

FALL 2022

THE WILDSIDE

A newsletter for the supporters of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance & The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge



PHOTO CREDIT: GIOVANNI P. ROCCO

Department of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland visits the Refuge!
Grounds are open every day from sunrise to sunset
See back of newsletter for the Visitor Service's Fall Calendar!





The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR) is located along the lower Detroit River and western shoreline of Lake Erie. Established in 2001, as the first International Wildlife Refuge in North America, it includes islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals, and waterfront lands along 48 miles of shoreline. Its unique location in a large urban area allows significant opportunities for the public to experience fish, wildlife, and plants in their natural habitat.

The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization – a “Friends” organization that works to support the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) in development of the DRIWR. We invite you to become a supporter of IWRA. Visit www.iwralliance.org, www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river, and www.detroitriverhawkwatch.org for more periodic updates.

IWRA Email: iwr_alliance@yahoo.com
 IWRA Phone: 734-362-3735
 International Wildlife Refuge Alliance
 5437 West Jefferson Ave
 Trenton, MI 48183
 General Information: 734-365-0219

IWRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Richard G. Micka, Chairman
- Gary. R. Kirsh, Vice Chairman
- Michael Morrin, Treasurer
- Roberta Urbani, Secretary
- Marika Diamond, Liaison
- Tim Bowman
- Mary Bohling
- John Cullen
- Michael Dunlap
- Joann Gonyea
- Elizabeth Iszler
- Kristen LeForce
- Bruce Ross
- Donald Skidmore
- Richard Whitwam

IWRA

- Joann Van Aken, Executive Director
- Nicole LaFleur, New Executive Director/Canvasback Nature Store Manager
- Shannon Nelson, Outreach & Operations Coordinator

DRIWR MANAGEMENT

- Dan Kennedy, Refuge Manager
- Steve Dushane, Deputy Refuge Manager

DRIWR BIOLOGY

- Jessie Fletcher, DRIWR Wildlife Biologist
- KR Vedolich, DRIWR Biological Technician
- Jasmine Mancuso, DR-WLE CWMA Coordinator
- Alexa Blankenship, DR-WLE CWMA Lead Strike Team Technician
- Michala Burke, DR-WLE CWMA Strike Team Technician
- Emma Delie, DR-WLE CWMA Strike Team Technician
- Erika Van Kirk, Detroit River Hawk Watch Apprentice
- Sarah deGuise, Detroit River Hawk Watch Apprentice

DRIWR LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Doug Briggs, Patrol Captain

DRIWR MAINTENANCE

- John Nicely, Maintenance Mechanic
- David Demeyere, Maintenance Assistant

DRIWR VISITOR SERVICES

- Jody Demeyere, Visitor Services Manager
- Todd Weston, Park Ranger
- Jazmyn Bernard, Park Ranger
- Aleigha Alexander, Volunteer Coordinator

A Message from the Alliance Chair

November 2009 seems only like yesterday; but so much in the life of Joann Van Aken has changed in the interim. Joann became an Office Manager for IWRA back then and has since elevated that position to Executive Director.

As circumstances would have it, I served as Chairman of the Board for IWRA that entire time and I can tell you that the description of “Executive Director” fits. Now, Joann has decided to step down from that Post after an exemplary career. She will be missed not only by the IWRA Board of Directors, but the Refuge Staff as well. We all wish her well in her new endeavors and know that in the heart of hearts she will always be part of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge as ordained by the late great John D. Dingell Jr.

All the Best,
 Dick Micka, Chair,
 IWRA, Board of Directors



Meet IWRA’s New Executive Director, Nicole LaFleur!

Hello! My name is Nicole LaFleur and I am so excited to begin my new role as Executive Director of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance. After graduating from Central Michigan University with my Bachelor’s Degree in Biology and Environmental Studies, and Master’s in Conservation Biology, I started working at DRIWR in 2015 as a biological technician on the invasive species crew.

I have spent the last five years with IWRA, learning about the non-profit world as Engagement Assistant, Nature Store Manager, and Assistant Director.

The Detroit River is one of my favorite places in the world (the other is Beaver Island!) and I love working at the Refuge and connecting people to the nature in their own backyards. My favorite place on the refuge is the Green Trail, my favorite animal is the monarch butterfly, and my favorite plant is the water lily. A proud Downriver native,

I grew up in Wyandotte and now live in Brownstown with my husband and two daughters.

Photo: Nicole and Joann posing in front of the John D. Dingell Jr. Visitor Center. Joann has been such an influential part of IWRA and its accomplishments since 2009. The DRIWR staff is going to sincerely miss her amazing, kind-hearted personality and spirit. Thank you for all that you have done for the Refuge and our local communities, Joann. Best wishes!

“It’s time to say goodbye, but I think goodbyes are sad and I’d much rather say hello. Hello to a new adventure.” – Ernie Harwell



Meet the New Refuge Manager, Dan Kennedy!

By Bert Urbani/IWRA



Dan Kennedy started his new job on February 28 and has now been at the Refuge for six months.

Dan brings a 25-year career in wildlife management, with nearly 19 years with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in the areas of wildlife and endangered and threatened species.



Dan Kennedy showing Congresswoman Debbie Dingell and Congressman Raúl Grijalva some of the nature exhibits inside the John D. Dingell Jr. Visitor Center.

He was inspired to apply for the job of Refuge Manager because of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, which has been in existence for about a decade but only recently funded at the DRIWR. Dan noted that historically the nation's conservation programs have focused on rural areas with large tracts of land but few people. With seven million people living within driving distance of the DRIWR, Dan is excited by the prospect of helping connect people with nature. The USFWS' Urban Program believes "Conservation in urban areas helps protect our natural heritage and provides people with access to nature that raises their quality of life."*

Dan's immediate goal is learning. He expects a steep learning curve to absorb the policies and practices of a new agency, the vast institutional and practical knowledge of the Refuge staff, and the present and growing challenges including climate change and invasive species. Dan is looking forward to getting to know the Refuge's partners, including its "Friend" group... IWRA. He plans to connect with former Refuge Managers, John Hartig on Grosse Ile and Susan White in Hawaii, to learn from their experiences, and acknowledges he is lucky to be arriving after the John D. Dingell Jr. Visitor Center was completed.

Dan loves to fish from his kayak and tried to go at least once a week during the depths of the pandemic to relieve stress. Originally from Midland, Michigan, Dan recently moved from Lansing and bought a house in Wyandotte. We will be seeing Dan at some IWRA functions as he settles into his new role at the DRIWR. We wish him a warm welcome!

<https://www.doi.gov/urban/USFWS>



What is Steve pointing at THIS time?!

Deputy Refuge Manager, Steve Dushane, took Dan Kennedy out for a DRIWR boat tour to learn more about the Refuge's history.

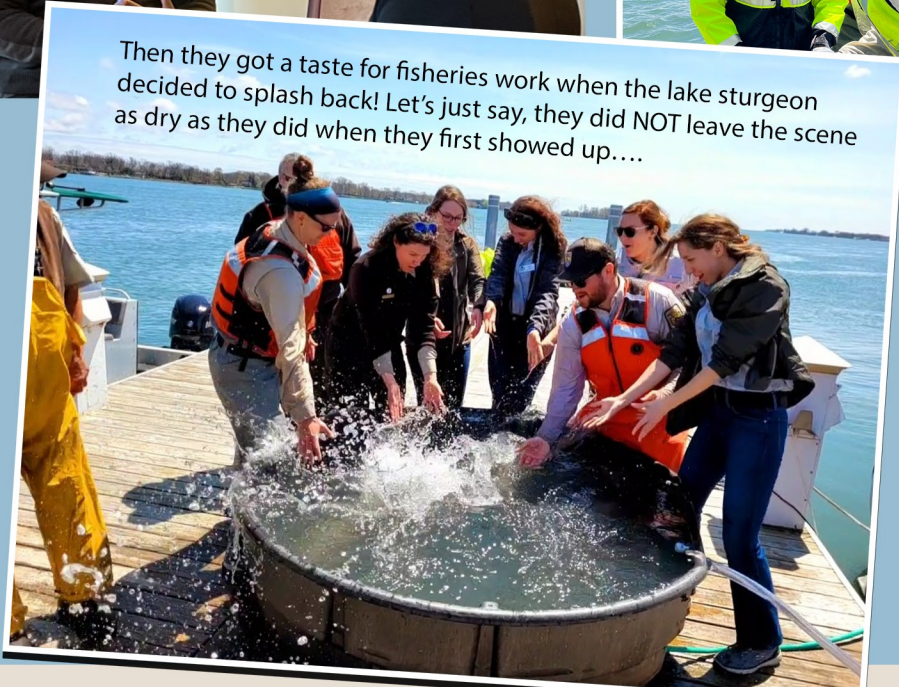
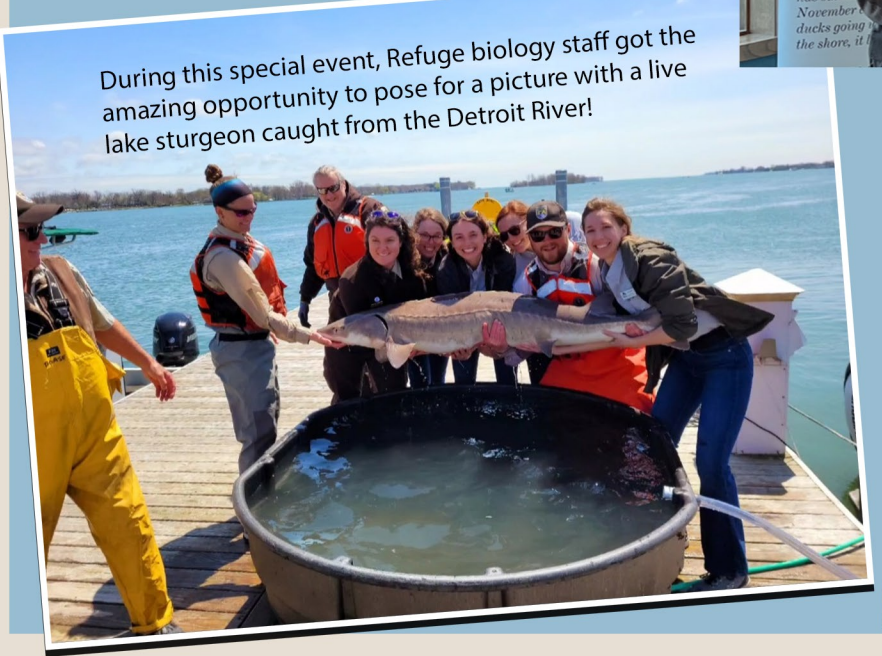
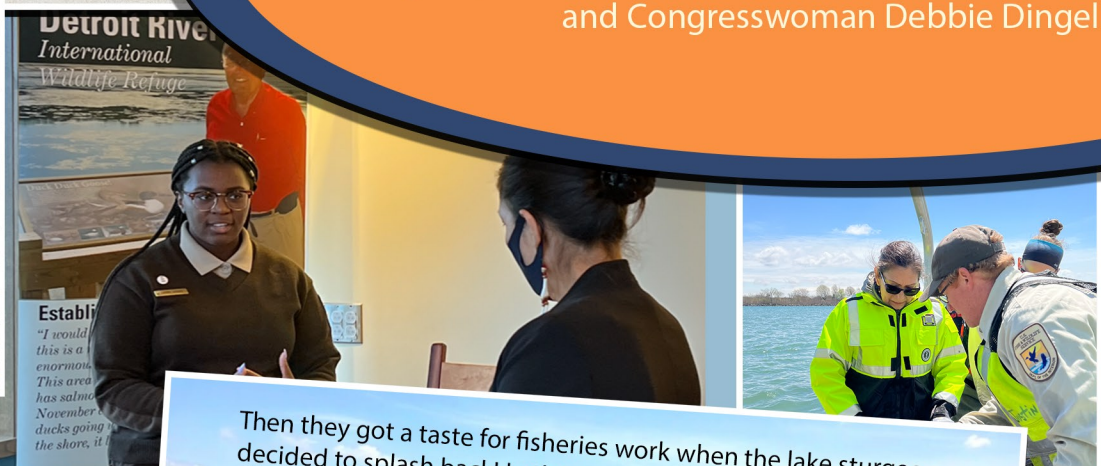
Steve is notorious for spotting Refuge gems when he is out in the field. Can you guess what Steve is pointing at in the photo?

Better yet, can you guess what Refuge unit they are at in the picture?

Photo Credit: Nicole LaFleur



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RE-OPENING OF
THE JOHN D. DINGELL JR. VISITOR CENTER CELEBRATION**
Featuring a special visit from Department of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland
and Congresswoman Debbie Dingell!



Biology Update!

By Alexa Blankenship, Michala Burke, Emma Delie, Jasmine Mancuso, and KR Vedolich

This summer, our biggest project was managing the aquatic invasive species, European frog-bit (EFB; *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) (Figures A – larger, dark green floating plant in photo).

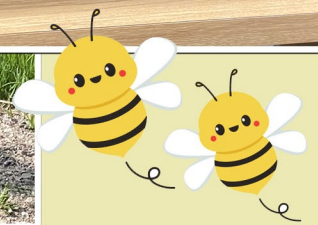
Staff from DRIWR, Detroit River-Western Lake Erie Cooperative Weed Management Area (DR-WLE CWMA), and volunteers from the DRIWR Stewardship Crew surveyed across both Refuge and partner lands for EFB.

Later in the summer, we used survey data to identify three properties to remove EFB from, by hand-pulling it before the reproductive structures (turions) dropped for the season (Figure B - Before; Figure C - After). Our efforts were rewarded with the removal of five full, 42-gallon, garbage bags across one acre (Figure D).



Honeybee Honey Harvest at DRIWR

By Jazmyn Bernard



Over the last year, Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge has had two honeybee hives in the prairie. Currently, there are about 60,000 bees in each hive. Our honeybees can produce hundreds of pounds of honey that can benefit both the beehives and people! So far, we've harvested 250 pounds of honey! All the honey harvesting is done by Bees in the D, a non-profit organization and partner of the Refuge.

This organization installed our beehives in May 2021, does routine beehive checkups, and harvests the honey from our hives. Bees in the D have a special way of harvesting and preparing the honey they collect, because they do not mix the honey they harvest. This allows them to harvest a variety of honey that come in different colors and has different tastes. Because the taste and coloration of honey can change depending on what mixture of flowers bees are collecting nectar from, we can end up with many different types of honey!

Did you know... the Canvasback Nature Store inside the John D. Dingell Jr. Visitor Center sells Bees in the D honey? Look for the unique barcode on each jar to find out exactly where your honey came from!



Photo Credit: Erika Van Kirk

Detroit River Hawk Watch Season Kick-Off!

By Erika Van Kirk

The Refuge is looking forward to our 40th consecutive season of monitoring diurnal raptor and turkey vulture migration at the mouth of the Detroit River. The Detroit River Hawk Watch (DRHW) takes place from September 1 – November 30 every year at Lake Erie Metropark’s boat launch.

This year, Lake Erie Metropark’s Hawkfest will also be taking place on September 17th and 18th.

Hawkfest is an all-day migration celebration for the whole family. This event features live birds of prey, interpretive programming, guest speakers, games, and crafts. We hope you can make it to the count site more than once to take part in some of the best hawk-watching in North America. When you come, our volunteers, apprentices, and official counter are all happy to teach you more about migration and hawk identification.

The main purpose of the DRHW is to collect population data to help us better understand factors influencing migration, species health, and population dynamics while also promoting awareness of our region’s wildlife resources.

Success of the count would not be possible without the support from the USFWS, IWRA, the Hawk Migration Association of North America, and the Huron-Clinton Metroparks.



Photo Credits: Andrew Sturgess



Meet the New Detroit River Hawk Watch Apprentice, Sarah deGuise!

Sarah deGuise is a recent graduate from Michigan State University where she obtained her degree in Fisheries and Wildlife with a concentration in conservation biology.

She just finished a field season with the Forest Service where she surveyed for sensitive shorebird and turtle species along the Lake Michigan coastline.

Her passion for nature was instilled in her at a young age but her love of raptors stem from her time spent as a raptor trainer in college. She is excited to get started identifying raptors with the DRHW.



MEET THE NEW KIDS AT THE REFUGE

Meet the DR-WLE CWMA's New Strike Team Technician, Emma Delie!

I am from Romeo, Michigan, where I spent my childhood visiting local parks and camping with my family. I graduated from Central Michigan University in 2020 with a Bachelor's in Conservation Biology and a Minor in Environmental Science and spent 2021 in the Southwest U.S. working for American Conservation Experience.

I joined the DR-WLE CWMA in March 2022 as a Strike Team Technician and am very grateful for this opportunity to learn and grow alongside the Refuge staff. In the future, I hope to obtain a career related to my passions of herpetofauna conservation and wetland habitat management.



Meet the DR-WLE CWMA's Coordinator, Jasmine Mancuso!

Jasmine joined the DR-WLE CWMA in 2022 as the Invasive Species Coordinator. As a native Michigander, she followed her love for Michigan's aquatic resources and obtained a bachelor's degree in Environmental Sustainability and Resource Management from Oakland University (2018) followed by a master's degree in Aquatic Biology from the Annis Water Resources Institute of Grand Valley State University (2020).

Here, she studied harmful algal blooms on Muskegon Lake. Prior to joining the DR-WLE CWMA, she managed Oakland University's Aquatic Ecology Lab, where her research efforts focused on the effects of an invasive snail on the Au Sable River and factors influencing organic matter decomposition in aquatic ecosystems. She also enjoys teaching at the college level and looks forward to teaching an Ecology Lab at Oakland University this Fall. Jasmine loves hiking, birding, and visiting Lake Michigan and hopes to leave a lasting, positive impact on the natural resources of the Great Lakes Region throughout her career.

Meet the DRIWR's New Volunteer Coordinator, Aleigha Alexander!

My love for working outdoors and passion to become a park ranger started when I was fifteen working for the Piatt County Forest Preserve Park District in Central Illinois. I obtained my Bachelor of Science degree from Kansas State University in Park Management and Conversation with an emphasis in Interpretation. During my college education I participated in two internships. One at the Hatteras Island Ocean Center and the second at the National Park Service on the Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

During my internships, I participated in the Sea Turtle Nest Sitting program where I aided in the release of endangered turtles to the ocean. Since graduating from college, I have worked as a park ranger for the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers at Perry Lake in Kansas and Wappapello Lake in Missouri. While in these positions I have received the Kansas City District Heartland Award, the St. Louis District Appreciation Award, and the St. Louis District Team Award. All these experiences have further enhanced my passion for Interpretation and desire to provide environmental education to our local communities to help facilitate the connection between nature and people. I identify closely with Dr. Seuss's the Lorax when he says, "I speak for the trees." In my free time I enjoy being with my family and friends, adventuring outdoors, and watching K-State Football, Go Cats!



Meet DRIWR's New Biological Technician, KR Vedolich!

KR serves as a biological technician at the DRIWR. They earned a dual Bachelor of Science from the University of Michigan (Ecology and Evolutionary Biology; Environmental Studies) and a Master of Science from Texas Tech University (Wildlife, Aquatic, and Wildlands Science and Management), where their research focused on rodent ecology in West Texas shrublands. Prior to joining the DRIWR, they managed invasive plant populations with Oakland County Parks.

KR is originally from southeast Michigan and hopes to protect a healthy landscape in the Mitten state throughout their career in wildlife and habitat conservation. They often explore natural areas with their dogs to enjoy the sights and sounds of the outdoors.