

**WISCONSIN
STATE REPORT**
June 17, 2010

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Significant Accomplishments

HUNTING HERITAGE CONFERENCE: In February 2010, the DNR hosted the first annual Hunting Heritage Conference. This conference focused on building community around the issue of hunter recruitment and retention, facilitated networking among individuals and organizations, discussed best practices for mentoring and hosting successful learn to Hunt Programs; conference funding was provided by a grant from the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF).

HUNTER EDUCATION & SAFETY: 2009 was the safest year recorded for Wisconsin regarding hunting incidents. A total of 18 incidents were reported, unfortunately one being fatal. Historical data shows 2007 as the next safest year with a total of 31 incidents. Hunter Education Outreach efforts continue to pay off, resulting in a reduction in hunting incidents. Since 1967, the onset of the program, Wisconsin has certified 956,548 students.

INVASIVE SPECIES ADMINISTRATIVE RULES: Invasive species continue to be a top priority for the DNR with emphasis on viral species (CWD and VHS), exotic and detrimental species including aquatic invertebrates, plants, and fish. We enacted an administrative rule that places invasive species into one of two categories with associated regulation. The regulations are to prevent the spread of invasive species that are currently not in Wisconsin and educate citizens about the threats that invasive species hold.

LANDOWNER INCENTIVE PROGRAM GRANTS - DRIFTLESS REGION: The biggest threat to plants and animals world-wide is loss or degradation of habitat. With more than 85% of Wisconsin's landscape under private ownership, and an estimated 90% of at-risk species having populations on private land, landowners play a key role in helping conserve the beauty and diversity of Wisconsin's natural heritage for future generations. Wisconsin's Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) partners with landowners to create and manage habitat for species that are rare or

Pink shaded area highlight's Wisconsin's portion of the Driftless Region.



declining. The program provides technical guidance and cost-share grants for voluntary management activities. LIP operates through the ongoing support of non-dedicated funding sources, mainly federal grants and donations from the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin. In 2009, Wisconsin's and Iowa's LIP were jointly awarded a Federal Grant to promote rare species habitat and assessments on private lands in the Driftless Region. In spring 2010, 21 landowners in this region were awarded \$115,000 in cost-share assistance for voluntary habitat restoration activities to benefit rare and vulnerable species. A second round of grants in this region is scheduled for fall 2010.

ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES OF WISCONSIN HANDBOOK: DNR is finalizing this extensive document, which describes the significant regional and continental resources in Wisconsin, and ecological features and socioeconomic conditions in each ecological landscape. It outlines the best locations and opportunities to manage particular natural communities, habitats, and aquatic features in the state. This will provide a framework for management decisions from a statewide and long-term perspective, allow for integration with other statewide plans, facilitate planning among other agencies and NGOs, and help citizens understand the ecology of where they live.

AMERICAN MARTEN: This past year (2009-10) marked the second of a 3-year project to stock American martens from northern Minnesota into an existing, but small population in northwest Wisconsin. To date, 58 martens (22 males, 36 females) have been released into the project area in parts of Ashland, Bayfield, and Sawyer counties. Twenty-seven of these animals were radio-collared and monitored to determine marten survival, residency, and habitat use after release. Stocking project partners are the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Wisconsin Trappers Association, and Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation. Additional American marten activities included 227 miles of winter track surveys (26 marten tracks observed), marten research in Iron County, re-signing of both Marten Protection Areas (532 mile²), development of a Marten Avoidance Techniques brochure, and the drafting and review of an updated American Marten Management Plan.

An American marten "quick" released into the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in fall of 2009. WDNR photo.



KIRTLAND'S WARBLER: A federally endangered bird, the Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*), has nested at a site in Adams County, Wisconsin for at least three consecutive years beginning in 2007. A second nesting site in Adams County and the first known nesting event in Marinette County were discovered by citizen volunteers participating in the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (WDNR) Annual Kirtland's Warbler Survey in 2009. Volunteers also found



A Kirtland's Warbler, Photo Credit: Joel Trick of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

lone singing males at two new sites in Marinette County. These observations were confirmed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and WDNR staff, who also located a male in Douglas County. Since 2007, more than thirty offspring have successfully fledged from the three breeding sites. This nesting success has been attributed to conservation and management activities implemented by a multi-partner project lead by the USFWS and the WDNR under the guidance of the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team.

CITIZEN-BASED MONITORING (CBM) PROGRAM The Wisconsin DNR's CBM Program is rounding out its sixth year of support and development of citizen (volunteer) programs. The goal of the CBM initiative is to facilitate the expansion of public involvement in natural resource monitoring and conservation. DNR provides direct financial and technical support to new or evolving projects and offer continuity to a growing network by facilitating communication and information exchange between organizations, disciplines, projects and individuals. As of May 2010, the popular CBM Partnership Program fund has supported 137 high priority natural resource monitoring projects statewide; most of which are directed entirely by external organizations. This provides a significant cost savings to the State of Wisconsin since partners normally exceeds a 3:1 match in non-state cash and donated time. The Citizen-Based Monitoring Program manages a directory called the "*Who's Who of Citizen-Based Monitoring*" and a website full of project and training resources. We also organize an annual conference to provide project coordinators, volunteers and agency staff additional networking, training and educational opportunities.

Major Issues for Agency

WOLF PETITION: On April 27, 2010, the Wisconsin DNR submitted a petition to Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, asking for removal of the gray wolf from the federal endangered species list in Wisconsin. Wisconsin's petition joins a similar action by Minnesota filed in March seeking delisting within Minnesota. Wisconsin's current wolf population is descendent from Minnesota wolves that came into Wisconsin seeking new territories. Wildlife biologists now count the wolf population shared by the two states in excess of 4,000 animals. The current late winter estimate of more than 700 wolves in Wisconsin is more than twice the management goal level prescribed by the Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan. The petition helps ensure that Wisconsin can benefit should the Fish and Wildlife Service act favorably on Minnesota's petition.

CLIMATE CHANGE: The Department has started the planning process for developing a Natural Resources Climate Change Adaptation Plan (plan). A cross-program planning team will develop the plan with the intent of meeting the requirements of future federal climate legislative requirements. Climate change work is a priority for the Department, and the plan will provide a framework and direction for the Department as it anticipates and responds to the impacts of changing climate in the state. The Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI), a group formed out of a partnership between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies in 2007,

provides the scientific foundation for the Department's adaptation plan (<http://www.wicci.wisc.edu>). Vulnerability assessments and sensitivity analyses completed by WICCI working groups will provide detailed information about which species and ecological systems and processes are most likely to be at greatest risk under a range of predicted future climate scenarios. Adaptation strategies that suit the needs and mission of the Department and its programs will be incorporated into the Department's plan. Information from both WICCI and the Department's plan will be incorporated into Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan.

WHITETAIL DEER RESEARCH: Wisconsin DNR is investing over \$2 million and developing collaborations to implement four deer research projects aimed at assessing buck mortality rates, fawn recruitment, ecological impacts of varying deer densities, and hunter recruitment. Objectives are to improve population estimates, assess recruitment and mortality rates, and document the impact of varying densities on ecosystems. These projects are being initiated in 2010 and some projects will continue through 2015.

INVASIVE SPECIES: Invasive species continue to be a top priority for the department. A new invasive crayfish that can harm native fish, frog and crayfish populations was found in Wisconsin in August 2009, presenting an early test case for the new invasive species control rule. A citizen found the red swamp crayfish, a Louisiana native raised by southern aquaculture operations, in a Washington County subdivision pond. This marks the first time the crayfish has been documented in Wisconsin. This is a prohibited species under the new rule, which gave the DNR authority to take fast action to eradicate prohibited species. Fisheries biologists and aquatic invasive species staff surveyed to determine whether it's a reproducing population and whether the crayfish have spread. A control plan was developed. Similarly, a rapid response plan was developed in Walworth County to eradicate yellow floating heart from a pond next to Delavan Lake by draining the water, dredging it, and installing a liner. Another species on the prohibited list, brittle water nymph, was confirmed in Mason Lake, bordering Adams and Marquette counties. Work with partners to develop a control plan was undertaken.

Other Issues and Challenges

BUDGET: Like many states, Wisconsin government continues to work with a budget deficit. Agencies remain under a hiring freeze, with limited approvals given to fill permanent vacancies that have been deemed an urgent need (including our new Federal Aid Coordinator) and limited term positions for parks, fire and similar seasonal functions. While we have been able to fill some positions, vacancies continue at the same rates as the workforce ages and individuals retire. We have invested our available resources (staff positions and technology) into expanding the services provided by our vendor agents and local governments and beefing up our Call Center and have reduced the hours (and staff positions) for providing licenses and assistance in person at our field offices.

WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME (WNS) IN BATS: Wisconsin became involved with WNS planning at the national level starting from the initial meeting in Albany, NY in June 2008. This past year,

Wisconsin DNR has greatly increased efforts on critical bat work needed in Wisconsin and contributed to the planning efforts for a National WNS Plan, a Midwestern Regional Response Plan, and are in the process of drafting Wisconsin's WNS Response Plan.

DNR has initiated contact and maintain close communication with partner states in USFWS Region 3 to ensure coordinated and collaborative ties to these neighboring states as state plans are developed. Four major research projects were completed with partner states (VT, NY, MI), universities, and federal agencies (USFWS, USGS). Providing healthy Wisconsin bats, Wisconsin DNR helped determine how the transmission of the fungus could occur from bat-to-bat, and from a previously affected cave-to-healthy bat. This past winter, DNR partnered again with USGS National Wildlife Health Center to conduct an experiment to determine if the fungus *Geomyces destructans* is the disease causing agent of WNS. For the second year, DNR aided a national research project by sending staff to join Michigan biologists studying arousal rates at control sites for comparison with bat arousal rates at WNS affected sites in the Northeast region.

As Wisconsin's WNS Response Plan is being created, DNR is employing a large crew of contractors to identify and contact all private landowners with caves or mines that may serve as hibernacula, as well as, to conduct maternity roost searches and acoustic surveys throughout the state to establish baseline conditions for each bat species' distribution and relative abundance. An online form is now active to allow public reporting to alert the Department of sick, dead, or dying bats, and any abnormal behavior.

BIOMASS HARVESTING GUIDELINES: There is increasing interest in utilizing biomass for energy purposes. Wisconsin DNR in collaboration with UW-Madison and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has initiated a process to develop guidelines for planting and harvesting non-forest biomass. Wisconsin has recently finalized initial guidelines for harvesting forest biomass. Currently there are five new research projects designed to assess biomass harvesting guidelines and develop ecologically sound approaches for utilizing biomass.

WHOOPING CRANES: As of mid-May 2010, there may be 102 birds in the Eastern Migratory Whooping Crane population, consisting of 58 males and 44 females. Most birds are in Wisconsin, 2 birds in Iowa, with 1 each located in Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. Six Direct Autumn Release birds are missing, for a total of 12 missing birds.

WILDLIFE POPULATION GROWTH: Bear and bobcat populations have recently expanded their ranges to areas of central and southern Wisconsin. WDNR wildlife researchers and managers are investigating the abundance and distribution of these species to determine future biological and social management issues related to this expansion.