IR3
Inside Region 3
April 15, 2004
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Weather Hampers Start of Region's Fire Season

Also in this Issue:

Can Bubbles Stop the Asian Carp? **Civil Servants of the Year**
What's Causing Ducks to Die on the Upper Miss?

Welcome to the new "Inside Region 3"

External Affairs is taking initial steps to redesign and restructure IR3 so that it provides more information about our workforce, in addition to information about our accomplishments from ARS. Of particular interest is increasing the "voices of the region" by having employees contribute articles, columns, questions or comments. Over the next several issues, you'll see numerous changes.

We'll still have ARS reports, but they'll be rewritten in a newspaper style for easier reading. As we have with this issue, we'll include information on new employees, retirements and reassignments. We'll have stories on Service policy that affects you too.

There will also be a regular column from the RD's office to share information about projects and issues currently occupying our time and attention. That might be written by me, Deputy RD Charles Wooley, or the RD's Special Assistant. And, much more importantly, we will also be including columns, comments or articles written by Region 3 employees from throughout the region. Please consider contributing articles/editorials that are not covered by ARS reports. Something that you have observed? Something you feel passionately about? Something on your mind? Something happening at your station that you just want to share? Please send contributions to the IR3 editor (suggested length is about 500 words). If you have photographs, please include those, too.

Regional Director Robyn Thorson

I want IR3 to be published routinely around the middle of each month, with timely information from ARS and from employees. Publications like this are intended to strengthen the organization's cohesion by sharing information and news. We'll be asking for feedback along the way to see what you think, and we'll adjust accordingly.

This first step by External Affairs focuses on internal communication. You'll be hearing about efforts to increase use of the ARS for our external communications also: our outreach to partners, Congressional offices, the Department, the Service, states, etc. Region 3 does important work and we do it well — it is important that we "tell our story." It increases our support and public understanding for our conservation mission.

I hope that you will enjoy the "new" Inside Region 3, and that you will consider contributing to it. Your feedback and suggestions are important.

--Robyn Thorson

About the Cover

Melting snow, migrating birds and prescribed fires are signatures of spring in the Midwest.

The cover photo was taken last year at Agassiz NWR. Dave Bennet (with torch) almost looks maniacal! He is using a drip torch to burn out an area around a phone box. A telephoto lens helps create a dramatic wall of fire behind the employees, who were actually quite safe.

The start of the fire season has been eventful. See the stories on page 4. By the way, we're always looking for great fire photos.

Hail & Farewell

Region 3 is a dynamic organization. Quality employees are continuously coming to the region or leaving for new challenges. Twelve employees have retired since January 1. Each month, we will do our best to publish a list of new employees, as well as those who have retired. Names are provided by the regional Human Resources Office.

This month, we bid farewell to the following retirees: **Marlys Bulander** and **Marion Cruikshank**, Division of Migratory Birds; **Brad Johnson,** Chief, Division of Federal Aid; **John Heinrich**, Marquette Biological Station; **Karen Nagengast**, National Wildlife Refuge System Operations; **Karen Seigfried**, Division of Realty; **Steve Dedon**, Division of Engineering.

Also this month, we welcome the following new employees: Fishery Biologist **Jessica Richards**, and Student Trainee **Heather Dawson,** Marquette Biological Station; Refuge Manager **Anne Sittauer**, Sherburne NWR; Refuge officer **John Megan**, Minnesota Valley NWR; **Ben Halverson**, Leopold WMD.

Thrift Savings Plan Open Season Runs Through June 30

It's open season for the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). Between **April 15 and June 30,** participating employees can change their contribution rate or where their contributions are invested.

If you are not a participant and are eligible to join, the open season provides you an opportunity to begin contributing to your retirement savings program.

The Thrift Savings Plan is a tax-deferred savings plan for employees that offer participants a choice of five investment funds and a loan program. Eligible FERS employees receive automatic agency contributions, and those contributing to the TSP receive matching agency contributions of up to 5 percent of the amount contributed.

Employees should have received a copy of the TSP Open Season brochure that provides limited information about the TSP, investment options and participation rules. Detailed infomation about the TSP can also be found on the the Web at http://www.tsp.gov.

June Johnson, Kathleen Schlener Named Minnesota Civil Servants of the Year

From Rick Greenblat

Two Regional Office employees were recently named "Minnesota Civil Servants of the Year" by the Federal Executive Board of Minnesota. Financial Technician **June Johnson** and Human Resources Assistant **Kathleen Schlener** will be recognized for their achievements at the federal recognition program and luncheon April 30, at the Sheraton Hotel Bloomington, Minn. (formerly known as the Radisson Hotel South).

In managing more than 1,000 charge card accounts, June Johnson helped develop a database that provides program managers with customized reports that list current and delinquent charge card balances for all employees. June also processed more than 1,000 actions on charge card accounts (add/delete/change information) to ensure account information is valid.

Kathleen Schlener works in the areas of workers' compensation and training. She volunteered to develop a web-based customer service questionnaire that provided valuable information to Human Resources staff and increased the number of employees completing the surveys. Kathleen also maintains the region's on-line training calendar.

DeSoto NWR Begins Public Use Season April 15

Morel mushroom hunters will get their crack at the bounty on DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge in western Iowa when the refuge begins its public-use season, April 15.

Special mushroom picking areas will be open through May 31. A map showing these areas is available at refuge entrances. The central portion of the refuge will be closed to mushroom picking and other public use to provide sanctuary for nesting birds and white-tailed deer during the fawning period.

In addition to mushroom picking, April 15 is the first day for boating, fishing, picnicking, hiking, wildlife observation and driving the 16 miles of refuge roads. An entrance permit is required for all vehicles.

Lost Mound Unit of the Upper Miss Refuge Complex Dedicated April 13

Staff from the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge were joined by U.S. Representative Don Manzullo and Regional Director Robyn Thorson April 13 at the Savanna Army Depot in Savanna Ill., to dedicate a new addition to the National Wildlife Refuge System - the Lost Mound Unit of the Upper Mississippi Refuges.

The dedication ceremony was attended by staff from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Army, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Jo-Carroll Local Redevelopment Authority, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and representatives from local conservation groups including the Northwest Illinois Prairie Enthusiasts

The Lost Mound Unit was officially established Sept. 26, 2003, when the Army transferred management rights on 9,404 acres of the closed Savanna Army Depot. The unit will be managed jointly by the Service and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

The Service will manage the unit as part of the Savanna District of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge complex. In addition to the Lost Mound Unit, local conservation organizations have began acquiring land and easements on adjacent lands that will eventually allow protection of natural resources stretching from the middle of the Mississippi River channel to the Hanover Bluffs.

Wildfire Burns Off Refuge Land at Big Stone NWR

By Scott Flaherty

Regional investigators are probing the cause of a wild fire that began Wednesday, April 7, and burned approximately 800 acres of grass land on and off Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge in Lac Qui Parle County in western Minnesota.

Service fire crews from Big Stone and Minnesota Valley NWR, Fergus Falls, Detroit Lakes and Morris Wetland Management Districts remained on the scene through Friday, April 9, to mop up scattered smoldering areas within the burned area, more than half of which is located on the refuge.

The fire was spotted by Big Stone fire crews at approximately 2:30 p.m. Wednesday on the southeast corner of the refuge. Fueled by northwest wind gusts in excess of 50 miles per hour, the fire jumped across a gravel road south of the refuge boundary and destroyed an unoccupied barn on private land. The fire also crossed U.S. Highway 75 and burned grassland belonging to The Nature Conservancy and other private land owners.

By 9 p.m., Service fire crews, joined by firefighters from local volunteer fire departments, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and local law enforcement agencies had contained the fire. No one was injured. No homes were damaged.

Big Stone NWR is headquartered near Odessa, Minn., and contains more than 11,500 acres in Big Stone and Lac Qui Parle counties.

On Tuesday, April 6, Service fire crews conducted a successful prescribed fire on a parcel of refuge land located northwest of the area where the wildfire began. The refuge, like all federal and state resource managers, routinely uses controlled, prescribed fire to reduce excessive woody underbrush and improve wildlife habitat.

Last year, the Service conducted nearly 400 prescribed fires on more than 70,000 acres of Service-managed land in Minnesota without a major incident.

Prescribed Fire to Enhance Oak Savanna at Sherburne NWR

Prescribed fires will be used to enhance rare oak savanna this spring on Sherburne NWR. The controlled burns mimic naturally ocurring fires that are a requirement for this vanishing ecosystem.

Controlled burns are planned for 5,182 acres on the refuge, located just north of Zimmerman, Minn. Last year, approximately 6,834 acres were burned.

According to Fire Management Officer Richard Johnson, the burns will only be conducted after a careful evaluation of weather conditions. "We want the public to know that safety is our utmost concern. By reducing fuels through prescribed burning, we minimize the threat that wildfires on or around the refuge may have on the surrounding communities," Johnson said.

Leopold WMD Planning Prescribed Fires in 11 Wisconsin Counties

By Jennifer Rabuck

Returning birds and melting snow are sure signs of spring in the Midwest. Natural resources professionals are also preparing for another spring ritual, the start of the prescribed fire season. From April 1 to mid-June, staff at Leopold Wetland Management District in Portage, Wis., will be mobilizing crews of firefighters and equipment for scheduled burns at 22 waterfowl production areas across south-central Wisconsin.

"Prescribed fire is one of the most effective management tools we have to manipulate vegetation," said Steve Lenz, district manager at Leopold WMD. "The name itself implies benefit is to be gained from carefully planned and implemented fire."

Last year Leopold WMD crews burned 1,256 acres on 15 WPAs in seven counties. This year, burns are planned for 22 WPAs scattered across 11 counties that include: Adams, Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Jefferson, Marquette, Ozaukee, Rock, Sheboygan and Winnebago. Public use of these areas will be restricted during fire operations.

Simulating historic, naturally occurring wildfires produces great benefits to native plants and animals. Burning the previous year's plant matter returns nutrients to the soil, encouraging healthier and more productive plant growth.

Fire top-kills woody plants such as willow and oak, causing them to sprout from the base. The resulting shoots provide tender, nutritious browse for animals like white-tailed deer. Fruit-bearing plants (like blueberry) are stressed by fire, signaling them to flower and fruit. Prescribed fire also reduces the risk of wild fires.

Robyn Flaherty and Jim Mattson watch a blindfolded Marion Cruikshank attempt to "pin a mustache on the Teddy."

Regional Office Bids Farewell to Refuge System Centennial

By Dan Sobieck, photos by Abby Rodriguez

Closing out the NWRS Centennial year in the Regional Office was an office celebration and sealing of the Regional Office Centennial time capsule. Items interred in the time capsule were collected from all programs, including badges and handcuffs (with key!) from the Division of Law Enforcement, old refuge system posters from the '80s, original recovery plans for endangered species, a CD of refuge system images, program brochures, and numerous lapel pins, buttons, and keychains from all Service programs. Also interred was a "blue goose scroll" which contained the names of all employees attending the final Regional Office Centennial Celebration.

As advertised, all participants who tested their skills in the "Pin the Mustache on Teddy" or the "Blue Goose Bean Bag Toss" games were awarded prizes, with the stuffed teddy bear and blue goose blue cap topping the "most desired" list. The highlight (or lowlight, depending on your taste in entertainment) of the event was the ceremonial sealing of the time capsule, with Regional NWRS Chief Nita Fuller performing the honors. Fuller was ably assisted in this task by Donna Stanek, Suzanne Baird and Dan Sobieck, who collectively proved once again that straw hats (like pearls) are always the right choice.

For now, the Centennial time capsule will reside in the regional office until a permanent home is located.

Nita Fuller seals the regional office time capsule as Dan Sobieck and Suzanne Baird look on.

Contents of the regional office time capsule.

Can Bubbles Halt Advance of Asian Carp?

By Rachel F. Levin and Mike Oetker

Last fall, a commercial angler made a troubling discovery: a bighead carp, netted in Lake Pepin, less than 100 miles from Minneapolis on the Mississippi River.

A short time later, the Service and the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources commissioned a study to identify ways to slow or stop the advance of non-native Asian carp—of which the bighead is one species—in the Upper Mississippi River Basin.

Among other deterrents, the study recommends an acoustic barrier that projects sound through a curtain of bubbles, repelling fish making their way upstream. Acoustic barriers would be located downstream from locks and dams; downstream from the barriers would be specially constructed habitat and staging areas to hold fish.

Each acoustic barrier with accompanying habitat and staging area would cost $8 million to $12 million, significantly less than similar electrical barriers that have proven effective in other waterways such as the Chicago Sanitary Ship Canal. Acoustic barriers are also less expensive to maintain than electrical barriers, and are safer to other wildlife and to people.

This specimen shows just how large an Asian carp can grow.

Other deterrents recommended in the report include physical barriers, harvest, and biological and chemical controls.

The Service will work with the Minnesota and Wisconsin DNRs, as well as officials from Iowa and the Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate the report and propose actions to fight the spread of Asian carp.

Large populations of voracious Asian carp can reduce populations of native plants, which are an important staple for native fish, waterfowl and other species. This can affect regional economies that rely on waterfowl hunting, fishing and boating. Asian carp also threaten imperiled native wildlife such as endangered freshwater mussels.

Asian carp may also pose a risk to human safety. Silver carp can jump 10 feet out of the water, behavior that has resulted in injuries to boaters in Illinois and Missouri.

Bighead, silver, grass and black carp all are native to Asia. Grass carp were first introduced into the United States in 1963; bighead, silver and black carp appeared in the 1970s. All four species of Asian carp escaped into the Mississippi River Basin, and all but the black carp are known to have developed self-sustaining populations there.

In May, resource professionals from across the country will meet to develop a management plan that will include strategies to limit the spread of Asian carp, prevent additional introductions and reduce the impacts of existing populations.

Did You Know:

· Silver carp consume up to 17 percent of their body weight per day in plankton; they can grow to 39 inches and 60 pounds
· Bighead carp can grow to 60 inches and 110 pounds on a diet of plankton
· Grass carp can eat up to 40 percent of their body weight per day in aquatic plants, and can grow to 59 inches and 99 pounds
· Black carp can grow to 48 inches and 71 pounds on a diet that is almost exclusively snails, mussels and other invertebrates
· Silver carp that jump out of the water are reacting to the sound of boat motors
· All of the Asian carp species can live to 30 years old

Parasites Again Causing Deaths of Diving Ducks

By Ann Blankenship

Wildlife disease specialists from the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wis., have diagnosed intestinal parasites, known as trematodes or flukes, as the cause of a spring die-off of lesser scaup, coots, and ring-necked ducks on Lake Onalaska (Pool 7) of the Upper Mississippi River near La Crosse, Wis. The first dead lesser scaup were collected the week of March 22. To-date, approxeimately 450 birds have been found.

Trematode-caused waterfowl and coot mortality has been documented each spring and fall on Lake Onalaska since the 2002 spring migration. Last fall, about 3,050 dead birds were found and total mortality was estimated at 6,300-7,000. Using lessons learned from the 2003 spring migration as a guide, lesser scaup are expected to be the species most affected and mortality is likely to continue through much of April.

Sick and dead birds are being found on Lake Onalaska and along the main channel immediately below Lock and Dam 7. Higher river flows appear to be moving sick and dead birds through the dam and depositing them along the main channel in the upper part of Pool 8.

Most trematodes have complex life cycles that require two intermediate hosts in which the parasites develop before they become infective for the definitive, final bird host. A mollusk is often the first intermediate host infected with a stage of the parasite. At least two different species of trematodes have been found in the digestive tracts of birds involved in this die-off. Both species are small, ranging in size from 1 millimeter to less than 2 millimeters.

--Photo courtesy Jim Nissen

Lesser scaup are turning up dead throughout Pool 7 on the Upper Mississippi.

Although small in size, hundreds of trematodes, more than sufficient to cause death, have been found in the lower intestines of most of the birds examined. One of the species of trematodes feeds on blood, and death is due to severe blood loss, anemia, or other complications. The other species causes disruption in water and electrolyte balance, leading to death. A second effect of trematodes is damage to the intestinal wall, which can lead to secondary bacterial infection in the abdomen of the birds.

Depending on how heavily snail populations are infected, some birds can receive a lethal dose during less than 24 hours of feeding. Susceptible waterfowl can die three to eight days after ingesting a lethal dose of the trematodes.

Avian predators and scavengers such as bald eagles, crows and gulls have been feeding on the sick/dead birds. According to the USGS, there appears to be no documented threat to raptors or scavengers feeding on infected carcasses.

Spot a Fluorescent Duck This Spring?

Those flourescent colored ducks migrating north this spring are not new waterfowl hybrids. The brightly colored ducks are part of a study by Louisana State University and states' departments of natural resources that will help solve the mystery of waning populations of lesser scaup.

No one can say why scaup, also known as bluebills, are in decline, but reporting your observation of the brightly colored ducks can help researchers find the answers. Public sightings are important to project success.

Color-marked scaup sightings can be reported online at www.iowadnr.com /wildlife, or by email to scaup-project@lsu.edu. or by calling: l- 888-MINNDNR, or fax to 225-578-4144.

Whooping Cranes Returning to Wisconsin

By Rachel F. Levin
Photo by John Christian

On March 21, International Crane Foundation biologist Anne Lacy confirmed the first whooping crane to return to Wisconsin from Florida this year. The crane, known as "6-01," was spotted amid 20 sandhill cranes at Necedah NWR. In subsequent weeks, several more cranes made their way north from Chassahowitka NWR on Florida's Gulf coast, and as of April 14, 15 cranes had returned to Wisconsin.

The cranes are part of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership's (WCEP) ongoing reintroduction effort that uses ultralight aircraft to guide young cranes on their first southward migration.

Sixteen whooping cranes following three ultralight aircraft left Necedah NWR on October 16, 2003, reaching their winter home at Chassahowitzka on December 8 after a 1,225-mile migration. They were the third group of cranes to be led south behind ultralight aircraft piloted by Operation Migration. With the successful migration of these 16 birds, there are now 36 migratory whooping cranes in the wild in eastern North America. Just four years ago, there were none.

WCEP will train a new class of whoopers at Necedah this summer in preparation for another ultralight-led migration this fall.

The whooping crane class of '03 follow their ultralight guide toward a landing at Florida's Chassahowitzka NWR last December.

Absent for a Century, Eagles Return to Chicago to Nest

For the first time in more than 100 years, there's an active bald eagle nest on the outskirts of Chicago. There, on the south side of the city, high in a tree along the Little Calumet River, a pair of bald eagles has built a huge nest.

John Rogner and Kris Lah of the Chicago ES office got a look at the nest and one of the adults in late March. Rogner says a pair of eagles has been seen regularly for the past several weeks. "If this is their first year, they may not be successful, but it's possible they attempted to nest last year, since the eagles were sighted periodically last summer and the nest appears to be fully constructed."

--Ohio Division of Wildlife photo

Room With a View

This pair of bald eagles has taken up residence in a goose nesting tub at a state wildlife area in north central Ohio. Ohio Division of Wildlife Public Information Officer Tim Daniel says the adults are incubating now, and wildlife managers are anxious to see if the pair is successful. Daniel says Ohio usually has 80 to 90 nesting pairs a year, and this year the count may top out at a record 105. "But this is the first time we've ever seen them build a nest in a goose tub," he said.

Accomplishment Reports

The following reports were processed between March 14 and April 13, 2004:

1. **U.S. Rep. Kaptur Joins Ottawa NWR to Celebrate Volunteers**, Rebecca Hinkle, Ottawa NWR, 3/14/2004
2. **Midwest Refuges at Lewis and Clark Three Flags Event,** Lauri Munroe-Hultman, Trempealeau NWR, 3/15/2004
3. **One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish,** Tracy Hill, Alpena FRO, 3/15/2004
4. **Lake Huron U.S. Agency Coordination Meeting,** Tracy Hill, Alpena FRO, 3/15/2004
5. **Fishery Management Reports Completed for White Earth Reservation and Tamarac NWR,** Scott Yess, La Crosse FRO, 3/15/2004
6. **Regional Funding Partnership Announces Grants Awarded After Tenth Cycle,** Michael Redmer, Chicago FO, 3/15/2004
7. **Service Participates in Planning for the No Chutes Area Restoration Project** Joyce Collins, Marion FO, 3/16/2004
8. **Lake Sturgeon Habitat in Detroit River Presented to Grosse Point Sportsman's Club,** James Boase, Alpena FRO, 3/16/2004
9. **Carterville FRO Presents Results of Dredge Material Studies at Annual UMRCC Meeting,** Nathan Caswell, Carterville FRO, 3/16/2004
10. **Toxicology Class Learns About Contaminants Issues in the Detroit River,** Lisa Williams, East Lansing FO, 3/17/2004
11. **Service Biologist Co-Chairs Modeling Subcommittee Meeting for 1836 Treaty Waters,** Aaron Woldt, Alpena FRO, 3/18/2004
12. **Experimental Assessment Gill Net Construction,** Scott Koproski, Alpena FRO, 3/19/2004
13. **450 Attend Habitat Day at Crane Meadows NWR,** Nancy Haugen, Sherburne NWR, 3/20/2004
14. **ANS Net Repair,** Adam Kowalski, Alpena FRO, 3/20/2004
15. **Federal Partners Staff Booth for Milwaukee Sports Show,** Molly Stoddard, Horicon NWR, 3/21/2004
16. **Anglers Get Hooked on Fishing at the Mississippi Valley Fishing Expo,** Scott Yess, La Crosse FRO, 3/21/2004
17. **Regional Director Participates in Summit, Learns About Kaskaskia River Watershed,** Joyce Collins, Marion FO, 3/22/2004
18. **Genoa National Fish Hatchery Hosts Annual Mussel Event,** Roger Gordon, Genoa NFH, 3/22/2004
19. **Natural Resources "Face Lift" in NE Ohio,** Karyn Tremper, Reynoldsburg FO,
20. **Service Assists U.S. EPA in Evaluating Effects of Oil-Waste Ponds on Wildlife,** Jeromy Applegate, Reynoldsburg FO, 3/23/2004
21. **Carterville FRO Works to Enhance the Fishery at Scott Air Force Base**, Colby Wrasse, Carterville FRO, 3/23/2004
22. **Great Lakes Waterways Curriculum Underway with Local Educators,** Susan Wells, Alpena FRO, 3/24/2004
23. **RIFO Staffers Attend Career Fair as Alumni,** James Murcia, Rock Island FO, 3/25/2004
24. **Green Bay FRO Summarizes Sportfishing and Fish Stocking Activities in Lake Michigan for 2003,** Dale Hanson, Green Bay FRO, 3/25/2004
25. **Pendills Creek Biologist Roessner in Sault Evening Newspaper,** Crystal LeGault, Pendills Creek NFH, 3/25/2004
26. **Coaster Brook Trout Experiment,** Jessica Krajniak, Ashland FRO, 3/25/2004
27. **Annual Check-up on Pool 9 of the UMR,** Corey Puzach, La Crosse Fish Health Center, 3/25/2004
28. **Computer Support Group Assists with Internet Shutdown Challenges,** Janice Whitney, ABA (CSG), 3/26/2004
29. **Spring Break Was Anything But a Break for University of Illinois - Chicago Students,** Candace Chambers, Great River NWR, 3/26/2004
30. **Region 3 Attends MANRRS Conference,** Reggie Clark, ABA (DCR), 3/27/2004
31. **Neal Smith NWR Recruits Minority Students,** Scott Ford, Neal Smith NWR, 3/28/2004
32. **Leading Creek Watershed Enhancement Project,** Bill Kurey, Reynoldsburg FO, 3/30/2004
33. **EEO Training at Regional Office,** Peggy Nelson, ABA (DCR), 3/30/2004
34. **Diversity Report**, Joan Bratley, Ashland FRO, 3/30/2004
35. **Active Bald Eagle Nests Double at Minnesota Valley NWR**, Vicki Sherry, Minnesota Valley NWR, 3/30/2004
36. **Red Lake Walleye Restoration Effort,** Frank Stone, Ashland FRO, 3/30/2004
37. **Proposed Web Page to Properly Size and Install Roadside Culverts,** Frank Stone, Ashland FRO, 3/30/2004
38. **Iron River National Fish Hatchery Brook Trout Get OTC Markings,** Frank Stone, Ashland FRO, 3/30/2004
39. **Biology Field Season Begins With Snow Melt in Northern Michigan,** Heather Enterline, Alpena FRO, 3/31/2004
40. **Rydell NWR Participates in Career Day at Fertile-Beltrami High School,** Juancarlos Giese, Rydell NWR, 3/31/2004
41. **Sea Lamprey Program Hires Employee from Michigan Rehabilitation Services,** John Heinrich, Marquette Bio Station, 3/31/2004
42. **Service , Corps Provide Navigation Study Information to River Constituents** Robert Clevenstine, Rock Island FO, 3/31/2004
43. **Intra-Service Consultations Conducted to Comply with ESA,** John Heinrich, Marquette Bio Station, 3/31/2004
44. **Local School Group Gets Hands Wet at Genoa NFH,** Doug Aloisi, Genoa NFH, 4/1/2004
45. **Pendills Creek Makes New Friends** Tracy Roessner, Pendills Creek NFH, 4/2/2004
46. **Population Assessment of Sora, Virginia, and Yellow Rails,** Ted Koehler, Ashland FRO, 4/2/2004
47. **Invasive Plant Research Conference a Success,** Sarena Selbo, Reynoldsburg FO, 4/5/2004
48. **Local Partnership Pools Resources to Manage High-Quality Prairie,** Michael Redmer, Chicago FO, 4/6/2004
49. **Ashland FRO Seeks GLNPO Funds for Major Projects,** Lee Newman, Ashland FRO, 4/6/2004
50. **Surveillance Detects Minor Ruffe Range Expansion During 2003,** Gary Czypinski, Ashland FRO, 4/7/2004
51. **Mount Maude Lake Wild Rice Restoration Project,** Ted Koehler, Ashland FRO, 4/7/2004
52. **Partnership Session a Success,** Mary Knapp, Reynoldsburg FO, 4/8/2004
53. **Volunteering Pays (Just Not in Cash),** Tracy Roessner, Pendills Creek NFH, 4/8/2004
54. **Great Lakes Legacy Act Proposals Reviewed,** Lisa Williams, East Lansing FO, 4/9/2004
55. **2004 Tribal Wildlife Grant and Tribal Landowner Incentive Grant Programs,** Frank Stone, Ashland FRO, 4/9/2004
56. **Ashland FRO Highlights Experiment to Restore Coaster Brook Trout to Whittlesey Creek, Bayfield Count,** Glenn Miller, Ashland FRO, 4/9/2004
57. **Ashland FRO Participates in Planning for 2004 AFS Meeting,** Glenn Miller, Ashland FRO, 4/12/2004
58. **Ashland FRO Library Database,** Kat Hentsch, Ashland FRO, 4/12/2004
59. **Ashland FRO Fisheries Database,** Kat Hentsch, Ashland FRO, 4/12/2004
60. **Addressing Area-Wide Flood Planning and Habitat restoration in the Red River Valley,** Laurie Fairchild, Twin Cities FO, 4/12/2004
61. **Lake Trout Database Work Progresses**, Joan Bratley, Ashland FRO, 4/12/2004

"Biology is a Big Deal"

By Jim Mattsson

bi-ol-o-gy. *The science of life and life processes, including the study of structure, functioning, growth, origin, evolution, and distribution of living organisms.*

Your dictionary may say something different, but the bottom line is this: Biology is a big deal. It's why we're all here. It's why we're healthy, sick, happy, sad, anxious, fat, skinny or pale. Biology, and all that it entails, forms the very underpinning upon which the Service and the Refuge System exist. We are first and foremost a biological organization.

In my early twenties, I discovered that some colleges actually offered majors in *wildlife* biology. Perfect! I plunged in head first and seven years later emerged with a couple of degrees in wildlife management and ecology. I was something of a bald eagle "expert" to boot, or at least I tried to convince my graduate committee to that effect. It must have worked because the next thing I knew I was an employee of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Lansing, Michigan.

During those first three years I conducted field work with a variety of exciting species including the critically endangered (179 pairs!) Kirtland's warbler (of which I became a recovery team member), various raptors, white-tailed deer, bobwhite, pheasants, and many others. Next, a three-year stint in Bemidji, Minn., found me coordinating migratory bird surveys throughout the state, developing woodcock capture techniques, and serving on the Northern States Bald Eagle recovery team. At that time, there were about 450 pairs of eagles in the entire lower 48 states. Today there are roughly 7,000 pairs! That makes me smile.

My career with the Refuge System began at Agassiz NWR. I was that station's first refuge biologist. During the 80s, I focused on over-water nesting waterfowl, principally canvasback and redhead ducks, which then were at perilously low levels continent-wide. Agassiz also provided seemingly endless opportunities to study a myriad of nongame wildlife species, such as cranes, grebes, rails, bitterns, sparrows, prairie grouse and much more. But there was no nongame program at that time, so funding was nonexistent. I was able to entice biology students from around the country to volunteer to work on field studies for several months at a time! And they were thrilled to work for free. So began the volunteer era on refuges.

While at Agassiz, I didn't realize that I was one of a very limited number of refuge biologists in the entire Refuge System. One by one, I contacted others in an effort to learn and to compare notes and ideas. There was no NCTC back then - most of my "training" resulted from personal contacts with my counterparts and refuge managers from around the country as well as from engaging with state biologists, university professors and the federal wildlife biologists at various Service research centers such as Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center in Jamestown, N.D. They were a wonderful group of "trainers."

For the past 15 years, as regional refuge biologist for Region 3, I've hung up my waders and have joined forces to grow the biological program for the Refuge System. I have been most fortunate to be part of the exponential growth of the biological program within Refuges that has paralleled a worldwide conservation movement concerned not just with a few species, but rather with the health of entire ecological systems at the scale of landscapes. Today, the majority of refuges or refuge complexes have permanent biologists who are assist managers by addressing biological solutions to challenging management issues. And many of these issues deal with nongame wildlife species that just 30 years ago were very low on refuges' radar screen.

It is the biological vibrance of this great planet that resonated with me at an early age, guided my focus during a 30-year career with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and will continue through what I hope will be an active and wildlife-filled retirement. Thanks to all of you who helped make my career so enjoyable and rewarding. And remember, biology is Big, really Big. And, it's been fun.

Jim Mattsson will retire April 30 after 30 years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Have a story or opinion to share?

If so, we want to hear from you. The region has some talented writers, each passionate about what they do for the resource. Each month, IR3 wants to publish letters, essays or opinion pieces from regional employees. Submissions should be no longer than two typed pages and will be subject to editing for clarity and space considerations. Write about anything you feel strongly about, but please know that letter should be appropriate to our audience and in good taste. Email your submission to Scott Flaherty in External Affairs.