Agency Reports
Wildlife & Vegetation Technical Section
Spring 2024

Illinois Department of Natural Resources Agency Updates for the UMRCC Wildlife and Vegetation Technical Section Meeting

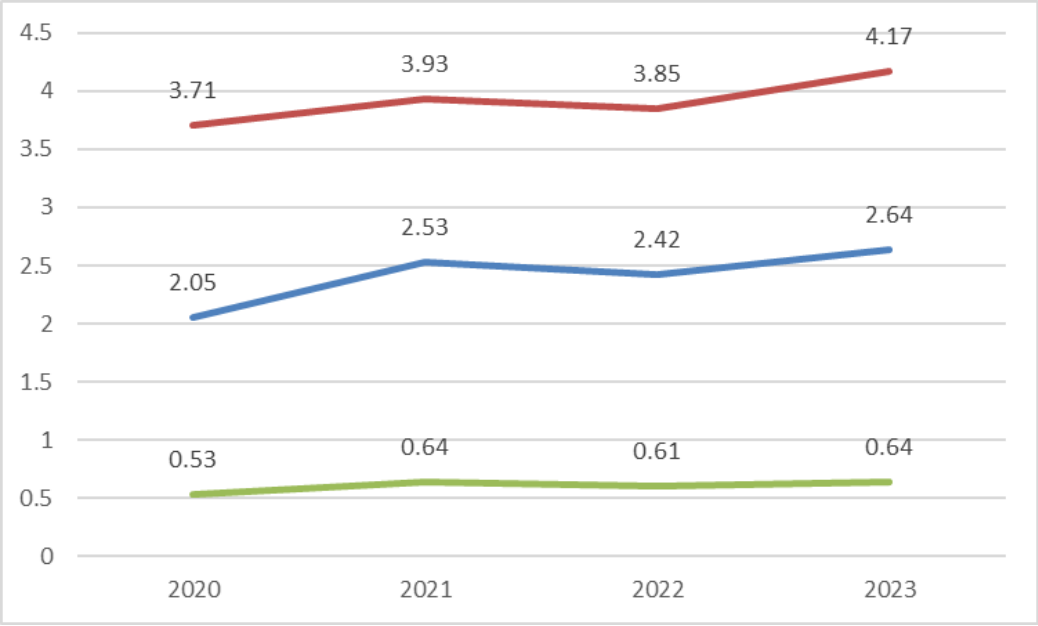
March 26, 2024
Rock Island, IL

Moderate drought conditions have continued in multiple regions of Illinois into 2024. Anecdotally, I have noticed that river levels have remained relatively low for the past 3 years and vegetation in many rivers has become more abundant than I've seen before. Also, prescribed fires have been increasingly intense the past couple years and areas that typically don't burn well are burning very well.

A wild roadkill Fisher (*Martes pennanti*) was documented in Illinois in 2023 in Winnebago County. Fishers had not been documented in IL since the 1800's. The following article contains more information: [On the Lookout for Fishers in Illinois (wildlifeillinois.org)]

CWD management remains the top priority for the IL DNR wildlife division. Prevalence rates have risen to 6.2% across the endemic area (FY23).

Turkey harvest and effort in IL have remained relatively stable over the past several years, but brood surveys have been more dynamic. Recent turkey brood surveys in IL, however, are showing some promising signs:



Poults per Brood

Poults per Hen

Percent of Hens with a Brood

Iowa Department of Natural Resources Agency Upadates
Wildlife & Vegetation Technical Section Meeting
Spring 2024
Submitted by Curt Kemmerer 3/11/24

HREP Construction:
McGregor Lake (Pool 10): Stage I construction completed. Stage II construction ongoing.
Beaver Island (Pool 14): Construction completed.
Steamboat Island Stage I (Pool 14): Construction completed. Stage II contract awarded.
Huron Island (Pool 18): Construction is completed. Aquatic vegetation, tree, and shrub plantings completed.

HREP Planning/Design:
Reno Bottoms (Pool 9): Working on draft feasibility report.
Lower Pool 10: Working on plans and specs.
Pool 12 Forestry: Working on draft feasibility report.
Pool 18 Forestry: Working on draft feasibility report.
Green Island (Pool 13): Working on draft feasibility report.
Lower Pool 13: Working on draft feasibility report.
Lower Pool 13 Stage II: Working on draft feasibility report.

NESP Ecosystem Project Planning:
Sabula Lakes (Pool 13): working on draft project implementation report.
Andalusia Island (Pool 16): working on draft project implementation report.
Sny Magill-Effigy Mounds National Monument: working on draft project implementation report.
Lock and Dam 22 Fish Passage: working on draft project implementation report.

NESP Navigation Mitigation Project Planning:
Mooring Cell Additions: working on draft project implementation report.

Habitat & Public Land:
The single, short-lived but pronounced flood event triggered by massive snow melt in northern MN and WI had some significant impacts on GP Lands managed by DNR. The most noteworthy was the levee breach and subsequent flooding at Green Island WMA in Pool 13. DNR estimates ~$2M in damages to infrastructure (levee, dikes, roads, boat ramps, water control structures) at this site and is working through the FEMA process to fund repairs. Less severe damages occurred with the over-topping at Princeton WMA in Pool 14, but will work with FEMA to repair the sections with minor to moderate levee slope erosion. Very minor effects that amount to re-seeding occurred at Odessa WMA near L&D 17. The remainder of the year saw low water levels and opportunity to revegetate areas.

Iowa has been awarded two IRA-funded, Nature-Based Climate Solutions grants for projects on State-managed lands within the UMR region. Both projects involve restoration of shallow wetlands in the floodplain. One project will restore 10 acres at Pool Slough WMA in Pool 9, while the other will restore about 30 acres and re-meander a straightened creek at Green Island WMA in Pool 13.

Iowa had a net loss of CRP (6,600Ac or ~ 10 mi2) this year. We lost general acres and gained continuous acres, presumably due to some Iowans with expiring general CRP re-enrolling in continuous because of the higher payment rates. General CRP is capped at $240/Ac while CCRP is capped at $300/Ac. Iowa will have ~75,000Ac that expire this September.

IHAP: as of this past fall we had ~33,000 acres enrolled, 260+ sites in 57 counties, our greatest enrollment so far. We've obligated all of our $1.5M grant from this Farmbill. We need a new Farmbill with more VPA-HIP funding to continue the IHAP program.

In FY'23 the DNR acquired 1,965 acres of land in fee title. This represents the lowest number of acres acquired in a year, by far, in a long time. There were 13 individual tracts acquired. The appraised value of those tracts were $7,361,700 for an average per acre cost of $4,057.

In 2023 the DNR formed a strategic deployment team to look into a potential "Aquatic Management Areas" program in the state. In 2024, we will take the program objectives and priorities that were developed and look at the next steps to move toward implementing the program.
The DNR is steadily increasing the number of active forest stewardship plans on public lands across the state and therefore is increasing the number of acres of active forest management, including harvests.

Non-game Species Updates:

The Iowa DNR has continued to assist in expanding a network of automated radio telemetry receiver stations as part of the MOTUS Wildlife Tracking System. Using mostly funding from donations and partners in 2023, Iowa now has 21 MOTUS Stations in Iowa with more planned in future years. The DNR (and grant partners) has six USFWS-SWG-C grants to implement projects this year, as the MOTUS SWG-C concludes March 2024. We continue to conduct research and management for the state endangered wood turtle and state threatened ornate box turtle. With partners, we are implementing more priority monitoring blocks in the North American Bat Monitoring Program, where volunteers drive predetermined routes with acoustic detectors. A project examining how Blanding's turtles respond to habitat management is underway, as is a Bumble Bee Atlas which will be open to volunteer assistance. We are working with ISU to update our predictive occurrence maps for SGCN using the data from the Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring Program and we are just starting an urban focused project to assess knowledge and opinions of homeowners, landscaping companies, city and elected officials related to rare wildlife (like the Rusty-patched bumblebee and some butterflies) that could thrive in urban settings.
2024 will be the 18th year of our statewide Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring Program which DNR and ISU jointly administer. In addition, Iowa DNR continues to train volunteers to monitor bald eagle nests and run frog and toad calling routes.

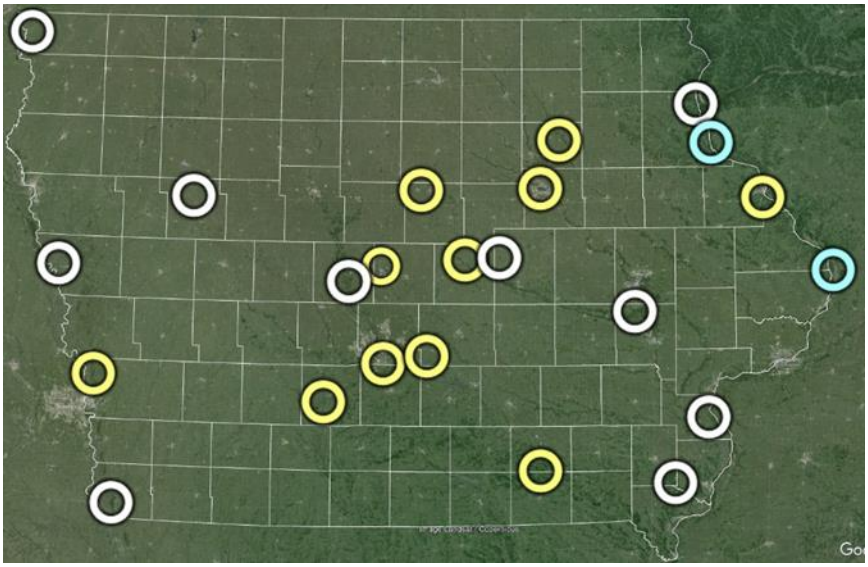


Figure. MOTUS Stations in Iowa as of March 31, 2024. Iowa DNR stations are white, partner stations are yellow, and stations in bordering states that overlap Iowa in coverage are shown in blue.

Game Species Updates:

The DNR Wildlife Bureau hosted the annual "Hunting and Trapping Season Public Discussion" meetings at 18 locations across the state last month. The meeting purpose is to summarize information from the past year's hunting/trapping seasons, share proposed rule changes, and to collect feedback from the public as we work through the rules process.

Pheasants: We expect the 2023-24 season harvest to be an increase over the previous year, which is well above the 10-year average. We expect bobwhite quail harvest (southern IA) to be similar to the previous year, which is above the 10-year average. We have seen a sharp increase in non-resident hunters the past couple of seasons, following the trend of increased pheasant numbers. Iowa is second only to SD in harvest the past

couple of years. Things are relatively good right now for upland bird hunters in Iowa, but we'll see what happens with CRP trends as to where we go from here.

Turkeys: We have concluded the 4th year (including a pilot year) of an anticipated 10-year study to determine factors driving our population decline. This project involves marking hens with GPS/VHF backpack transmitters. Unfortunately, this winter proved difficult to catch turkeys due to unprecedented warm and open conditions, and only 10 turkeys were caught and marked. On a positive note, we did see another slight uptick in observed turkey production this year, as 7 of 9 regions in Iowa reported higher nest success and poult/hen ratios.

Furbearers:

Most furbearer species are trending stable to increasing, with the exception of gray fox and muskrat, which are on a significant, long-term decline. Trapper effort across the state is down significantly due to fur market declines. Iowa extended the regular trapping season from the end of January to the end of February this past season, as well as to moved raccoons into a continuous open season status. Iowa continues to see the increase in rare animal occurrences in recent years, including fisher, black bear, mountain lion, and gray wolves. This past year also saw several "non-furbearer" visitors in Iowa including elk and moose.

Waterfowl:

Drought conditions affected much of the state for a third year in row. Our statewide trend for weekly duck survey numbers was lower than last year and below the 10-year average. Many areas along the UMR had excellent habitat due to low water levels and abundant vegetation.

The Iowa DNR once again contributed hunter-harvested Avian Influenza surveillance samples to USDA Wildlife Services during the waterfowl hunting season, but 2023 was a much quieter year for AI than 2022.

Deer:

Total statewide harvest was ~104,000, a decrease of 5% compared to last year and 2% below the 5-year average. Our deer population model trend continues to be stable to slightly increasing statewide, but within our statewide goal of harvesting 100,000-120,000 deer annually. Iowa experienced a significant EHD outbreak last summer/fall, with ~2,000 reported mortalities being the 2nd highest total ever recorded (10-year avg. is ~200 mortalities). It was also the most widespread outbreak (77 counties) to date. New in 2023, Iowa launched a Deer Hunter Survey. This survey was sent to 10% of resident hunters and included diverse topics such as hunter motivation, satisfaction with regulations and perceptions of fair chase and emerging technologies. This survey will likely be repeated every 5 years.

CWD:

We sampled ~5,700 wild deer during the 2023-24 season. A total of 127 wild deer tested positive statewide, including deer in 8 new counties. Counties with wild positives along the UMR include Allamakee, Clayton, Dubuque, Jackson, and new this year, Muscatine and Des Moines. We are trying to slow the spread through education and reducing deer numbers in counties with positives.

Staffing and Leadership:

The Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund bureaus (Fisheries, Wildlife, Law Enforcement) have been steadily filling vacant positions during the past year. No changes in DNR leadership. There were several staff changes along the UMR, in both the Fisheries and Wildlife Bureaus. Fisheries staff changes include the creation of new Mississippi River Region Supervisor, filled by Kirk Hansen. The Mississippi River Habitat Coordinator position (formerly held by Kirk Hansen) was filled by Ryan Hupfeld. The Mississippi River Research Biologist position (formerly held by Ryan Hupfeld) was filled by Rebecca Krogman. Wildlife staff changes include the Southeast District Supervisor position (formerly held by Bryan Hellyer) being filled by Curt Kemmerer, and the Maquoketa Wildlife Unit Biologist position (formerly held by Curt Kemmerer) being filled by Nick McClimon.

Funding:

No updates.

Missouri State report

Missouri Department of Conservation

03/11/2024

In Missouri, its business as usual. Our Director Sara Parker Pauley is set to retire in the coming months. Over the course of the next year, it should be interesting to see if there are any big changes coming regarding Department priorities throughout the agency.

One of our biggest priorities right now is CWD monitoring in our whitetail deer herd. The MO Department of Conservation has continued to monitor CWD prevalence throughout the state, sampling over 243,000 since 2012. In 2023 alone we had 117 positive deer taken off the landscape, 76 hunter harvested and 41 through our winter culling efforts. We have added 9 new CWD positive counties in 2023. During the winter culling efforts 3,520 deer were removed in 2023 and we detected 41 CWD positive deer. Moving forward we are going to continue using meat processors, taxidermists, and mandatory sampling stations during the opening weekend of our rifle season to continue to survey deer. As of right now state staff will continue winter culling efforts to limit the spread of CWD throughout the state.

Feral hog elimination is still a top priority across the southern half of the state. Over 6,000 hogs were removed in 2023 across 4 zones. Although hog numbers and the total number of areas affected are declining across this portion of the state, staff are still assisting with the population monitoring and elimination of feral hogs in this portion of the state.

Thanks,

Troy Tallman

Missouri Department of Conservation

Wildlife Biologist

USACE St. Paul District – La Crescent Field Office Agency Updates for the UMRCC Wildlife and Vegetation Technical Section Meeting
March 26, 2024
Rock Island, IL

- Current Staffing: Jon Schultz (Section Manager), Ashley Kiley (Shoreline Ranger), Andy Meier (Lead Forester), Sara Rother (Field Forester)
    - Lewis Wiechmann transferred to St. Paul District Environmental Planning Branch in September 2023
    - Ray Marinan transferred to St. Paul District Real Estate Division in late 2023, replaced by Ashley Kiley
- USACE La Crescent Field Office has received authorization to increase staffing to provide technical forestry support for increased funding via UMRR and NESP
    - Current authorized staffing for GS-11 lead forester and two target GS-9 field foresters
    - New staffing authorization retains lead forester, adds two more target GS-11 field foresters (CORs) and two GS-7 forestry technicians
        - Interviews conducted for target GS-11 foresters in early March
            - Sara Rother and Caleb Redick selected for these positions; Sara is currently on staff and Caleb is expected to start in summer 2024
        - Backfills for Rother and Wiechmann for the target GS-9 forester positions hoped by summer 2024
        - Forestry technician advertisement later in the summer
- Currently managing 9 active forest management contracts with 4-5 new contract starts in prep for FY24 from Pool 3 to Pool 9
    - Funding from Operations Environmental Stewardship, UMRR and NESP Systemic Forestry
    - 2,500 acres of forest inventory in FY24
    - First MVP NESP Systemic Forestry contract awarded for 200+ acres of invasive species control at Goose Island in Pool 8
    - First prescribed fire contract in 10 years completed at West Newton Prairie in October 2023
    - Completed tree planting on a first in the nation Tribal Partnership Program island rehabilitation project with the Prairie Island Indian Community in Pool 3
- New CESU agreement with the University of Minnesota to evaluate ecophysiological conditions associated with survival and growth of planted and naturally regenerated seedlings of light-seeded species
- Continued to collaborate with US Forest Service and WI DNR on collection of graft wood from large, surviving American elm to evaluate Dutch elm disease resistance and potentially develop future seed orchards
    - 30 trees collected in 2023 and 2024, outplanting planned on USFS and WI DNR land in 2025 and 2026
- Continue to collaborate with USFS on development of swamp white oak seed orchards
    - Seed collected by USFS in 2021, 2022 and 2023
    - First trees planting in future seed orchard on USACE-owned land in Goose Island County Park in spring of 2023
    - Additional planting in seed orchard in 2024 and 2025

CEMVR-OD-MN 26 March 2024

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: ODMN Update to Spring UMRCC Wildlife Tech. Meeting

1. Staff changes. Joseph Lundh continues as Environmental Stewardship supervisor and Kevin Reynolds continues as the shoreline ranger. The lead forester position is now split between Tate Sattler and Ben Vandermyde with primary focus of pools 11 to 16 for Vandermyde (northern) and pools 16 to 22 for Sattler (southern). Reilly Dolan and Allison Nickel support forest management actions in the northern pools and Jillian Harms and a vacant position (anticipated new hire in May) will support forestry actions in southern pools. Continue with having two summer hire positions assisting with forest management actions.
2. Funding. Fully funded for staff and routine operations. Additional funding is currently in place for boundary encroachment resolution.
3. Forest Management Plan and Programmatic BA. Continuing to be under development and review. Potential for partner review will continue to be requested by Ben Vandermyde prior to public review.
4. Forest Management Geodatabase (FMG). Rock Island District GIS support continues in development of sharing data with partners.
5. 43rd Annual Forest Coordination Meetings: two have been held and one remaining to occur in April.
6. Continued technical support on 8 UMRR HREP projects; all including forest management actions.
7. Continued technical support on 3 NESP projects; to include UMR Systemic Forest Stewardship and 2 overwintering projects.
8. Anticipating to reach out to partner agency offices to establish the District Forestry Working Group which will identify forest management actions for NESP funded UMR Systemic Forest Stewardship.

USFWS Agency Updates for the UMRCC Wildlife and Vegetation Technical Section Meeting
March 26, 2024
Rock Island, IL

UMRNWFR – HQ Office (submitted by Steve Winter and Bruce Henry)

- We are continuing to jointly-fund a Forest Ecologist position through a Cooperative Agreement with the National Audubon Society.
- The UMRNWFR HQ office is currently receiving fur catch reports from 130+ permitted trappers.
- We've received approval on the first 10 of a planned 20 Pesticide Use Proposals for the 2024 application season.
- From 2023 to present, the UMRNWFR HQ office administered 8 Special Use Permits for inventory, monitoring, and research by third parties.
    - Infection dynamics of the invasive faucet snail (*Bithynia tentaculata*).
    - Understanding landscape-scale patterns in winter conditions in the Upper Mississippi River System.
    - Evaluating Bottomland Forest Bird Response to Forest Management and Identifying Priority Conservation Areas Across the Upper Mississippi River.
    - Assessing Lesser Scaup Parasite Loads: Development of a Fecal DNA Assay.
    - Long-term multisensor surveillance of wetland surface-water availability and wetland-dependent species relative to changing climate conditions.
    - Odonata surveys for 2023-2025.
    - Statewide Wild Rice Monitoring - Sulfate Monitoring.
    - Avian associations with management in the UMRS: filing knowledge gaps for habitat management.
- The refuge is currently considering four research/science proposals for potential Inflation Reduction Act funding.
- Building Resilience in America's Big River Forests- Systemic Forest Resilience through Nature Based Solutions IRA project. Proposed, approved, planning phase.

UMRNWFR - Winona District (submitted by Wendy Woyczic)

- Wendy Woyczik is the new Winona District Manager, replacing Mary Stefanski who retired on August 31.
- Currently administering 2 Special Use Permits for inventory, research, and monitoring by third parties.
    - Bat PIT Tagging at Lower Springs Landing (WI DNR) – Lower Spring Lake Landing, Pool 5.
    - The Blufflands Section Lichen Survey (MN DNR) – Trout Creek area, Pool 6
- Biology program surveys planned for 2024:
    - Bald Eagle nest monitoring for powerline and pipeline needs, Black Tern nesting survey, bat acoustic monitoring, forest inventory, various invasive plant control efforts, prairie plant monitoring, and bumblebee surveys.
- Bat acoustic data is in the process of being analyzed by the Virginia Tech USGS Co Op unit.
- District staff and LTRM staff conducted standardized flowering rush and native emergent vegetation monitoring surveys in 2022 and 2023 and are now working on data analysis and manuscript preparation.
- 23 Invasive phragmites patches (mostly in pool 5) were treated by contractor in summer '23, and will be treated again in '24, with the addition of several newly discovered patches.
- Habitat management projects for 2024:
    - For summer 2024 the district will have two bio-techs.
    - Big Lake HREP planning is ongoing, TSP and draft report completed, Final Report expected by May 2024.
    - Robinson Lake HREP planning began in January 2023, TSP expected fall 2024
    - NESP project: Kickoff meetings for WI DNR Johnson Island, Pool 6
    - Inflation Reduction Act project: Sam Gordy, Pool 6 – still waiting for approval

UMRNWFR – La Crosse District and Trempealeau NWR (submitted by Cheryl Groom and Bruce Henry)

- District manager Tim Miller is currently on a detail as the Area 1 Inflation Reduction Act Nature Based Solutions Project Coordinator. Deputy manager Cheryl Groom is acting district manager.
- Currently administering 1 Special Use Permits for inventory, research, and monitoring by third parties.
    - Forest Inventory through NESP: Black River Bottoms Management Unit Pool 7
- Biology program surveys planned for 2024:

    - Bald Eagle nest monitoring for various projects
    - Silvicolous* Bird surveys via UMRR/Audubon at Black River Bottoms Management Unit, Pool 7; and Goose Island Management Unit, Pool 8
    - Acoustic Bat surveys at Trempealeau NWR and Pools 7 and 8
    - Black tern monitoring,
    - Forest inventory in Pool 8, Root River Management Unit
    - Goose Island Closed area waterfowl surveys during fall migration in Pool 8
    - Assisting Trempealeau NWR with developing protocols for lupine mapping and monitoring to determine if Karner blue butterfly re-introduction is feasible, working with WIDNR on eastern massasauga rattlesnake surveys.
- Habitat management projects for 2024:
    - Invasive species management on LaCrosse District and Trempealeau NWR:
        - third year of R3 Invasive Species Strike Team funding for Trempealeau NWR's "Bye Bye Black Locust" Project to restore the refuge's oak savanna and sand prairie ecosystem.
        - Japanese hops control population wide at the Root River Management Unit
        - RCG control via mechanical tillage at Root River MU
        - Continuing invasive species control on areas such as Midway Prairie (remnant) and Brice Prairie (restored).
    - Floodplain forest regeneration using RCG conversion, scarification and seed tree utilization. Initial chemical and mechanical treatments planned. Root River Management Unit, Pool 8 – up to 5 acres
    - Floodplain forest tree plantings: 10 acre afforestation and 10 acre high terrace underplanting at Root River MU; 2 acres at Green Island Pool 8; maintenance management planned on 6 acres of previous plantings
    - Coordinating the rehabilitation of the Log Lake Water Control structure – sediment deposited by flooding in spring 2023 is impeding the functionality of the structure.

*** Silvicolous**: adjective; sil·vic·o·lous, silˈvikələs; living in or inhabiting woodlands. Merriam-Webster Dictionary (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/silvicolous).

<u>UMRNWFR – McGregor District (submitted by Billy Reiter-Marolf)</u>

- Kendra Pednault, District Manager, is currently on two-month detail to Becharof NWR, Alaska. She will return in early May. Billy Reiter-Marolf, wildlife biologist, is Acting District Manager.
- Wendy Wyoczik, formerly the McGregor District's Deputy District Manager, was promoted to Winona District Manager in the Fall of 2023
- Currently reviewing bids for new Luster Heights office construction project
- Currently administering 2 Special Use Permits for inventory, research, and monitoring by third parties.
    - Vascular Plant Surveys and temperature monitoring on the algific talus slopes of the Driftless Area NWR (DANWR)
    - Iowa Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring (MSIM) Program – Turkey River Bottoms (Pool 11)
- Biology program surveys planned for 2024:
    - Bald Eagle nest monitoring for HREP projects
    - Bird surveys in Sny Magill, Pool 10, Cerulean Warbler long-term monitoring
    - Acoustic Bat surveys in Pools 9,10, and 11
    - Non-lethal bumblebee surveys on DANWR and McGregor District
    - Northern Monkshood surveys on DANWR
    - Forest inventory in Pool 9
    - Red-shouldered Hawk nest surveys in Pools 9 and 10
- Habitat management projects for 2024:
    - HREPs in progress: Reno Bottoms, McGregor Lake, Lower Pool 10
    - HREPs starting in 2024: Lower Pool 11
    - NESP projects in progress: Sny Magill - Effigy Mounds National Monument
    - Inflation Reduction Act project: Guttenberg Ponds (Pool 11)

- Invasive species management on McGregor District (mapping Japanese hops and other small treatments)
- Invasive species management on the Driftless Area NWR (garlic mustard, buckthorn, honeysuckle, multiflora rose, and leafy spurge)
- Maintenance mowing of two late fall 2023 prairie seedings:
  - Luster Heights (UMRNWFR) – 6 acres
  - Driftless Area NWR, Pine Creek Unit – 28 acres
- Install deer fences around planted trees at DANWR - Pine Creek
- Floodplain forest regeneration using RCG conversion, scarification and seed tree utilization. Initial chemical and mechanical treatments complete. Turkey Creek Management Unit, Pool 11- 60 acres.

<u>UMRNWFR – Savanna District (submitted by Ed Britton and Bruce Henry)</u>

Prescribe burned two parcels in February: Spring Lake levee = 200 acres; Tarr Marsh = 355 acres. March burn planned: Lost Mound Unit = 900 acres.

One wildfire in February caused by neighbor burning stumps that only spread over one acre thanks to our disked fire break at the Thomson Research Natural Area and quick response by Thomson Fire Department.

Infrastructure Reduction Act Project: Restoration of the 400 acre Tarr Marsh to include rehab of a former oxbow of the Maquoketa River (that was straightened many decades ago), connect the oxbow to adjacent low elevation areas, and installation of a concrete mat spillway in the levee breach to contain as much flood water as possible.

The Pool 12 Forestry HREP is in the planning phase.

<u>Clarence Cannon, Great River, and Middle Mississippi River NWRs (submitted by Bruce Henry)</u>

- Bottomland forest restoration with Ducks Unlimited partnership kicked off: Delair Division of Great River NWR, Pool 24, 90 acres planted in 2024 of a planned 590 at project completion
- NESP Floodplain Restoration project with afforestation, underplanting, cypress swamp restoration and ridge-swale topographic restoration at Horse Island Division of Middle Mississippi River NWR, Open River Reach- 2100 acres
- Floodplain forest restoration tree plantings at Crains Island Division of Middle Mississippi River NWR- 7 acres
- Slope forest restoration tree plantings at Rockwood Division of MMR NWR- 4 acres

<u>Two Rivers NWR (submitted by Kirsten Schmidt)</u>

Habitat and Management

- The refuge is involved in the planning of four UMRR projects:
  - Reds Landing (IDNR) & Gilead Slough (USFWS) HREP - Scoping charrette developed in January 2024.
    - Refuge (Gilead; Batchtown Division) portion includes side channel, backwater, island, and floodplain forest areas.
  - Yorkinut Slough HREP- Feasibility report approved, design workshop scheduled for April.
    - Project aims to improve wetland impoundment function and resiliency in the Calhoun Division.
  - West Alton Islands HREP- Feasibility report in review.
    - Refuge portion of the project adds to the resiliency of four islands in the Portage Island Division, and enhances backwater and forest habitat.
  - Swan Lake HREP Flood Damage Assessment - Report approved.
    - Aims to repair flood damages within the Swan Lake HREP and assess repairs needed for added resiliency.
- Portage Island had timber stand improvement performed last spring (2023) as part of a partnership with Ducks Unlimited and the Corps of Engineers.
  - Efforts to control Japanese hops and establish cottonwood trees in new canopy gaps are ongoing, with routine visits scheduled for this spring and summer by the Corps of Engineers and the USFWS.

- One of two new electric wells provided through a NAWCA grant and partnership with Ducks Unlimited was used for the first-time during the fall of 2023 in the Calhoun Division.
- Following spring migration, the refuge will focus habitat management efforts on setting back succession in prairies and moist soil impoundments, and performing drawdowns in the Batchtown, Calhoun, and Gilbert Lake divisions.
- For the third year in a row the refuge did not completely freeze during winter, allowing thousands of waterfowl to overwinter at Two Rivers NWR.

Staffing

- Ivan Bossert joined the team in November 2023 as a visitor services intern and will be with us until October 2024. Ivan is contracted through the Hispanic Access Foundation and delivers urban conservation programming to underserved communities in the greater St. Louis area, with a focus on K-12 students.
    - Ivan represents the refuge while working with the dedicated education team at the Audubon Center at Riverlands. With his help, our organizations have a larger reach in St. Louis.
- We will be hosting an American Conservation Experience EPIC intern starting in early summer and lasting 6 months. The position is funded by the USFWS Region 3 to address invasive species threats.
    - The position will focus on inventory and control of invasive plants, and *Boltonia decurrens* (a federally threatened plant) surveys in three refuge divisions (Portage Island, Gilbert Lake, and Calhoun).

Ecological Services Minnesota/Wisconsin Field Office and Iowa/Illinois Field Office (submitted by Sara Schmuecker)

National Listing Workplan for Fiscal Years 2022-2027 | FWS.gov

https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/report/species-listings-by-region?statusCategory=Listed&regionNum=3&regionName=Midwest%20Region%20%283%29%20&total=50

https://www.fws.gov/media/national-workplan-complete-five-year-reviews-species-listed-under-endangered-species-act

- **New Listed Species**
    - Alligator snapping turtle (Proposed T)
        - The Service proposed to list the alligator snapping turtle as threatened with a 4(d) rule in November 2021. The current known range of the alligator snapping turtle includes the Mississippi River, extending downstream from the Cape Girardeau area.
        - Alligator Snapping Turtle (Macrochelys temminckii) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - Tri-colored bat (Proposed E)
        - The Service (Sept 2022) proposed to list the tri-colored bat as endangered, with white-nose syndrome being identified as the primary threat increasing the species' risk of extinction. A final listing decision is expected in FY24.
        - Tricolored Bat (Perimyotis subflavus) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - Salamander mussel (Proposed E)
        - The Service conducted a Species Status Assessment to evaluate the status of the Salamander Mussel to determine whether it warrants protection under the ESA. The listing determination for Salamander Mussel is proposed as endangered and critical habitat was proposed for designation concurrently with a proposed listing rule. The final listing decision for this species is pending.
        - Salamander Mussel (Simpsonaias ambigua) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)

- **Candidate Species**
    - Monarch butterfly (Regional Office)

        - In 2020, the Service determined that listing of the Monarch butterfly was warranted but precluded by higher priority listing actions. Currently, the monarch is a candidate species for listing and is on the listing workplan for FY24. The Service has been directed through a court order to complete a listing decision for the monarch by September 30, 2024.
        - Monarch (Danaus plexippus) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)

- **Under Review Species and Listing Decisions**
    - Sturgeon/Sicklefin chub
        - The Service conducted SSAs for these two chub species (primarily relevant to those working in the Middle Mississippi River reach). Not warranted 12-month finding September 20, 2023.
        - Sturgeon Chub (Macrhybopsis gelida) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
        - Sicklefin Chub (Macrhybopsis meeki) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - Lake sturgeon (Regional Office)
        - The Service is currently evaluating the status of the lake sturgeon, in an effort to determine whether the species is warranted for listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (Act). We made an initial positive 90-day finding on a petition to list the lake sturgeon under the Act in August 2020, and added the species to the listing workplan. We intend to determine whether listing the lake sturgeon is warranted by June 30, 2024, per a court order. To inform our determination, the Service is conducting a species status assessment (SSA) to evaluate the species' needs, as well as the past, current, and future conditions for the species.
        - Lake Sturgeon (Acipenser fulvescens) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - Little brown bat (Indiana FO)
        - The little brown bat is currently under review to determine whether listing of the species is warranted. An announcement on these findings is forthcoming.
        - Little Brown Bat (Myotis lucifugus) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - Blanding's turtle (IL/IA)
        - The Service has completed a Species Status Assessment to evaluate the status of the species and determine whether it warrants protection under the ESA. The listing determination (12-month finding) for Blanding's turtle is currently on the Service's National Listing Workplan for FY24.
        - Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - Spotted turtle (Chesapeake Bay FO)
        - The Service has completed a Species Status Assessment to evaluate the status of the species and determine whether it warrants protection under the ESA. The listing determination (12-month finding) for the spotted turtle is currently on the Service's National Listing Workplan for FY24.
        - Spotted Turtle (Clemmys guttata) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - Eastern Hellbender (Ohio FO)
        - The Service continues to evaluate the status of the species to determine whether it warrants protection under the ESA. The listing determination is currently on the Service's Workplan for FY24.
        - Eastern Hellbender (Cryptobranchus alleganiensis alleganiensis) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - Prairie Gray Fox (IL/IA)
        - The Service will conduct a Species Status Assessment to evaluate the status of the prairie gray fox to determine whether it warrants protection under the ESA. The listing determination is currently on the Service's Workplan for FY27.
        - Prairie Gray Fox (Urocyon cinereoargenteus ocythous) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - American Bumble Bee (TBD)

        - The Service will conduct a Species Status Assessment to evaluate the status of the species to determine whether it warrants protection under the ESA. The listing determination is currently on the Service's Workplan for FY26.
        - Bumble Bee (Bombus pensylvanicus) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)
    - Variable Cuckoo Bumble Bee (TBD)
        - The Service will conduct a Species Status Assessment to evaluate the status of the species to determine whether it warrants protection under the ESA. The listing determination is currently on the Service's Workplan for FY26.

CRITICAL HABITAT

- Rusty patched bumblebee – In August 2023, courts reversed the Service's opinion that designating critical habitat for the RPBB was undeterminable. The settlement agreement requires that the Service publish a final CH rule by October 31, 2025. As part of the reevaluation of critical habitat, the Service now accepting new (not previously submitted) information through March 1, 2024. If the Service determines that designating critical habitat is prudent, we will publish a **proposed** critical habitat designation in the *Federal Register* and open a public comment period within calendar year 2024.
- Spectaclecase/Sheepnose/Rayed Bean/Snuffbox - The Service is working to identify potential critical habitat designations for these 4 mussel species, all listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. We are currently seeking information from partners relevant to these species. This letter request for information was sent out to our State partner contacts via email on February 5, 2024.

SSA's Upcoming

- Prairie Gray Fox – CY25/26 (IL/IA)
- Variable Cuckoo Bumble Bee – CY24/25 (RO)
- American Bumble Bee – CY24/25 (RO)

5-Year Reviews Upcoming

- Hine's Emerald Dragon Fly – CY23/24 (Chicago)
- Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid – CY24/25 (Chicago)
- Leafy Prairie Clover – CY26/27 (Chicago)
- Iowa Pleistocene Snail – CY 24/25 (IL/IA)
- Illinois Cave Amphipod – CY 24/25 (IL/IA)
- Decurrent False Aster – CY 24/25 (IL/IA)
- Sheepnose Mussel – CY 24/25 (IL/IA)
- Indiana Bat – CY 24/25 (Indiana)
- Piping Plover – CY 24/25 (Michigan)
- Eastern Massasauga – CY 25/26 (Michigan)
- Rayed Bean – CY 24 (Ohio)
- Snuffbox Mussel – CY24 (Ohio)
- Lakeside Daisy – CY 25/26 (Ohio)
- Spectaclecase Mussel – CY24 (MN/WI)
- Higgins Eye Mussel – CY24/25 (MN/WI)
- Rusty Patched Bumble Bee – CY26/27 (MN/WI)
- Northern Long-eared bat – CY24 (MN/WI)
- Prairie Bush-Clover – CY 24/25 (MN/WI)
- Pink Mucket – CY24 (Missouri)
- Scaleshell – CY 25/26 (Missouri)
- Mead's Milkweed – CY 26/27 (Missouri)
- Dakota Skipper – CY 24 (MN/WI)
- Karner Blue Butterfly – CY 24 (MN/WI)
- Poweshiek Skipperling – CY 24 (MN/WI)

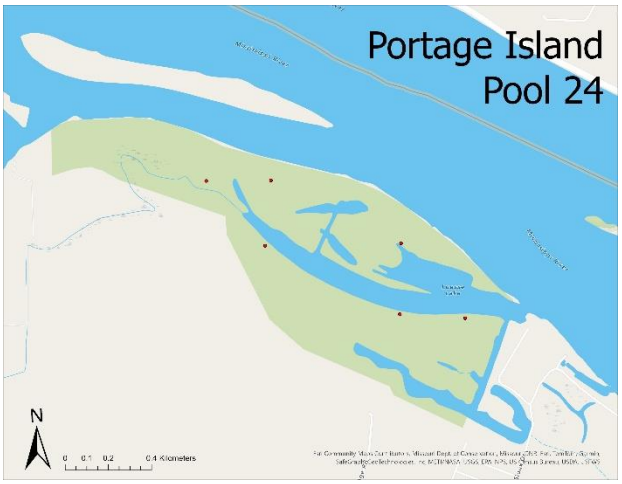
SPECIES RECOVERY PLANNING

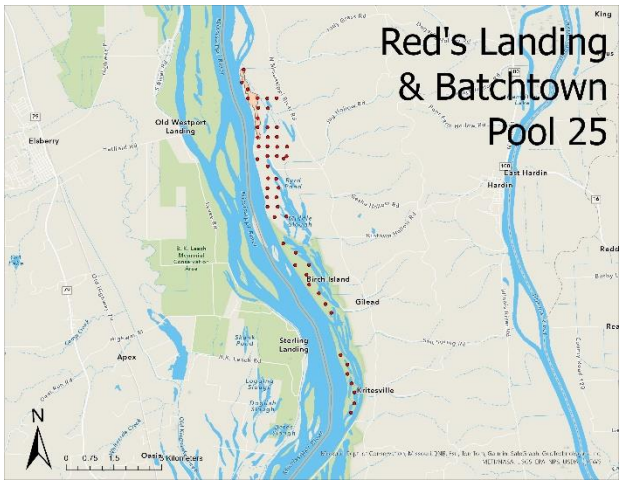
- **Spectaclecase (MN/WI), Sheepnose (IL/IA), Snuffbox (Ohio FO), and Rayed Bean (Ohio FO) Mussels**:
    - The draft Recovery Plan for these four mussel species is currently available for public and agency review. The comment period closes March 25, 2024. The draft Recovery Plan documents the Service's plan for the conservation and recovery of the species. Following, the Service will be engaging with partners to cooperatively develop the respective Recover Implementation Strategies (RIS). The RIS is an operational document for stepping down the recovery actions into specific activities needed to achieve recovery, with specifics updated as new information becomes available.
        - Draft Recovery Plan: https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plan/Draft%20Recovery%20Plan%20for%204%20Mussels_December%202023.pdf
        - Notice of Availability: https://ecosphere-documents-production-public.s3.amazonaws.com/sams/public_docs/species_nonpublish/11628.pdf

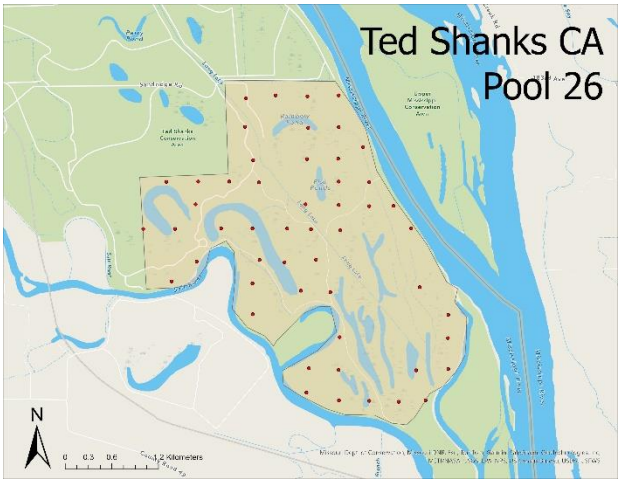
Audubon Upper Mississippi River (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri) Update:

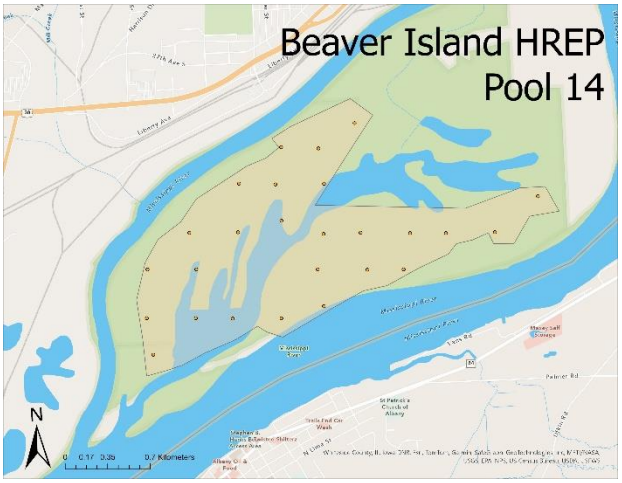
Bottomland forests and birds

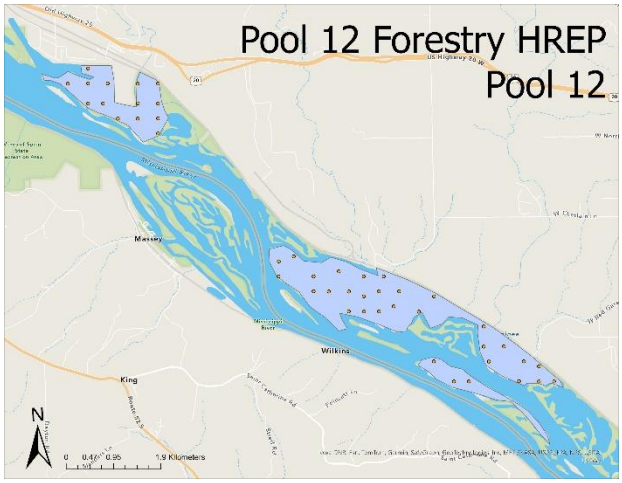
- Summer 2024 will be the start of our 9th year of bird monitoring with the USACE MVS in the St Louis Region across pools 24-26
    - Surveys will take place from mid-May to mid-July across approximately 26 different sites with various ownership (i.e. USACE, USFWS, IL DNR, MDC)
    - Results of surveys will contribute to our larger dataset to create annual bird density estimates, trend models and habitat relationships
    - Next two years will include more data collection, but also larger habitat association modeling for select species and report writing for bird management suggestions within bottomland forests
- Summer 2024 will be the first year of our UMRR project, “Avian associations with management in the UMRS: filing knowledge gaps for habitat management”
    - Project is set for three years starting in 2024
    - Surveys will be conducted for 2 years followed by a year of analysis and report writing
    - Coordinated effort including USGS, USFWS, USACE MVR, MVP and MVS districts, and NGRREC
    - Surveys will take place in June in pools 3, 7, 8, 12, 14, 24-26 (site photos included below)
    - Planning on hiring a Sr. Conservation Science Associate to lead on this project by the end of the year
- Continuing in our second year of surveys at Prairie Island Indian Community
    - Surveying both bottomland and grassland sites across their property
    - Reporting bird density estimates and species occurrences across property
- For more information contact Tara Hohman (tara.hohman@audubon.org)

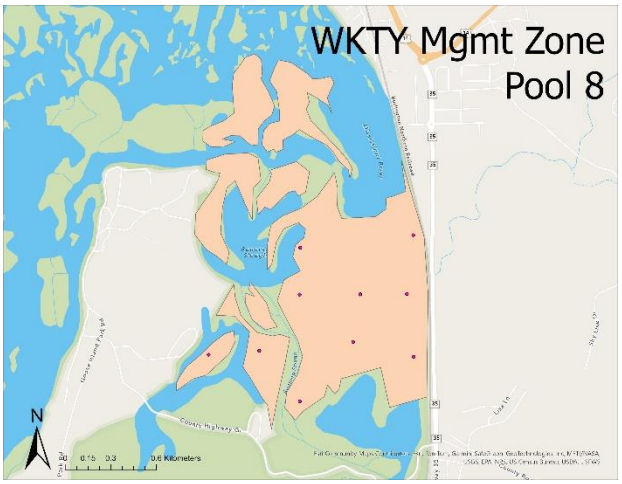


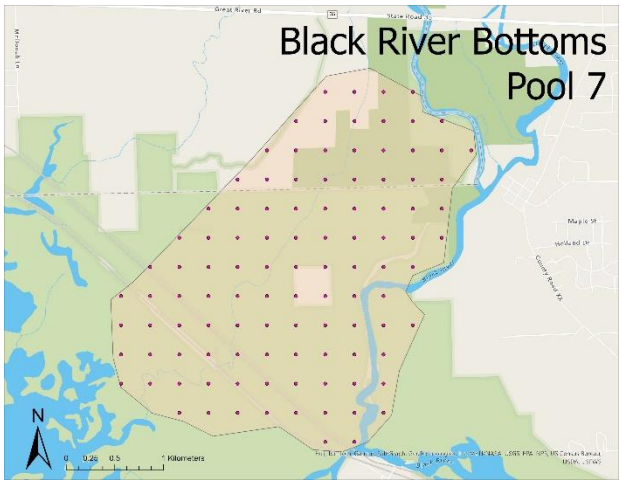





Beaver Island HREP
Pool 14
N


Pool 12 Forestry HREP
Pool 12
Massey
Wilkins
King
N


WKTY Mgmt Zone
Pool 8
N


Black River Bottoms
Pool 7
N

Gores WMA
Pool 3
Smith Landing
N

Audubon/USFWS Forest Ecology in MN/WI

Winona District Narrative Summary 2023

- **Horseshoe Bend CORPS + FWS**
  - June 2023 Brothers up North planted additional 681 bare root trees in Unit 3 (14 ac) and felled marked trees in Unit 3 (14 ac). Also they sprayed glyphosate around previously planted bare root trees in Unit 2 (12.3 AC), unit 4 (11.5 ac), unit 5(6 ac), unit 6 (11.8 ac).[42 acres, Rodeo, 0.4 gal active]
  - Fall 2023 Horseshoe Bend North Island **FWS**. Zumbro completed (38 acres) of buckthorn and prickly ash control, cut stump and/or foliar herbicide application. [38 acres, Vastlan, 0.4 gal active]
- **Garvin Brook CORPS + FWS**
  - July 2023 Zumbro sprayed glyphosate around planted trees in Unit 2 (18 ac) and Unit 4 (38 ac) [38 acres, Rodeo, 1.2 gal active]
  - July – September 2023 Audubon treated Japanese Hops with Garlon 3A on **FWS** land. (40 acres) [40 acres, Garlon 3A, 2.7 gal active]
  - October 2023 Audubon mapped the extent of hops coverage. (50+ acres)
- **Upcoming work spring 2024**
  - Winona District Resprouts Contract – buckthorn, honeysuckle, and prickly ash control. $48K
  - Half Moon landing 56 acres
  - Wabasha Fingers 79 acres
  - Whitewater Delta 41 acres

La Crosse District Narrative Summary 2023

- **Niebeling Tree Planting**
  - 7 acre site was mowed before planting. Contractor Morchella LLC planted 900 RPM trees from Forrest Keeling Nursery. Species included Hackberry, Kentucky Coffee Tree, Sycamore, Cottonwood, Swamp White Oak, and Pin Oak. All trees were staked. All trees except hackberry were protected with 48 inch tree tubes.
- **Root River Tree Planting**
  - 8 acre site was mowed before planting. Contractor Morchella LLC planted 1000 RPM trees from Forrest Keeling Nursery. Species included Hackberry, Kentucky Coffee Tree, Sycamore, Cottonwood, Swamp White Oak, and Pin Oak. All trees were staked. All trees except hackberry were protected with 48 inch tree tubes.
- **Root River Japan Hops Herbicide treatment and mapping**
  - July – September 2023 Audubon treated Japanese Hops with Garlon 3A on **FWS** land. (40 acres)[40 acres, Garlon 3A, 2.7 gal active]
  - October 2023 Audubon mapped the extent of hops coverage. (50+ acres)
- **Upcoming work spring 2024**
  - 10 acre tree planting Root River $50K estimate

Off Refuge Narrative Summary 2023

- **Whitewater Nursery site MN WMA**
  - Direct seeding, (7.2 acres)
  - Oust herbicide application after plants went dormant, (7.2 acres).
  - Hand cut and treat (20.5 acres)
  - Herbicide application (20.5 acres)
- **Vermillion River Tree Planting MN DNR FORESTRY**

- Contractor planted 7.5 acre site near Hastings MN. Site was prepared by bulldozer (MNDNR). 1455 RPM trees. Species list included Silver Maple, River birch, Hackberry, Kentucky Coffee Tree, Cottonwood, Swamp White Oak. All trees were staked and protected with 24 inch tree tubes. All trees were treated with Plantskydd after planting.

Supporting FWS Work Summary 2023

Education and interpretation activities

- Lydell's Landing bird walk - 05/2023
- World Migratory Bird Day at Trempealeau NWR - 05/13/2023
- Aldo Leopold Day bird walk - 03/02/2023
- Myrick Marsh, La Crosse bird walks - 05/2023
- Christmas bird count avian monitoring - 12/17/2022

FWS field work days

- Tree planting at Black River Bottoms - 07/2023
- Cut and treat oak grubs at Trempealeau -11/2023
- Homeless camp cleanup - 06/2023
- Controlled burns --12/2023
- Buoy deployment and closed area sign posting - 10/10 /2023

Site Visits / Driving Tour / Barge Tour

- MN and WI legislators barge boat tour- 05/30/2023
- Audubon MN board members driving tour – 08/15/2023