center Groundbreaking • Win a Great Lakes Freighter Trip • State of the Strait ...and more!

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" 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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Message from the Alliance Chair

Richard Micka

Our board members devote a significant amount of time and effort to make the Alliance work. Their commitment is for three years, and many have served several terms. Recently Fred DeLisle (BASF), Jack Liang (HCMA), Jon Peterson (AT&T) and Ryan Werder (formerly the Michigan League of Conservation Voters) stepped down to make way for others. We owe them a debt of gratitude for their devotion to the cause and wish them well in their future endeavors. We welcome new Alliance board members Joann Gonyea (City of Trenton), Peter Israel (BASF), Elizabeth Iszler (Wayne County Parks), and Paul Muelle (Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority).

Richard Micka, Chair
International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Board

Visitor Services News

Jamie Lanier, *Visitor Services Manager*

Volunteer Recognition & Awards

Last September, Detroit River IWR celebrated the outstanding accomplishments of our many dedicated volunteers and Friends. More than 100 guests were in attendance at this year's Annual Appreciation Dinner at Silver Shores Waterfront in Wyandotte. An "Anchors Aweigh" theme, complimented by the lovely waterfront view, highlighted the exciting changes taking place at the refuge, including the groundbreaking for a new, Gold LEED-certified visitor center facility at the Refuge Gateway.

Special awards were given to Mr. Arthur Payette, Mr. and Mrs. John and Beverly Bordach, Mr. Alfred Foster, and Mr. Devin Lang in recognition for their exemplary contributions to the Refuge.

Mr. Arthur Payette, a member of the Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy, has been a phenomenal force of energy at the refuge's Gibraltar Bay Unit. His leadership of the stewardship work effort being made at the unit is extraordinary and has resulted in dramatic changes and numerous improvements in visitor accessibility and habitat management on the unit.

Mr. and Mrs. John and Bev Bordach have contributed countless hours to the Refuge's public use program. This couple's dedication is truly inspiring and always a welcome addition to our programs and event. Never without a smile, they are full of energy, spunk and spirit and make any activity they take part in fun for all.

Mr. Devin Lang, one of our youngest volunteers, has dedicated a large part of his young life to ensuring the success of our refuge operations. Devin spent this past summer acting as the Youth Leader for our YCC Crew and much of his free time helping to further establish our volunteer program. Talented and confident, Devin is a true gem and we look forward to working with him for many years to come.

Mr. Alfred Foster, an indomitable force of energy, has been volunteering at the Refuge for a number of years. No task too large or too small, Alfred can always be counted on to accept the challenge with enthusiasm. You will often see him greeting visitors of all ages and sharing information at any number of the refuge's outreach events.

Volunteers are an integral part of any successful Refuge operation, and we're no exception here at Detroit River IWR. These dedicated individuals make it possible for us to accomplish the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System. 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.

From the Refuge Manager...

***John H. Hartig**, Refuge Manager*

Conservation Efforts Are Good For Our Economy

In 2001, Canada and the U.S. signed a "Conservation Vision for the Lower Detroit River Ecosystem" that called for the establishment of an international wildlife refuge that was codified in U.S. law through the 2001 Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act. In Canada, federal, provincial, and local partners have worked through existing laws and signed a Memorandum of Collaboration Agreement for the Western Lake Erie Watersheds Priority Natural Area to work more closely with U.S. partners on the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and other related initiatives. One outcome of these collaborative efforts is the establishment of Canadian and U.S. registries of lands that are being stewarded in the spirit and intent of the 2001 Canada-U.S. Conservation Vision and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. The U.S. registry of lands includes 7,897 acres of lands owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and 5,787 acres of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands, totaling 13,684 acres. Both Michigan Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service still maintain full management authority of their respective lands, but work collaboratively to create efficiencies and greater effectiveness on things like hunting, monitoring, cooperative weed management, research, outreach activities like Pointe Mouillee Waterfowl Festival and Hawk Fest, and more. In Canada, Essex Region Conservation Authority has placed 3,797 acres of conservation lands and open spaces (under their control) on the Canadian registry of lands. When totaled between Canada and U.S. that means that 17,481 acres of land in southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan are now being managed collaboratively in the spirit and intent of the 2001 Conservation Vision and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. With the potential for continued growth, it is probable that our two countries could reach 25,000 acres of lands cooperatively managed for conservation and outdoor recreation in the next 5-10 years.

As the Detroit Metropolitan Area and the Windsor-Essex Region join hands across the river in transboundary conservation to build the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, leaders are discovering that such conservation programs are powerful economic engines. On November 5, 2013, a new major economic study titled "Banking on Nature" was released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service documenting that the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System:

- generates $2.4 billion in annual sales and economic output;
- welcomes 46.5 million visitors annually;
- returns on average $4.87 to a local economy for every $1 spent by government to run the system;
- creates 35,000 jobs annually;
- produces $792.7 million in job income for local communities;
- generates $342.9 million in local, county, state and federal tax revenue; and
- brings tourists from around the nation and world.

This is particularly good news for our combined bioregion that our shared world-class natural resources return substantial economic benefits from exceptional outdoor recreational opportunities.

***-John Hartig,** Refuge Manager*

We are pleased to announce that the **9Th Annual Benefit Dinner** in continued support of the **Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR) is scheduled for Sunday, May 18th**. We are excited to announce this year's event will be held at **Silver Shores Waterfront in Wyandotte** located along the Detroit River in Wyandotte, MI. Silver Shores' location will provide a striking waterfront view of the Detroit River, the very resource you are helping to conserve and restore by providing your continued support. Please join us in celebration of the amazing work that has been achieved to date and share in the excitement in what the future will hold with the construction of the visitor center and the ongoing conservation and restoration occurring at the Refuge.

Make your reservation today at www.iwralliance.org through the orange DONATE button, or contact Joann at iwr_alliance@yahoo.com or 734-692-7671.

Win The Trip Of A Lifetime On A Great Lakes Freighter!

Have you always wanted to ride a Great Lakes freighter – one of the huge ships that ply our inland seas with vast cargoes of iron ore, steel, coal, salt, wheat, or corn? Well, here's your chance!

The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance is pleased to announce a fund-raising raffle with a grand prize of a trip for 4 people on a working Great Lakes freighter! Trips onboard a working freighter are generally only available to the shipping companies' officers and customers. However, the Interlake Steamship Company of Middleburg Heights, Ohio has generously donated this trip to IWRA to support the development and operation of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, the nation's only international wildlife refuge.

Tickets are $10 each, or 3 for $25. Mail your check today or use a ticket order form from the IWRA website. Ticket order forms will also be on the famous boatnerd.com website soon. The winners will enjoy outstanding accommodations in the Owner's Quarters (a stateroom for each couple) and share a lounge high above the deck overlooking the water. The Interlake Steamship Company chefs and galley crews are well known for their fabulous entrees and menus. Guests will enjoy touring the ship and will be able to record their experience by taking pictures of passing ships, the Soo locks, Great Lakes ports, cargo loading and passages through the rivers.

Winner must be flexible concerning scheduling and work with ISC on a mutually agreeable window of departure dates. Guests are required to adhere to all company polices and safety procedures. All guests must have a valid passport and be physically able to negotiate stairways and ladders.

Your ticket(s) will be promptly mailed to you upon receipt of your order form. The drawing will be held at the IWRA 9th Annual Benefit Dinner on Sunday, May 18, 2014. Winner need not be present at the drawing to win and will be notified by mail and/or phone.

Deadlines - All tickets orders must be **received** no later than **Friday, May 16, 2014**.

Mail in your check today! Please include your name, address, phone number, email, the number of tickets ($10 each or 3 for $25) and the amount enclosed.

How I Spent My Fall Vacation

***Bert Urbani**, IWRA Board Secretary*

Last September, John Leon (my husband), Captain Gary Longton and I were lucky enough to cruise the Great Lakes aboard the Paul R. Tregurtha. The Paul R. Tregurtha is the flagship of the Interlake Steamship Company and the longest vessel on the Great Lakes at 1, 013 feet 6 inches. We traveled from St. Clair, Michigan to Duluth, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin and back, during six beautiful fall days. It was a dream come true for all three of us.

The boat was amazing – eight stories tall, and 1,000 feet long – everything else on the water looked tiny. The captain and crew were friendly, helpful and informative. The accommodations were superb and the food was great. Just being there, on the boat, on the lakes, through the locks, incredible!

We live in a beautiful region, surrounded, as we know, by the largest volume of fresh water in the world, inhabited by a myriad of species (besides our own) that depend on the water. It was an inspiring journey, and we returned refreshed and recommitted to the mission of the Refuge and the Alliance.

Most folks get to see a lake freighter in their lifetime, but very few are gifted with a week-long cruise aboard an over 1,000 foot long by 100 foot wide, massive moving vessel. These vessels are some of the largest movable objects on earth. The accommodations, meals, and family style treatment from the captain and crew are wonderful. Tours of the entire vessel and observing loading and unloading operations are superb. It is truly an amazing adventure. Cruising the St Clair River, blue waters of Lake Huron, the winding St Mary's River, traversing the mighty Soo Locks, navigating the entire length of Lake Superior to Superior Wisconsin, then returning again to St. Clair, Michigan. I thoroughly enjoyed participating on one of these very special cruises, this past fall. A fantastic, floating, forever memory. Get your ticket for a chance to win this opportunity of a lifetime.

-Gary Longton

Groundbreaking Ceremony

***Steve Dushane**, Assistant Refuge Manager*

November 8, 2013 was a very special day for YOUR Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR). On that beautiful November day, the USFWS, IWRA and partners broke ground on a new 11,800 square foot LEED Certified Visitor Center (VC). Despite being cancelled once in October due to the Federal Government shutdown, the VC groundbreaking ceremony was a testament to the public's unwavering support for the refuge. With over 300 people in attendance, including USFWS Director Dan Ashe and Congressman John Dingell, the refuge was able to kick off the next chapter in DRIWR's short history. (Remember, the refuge just turned 12 years old on December 21, 2013.)

The festivities for the day included an open house to wander the Humbug trails, a tent for refuge partners to share the restoration efforts that helped prepare the former industrial site to become the "Gateway" for the refuge with a new home - the visitor center, many speakers, and an official "shovel turning" that even included Puddles the Blue Goose. (I must add that the shovels were gorgeous but I may be slightly biased).

The new Visitor Center facility will include classrooms, multimedia exhibits about the refuge and its various habitats, a 4D object theatre, outdoor learning spaces, refuge offices and much more. The VC will be a gathering place for families, schools, scouts, the general public and other user groups to come and learn about the refuge and discover what makes the Detroit River and western Lake Erie such a special place.

It is hoped that the refuge will be planning another ceremony in two years or so to cut the ribbon at the grand opening of the facility. So, be sure to watch the newsletter because we hope to see you there!

To see an amazing video of the groundbreaking produced by students from Gibraltar Carlson High School students go to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEj1oGHWL4U&sns=em

To read more about the groundbreaking go to: http://www.fws.gov/midwest/news/691.html

Refuge Habitat Management Plan Nears Completion

***Greg Norwood**, Wildlife Biologist*

We are all familiar with prioritizing our activities based on finite time and money. Refuge habitat management is the same, with a truly infinite continuum of ecological health to be achieved, yet limitations of time and resources. It is for this reason that priorities must be set.

A frosty fall morning in a recently cut-over area of the Humbug Marsh Unit intended to set-back shrub succession by mimicking a moderately-sized windthrow event, which will benefit species like northern flicker, migrant rusty blackbirds, and migrant American woodcocks that share similar habitat requirements with hundreds of other species, including neotropical migrant songbirds. Photo: Greg Norwood

The Refuge and its contractor, Cardno JFNew, will be submitting the draft Habitat Management Plan (HMP) this winter for approval by regional staff. This document provides long-term guidance for management decisions for a 15-year period in concert with the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Refuge which was completed in 2005.

For simplicity, the HMP broadly divides the Refuge into only five habitat types: open water/submergent wetland, mud/moist soil, emergent wetland, wet prairie, and wet-mesic forest. The entire Refuge is mapped to one of these five broad habitats and will be managed either actively or passively to enhance the health of four specific natural communities and 23 individual fish and wildlife species.

Many may wonder how we can distill the immense variation of the Refuge into only four natural communities and manage habitat for only 23 fish and wildlife species! There are two reasons for this approach: First, it assumes that habitat management actions good for one species are also good for a large guild of other species requiring similar conditions. Second, Refuge staff ultimately manage habitat by mimicking, to the extent practical, only natural disturbances and processes that have been removed from our historical landscape and equally try to find opportunities to simply step aside and watch these disturbances occur. In other words, the immense variation in habitats is already determined by soil, landscape setting, land use history, climate, etc. We need only determine if, when, and how we will manipulate surface water, the timing, frequency, and severity of fire/cutting, and removal of invasive species, which is based upon our incomplete, but growing knowledge of the ecosystems and fish and wildlife.

For most Refuge land, staff and volunteers do very little and simply watch natural processes like wind, water, pathogen, and the occasional prescribed fire (or lack thereof) influence habitats. The Refuge Habitat Management Plan will provide that critical if, when, and how in restoring or mimicking lost habitat processes to maximize benefits to that infinite array of variability and thousands of species that make up the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

Hawk Watch Report

***Jonathan Stein**, Hawk Watcher*

After an underwhelming 2012, the 2013 hawk watch season was far more lively, much to the delight of our many dedicated volunteers and interested visitors. This fall, we shattered the previous season high count for Bald Eagles, eclipsing the 350 individuals observed plateau for the first time ever. Turkey Vultures were seen in their second highest overall number in the count's history. Rough-legged Hawks turned in their best showing since 2004. And all three regularly occurring falcon species (American Kestrel, Merlin, and Peregrine) sped by in their highest numbers since 2007. All in all, it was quite the turnaround from 2012, when the only species to be seen in above average numbers was Bald Eagle. Here's one hawk watcher hoping 2014 is equally as enjoyable.

Red-Shouldered Hawk • Photo: Andrew Sturgess

STATE of the STRAIT

__Anna Cook__, FWS Administrative Assistant and
__Roberta Urbani__, IWRA board member

On **October 28, 2013** a tradition between the United States and Canada continued with the biennial State of the Strait Conference. The U.S and Canada alternate hosting the conference every two years and the 2013 conference (the fifth in the series) returned to the University of Windsor. The theme was "Setting Ecological Endpoints and Restoration Targets" and progressed from the 2006 State of the Strait Conference which compiled available data on 50 candidate indicators for the Detroit River and western Lake Erie. More than 200 people attended, including students from both sides of the border, scientists, researchers, managers, and concerned citizens.

There were many distinguished presenters with talks focused on issues in the region such as the phosphorus indicators and target loads in relationship to the record-breaking cyanobacteria blooms in Lake Erie, Lake Sturgeon restoration targets in the Detroit River, and the status of the ongoing battle against Phragmites in the Refuge as assessed by remote sensing, GIS and repeat photography. Discussions included defining a "desired future state," ensuring ecological relevance, building consensus on quantitative targets, and ensuring minimum, necessary, sufficient, and feasible long-term monitoring.

The conference was dedicated to the memory of Dr. David M. Dolan. On June 18, 2013, the Great Lakes community lost one of its great leaders when Dave Dolan passed away unexpectedly. Dave was an applied environmental statistician. During his career, Dave worked for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the International Joint Commission, and University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. One of his greatest contributions was estimation of phosphorus loadings to better understand and manage the Great Lakes.

Dave Dolan

Dave believed strongly in sharing knowledge and helping others improve their understanding of the environment, both as a teacher and as a strong supporter and advocate for the International Association of Great Lakes Research. One good example of these traits is that he was the catalyst for the first State of the Strait Conference in 1998 entitled "Rehabilitating and Conserving Detroit River Habitats." This conference helped focus, at that time, on critical habitats threatened by development, including Peche Isle and Humbug Marsh. Both of these habitats are now protected in perpetuity, in part due to that conference that Dave inspired.

A report will be released in early 2014. You can learn more about the State of the State Conference at www.stateofthestrait.org.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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

Sundays 1 - 4 pm
Gibraltar Bay Unit Open House
June through October with the Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy
(entrance on East River Road, half mile south of Groh Road in Grosse Ile, MI)

•••

Tuesday, March 11 • 6 - 8pm
Volunteer Orientation Training
Registration Required – Jamie_lanier@fws.gov

•••

Wednesday, April 9 • TBA
Volunteer Thank You Dinner

•••

Saturday, May 10
Humbug Marsh Open House
International Migratory Bird Day Celebration
Early bird walk, family events

•••

Sunday, May 18 • 4 - 8pm
9th Annual Benefit Dinner
Silver Shores Waterfront, Wyandotte

•••

Saturday, June 7 • TBA
National Trails Day

•••

Sunday, June 8 • TBA
Kids Free Fishing Fest
Milliken State Park
Registration required

•••

Tuesday, June 24 • 4 - 8pm
Humbug Marsh Open House

•••

Sunday, July 20 • 3 - 6pm
Sundaes on a Sunday in the Refuge
Brancheau Unit

•••

Saturday, July 19 • 9:30 - 11:30am
Volunteer Orientation Training
Registration Required – Jamie_lanier@fws.gov

•••

Thursday, July 24 • 1 - 7pm
Humbug Marsh Open House

•••

Saturday, August 9 • TBA
Kayak in the Refuge Event

•••

Sunday, August 17 • 1 - 4pm
Humbug Marsh Open House

Did You Know?

… the Bald Eagle is both the national bird of the United States and the national animal?

... the Bald Eagle was not Benjamin Franklin's choice for the national symbol of the newly formed United States of America? He didn't approve of the eagle because it frequently steals fish from ospreys and other birds of prey. He preferred the wild turkey.

… the sound you hear on movies and TV of a Bald Eagle is actually a Red-tailed Hawk? The eagle's natural voice is somewhat high-pitched and squeaky, and not deemed impressive enough for our national symbol!

And, did you know registration for the 2015 DTE Energy USFWS Eagle Tour opens on the DRIWR website on Thanksgiving? The registrations are granted through a lottery after usually receiving over a hundred requests. Mark your calendar to register for your chance to go next year!

NPR: http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=279405587&m=279405588

Washington Post: http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/eagles-make-michigan-power-plant-their-winter-home/2014/02/19/0bd8a4fc-992e-11e3-b1de-e666d78c3937_story.html

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