

**WISCONSIN
STATE REPORT
MAY 31, 2009**

Matt Frank, Secretary
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 7921
101 South Webster Street
Madison, WI 53707

SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

▪ **WILD ROSE FISH HATCHERY**

The renovation of the coldwater production facility (Great Lakes trout and salmon) at our Wild Rose Fish Hatchery was completed and a grand opening was held in August, 2008. Work is currently underway for construction of a new cool water facility for northern pike, musky, walleye and sturgeon at Wild Rose. Completion is expected next year. The entire project is expected to cost approximately \$34.5 M. The Wild Rose Hatchery is critical to Wisconsin's \$2.3 billion sport fishery because it produces 27% of the trout and salmon, 64% of the northern pike, 100% of the lake sturgeon, and 100% of the spotted musky that are stocked statewide.

▪ **HORICON MARSH EDUCATION CENTER**

The new Horicon Marsh International Education Center is now open to the public and serves as a destination and a gateway for visitors to Horicon Marsh, as well as providing year-round educational opportunities. More than 500,000 people visit the marsh each year to observe wildlife in a natural setting, creating a huge demand for interpretive services. Since 1984, the Horicon Marsh education program has conducted more than 4,000 programs for over 225,000 people.

The 32,000-acre Horicon Marsh includes an 11,000 acre State Wildlife Area, with the remaining land designated a National Wildlife Refuge. The marsh received the prestigious title of "A Wetland of International Importance" in 1991, hence the current name of Horicon Marsh International Education Center. The marsh, also designated a Unit of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve, is recognized as a Globally Important Bird Area.



Facing across the marsh, this view showed how the building was built into the landscape and opens up to a great view of the marsh.
WDNR Photo

▪ **WISCONSIN BIRDING AND NATURE TRAIL**

The Endangered Resources Program announced the completion of the Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail, with the release of the fifth and final trail guide. The "Southern Savanna Birding and Nature Trail" guide takes the traveler through thirteen counties in the south central part of the state and includes 71 waypoints. Featuring state



parks, state wildlife areas, private sanctuaries, land trust properties, a natural history museum and state natural areas, this highway-based trail has something for everyone. During the past five years of work on the guides, nature lovers from throughout the state sent nominations for their favorite places to see native species in native habitats. The first four "Birding and Nature Trail" guides in the set were "Lake Superior /Northwoods" (2004), "Mississippi/Chippewa Rivers" (2005), "Lake Michigan" (2006) and "Central Sands Prairies" (2007)

▪ **MERCURY REGULATIONS -**

In June, the state Natural Resources Board approved a mercury reduction rule that will accomplish the goal to reduce the amount of mercury released to the environment by 90 percent. The rule targets mercury emissions from utilities. Mercury is a toxic byproduct of burning coal to generate electricity. Mercury is released from smokestacks and falls into surface waters where it enters the food chain and concentrates in fish and other wildlife. It's anticipated that there will be a significant reduction of mercury deposition into Wisconsin's lakes, benefiting our fish and wildlife and human health – through the implementation of this rule.

▪ **STATE NATURAL AREAS**

The recent designation of 28 new State Natural Areas (SNA) on DNR fishery and wildlife properties in is the culmination of cooperation among the bureaus of Endangered Resources, Wildlife Management and Fisheries Management. The goal is to establish a system of SNAs that protect all natural community types across the ecological landscapes of Wisconsin. State Natural Areas are devoted to scientific research, the teaching of conservation biology, and the preservation of their natural values and genetic diversity for future generations. SNAs serve as ecological reference points and sites of high conservation value for Wisconsin's forest certification purposes.



The uncommon Le Conte's sparrow resides in the northern sedge meadow at the "virtually undisturbed" Peshtigo Brook State Wildlife Area (#564) in Oconto County.
WDNR Photo

▪ **HMONG INSTRUCTORS TEACH HUNTER SAFETY COURSES / HARMONY IN THE WOODS**

More than 250 Hmong hunters completed DNR's hunter safety courses taught by Hmong instructors, culminating a targeted outreach to this community begun last year. Course enrollment topped out at 25 to 30 for each of twelve courses held between May and August 2008. The majority of participants were Lao Veterans, American allies during the Vietnam War. In July 2007, conservation wardens trained a group of Hmong Lao Veterans to be Hunter Education instructors. The goal of the training is for the participants to return to their communities and set up hunter education courses for fellow hunters. Fifty veterans took this initial training course; 11 succeeded at becoming certified instructors. DNR holds about 1,000 hunter education courses each year, making Wisconsin's hunter education program the largest in the United States, with about 5,000 volunteers.

The focus of the **Harmony in the Woods** program this year has been on educating predominately white hunting & conservation clubs on Hmong hunting and cultural traditions. This is to help engender more cross-cultural familiarity and acceptance in the outdoors as people hunt and enjoy the outdoors.

- **OSPREY AND TRUMPETER SWAN DELISTING**

The Natural Resources Board has approved removing the trumpeter swan and osprey from the state Endangered and Threatened Species list in January, 2009. Trumpeter swans had been listed as a state endangered species while ospreys were listed as a state threatened species. Both species will continue to receive protection under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The successful recovery of the trumpeter swan and osprey is the result of decades of hard work on the part of DNR staff, the conservation community, state, federal, and tribal governments, as well as numerous individuals and businesses.

- **GREAT LAKES COMPACT**

The Great Lakes Compact took effect Dec. 8, 2008, ushering in a new era of cooperation and conservation among those states that border the five Great Lakes, which hold one-fifth of the world's fresh surface water. The historic agreement binding Wisconsin and seven other Great Lakes states largely prohibits water from being diverted outside the Great Lakes Basin while committing residents and businesses within the basin to sustainably use of that water. The compact directs the Great Lakes states to develop water conservation and efficiency programs, and promotes the sustainable management of the groundwater and surface waters of the Great Lakes Basin.

- **FOREST CERTIFICATION**

More than 2 million acres of Wisconsin's privately owned forest lands enrolled in the Managed Forest Law Program have been awarded Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) accreditation by the SmartWood Program of the Rainforest Alliance. Forest Certification is a process that provides information for consumers that timber (and products made from certified wood) has been grown and harvested in a way that meets strict environmental and social standards. The certifying agency is an independent third party (such as FSC). The Smartwood seal of approval certifies that sustainable forestry is practiced on the enrolled lands. A growing number of companies and consumers have a preference for forest products originating in sustainably managed forests. Wisconsin's state and county forests also have been certified in recent years

The certification of private forest lands enrolled in the MFL Program is significant economically as well as environmentally because these private lands provide the majority of timber that fuels the state's forest products industry. Certification not only benefits the landowners; it provides a society-wide benefit, an assurance for the citizens of Wisconsin that the state's forest resources are well-managed and will be available into the future. While more than 254 million acres of forests are FSC-certified worldwide, this is the first large-scale recognition of family forests.

In addition, one million acres of state-owned land have received recognition as being sustainably managed by both the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), bringing the number of certified state lands to 1.5 million acres. The certification adds state parks, wildlife areas, and natural areas to the 10 state forests that were first endorsed in 2003.

MAJOR ISSUES FOR AGENCY

▪ BUDGET AND STAFFING

With the economic downturn, Wisconsin state government is projecting a deficit of more than \$6.6 billion in the state budget. All agencies are currently under a strict hiring and out-of-state travel freeze, affecting both full time and limited term workers at DNR. One of the major challenges we will face over the biennium will be managing our position vacancies. We currently have about 300 vacancies at the DNR, and that number will likely increase. The proposed state budget for the next biennium will cut 85 positions from the Agency, including eliminating counter service at 24 DNR service centers throughout the state.

▪ CLIMATE CHANGE - The Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI) has formed in response to a changing climate in Wisconsin. WICCI is a partnership between the Wisconsin DNR, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and other state agencies and institutions. WICCI focuses on the impacts of climate changes, how climate change affects us, and developing adaptation strategies. One of the goals of WICCI will be to incorporate climate change into the Wildlife Action Plan.

The Wisconsin DNR in collaboration with the Wisconsin Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit is developing a comprehensive risk assessment to quantify the impacts of climate change on Wisconsin's wildlife species. The DNR is also working in collaboration with scientists at the UW-Madison re working to identify the potential impacts of climate change on coldwater fish and fisheries in Wisconsin streams and inland lakes and to develop adaptation strategies in response to climate change. Scientists from DNR and UW-Madison, and others, have initiated a collaborative study utilizing paleoecological records to assess the impact of climate change on forested communities and associated wildlife communities in northern Wisconsin.

▪ INVASIVES - In April, 2009 the state Natural Resources Board approved a new framework for classifying invasive species and providing preventive measures to control their spread in the state. Invasives are able to out-compete native plants and wildlife and can significantly affect the economy and outdoor traditions. Wisconsin is the first state in the nation to develop a comprehensive rule of this kind. Drafted over a period of four years with extensive input from stakeholders, the Wisconsin Council on Invasive Species and the public, the new rule establishes a science-based classification system for legally listing invasive species.

The classification system groups known invasive species into two formal categories: prohibited and restricted, and two informal categories, caution listed and non-restricted. The classifications are based on potential impacts, present distribution and abundance, potential for establishment and spread, control potential and both positive and negative socio-economic impacts. Preventive measures, primarily aimed at aquatic invasive species, include the removal of aquatic plants and animals from all equipment after exiting a waterbody.

The rule gives the DNR the ability, under existing authority, to prevent the importation, sale and release of known invasive species. The rule prohibits or restricts the transportation, importation, possession, transfer or introduction of invasive species classified as either prohibited or restricted and gives the department authority to order or implement control measures if necessary for prohibited species. Inspection and enforcement authority in the rule is intended to deal mainly with willful and knowledgeable introduction of listed invasive species. There are also provisions allowing transport, transfer, possession and introduction of prohibited and restricted invasive species under certain circumstances.

OTHER ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Status of wolves – Gray wolves in Wisconsin and the rest of the Western Great Lakes Region were removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered species on May 4, 2009. Wolves had previously been delisted from the federal list on March 12, 2007, but as a result of the outcome in a federal lawsuit, wolves in Michigan and Wisconsin were again listed as endangered and in Minnesota as threatened, on September 29, 2008. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service addressed the concerns of the Federal court in a re-publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register and de-listed wolves in the Upper Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment effective May 4, 2009. The plaintiffs have filed a notice of intent to sue. The federal delisting represents a major accomplishment in the conservation of gray wolves for the state, and returns management authority to the DNR and tribal conservation departments. The state has conducted intense population monitoring of wolves every year since winter 1979-1980, representing the longest continuous monitoring of any state gray wolf population in the U.S. The wolf population grew from 25 wolves in 1980, to 540 wolves in 2008, and continued to grow to 625-650 wolves in 2009. Wolves again play ecological roles in the forests of northern and central Wisconsin. Wolf depredations on farms have grown to 30 farms in 2007 and 2008, but flexible controls now available should help reduce levels of depredation on domestic animals in the future.

Bear Harvest - Wisconsin's bear harvest is expected to increase more than 55% next year due to the results of a new UW-Madison population study. 7,310 Class A bear licenses will be available for the 2009 black bear season.