

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

REFUGE UPDATE

Presented at the Lake Onalaska Protection and Rehabilitation District Annual Meeting

August 31, 2022

Biology/Management projects

- **Vacant Wildlife Biologist Position:** Casey Bryant former La Crosse District Wildlife Biologist, left the Upper Mississippi River NWR in November 2021, but didn't go far. She took the position of Refuge Manager at Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge. Currently budgets are tight and we are hopeful to backfill this critical position in the near future.
- **Flowering Rush Control Efforts:** Flowering Rush is an aquatic-invasive plant that when emergent looks like native rushes, and when submersed appears like native wild celery. It is cryptic unless flowering during low-water summers. It reproduces through seeds, root bulbils (little root pods that float), and broken root systems. It is highly mobile and readily reroots/resprouts when disturbed by boats, dredging, wildlife, drawdowns and floods. It was discovered in Pool 8 in mid-June 2020, and by mid-July USFWS, WI/MN DNRs, and LTRM staff was mapping it in all pools of the UMR. In the La Crosse District there are 6-8 known small patches of flowering rush plants in Pool 7, including one location in Lake Onalaska. In Pool 8 there are multiple large infestations. The Refuge received a grant to hire a contractor and facilitate herbicide applications. Efforts this late summer have concentrated on the infestations around Dresbach Island in Pool 7 and Shady Maple area in Pool 8.



- **Prairie:** In 2022 refuge staff conducted a 90 acre prescribed burn on the Brice Prairie Tract adjacent to the Visitor Center. This burn was very successful in setting back woody plant invasions into the prairie and reinvigorating grasses and forbs. We followed this

action by mowing after the fire to further stress invasive woody plants, then treated the resprouts with herbicide. The entire Brice Prairie Tract was treated for invasive trees and other invasive plants. Biological Technicians continued the efforts to survey prairie sites in the La Crosse District this year to evaluate their status in the restoration process.



- **Forest Inventory:** in 2022, Biotechs and Foresters continued to monitor forest conditions on the refuge by conducting surveys on Forest Inventory plots on the refuge.



- **Black Tern Surveys:** Staff completed monitoring surveys for Black Terns nesting on the Refuge. Survey work was completed in Blue/Target and Lawrence Lakes in Pool 8. Nesting for these birds seemed to be a couple weeks later than usual this year.



- **Slow No Wake Posting and other sign maintenance** – It's that time of year to get out and make sure refuge signs are visible and the "slow no wake"/"voluntary avoidance

areas” and “Closed to Migratory Bird Hunting areas” are marked before the start of the waterfowl season.



- **Voluntary Waterfowl Avoidance Areas-** Staff will be deploying the buoys on Lake Onalaska for the Voluntary Waterfowl Avoidance Area. Waterfowl need a place to rest and refuge to feed and gain necessary resources for migration. Please help us by avoiding this area from October 15 to the end of state duck hunting season.

Wildlife update!

- **Waterfowl Counts** –Fall migration waterfowl counts will be conducted in the Pool 8 Goose Island Closed Area this year.
- **Waterfowl Disturbance Monitoring on Lake Onalaska Voluntary Waterfowl Avoidance Area:** USGS will be continuing a study to monitor disturbance to resting/feeding waterfowl using the Lake Onalaska Voluntary Waterfowl Avoidance Area. We ask the public to please avoid the area marked with the buoys from October 15th to the end of the state duck season.
- **Bat Surveys:** In 2022 bat detectors were deployed on the District. Data collected supports a better understanding of bat use of refuge habitats. Bats in the Midwest have been experiencing population declines due factors like the fungus “white nosed syndrome”. Understanding bat use of the refuge will help managers better plan projects that support bat use including forest management practices.



Visitor Services projects

World Migratory Bird Day: We had a beautiful day for World Migratory Bird Day events! The Friends of Trempealeau hosted a presentation at Elmaro Vineyard on Friday May 12th and had a great turnout. Visitors enjoyed guided bird walks, a wildflower walk, and children's crafts on Saturday at the Refuge. About 50 people attended Saturday's activities.

- **Environmental Education** – 250 students visited in May from Little Lamb Pre-school, Summit Environmental School and Logan Middle School for Ranger-led programming. Cashton Elementary School 4th graders will be coming for self-guided programming. Northern Hills Elementary planned a visit but had to cancel due to weather. Hallie and Zach led programming in the McGregor District for "Mississippi River Adventure Days" in Lansing, IA – fifth graders from schools around the area attend.
 - Overall rangers have provided EE to nearly 500 students this year



- **Friends of the Refuge – Mississippi River Pools 7 & 8** – FOR78 attended the Driftless Outdoor Show on May 12th and 13th to share information about the refuge and water trails!
 - – FOR78 attended the Earth Fair at Myrick Park on April 24th.
- **Interp/Outreach/Special Events** –
 - Hallie and Sabrina have been working with partners to continue brainstorming for the refuge's 100th Year Celebration coming up in June 2024.
 - 27 people attended bird walks at the Shady Maple Interpretive Trail at Goose Island County Park! Even in the heat, we saw more than 20 species of birds!
 - Holmen Library will be hosted a wildlife-themed reading display using materials from the refuge – furs, skulls, etc. during June, July, and August.
 - FOR78 and refuge staff attended Youth Outdoor Fest, Sat. July 9th at Pettibone Park from 10am – 2pm- made over 300 contacts.
 - Provided furs and skulls program at the Houston County Library to 50 people
- **Partnerships** –
 - working with partners on a grant application with the National Scenic Byways Commission to highlight/improve bank fishing opportunities along the river. The Fred Funk Landing and Long Lake Landing have been chosen for potential sites for improvements in our District.

- Hallie has been working with the Outdoor Recreation, Interpretation and Environmental Education (OREE) technical working group of the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Committee to rebuild their website.
- Working with DU to get new plaque and cattail structure at Upper Halfway Creek to replace the old sign that was falling apart- hope to install this spring
- **Voluntary Waterfowl Avoidance Areas Outreach project** – Katie and Hallie have worked with External Affairs specialist, Melissa Clark to fine tune outreach materials for a variety of audiences about the Voluntary Avoidance Areas to test out this coming Fall 2022.
- **Website** We transitioned to a new website platform and are busy trying to get everything back up to speed, all new pool maps will be posted by end of September
 - **Story map** – Intern, Zach Robinson has been working on an accessible story map to feature places visitors can get out to explore around the La Crosse District and on the Refuge canoe trails. We hope to be able to share his work on our new website.
- **Visitor Center Hours-** Summer open Wed- Saturday 9am-3pm and Fall will be same.
- **Volunteers Needed:** Visitor Center Volunteers, staffing the front desk, welcoming visitors, sharing info. **Seed collection:** Volunteers needed to find and collect tree seeds for nursery stock and restoration projects on the refuge. Contact Katie Julian: 608-779-2391 or Katherine_julian@fws.gov.



Seeking Volunteers!

Come join our team!

Visitor Center Volunteers



We are looking for outgoing folks to help staff our front desk by..

- welcoming visitors of all ages and backgrounds
- directing calls to refuge staff
- sharing info about activities for children and adults
- helping orient visitors
- learning more about the National Wildlife Refuge System!

- **Weekly or 2x month shifts open:** Friday morning, 9am -noon; Saturdays 9am-noon or noon-3pm
- **Substitutes needed:** Wed - Saturday, morning or afternoon

Acorn Collecting Volunteers

Help restore the floodplain forest! Join our Refuge forestry team in growing flood-resilient oak trees!

- Work with our Forest Ecologist to choose a site to monitor an oak tree (or multiple trees) watching for when acorns will fall
- collect the acorns and return them to refuge staff
- these seeds will be used to grow hearty trees for future restoration projects!

Time commitment: We are still developing this activity but will be looking for help late summer/early fall!

Interested? Contact our Volunteer Coordinator at 608-779-2391 and/or ask for an application at the front desk.

