



Wildlife Management



August 2013

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

MIGRATORY BIRD PROGRAM

Contributed by Kent Van Horn and James Christopoulos

Spring Waterfowl Breeding Survey

The 2013 Waterfowl Breeding Population Survey for Wisconsin was conducted May 6 - 17, following methods of the [North American waterfowl population survey](#). The information from the survey is used as part of the overall survey of breeding waterfowl in North America as well as being important in making state level waterfowl management decisions. This was the [41st consecutive year](#) we have conducted

the survey. These data on Wisconsin waterfowl breeding populations are best interpreted as population trends viewed over several years rather than as year-to-year changes in the condition of waterfowl populations in Wisconsin. The survey experience in 2013 is a good example of why caution in interpretation of annual survey results is warranted; the late spring resulted in abnormal duck migration and breeding activity which affected survey results. We are confident that in 2013, we have improved wetland conditions and while delayed, duck production should be similar to recent years. However, we have less confidence in the actual population estimates because a number of factors impacted the survey implementation.



Donna Dewhurst - USFWS

In Wisconsin, increased winter and spring precipitation across the state provided adequate water on the landscape and helped alleviate the drought conditions of last year. Wetland counts during the survey indicated improved conditions from 2012 in all regions except for portions of the north; most regions are above or near the average for the last 10 years. Continued rainfalls have improved the observed conditions, and overall Wisconsin's marshes and other waters should provide good brood habitat in 2013. The total state breeding duck population estimate of 527,340 is similar to 2012 and 19% above the long-term mean (40 years). The 2013 total mallard population estimate of 181,200 is statistically similar to the 2012 estimate of 196,950 and 1% below the long-term average. The 2013 blue-winged teal breeding population estimate of 73,483 is down 31% from 2012 and 35% below the long-term mean which excludes the migrant years of 1981, 2004, and 2005. In 2013, the population estimate for wood ducks is 91,516 which is down 14% from 2012 but remains 16% above the long-term mean. The statewide breeding Canada goose population estimate of 138,925 is down just 4% which is statistically unchanged from 2012 and 51%

above the long-term (27-year) mean. Overall, duck numbers were about average and similar to recent years; the complete survey report is available dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/documents/WaterfowlSurv.pdf.

We expect continental duck survey data will be available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in early to mid July.

Waterfowl Program Filmed In Wisconsin

Film crews worked with DNR staff on an upcoming TV show about ducks, waterfowl hunting, and wetlands across Wisconsin. They completed segments with air and ground survey crews during the Spring Waterfowl Breeding Survey and interviewed Migratory Game Bird Ecologist Kent Van Horn for perspectives on state and continental waterfowl monitoring efforts and how those data are utilized. The show will feature a number of public waters and wildlife areas around Wisconsin that are available for duck hunting. The filming is taking place throughout 2013 with the show slated to be aired in 2014.

Federal Duck Stamp Online

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the [Permanent Electronic Duck Stamp Act](#), authored by Reps. Ron Kind (D-WI) and Rob Wittman (R-VA), on a bipartisan vote of 401-0. This legislation aims to make federal duck stamps permanently available for purchase online. Wisconsin has participated in a pilot program for several years which allowed the purchase of federal ducks stamps at license vendors. Modernization of the program will allow sportsmen across the country to more easily obtain a federal duck stamp as an in-person visit to a local post office will no longer be required. Sale and distribution of federal duck stamps fund conservation of vital waterfowl habitat across the country.

Bird Banding Operations

Waterfowl and mourning dove banding plans have been completed and distributed to staff. Our statewide quotas will include 4,000 mallards, 4,000 geese, 1,500 wood ducks, and 850 mourning doves; in some areas we will continue to work in conjunction with USFWS refuge staff to achieve these goals. For doves, recently expanded efforts into the north will ensure Wisconsin meets the outlined goals, which include banding across both [Bird Conservation Regions](#) in the state. We also expect to have better distribution of goose banding in the south-central area of Wisconsin. Although many people think of banding strictly in terms of

DNR photo



monitoring bird movements, banding is increasingly being used to determine harvest rates. Harvest rate is a key information piece in harvest management for mallards, wood ducks, and Canada geese and is used in determining hunting season length and daily bag limits.

National Dove Hunter Survey

The National Dove Hunter Survey, a cooperative effort by the state fish and wildlife agencies, all four flyway councils, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will ask dove hunters from across the U.S. to share their experiences and opinions about dove hunting. Topics will include learning about hunter characteristics, time spent hunting, their perceived constraints to hunting, and thoughts about potential effects of spent lead from hunting ammunition on mourning doves and other wildlife. The National Dove Hunter Survey is scheduled to begin in June and will be compiled by the end of the 2013.

Summer Waterfowl Rules Process and Public Involvement

In public meetings this summer, we will be taking out the emergency waterfowl rule that will set the 2013 hunting season as well as a permanent rule that provides a general framework that will be altered each year to ensure compliance with the federal process. In the past, the permanent rule on the books was always outdated and did not reflect the current season's waterfowl rule because of the timing of the federal and state rule processes. In addition to the usual discussions about season dates, we will be taking final comments on the proposed increase in open water duck hunting opportunities on ten additional lakes for the 2013 season.

We will also discuss proposed changes to the Horicon goose zone, which could go into effect for the 2014 hunting seasons. Based on band return information and hunter input, we are including proposals to shrink the Horicon Zone and expand harvest opportunities in areas with fewer migrant geese and limited hunter harvest. Creating tagging and harvest reporting requirements which are similar to the Exterior Zone will also provide more comparable data and uniform regulations between the Horicon and Exterior zones. Additionally, changes to the process for issuing licenses will remove the current lottery-based system and replace it with a process that has no application deadline.

If you are unable to attend a hearing, input on current season structure and rule proposals will be accepted (by phone, email, or mail) until midnight on Thursday August 8th; please contact James Christopoulos, Assistant Migratory Game Bird Ecologist, at: (608)261-6458, james.christopoulos@wisconsin.gov or 101 S. Webster St, PO Box 7921 Madison, WI 53707.

Wetland Habitat Management

Contributed by Jason Fleener

- Funding selections have been made for new FY14-15 State [Waterfowl Stamp](#) projects. Approximately half of the project applications that submitted will receive funding through the stamp account. About 16-17 Wisconsin funded projects will begin each year in the biennium. Project work will primarily take place on public lands such as [State Wildlife Areas](#), but some private land projects will also be funded

Public Meetings and Hearings

Post-Flyway Meeting

(DNR Public Meeting)

Saturday August 3, 1 pm

Holiday Inn-Stevens Point

1001 Amber Ave, Stevens Point, WI 54482

715-344-0200

Public Hearings

(all at 7 pm)

Monday, August 5

State Office Bldg, Rooms B-19 and B-20

3550 Mormon Coulee Rd, La Crosse

(608) 785-9000

Tuesday, August 6

Days Inn

1710 South Main Street, Rice Lake

(715) 234-4444

Wednesday, August 7

Agricultural Services Center

Main conference room

3369 West Brewster St, Appleton

(920) 832-1804

Thursday, August 8

Wildwood Lodge

N14 W24121 Tower Place, Pewaukee

(262) 506-2000

Natural Resources Board Meeting

Wednesday August 14th, 8:30 am

Clarion Hotel and Convention Center

626 W. Pine St., Baraboo.

for waterfowl habitat and propagation. Partners receiving funds for Wisconsin projects include Dane County Land and Water Conservation District and [Wisconsin Waterfowl Association](#). Project work will include restoration of wetland habitat or major maintenance of wetland infrastructure (e.g., major dike repairs, water control structure replacement, etc.). The project work will result in more and better wetland habitat for breeding and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife.

- **Northwest Wisconsin Wetland and Grassland Program – Phase II complete.** This was the second phase of a small [North American Wetlands Conservation Act](#) (NAWCA) grant, which was completed in June 2013. The grant, administered by [Ducks Unlimited](#), provided \$75,000 in federal NAWCA funds to restore wetland and grassland habitat on private and public lands in Polk, Burnett, St. Croix, and Barron counties. Project work was implemented by Brett Olson (WDNR) in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program](#). Habitat work took place on 25 sites and restored a total of 84.5 acres of wetland habitat and 192 acres of grassland/nesting habitat; the number of acres that were restored during this project exceeded the goals in the original grant proposal. Matching funds were provided to the projects from State Waterfowl and Pheasant Stamp funds.
- **Meadow Valley Flowage Dike Renovations** – A multi-phase project continues to improve wetland habitat within the [Meadow Valley Flowage](#) in the [Meadow Valley Wildlife Area](#) in Juneau County. The goal of this project is to improve the dike system within the flowage throughout numerous interconnected impoundments. This will result in longer lasting dikes and improved capabilities to manage water levels for the benefit of waterfowl and other wildlife. Phase II of a small NAWCA project was completed late last year to improve the SE Refuge Pool impoundment. Phase III of the NAWCA project, which began in 2013, includes work to renovate the NW Refuge Pool impoundment. Additional state waterfowl stamp funds have been dedicated to the NW Refuge Pool as well. Noticeable habitat improvements from previous impoundment work at Meadow Valley have been observed, including a noticeable population of ring-necked ducks, increased shorebird stop-overs, and little invasion of exotic plant species. Partners including the Stan Plis Sportsman’s League, Ducks Unlimited, and USFWS have been key to completing the project work.



Dave Menke - USFWS

FURBEARER PROGRAM

Contributed by John Olson and Geriann Albers

Trapper Education Updates

[Trapper Education](#) classes, conducted in cooperation with the [Wisconsin Trappers Association](#), are in full swing and classes are being held throughout the state. To find a Trapper Education class, visit [dnr.wi.gov](#); keyword '[trapper ed](#)'.

The WTA [Future Trappers of Wisconsin](#) youth camp will be held August 7–11 at [Trees for Tomorrow](#) near Eagle River, WI. The five-day camp will cover the basics of trapping, including trap preparation, trap setting, and fur put-up. Two youth from each Trapper Education District will be selected to attend the camp. If you know a youth interested in attending, please contact your District Trapper Education

Coordinator, whose information may be found in the [trapping regulations](#).

Furbearer Program Event Updates

Carcass Data Collection

The final two carcass data collection events for the year were held in Madison and Rhinelander in May and June. Volunteers removed teeth and reproductive tracts from otter, bobcat, and fisher. Teeth are used for aging the animals and the reproductive tracts give us insight into pregnancy rates and the potential litter size of these species. This information is invaluable to understanding the populations of these furbearer species in Wisconsin.

Furbearer Committee Meeting

The annual Furbearer Committee Meeting was held May 30–31 in Wausau. The first day of the meeting, attendees and invited speakers gave reports from agencies and updates on research projects. On the second day, the committee developed quota recommendations for bobcat, fisher, and otter and discussed proposed rule changes.



Herbert Lange

Coyote Best Management Practices Necropsies

Lindsey Long, state wildlife veterinarian, and Melissa Clark, part of the Wildlife Health Team, performed necropsies on coyotes taken as part of the [Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Best Management Practices](#) for trapping research with furbearer staff assisting. The coyotes were harvested by WTA trapper education instructors and trained BMP trappers, and necropsies were performed using [International Standards Organization](#) (ISO) metrics. Any injuries were documented and recorded with final analysis determining humane status of each specific restraint device. Through this trap research program we have now tested over 150 restraint traps on 20 furbearer species in the United States.

Advanced Skinning Workshops

Several Wisconsin Trappers Association Trapper Education Districts have held Advanced Skinning Workshops over the past few weeks, and two more events are planned for the future. During these workshops, attendees learn about proper fur handling and 'put-up', especially for species such as beaver and otter that are more challenging to

work with. The events give attendees hands-on practice in skinning and fleshing while WTA instructors are on hand to mentor and provide suggestions and guidance.

Agriculture Educator's Trapper Education Instructor Workshops

On June 25 and 26, Furbearer staff, Law Enforcement staff, and members of the Wisconsin Trappers

Association conducted a workshop at the [Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators](#) conference in Green Bay to certify teachers in Trapper Education. By completing this certification, teachers will be able to incorporate Trapper Education into a semester long school course related to natural resources or wildlife management. The workshop covered traps and trap setting, regulations, trapper ethics, Best Management Practices for Trapping, furbearer management, materials available for classroom use, and completing required paperwork to certify students in Trapper Education.

Park Ranger Staff Trainings

Furbearer staff teamed with Law Enforcement staff in Green Bay on June 25 and 27 to conduct Trapper Education training for State Park staff. This training covered furbearer management, Best Management Practices for Trapping, trap setting, trapper ethics, and trapping regulations. A similar training was conducted for State Park Rangers last December in response to [Act 168](#), which allows limited trapping in many State Parks.

Youth Expo

Furbearer management staff assisted the Wisconsin Trappers Association at the [Wisconsin Outdoor Youth Expo](#) in Beaver Dam. Staff and WTA members discussed furbearers and trapping with the youth attendees.

DNR photo



Fur Takers of America National Rendezvous

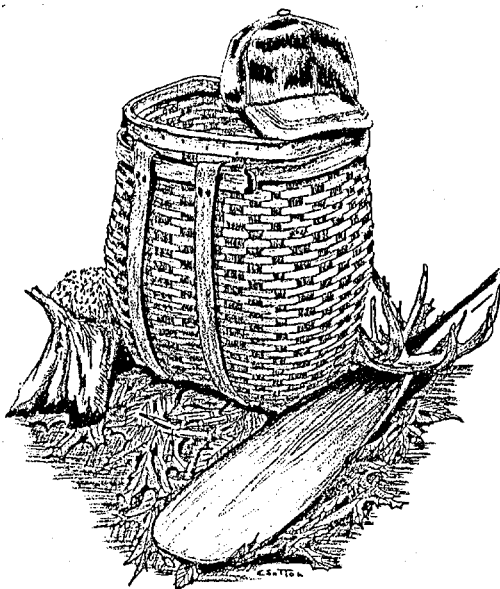
The [Fur Takers of America](#), hosted by the WTA, held their nation-wide annual rendezvous at the Marshfield fairgrounds from June 27–29. Hundreds of vendors manned booths and department staff from Law Enforcement, Endangered Resources, and Wildlife Management were available to the public for questions. Thousands of attendees came from numerous states and participated in trap demonstrations, contests, and meetings in addition to trading and/or purchasing equipment in preparation for next fall.

New Furbearer Webpage

DNR staff have developed a furbearer webpage that discusses some of the natural history of the furbearers of Wisconsin. The page can be viewed by going to dnr.wi.gov; keyword: '[furbearer](#)'.

Upcoming Events

- Work continues on the Beaver Management Plan.
- The [Upper Mississippi River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge](#) will be hosting a Big River Furbearer/Trapping meeting July 17. Attendees will include many user groups, and agency staff will discuss current issues and research related to furbearers along the Mississippi River.



Stretching the Knowledge of Wisconsin's Furbearers

Contributed by Elizabeth Boyd

While growing up, I can remember hanging out with my dad and two brothers in the fur shed at home. We would spend hours huddled around the wood stove watching dad skin, flesh, and stretch raccoon, fox, mink, and muskrats to name a few. That's why there wasn't the slightest hesitation when the opportunities arose to give presentations at Sauk and Iowa Conservation Days and at the Iowa/Grant Elementary School for Arbor Day. My last presentation included the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resource's fur collection. This gave the students some hands on experience where they could see and feel the animals first hand as I was talking about each one. To aid with the presentation, I put together a power point presentation. Within the presentation, I included things that may be hard to picture, such as a beaver's lodge and how it look on the inside. Then for each animal, I included a fun fact, for example, the opossum is Wisconsin's only marsupial. What I love most about giving this presentation is how involved the students become. When I ask the students, "does anyone know what animal this is?" they all shout the answer and many of them have stories of their encounters, especially opossums, raccoons and skunks. Wisconsin trapping is a declining sport among younger sportsman and women. This is why I feel it is important to educate the younger generations, even if they choose to not participate in trapping, they will still know and understand the history, importance, and ethics of this sport.



Meghan Ziegler (left) and Elizabeth Boyd (right) presenting at the Sauk County Youth Conservation Days.



Thank you letter from a student at the Iowa/Grant Elementary School

WILDLIFE AND FORESTRY RESEARCH

Should We Remove Tree Rows from our Grassland Landscapes? A Grassland Bird Perspective

Contributed by David Sample

As a group, grassland birds are of high conservation concern in Wisconsin and throughout their range, primarily because of steep, long term population declines. The search for the mechanisms behind these declines has been ongoing for several decades. Since the biggest source of reproductive failure for all birds is nest predation, our work here on the breeding grounds has recently focused on factors believed

to influence the predator community.

Over the past 150 years, encroachment by trees and shrubs along field boundaries and fencelines has widely impacted grasslands in a number of ways: 1) potential nest predator diversity and abundance is often greater along wooded edges; 2) linear strips of woody vegetation fragment grassland fields, leading to negative edge effects of increased predation on grassland bird nests; and 3) many grassland birds avoid nesting near woody vegetation. Our study asked the question, what are the impacts of linear tree rows and their removal on nesting grassland birds and their associated predators?

We measured the impacts of removing rows of trees and shrubs that intersected grasslands on potential nest predators and the three most abundant grassland bird species: Henslow's sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*), Eastern meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*), and bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) at six cool season grass [Conservation Reserve Program](#) fields in Dane and Iowa counties, southwest of Madison, WI. We monitored three control and three treatment sites for one year prior to and three years after tree row removal at the treatment sites. We found that grassland bird density increased (2–4 times for bobolink and Henslow's sparrow) and bird nest densities increased for all three species in the removal areas compared to control areas where tree rows remained.



Dominic Sherony



Steve Maslowski - USFWS



Herbert Lange



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A grassland field bisected by a tree row on the left side of the photo.



DNR photo

The same grassland field one year later, after removal of the tree row.

After removals, Henslow's sparrows nested within 50 meters of the former tree row, an area where they did not occur when tree rows were present. Most dramatically, activity by woodland-associated predators nearly ceased (a nine-fold decrease for raccoon [*Procyon lotor*]), and grassland predators increased (up to 27 times the activity for thirteen-lined ground squirrel [*Ictidomys tridecemlineatus*]) after tree rows were removed. Nest success did not increase, likely reflecting the increase in grassland predators. However, more nests were attempted after tree row removal by all three species (175 attempts versus 116 attempts) and the number of successful nests for bobolinks and Henslow's sparrows increased.

The bottom line? Because of gains in grassland habitat area, increased bird nest density, greater production of young, and the effective removal of woodland-associated predators, tree row removal, where appropriate based on the predator community, can be a beneficial management action for conserving grassland birds and improving fragmented and degraded grassland ecosystems.

Spring Hearing Rules Update

At its May 22nd meeting, the [Natural Resources Board](#) adopted the Wildlife Management Spring Hearing Rule. The agenda item can be seen here: dnr.wi.gov/about/nrb/2013/May/05-13-3B4.pdf

Some points of interest are:

- Use of rifles for deer hunting statewide – in response to public requests, DNR will try to have this proposal in effect for the November nine-day season. The proposal has not been particularly controversial but it still needs to complete the legislative review process before it can be implemented. If you check with the DNR in early September we will be better able to answer if rifles will be allowed statewide this fall. Hunters will still need to check with their local municipality for any local ordinances that restrict the use of some weapons.
- Most of the changes that are part of this rule will not be in effect until 2014 so things like pheasant leg tags at hen-rooster areas will still be required this fall. Look for these changes in the 2014 regulation booklets.
- The proposal to allow overnight placement of tree stands and ground blinds on DNR managed lands was not advanced by the board and is no longer part of the rule package.
- The proposal to consolidate mink and muskrat trapping zones, which would have resulted in an earlier season opener in the south, was tabled by the board. It can still be considered in a separate board order or with other rulemaking, but it is set aside for now. This is a continuation of the age-old challenge of balancing rule simplification with the desire for locally tailored specific regulations.
- The daily pheasant hunting fee at Bong Recreation Area will be \$7.00 for people age 17 or younger.

Contributed by Scott Loomans

Invasive Species Awareness

Please Report Invasive Species Occurrences!

Contributed by Nisa Karimi

Reporting invasive species occurrences is critical to better understanding species distribution patterns across the landscape, predicting species migrations, and providing us the information needed to rapidly respond to and control invasive species before they spread into new areas. For example, Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*), an invasive species sometimes referred to as 'the vine that ate the south' is currently found in Illinois, but is reported to be migrating north.

Depending on your technological preference, there are three easy ways to contribute to the invasive species tracking and reporting effort in the state:

1. **SmartPhone App:** [The Great Lakes Early Detection Network](#), in collaboration with the [Early Detection Distribution and Mapping System](#), has recently developed a smartphone app for the iPhone and Android operating systems. This app utilizes your device's internal GPS capabilities to send location information directly to the network, along with images for verifiers to confirm the species. Data is then added to the network to help track the invasive species across the country.

You can download the free app from this site: <http://apps.bugwood.org/mobile/gledn.html>.

2. **Online Reporting:** Visit the [Great Lakes Early Detection Network](#) website at www.gledn.org. No registration is needed. Simply click the button 'Report An Invasive Species' and provide the latitude and longitude coordinates or use the interactive map to pinpoint an accurate location. Include a photograph and site description.

For early detection species, submit reports via the DNR Invasive Plant Report Form at dnr.wi.gov; keyword: '[report invasives](#)'. This form allows DNR staff to track more detailed information including invaded habitat type descriptions, size of populations, and phenology notes. Please include photographs.

3. **Send an email:** You can also send a report via email to invasive.species@wisconsin.gov. Include a detailed geographical location and a photograph. Any other information regarding the invaded habitat type (e.g., forest, grassland, wetland, etc.) and the size of the population is helpful.

'Early Detection' Invasions

Have You Seen This Species?

Be on the lookout for Himalayan blackberry! An emerging threat in the state of Wisconsin is *Rubus armeniacus*, also known as Himalayan blackberry. An abundant source of blackberries sounds like a pie-makers dream, but this species creates impenetrable thickets of thorns and inhibits native plants' survival and establishment. This new species potentially poses a great threat to Wisconsin's many native species of raspberries and blackberries, and greatly impacts forest health. Currently, this species has only been reported in isolated areas in Vernon County; however, it is highly likely that this species exists elsewhere. To the untrained eye, it may be difficult to distinguish this plant from our many native species. Here are a few ways to help identify Himalayan blackberry versus native species:

- Stems or canes are greenish to reddish and woody. Stems are distinctly angular or have edges, while many native species have rounder stems. Native species also often contain a whitish powdery residue on the stems, while the non-native does not.
- Fruits typically ripen much later in the season than native species.
- Stems die back each year; however, the previous year's thick stalks remain standing throughout the winter, making them easier to spot. Erect stalks reach greater lengths than our native species, and often are double in size than the surrounding native *Rubus* spp.
- In western United States, where this species has resulted in serious economic and ecological consequences, the underside of the leaves are silver in color, with the upper leaves green; however, this has not yet been observed in the Wisconsin populations.

Please report this species! Include photographs and the exact location. Send the report to: invasive.species@wisconsin.gov.



The stems of the native berries have a powdery look.



Himalayan blackberry have angular stems



Leaves of the Himalayan blackberry.

Contributed by Nisa Karimi

Contributed by Mary Kay Salwey

Wisconsin Outdoor Education Expo

Nearly 3,500 students, teachers, and mentors enrolled in the 8th annual [Wisconsin Outdoor Education Expo](#) in 2013. Since 2006, this event has attracted over 32,000 4th and 5th graders, their teachers, parents, and chaperones. At this unique statewide event, students have matchless opportunities to experience a variety of traditional outdoor recreational activities from archery, shooting sports, and firearm safety to fishing, sporting dog training, and trail recreation. The Wildlife Management program in cooperation with the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and WDNR's Forestry Division, provided students with activities about bird, mammal, and butterfly identification, prescribed burning, prairie plant identification, mammal tracking, and more!



DNR photo



DNR photo



DNR photo

Meet Our Wildlife Conservation Educator at Crex Meadows

Through the generous fund raising efforts of the [Friends of Crex](#), WDNR Wildlife Conservation Education Program now has a brand new full-time Wildlife Conservation Educator position at [Crex Meadows Wildlife Area](#) in Grantsburgs. Kristi Pupak, a Wisconsin native, joined our education team after leaving the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery in Jamestown, Kentucky where she gained valuable experience in conservation education. Kristi was born and raised in Germantown, WI and attended [UW-Stevens Point](#) where she received her Bachelor's degree in Resource Management with an emphasis in Environmental Education and Interpretation. Kristi began her new position at the tail end of February and is going gangbusters developing many new exciting programs at Crex Meadows. She also serves schools and libraries located in Burnett, Polk, Barron, Washburn and Douglas counties. She will also be assisting with special statewide education events.



Kristi Pupak

Kristi's interests include a wide range of traditional outdoor skills such as hunting, trapping, fishing, hiking, and horseback riding. She has always wanted to be a teacher, but with her passion for wildlife, the natural world, and involvement in traditional forms of recreation, she views her education position at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area as the best of both worlds.

Programs and Participants

Since January, our team of Wildlife Conservation Educators has been busy presenting programs on wildlife conservation issues, wildlife identification, wildlife management and ecology, and wildlife-based recreation at their local Wildlife Conservation Education Centers as well as to groups off-site. In this report, we focus on programs and participants at Crex Meadows, Horicon Marsh, and Ladysmith Outreach Offices.

Since January, Kristi Pupak and her crew of wildlife conservation education assistants and volunteers hosted both on-site and off-site programs for nearly 2,000 participants. Local wildlife biologists and wildlife technicians at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area also assisted with these programs. Children's programming focused on wildlife habitats, mammal tracking, bird watching, wildlife adaptations, wildlife identification (e.g., skulls and skins, waterfowl, mammals, amphibians, etc), wetland ecosystems, carrying capacity and more. Two new outdoor skills programs are being piloted this summer:

- **Becoming an Outdoor Family:** This program includes experiences in trapping, waterfowl hunting skills, archery, and orienteering.
- **Youth Outdoor Skills Camp:** This camp includes activities such as archery, wildlife tracking, outdoor survival, orienteering, and forestry.

Liz Herzmann and her crew of wildlife conservation education assistants and volunteers at [Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area](#) conducted both on-site and off-site programs, including school group programs, science lecture series, public interpretive programs, and four special events for nearly 6,000 people. Assistance with these events was also provided by the visitor service specialist, local wildlife biologists and technicians. Some of the more popular programs and special events included Paddling Southern

Wisconsin Rivers, Fabulous Frogs and Toads, Night Sounds on the Marsh, Candlelight Snowshoe Hike, Nest Box Seminar, Horicon Marsh Bird Festival, Earth Day and Paddle Horicon Marsh. This team also coordinated staffing at the [Wisconsin Outdoor Education Expo's](#) bird identification teaching station reaching nearly 3,500 4th and 5th grade students, their teachers, and chaperones.

Pam Resech and her crew of wildlife conservation education assistants, volunteers and local wildlife management staff at [Mead Wildlife Area](#) provided programs for nearly 3,500 students, teachers, and mentors since January. Special events included an Earth Day Trail and Grounds Clean Up Day at Mead, their annual Pancake Breakfast fund raiser for the education program, and a new event, 'Winged Wonders' that focused on birds, bats, butterflies, and the role some of these animals play in pollinating our native wildflowers and trees. The local community also participated in the annual Aldo Leopold Weekend event with readings from [A Sand County Almanac](#), a tour of the ruffed grouse habitat management area, and a viewing of the '[Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time.](#)'

Chris Cold, wildlife technician working out of the Ladysmith WDNR office, spends about half of his time offering wildlife conservation education outreach programs on such topics as wildlife ecology, habitat management, ethics of trapping, mammals of Wisconsin, birds of Wisconsin including programs on owls and raptors of the Great Lakes region, reptiles and amphibians of Wisconsin, wild turkey biology and management, nocturnal animals and night sounds, wildlife adaptations and wildlife 'unhuggables'. Since January, Chris has presented his classroom, school auditorium, Outdoor Skills Days, and special event programs to 4,250 people, including students, faculty, staff, and the general public.



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Interpretive Exhibits: Horicon Marsh Explorium

The Horicon Marsh Interpretive Planning Team, co-chaired by Mary Kay Salwey and Bret Owsley, with members Brenda Kelly and Paul Samerdyke (wildlife biologists), Liz Herzmann (educator), Jen Wirth (visitor services specialist), and Merlin Pieper (friends group board member) completed a rigorous and highly competitive hiring process to procure a highly talented interpretive exhibit designing and building firm. Taylor Studios of Rantoul, Illinois successful won the Request for Proposals process. The Interpretive Planning Team eagerly looks forward to moving the ideas outlined in the Exhibit Concept Plan toward the final exhibit fabrication and installation stages, with a debut tentatively scheduled for late fall 2014. You're going to love what you see! Mark your calendars!

DNR photo



Chris Cold giving a presentation on raptors of Wisconsin.



DNR photo

Horicon Marsh Education Center

NASP®: National Archery in the Schools Program

During the Wildlife Conservation Education Strategic Planning process, a suggestion was made that all of the shooting sports programs emphasizing technical shooting skills and shooting safety such as the [Learn to Hunt](#), [Hunter Education](#), [Bowhunter Education](#), [NASP](#), and Explore

Bowhunting should be housed in the same bureau for streamlining coordination efforts. Since the Bureau of Law Enforcement historically has offered these types of shooting safety programs, and since most other states coordinate NASP through their Law Enforcement bureaus, it made logical sense to make the same strategic shift at WDNR as well. Therefore, National Archery in the Schools, Explore Bowhunting, and all other archery shooting skills programs will now officially reside in the Bureau of Law Enforcement. Dan Schroeder, current coordinator of NASP and archery skills education programs, maintains his same office in Oshkosh and the same email and phone numbers as when he was housed in the Bureau of Wildlife Management. For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov; keyword: '[NASP](#)'.

Improving Website Navigation for Teachers

If you were having a tough time navigating the WDNR website to find exciting field trip opportunities that our Wildlife Conservation Education Centers offer, we're one step closer to solving that navigation quagmire. The keyword '[Field Trips](#)' has been added to aid teachers, scout leaders, and other educators when they are trying to navigate to our wonderful [state wildlife areas](#). Our wildlife conservation educators will be working as a team to standardize each education center's homepage and we will create a special landing page that briefly describes all the public and private education centers located on our state wildlife areas, which include [Crex Meadows](#), [Horicon Marsh](#), [Mead](#), [Sandhill](#), [Navarino](#), [Collins Marsh](#), and [Brillion](#).

DNR photo



Dan Schroeder

FEATURED DISTRICT: WEST CENTRAL

Contributed by Kris Belling

From the coulees to the prairies, from the mighty Mississippi to the Wisconsin River, the West Central District (WCD) wildlife biologists and technicians have been busy – providing access and habitat on wildlife areas, monitoring wildlife populations and educating our youth – often in partnership with you – the people and organizations that are interested in preserving wildlife and the places that they live.

State Wildlife Area Habitat

Providing habitat on state wildlife areas is among the key duties of the WM staff. These properties range in size from the five acre Simon Prairie in St. Croix Co. (part of the Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area featured below) to the 90,000 acre [Sandhill/Meadow Valley/Wood County Wildlife Area](#) complex in central Wisconsin.



Scott Krultz

Wilson Flowage Renovation Jackson County

Properties in the WCD have a significant amount of wetland infrastructure (i.e., dikes and water control structures), requiring continual monitoring and maintenance. In 2012, over 6,000 feet of dikes were rebuilt or improved, including rebuilding the 1,800 foot [Wilson Flowage](#) dike at the [Dike 17 Wildlife Area](#) in Jackson County, 2,000 feet of rip-rap and renovations at Sandhill and 2,500 feet at the Mead Wildlife Area, located in Marathon, Portage, and Wood counties. In addition, over 75 miles of dike were mowed and 130+ water control structures were inspected and monitored. This work is necessary to maintain the numerous wetland impoundments in a functional condition, which then allows the property managers to provide high quality wetland habitat.

Thousands of acres of grasslands were maintained through burning and other means, including cooperative grazing agreements on [Buena Vista Wildlife Area](#), Portage Co., to benefit prairie chicken habitat. Nearby, at the [Paul J. Olson Wildlife Area](#), Wood Co., meetings with interested neighbors resulted in development of a rotational grazing pilot project on 80 acres which will begin in the spring of 2014. Prairie restorations are ongoing in many areas and the Star Prairie Seed Farm, St. Croix Co., a cooperative effort with the [St. Croix Wetland Management District](#) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, continues production of local ecotype prairie seed that is used not only for local restorations, but across the state. Critical oak and pine barrens habitat was maintained through burning, mowing, and bison grazing. At [Quincy Bluff and Wetlands State Natural Area](#), Adams Co., a 138 acre biomass harvest was successfully conducted for barrens restoration. Due to the 2012 drought, 46 haying agreements for 1,300 acres were issued to local farmers; these agreements helped farmers through the drought while maintaining our grasslands at the same time.



Wayne Hall Jr.

Over the last few years, there has been an increased emphasis on updating information on

Maintaining barrens habitat on the Sandhill Wildlife Area – Wood County.



Jon Robaidek

Maintaining grassland habitat through prescribed burning

forested areas on state lands and on conducting timber sales that are beneficial to wildlife and ecologically appropriate for the area. As a result, thousands of acres of timber harvest have been planned or are underway across the region. In many cases, like at the Sandhill Work unit, this harvest will promote regeneration of ‘young forest’ species like aspen, which provides excellent habitat for species such as ruffed grouse, golden-winged warblers and white-tailed deer. The [Sandhill Work Unit Master Plan](#), completed in December 2011, calls for nearly 10,000 acres of Grouse Management Areas, where rotations of active forest management will maintain these young forests. Another example of ‘young forest management’ is alder mowing, which was done on 28 acres in Marathon Co. to improve habitat for woodcock and other



DNR photo

Alder regenerations make great woodcock habitat!

young forest wildlife species. Timber harvests at the [Tiffany Wildlife Area](#), Buffalo Co., and [Battle Bluff State Natural Area](#), Vernon Co., were conducted to assist in restoring both upland and floodplain savanna habitat. In the La Crosse area, wildlife and fisheries crews planted hardwood trees and shrubs on DNR Fisheries and State Natural Areas lands; these plantings should benefit wild turkeys

Habitat Highlight

Restoration of the Meadow Valley Flowage Complex

The [Meadow Valley Wildlife Area](#), a 58,000 acre wildlife area directly adjacent to [Necedah National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Juneau Co., includes a 3,000-acre emergent wetland complex known as Meadow Valley Flowage. The flowage consists of eight individually managed pools with water control capacities. The condition of Meadow Valley Flowage dikes has been in decline for decades, and proper habitat management was no longer possible due to aging and inadequate water management infrastructure.

The DNR and [Ducks Unlimited](#) (DU) cooperatively initiated the Meadow Valley Flowage Wetland Enhancement project in 2007 to improve waterfowl and wildlife habitat. Wisconsin has lost more than 50% of its wetlands, making it extremely important to maintain the productivity of remaining wetland habitat. This project will enhance and restore management of a key wetland complex so that the many benefits associated with this habitat will be sustained well into the future.

Since 2007, nine miles of dikes have been renovated within the Meadow Valley Flowage. This work has completely renovated the dikes on five of the eight primary pools within the complex, resulting in 1,600 acres of wetland habitat enhancement.

In June of 2011, the Meadow Valley Flowage was honored to be the site of the 100,000th acre conserved by Ducks Unlimited in Wisconsin.

Dike renovations are ongoing and funding has been secured to continue this work on the Northwest Refuge Pool during 2013-14.



DNR photo

Meadow Valley Flowage - Juneau Co.

and interior songbirds in the future.

Unfortunately, invasive species continue to plague our wildlife areas and keep staff in an ongoing battle to keep them under control.

FIVE QUESTIONS

◇◇◇◇◇◇ With ◇◇◇◇◇◇

Jon Robaidek, Wildlife Biologist for Adams and Juneau Counties

1. What is your favorite part of your position?

I really enjoy the development and enhancement of habitats. Starting a prairie from a fallow field, re-creating an oak barrens where the lack of fire has allowed it to get reforested, and the manipulation of waterlevels in a flowage to encourage vegetation for migrants and other resident wildlife are the tasks I like most about my position.



2. What species are your favorite with which to work, and why?

I enjoy working with those critters that are rare or unique. I have been fortunate to have been in central Wisconsin where many rare and unique animals are found and have had the opportunity to educate others about them, help in their protection and worked on the development of special habitat needs. Some of what I have worked with includes Kirtland's Warbler, Gray Wolf, Whooping Cranes, Trumpeter Swans, and Karner Blue Butterflies.

3. How did your past lead you to your current position?

I grew up on a family dairy farm in northeast Wisconsin. Working with the animals, the land, and all the wildlife that comes with it started me in this direction. My education at UW-Green Bay and summer jobs with the Forest Service and the Wisconsin Conservation Corps gave me some great additional experiences. I then took on limited term and volunteer positions working for the Shawano, Appleton, and Green Bay DNR offices before I started working permanently for the DNR first at Sandhill Wildlife Area and then in Wisconsin Rapids. Fifteen years at those locations was followed by me taking on my current role in Adams and Juneau County.

4. What would the public find most surprising about your position?

Directly working with wildlife in the field can be some of the most satisfying duties I have, but are a very small part of my job. It is working with people and both their positive and negative interactions with wildlife that can take up a lot of my time and keep me in the office and not in the field. This sometimes requires permit writing, informational mailing, property visits, and an explanation of rules and regulations. One important segment of Wildlife Management is 'people and wildlife management'.

5. Can you tell us about a 'hidden gem' that is located on one of the properties that you manage?

I am property manager for [Quincy Bluff and Wetlands State Natural Area](#). The property itself is a gem in that it has a little bit of everything. You can find prairies, forests, rock outcrops, oak barrens, and a whole myriad of wetlands. I am particularly fond of Lone Rock which is a rock outcrop in the center of the property which can provide one with a view for miles overlooking the various habitats.

Public Access For Wildlife Based Recreation

Another important component of managing public lands is providing access for hunters and other property users, as well as access needed by department staff to conduct habitat management. In 2012, the WCD received over \$200,000 of Conservation Infrastructure funding to maintain and improve public access to the properties we manage. Five parking lots were constructed and 15 were upgraded at the [Mead Wildlife Area](#), and an important access road into the [Van Loon Wildlife Area](#), LaCrosse Co. was maintained. This road will also provide access to work on a second road where the seven historic [McGilvary Road Bridges](#) are located. Both road projects will maintain public access while also reducing erosion and enhancing the floodplain forest and savanna on the property. Access and parking were also improved on [Quincy Bluff](#) and [Lower Chippewa River](#) state natural areas, and property signs were added at a number of locations with more signs to come. On the Sandhill Work Unit alone, three miles of road were improved and an additional 20 miles were graded; over 70 miles of trails were mowed, and 11 primitive campsites, including eight restrooms were maintained. Across the region, numerous parking lots and gates were maintained and upgraded, partition fences were maintained and miles of property boundaries were posted. In addition, many permits for the use of 'Power Driven Mobility Devices' (aka motorized vehicles) were issued to make our public lands accessible to the disabled.

Finally, mention must be made of the [Voluntary Public Access](#) (VPA) program. Wisconsin was successful in receiving federal funding to compensate private property owners who were willing to open up their land for hunting. There were four focus areas around the state, three of which were partially located in the West Central District. To give an idea of the impact of this program, in the nine-county West-Central Focus Area alone, 90 landowners enrolled a total of over 17,000 acres, resulting in increased hunting opportunities and many happy hunters!

FEATURED PROPERTY WESTERN PRAIRIE HABITAT RESTORATION AREA

A jewel along our western border is the [Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area](#). When you think of prairies, do you think of the Great Plains states? Rightly so, but prior to settlement, Wisconsin was also home to prairies, including a large block centered in St. Croix Co. While we may think of prairies as simply large areas of grass, they are a diverse and beautiful community that supports a variety of plants, insects, and wildlife that have intricate interactions with each other. Unfortunately, very little of the original prairie remains. Much of the original prairie was tilled and some was pastured; trees were planted and houses built. But some high quality remnants of the native prairie do still exist and these areas, along with the wide-open landscapes dotted with 'prairie pothole' wetlands, set the stage for restoration of the prairie heritage of this area.

The DNR and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) (USFWS) began preserving grasslands and wetlands in this area in the 1960's, and in 1999, the Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area (WPHRA) was established to continue this effort. The goal of the WPHRA is protecting and restoring 20,000 acres of grassland and wetland habitat in western St. Croix and southwestern Polk counties. This includes buying land and

DNR photo



Needlegrass, a native grass species.

DNR photo



A restored prairie

restoring it to prairie as well as working with private landowners to provide habitat on their land. We are accomplishing this through partnerships with USFWS, [Pheasants Forever](#), [Kinnickinnic River Land Trust](#), private landowners, and many others. To date, 8,000 acres of land within the WPHRA are under state or federal ownership. These lands provide the public opportunities for hunting and wildlife observation, as well as an opportunity to participate in restoration of an important ecosystem right in our backyards!



DNR photo

Blue-winged Teal hen on a nest.

When compared to other grassland areas around the state, the WPHRA has the highest densities of Henslow's sparrows, grasshopper sparrows, and pheasants. The wetland component also makes it great producer of mallards, blue-winged teal, and woodducks.

A unique, recent effort was the forging of a local 'Pure Prairie League' group of partners to rescue our state-endangered [Dotted Blazing Star](#) plants from the footprint of the new bridge spanning the St. Croix Scenic Riverway. This diverse and botanically stimulating partnership included [The Prairie Enthusiasts](#), staff from DNR bureaus of [Forestry](#) and [Natural Heritage Conservation](#), project engineers and consultants with Minnesota and Wisconsin DOT, students at UW-River Falls and UW-Eau Claire, New Richmond Middle School, Baldwin High School, and Hudson and Houghton elementary schools. The 'rescue' included removing and relocating dotted blazing star plants to several locations, including the DNR's Hayward Nursery, where it will be maintained and seed will be collected for use in future prairie restorations. In addition, seed was collected and distributed to local schools. The students grew transplant plugs over the winter in school greenhouses with guidance from DNR prairie nursery manager Ryan Brathal and the teachers. These plugs were relocated to strategic permanent prairie restorations in St. Croix County in May 2013. The students and teachers were excited to be a part of history and help save this plant native to the county. The event also added restoration plant ecology to the local school curricula's over the past year. Our hope is that through cooperative efforts such as this, we can increase not only the presence of this endangered species, but of Wisconsin's prairies in general on the landscape.



DNR photo

Prairie Smoke - a native wildflower.

Another exciting development is the hiring of Missy Sparrow as the WPHRA biologist and coordinator for the WPHRA. This is the first time we have been able to dedicate a position to this important landscape effort, and with it, we hope to grow our partnerships and find new ways to restore and maintain native prairies and wetlands within the WPHRA.

For more information on the Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area, contact [Missy Sparrow](#) at 715-684-2914 ext. 112. For more information on the WPHRA, visit dnr.wi.gov; keyword: '[WPHRA](#)'.



Harry Halvorsen

Missy Sparrow, WPHRA Biologist, assisting with dotted blazing star rescue.

Monitoring Wildlife Populations

Of course, the monitoring of wildlife populations is an important part of our work as well, and the number of efforts staff have been involved in is huge. Routine/annual [population surveys](#) conducted include grouse, woodcock, pheasant, breeding ducks, banding ducks and geese, winter waterfowl, deer/bear registration, deer, furbearers, nightjars, game bird broods, whooping cranes, black terns, turtles, and frogs and toads. Staff address [wildlife damage](#) and nuisance concerns as well. The number of deer shooting permits issued has gone up in recent years, and educational efforts on co-existing with black bears continue as their population expands south and they get into some sticky situations.

Despite a winter that did not want to go away, the annual spring [Greater Prairie Chicken](#) surveys were conducted by DNR staff and volunteers. Following the translocation of prairie chickens hens from Minnesota into central Wisconsin during the years 2006-2009, the genetic variation of Wisconsin's prairie chickens has increased and the overall population appears stable; this is good news! However, the geographic area where prairie chickens exist continues to get smaller, and that's not good. The Prairie Chicken Management Plan will be updated beginning this summer and will identify future strategies to maintain this iconic bird that is such a unique part of our wildlife heritage.

New in 2012 was the wolf season, during which staff assisted with registration and carcass collection. Intensive monitoring of wolves in the central forest by DNR staff along with partner agencies and volunteers will continue.

Monitoring wildlife populations also includes monitoring the diseases that affect them. In 2012, CWD was detected for the first time in wild deer in Adams, Juneau, and Portage Counties – a very discouraging discovery. Public meetings were held in each of these three locations to hear from local citizens, and additional CWD surveillance in these areas is ongoing through testing of deer harvested under the agricultural damage program and testing of sick deer. During the upcoming fall deer hunting seasons, our goal is to collect an additional 500 samples from deer harvested within 10 miles of each of the locations where CWD deer were found. Direction for our long-term response to the disease will be coming from the [Deer Trustee Report's Herd Health/Chronic Wasting Disease](#) Action Team, and we'll continue to discuss options with the public as well.

CWD testing will also be conducted this fall on hunter-harvested deer from public lands in eastern Jackson County in preparation for the translocation of elk into this area. This is dependent upon obtaining all of the necessary approvals.

Engaging The Public

If there is anyone who thinks a career in Wildlife Management means being off in the woods by yourself every day, they haven't met our WM staff. Of course, time spent in the field is important, but time spent with the public is critical as well. We work with the public on a daily basis, answering questions and providing assistance with wildlife issues, but the public engagement that we are involved in goes well beyond that. Here's just a partial list of what staff have reported:

- Staff participate in 7-8 [Deer Forums](#) throughout the district each year.
- Helped teach conservation classes at the local elementary and high schools.
- Participated in career days.
- Gave wildlife population ecology presentations to three high school classes.
- Participated in UW-Extension's Learn About Your Land series; presented Learn About Your Land



DNR photo

An unusual leucistic (white) male prairie chicken – seen for the 2nd year on Buena Vista Wildlife Area

Wildlife Management talks

- Assisted at DNR booth at the [Wisconsin Valley Fair](#), the Wisconsin Deer Classic, county fairs and the State Fair.
- Presented wildlife management talks to numerous hunter safety classes.
- Co-coordinated several [Learn to Hunt](#) Workshops.
- Assisted with Buckhorn Novice Gun Deer Hunt training which involved 49 students and 49 mentors.
- Submit weekly Outdoor Reports.
- Taught Wildlife Management session at [Managed Forest Law](#) Recertification Training for state and private foresters.
- Three volunteer work days were held with the [Lower Chippewa River Alliance](#) to assist in invasive species removal in [Tiffany Wildlife Area](#).
- Educational talk for [United Special Sportsman Alliance](#) for 100 special need children and adults.
- Held two Tiffany Wildlife Area [train tours](#) for 100 people.
- Developed Liver Fluke Parasite Extraction Lab for 20 high school students from Cochrane.
- Judged a Wildlife Conservation Speaking Contest.



DNR photo

**A satisfied urban deer hunter –
La Crosse**

La Crosse staff have worked with local governments for several years to establish hunting opportunities to help reduce deer populations in and around the metropolitan areas. The City of Onalaska urban deer program, which has been ongoing for 6 years, utilizing bow hunters has been well accepted in the community as a tool for managing the urban deer population and providing an outdoor recreational opportunity, and opportunities for disabled hunters have been provided as well.

Staff have led at least five [Natural Resources Foundation](#) tours already in 2013, with more planned. These tours not only offer an opportunity for the public to learn about the natural resource gems located here in western and central Wisconsin, but some funds raised from tours go into endowments which will provide funding for wildlife and habitat conservation in the future. An endowment specific to the [Lower Chippewa River State Natural Area](#), in Dunn, Pepin, Buffalo, and Eau Claire counties, has reached nearly \$30,000 in just a few years thanks to a great network of supporters, and

will begin providing funding for habitat management this year!

Staff also regularly work with partners, for example, constructing and updating informational kiosks on properties, providing prairie chicken viewing opportunities, providing habitat educational events for landowners, and much more.

The education centers at Mead and Sandhill are keeping busy as well. The [Stanton W. Mead Education and Visitor](#)



DNR Photo

**Lower Chippewa River State Natural
Area**

DNR photo



Wisconsin Rapids Area staff at the renovated Buena Vista Wildlife Area informational kiosk. This project was completed with assistance from numerous partners, and includes an audio box that will provide grassland bird calls and other information.

DNR photo



Did you know that young porcupines are called 'porcupettes'?

DNR photo



Ripon High School students assist a UW-Madison graduate student radio-collaring a porcupine.

Center reaches thousands of visitors annually, hosting school groups, family events, meetings, retreats, and casual visitors. At *Sandhill*, the dormitory facility allows them to fill a unique educational niche; they host fewer participants but for longer, often multi-day, in-depth experiences. One of the unique opportunities available at Sandhill is the High School Independent Study program, which allows motivated high school juniors and seniors to be engaged in a porcupine ecology study. During the winter of 2012-13, 17 students from eight schools spent 25 days each at Sandhill from November – March, tracking, capturing, collaring, and marking porcupines. Students captured and marked 13 new (unmarked) porcupines, including a yearling, two juveniles, and one newborn. At the end of the season, most students participated in a data-crunching day, and some returned later to volunteer their time tracking radioed animals (both porcupines and turtles) using telemetry equipment. What a valuable experience for the students!

CONGRATULATIONS go to our 'Dave and Dave' team in Viroqua! Dave Matheys, Wildlife Biologist, and Dave Wyman, Wildlife Technician (now retired after 30 years with the department), were named Wildlife Biologist and Wildlife Technician of the Year in 2012. Both well-deserved!

Staffing Changes

Since our last report, the WCD has said good-bye to several biologists and technicians who have moved on to retirement or other careers – we thank them for their years of service and wish them the best! While we were able to fill a few of those vacancies (we welcome Brenda Kelly as the Mississippi River Biologist and congratulate Brian Peters and Kris Johansen on their promotion to supervisors), our vacancy rate has been around 30%. I would like to publically acknowledge and thank the MANY staff who stepped up during this time to keep things running. Having staff go above and beyond is not unique to the WCD but is a common characteristic of WM staff around the state, and during this time of vacancies, some tough decisions needed to be made on how to best deploy the staff we have. As a result of this process, two vacant WCD positions were re-allocated to other districts and one was moved within the district. At this time, there are four Wildlife Biologist and four Wildlife Technician vacancies in the WCD. The hiring process has begun for the Wildlife Biologists and we're looking forward to

welcoming them aboard in late summer or early fall. Hiring of Wildlife Technicians will follow. We know there are a lot of high quality candidates out there, and we're excited to be able to offer them a chance to join our team.

FEATURED PROPERTY: MISSISSIPPI RIVER

On Wisconsin's west coast lies one of our states greatest, and likely, most complex natural resources: the Mississippi River. From the confluence of the St. Croix to the Illinois border, the 230 miles of river relies on a special and unique partnership between federal, state, and non-government agencies working together for the benefit of wildlife, fish and our local communities.

Over the many decades since construction of the lock and dam system on the river, fish and wildlife habitat has been degraded. For example, consistent higher water levels reduced the amount of emergent wetland vegetation and increased wave action eroded islands and shorelines, further reducing habitat and water quality. With our many partners, we're working to change that.



DNR photo
Scenic view of the Mississippi River



DNR photo
A new island being born.

WDNR is a member of the Water Level Management Task Force for the Upper Mississippi River along with [Minnesota DNR](#), [Iowa DNR](#), [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#), and [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#). Water level management is a common tool that wildlife staff use: the planned lowering and raising of water levels to enhance wetland vegetation and increase the variety of wetland habitat to meet different species' need. When put in practice on a complex river system where industrial navigation and recreation need to balance with habitat management, the planning phase requires a collaborative effort among many stakeholders prior to implementation. Over the last eight years, drawdowns

implemented in Pools [6](#), [8](#), and [9](#) have improved habitat, and planning is underway for water level management in Pool [3](#).

Construction of islands has proven successful in providing areas protected from the waves that can sustain vegetation, and therefore support river fish and wildlife as well. As with water level management, island projects in the context of the Big River are complex and challenging. An example of the issues that have to be overcome include getting fill material and heavy equipment out into the river. Several projects have been completed and great results have been documented.



DNR photos
Vegetative response to the island restoration.

Currently, construction is underway for Phase II of the [Capoli Habitat and Rehabilitation Enhancement Project \(HREP\)](#), Pool 9. Phase I was constructed in 2012 with seven islands being completed. This final phase, which is scheduled to be completed this year, will add an additional four islands for a

total estimated project cost of \$4 million. Partners meet weekly with the contractor to monitor project progression and troubleshoot any issues if they arise.

Once constructed, wildlife staff monitor the islands to better understand nesting ecology, specifically factors affecting brood production and colonization of newly constructed islands by nesting waterfowl.

In addition to these large habitat projects, the river team conducts a number of wildlife surveys with the goal of acquiring a long-term data set to better understand annual variations in furbearer populations.

These efforts include an annual muskrat survey that has been run in Pools 4 -11 since the winter of 1988-1989. Several waterfowl surveys are conducted, including the mid-winter waterfowl survey in early January and weekly flight counts in the fall. Waterfowl disease events, such as die-offs due to parasitic trematodes, are also monitored.

Invasive species unfortunately have their own stronghold on the Mississippi River. Three new exotic invasives that were found in 2011 are [water lettuce](#) (*Pistia stratiotes*), [water hyacinth](#) (*Eichornia crassipes*), and [parrot feather](#) (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*). We'll continue to monitor and use all available tools, such as hand pulling and disposal or use of herbicide, to rid this invasive from our landscape.

What's next? In the upcoming months we'll be working towards meeting our quota of banding Canada geese, mallards, and wood ducks. Have an interest in holding a goose? How about visiting a newly established island on the Mississippi River? For those interested in learning more about wildlife management on the Mississippi River, or maybe seeing some of these projects up close, please contact [Brenda Kelly](#), our Mississippi River Wildlife Biologist at 608-785-9994.



DNR photo

A mallard nest



DNR photo

Goose banding on the Mississippi River



Wildlife Management

Division of Land  Wisconsin DNR