

**Workshop Summary**  
**Wisconsin Habitat and Species Workshop**  
**March 17, 2009**  
**University of Wisconsin-Sheboygan – Main Building**  
**Sheboygan, Wisconsin**

Shaili Pfeiffer of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) provided a brief welcome and called upon state partners to work together in moving habitat restoration forward in the State of Wisconsin. Victoria Pebbles, Great Lakes Commission, reviewed the agenda and logistics of the day.

Mike Greer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District, provided an overview of the Corps' Great Lakes Habitat Initiative (GLHI), which provided the impetus for the 2007 state habitat workshop series, developed regional database of habitat projects (actual and proposed), and a database of habitat funding programs. The GLHI also produced a final implementation plan, primarily directed at the Corps, but also for consideration by other agencies. These products are available online at [www.glhi.org](http://www.glhi.org). Greer noted that the GLHI was a two-year project that has been officially completed, but that the stakeholders involved have continued to work together and are now part of a formal Habitat/Species Subcommittee under the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy (GLRC). Greer completed this overview with a brief description of recent updates underway to improve and link the habitat and projects databases. A question was raised as to whether the Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program will be funded this year. Greer indicated the program is in the President's FY2010 budget and that the Healing Our Waters (HOW) coalition is advocating for an increase in funds.

Participants then heard from a panel of speakers who provided overviews of programs involving habitat protection and restoration from a lake basin and statewide perspective. Cynthia Moore of WDNR provided an update on Wisconsin's Great Lakes Habitat Protection and Restoration Strategy (Wisconsin Strategy). She indicated the Wisconsin Strategy is very stakeholder-driven to implement the GLRC Strategy and to help fulfill the goals of both the Lake Michigan and Lake Superior Lakewide Management Plans (LaMPs). The Wisconsin Strategy includes several wetland protection target areas and tributary protection target areas for both lake basins. The Wisconsin Strategy is an effort to translate state-specific habitat actions to protect and restore Wisconsin's Great Lakes by building on other statewide plans and initiatives. It is meant to serve as a framework for planning and implementation for projects seeking new Economic Stimulus funding and other federal funding. The Strategy is a comprehensive plan to enhance other funding opportunities as well and coordinate allocation of resources. The Strategy is also a means to engage and educate stakeholders, including groups from both the Lake Superior and Lake Michigan basins. The Strategy's Habitat and Species goal is to protect and restore habitats critical for "species of greatest conservation need." A revision of Wisconsin's Strategy will be published by the end of summer 2009.

A question was asked regarding the purpose of the "target areas" lists in light of the existence of 303-d lists and watershed management plans. Moore replied these lists are

overall state goals taken from the 2006 Strategy. She suggested that they may want to list selection criteria in the revised document. Shaili Pfeiffer indicated that, from the Wisconsin Office of the Great Lakes perspective, the lists help decide which projects receive funds – the Strategy and the lists are a means by which the state pulls together information from different watershed management plans. Pebbles added that other states (e.g. MI and OH) have plans on what they're doing at the Great Lakes level. These larger plans or strategies provide a point from which states can measure progress. Another participant asked if part of the focus of the target lists is protection as well as restoration. Pfeiffer replied that both are foci. The questioner suggested that it may be advantageous to have both a protection and restoration list with different criteria. There were also questions asking whether the Strategy would contain commitments from the state to support implementation and achievement of restoration goals. There seemed to be general support for this idea.

Ricky Lien provided an overview of the Wisconsin State Wetlands Strategy and the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture Challenges. He indicated how the North American Waterfowl Management Plan became the guiding document for wetlands restoration work in Wisconsin. He explained how a Joint Ventures effort for the Upper Mississippi/Great Lakes region stepped down a continent plan to a regional plan, and then down to the Wisconsin Plan. The Joint Ventures efforts have recently evolved into four bird restoration plans – for waterbirds, shorebirds, neotropical birds, and ducks. These plans include Bird Conservation Areas with specific goals, for example, the number of acres of wet meadows to restore. Restored acres are then reported to all Joint Venture partners. Results for the past two years (2007-08) indicate a downward trend in total acres of wetlands restored. Lien then outlined several issues that could impede wetlands/habitat restoration work including lack of adequate staffing and training for new staff, shortage of ready restoration sites, the financial disincentives associated with use value taxes (UVT), and complexity of permits among others. A question came up regarding the apparent decline in the number of wetlands being restored and the factors involved. Lien replied that it is a very complicated issue and depends on commodity prices, the economy, Farm Bill programs, available funding, UVT, etc. Wisconsin Wetlands Association reported to the group that they have been working to remove this barrier to wetland restoration for several years. Efforts to remove wetland restoration tax penalties through administrative rule did not work, but a new effort to work changes through legislation is underway.

Jim Teselle, president of the Wisconsin Great Lakes Coalition (WGLC), provided an overview of the Lake Michigan Stakeholders (LMS) group as a model for collaboration. The group was formed in 2005 by the WNDR and WGLC and is comprised of about 60 nongovernmental organizations and public groups working to develop a way to implement Great Lakes restoration in Wisconsin. The group strives to ensure that Lake Michigan and resources of the basin are environmentally sustainable and economically viable for present and future generations. The LMS has eight workgroups, one for each of the Council of Great Lakes Governors priorities, and uses people from existing organizations to prepare and implement plans. The Wisconsin Strategy is the basis for developing the group's objectives. The group's two basic needs are money and staffing. The LMS would like to work with other Lake Michigan states (IL, IN, MI) to coordinate restoration efforts.

Melissa Malott of Clean Wisconsin provided an overview of the Healing Our Waters (HOW) Coalition and described ways HOW can help advance state priorities related to habitat restoration and protection. She reviewed HOW's FY2009 priorities and authorizations and FY2010 priorities and appropriations. She encouraged those present to join HOW.

John Hummer presented updates and enhancements underway for the habitat projects database/repository and the habitat funding database. These enhancements include additional quality control over projects that were previously entered, a more simplified data entry form for habitat projects, a new, more user-friendly web user interface and linkages with the funding database. Roger Gauthier – via WebEx – provided a hands-on demonstration of the web tools, including examples of how users will be able to query the databases to find potential funding sources that match habitat projects. He indicated that enhancements to the web tools are now fully functional. A few questions were asked:

- From the state's perspective, is there a way to select a project with particular benefits that relates to the overall goals of state plans and strategies? Gauthier responded that this is a common need among the states and that staff will be working to link the projects in the database with much higher-resolution tools for particular watersheds.
- If a person wants to see all restoration activity going on in a particular watershed, can s/he do that? Gauthier replied that this is one of the enhancements underway – adding linear functionality which would largely use the USGS hydrologic database that is segmented by every watershed, impoundment, etc. – to generate this information.
- Are forestry habitat protection projects included in the database? Mike Greer replied that the GLRC plan included a goal of "x" number of acres of forest/upland habitat to be restored. There currently may not be many forestry projects in the database, but future efforts will try to target classes of habitat that may be largely absent from the database. An additional comment indicated that there needs to be a stronger link between forest habitat enhancement and other restoration activities. This would open up new opportunities and incentives to work with private landowners who have forestry habitat in need of restoration or enhancement and help prioritize habitat/species at risk.

Next, two local projects were discussed as examples of fostering collaboration to advance restoration projects. Art Techlow III of WDNR provided an "old fashioned" slide show of Lake Winnebago Restoration. Lake Winnebago is the largest inland lake in the state with surrounding lakes that are flooded wetlands. The lake has had numerous nutrient and sediment issues. Dams in and among the lakes have raised water levels by 2-3 feet which caused a loss of a lot of emergent marsh. Several haphazard attempts were made to restore marshes; however littoral, nearshore habitat/species were not addressed. Later, the WDNR restored and protected thousands of acres of wetlands in the area; however, these efforts did not address water quality problems on the periphery of the restoration areas. Remnant wetlands have also been invaded by Phragmites – not much substrate remains. Hundreds of millions of dollars are still needed for further restoration work in the Lake Winnebago watershed; some of this will

come through Corps habitat enhancement monies as well as Natural Resources Damages Assessment (NRDA) funds.

Will Wawrzyn outlined Milwaukee River Basin dam removal challenges and risks. Challenges include water quality and quantity issues; invasive species; flood control issues; infrastructure and utility impacts; aesthetic, historic, social and scientific issues; costs and associated liabilities; staffing; sediment transport; land ownership use and values. Wawrzyn indicated that methods “beyond traditional approaches” are needed to address many dam removal issues. More and better coordination is needed among multiple partners including dam regulators, basin plans and fisheries people. Costs and benefits need to be better defined. Funding for these projects should include incentives and grants and be tied to community development. A “cradle-to-grave” management plan should be implemented for all dam projects. Natural “fishways” are a viable alternative – mimicking natural watercourses.

Federal agency representatives from NOAA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service provided brief overviews of their habitat funding programs and handed out related materials or pointed participants to relevant web sites.

Next, Judy Beck of the U.S. EPA’s Great Lakes National Program Office led a discussion on addressing challenges to restoration progress. She indicated that the Lake Michigan LaMP is a ready reference available online, with Chapter 4 devoted entirely to addressing habitat issues and challenges. For each of the basin’s 33 8-digit Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUCs), there is a factsheet including The Nature Conservancy-identified biodiversity hotspots (also available on TNC’s website). She indicated projects addressing the GLRC priorities and Great Lakes Areas of Concern are high priorities.

Victoria Pebbles and Shaili Pfeiffer (with input from other participants) then provided summary points they gathered throughout the workshop:

- Project coordinators should continue to add projects and/or keep projects already in the database up to date. This would be very helpful to federal agencies and other grantors who might fund these projects.
- The Gathering Waters Conservancy, other land conservancies, and nongovernmental organizations are working closely with the WI Strategy and GLRC Strategy – an up-to-date database would really support their efforts.
- The Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA), as part of its mission, communicates habitat/wetlands funding opportunities and works on education and policy issues. The organization works to address barriers to habitat restoration in the state. The WWA sees valuable long-term use of the web tools and has a listserv to connect wetlands stakeholders in Wisconsin. People can sign up by visiting: [www.wisconsinwetlands.org/alerts.htm](http://www.wisconsinwetlands.org/alerts.htm).
- Getting from planning to implementation of projects is a challenge. There always seems to be a shortage of project managers. Adequate staffing is a major issue.
- There is a need for more engineering and scientific capability to move some projects forward.

- Projects often boil down to policy and staffing issues; need to do better job organizing at the state level and removing barriers to wetland restoration. The WWA would like to facilitate a broader dialogue on these issues.
- Habitat restoration is no longer "business as usual." Need to think big – the Great Lakes are the largest freshwater system in the world. How will all the needs be funded, managed and staffed? Need to think about all this collectively.