

# U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Inside Region 3

*May 2007*



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***Ottawa Refuge Opens New Visitor Center  
Baird Takes Maiden Voyage***

**About the Cover:**

Whittlesey Creek NWR Public Use and Education Coordinator Katie Goodwin talks with kids about the refuge as part of the "River of Words" project.

*-USFWS photo*

## McGregor District Eagle Nest Continues Record 34 Year Run

The oldest bald eagle nesting territory on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge continues a remarkable history of use in 2007.

Records dating back to the early 1920's make no mention of bald eagle nests on the Refuge. Then in 1969 the first reported nest was discovered on the Refuge near New Albin, Iowa. Five years later, in 1973, a second nest appeared on the Refuge in the McCartney Bay area of Pool 11, about five miles south of Cassville, Wis., in Grant County. This nest has remained active every year since 1973.

Clyde Male, Assistant Refuge Manager for the McGregor District of the Refuge, is very familiar with the McCartney Bay territory, having spent much of his career observing eagle activities in Pool 11. Male confirms the McCartney Bay territory has been active each year since its discovery. It is not uncommon to have a nest used sev-

eral years in a row or to have an alternative nest in the same territory used, but 34 years straight is indeed remarkable.

Male states that it's probably not the same pair using the nest for the past 34 years because after reaching sexual maturity at 4-5 years old an eagle would be lucky to nest 20 years in the wild. Bald eagles mate for life, but will readily accept another mate if one of the pair dies. Male went on to say that "what we are probably seeing in the prime nesting territory in McCartney Bay is a series of eagles who have rotated through several mates through the years."



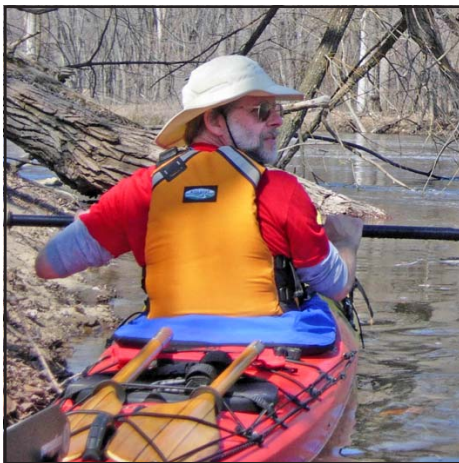
- USFWS photo

This bald eagle nest on the McGregor District of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge has remained active for the past 34 years.

Within the McGregor District of the Refuge the number of active bald eagle nests has reached an all-time high. Initial nest search surveys were recently completed within the District's navigational Pools 9, 10 and 11 and a total of 99 active bald eagle nests were discovered. *Dixie Palmer, Upper Miss. NWFR - McGregor Dist.*

## Midwest Region's Refsnider Wins DOI Cooperative Conservation Award

Ron Refsnider, a biologist in the Midwest Regional Office was recently honored by the Department of the Interior as part of a



- Photo courtesy Refsnider family

When not restoring endangered species, Refsnider enjoys kayaking the Mississippi River.

team that helped recover the gray wolf in the western Great Lakes. Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne presented the Cooperative Conservation Award to the 10-member team at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., on May 2.

The award recognizes conservation achievements by groups of diverse partners, including federal, state, local and tribal governments, non-government organizations, and individuals. Refsnider's award recognized the wolf partnership's work to establish the political, cultural and biological conditions that allowed the once-imperiled gray wolf to recover in Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin.

"We are grateful to Ron and the team for their perseverance, cre-

ativity and dedication to gray wolf recovery," said Robyn Thorson, the Service's Midwest Regional Director. "By engineering wolf recovery, Ron and his teammates have made a lasting contribution to the conservation legacy of the United States."

As lead biologist for the Fish and Wildlife Service for Midwest wolf recovery, Refsnider coordinated the federal role in wolf recovery, as well as efforts by the Service in the Midwest to implement recovery actions. He worked with partners to educate the public about wolf recovery and authored the rules that removed gray wolves in the western Great Lakes from the list of endangered and threatened species. *Georgia Parham, External Affairs*

## Missouri Ecological Services Plant SEEDS in Young Minds

In an ambitious move to combat a growing “nature-deficit disorder” among local kids, the Missouri Ecological Services implemented its first ever environmental education program for fifth-grade students at Lee Expressive Arts School in Boone County, Mo.

The program, titled SEEDS-Students, the Environment, and Endangered Species- was developed as a response to a challenge by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dale Hall to identify ways to connect children and nature within local communities. The SEEDS Program, which ran from April 16 - 21, brought fish and wildlife biologists, and the endangered species they work to protect, into the classroom to educate students about wildlife and environmental conservation.

On April 16, Fish and Wildlife Biologist Heidi Kuska took the class to an outdoor park to intro-

duce students to the fascinating world of caves and karsts, and the bat species that call them home. Back in the classroom, Sybill Amalon from the U.S. Forest Service introduced the students to Chewbacca and Pinky, two brown bats. Eleven-year-old Lee student Tarus Moore said, “The bat felt really hairy and the wing was kinda smooth, but kinda rough.”

On April 17, Fish and Wildlife Biologist Andy Roberts took students back to the time of the dinosaurs, unveiling a shovel-nosed sturgeon in a mobile tank in the school’s media center. Roberts also introduced endangered Topeka shiners to the school’s new aquarium, which was donated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Students were surprised to know that these endangered minnows can be found in creeks right in their own back yards.

On April 20, Fish and Wildlife Biologist Jill Utrup introduced students to raptors and other birds of prey, specifically telling the children about the amazing recovery efforts that have saved the bald eagle from extinction. Towards the end of the presentation, the students were surprised by visitors from the Missouri University Rap-



- USFWS photos by Rick Hansen

Biologist Andy Roberts of the Columbia ES Field Office shows a shovel-nosed sturgeon to two Lee School fifth graders during the SEEDS program.



A student wears her SEEDS t-shirt, donated by the Columbia ES Field Office.

tor Rehabilitation Center, who brought two real birds of prey, the great-horned owl and American kestrel.

The program culminated in the SEEDS Bookfair, which was held at Barnes and Noble Bookstore in the Columbia Mall on April 21. Teachers, parents, students, and curious onlookers helped to raise more than \$400 for the purchase of wildlife books for the school’s media center. Throughout the week, various local media including the Columbia Daily Tribune, the Missourian, and KBIA Radio covered the events, raising awareness for the Fish and Wildlife Service and its mission to connect children with nature.

Missouri Ecological Services Field Supervisor Charlie Scott said, “SEEDS is a long-term commitment by our office towards ensuring future conservation in Missouri and we hope to expand this program into more and more schools in the near future.” Ashley Spratt, Columbia ES Office

## The “Perfect Pallid Storm”

It is often said in fishing circles, “You should have been here last week when the fish were really biting,” and it may be what a team of biologists is saying next year after the incredible success of our 2007 pallid broodstock collection efforts on the Missouri River.

Six years into the Corps of Engineers’ recovery efforts for this endangered fish, more than \$5 million has been invested in renovating and expanding three hatcheries to meet pallid production needs in the lower Missouri.

Millions more have been invested in the biggest telemetry program ever attempted in a large river system — 13 telemetry tracking crews and 27 stationary sonic buoys throughout 800 miles of the nation’s longest river this year.

Sampling for the endangered pallid sturgeon began on the lower Missouri River in 1999. Despite success in collecting wild pallids, crews from state and federal agencies have never been able to catch reproductively active pallids from the lower Missouri to serve as the parents of hatchery-reared fish.

Prior to 2004, the lower Missouri River was stocked with progeny from the upper basin. Advances in sturgeon genetics led the pallid sturgeon recovery team to decide that only local fish should be used for stocking the lower Missouri.

As lower Missouri crews were unable to capture reproductively active adults with standard monitoring gears through 2006, fish have not been stocked in recent years.

Wanting to document pallid migrations and fill the newly expanded hatcheries, crews from five state and federal agencies made a



- USFWS photo

Prehistoric pallid sturgeons are slowly returning to the Missouri River basin thanks to cooperative efforts.

concerted effort this spring to collect local stocks of pallids, stepping outside traditional sampling techniques used to monitor range-wide pallid populations across all habitats types.

Innovative nets and trot-line gears were developed to target the large fish in their pre-spawn habitats. As if on cue, the Missouri River created perfect conditions for a migration run, and with crews in place, the team collected an astounding 210 pallid sturgeon in just a few months.

Two females and three males were implanted with transponders for telemetry tracking. These fish will provide information about the habitats and behaviors of wild adult fish during spawning season. This will be the first time a female pallid will be tracked during the spawning migration.

A crew led by Wyatt Doyle collected the only gravid female fish

with mature black eggs ever captured in the lower river. Three reproductively males were also collected by crews from the Missouri Department of Conservation and Columbia Fishery Resources Office.

In all, Columbia FRO’s crews led by Nick Frohnauer, Andy Starostka, Andy Plauck, Patty Herman, Jeff Finley, Nick Utrup and Colby Wrasse collected 46 pallids in March and April — a considerable feat considering Columbia FRO only captured 15 pallids in all of 2006 and 25 in 2005.

The incredible luck of this year’s optimal river conditions may mean it will be just another fish story next year; for now, the Missouri River team can hold their heads high. This achievement is a great step forward in the recovery of this prehistoric creature. *Wyatt Doyle, Columbia FRO*

# M/V *Spencer F. Baird* Makes Maiden Voyage

On April 17, the M/V *Spencer F. Baird* took her maiden stocking voyage, successfully planting lake trout at off-shore locations in the Great Lakes. Approximately 100,000 fish were loaded on and stocked at Bois Blanc Light and Goose Island Shoal in Lake Huron.

Fish were discharged over the side of the boat and immediately dived down toward their new homes. *Baird* Marine Engineer Bob Bergstrom commented that it was “probably the best release of fish he had seen in years.”

The 95-foot *Baird* is a fish stocking and population assessment vessel that will annually stock nearly 4 million lake trout into lakes Huron and Michigan, furthering a four-decade effort by

the Service and its partners to restore depleted lake trout populations in the Great Lakes and establish self-sustaining populations of this native fish, which was nearly wiped out in the late 1950s due to

of three—will evaluate the performance of stocked lake trout. It will also measure the abundance and distribution of other fish species, which will help meet the information and research needs of the Service and its state, tribal, provincial and federal partners.

After decades of restoration work, self-sustaining populations of lake trout are established in Lake Superior, and Lake Huron is showing signs of rehabilitation. Research continues to identify major limiting factors affecting lake trout restoration in these two lakes. Strong partnerships have been key to successful lake trout rehabilitation in Lake Superior and will be critical to continued rehabilita-

tion efforts in lakes Huron and Michigan. *Rick Westerhof, Jordan River NFH and Rachel F. Levin, External Affairs*



invasion of sea lampreys, overfishing and pollution.

In addition to its stocking duties, the *Baird*—operating with a crew

# Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Opens New Visitor Center

On Friday, May 11, a new state-of-the-art, multi-million dollar visitor center was officially opened at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge in Ohio. The Center includes hands-on exhibits on the history, fish, wildlife and people of the Ottawa Refuge, Great Black Swamp and Lake Erie. The Center also provides office and meeting space for refuge staff, the refuge Friends Group and other organizations.

The entire Midwest Regional Directorate Team, as well as Director Hall, Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur and Senator George Voinovich were at the grand open-

ing to help Refuge Manager Doug Brewer dedicate the building and welcome the public.

It is estimated that more than 10,000 people visited the refuge for the Visitor Center opening and International Migratory Bird Day events that occurred throughout the weekend. *Chuck Traxler, External Affairs*



- USFWS photo by Chuck Traxler  
Director Hall, Congresswoman Kaptur, Senator Voinovich and Refuge Manager Doug Brewer cut the ribbon to officially open the Visitor Center at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

### A River of Words Flows Through Whittlesey Creek Refuge

Dawn broke on the early October morning and sunlight filtered through the trees creating pockets of light on the forest floor as Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge began to awake with the sounds and smells of autumn. Park Ranger Katie Goodwin started her day by opening the shutters to the refuge's education shelter and preparing for 50 fourth-graders, their chaperones, a professional artist and a professional poet.

Nearby Washburn (Wisconsin) Elementary School's fourth grade classes were coming to participate in the third "River of Words" program hosted by the refuge. School buses arrive and eager students unload with journals in-hand. Students spend the day investigating the watershed along side area professionals. They learn about the water cycle, watersheds, habitats, wildlife, fish, invertebrates, science, English, plant taxonomy, artistic impression and stewardship. They take samples, observe their surroundings and take in all of the sights, sounds and smells of Whittlesey Creek Refuge. Each student records their observations by writing and sketching in their journal to prepare for projects con-

ducted throughout the school year.

Revelations and experiences simmer over night and the students start on the first project with their newly acquired information the very next day. Each student will be asked to relate what they experienced at the refuge into a poem and a piece of artwork. Over the course of the school year, Park Ranger Katie Goodwin, poet Ted Gephart and artist Jan Wise spend time with the students in their classroom to refine and expand on the inspirations that were spawned while on the refuge.

The River of Words project is designed to help connect student to their physical surroundings; but it also gives them a connection, and sense of place, to hopefully make a lasting impression on their lives. Students move on to other topics involving Wisconsin's bodies of water, history and traditions of the Great Lakes region with the help of other U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees and resource agencies. As students continue to broaden their minds, their original poems and artwork are put onto public display and compiled into the 2006-2007 "River of Words" booklet.

On the evening of May 3, the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center hosted the River of Words' Poet and Artist Celebration. Students, their



families, teachers, school officials and project professionals gathered to bring the student's projects to a close for the year. Each student is presented with their own copy of the book.

Washburn Principal Sue Masterson added that without the partnerships formed within the community, with the refuge and the commitment of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center to providing quality educational opportunities to this area, none of this would be possible. A successful project year came to a close as students and organizers read their poems for families and friends before saying good night.

The hope for Whittlesey Creek's River of Words Project is that it gives students an alternative learning environment while combining a number of disciplines to give the students new experiences, knowledge and ways to communicate what they have learned with their peers and communities. *Katie Goodwin, Whittlesey Creek NWR*



Artwork from the 2006-2007 River of Words project.

# Around the Region



- USFWS photo

Minnesota Junior Duck Stamp Coordinator Mara Koenig with Paige Brevick. Paige's painting of a Fulvous whistling duck won Minnesota's Junior Duck Stamp Best of Show and placed third nationally.



- USFWS photo

More than 150 kids and their parents traveled to Genoa National Fish Hatchery for its annual kids fishing day held on May 12.



- USFWS photo by Jason Holm

Congressman John Dingell, Director Hall and Detroit River Refuge Manager John Hartig talk before dedicating an observation deck at the refuge, May 12.



- USFWS photo

Columbia Fishery Resources Office Biologist Jennifer Johnson, seen here holding a flathead catfish from the Missouri River, is moving to a new position at the Arizona FRO. Thanks for your four years of service in the Midwest Region and good luck in Arizona.



- Photo courtesy Indianapolis Airport Authority

Bloomington ES Field Office Biologist Lori Pruitt discusses bats with Indianapolis Youth Conservation Field Day participants.



- USFWS photo by Kevin Lowry

Puddles joins Middle Mississippi River Refuge staff and volunteers as part of the MayFest parade in Perryville, Mo., May 11.

# Awards and Recognition

The employees of the Midwest Region continue to excel in their efforts to support the Service's mission. There have been numerous awards and recognition for these efforts over the

past months. In an effort to shed some light on the good work we are all doing, here are a few examples of the accolades our employees have received.

### Big River Journey a Finalist in Environmental Initiative Award

The Big River Journey is an environmental education partnership among twelve organizations that connects school children with the Mississippi River's science and heritage, and fosters river and watershed stewardship. The partnership engages students in river-related curriculum over several months, including hands-on exploration, restoration, and community service projects that provide students with the chance to learn and practice citizenship in the form of river stewardship.

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Park Ranger **Nicole Rankin** leads the refuge's participation in the Big River Journey. Nicole presents at a teacher workshops that allows teachers to participate in demonstrations supporting classroom activities and to get oriented with the field trip's logistics.

Much of the learning occurs on a river boat that travels the Mississippi River near downtown St. Paul, Minn. On the boat, Minnesota Valley Refuge staff members **Nicole Rankin, Sarah Inouye-Leas, Mara Koenig, Suzanne Trapp, Barry Jones** and **Beth Ullenberg** lead a hands-on discussion about river birds.

The Minnesota Environmental Initiative Awards are presented annually to projects that exemplify a commitment to partnership and environmental outcomes.

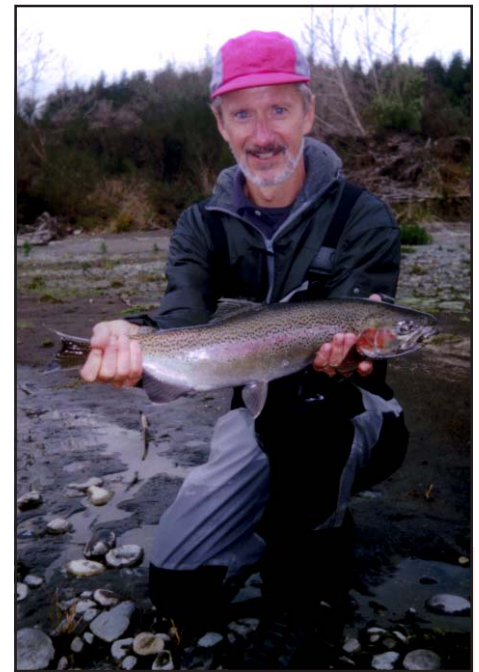
### Mike Hoff and Pat Percy Named Civil Servants of the Year

**Pat Percy**, an information technology professional in the Regional Office, administers the regional office network, providing high availability, performance and security to over 230 employees. She also manages the Region 3 Help Desk and as a Contracting Officer's Representative, oversees the work of IT contractors. Pat was the co-lead on a major network platform migration. Her IT project management skills, ability to work collaboratively with regional and national colleagues and attention to detail and follow-through resulted in the success of the project, which served as the pilot for the national migration project.



Pat Percy

**Mike Hoff**, the Region's lead for the Aquatic Invasive Species Program, works cooperatively with our many partners at the state, regional and national levels to address this important resource issue. He was instrumental in framing the document developed by the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, to address priorities to manage invasive species in the Great Lakes. He also heads an outreach program to the community via a Holiday Caring Tree Initiative each year. Through his efforts Regional Office personnel donate gifts to children identified by the Hennepin County Child Protection Services. His efforts assure a happy holiday season for hundreds of children in the metro area.



Mike Hoff



## Before the Work Day Begins

What a morning. I started out on a turkey hunt at 4:45 a.m. I quietly walked in the darkness and listened to the owl calls.

At 5 a.m., a pair of geese announced their pleasure with the new home they were building on a muskrat house. Off in the distance a turkey gobbled in the roost, as if to announce his displeasure to the barred owls for waking him up. The turkey seemed to be saying, "I hear you and quit messing with me."

As I moved toward the gobbling bird, I flushed three hens off the edge of the lake. The gobbler didn't mind, he was too busy staking his claim.

As the soft morning light approached, the gobbler pitched down 50 yards away from me into a wet meadow full of sedges. He began his morning routine of announcing to the world that he is the toughest, best looking thing around. The hens seemed to agree as they began appearing one by one.

Two younger gobblers decided to try and get into the show, but they refused to fully test the boss bird.

All of a sudden I heard an alarm putt. I thought one of the birds had spotted me and the game was over.

I looked up just in time to watch a red tail hawk make an ill fated attempt to make breakfast out of one of the hens. A couple of wing flaps and the hen escaped, running back to the gobblers who had been pestering her. She stood right in the middle of two gobblers for protection.

The hawk landed in a pin oak tree above my head and screamed his displeasure, causing the gobblers to immediately reply. They seemed to be saying, "bring it on little bird." The hawk jumped to the next tree and screamed again, try-

ing to save face. Again the gobblers responded.

Even the hen began scolding the hawk, feeling much braver with new found affection for her two body guards.

For two hours these birds did their best to impress each other and scold any unwanted intruders to their party. A raccoon appeared, but he quickly scurried around the edge of the open meadow and back into cover as soon as the gobblers challenged.

Great blue herons were everywhere and obviously happy with the supply of fish the recent flooding had brought into the restored shallow wetlands. I hoped they would leave some fish for the egrets that began to arrive.

In the distance I heard an eagle, followed by a gentle splashing; she too was fishing. I wished her luck in her quest to find fish to feed the hungry mouths waiting back at her nest. I am confident she will do well, I know this bird and it isn't her first attempt at raising a family. A couple of years ago she fledged all three of her young ones.

As the wrens, sparrows, rails, pheasants and quail greeted the sunrise, the morning was hopping. The shorebirds are working the edges of the wetland while the teal, shovelers, grebes, hooded mergansers and wood ducks were all taking advantage of the invertebrate soup.

One grebe was busy working on her nest. For her sake, I hope the water doesn't get much higher this spring. She lost her nest in that same spot a couple of years ago.

I could hear the pair of sandhill



- Photo courtesy Tom Cox

Port Louisa Refuge Manager Tom Cox and son Ethan (behind the turkey) after an early morning visit to the Horseshoe Bend division of the Refuge.

cranes that folks have recently reported seeing. I hope this is the year they decide to stay and join the other few pair we have nesting in the county.

After a couple of hours it was time for me get ready for work and get out of the way of the soon to be arriving more hunters.

I wasn't upset that I needed to end my hunt and get to work. All of this is the result of our work and the far-sighted vision of those who came before.

I was on the Horseshoe Bend Division of the Port Louisa Refuge, a 2,700 acre area that was a corn and bean field just 10 years ago. This place is still healing, but well on its way.

It really doesn't matter the outcome of the hunt, just the fact that this place now exists, makes it a successful morning.

Take care and watch the sunrise in your neck of the woods. *Tom Cox, Port Louisa NWR*

### Dashboard Confessional

Staff from the Regional External Affairs Office are occasionally allowed to leave their desks and actually go out and see the people, places and things we help to promote. While traveling around the Midwest Region, you can't help but notice the quality professionals we have working for the Service. In each destination, there is a unique story. We'll try to share as many of these stories with you as we can. This is one of them.

**Kevin Shinn** is a Law Enforcement Zone Officer for Michigan and Ohio. An 11-year Service veteran, Kevin strives for self-improvement and professional excellence. However, his true focus and priority—his balance—is what he gives back to his family, his church, and his community. External Affairs ARD Jason Holm had the pleasure of riding with Kevin from Ohio to Michigan recently and asked him a few questions.

EA: Kevin, what did you do before you came to Fish & Wildlife Service?

KS: I worked as a seasonal biologist for six years for the Forest Service, Park Service, Michigan DNR and the Florida Game & Freshwater Fish Commission. I did mostly carnivore research. My dream was to study bears.

EA: Was your education in Law Enforcement?

KS: No, I actually have a Bachelors in Fish and Wildlife from Michigan State, and a Masters in Biology from University of Texas.

EA: Interesting. Who do you cheer for if Texas plays Michigan State?

KS: Well, I'm from Southeast Michigan, and I walked on in football at MSU, so I have to say I'd cheer for the Spartans. I was able to cheer for Texas when they won the national championship, because there wasn't a Big Ten team involved.

EA: Why did you choose Law Enforcement?

KS: LE happened as a refuge manager. I was sent to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), and found I was good at it as well as enjoyed the work. I like the physical aspect. Also, as a refuge manager, it was tough to juggle both jobs and feel like you weren't shorting one of them. This allows me to give my full effort and make a difference for the resource in the very immediate, short-term sense. I also like the people aspect, dealing with such a diverse range of folks in the field.

EA: Do you miss the biology?

KS: I do miss it, but working with Refuges allows me to satisfy that need. I like to help out whenever I can while I'm at a Refuge. I have to admit, I still keep binoculars and a bird guide in the truck.

EA: What are your biggest challenges?

KS: Trying to provide LE coverage within a full zone is a challenge given the scarcity of officers. When I first got here, we had to build a zone system—doing things like creating law enforcement radio communications for each station, entering into agreements with agencies for cooperation and backup, building relationships with State and local law enforcement agencies, and discovering station law enforcement needs. I'm proud that we've finished two Refuge LE complex plans, which will make the work easier and more professional.



- USFWS photo by Jason Holm  
Michigan LE Zone Officer Kevin Shinn with FWS Director Dale Hall at a recent event at the Detroit River IWR.

EA: What do you like to do in your spare time?

KS: I love spending time with my family. (wife-Deborah, daughter-Mikayla (6), daughter-Isabella (3), and son Zachary (1)). We love camping and outdoors. I also enjoy playing sports, and am active with community youth through my church. I'm also about two-thirds of the way through my goal of climbing the highest peaks in all 50 states.

EA: What are your professional goals?

KS: To help improve our law enforcement program through enforcement, training, program building and policy making. Eventually even move to the Regional Office. There are more challenges out there I'd like to face, but there are plenty of needs here. Also my family is very happy in Michigan and balancing my desire for career advancement and family needs have become even more challenging as my children grow and I continue developing my professional career.

## Inside Region 3



<http://midwest.fws.gov>

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