

*The Fox River Current is featuring promising natural resource damage assessment projects in and near the Lower Fox River.*

# Spotlight On:

## Wetland Restoration on the Fox River National Wildlife Refuge

By Colette Charbonneau, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Fox River National Wildlife Refuge, managed through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Horicon NWR, encompasses 1,004 acres, of which 800 acres are wetland habitat (wildlife homes), along the Fox River in Marquette County, Wis. Prior to refuge establishment in 1979, approximately 400 acres of wet prairie, sedge meadow, and shallow marsh wetland were illegally ditched for agricultural development. The previous owner was required to fill in the illegal ditches but was not able to complete the work. Therefore, the federal government acquired the land.

The illegal ditches carry sediment, pesticides and fertilizer from upstream farming operations straight into the Fox River. The historic wetlands that once filtered water flowing to the river have lost native wetland vegetation and non-native upland shrubs have been taking over the area. This reduces the ecological value of the land for migratory birds and fish that use the wetlands.

The Fox River/Green Bay Natural Resource Trustee Council approved funding to restore the hydrological



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*Refuge personnel fill ditch areas with soil to improve ecological value of the land for migratory birds and fish.*

conditions in approximately 200 acres of the refuge wetlands. Refuge personnel are filling or plugging the ditches using soil from the refuge lands. The shallow scrapes made from the borrow areas to fill the ditches will produce shallow wetland pools that are important for waterfowl and fish. Once the ditches are filled and no longer carry runoff directly to the

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river, the water will spread out as sheet-flow (flow of water that is spread out like a sheet over a large area), covering the whole area over the land and slowly filtering through the wet prairie, meadow and shallow marshy areas improving water quality in the Fox River. Adding water to the historic wetland areas will also stop the growth of the upland shrubs that are encroaching into the habitat.

“The wetland restoration will result in increasing water depth, duration of water on the wetland and frequency of flooding in drained areas, especially during the spring,” explained Sadie O’Dell, refuge wildlife biologist. “This creates habitat conditions important for fish spawning and nursery areas as well as for migratory birds such as mallards, greater sandhill cranes, American bittern, northern harrier and the yellow rail.”

Refuge managers are currently developing a recreational fishing plan for the Fox River NWR. The plan is expected to be completed for the 2008 fishing season. The refuge will be opened for the public to fish on Fox River backwater lakes and along the river’s edge. Fish species found on and along the refuge include channel catfish, northern pike, black crappie, bluegill, green sunfish, largemouth bass and pumpkinseed. Until the fishing plan is completed,

the refuge is open for deer hunting season only.

The natural resource trustees are comprised of FWS, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Michigan Attorney General, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

For further information on natural resource damage assessment projects, contact Trustee Council Coordinator Colette Charbonneau, FWS, at [Colette\\_Charbonneau@fws.gov](mailto:Colette_Charbonneau@fws.gov) or at (920) 866-1726.



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*Sandhill cranes fly over wetlands that have been restored where native vegetation is growing.*