

Winter 2017

THE WILDSIDE

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



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PHOTO CREDIT: JAKE BONELLO

ABOUT DRIWR & IWRA



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 in the development of the DRIWR. We invite you to become a supporter of IWRA.

Visit iwralliance.org, www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river and www.drhawkwatch.org for more periodic updates.

IWRA Email: iwr_alliance@yahoo.com
IWRA Office: 734.692.7671

DRIWR Office: 734-362-7736

General Information: 734-265-0219

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Staff

Dr. John Hartig • Refuge Manager
Steve Dushane • Assistant Refuge Manager
Jody DeMeyere • Visitor Services Manager
Jennifer Braatz • Visitor Services Park Ranger
Greg Norwood • Biologist
Jake Bonello (Pathways) • Biological Support
John Nicely • Maintenance Mechanic
Anna Cook • Administrative Assistant
Robert Primeau • Landscape Designer
Doug Briggs • Zone Federal Wildlife Officer
Josh Bauer • Federal Wildlife Officer

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A Message from the Alliance Chair

2017 will usher in a new era for the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. The Visitor Center will become a "hub" of activity for the next generation of conservationists and sustainability entrepreneurs.

Richard G. Micka, Chair
International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Board



Meet Mariam Salmassi Urban Outreach Ally

For the Detroit River
International Wildlife Refuge

Introduction: My name is Mariam Salmassi. I was born and raised here in Michigan by my Mother and Father with my two brothers.

I moved to Cleveland, Ohio to attend Cleveland Job Corps when I was 18. I then graduated from the Ohio Peace Officers Training Commission Academy at Cuyahoga Community College and worked as a security officer at Homeland Security, The CCA, The Department of Public Health and Cleveland Hopkins Airport.



I am currently a criminal justice major at Henry Ford College as well as a Public Ally through AmeriCorps and the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

About my job: As an Urban Outreach Ally my job is to help urban communities in and around Metro Detroit become more involved with nature! I am honored to have the opportunity to work with the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge for the next 10 months and be a part of all the amazing changes that are happening here.

Can you guess "Where Steve is"?



Hint: On this day your Deputy Refuge Manager found himself hiding in one of the refuge's newest amenities. While waiting for a shot at congregating waterfowl, the random deer, or wading birds skillfully hunting in the shallow shoreline, Steve was caught once again pointing at something very important. Even though this would make an excellent deer blind, and Steve often times does not show up for work if the wind is right, he is not hunting. He was actually busy trying to take some photos when someone took his photo instead. More than likely he is pointing at the hundreds of fowl that were scared away by this intrusion.

Email your answer to iwr_alliance@yahoo.com. The first correct guess will receive a Nature Store tote bag!

From the Refuge Manager John Hartig John D. Dingell Visitor Center



On January 14, 2017 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service honored Congressman John D. Dingell for all he has done for conservation throughout North America, the United States, the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem, and in the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, including naming the new Refuge Visitor Center in honor of him.

"Congressman Dingell made huge advances for conservation on a continental scale."

I'm honored to dedicate this building as the John D. Dingell Jr. Visitor Center. For generations to come, it will help us share your love of nature with America's families and children," said Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius.

The Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act are all the result of John D. Dingell's efforts during his 59 years of service in Congress.



John Hartig and Regional director Tom Melius pose with former congressman John D. Dingell Jr. and congresswoman Debbie Dingell. Photo credit: Mark Messer

All in attendance got a glimpse of how we will soon be reconnecting people to continentally-significant natural resources and inspiring them to care about nature in their backyard and beyond. The John D. Dingell Visitor Center is scheduled to open later in 2017.

Introducing SCA Intern Shannon Nelson

A native of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, I grew up in a natural playground – barefoot much of the summer, snow forts in the winter, swimming in Lake Superior, and canoeing the magical Fox and Two Hearted Rivers. I was immersed and felt at home in nature.

I might have taken this all for granted if it hadn't been for my father, who encouraged an appreciation of nature, and also taught me that wild and beautiful places would not exist if it weren't for people deciding to protect them. As a toddler I remember sitting on his shoulders under a glittering star-filled sky as he pointed at the moon (my first word, I'm told). Later I saw him plant trees, pick up litter, and lead a local effort to build public support for passage of Michigan's bottle deposit law.

These experiences left a big impression on me, so in college I decided to turn my love for nature and the outdoors into a career. I earned a degree from the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan and bought a one-way ticket to Alaska. There, I encountered nature and wilderness on a grand scale, grateful that such places exist. I spent ten years working for different federal land management agencies, including seven years as an Education Specialist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, at the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge. After many adventures in the far north, I circled back to Michigan with my husband where I have volunteered for various environmental and animal welfare nonprofit organizations, taught ceramics classes, and worked as an Educator at a local nature center.



I am inspired by the story of DRIWR – how people decided to restore and protect a section of the Detroit River that many had written off. Through partnerships, education, and outreach, the river and surrounding areas are coming back to life. Wildlife is returning, more people are getting involved, and children are having fun while exploring nature right in their own backyard – much like I did as a kid. I know how enjoyable and fulfilling a connection to the natural world can be.

Through my internship at DRIWR, I'm excited to help foster positive experiences and new discoveries in people of all ages and backgrounds, hopefully enriching their lives and nurturing an appreciation for wild and beautiful places that people, ultimately, will want to protect.



Humbug Stewardship Crew

Assists with Habitat Management

Dick Skoglund

The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Stewardship Crew, under the direction of the Refuge biologist, assists with Habitat Management at various units of the Refuge as well as various other tasks as requested by the Visitor Services Manager. During 2016 the main focus of the crew was removing invasive woody vegetation, which had overgrown a Great Lakes coastal wetland area at the Humbug Marsh unit.

Additional tasks were building a replica of an eagle's nest, pulling invasive Canada thistle and garlic mustard plants, harvesting native grass seeds, maintaining the trails and helping to install Refuge signage.

The Stewardship Crew works Wednesdays and Fridays from 9:00 AM to noon throughout the year. Below are some of the reasons people volunteer with the crew.

Jackie Favot - "Volunteering at the DRIWR provides me with a morning of fresh air, exercise, comradery, satisfaction with our progress, and an increase in knowledge of our local environment - plus it is addicting."

Al Jurczyk - "The work is rewarding and the friendships made are priceless."

For information on working with the Stewardship Crew please contact Jody DeMeyere, Visitor Services Manager at jody_demeyere@fws.gov or 734-692-7649.



Stewardship Improves Gibraltar Bay Unit

Peter Kantz

Stewardship volunteers at the Gibraltar Bay Unit of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge have reason to be proud. This summer GBU became the only unit open to the public from dawn to dusk seven days a week. The opening of GBU was made possible by the hard work of stewardship volunteers working at GBU on Mondays from 9:00 am to noon. In addition to their routine tasks of cutting grass, maintaining trails, tending rock gardens and eradicating invasive plants, the volunteers also handled a number of special projects such as: assembling and installing picnic tables and benches, taking down old chain link fences and installing new split rail fences, signs and bulletin boards.

Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy leads the stewardship effort at GBU and as part of their commitment to the refuge built a handicap accessible photography blind on the eastern shore of Quarry Pond. The photography blind, made possible by a very generous donation from a GINLC member, is accessible from a handicap parking area and ADA compliant path. The path also provides access to a newly restored replica of a Native American Council Ring.

Along with ongoing maintenance at the refuge, new projects are planned for 2017. Additional volunteers are always welcome and greatly appreciated.

If you'd like to become involved with stewardship at the Gibraltar Bay Unit located at 28820 East River Road, Grosse Ile, Michigan, please contact Jody DeMeyere, Visitor Services Manager at jody_demeyere@fws.gov or 734-692-7649.



Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) chasing sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) at Detroit River Hawk Watch. Photo credit: Andrew Sturgess.

Detroit River Hawk Watch 2016 Season Summary

Greg Norwood

The Detroit River Hawk Watch completed its 34th year monitoring the fall migration of vultures, hawks, eagles, and falcons at the mouth of the Detroit River.

Each day from September 1st through November 30th at least two team members systematically observed the skies, recording data on migrating raptors from the exact same location at Lake Erie Metropark's boat launch. A final report is available at <http://www.drhawkwatch.org/publications>; also available are raw data and day summaries at https://hawkcount.org/month_summary.php?rsite=285.

Our trend data are intended to be analyzed in conjunction with data collected at many other hawk watch sites for analysis of raptor populations in North America. Each site uses the same protocols and uploads data at hawkcount.org. Annual variation in raptor populations is expected at each site and can originate from many factors including breeding productivity, weather, and observer error. Long-term data exceeding ten years, and preferably longer, allow formulation of raptor population indices that account for this expected variation and observer error. Data collected in the same way over long time periods can help elucidate long-term changes in populations.

This year, we observed nearly all species in below average numbers. We recorded 65,398 migrating raptors in 2016, including some of the best passages in North America of broad-winged hawks (17,529), turkey vultures (38,528), and red-shouldered hawks (448).

The 2016 field season was led by Dustin Brewer and Natalie Cypher, along with official counters Rosemary Brady, John Elliot, Raburn Howland, Frank Kitakis, Patrick Mulawa, Don Sherwood, and Andrew Sturgess. More information on the program is available at www.drhawkwatch.org.

Progress on Trees at the Refuge Gateway

Robert Primeau

With winter upon us, the trees have gone dormant until spring.

However, efforts to establish new woodlands at the Refuge Gateway continue, building on ambitious summer plantings by the Greening of Detroit.



Students from the Greening of Detroit's Green Corps pose with an oak tree planted moments before.

In late August, Refuge staff welcomed workers and volunteers from the Greening of Detroit to plant 70 trees and over 90 shrubs at the Refuge Gateway in Trenton, a 44-acre former industrial site jointly owned by Wayne County and USFWS, opening as headquarters of the Refuge later in 2017. The Greening of Detroit operates a job training program that prepares trainees for employment in the landscaping industry. For two weeks, these trainees led middle and high school students in planting trees. For many of these students, this was their first experience working in the soil.

The Greening and Refuge staff planted 10 - 12 foot tall trees. Species included various types of oak (*Quercus spp.*) and maple (*Acer spp.*), hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), and black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*). Along with trees, over 90 young shrubs were planted, including spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*), sumac (*Rhus spp.*), and native prairie rose (*Rosa setigera*). As they grow they will provide additional food and cover for wildlife.

Planting these trees is only the first step in ensuring successful woodland restoration at the Refuge Gateway. Through the fall and into the winter Refuge staff must attend to the trees. Trees are especially vulnerable for the first two to three years after they are planted because it takes about that long for their roots to establish in new soil. Until then, they can be very vulnerable to drought and uprooting by high winds. Refuge biological technicians and the landscape designer watered the new trees regularly through dry periods in the fall to prevent loss, and installed wire cables to anchor them against high winds. In the fall, technicians wrapped the new trees with deer guards. These guards are a flexible plastic armor that wraps around a tree's trunk to prevent deer from rubbing the bark off when they rub shed antlers in autumn. As winter progresses, Refuge technicians will continue work on all the trees at the Refuge Gateway, replacing degraded deer guards and tagging trees with metal labels so they can be uniquely identified and tracked over time.

Assuming planting success, as the years pass these trees will grow taller. Their canopies will fill out and they will transition a portion of the Refuge Gateway's prairie into woodland habitat that will compliment the Oak-Hickory forest at the adjacent Humbug Marsh Unit. These plantings will increase species and habitat diversity at the Refuge Gateway while demonstrating, along with the prairie and wetlands on site, a wide variety of successful ecological restoration projects at the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

How does wetland restoration affect the balance of ecosystem services?

Dr. Kristi Judd

Eastern Michigan University



Wetlands provide a number of critical ecosystem services that benefit humans, including biodiversity support, flood protection, water quality improvement, and carbon sequestration from the atmosphere. The extent to which a wetland provides each service depends on a number of factors, such as size, climate, hydrology, and plant community composition and productivity. Invasion by exotic plant species, such as *Phragmites australis*, and restoration practices to remove those invasives can alter the balance of ecosystem services. Ideally, restoration improves multiple ecosystem services. However, while some services are "bundled" (i.e., tend to co-occur), other services may form "trade-offs." Two potentially conflicting ecosystem services are biodiversity support and nutrient removal.

Nutrient removal in wetlands prevents the delivery of nutrients to downstream aquatic systems, and is of particular concern in this region because of the long history of nutrient pollution in Lake Erie, and the more recent concerns over toxic harmful algal blooms. Two important pathways for nutrient removal in wetlands are plant nutrient uptake and sediment denitrification, a process carried out by microbes in anoxic sediments that converts inorganic nitrogen in the form of nitrate to harmless N₂ gas. Plant productivity converts inorganic nutrients into plant biomass.

The large, fast-growing *Phragmites* has high rates of productivity and nutrient uptake, and removing *Phragmites* may result in increased nutrient loading to aquatic systems, particularly in the year following herbicide treatment.

But *Phragmites* also may reduce denitrification in the sediments. Why is that? *Phragmites* oxygenates the sediment environment with its efficient gas transport system through its roots and rhizomes, and these conditions do not favor denitrification.

My research group is interested in evaluating how wetland restoration alters the balance biodiversity support and nutrient removal. Understanding whether this trade-off exists, and if so, the magnitude of this trade-off, may help guide management decisions with respect to multiple ecosystem services.

Save these dates! Calendar of Events 2017

- *Shiver on the River - **February 4** at the Belle Isle Casino
- *Kids Free Fishing Day- **February 18 & 19-STATEWIDE**
- *Movie at Trenton Theater - **February 28**
- *World Wetlands Day-**March 10** at Gibraltar Carlson H.S.
- *Point Pelee Festival of the Birds - **May 1-22** at Point Pelee-Parks Canada
- *The Biggest Week in American Birding at Ottawa NWR- **May 5-14**
- *International Migratory Bird Day- **May 13**
- *Grosse Ile Island Fest - **June 2-4**
- *Kids Free Fishing Day- **June 10 & 11-STATEWIDE**
- *Hawkfest at Lake Erie Metropark- **September 16 & 17**
- *Pointe Mouillee Waterfowl Festival-**September 16 & 17**

For more details about these events, please contact Jennifer Braatz at jennifer_braatz@fws.gov or at 734-362-7736



To learn more about the refuge, please visit our website at www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river



Thank you, 2016 4TH Quarter Donors!

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HAWKWATCH

- Dustin Brewer
- Raymond Caloia
- Natalie Cypher
- Raburn Howland
- Stanley Kowalski
- The many volunteers who gave their time for the annual Hawkwatch count

IN HONOR OF JOHN D. DINGELL

- John Orlando

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- City of Monroe
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- John Bordach
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- Richard and Jeanne Micka

NATURE STORE

- Ann and Gene Anderson
- Mary Bactcheller
- Bruce Manny
- Barbara Siepierski
- Thank you to all who stopped by the IWRA Garage Sale held at the Gibraltar Bay Unit this past summer
- Thank you to many folks who came out for the 1st Annual Holiday Shop

STEWARDSHIP

- Americana Foundation
- DTE Energy Company
- Grosse Ile Land and Nature Conservancy Stewardship Crew
- Humbug Marsh Stewardship Crew

2017 ANNUAL BENEFIT DINNER

Tim Bringard

We are honored to share your support of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

We truly appreciate all support given, whether in donations or in-kind services. Please forgive us for any omissions from this quarter.

The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization (#20-3318708) dedicated to helping the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service deliver the mission of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, North America's first international wildlife refuge – working through partnerships to protect, conserve, and manage the Refuge's wildlife and habitats; and to create exceptional conservation, recreational, and educational experiences, to develop the next generation of conservation stewards, thanks to you and your continued support!



Announcing Facebook Blue Goose Mondays!

We have a facebook page! Be sure to check us out online for a lot of fun and look out for Blue Goose Mondays! www.facebook.com/DetroitRiverIWR www.facebook.com/IWRA



SAVE THE DATE: MAY 20, 2017

MONROE GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

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9311 Groh Road

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