

NORTH AMERICAN

WETLANDS

CONSERVATION ACT

project flash

Wisconsin Partnerships Receive \$192,964 for Wetlands Projects

On June 9, 2004, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council reported to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission that it had approved **\$192,964** in funding under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act's Small Grants Program for **five projects in Wisconsin**. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop and implement wetlands and associated uplands conservation projects to benefit wildlife. Projects must meet certain biological criteria to be considered for funding, and partners must be able to match the grant request 1:1 with nonfederal funds.

Fox River National Wildlife Refuge Wetland Restoration Project

Before being incorporated into the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) National Wildlife Refuge System, approximately 400 acres of what is now the Fox River National Wildlife Refuge were illegally drained for agriculture. Although some of the drains have been filled, remaining ditches draw water out of the refuge reducing the depth, duration, and frequency of flooding of refuge wetlands. Despite the negative hydrologic and vegetative impacts that have resulted from this modification, the area, located in **Marquette County in Congressional District 6**, remains important to populations of migratory birds in the **Mississippi Flyway**.

Project partners will enhance refuge habitat by restoring historic hydrology to approximately 100 acres. Additionally, encroaching woody vegetation will be removed to allow for the regeneration of native wetland plant species. Many of these areas are fens, a very rare wetland type in Wisconsin. Commonly seen waterfowl species that will benefit from this project are mallard, American black duck, blue- and green-winged teals, northern pintail, wood duck, American wigeon, and gadwall. In addition, this project will create habitat for the federally listed threatened bald eagle and endangered whooping crane.

Partners include the Service, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and River Crossing Charter School. Their **\$17,500** grant will be matched with **\$22,500** to achieve project goals. The partners' work also supports habitat conservation goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's **Upper Mississippi River & Great Lakes Joint Venture**.

For more information about this project, contact Shawn G. Papon, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, shawn_papon@fws.gov, (920) 387-2658 extension 16, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.

Lea Lake Principal Spillway Construction Project

The Rusk County Forestry Department owns and maintains a 230-acre impoundment known as Lea Lake, which is located in **Rusk County** in

DIVISION OF BIRD HABITAT
CONSERVATION
NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS
CONSERVATION COUNCIL
4401 NORTH FAIRFAX DRIVE
MAIL STOP 4075
ARLINGTON, VA 22203
birdhabitat.fws.gov • 703/358-1784



Congressional District 7. The impoundment is a shallow-water marsh that serves as resting, feeding, nesting, and brood-rearing habitat for **Mississippi Flyway** mallards and wood ducks. American black ducks, ring-necked ducks, and greater and lesser scaup also use the marsh as stopover habitat during migration. Other migratory birds such as the American bittern, northern harrier, sedge wren, greater yellowlegs, common and black terns, and black-billed cuckoo also make use of the project area, as does Blanding's turtle, a state-listed threatened species.

The principal spillway of the Lea Lake Dam is failing and needs to be replaced to assure water-level management can be maintained to provide the highest-quality habitat. Using their **\$50,000** grant and **\$125,000** in matching funds, project partners will install a new spillway. Rusk County will continue to manage levels to encourage shallow-water plant species, a favorite food of waterfowl. Improved water management also will benefit wild rice cultivation that has been carried out in partnership with Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, and Wildlife Restoration Association. Wild rice harvest, as well as other non-consumptive activities on Lea Lake, benefits both tribal members and nontribal area-residents.

Partners in this project include Rusk County, Lac Courte Oreilles Conservation Department, Rusk County Conservation Aids, Rusk County Development of Forest Habitat, Wildlife Restoration Association, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Their efforts also advance the habitat goals of the **Upper Mississippi River & Great Lakes Joint Venture**.

For more information about this project, contact Paul Teska, Rusk County, pteska@ruskcountywi.us, (715) 532-2113, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.

Pheasant Branch Wetland Restoration Project

The Pheasant Branch Conservancy (Conservancy) is a 560-acre natural area in **Dane County in Congressional District 2**, containing a regionally unique mix of oak savanna, dry prairie, oak woodland, marsh, sedge meadow, shrub carr, and wetland forest communities and open water. The goals of Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Inc. (Friends), are to enhance 50 acres of sedge meadow, improve water quality in 200 acres of open marsh and wetlands, and restore 135 acres of upland prairie and savanna habitat. In addition, Friends will clear 51 acres of invasive and nuisance plant species and monitor and document the resulting habitat changes to determine their affects on plant and animal populations and water quality.

These activities will increase connectivity between wetlands and uplands to offer waterfowl and nongame migratory birds of the **Mississippi Flyway** contiguous, high-quality nesting, breeding, and wintering grounds. The Conservancy attracts large numbers of northern pintail, American black duck, mallard, lesser scaup, wood duck, redhead, canvasback, ring-necked duck, and American wigeon. Breeding and feeding habitat also will be enhanced for amphibians, including the state-listed threatened Blanding's turtle, and mammals.

This work will complement previous conservation work completed through the long standing partnership among the Conservancy's three owners: City of Middleton, Dane County Parks Department, and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Other partners of this project include Friends, U.S. Geological Survey, and Middleton High School ecology students. Together they will add **\$210,691** to their **\$50,000** grant to attain their project goals, which also contribute to the habitat goals of the **Upper Mississippi River & Great Lakes Joint Venture**.

For more information about this project, contact Jan Coombs, Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Inc., pheasantbranch@charter.net, (608) 831-8823, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.

Rose Lake Acquisition Project

Rose Lake is a 175-acre deepwater marsh located in **Jefferson County** in **Congressional District 2**. Further, the marsh lies within the Southeast Focus Area of the **Upper Mississippi River & Great Lakes Joint Venture**. This prairie pothole wetland provides critical habitat for **Mississippi Flyway** species such as mallard, redhead, wood duck, Southern James Bay Canada goose, northern pintail, American black duck, canvasback, ring-necked duck, and American wigeon. The lake's adjacent shallow marsh, sedge meadow, and mesic prairie provide habitat for other migratory birds as well, including several species of management concern, for example, Henslow's sparrow, bobolink, sedge wren, grasshopper sparrow, blue-winged teal, Wilson's phalarope, northern harrier, and short-eared owl.

Partners intend to acquire 80 acres of habitat, including 35 acres of degraded wetlands, 45 acres of associated uplands, and about 2,500 feet of Rose Lake shoreline. This purchase complements the 120 acres and 5,100 feet of shoreline already purchased by the partnership. The current landowners have indicated that they wish to develop this land if it is not purchased in the near future. This project will allow the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (Department) Bureau of Endangered Resources to designate Rose Lake as a State Natural Area and protect it from development. Although not part of this grant, the acquisition will be followed by the restoration of 35 acres of wetlands, and at least 35 acres of upland pasture will be restored to tallgrass prairie.

Partners participating in this project are the Department, Madison Audubon Society, and Jefferson County Parks Department. They received a **\$50,000** grant to which they will add **\$385,000** to accomplish project goals.

For more information about this project, contact Marsha Cannon, Madison Audubon Society, Inc., marsha.audubon@charter.net, (608) 327-0129, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.

Yahara River – Cherokee Marsh Restoration Project

Cherokee Marsh, a state natural area located in **Dane County** in **Congressional District 2**, is the largest remaining wetland in the county, with more than 2,000 acres in state, county, and City of Madison ownership. Around 1910, a dam was installed at Tenney Park, which raised Lake Mendota's water level 5 feet and backed up water into the Yahara River 2.5 miles north of the lake. Based on a review of historical aerial photos, 371 wetland acres were lost between 1910 and 1937, and more than 275 acres of highly diverse wetlands have been lost since 1937. Cherokee Marsh was once outstanding **Mississippi Flyway** waterfowl habitat, but the dam's construction changed that as the wetlands vegetation that these birds needed disappeared. Increased water depth in the Yahara River, which feeds the marsh, has resulted in the erosion of sedge meadows, wet prairies, and fens, which have been replaced by shallow open-water habitat containing virtually no emergent or submergent plants. This loss continues to accelerate: as the size of open-water area increases, the erosive force becomes greater.

Project partners will establish emergent/submergent palustrine wetlands adjacent to the "floating sedge meadows" to buffer 200 acres of diverse peat wetlands from further losses to erosion. They also will restore 80 acres of emergent/submergent palustrine wetlands in shallow water, to provide feeding habitat for species such as wood duck, mallard, lesser scaup, ring-necked duck, redhead, canvasback, and

American wigeon. Nonwaterfowl species, including American bittern, northern harrier, American woodcock, sedge wren, marsh wren, common tern, short-eared owl, Acadian flycatcher, golden-winged warbler, cerulean warbler, and Henslow's sparrow, will use the area as well. The project's results also support the conservation goals of the **Upper Mississippi River & Great Lakes Joint Venture**. Partners including City of Madison, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Dane County Conservation League, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and Madison Audubon will contribute **\$25,464** to match their grant of the same amount.

For more information about this project, contact Russell Hefty, City of Madison Parks Division, rhefty@ci.madison.wi.us, (608) 267-4918, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.