

## EPA Responds to Comments, Drafts New Lake Cleanup Plan

By Susan Pastor, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Over 40 comments were received by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on a proposed cleanup plan for Little Lake Butte des Morts.

EPA's comment period, which ran from Nov. 26, 2007 to Jan. 31, 2008 solicited input from the community via postal mail, e-mail and orally at a Dec. 13 public meeting in Appleton. At press time, EPA was in the process of preparing written responses to those comments. While a few offered suggestions on how to clean up PCB-contaminated sediment in Little Lake Butte des Morts, most were either for or against EPA's proposal to do more capping and less dredging in the lake, also referred to as operable unit 1.

EPA Remedial Project Manager Jim Hahnenberg is answering the comments with help from his colleagues at Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. "Some of the comments are helpful while others stated they did or did not agree with our recommended option," he stated. "Unfortunately, the Superfund law doesn't allow us to weigh comments that merely like or dislike our proposal. It's not a vote. We are charged with considering only comments that provide new information or present scientific studies that we may have overlooked."

Late last year, EPA and DNR proposed changes to their original plan, adopted in December 2002, to include a combination of capping and dredging. If approved, these changes would affect areas of the

lake where new information gathered over the past four years showed dredging to be less effective, more difficult to accomplish and more costly than originally anticipated. The latest information also shows that more capping will also clean up the lake faster.

"We are recommending the use of more engineered caps and sand covers because that will help us reach our cleanup goals several years sooner," Hahnenberg added. "This is similar to the situation on the rest of the river from Appleton to Green Bay where we also found that we were limited as to where we could dredge."

The concept of more capping is not entirely new, Hahnenberg stated. "The 2002 plan outlined more capping as an optional step because physical conditions are not exactly the same around the lake. We suspected back then that relying only on dredging to do the cleanup might not be feasible."

The final decision on whether to revise the 2002 cleanup plan is expected to be made this spring. The decision document will be available at the information repositories listed on Page 7 and online at [www.epa.gov/region5/sites/foxriver](http://www.epa.gov/region5/sites/foxriver).

The agencies approved a cleanup plan for three other reaches of the river and the bay last year. That plan, which also calls for more capping, revised a June 2003 plan based on new information collected while designing the specifics of the cleanup.

# Fish Consumption Advisories Continue

By Jessica Maloney, Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

Each year Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources samples fish from various water bodies throughout the state to update its fish consumption advisories.

The Lower Fox River is sampled about every five years and Green Bay every other year because of the known PCB contamination. The fish samples are then tested for mercury and PCB content. New information is examined along with information from earlier years to determine if the advisories, provided in terms of the number of meals that may be safely eaten, need to be updated. Fish consumption advisories for the Lower Fox River and Green Bay were first issued in the mid-1970s and remain in effect today.

Although the Lower Fox River cleanup is making strides in creating a healthier ecosystem for fish, the best way to protect your health is to pay attention to the advisories and the various signs posted along the river. It's important to note that there may be slightly different advisories for each stretch.

According to Candy Schrank, DNR fisheries toxicologist, there were minor updates to the advisories for the Lower Fox River and Green Bay in 2007. "It remains important to check the advisory booklets and state Web sites for the consumption advice that applies to the fishing spot and fish species you eat," she explained.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HENRY NEHLS-LOWE, WDHFS

*Fish advisory signs are posted along the Lower Fox River informing people of safe eating guidelines.*

General fish consumption advice for anglers, especially women of child-bearing age and children, is to eat smaller, younger fish. Fish that are smaller and younger tend not to eat other fish so they don't accumulate as many toxins in their bodies. You can still have fun fishing on the Lower Fox River and Green Bay; just take care to limit your fish consumption to the information posted in the advisories.

In addition to the signs posted along the river, there is a full set of advisory information located on the

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DNR Web site at <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/consumption>. Advisory booklets are also available from local DNR and Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services offices. A variety of fish consumption information can also be found at <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/eh/fish/index.htm>.

## Ducks Unlimited Helps Fund Wetlands Restoration Project

U.S. Department of Interior awarded a \$1 million grant to Ducks Unlimited for wetlands conservation projects. A portion of the grant funding was used for the Rush Lake restoration project in Winnebago County, Wis. See Spotlight article on Page 4 for details.



U.S. Department of Interior Deputy Secretary Lynn Scarlett presents a check to Ducks Unlimited Biologist John Coluccy.



## Out and About...

By Susan Pastor, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

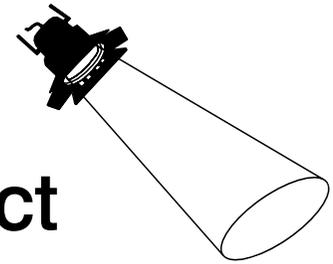
The Fox River Intergovernmental Partnership is made up of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin and Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin. These partners, as well as other supporting agencies, regularly provide speakers to organizations in the Fox Valley area. The following people recently made presentations:

### January

- ◆ *Colette Charbonneau, FWS: U.S. Rep. Steve Kagen's environmental staff, Green Bay; Lower Fox River/Green Bay restoration presentation.*
- ◆ *Jim Hahnenberg, EPA: Optimizing Decision Making and Remediation at Complex Sediment Sites Conference, New Orleans; Lower Fox River 2007 record of decision amendment.*

*The Fox River Current is featuring promising natural resource damage assessment projects in and near the Lower Fox River.*

# Spotlight On: Rush Lake Restoration Project



By Colette Charbonneau, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Rush Lake is a 3,070-acre prairie pothole marsh (see box on Page 5) with an average depth of 1.5 feet located in southwestern Winnebago County, Wis. It is the largest prairie pothole east of the Mississippi River. Historically, the area had extensive stands of hardstem bulrush (a tall, leafy wetland plant), for which Rush Lake is named. This native aquatic vegetation was home to a multitude of wetland birds and animals.

“The past 30 years witnessed a dramatic decline in the lake’s aquatic vegetation, water quality and wildlife populations,” said Tim Lizotte, Wisconsin Department

of Natural Resources former wildlife biologist for the Oshkosh area. “Research has attributed these declines to artificially stable and high water levels, carp infestation, and nutrient and soil runoff.”

Until the recent restoration effort, the infamous bulrush occupied less than 1 percent of the marsh’s surface area where once vast areas of the prairie pothole were covered. The marsh waters were dominated with vegetation-destroying fish such as

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2006

2007



PHOTO COURTESY OF WISCONSIN DNR

*Lake vegetation is minimal before the restoration project. After restoration, water covers the entire lake and new vegetation flourishes.*

## What Are Prairie Potholes?

Prairie potholes are depressional wetlands (primarily freshwater marshes) found most often in the upper Midwest, especially Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota. This formerly glaciated landscape is marked with an immense number of holes which fill with snowmelt and rain in the spring. Some prairie pothole marshes are temporary, while others may be permanent. A pattern of rough concentric circles typically develops. Submerged and floating aquatic plants take over the deeper water in the middle of the pothole while bulrushes and cattails grow closer to shore. Wet, sedgy marshes lie next to the upland.

Many species of migratory waterfowl depend on the potholes for breeding and feeding. In addition to supporting waterfowl hunting and birding, prairie potholes also absorb surges of rain, snow melt and floodwaters which reduces the risk and severity of downstream flooding.

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carp. Habitat was limited and only a few duck broods were raised each year. The ecological community had been significantly affected and people were no longer able to enjoy the prairie pothole marsh as it once did.

To tackle the marsh's problems, local citizens and groups got together under advice from government officials. They formed a non-profit organization called Rush Lake Watershed Restoration, Inc. Soon, a restoration plan for the area was developed with input from hundreds of citizens living in the vicinity of the marsh or those who once used the area for recreational purposes.

The plan concluded that it was necessary to draw down the water in Rush Lake to regenerate bulrush seeds in the sediment. Significantly reducing the amount of water in the marsh would also provide a natural way to reduce carp populations. To accomplish this task, a new dam needed to be installed and the outlet channel of the marsh had to be dredged and regraded

to allow for more flow of water leaving the marsh into nearby Waukau Creek. About \$1 million was needed to implement this project. Many partners helped with this extensive restoration project. Partners included the Fox River/Green Bay Natural Resource Trustee Council, Rush Lake Watershed Restoration, Inc., Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation Department, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, DNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and Ripon College.

In 2005 the work began. The old dam was removed and a new one was installed with six gates for better water level control in the marsh. The dam gates included "carp guards" to keep the destructive fish from swimming upstream into Rush Lake. Carp guards were also installed in each bay of the marsh. The outlet channel was dredged and regraded with natural channel meanders. Large rocks and gravel were added to the outlet area as habitat features for native fish.

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Old culverts on the outlet channel were replaced in 2006 with free-span bridges to provide improved stream flow and facilitate the drawdown while allowing public access to the marsh. A tool called an aquatic vegetation cutter was used to clear dense mats of cattails from the channel in the marsh upstream from the dam to allow better water flow into and through the dam. The dam gates were opened and the waters of Rush Lake started to recede. By July 2006, vast areas of sediment which had been under water for decades were exposed to the air and sunshine.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WISCONSIN DNR

*A new dam is installed to provide better control of water levels in Rush Lake.*

The aquatic plant seeds responded dramatically to the drawdown. Over 50 percent of the exposed mudflats were covered in new plant growth by summer 2007. A chemical carp treatment was used to eliminate what carp remained after the winter freeze. In September, some of the dam gates were closed and water levels rose to provide shallow water for migrating wetland birds.

“The major goal of the Rush Lake project was to re-establish native aquatic vegetation in over 50 percent of the marsh,” Lizotte continued. “This goal was achieved in 2007 as measured by aerial photography.”

A more quantitative and intensive study of the marsh’s vegetation will be completed this summer. In addition, bird use (breeding, migrating and feeding), water clarity and water quality will be measured and compared with information obtained prior to the restoration.

The benefits of this complex restoration project are:

- Creation of habitat for a wide range of wetland wildlife, including emergent plant islands that are preferred nesting areas for rare state species such as Forster’s terns, black-crowned night herons and red-necked grebes.
- Nesting and brood-rearing habitat for redhead, ruddy, mallard, teal and wood ducks.
- Migration stopover places for a wide range of shorebirds including semipalmated sandpipers, least sandpipers, white-rumped sandpipers, dunlin and Wilson’s phalarope.
- Staging areas for many species of waterfowl such as American widgeon, gadwall, canvasbacks, scaup and Canada geese.
- Habitat for a variety of wetland mammals such as muskrats, otters and mink.

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“There will also be many human recreation benefits from the restoration as Rush Lake has a rich tradition of bird watching, waterfowl hunting, trapping and fishing,” concluded Lizotte. “These activities stand to vastly improve the fish and wildlife habitat.”

Lizotte continues to work for DNR but can now be found managing a DNR office in the Milwaukee area.

The natural resource trustees are comprised of DNR, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, Menominee

Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Michigan Attorney General, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, FWS and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

For further information on Natural Resource Damage Assessment projects, contact Trustee Council Coordinator Colette Charbonneau, FWS, at Colette\_Charbonneau@fws.gov or 920-866-1726.

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## Information Available at Local Libraries

The Intergovernmental Partners invite the public to review technical reports, fact sheets and other documents related to the Lower Fox River cleanup at information repositories set up in the reference sections of the local libraries listed below. Information repositories at the public libraries in De Pere, Kaukauna, Little Chute, Neenah and Wrightstown have been discontinued. However, binders containing fact sheets and newsletters are being maintained at these locations as well as at the following repositories:

- **Appleton Public Library**, 225 N. Oneida St., Appleton, Wis.; 920-832-6170
- **Brown County Library**, 515 Pine St., Green Bay, Wis.; 920-448-4381, Ext. 394
- **Door County Library**, 107 S. Fourth Ave., Sturgeon Bay, Wis.; 920-743-6578
- **Oneida Community Library**, 201 Elm St., Oneida, Wis.; 920-869-2210
- **Oshkosh Public Library**, 106 Washington Ave., Oshkosh, Wis.; 920-236-5205

*An administrative record, which contains detailed information upon which the selection of the final site cleanup plan was based, is also available for review at two DNR offices: 801 E. Walnut St., Green Bay, Wis. and 101 S. Webster St., 3rd Floor, Madison, Wis. An administrative record is also available at the EPA Record Center, 77 W. Jackson Blvd., 7th Floor, Chicago, Ill.*



***Check out these Web sites:***

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/foxriver/index.html>

<http://www.epa.gov/region5/sites/foxriver>

<http://contaminants.fws.gov/Issues/Restoration.cfm>

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/nrda/index.html>



Prepared by the Fox River Intergovernmental Partnership: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Supporting agencies include Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in these articles are solely those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by all members of the Fox River Intergovernmental Partnership.

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*Fox River Current* is published quarterly by the Fox River Intergovernmental Partnership. Its purpose is to provide up-to-date information about cleanup and restoration efforts on the Lower Fox River. Call Susan Pastor at 312-353-1325 to request a subscription or alternative format. Feedback on articles and ideas for future issues are welcome. Send comments to Susan Pastor, EPA Office of Superfund (P-19J), 77 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60604 or e-mail [pastor.susan@epa.gov](mailto:pastor.susan@epa.gov).



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