U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Northeast Region

the *MARS* report

December 2003 - January 2004

The Northeast Region's Monthly Accomplishment Report Summary

Project Protects Maine's Largest Contiguous Land Tract

On Jan. 5, the Service and other cooperators announced completion of a joint project to protect a 329,000-acre tract of land in northern Maine. The West Branch Project is the single largest conservation project ever accomplished on a contiguous tract of land in Maine.

Molly Sperduto, representing the Northeast Region's New England Field Office, and Stewart Fefer, from the region's Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, led Service support of the $35 million acquisition project. Sperduto and Fefer engaged in complex negotiations with the trustees of the North Cape, Rhode Island, oil spill and Alan Hutchinson, executive director of the Forest Society of Maine, to provide $800,000 toward the $35 million fundraising effort. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Legacy Program provided an unprecedented $19.7 million (out of a $64 million nationwide funding budget), The Nature Conservancy (Maine Chapter) provided $3 million, and the state of Maine's Land for Maine's Future Program provided $1 million. The landowner and other individuals and foundations provided additional funds.

An additional $3 million dollars remains to be raised for the stewardship endowment fund and to monitor the easement. The project includes a 282,000-acre conservation easement under which timber harvest will continue. The Maine Dept. of Conservation will acquire and manage 47,000 acres.

Forest management practices will support sustainable timber harvest on the tract. Lands will remain open to the public for traditional recreational uses, including hunting, hiking, camping, snowmobiling, canoeing and kayaking. Plants and animals protected by the acquisitions include Canada lynx, pine marten, wood turtle, sedge wren, yellow rail, blue-backed trout, bald eagle, creeper (a freshwater mussel), extra striped snaketail dragonfly, green spleenwort, slender cliffbreak, black sedge, sheathed sedge and swamp fly-honeysuckle.

The press event, coordinated by the Forest Society of Maine, received news coverage from major television and newspaper media outlets throughout the

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Damage Settlement Brings Restoration to Lordship Point

The 30-acre Lordship Point Gun Club Site overlooks the mouth of the Housatonic River on the Connecticut shore. Trap and skeet shooting on the site deposited 3 million pounds of lead shot between the 1920s and 1980s, contaminating intertidal mudflat and saltmarsh and upland grassland. The Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Sporting Goods Properties Inc. (DuPont Chemical) have conducted a cooperative natural resource damage

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Raceway Cleaning Project Protects Fish Health at Pittsford Hatchery

Pittsford National Fish Hatchery staff recently conducted a complete cleaning of all 38 raceways containing two-year classes and six lots of sea-run and landlocked Atlantic salmon (Salmo salar). Regular cleaning had been set aside to attend to intensive fin clipping and vaccination of 145,000 fish during previous weeks. The thorough cleaning halted algae growth and forestalled a buildup of organic solids that could have caused deterioration of water quality and an increased risk to the fish.

Staff members put in a total of 42 work hours with brooms, brushes and scrapers in a seldom-mentioned hatchery activity that is vital to reaching the production goal of healthy fish.

New Project for Maryland Partners Program

The Northeast Region's Chesapeake Bay Field Office Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, in concert with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forestry Service, has begun a restoration project with a local community homeowners association in Frederick County, Maryland. The Deerbought Community, located adjacent to the Monocacy River on 148 acres of open space land,

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Winter at a National Fish Hatchery

Life in the Pittsford National Fish Hatchery's remote northern temperate zone in winter can involve many hours of snow and anchor ice removal. (A discussion of anchor ice can be found at http://www.roaringfork.org/images/other/AnchorIce.pdf. Not a Fish and Wildlife Service Web site.) Such ice clearing is vital to keeping the hatchery's water intake structures open and brook water flowing to the fish stock. Ice removal is prompted by alarms that sound in the early morning hours, when cold temperatures bring favorable conditions for ice formation.

During winter at the hatchery, snow plowing and anchor ice removal are special burdens because the work adds to the ongoing chores of fish feeding, egg picking, sac fry care and starting fry on feed. Many hours in winter are spent keeping hatchery roads and parking area turnarounds open. We must prepare the hatchery's rearing units for truck access during spring stocking of salmon smolts before all the snow has melted.

These winter conditions will lead, in turn, to spring's floods, muddy water and ice and debris jams ... and a new season of challenges at the hatchery.

National Hydric Soils Committee to Review Delaware Soils

The National Technical Committee for Hydric Soils, of which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a member, will conduct field reviews in Delaware of the "Anomalously Bright Loamy Soils." The soil types were brought to the attention of the Mid-Atlantic Hydric Soils Committee by a soil scientist from the Chesapeake Bay Field Office. The field office is a full member of the Mid-Atlantic Hydric Soils Committee, comprised of federal and state agencies and academic personnel.

These soils meet the technical standards adopted by the national technical committee but lack classic hydromorphology.

The University of Maryland, in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Mid-Atlantic Committee, is finishing a three-year study of these soils confirming their status as hydric soils. The implication of this study is the potential protection of thousands of wetland acres in the Coastal Plain Physiographic Province that currently are not identified as wetlands due to the lack of hydromorphic soils.

2003 a Year of Accomplishment for Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge and Friends

Non-refuge staff members contributed a total of 9,100 hours in 2003 at Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge. Members of the Friends group and other volunteers donated over 5,400 hours. The remaining 3,700 hours of refuge labor were performed by prison workers through a partnership with the Delaware Department of Corrections.

The major highlight of this past year was the National Wildlife Refuge System centennial celebration. Prime Hook welcomed close to 2,000 visitors to a community open house on March 15 to mark the centennial and Prime Hook's 40th anniversary. The Friends group really worked hard to make this day a success. They were instrumental in planning, organizing, logistics, networking and public outreach.

The Friends group was very successful at their first major fundraising initiative and at spreading the news about Prime Hook and the refuge system to the local community. This event was highlighted by many activities such as the attendance of state, county and local representatives, exhibits from more than 30 partners, and great media coverage. Donations of cash and in-kind contributions brought more than $7,000 to the Friends group from more than 40 local businesses and individuals.

US Fish and Wildlife Service photo

Friends and volunteers were again very instrumental in public outreach activities in 2003. The Friends joined the chambers of commerce of the refuge's three neighboring communities and the Southern Delaware Tourism Bureau. Friends and volunteers participated in refuge festivals celebrating International Migratory Bird Day and National Wildlife Refuge Week. They participated in parades and display booths at local events, updated the design of their quarterly newsletter, assisted in field trips to the refuge by local schools, and staffed the organization's sales outlet in the visitor center on weekends and during the week.

Other projects included designing and constructing a display highlighting the refuge system centennial and the refuge's 40th anniversary, designing and constructing information kiosks for visitors, planning and constructing a boardwalk leading to the newly built photography blind, designing a refuge bird list, and participating in a local "Take a Kid Fishing" event in Milton.

Friends members also participated in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service tractor training course to become certified to operate tractors and lawn mowers. With this training, members designed and planted a wildflower garden to highlight the native flora of this area.

The group also sponsored an interpretive program at the Salisbury Zoo for the annual volunteer recognition ceremony, participated in shorebird banding initiatives, funded the construction of osprey platforms on the refuge and led monthly walks for birding enthusiasts.

It was a great year in 2003, and we look for 2004 to be even better!

New Project

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decided to create wildlife habitat and improve water quality by restoring 8 acres of riparian buffer. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program is donating 3,800 native tree and shrub seedlings to the association to plant this spring.

A representative from the field office will continue to provide technical assistance for future projects on the remaining 140 acres of open space.

Invasive Plants Publication Becomes Multi-Agency Project

A biological invasion of non-native plants is spreading into our nation's fields, pastures, forests, wetlands, waterways, natural areas and rights-of-way. Variously referred to as exotic, nonnative, alien, noxious, or non-indigenous weeds, invasive plants impact native plant and animal communities by displacing native vegetation and disrupting habitats as they become established and spread over time.

The University of Georgia and agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture have together developed a CD to provide resource managers and the public with information to help check the spread of invasive plants. Originally developed by the Northeast Region's Chesapeake Bay Field Office, "Invasive Plants of the Eastern United States: Identification and Control" covers identification characteristics, plant distribution and control options for 97 tree, shrub, vine, grass, fern, forb and aquatic plant species that are invading the eastern United States. For each species, a menu of control options is presented, including mechanical treatments, specific herbicide prescriptions and, for selected species, recent advances in biological control. (The project can be viewed online at http://www.invasive.org/eastern/. This is not a Fish and Wildlife Service site.)

While the publication is not an official list of "invasive" plants throughout the eastern United States, it includes federally identified noxious weeds and those listed by state regulatory agencies, pest plant councils and other organizations. Some of the plants on the list are often found in ornamental plantings and landscapes. In fact, many non-native plants introduced for horticultural and agricultural use now pose a serious ecological threat in the absence of their natural competitors and control agents.

The publication will help landowners, foresters, resource managers and the general public become familiar with invasive plants to help protect our environment from the economic and ecological impacts of these biological pollutants.

Damage Settlement

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assessment to determine how to offset injuries caused by the lead. The resulting settlement agreement, reached in January, provides for the donation of a conservation easement on the site to the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, restoration of 8.2 acres of native coastal grasslands, and a cash payment of $250,000 to reimburse the United States for past assessment costs and to support future wildlife habitat restoration projects in the area.

As a result of the settlement, a conservation easement valued at approximately $6 million has been donated to the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, thereby protecting the site as wildlife habitat in perpetuity. Approximately 8 acres of native grassland has been created on the site in the upland areas formerly contaminated with lead. In addition, $215,000 has been made available for coastal restoration projects.

Project Protects

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state.

The Gulf of Maine Coastal Program and the New England Field Office plan to coordinate another on-site press event this coming spring to highlight the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's active involvement with three recent landscape-scale habitat protection projects in Maine's North Woods. These include the West Branch, the ongoing Machias River project and the pending Downeast Lakes project.

Disabled Hunters Participate in Wheelin' Sportsmen Event at Bombay Hook Refuge

Heavy rains did not keep five hunters from hunting waterfowl from their wheelchairs at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge recently. The event was the result of a partnership with the National Wild Turkey Federation's Wheelin' Sportsmen program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This was the first year for this event, designed to provide a rare opportunity for non-ambulatory hunters to take part in waterfowl hunting. Although some hunters did not attend due to rain, the five participants enjoyed a good day in the outdoors. Some individuals were hunting waterfowl for the first time, while others were experienced goose hunters. One hunter was returning to the sport after his accident two years ago. His 71-year-old father sat in the blind with him, his first time watching his son hunt waterfowl.

Professional guides, experienced waterfowlers and champion callers donated their time, expertise and equipment for the event. Temporary blinds, designed for hunting from a sitting position, were built and placed the previous day. The permanent field blind that is regularly available for hunters in wheelchairs was also used.

The group met at 4 a.m. for a predawn breakfast and hunt orientation. Blinds were placed along roads, and plywood was used to keep the wheelchairs from sinking in the mud.

"It was an unforgettable experience," said Wayne Carter, executive director of the Delaware-Maryland Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America and a veteran hunter. "Events like these renew people's self-esteem. The world comes alive when you get out into the woods, sit in a marsh to see the sun rise and enjoy the camaraderie of others who are in wheelchairs."

One of the hunters summed it up as he prepared to leave at day's end. "It was a good day."

We hope to grow this program at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge to provide more opportunities for disabled hunters and to foster awareness of wheelchair-accessible deer stands and a goose blind that are available for use during regular refuge hunts.

This event would not have been possible without the support of the National Wild Turkey Federation, including local chapters and Steve Farrell from the Division of Visitor Services and Communication of the National Wildlife Refuge System in the Washington Office. The refuge provided the land and the birds, and 15 dedicated volunteers donated 150 hours of their time and expertise. They enthusiastically volunteered to return next year to make this an annual event.

Service's Northeast Region Puts GIS Data on the Internet

The Northeast Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the first of the Service's regions to bring all of its national wildlife refuge metadata into compliance with the federal standard and serve it publicly online via the National Biological Information Infrastructure and the National Spatial Data Infrastructure. National wildlife refuge metadata is made up of files that describe the refuge boundary digital data for users of the Service's geographic information system. Development and use of these online data clearinghouses are high priorities under this administration's e-government initiative.

Users can go to these sites, do a search on "refuge," and receive a listing of 88 Northeast Region national wildlife refuge files. The users can then peruse the information and download the actual data for use in their geographic information systems.

Many thanks to Sue Fuller and Florence James of the Northeast Region, Barb White and Andrey Andreyev of the Service's Washington office, and Terry Giles of U.S. Geological Survey for making this achievement possible.

Gulf of Maine Coastal Program Suppports Land Trust Grant Applications

Gulf of Maine Coastal Program staff members Lois Winter, Bob Houston and Jean Fujikawa recently worked closely with four land trust partners that submitted Small NAWCA grant applications for consideration. The proposals submitted include the following:

• Talbot Cove, Straight Bay, Trescott Township. Includes 38 acres of salt marsh, tidal mud flats, 8,352 feet of shorefront and 94 acres of upland buffer to be added to Cobscook Bay Wildlife Management Area

• Carney Island and the Causeway Intertidal Basin, Deer Isle. Includes 17 acres of upland and 29 acres of immediately adjacent intertidal wetlands

• Day's Marsh, Newcastle. Includes domed bog-raised peatland, open water and upland wooded buffer in 68 acres

• Killick Pond/Gannett Tract, York County. 107-acre addition to the existing 2,463-acre Killick Pond Wildlife Management Area. Includes high-quality pitch pine forest, floodplain forests, frost pockets and kettlehole wetlands

All four projects protect significant wetland acreage and provide high value habitat for waterbirds and endangered species. In order to finalize the grant proposals, coastal program staff provided landcover and habitat maps and calculated wetland acreages. They coordinated with the staff of the land trust partners, interpreted and described predicted habitat values for 91 priority trust species based on our Gulf of Maine watershed habitat analysis, wrote biological components of the final text, reviewed and commented on the full proposals, wrote letters of support, and answered questions from the grantees regarding grant application procedures.

Settlement Reached in Town of Plymouth, Mass., Endangered Species Case

In 1996, a piping plover chick was crushed by an off-road vehicle on Plymouth Long Beach before the Town of Plymouth restricted access for the nesting season. Ongoing concern about the safety of piping plovers on the beach prompted the Service to take legal action against the town in 1998. The Solicitor's Office issued a civil penalty of $12,000 for the death of the chick, a violation of the Endangered Species Act. The U.S. District Court supported the Service's request to close the beach to off-road vehicles during the plover breeding season.

The town appealed the penalty. The Service postponed a hearing on the appeal to provide town officials adequate time to develop a beach management plan. In a public statement, Acting Northeast Regional Director Rick Bennett said, "The Service recognizes that it will be expensive for the town to implement the protection measures for shorebirds called for in the plan. We decided to excuse the penalty as it's clear that the money can best be used to support local efforts to protect the piping plover."

The case against the Town of Plymouth was closed last week. The town had agreed to a final plan to manage public uses on Plymouth Long Beach to protect piping plovers and other shorebirds that nest and breed on the beach each spring. The plan received final approval from the state in September.

The Service, now satisfied with the piping plover protection measures included in the plan, has dismissed the $12,000 civil penalty that had been held in abeyance.

This case has been closely watched by other Massachusetts towns with beach management programs that impact nesting piping plovers. To date, no other town in Massachusetts has ignored the Service's request for compliance with piping plover management.

Law Enforcement Activities

Import Seizures Tallied

Since Dec. 1, wildlife inspectors at the Port of Boston have seized the following items: two shahtoosh shawls imported from India; two jars of sea turtle meat from Cape Verde; one pair of leopard shoes imported from Syria; two African elephant ivory necklaces from Botswana; two moose antlers and one stuffed hawk taken by the Canadian Border Patrol at the Portland, Maine, ferry from Canada; 100 grams of sturgeon caviar from the United Kingdom; one stuffed caiman and two mounted frogs from South America; one carved African elephant ivory tusk taken from a person arriving from Nigeria; one dead tortoise from Moldova; one walrus ivory pendant from Denmark; two mounted arctic terns from Iceland; and one mounted raptor from Iraq via Syria.

All of these seizures came from personal baggage. Only two of the 14 seizures listed above were declared to Service or CBP officers prior to inspection of baggage. The remaining 12 seizures were not declared to any federal agency and were found during secondary inspection of baggage.

Bust Nets Surprising Violators

Special agents, along with an officer from the Maine Warden Service, conducted overt sea duck hunting patrols on New Year's Day. They conducted a surveillance of one outfit in an area that is locally known for scaup (blue bills). The season for scaup was closed.

At the conclusion of their hunt, it was discovered one subject had an unplugged 10 gauge shotgun, one subject had an unsigned and unattached federal duck stamp, the boat was unregistered, and there were not enough life jackets for the occupants.

Of special note, the occupants of the boat all were employed by a federal agency responsible for enforcing boat safety. Criminal tickets were issued.

Pigeon Racer Cited in Hawk Shooting Incident

A special agent was requested by Massachusetts Environmental Police Officer Beaulieu to assist with the investigation of a hawk shooting in Upton, Massachusetts. The case was initiated by Upton Police Department in response to a complaint, and during the police department investigation a Cooper's hawk was recovered from the subject. The subject claimed the hawk was in the act of attacking his champion homing pigeons.

Officer Beaulieu and the special agent interviewed the complainant, who produced digital pictures of a hawk trap in the subject's backyard, with the hawk in it. The final picture showed the subject shooting into the trap. Interview of the subject produced admissions and an affidavit. Most importantly, the subject is president of a local pigeon club and said he learned how to make the trap from other members. The following day the subject told the special agent that several of the club members had traps and had removed them from their yards.

Apparently there is a lot of money in raising champion pigeons: The subject sold one to a person in Taiwan for $25,000. The special agent will present this case to the U.S. Attorney's Office for prosecution in Boston.

67 Cited In Rhode Island Joint Task Force Operation

Special agents coordinated a joint state and federal waterfowl task force with the Rhode Island Environmental Police on January 23 and 24, the last weekend of the waterfowl season there. Seven New England special agents and six environmental police officers participated in the operation, including three teams on boats. A total of 67 hunters were checked.

The following violations were documented: four possession of lead shot; two wanton waste; two failure to retain field possession; four federal duck stamp; two state violations; two take over limit; two take by aid of motorboat; and four HIP violations. Rhode Island Deputy Chief Kurt Blanchard was very pleased with the Service's participation.

Accomplishment Reports Received

The following reports were received in the Accomplishment Reporting System prior to February 1, 2004. Reports received after that date will be included in the next issue of *the MARS report.*

Readers can view issues of *the MARS report* at the Northeast Region Web site (http://northeast.fws.gov/ars). To enter the Accomplishment Reporting System, go to http://ars.fws.gov.

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