



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

# Inside Region 3

March 2009

## Going Green



Global Climate Change



First Lady Address



Winterfest at Sherburne



Plus:

Local Students Learn Fish Culture at Jordan River NFH  
Missouri River Spa

# what's inside

## 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](mailto:valerie_redmond@fws.gov) with your Let's Go Outside and Kids Corner articles, photos, journal entries and poems.

**On the Cover:** Sadie O'Dell, Wildlife Biologist, is shown using the new Dyson hand dryers that were recently installed at Horicon NWR. FWS Photo. - USFWS photo

## Departments

The Buzz /4

Employee Profiles/ 7

Around the Region / 14

Quote of the Month / 15

## Features



RD Melius/ 3

Global Climate Change



Biologist of the Year/ 8

Sara Vacek

By Patricia Heglund, Ph.D.



Climate Change / 6

A Challenge

By Teresa Woods



Sherburne NWR/ 11

Winterfest

By Nancy Haugen,



## Service Addresses Global Climate Change

Images of millennium old ice cascading into a widening Arctic sea, an increase in sea level, depleting natural resources, and increasingly vulnerable wildlife are just some of the visually compelling, high profile effects of climate change that have America and the world exploring the notion of “going green”. But what does that really mean? And furthermore, what does that mean to us as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) employees? And more specifically, what are the impacts of global climate change in the Midwest or locally where you work?

The quest for clean air, clean water, green space, and a green planet has led to a conscious effort by many to recycle, reuse, reduce, renew waste and recover precious resources. Raised awareness has people thinking differently—thinking about alternative energy and how it can be used—and thinking about the size of their carbon footprint. It has got people thinking up innovative ideas to foster a more eco-friendly planet. More people are paying attention to ways to live with environmental responsibility than ever before. Why? Because no member of our society is immune from the effects.

Climate change is accelerating the need for change in our profession and conservation approach. We must begin to develop the capacity to deliver conservation across networks of connected habitat now.

What this means for the Service is that people will be looking to us to lead as stewards of the land and conservation professionals, people are watching and waiting. It is up to us to set the tone and direction with a foundation of sound science backing us up.

The Service is rising to this challenge, starting with the release of a discussion draft of its climate change strategic action plan. This plan highlights key steps the Service will take to adapt to global climate change. For the past few months Service employees have been viewing and commenting on the plan. Once complete, we will support this action plan using the scientific expertise, strong abilities and assets we have in the Midwest Region. We will address habitat fragmentation, build a climate change leadership base, re-evaluate grant criteria, assist in



shaping energy policy and share our knowledge with each other, our partners and our stakeholders.

As the Service identifies its role and actions in addressing global climate change, know that you all play an important part in moving this agency forward. While this may seem as a daunting task, together with the support of our partners, we can meet the challenge.

--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](mailto: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.

## Students Take to the Field

Green Bay Field Office (GBFO) biologist Gary VanVreede led a field trip for a group of Natural Resource students from Fox Valley Technical College of Appleton, Wisconsin. The field trip was part of an effort by the college to provide instructional experience for the students that involves interfacing with resource professionals in the field. The students were taken to a wetland site previously restored by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Mr. Van Vreede discussed the importance of wetlands to wildlife and water quality protection, explained the process of wetland restoration, and described other habitat improvement accomplishments of the Partners Program. He also talked about some of the conservation objectives of the Service and shared some insights on how students might position themselves for careers in the field of resource management and conservation.

--Gary Van Vreede, Green Bay Field Office



*Above:  
Service biologist Gary Van Vreede talks to natural resource students from Fox Valley Technical College about wetland restoration. Photo by Kari Esbensen.*

## Learning Through Experience: Resource Center Trunks

We know that learning may be enhanced by actual experiences with relevant resources. In our efforts to conserve the nature of America we provide opportunities for educators, communities and partners to develop appreciation for wildlife and their critical habitat. Getting people out onto refuges is ideal but sometimes an indoor alternative is needed to get a feel for wildlife and habitat. Trunks are kits available from the Region 3 Resource Center that provide materials and curriculum for hands-on learning through a variety of interactive experiences. Trunks feature wildlife including shorebirds, songbirds and wolves as well as prairie and wetland habitats. Enviroscape models demonstrate functions and values of watersheds and wetlands. These materials can be used with a variety of audiences and learning styles, so check one out this spring for a wild indoor experience.

Contact the Resource Librarian, [Judy\\_Geck@fws.gov](mailto:Judy_Geck@fws.gov), or visit the website at [www.fws.gov/midwest/MinnesotaValley/resource\\_center\\_trunks.html](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/MinnesotaValley/resource_center_trunks.html) for additional information.

-- Judy Geck, Resource Librarian



# Working Together



## Outdoor Classrooms that WOW!

Recently, the Columbia National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office teamed up with faculty from the University of Missouri-School of Natural Resources with the goal of providing new educational outdoor experiences to Missouri residents. Dr. Sonja A. Wilhelm Stanis recently volunteered to assist technician Chris McLeland in the development of new programs, strategies and ideas that would encourage people to become involved in the outdoors as well as to learn new skills associated with natural resources conservation.

Wilhelm Stanis has utilized her expertise to assist in the development of the 2009 Wonders of Wildlife (WOW) outdoor school in Columbia, MO. WOW offers a wide range of outdoor related courses with varying degrees of difficulty. It provides a foundation for novice outdoor enthusiasts to learn new skills and it also offers new challenges for those more advanced. Wilhelm Stanis has assisted in the development of new advertising approaches as well as offering her expert advice in the area of nature deficit disorder. She has provided guidance in creating a scholarship program that will provide school groups and families with the ability to attend WOW, despite financial burdens.

Dr. Sonja Wilhelm Stanis joined the University of Missouri's School of Natural Resources in August 2008 as a faculty member in the department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. Her primary work is in the human dimensions of natural resource management with an

emphasis in the social psychological aspects of outdoor recreation and recreation resource management. Specifically, her research examines motivations for and benefits of outdoor recreation, constraints to outdoor recreation, the role of parks and other public lands in promoting physical activity and public health, and issues in outdoor recreation relating to diversity and youth. Originally from Madison, Wisconsin, Wilhelm Stanis came to Missouri from the University of Minnesota where she completed her M.S. and Ph.D. in Natural Resources Science and Management with a minor in program evaluation.  
--Chris McLeland, R3-Columbia FRO

## Going Green

Horicon National Wildlife Refuge recently purchased two "GreenSpec" listed hand dryers for the office and visitor center bathrooms. The dryer replaced the traditional paper towels that were used. While a bit pricey at just over \$1,000 each, the Dyson Airblade hand dryer has a cost savings of nearly 98 percent over paper towels.

In addition, these hand dryers use up to 80 percent less energy than that of conventional hand dryers. Conventional hand dryers rely on high power heating elements to dry hands, often taking over 22 seconds and wasting energy.

The Dyson Airblade hand dryer is powered by an energy-efficient

motor, has no heating element, and takes only 12 seconds or less to dry hands. The dryer is touch-free and uses a HEPA filter to remove over 99.9 percent of bacteria from the air, making it the most hygienic hand dryer on the market. Most importantly, refuge staff are proud to be doing their part to help the environment.

--Diane Kitchen, R3-Horicon NWR



Above: Sadie O'Dell, Wildlife Biologist, is shown using the new Dyson hand dryers that were recently installed at Horicon NWR. FWS Photo.

# Climate Change Challenge

Climate change is one of the most far reaching conservation challenges that we have ever faced because changes in temperature and precipitation are likely to affect our trust resources in unprecedented and unpredictable ways.

**The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service ((Service) is responding by focusing on three main areas:**

- (1) Understanding and managing fish and wildlife adaptation to change.
- (2) Assisting in this administration's efforts to develop clean energy and sequester carbon.
- (3) Taking steps to reduce our own carbon footprint.



To jump start this effort, the Service Directorate chose a set of climate change action priorities (CCAPs) for implementation in FY09. Each region has specific responsibilities.

**Here are some actions currently underway in Region 3:**

- Region 3 is convening a Climate Change Team to help implement the FY09 CCAPs, facilitate communication about climate change among and within programs, and to help prepare strategies for addressing climate change in the Midwest.
- Don Hultman (Upper Mississippi River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge) and Louise Clemency (Green Bay Ecological Services Office) are assisting with the review the nearly 1,000 pages of comments received on the draft Strategic and 5-Year Action Plans.
- Employees from Region 3 are participating in national teams:
  - Pauline Drobney (Land Management and Research Development Office at Neil Smith National Wildlife Refuge) is serving on a National Carbon Sequestration Team.
  - Josh Eash, (R3 NWRS hydrologist), is representing Region 3 on a National Water Issues Team.
  - Bob Krska (Ecological Services) and Teresa Woods (Regional Director's Office) are leading a National effort to gather and make available best practices for achieving conservation goals with energy development.
  - Tom Larson (NWRS Planning Chief) is leading the Regional Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) Support Team in an analysis to establish Landscape Conservation Cooperatives designed to increase our scientific and technical capacity to set landscape- and population-level goals, so that we can better understand how our project level activities benefit larger conservation goals.
  - Mike Sweet (Federal Assistance Program) is the Service's representative to



the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies helping its efforts to incorporate climate change issues in State Plans.

This is an exciting time for the Region 3 as we face the challenge of climate change and the related issue of clean energy development.

For more information visit R3's SharePoint site (<http://sharepoint.fws.net/regions/r3/r3cc/default.aspx>) or contact Teresa Woods ([teresa\\_woods@fws.gov](mailto:teresa_woods@fws.gov)).

*---Teresa Woods  
Special Assistant  
to the Regional Director*

# Employee Profile

## Andrew Prouty

Andrew Prouty is a mail clerk that works in the regional office. His is responsible receiving, sorting and distributing U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) mail. He is also responsible for record keeping, restocking, and helping people with mail.

What's compelling about Prouty is that he is able to excel in his job, despite several physical disabilities. He cannot hear and has a visual impairment. Prouty does not read lips, but communicates with sign language in addition to written and electronic text.

In the fall of 2007 many regional employees enrolled in Deaf Awareness Level 1 and American Sign Language diversity training to learn how to better communicate with Prouty. Employees are further aided in their communications efforts with a mail room posting entitled "Word of the Day". The posting features sign language for common English words and letters of the alphabet.

Prouty became a government employee in 2001, when he was hired by the Corps of Engineers. There he was responsible for scanning documents into digital format and sorting mail. "After a few years with Corps of Engineers, I begin to search for higher paying jobs with more variety and new challenges," says Prouty. Prouty says he became aware of opportunities at the Service from a neighbor. He was subsequently promoted with the transfer from Corps of Engineers to the Service.

Born in Oregon, Prouty attended Metro State University in St. Paul. "My family moved to several states for two reasons: to find the best school with deaf education for me and because my dad, who also works for the Government, was receiving promotions," he says.

*--Valerie Rose Redmond, External Affairs*



You may hear the sound of the mail cart coming each morning with the daily mail or the shopping cart carrying FEDEX and UPS packages for you to sign.

Andrew Prouty greets you with a good morning in sign or smiles. He has been doing this job for over one year now and knows the mail route. He knows the employees in the area where he drops off the mail and they know him.

You may see him taking extra care with the envelopes; checking each envelope and making sure that the envelope has the correct address stamped or typed on it, taping the envelopes, and placing them on a numbering system that indicates the mail codes for outgoing mail and packages.

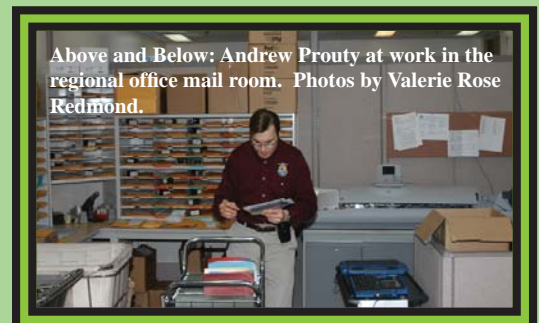
Prouty is always willing to assist with securing envelopes or delivering paper to offices. He keeps the copier in the mail room full of paper.

Prouty is always looking for new challenges. He just started working with Finance on filing payments and alphabetizing credit card applications.

If you have a problem with the storage room in the basement, you can see Prouty and he will help you solve it. He has come a long way from the first day we met him to how he is now. He has learned everything about the mail and is always looking for new challenges.

You might be saying to yourself... anyone can do that. But what is interesting is that Prouty is deaf and has low vision. He uses special equipment such as a magnifier and an enlarged screen to help him in his job. He never lets his deafness or his low vision stop him from achieving his goal of doing everything perfectly. He has a great opportunity to achieve what he wants. As once was said, "A good person, a good worker, is hard to keep down."

*--Chris Jensen, ARD, Budget and Administration*





# 2008 Biologist of the Year

## Sara Vacek

Sara Vacek is an exemplary biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Her leadership and dedication towards fish and wildlife conservation, her enthusiasm for applying science-based thinking to land management decisions, and her ability to effectively work with others to tackle complex problems sets her apart and warrants her receiving the 2008 biologist of the year award. Below are paraphrased excerpts from her nominations:

Vacek embraced new scientific approaches to resource management and guided the participation of others. Her work supports refuge management that is grounded in thorough, objective science.

The Adaptive Management Consultancy is a project designed to help refuge staff learn how to implement adaptive management through focused case studies.

Vacek proposed three case studies for Region 3 in 2007 and all three of her proposals were successful. She has since worked tirelessly to make the resulting collaborations successful by leading the planning and implementation teams, summarizing the workshops, and preparing the adaptive management implementation plans.

Vacek leads the Native Grassland project, and is a co-leader of the Excavate Sediment and Temporary Wetland projects.

She has been a leader in a study of waterfowl nest success on Waterfowl Production Areas. She successfully secured funding for this work from the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture along with partners from the Delta Waterfowl Research Station and the University of Minnesota. This three year research project will examine the effects of woody cover on duck nest success on Waterfowl Production

Areas in the best remaining habitat in the Morris Wetland Management District. Vacek not only helped forge the partnership and concept, but also helped define the most appropriate research sites and trained a graduate student in waterfowl nest searching and monitoring techniques.

Vacek has been a leader and participant in multi-station efforts that derived from the network connections. These include the multi-station HMP development among several WMDs in Minnesota and the Refuge Cooperative Research Project on prairie invasives. These are all projects that involve a great deal of coordination among biologists and other research participants. Vacek got the Prairie Network pointed in a direction that led to cooperation and collaboration among several stations in Region 3. This network has more members than any of the other networks. Having more people tends to make people think they can sit back and let others do the work. Vacek forced people to take action even when they were reluctant, and established the groundwork for a successful network.

This award is a recognition of leadership among peers and is one of our ways of highlighting the scientific excellence within the National Wildlife Refuge System. A formal recognition ceremony will take place later this winter in the Regional Office and again at the next Biologist's Workshop, tentatively scheduled for 2010.

- *Patricia Heglund, Ph.D.*  
*Regional Refuge Biologist*

### From The Visitor Services Update

- Send in your success stories for Connecting People and Nature and see them here!
- The Blair-DeSoto NWR Environmental Education Partnership made national news on the web: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28858641> To see the video clip from the local ABC affiliate (KETV - Channel 7) that aired on Sunday night go to this site and click on the video link: <http://www.ketv.com/news/18565116/detail.html> Way to go DeSoto!
- Have you registered your school or organization for National Environmental Education (EE) Week, April 12-18, 2009? Register on-line today at [www.EEWeek.org/register](http://www.EEWeek.org/register). Certificates are provided to recognize registered partners and students, and those who register before January 30 will receive a free copy of National Geographic Explorer magazine. Register now to receive your certificate and a free copy of National Geographic Explorer! Visit: <http://www.eeweek.org/> for more info.

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



# Missouri River Spa

After a particularly raw day of sampling on the Missouri River, I sat on my couch staring at the TV. My face was stinging from being sandblasted with sleet and snow pellets and a 40 mph northwest wind. I was watching, in disbelief, a commercial for a spa touting facial dermabrasion. "You have got to be kidding me!" I exclaimed. "I just got paid to do this to my face and it feels miserable - there is absolutely NO way I would pay someone to do it to me!" In a nutshell, the fall/winter weather was rather unrelenting for Columbia NFWCO crews sampling on the Missouri River.

Coupled with our standard sampling for the Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment Program (PSA), we have been systematically sampling two segments of the lower Missouri River with trotlines. We are evaluating the effectiveness of trotlines for catching sturgeon, particularly the federally endangered pallid sturgeon. River segments defined by the PSA

program have been subdivided into "reaches." In general, each reach encompasses roughly 20 miles (approximately eight bends) that are sampled from downstream to upstream within a week. This design addresses the potential for baited hooks acting as an attractant and allows crews to more efficiently sample stretches of river. Based on pallid sturgeon trotline catch in 2008, a model was developed to predict the number of hooks necessary for detecting a pallid sturgeon in a bend. The model predicted that 14 hooks per tenth of a river mile were needed to have an 80% chance of catching a pallid sturgeon. We intended to test this prediction by sampling 250 river miles, from the confluence with the Mississippi to the Grand River, during the 2009 sample year.

All complaining about the weather aside, our trotline catches have been phenomenal. To date, we have sampled 4 reaches (29 bends) of segments 13 & 14. That equates to 10,156 hooks and 72 miles of river sampled. Besides the hundreds of shovelnose sturgeon, we have captured 35 lake sturgeon, eight suspected hybrid (pallid x shovelnose) sturgeon, and 48 pallid sturgeon. Thus far, we have sent five of those pallid sturgeon to the hatchery as potential broodstock fish. We have captured wild fish from each reach

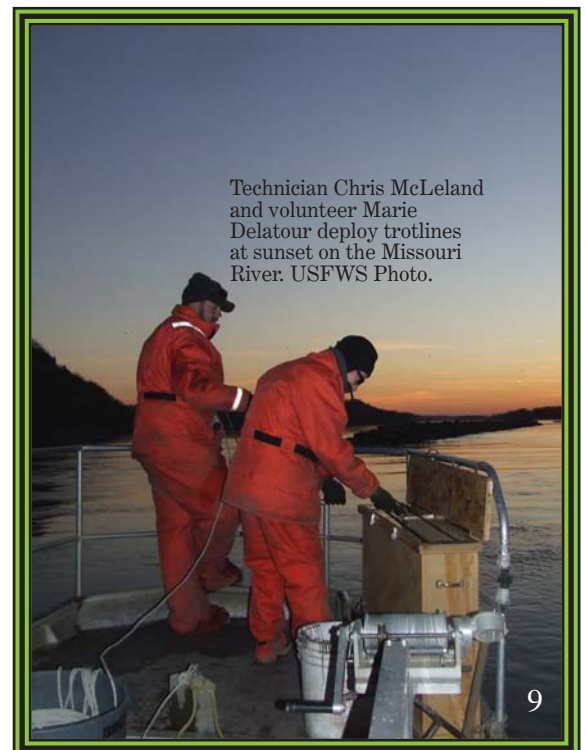
and have also detected some interesting dispersal patterns for both shovelnose and pallid sturgeon. Fish have rarely been recaptured within a reach during the sampling time frame, downplaying some of the concern for attractant bias. Thus far, we have been able to detect at least one pallid in 83% of our bends. On average we are catching one pallid sturgeon for every 211 hooks deployed. As time has permitted, and there has been precious little, we have deployed trotlines in addition to our standardized effort. This extra effort had yielded 34 lake sturgeon (69 total), three hybrid sturgeon (11 total) and two pallid sturgeon (50 total).

Development of gears to detect, monitor and collect pallid sturgeon allows us to meet our Aquatic Species Conservation and Management objective of recovering fish and other aquatic resource populations protected under the Endangered Species Act.

--Patricia Herman, R3-Columbia FRO



Technician Adam McDaniel releases a pallid sturgeon back into the Missouri River. USFWS Photo.



Technician Chris McLeland and volunteer Marie Delatour deploy trotlines at sunset on the Missouri River. USFWS Photo.

# Let's Go Outside!

## Local Students Learn Fish Culture at Jordan River NFH

Mancelona Public School's *Choose Success* program, together with Jordan River National Fish Hatchery has forged partnerships with many organizations and private citizen volunteers to deliver programs designed to get students out of doors and into nature. As part of the program the students from Mancelona Elementary and Middle School have been raising brook trout at the hatchery.

The newest partner Concord Montessori and Community School has also become fully engaged in the program. Concord has revised its educational philosophy to emphasize outdoor education and environmental studies.

In October the 4th graders and 5th graders from Mr. Eric Shupbach's Outdoor Education Class, helped staff with an inventory of the Baby Brookies, as well as carry out some length and weight measurements, on the fish. The students toured the hatchery grounds and benefited from some unstructured exploration. The brook trout will be cared for by the students until the fish are ready (catch able sized) to be stocked for children's fishing events.

While tending to the trout during their visits to the hatchery over the coming years, the students will learn about brook trout biology and ecology, fish culture and hatchery operations. Curriculum

components such as math, science, social studies are covered during their visits.

If you are interested in volunteering for any of the Imaginature activities or just want to know more about this exciting new program please contact 231-584-2461.

--Tim Smigielski  
Jordan River NFH



Mr. Shupbach and his outdoor education classes from Concord Community School enjoy working with baby brook trout at Jordan River NFH. Photo by Tim Smigielski.

## Exploring Nature in Winter

Connecting people and nature doesn't stop at Tamarac NWR just because it's cold outside and the ground is blanketed with snow. A weekend cross-county ski trek for families explores stories in the snow. Refuge Ranger Kelly Blackledge leads visitors through the woods on a ski trail to explore winter ecology.

The group stopped to watch a porcupine in a tree and identify tracks left by squirrels, rabbits, and ermine. Eight miles of ski trails on the refuge are occasionally groomed by a volunteer, enticing visitors to explore the refuge beyond the warmth of a car. In January and February when

cabin fever sets in, more and more visitors take part in winter photography and wildlife watching on the refuge

--Kelly Blackledge, R3-Tamarac NWR



Above: Visitors at Tamarac Refuge spot a porcupine up in a tree along the Pine Lake ski trail. Photo by Gloria Schattsneider.



Above: Tamarac Refuge Ranger Kelly Blackledge helps a few young skiers identify wildlife tracks in the snow during a family cross-country ski event. Photo by Gloria Schattsneider.



## 1100 Attend Winterfest at Sherburne NWR

Attendance topped 1100 at Winterfest, a family event with a focus on getting kids outdoors in winter, held at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge on February 7.

Co-sponsored by the Friends of Sherburne (Friends) and the refuge, the event provided a full day of free activities that centered on how wildlife and people deal with and enjoy the snow and cold.

Ninety pair of snowshoes, provided by the Friends, enabled over 450 kids of all sizes to try snowshoeing. The horse-drawn sleigh ride, with volunteer interpreters on board to share information on the refuge, was enjoyed by over 700 kids, parents and grandparents. An interactive live-raptor presentation by the Audubon Center of the North Woods was attended by over 475 kids and families. The "Winter Wonders Walk," led by a volunteer educator, enticed 32 kids and parents to venture with him through the nearby woods and prairie opening. Exhibits on bird feeding, animal tracks, wildlife fur, and winter survival each had over 500 kids and parents stop by to touch, feel and ask questions. Inside the small school house, young kids enjoyed making pinecone bird feeders and choosing animals designs for face painting.

The Friends recruited over 10 new members and had excellent turn-out at their Gift Shop, Silent Auction and Hot dog/brat lunch.

The event celebrated the 106th anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System. To enhance the celebration, the Friends offered free anniversary cake to the visitors.

Puddles, the Blue Goose mascot of the National Refuge System, visited the event, posing for photos with many children.

The event was made possible with the assistance of 105 volunteers which included students from Anoka-Ramsey Community College, St. Cloud State University student chapter of the Wildlife Society, and the Environmental Explorers Club at Rogers Middle School. Business supporters for this event included Waste Management, Great River Energy, Walmart, Federal Cartridge, Anoka and the First National Bank all of Elk River.

--Nancy Haugen,  
R3-Sherburne NWR



Above: Kids enjoy snowshoeing at Winterfest held at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge on February 7, 2009. Photo by Nancy Haugen.



Above: Kids learn about wildlife from refuge volunteer at Winterfest. Photo by Nancy Haugen.



Above: Families enjoyed snowshoeing at Winterfest. Photo by Kimberly Farah.



Above: Kids learn about wildlife furs from refuge volunteer. Photo by Nancy Haugen.



Above: Kids enjoy making animal tracks at Winterfest. Photo by Ken Brennen.

# Illinois Project Leaders Meet with State Counterparts

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) project leaders and Regional Office program managers recently held their second semi-annual meeting to discuss opportunities for both agencies to coordinate implementation of the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Plan. The Service utilizes these plans as a way to align our goals, strategies and actions with those of the states and to redefine its relationship so that it becomes a full conservation partner.

The meeting was co-chaired by Mike Conlin, Chief of the Illinois DNR's Office of Resource Conservation and John Rogner, Field Supervisor for the Service's Chicago Ecological Services Field Office. Most Illinois Service field offices were represented as was Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration.

Illinois' plan identifies a statewide system of Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs), which are areas that have high concentrations of rare or significant natural communities and/or species. These areas also have high potential for restoring these features.

With support from a state wildlife grant, IDNR is beginning to develop partnership models, track planning progress, define priority activities and develop performance measures for COAs. The project would also examine whether boundaries of COAs defined in the original plan should be re-drawn. The focus of this meeting was to discuss ways that Service offices could assist in this project,

especially by integrating past and ongoing refuge planning into COAs.

IDNR staff also presented models that are being used to build a Wildlife Habitat Planning Tracking System and a Statewide Streams Database. Both tools would be used to track implementation of key components identified in the plan, and will ultimately have great utility to both agencies in such areas as population modeling, climate change planning and impact assessment.

Numerous other topics related to Service programs and initiatives, and opportunities to coordinate them with IDNR, were also discussed. Among these were: (1) the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (2) the Regional Wildlife Disease Response Team (3) the Northeast Illinois Urban Fishing Program and other opportunities for both agencies to "Connect People with Nature" (4) the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and impending move--co-location of the Service's Illinois Private Lands Office at IDNR headquarters in Springfield and (5) hunting and trapping opportunities on Illinois' National Wildlife Refuges.

On day two of the meeting, participants were treated to a presentation titled "Future of Illinois Biodiversity," by Dr. Brian Anderson (Director, Illinois Natural History Survey). Anderson demonstrated that in order to meet goals set out in the plan, Illinois will need to greatly



Above Top: Chicago ES Field Supervisor John Rogner (R) meets with Illinois colleagues Dr. Brian Anderson of the Illinois Natural History Survey (L) and Illinois DNR's Mike Conlin. IDNR photo by Kathy Andrews.



Bottom: FWS project leaders in Illinois meet with their state counterparts to discuss issues of mutual importance. IDNR Photo by Kathy Andrews.

expand initiatives that encourage or enable habitat conservation throughout the state. Finally, the participants at the meeting held a lengthy discussion on ways to manage agency activities and meet increasing public demand on resources in an era when both state and federal agencies continue to lose human capital and funding. In addition to this annual meeting and state wildlife grant oversight, the Service is actively involved in Illinois' Wildlife Action Plan implementation through Service biologist Mike Redmer's participation in the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Team.  
--John Rogner, Field Supervisor, Chicago ES Office



# First Lady Addresses Key Midwest Conservation Issues

Regional Office employees gathered on February 9 to hear first lady and Midwest native, Michelle Obama address the Department of Interior, the third agency stop on her get-to-know Washington tour.

Mrs. Obama was greeted by a traditional Native American “Honor Song” and presented with a hand made shawl, which she modeled to the audience.

After the salutation, the first lady thanked the performers and assured listeners that with regard to Native American issues and concerns, there is “a wonderful partner in the White House right now.” She also said that President Obama will soon appoint a policy advisor to work with tribal issues such as sovereignty, health care, and education.

Mrs. Obama keyed on several other issues of strategic importance to the Midwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) such as energy and connecting people with nature. She emphasized the importance of experiencing nature as an element of quality family time and the key role that the Service, as stewards of the land, plays in the conservation of it. “Some of the greatest adventures that we experience in life here in this nation -- like family vacations, and camping,



and hiking, and fishing, if you’re blessed to have access to those resources,” she said, “are possible because of the work that you do right here in this department.” She went on to reference our natural resources as “assets” that we have the responsibility to protect for our children. The first lady’s emphasis on the importance of conservation work reflects her husband’s sentiments on the shift to alternative energy. “You are at the center of this administration’s highest priorities: securing America’s energy future,” she said.

She underscored the importance of conservation work and the impacts of using natural resources responsibly in the midst of climate change.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, First Lady Michelle Obama, and Nedra Darling, Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Public Information Office listen to the Honor Song by the Black Bear Singers. [Photo Credit: Tami Heilemann, DOI-NBC] Hi-Res

Mrs. Obama closed with a thanks to all for the hard work that has already been and will be done. “We’re counting on you all...” she said, “...together we can get a lot of things done.”

--Valerie Rose Redmond  
*External Affairs*

# Around the Region

## Celebrating Excellence

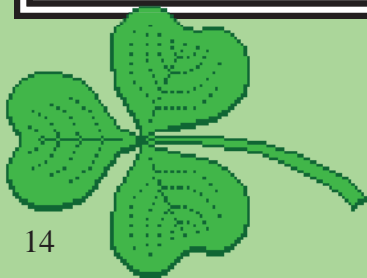
Right: Costumed handler with young whooping cranes at Neecedah NWR, WI. Photo courtesy John Cullum, FWS.



### Mississippi Makeover - Restoration Plan Is Just Around the Bend

The Mississippi River above Lake Pepin, the Lower Vermillion River, and Spring Lake, all polluted with sediment and algae, are getting a makeover. This section of the Upper Mississippi River lies within the Twin Cities Metro Area of Minnesota and receives significant loads of sediment and nutrients from the Minnesota River, which drains much of Minnesota's agricultural region. Mississippi Makeover is a new partnership of local citizens and stakeholders: Dakota County (project coordinator), Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District, Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). It is a smaller part of the ongoing Mississippi River/Lake Pepin Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Study. The ultimate goal of this partnership is to implement a variety of watershed and river projects to create a healthy and protected ecosystem that attracts abundant wildlife, becomes a mecca for outdoor enthusiasts, and provides economic benefits to local communities. Additional information is available at <http://www.dakotaswcd.org/>. --Gary Wege, Twin Cities Field Office

Above: One of the most important issues affecting Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge is water quality. The refuge is near the bottom of the largest watershed in the state. A rain garden was constructed next to the parking lot to prevent further degradation of refuge waters. The rain garden is both attractive and an educational feature. Photo by Steven F. Kahl/USFWS.



## Happy St. Patrick's Day





## Quotes of the Month

"Each moment of the year has its own beauty." -- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

# Honoring Black History Month



Diversity Manager, Marc Gunby and Kathleen Schlener, SEPM for the People with Disabilities Program coordinated Black History Month events for FWS.



Above: FWS employees gather to enjoy Black History Month Events. Both the Soul Food Experience and the showing of *African American Lives* (a PBS four-part DVD series) were well attended. Photos by Valerie Rose Redmond.