



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Inside Region 3

April 2009

Connecting Kids with Nature



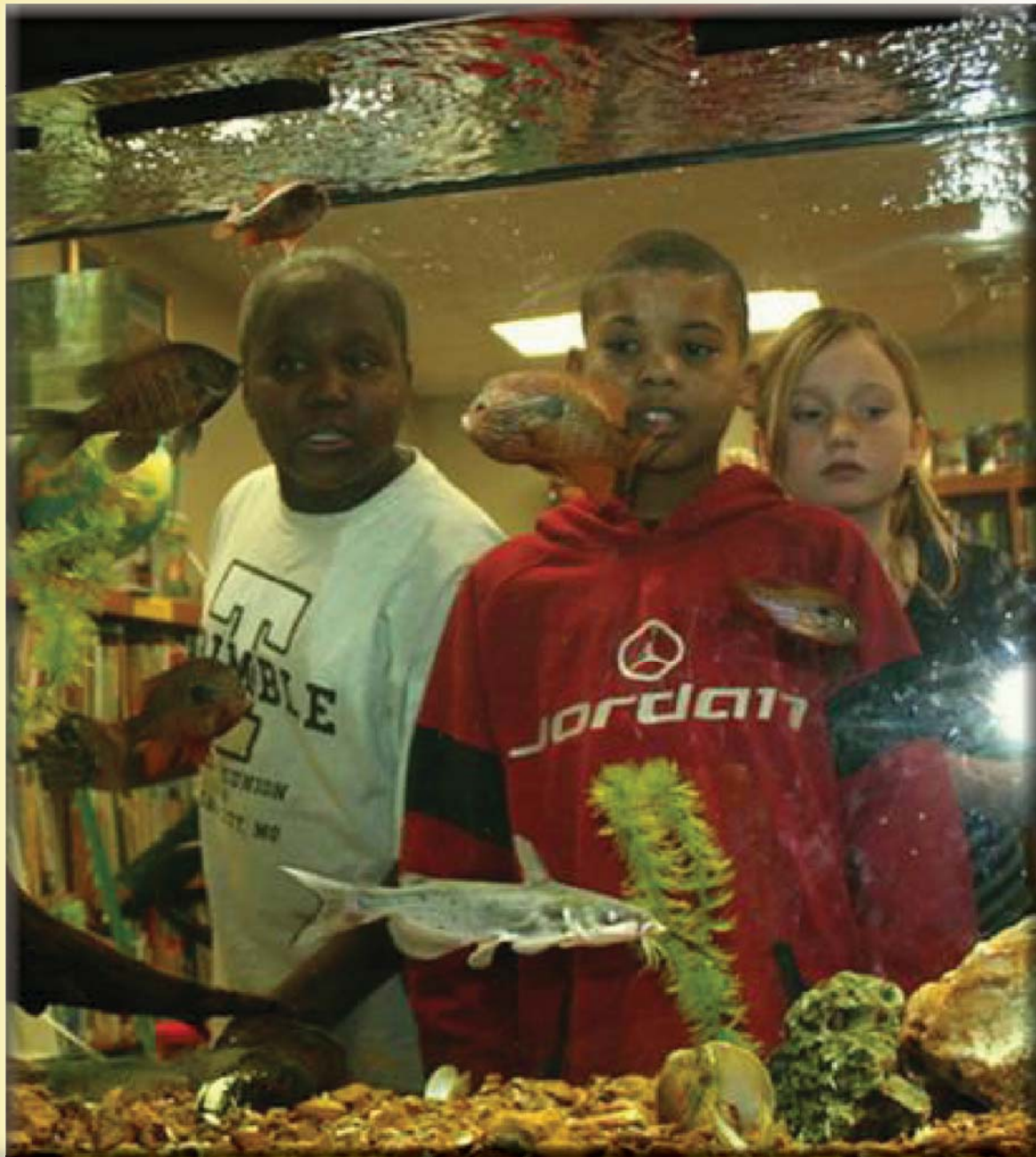
**Congressman
Dingell Honored**



**President Hails
Sound Science**



**An Eye on
the Outdoors**



Plus:

**Illinois McGregor District Wins National Friends Group Award
Lake Winnebago Spear Harvest**

Editor's Note:

Connecting with nature does not look the same for everyone. Connecting with nature means different things to different people. For some, it's hunting and fishing. For others, it's walking in the woods or on the beach. What does your nature encounter look like? We want to know. To that end, we have added a regular section called Let's Go Outside!

We invite you to submit personal nature encounters as experienced by you and your children, as well as innovative ideas on how to connect with nature. We will run your accounts in this feature segment.

Please submit your youngsters' stories and photos to our regular section: **Kid's Corner**. Kid's Corner features the nature writing and photographic pieces by the children of regional employees.

E-mail: valerie_redmond@fws.gov with your Let's Go Outside! and Kids Corner articles, photos, journal entries and poems.

On the Cover: Students at Lee Expressive Arts Elementary marvel at the fish in the tank at the school. USFWS Photo.

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Connecting People and Nature

In my first months in the Region, I've been able to travel to several field stations—where spectacular efforts to reconnect people with nature are ongoing. Former Director Hall's establishment of Connecting People and Nature (CP&N) as a Director's priority was an affirmation of the great work we've been doing. Our employees have long recognized that building the next generation of conservationists is critical for the health of our agency and survival of our trust resources.

As we wait for our new Director to be named, I want to express my commitment to the continued efforts in bringing people back to their natural environment. Regardless of whether CP&N becomes an official priority of the new Director, it is really the baseline for all the work we do. The question we continue to ask is: In 20 years will the American people be interested in working with us on our conservation mission? Will they view our work to be to their continuing benefit? Or as biologist and author Robert Michael Pyle asked, "What is the extinction of the condor to a child who has never seen a wren?"

Studies continue to show that there is a direct connection between an adult's attitudes and behavior towards nature, and direct interaction with nature as a child—especially before age 11. In a recent visit to the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, in Fergus Falls, Minn., I was able to see personally how one U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) effort is making a change in the life and natural priorities of hundreds of public school children. This novel effort, which bears consideration for replication elsewhere, has added the natural world to the current, standards-based curriculum, rather than asking teachers to do "one more thing" with limited time and resources.

While in Columbia, Mo., I heard much of the "Wonders of Wildlife" (WOW) program, which uses Service employees in direct partnership with other agencies, NGO's and the private sector (Bass Pro) to assist families in returning to nature—whatever their experience level. This initiative, which could also be replicated, makes use of novel partnerships to bridge gaps in funding, staffing, equipment, and locations.

These are only two examples of what is an extensive effort by this region. This effort demonstrates that you already recognize the significance of the priority, and



the consequences of inaction. I encourage you all in this effort. Recently, Tim Smigielski, from Jordan River NFH, has volunteered for the leadership role among our regional CP&N ambassadors. Please contact Tim with ideas or questions, and continue to send your accomplishment reports and news to Ashley Spratt, communications lead for CP&N.

In conclusion, I remind you all of the vision for the Service's CP&N priority, which is also one of my priorities: "All of America's children will have enjoyable and meaningful experiences in the out-of-doors, improving their health and well-being and leading to life-long connections to the natural world." It is this next generation of would-be-conservationist who will determine if our careers' work is worth building upon.

*--Tom Melius
Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Midwest Region*



Attention R3 Photographers!

We have an opportunity for all ranges of photography talent....from experienced lensmen and women, budding Ansel Adams, or just opportunistic (lucky) hacks. The R3 External Affairs office is sponsoring a digital photo contest open to all employees of the Midwest Region. The contest is from February 1 - July 15.

If you have a knack for the shutter, or even if you got that lucky, once-in-a-lifetime shot, please consider entering. Valuable prizes, honors and accolades await the winners... see details below.

Image categories are: People/Children and Nature; Fisheries/Water; Nature Landscapes; Migratory Birds/Sky; Plants, Trees and Flowers, Animals, Insects and Refuge lands.

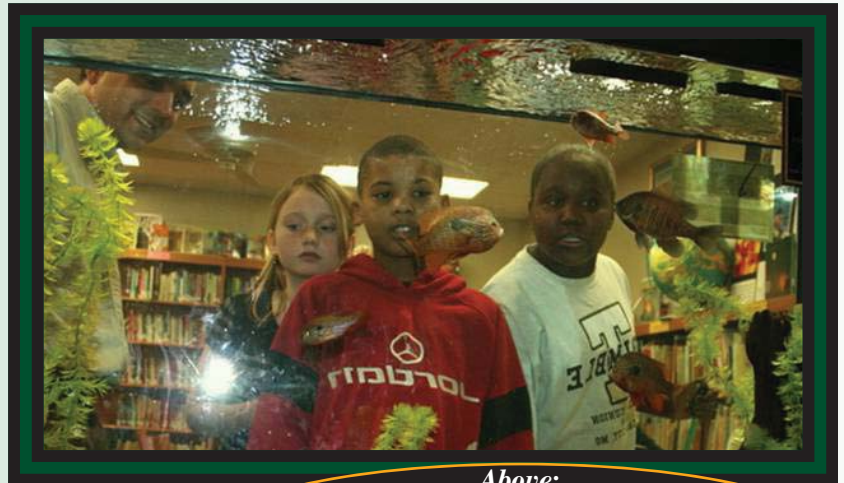
Photographs must be submitted to one of the eight categories above and must be captured from one of the eight states that the region encompasses.

How to Enter: Entrants may submit any number of photographs. Entrants must e-mail digital images to IR3Mail@fws.gov, along with the following: Name, Job Title, Organization, Address, Phone Number, Title of Photograph, and Category Submitted To. E-mail submissions should have REGION 3 DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST in the subject line.

Channel Catfish Inspire Young Artists in Columbia, Mo.

Do you know what the state fish of Missouri is? It is a reclusive scavenger, the channel catfish. Columbia Ecological Services Field Office (CMFO) and their partner in education, Lee Expressive Arts Elementary, will work together to represent Missouri in the Wildlife Forever State-Fish Art Contest.

The participation in this art contest is a continuation of the national U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service's) Children and Nature program. In 2007, the Students, Environment and Endangered Species (SEEDS) program was designed and introduced to Lee Expressive Arts Elementary School by the staff of Columbia Ecological Services Field Office.



*Above:
Students at Lee Expressive Arts Elementary marvel at the fish in the tank at the school. USFWS Photo.*

Andy Roberts, fish and wildlife biologist, delivered three channel catfish to the aquarium at the Lee School library on February 12, 2009. The catfish were provided by Osage Catfisheries, Inc. and transported to Columbia by Columbia Bass Pro Shops Sportsmen Center. A class of eager fourth graders watched as Roberts introduced the fish to the aquarium. One student asked Andy, "Are the catfish edible?" Roberts answered, "Yes." These catfish, however, will be used to inspire the student's contest entries. Students must also submit a composition with their renderings of the state fish. Roberts will give a presentation about channel catfish, to all of the students at the school during their next assembly. Columbia ES office is confident that the talented students at Lee will create impressive art work for the contest.

--Hilary Shaw, Education Outreach Specialist

Working Together

Prairie Wetland Managers Recognize Congressman Dingell

On March 19, Congressman Dingell (D-MI) was presented with a plaque signed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Small



Above: Regional Director Tom Melius (R) and Deputy Regional Director Charlie Wooley (L) present the Congressman (C) with the award. USFWS Photo.

Wetlands Acquisition Program (SWAP) district managers in the prairies. The District managers presented the plaque on behalf of the Service's National Wildlife Refuge System, to commemorate the Congressman's years of support for the system, particularly in light of the 50th anniversary of the Small Wetlands Program. This plaque was envisioned after the Congressman graciously videotaped a message for Refuge supervisors for their annual meeting last fall.

Service biologists working to protect our prairie wetlands witness firsthand the benefits generated by SWAP in the form of waterfowl and shorebird production rearing areas for grassland birds and other wildlife, and countless other

natural resource values. For these reasons, Service field managers wished to provide a special thank you to Congressman Dingell for his role on the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission and long-standing support of SWAP. --*Ryan Aylesworth, External Affairs*

Congressional Operations Seminar

On March 9-13, seven Region 3 personnel and approximately 40 other U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) employees from across the country attended the Congressional

Operations Seminar, a one-week NCTC course offered once a year in our nation's capitol.

Participants in the course included those employees who deal with congressional offices and their staff or those who, as part of their job, need to understand how Congress operates. The course took place on Capitol Hill so that participants could obtain a firsthand understanding of federal law-making and congressional culture. It explored different aspects of Congress, including: the federal budget cycle, congressional process and procedures, and procedural effects on Service operations.

Participants had the opportunity to hear from and ask questions of congressional members, committee staff, political scientists, lobbyists, the media, Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

staff, and Service legislative affairs and budget office personnel. Participants also attended congressional hearings and observed floor action in both the House and Senate galleries.

This year's cohort had the good fortune of observing floor debate on the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009, as well as the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee confirmation hearing for David Hayes, the Obama administration's nominee for Deputy Interior Secretary. Personnel from the Midwest Region thoroughly enjoyed the experience and look forward to applying the knowledge obtained from the course to better communicate the Service's work to congressional offices and other elected officials. Talk with your supervisor if you are interested in taking the course!

--*Ryan Aylesworth, External Affairs*



Above: Region 3 participants (L to R): John Mabery (Refuge Manager, Two Rivers NWR), John Kiefer (Project Leader, Indiana PLO), Matt Sprenger (Area 2 Refuge Supervisor), Barbara Boyle (Refuge Manager, Tamarac NWR), Tracy Casselman (Refuge Manager, Seney NWR), Ryan Aylesworth (Regional Congressional Liaison), and Rob Miller (Budget and Facilities Management Chief). USFWS Photo.

President Obama Hails Sound Science

President Barack Obama hailed sound science as a process to be respected at the Department of Interior's (DOI's) 160th anniversary celebration in Washington. "The work of scientists and experts in my administration, including right here in the Interior Department, will be respected," said the President. "For more than three decades, the Endangered Species Act has successfully protected our nation's most threatened wildlife, and we should be looking for ways to improve it, not weaken it."

Regional employees listened intently as President Obama described the rationale behind the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and how its implementation will benefit the nation. The President said that the act will give \$3 billion to the DOI to create jobs and improve infrastructure. The funding will afford conservation specialists with increased ability to



Above: President Barack Obama and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar mark the 160th Anniversary of the Department of the Interior in a ceremony at Interior Headquarters. Photo Credit: Tami Heilemann, DOI-NBC.

preserve our natural resources and replace research equipment, among other benefits.

"Finally," the President said, "today, I assigned a memorandum that will help restore the scientific process to its rightful place at the heart of the Endangered Species Act..."

The President said that the return on investment will be an environment that we can enjoy as well as our children and their children for generations to come...

"We'll provide clean, reliable drinking water to rural areas, promote water conservation, [and] repair aging water infrastructure," the President said. "And the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will rebuild and remodel schools on Indian reservations across this country while providing more than \$100

million in loans to spur job creation in the Indian economy."

In addition to restoring economic growth, the intent of the ARRA is to enhance energy independence. The President said that we all have a role to play in the quest for energy independence and that the growth of our economy and the preservation of our environment are not mutually exclusive. "With smart, sustainable policies, we can grow our economy today and preserve the environment for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren," he said.

--Valerie Rose Redmond
External Affairs



Above: President Barack Obama greets Interior employees at the Department's 160th Anniversary ceremony at the Main Interior Building on March 3. Photo Credit: Tami Heilemann, DOI-NBC.

WSFR Staff Donates Laptops to Rosemount Elementary School

Laptops Avoid Dismal Fate

In accordance with Executive Order 12999, a batch of excess laptop computers were donated to Rosemount Elementary School. The fate of the laptops would have been to collect dust in a storage locker until they were of no use to anyone. The laptops will be used in conjunction with SMARTBOARDS, electronic whiteboards.



Above: Students at Rosemount Elementary proudly display their new prizes. USFWS Photo.

Friske donated a government laptop. Susan Humphrey donated a power cord. Jim Hodgson and the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) staff donated three laptops. And Lynn Kelley and Pat Percy both helped out with the paperwork.

On a side note, Ronald Boyd, a teacher at Rosemount Elementary, is the keeper of 6 aquariums. He is interested in getting some native Minnesota fish instead of just those from Africa or Central America. He thought it would be an awesome teaching tool and asked for our help to put him in contact with someone who could supply him with very young fish from a fishery that stocks

lakes. The Fisheries Department got involved and Ronald was given a great contact with the MN DNR. I checked back with him and he said he received an extensive list of possible suppliers that can supply him with the fish he wanted. Now it's just a matter of him finding time to call and make the arrangements.

Service employees are asked to spread the word about this reusable process. To

learn more about the laptop reusable program or to get involved contact Brian Morrow at 612-713-5150.

To learn more about smart boards, visit: <http://www2.smarttech.com/st/en-US/Products/SMART+Boards/default.htm>.

--Brian Morrow
FWS R3 RO FA WSFR

Regional Director Tom Melius Visits Horicon NWR

On February 6, Regional Director Tom Melius visited Horicon NWR. Refuge staff hosted a potluck fish fry for Melius who visited with refuge staff and answered questions. After lunch, Melius was treated to a driving tour of the area. Unfortunately winter is not the best time for seeing the refuge but hopefully the visit gave the RD a taste for wanting to see more wildlife and wetlands during a different season. Refuge staff hopes he will visit again!

--Diane Kitchen, R3-Horicon NWR



Above: Regional Director Tom Melius with Teddy Roosevelt and Horicon National Wildlife Refuge staff. USFWS Photo.

There were many U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) employees who helped out with the process. Julie Hernandez-

Let's Go Outside!

Edward J. Lagace

Edward J. Lagace, park ranger for the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Winona District, is connecting kids with nature through the lens of a camera. His duties in environmental outreach education give him the opportunity to develop programs and activities for key venues that assist him in getting the refuge message out to the public.

Lagace joined the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in October 1991 after a friend mentioned that there was a job opening at the Winona District. At the time, he was a head wrangler with the Boy Scouts. His personal need and passion for preserving our natural resources, and helping the public become knowledgeable about the natural world made the Service a great opportunity and a great fit. "This made it possible for me to fulfill my childhood dream," Lagace said.

Not long ago, he teamed up with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on a program called, Project Go. Lagace got involved with the program through an invitation from Sara Grover of the DNR, who initiated Project Go at the Maple Wood Housing Project. The program was designed to offer the children an opportunity to experience new things after school lets out. The DNR's Project Go teams with a

number of partners in the community including, Winona State University, Healthy Kids Club, Winona Park and Recreation, Winona 4 H, and many others.



Left: Lagace, out on the land, smiles for the camera. USFWS Photo.



Lagace pauses for a swan watch. USFWS Photo.



Out with Lagace, kids get hands on training. USFWS Photo.

through the lens of a camera was a natural progression for Lagace. He has a passion for photography as an art, went to college for it, and worked as a professional photographer several times in his career.

On the second Tuesday of each month Lagace takes children outside to experience life in the outdoors. "It's important to me," he reveals, "to help open the eyes of our future leaders to the natural world and to instill a respect for the wild thing that is hiding somewhere inside each of us." He says when he prepares a program it's not about him, it's about the child and generating an awareness of the living breathing flora and fauna that we share.

Lagace says the biggest challenge that he faced in implementing his program was to develop a simple, fun, and exciting activity for kids that would really engage them. He says he really wanted to give them something to do outside, not just walk. "Children want to learn to absorb new ideas; the camera is a tool to achieve this," he said.

did not take me long to see the need to use digital photography as an opportunity to reach the children..." he says, "...to see the wild things that await them just outside their front door." Introducing kids to the outdoors

Lagace was asked to develop a group of activities for Project Go. "I arrived not knowing what to expect. It

Let's Go Outside!

Edward J. Lagace

When asked what advice he has for other field stations who are thinking of launching a similar program, he says the first thing is to find the funding for the cameras. He worked with Cindy Samples, also of Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Samples secured a Challenge Cost Share grant and partnered with camera manufacturers to get the cameras for the kids.

“The program,” he says “can be a one-day outing with no follow through or make it a year long season by season activity. There are really no limits to this idea. Using the cameras as an outreach aid fits the kids of today by tying into their close relationship to technology.”

Lagace operates on the premise that children from all walks of life need to connect to the great outdoors.

Out for a walk. USFWS Photo.



Lagace surveys the land. USFWS Photo.



Lagace leads a kids and nature event at Mc Gregor for River Education Days. USFWS Photo.

He says that digital photography gives children the ability to see, to touch, to feel, and above all make a personal connection to the outdoors.

“My life has been made whole knowing that my purpose and passion are one,” said Lagace.

--Valerie R. Redmond
External Affairs



Left: Peace, be still. USFWS Photo.

Right: Connecting to nature through a photographer's lens. USFWS Photo.

A Photography Essay

The activity that is most important to me is photography. I absolutely love photography. I enjoy taking pictures of various things like nature, objects, and architecture.

It all started when I got a digital camera for Christmas a year ago. I was excited, but I didn't realize how much I would come to love it. At first I was just taking pictures of random things just for fun. I soon realized that I really had a real passion for photography. I was looking online at other

photographer's photos and I began to understand what makes a good photo. I learned a lot of things just by looking at amazing photos. I taught myself how to position the lighting so all the values

of the colors come out clearly. I also learned about composition simply by experimenting with it. Sometimes I would take certain items, place them in different positions, and take multiple pictures of them. I also enjoy playing with angles taking a picture of an item from every angle possible.

Even though I have taught myself a lot of things, I have learned so much more in the photography class that I am taking in school. I am taking a year long photography class and it is so much fun. We have done many different projects.



Samantha Elayne capturing the tall, tall grass at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Photos by Valerie Rose Redmond.

For example, we have done photo grams. That's when we placed items on photo paper and exposed light to them. We worked on composition, reflections, and hand projects. My favorite project is the one we are working on right now, which is surrealism. I love this one because I can just have fun and go crazy with it. We are working with the Photoshop program to edit our pictures and make them look weird and interesting. For example, I can make someone look like they are flying in outer space. I am really enjoying my photography class.

My favorite type of photos are macro photos. They are photos

where I get really close to the object and I show the detail of the object. Nature is very good for macro photos because there are so many different types of textures, patterns, and colors in nature. You would be surprised by how many beautiful pictures you can get just in your backyard. The macro photos contain a lot of detail which make it really fun to edit them in different programs. One of my favorite things to do with editing is making the pictures black and white. Changing a picture to black and white can really bring out the value in a photo.

I am very enthusiastic about photography. That why it is my favorite thing to do. I will continue my love for photography for the rest of my life and I am definitely curious to see where it leads me.

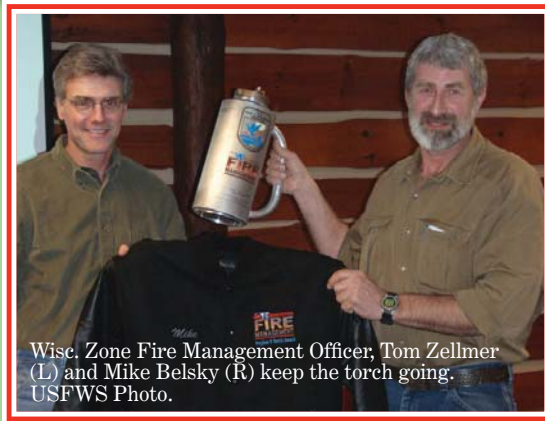
--Samantha Elayne
Budding Photographer

Passing the Torch

SECOND ANNUAL TORCH AWARD PRESENTATION

The Torch has been passed on to another well-respected individual in the fire profession. Mike Belsky of Necedah NWR is the 2008 recipient of the 2nd Annual Region 3 Torch Award. This recognition was awarded by Mike's peer group of firefighters who are the mainstay of the Region 3 prescribed burn program.

Mike, a Fire Program Technician at Necedah NWR, not only strives to be the best mentor he can be regarding U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fire Management, he does so with an attitude that continually earns respect and appreciation. In addition to being one of the Zone's primary Type 2 Prescribed Fire Burn Bosses and continually offering his many talents to the refuge, Mike has been instrumental in the station's success regarding mechanical hazardous fuels reduction. He continually augments treatment opportunities by thinking "outside of the box" and using a common sense approach to do what is right for the resource. He has been essential in integrating the station's mechanical hazardous fuels reduction program with



Wisc. Zone Fire Management Officer, Tom Zellmer (L) and Mike Belsky (R) keep the torch going. USFWS Photo.

biological goals and objectives, resulting in more efficient and effective resource management. Additionally, Mike was one of the pioneers for biomass utilization in the area; not only increasing treatment acres, but subsequently decreasing the hazardous fuel threat and supporting the local economy. Mike has worked in this capacity for the past 17 years efficiently, successfully, and most importantly – safely!

Don Hultman (Refuge Supervisor for Upper Mississippi River NWRs), standing in for Nita Fuller (Region 3 Refuge Chief), presented the award to Mike at the Fire Management Officers Workshop in February, 2009. Mike not only received the Torch Award to display in his office for a year, but he also was presented with a jacket that sports the USFWS Fire Management logo.

The Torch Award is imprinted with the Fish & Wildlife Service shield, along with the Fire Management logo. After last year's Torch presentation, Steve Jakala, Regional Fire Management Coordinator, along with the other Regional Office Fire Staff, and Zone Fire Management Officers, decided that the Torch Award was lacking a dedication or purpose. They collectively decided to dedicate the award to Nita Fuller for her vision, support, and guidance of the R3 Fire

Program. This dedication is now inscribed on the torch.

--Lynda Knutsen
Fire Education Coordinator

From the Visitor Services Update

Take Pride in America® is seeking nominations for Outstanding Volunteers and Volunteer Projects for 2009 National Awards. Take Pride in America® is seeking nominations of individuals, companies or civic groups that have demonstrated a commitment to stewardship of America's public lands. Every year, Take Pride in America® presents the national awards to individuals and groups who have volunteered their time and talent to our federal, state, and local public lands and waterways. Recognizing volunteers for their service is a fundamental component of Take Pride in America® and it needs your help to say, "Thank You!"

Do you know someone who organized a roadside clean up or anyone who works as an interpreter at a park visitor center? Anyone may submit a nomination; self-nominations are accepted and encouraged! Nominations are due May 1, 2009 by 12 noon EST. Nominated projects and efforts must have been started and/or completed between May 1, 2008 and April 30, 2009. Winners will be chosen by a selection committee and are invited to attend an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. on July 16 & 17.

--Kenneth A. Garrahan
Visitor Services Manager
Prairie Wetlands
Learning Center



Above: Don Hultman (L) presents the Torch Award to Mike Belsky (R). USFWS Photo.

Illinois McGregor District Wins National Friends Group Award

Midwest Region Refuge Friends Group Wins National Honor

At a ceremony held in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 22, several members of the Friends of Pool 9 were presented the National Wildlife Refuge Association Friends Group of the Year Award.

Just three years old, but 400 members strong, the Friends of Pool 9 are making a difference along their 31-mile stretch of the 261-mile Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Despite daunting obstacles such as severe flooding throughout Iowa this past year, the Friends of Pool 9 have made significant improvements to the quality of the refuge, earning praise from refuge staff and cooperation from the local community.

The Friends of Pool 9 host many annual events to both preserve and showcase all the refuge has to offer. Their annual Pool Wide Clean-Up Day and the implementation of a "Leave-No-Trace" program serve to rid the refuge of trash left behind by visitors. Each fall, their Rivers and Bluffs Fall Birding

Festival brings over 300 people to the area to enjoy and invest in the region and in the refuge. They also showcase the refuge to youth through environmental education programs such as The Mississippi River Adventure Day.

These high visibility programs and projects have improved the



Above: Members of the Friends of Pool 9 take a break during on of the many habitat improvement projects they have conducted in the McGregor District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. USFWS Photo.

communities' relationship with the refuge and opened up new opportunities for friends groups all along the river. Four new groups have recently formed using the Friends of Pool 9's grass roots approach as an example. By opening the communication lines between the refuge and the community through their quarterly newsletter "The Otter's

Tale" and by reaching out to local newspapers, news networks, and radio shows, the Friends of Pool 9 have gained regional recognition for their efforts.

"Friends groups make a significant contribution to not only the refuge they support, but to the entire National Wildlife Refuge System," said Midwest Region Refuge Chief Nita M. Fuller. "There is no doubt in my mind that the entire system is stronger because of our Friends Groups."

Refuge Friends Groups from the Midwest Region have won more of these awards than any other Region. Last year, the Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge won the award. In all, five friends group from the Midwest Region have won the award since

it was initiated in 1998. Other Midwest Region winners include: Friends of Minnesota Valley NWR in 1998, Friends of Rydell NWR in 2000, and the Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Refuges in 2001.

To learn more about the Friends of Pool 9 visit: <http://www.friendsofpool9.org>

New Manager at Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuges

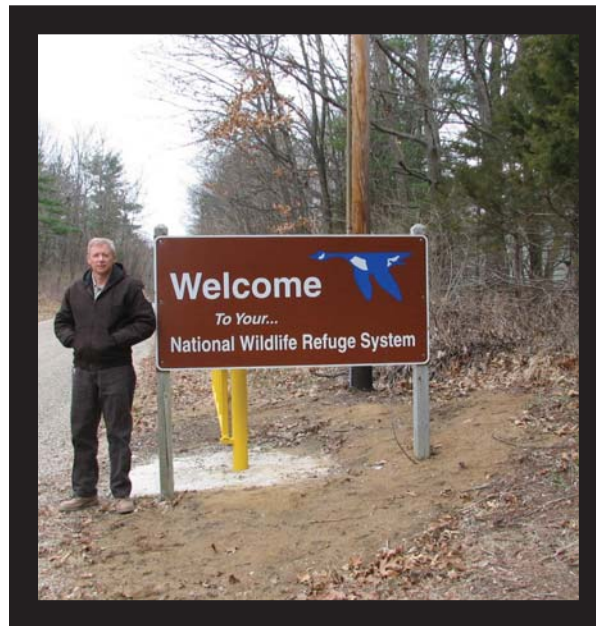
After more than 24 years of working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service across the nation, Lee Albright has returned to his home state of Illinois to serve as the new manager for the Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuges. The station, headquartered in Havana, Ill., includes three national wildlife refuges -- Chautauqua, Meredosia, and Emiquon – that together cover more than 12,000 acres and extend 125 miles along the Illinois River from its northern most to southern most point.

Albright was born and raised in Peoria, Ill. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Zoology from Southern Illinois University. He first put his education to work with volunteer and seasonal positions for The Nature Conservancy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in North Dakota.

During the winter, when seasonal positions were not available in North Dakota, Albright worked for the National Marine Fisheries Service as a government observer on commercial fishing vessels, ensuring the fish were harvested in a legal and sustainable manner. Over the course of several winters he worked on ships based out of Dutch Harbor, Alaska and Panama.

Albright's first permanent position with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was at the Kulm Wetland Management District in North Dakota. Over the next 20 years

he held positions at Valley City, Arrowwood, and J. Clark Salyer Wetland Management Districts in North Dakota. He then moved to Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado, and finally to the Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Washington State prior to moving to his new position at Illinois River.



Above: Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuges Manager Lee Albright is ready for duty. USFWS Photo.

“Illinois is my childhood home and I’m very gratified to be back here in this capacity,” said Albright. “It was a long and winding path back home, but I’m looking forward to using all the experience I gained along the way to help improve fish and wildlife habitat here along the Illinois River.”

The national wildlife refuges under Albright's management were established at different times for a variety of purposes. The first refuge, Chautauqua NWR, was established in 1936 and includes 4,488 acres in Mason County, along with an additional 1,709 acres in Marshall County that is known as the Cameron-Billsbach Unit.

The next refuge established was Meredosia in 1973. Meredosia NWR currently includes 3,852 acres in Cass and Morgan Counties, it is authorized to include up to 5,807 acres. The final refuge, Emiquon, was established in 1993; it currently includes 2,114 acres and is authorized to expand to 11,122 acres.

More information on the Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuges can be found online at: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/IllinoisRiver/>

Refuge "Boomer Blind" Available to Public

A prairie chicken viewing blind is available to the public on Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge. From the blind, observers can see the spectacular annual mating ritual of the Greater Prairie Chicken, in an activity known as "booming". This primitive ceremony pits bird against bird as male chickens stake out territory to attract hens for mating. The most dominant and aggressive males will hold the center of the "booming ground", which is called a lek. Younger males on the edge of the lek will challenge the older males. Males confront each other aggressively, jumping high in the air and striking each other with feet, wings, and bill in ritualistic fighting. Prairie chickens have a distinctive pinnae or long feathers on each side of their neck. While on the booming ground, the males raise these feathers exposing bright yellow air sacs along the neck. The air sacs expand while making their distinctive low booming sounds.

The blind is located 10 miles northwest of Detroit Lakes and can seat 4 adults. The public may make a reservation for use of the blind by calling the Wetland Management District office at 218-847-4431. Reservations are required, but are no cost to the public. A confirmation letter, information package and map will be sent after reservations are made. The best time for viewing the booming ground activity is during the month of April.

Wetland Manager Scott Kahan believes the public will have a very high quality wildlife experience, and noted that the 2009 blind has been



Above: Prairie Chicken on Fergus Falls Prairie. USFWS Photo.

moved closer to the dancing ground. A do's and don'ts list will be sent in the information package. The list includes entering the blind 55 minutes before sunrise. Observers may leave the blind only after the prairie chickens have left for the morning, which is at approximately 8:30 a.m.

This is the first prairie chicken lek to develop on Hamden Slough Refuge and is the nearest booming ground to Detroit Lakes. The lek developed on the refuge in 2003, with 17 adults performing their mating ritual. In 2008, at the peak of the mating season, 30 prairie chickens were on the lek.

Prairie chickens once numbered in the millions but their population rapidly dwindled with the loss of prairie habitat. The species has been reintroduced into southwest Minnesota and Iowa, but nesting populations are not yet well established. Kahan noted that the prairie chicken scientific name *Tympanuchus cupido* means "drummer of love" and was inspired by the sound of prairie chicken feet dancing rapidly on the booming ground.

--Scott Kahan
Wetland Manager

You Deserve A Break!

Administrative Technician Clarice Beckner from Jordan River National Fish Hatchery retired on March 3. Clarice had been with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for over 37 years. She started with Region 3 Fisheries at the hatchery when she was the tender age of seventeen. A party was held in her honor on Saturday evening February 28 in nearby Gaylord, Mich. Over eighty people attended the event. Many colleagues, co-workers, friends and family members helped Clarice celebrate her long, successful career.

A common theme from the many who spoke at the event was that Clarice was a rock, a go-to person for any and all professional assistance and just an all around wonderful person. She will be sorely missed and can never be replaced! Congratulations Clarice!

--Tim Smigielski
Jordan River NFH



This gift was purchased through the generous contributions of her friends and co-workers. Clarice gives a lot to her community, including mowing the village park! USFWS Photo.

Around the Region

Celebrating Excellence

Ice Fishing Day: Getting Outside Minnesota Style

Seventy youth ages 6 - 13 participated in an annual Ice Fishing Day event hosted by the Friends of the Refuge Headwaters and the Winona District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife & Fish Refuge. Upper Miss. staff from Winona, LaCrosse and headquarters offices, along with personnel from the LaCrosse National Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office and Trempealeau NWR treated the anglers and their families to an afternoon of ice angling and fun indoor activities. A warm lunch and hot chocolate was provided and served by the Friends of the Refuge Headwaters. In addition to ice angling, fish identification and GPS activities were also available.

--Brian Pember, R3-UMRNW&FR



Patently waiting. USFWS Photo.



You don't see that everyday!

During a warm, windy day in March, Columbia NFWCO's Andy Plauck, Cliff Wilson and Chris McLeland were pulling gillnets in search of the federally endangered pallid sturgeon on the Missouri River near Herman, MO. Two interesting fish caught the attention of the crew that day. An albino blue catfish came out of the first net. Albino fish lack skin pigments, which leads to a ghostly white animal with a pink tint. Most albinos become prey and don't survive to adulthood. It is likely that the muddy waters of the Missouri River gave this fish a better chance of survival. Our crews have sampled a few of these fish on the Missouri River but this one was the largest (around six pounds). According to our catch records, this variation of blue catfish is more rare than the pallid sturgeon.

The second attention grabbing fish is not a rare fish in nature, we just don't catch them on the Missouri River. The northern hogsucker, with its block shaped head and mottled coloration, usually inhabits small to medium streams with clear water. The northern hogsucker that we captured must have strayed from a small nearby tributary. In the winter, the water in the Missouri River becomes much clearer, resembling some of clear-water tributaries that drain the Ozark plateau. This is the only time of the year we catch fish like the shorthead redhorse and white sucker. Catching fish that you don't see everyday is always something memorable. In this case, we were able to get two in one day. Monitoring native fish, whether rare or common, is an important part of conserving America's fisheries. --Andrew Plauck, R3-Columbia FRO



Above: Chris McLeland (Columbia NFWCO) with an albino blue catfish captured in the Missouri. USFWS Photo.

Happy Spring!



Quotes of the Month

It's a child wandering amidst ancient redwoods,
a love for science spurred as she looks skyward. --President Barack Obama



Left: Lucky spearer Amy Van Beek of Menasha, Wisc. and her 168.8 pound, 80.8 inch sturgeon that she harvested on Valentine's Day. Photo by Mark Brouder, Ashland NFWCO.



Left: The look on these future sturgeon biologists' faces as they guess the sex and weight of the sturgeon waiting to be processed tell an interesting story. Despite their expressions, these budding biologist were right about 80% of the time. Photo by Mark Brouder, Ashland NFWCO.



Left: Scott Bradon, Meg Malovec, UW Stevens Point student and Steve Faffner, WDNR Wild Rose Fish Hatchery manager collect the ovaries of a black egg female sturgeon to be analyzed later at the WDNR Oshkosh office. This information will be used to determine the potential production of sturgeon in the Lake Winnebago system. Photo by Mark Brouder, Ashland NFWCO.

Lake Winnebago Spear Harvest

The morning of Friday, February 13 found Ashland NFWCO Fishery Biologist, Glenn Miller and Northland College student, Scott Bradon heading to Oshkosh, Wisc. to attend the annual meeting held for registration station personnel for the Lake Winnebago spear harvest season. Meeting at the Asylum Point net and boat building of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is a long standing tradition. Fishery Biologist and spear harvest coordinator, Dr. Ron Bruch, went over the various functions required for registering lake sturgeon.

Anyone harvesting lake sturgeon from Lake Winnebago is required to register the fish at any of the seven registration stations found along Lake Winnebago's shoreline. The three upper lakes of the Winnebago chain, Lake Poygan, Winneconne and Butte des Morts have a lottery system for fish harvest. Anyone interested in spearing the three lakes had to apply for a harvest tag in August of 2008 (which 4,031 spearers did) for a chance to pull one of the 500 harvest tags allowed for the upper lakes season. The lucky lottery winners were then notified by October 1, and had to purchase a harvest tag by October 31. A total of 500 tags were sold for the 2009 upper lakes season which, along with Lake Winnebago, started on February 14. Three registration stations are on the upper lakes.

--Glenn Miller, R3-Ashland FRO

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