

ST. CROIX WETLAND MANAGEMENT DISTRICT  
New Richmond, WI

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT  
Calendar Year 1996


U.S. Department of the Interior  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

REVIEW AND APPROVALS

St. Croix Wetland Management District  
New Richmond, WI

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT

Calendar Year 1996

  
Wetland District  
Manager

3-10-97  
Date

  
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9/8/97  
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ARD - Refuges & Wildlife

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Date

## INTRODUCTION

The St. Croix Wetland Management District (WMD) was established on September 21, 1992. WPA acquisition began in 1975. From 1975 through 1992, WPA's were managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) under a cooperative agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Following a one year transition phase of joint management, the Service assumed full management responsibilities for Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA's) on July 1, 1993.

The District includes counties within the "northwest Wisconsin pothole area", an area which resembles the prairie pothole region of North America. This part of Wisconsin contains abundant small wetlands within an historical prairie area. Waterfowl breeding densities and nest success compare favorably with the prairie pothole regions of the Dakotas and Canada although fewer waterfowl species nest in this area.

Several parts of the District contain high quality wetlands and native prairie remnants. However, we are within a zone of increasing urban encroachment from the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. The greatest threat to remaining habitat is not agriculture, but urban sprawl.

The St. Croix WMD is charged with managing 6,291 acres of WPA's, 920 acres of conservation easements, acquisition of new WPA's, and coordinating an aggressive habitat restoration effort on private land.

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#### A. HIGHLIGHTS

- Together with state and private cooperators, we restored 132 wetlands and planted 928 acres of native grassland (section F. 12).
- We acquired 474 new WPA acres in Dunn and St. Croix Counties (section C.1).
- We completed spending on a two year NAWCA grant which provided us with \$550,000 above our base budget (section E. 3).
- We received approval to replace our three FTE's of temporary staff with three permanent FTE's (section E.1).
- Our fall Open House attracted 150 people (Figure 1) (section H.1).



Figure 1. Harvey Halvorsen, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, helps out with our Open House tour of the St. Croix Prairie WPA during National Wildlife Refuge Week.

## B. CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

The geographical area in which the St. Croix Wetland Management District is located has a temperate climate that is characterized by extreme seasonal variability. Mean monthly air temperatures are 10° to 15.8°F in January and 68° to 71.6°F in July. The average growing season ranges from 100 days in the northern counties (Burnett, Washburn) to 120 days in the southern counties (Pierce, Pepin). The ground is usually frozen from late November through mid-April and the frost depths range from 26 to 34 inches.

In 1996 mean temperatures were below normal. The greatest difference was the mean minimum temperatures of 29.3°F for the year, this is 5.0°F below the normal mean of 34.3°F. The mean maximum temperature was 4.0°F lower at 51.0°F. Precipitation for the year was 35.37 inches, about average for this area.

In January, frigid conditions prevailed with an average temperature of 7.3°F. Conditions didn't improve when on the evening of January 17 we received a rainfall of 1.53 inches which quickly froze when temperatures plummeted overnight. Summer temperatures never reached the 100°F mark, but rather 95°F on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June. Snow fall for the calendar year was about 10 inches below the average of 54 inches, most of that was received in November and December with snow falls totaling 30.15 inches - looks like we're in for a long winter!!!

## C. LAND ACQUISITION

### 1. Fee Title

The St. Croix WMD developed from a WPA acquisition program initiated in 1975. Acquisitions occurred sporadically from 1975 through 1986 as funding permitted. Since 1987, yearly acquisition funding has been available.

Acquisition efforts slowed somewhat in 1996 due in part to several rejected offers (Table 1). At the close of the year, the Service had accepted four options, including one trade. Thus, the WMD added 474 WPA acres in 1996, an eight percent increase in WPA acreage.

**Table 1. St. Croix WMD 1996 Acquisition Activity**

COUNTY	TRACT	ACRES	LANDOWNER DECISION	OPTION ACCEPTED BY FWS	CY 96 COST(\$)
Dunn	Kothlow (Trade)	+32.5 -61.7	Accepted	4-96	trade
Dunn	Dix	151	Accepted	5-96	196,000
Dunn	Strehlau	110	Accepted	12-96	115,000
Dunn	Anderson	221	Rejected		
Dunn	Prochnow	314	Pending		
Dunn	Leach	60	Rejected		
St. Croix	Coughlin Estate	242	Accepted	12-96	302,500
St. Croix	Sicard	52	Pending		
St. Croix	Simon	184	Rejected		
St. Croix	Halleen 2	40	Rejected		

The Dix and Strehlau tracts are initial acquisitions in the Red Cedar WPA in Dunn County. The area is among the finest waterfowl breeding habitat in the county and has long been delineated without any prior successful acquisition. Besides containing an existing superb brood marsh, a number of drained adjacent wetlands will be restored on the WPA.

The Coughlin Estate tract in St. Croix County contains a collection of typical prairie wetlands and also encompasses a one-half mile long segment of the Willow River with associated flood plain and backwaters.



Generally, the community remains supportive of our acquisition efforts. The sporadic opposition is usually over the tax issue. Interestingly, the Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service has studied the effects of public land acquisition and has found it to be essentially neutral in affecting property tax rates for private property in Wisconsin. State school aid formulas eliminate any loss to local school districts. Revenue sharing and other phenomena produce small losses or gains to County and Town governments.

## 2. Easements

Except for FSA (FmHA) easements, no easements have been taken in the District. We continued to pursue a possible FSA debt restructure easement on a tract in Dunn County but the project is not complete.

We had no opportunity to review new FSA inventory properties in 1996. Some coordination work continued on proposed easements of existing inventory properties.

Late in the year, we reviewed each of our existing conservation easements and contacted landowners to remind them of the easement and, where appropriate, offer to enter into cooperative grazing, farming, or haying agreements (see section F. 4).

## D. PLANNING

### 1. Master Plan

Nothing to report.

### 2. Management Plan

We write management plans for each WPA. We have been slowly completing plans for the backlog of existing WPAs. Progress on the plans continue, but they have not all been completed. Gaunitz has completed all the background information in each plan. Hericks is in the process of completing the management objectives and future considerations for each plan.

### 3. Public Participation

A Natural Resources Interpretation and Communication class from the University of Minnesota conducted a field review of the St. Croix Prairie WPA (Figure 2). The purpose of their visit was to develop plans for an interpretive kiosk and trail as a class assignment. Joan Guilfoyle, Deputy Assistant Regional Director of External Affairs, was a student of the class and initially came up with the project idea for the class. Delehanty briefed the students about the WMD and the specific WPA they would focus on and later reviewed the completed projects.



Figure 2. University of Minnesota students braving the elements for a class assignment at St. Croix Prairie WPA.

### 4. Compliance with Environmental and Cultural Resource Mandates

Noting to report.

## 5. Research and Investigation

Again we issued a Special Use Permit to Jim Margenau of the St. Patrick's High School in Hudson. The permit authorized Mr. Margenau to continue an ongoing ozone study coordinated by the WDNR at the Ten Mile WPA located in St. Croix county. Milkweed plants were used as indicator species of ground level ozone problems. The study takes into account the percent of leaves damaged on a plant and the extent of damage to the leaves. This is the fourth year for the study. Results indicate light damage present in the study area. All samples and data were sent to Madison for analysis by the state of Wisconsin.

Mr. Margenau was also issued a Special Use Permit for the collection of butterflies on various WPA's. Efforts by his students resulted in some fascinating findings. It appears that Ten-Mile and Clapp WPAs have a great diversity of butterflies. However, it was at Ten-Mile WPA where a significant population of Regal Fritillary (*Speyeria idalia*) was found. This species is a Federal species of concern in Wisconsin and a state listed threatened species. The students also had the opportunity to successfully tag 44 monarchs, one of which was later recaptured in Texas during migration.

## E. ADMINISTRATION

### 1. Personnel

Name	Position	FTE
Steve Delehanty	Wetland District Manager	PFT - 1.0
Candace Hericks	Assistant Manager	PFT - 1.0
Debra Gaunitz	Biological Technician	TFT - 1.0
David McConnell	Biological Technician	TFT - 0.8
Jeannie VanBeek	Administrative Assistant	TPT - 0.8
		Total: 4.6





**Figure 3. 1996 Staffing at St. Croix Wetland Management District. Left to Right: VanBeek, Hericks, Gaunitz, and Delehanty. McConnell pictured in Figure 4.**

Permanent FTE's remained below what is needed to function at even a minimal level. We supplemented the permanent staff with temporary employees who do great work with insufficient security and compensation. Late in the year, a region-wide staffing plan for refuges and WMD's finally incorporated a permanent staff of five FTE's for St. Croix given current funding. The temporary positions will be replaced by permanent positions in 1997. We evaluated our staffing plan and were able to create several permanent-seasonal positions to allow for six permanent employees during the field season in future years.

Biological Technician Dave McConnell was put on intermittent status during the winter and converted back to full time in March.

A work study student from Vermillion Community College in Ely, Chris Hendrickson, assisted us for ten weeks during the summer. Chris spent much of his time on the tractor mowing brush on WPA's and helped with a variety of other tasks.



Eric Allness was hired by the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association to work on wetland restoration projects in the St. Croix WMD for 12 weeks. Although a WWA employee, Eric received work guidance and worked out of our office. Eric screened new sites, surveyed dike sites, worked with contractors on the ground, and seeded newly built dikes. Eric also used his excellent birding skills to voluntarily conduct a point-count survey of grassland birds on WPA's (see section G. 7).

## 2. Volunteer Program

In 1996, volunteers contributed over 350 hours. The principal force behind the volunteer program continues to be Tom Marcouiller (Figure 4). Tom donated 220 hours over the course of the year on such projects as mowing, firebreak installation, hydroaxe operation, snow plowing, general construction projects, and wetland restorations.



Figure 4. Dave McConnell (left) presents Tom Marcouiller with a "Special Achievement Award" for his volunteer work at St. Croix WMD.



In addition to Tom there were several others that assisted the station with various projects. The University of Wisconsin - River Falls Horticulture club (Figure 5) was instrumental in the planting of shrubs in our native prairie garden located at the office. Allan Rupnow, Jeff Mikla, Mike Stoeckmann and Chad Murray combined to contribute over 110 hours on projects such as dike seeding and mulching, fencing, and brush cutting.



Figure 5. UW - River Falls Horticulture Club members helping with landscaping the office.

A group of students from Clear Lake High School spent a Saturday on Rose Lee WPA installing a parking area fence and putting out nest structures.

### 3. Funding

Our 1996 budget was a creative blend of accounts which cumulatively allowed us to accomplish good work. The refuge O&M funds were below what is needed to operate, but together with the other major accounts, let us stay afloat and improve wildlife habitat (Table 2).

**Table 2. St. Croix WMD Funding**

<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>1993 (\$)</b>	<b>1994 (\$)</b>	<b>1995 (\$)</b>	<b>1996 (\$)</b>
O&M 1261	18,760	79,480	104,470	153,098
MMS 1262	37,000	20,000	40,000	30,000
Private Lands 1121	60,000	75,000	40,000	88,000
Fire 9110/9120	0	2,600	7,600	21,100
Migratory Birds 3110	5,000	0	5,000	5,000
Nongame 1230	0	0	0	2,600
Drug 1221	0	0	0	500
WRP 1902	0	0	0	7,000
Joint Venture	0	5,000	0	0
Flood 4672*	0	98,000 (7104 spent)	90,896 (carry- over)	0
Flood 4673*	0	34,000 (6,314 spent)	(carry- over) 27,686	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>120,760</b>	<b>195,498</b>	<b>315,742</b>	<b>307,298</b>

\*Flood money was two year money (FY 94 and FY 95)

1996 was the second and final year of a large NAWCA grant which greatly increased our habitat accomplishments above what our traditional budget allowed. Wisconsin DNR led the effort for the NAWCA grant for Northwest Wisconsin. The Service was a partner in the project along with Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. St. Croix WMD received \$450,000 for land acquisition and \$100,000 for wetland and upland habitat restoration. In 1996, we spent the remainder of the grant: \$280,000 for land acquisition, \$29,000 for wetland restoration, and \$18,000 for upland habitat work on WPAs. NAWCA grant money is not shown in table 2.

#### 4. Safety

Safety topics including first aid, defensive driving, prescribed fires, and others were covered during the year. All staff attended a review for first aid and CPR. We also had a speaker provide information and discussion on blood born pathogens.

Biological technicians McConnell and Gaunitz, and Assistant Manager Hericks had fire physicals and successfully completed their step-tests. Manager Delehanty completed his LE physical and successfully completed the 1.5 mile run for fire certification during his LE training.

Eric Allness and Chris Hendrickson were certified by Harold Carter of Necedah on the operation and maintenance of farm tractors.

On October 7, Delehanty was injured while conducting repairs to an overhead garage door. Injuries resulted in serious damage to his teeth and less serious lacerations on his face. It's very fortunate that he didn't sustain worse injuries!

#### 5. Technical Assistance

Technical assistance was provided to various private, local, state, and federal entities with regards to wildlife. Assistance included reviews of FSA easements (Figure 6), WRP enrollments, wetland projects for the Land Improvement Contractor's Association, St. Croix county Comprehensive Land Use Plans, and other projects. We routinely exchange services with the WDNR on prescribed burns and other land management projects.





Figure 6: Wetland review on Stoerbel property located in Barron County.

#### 6. Other

The Refuge Revenue Sharing Act provides for yearly payments to local units of government for lands under the administration of the Service. Funds for these payments are derived from revenue on the sale of products from these lands plus a supplemental congressional appropriation. In 1996, insufficient appropriations caused the Revenue Sharing payments to be less than a full payment, resulting in a disturbing loss to local units of government.

Fourteen refuge revenue sharing checks totaling \$17,961 were distributed in 1996 (Table 3).

**Table 3. 1996 Refuge Revenue Sharing Payments**

COUNTY	TOWNSHIP/VILLAGE OR TOWN	PAYMENT
Polk	Town of Clear Lake	\$ 304.00
Polk	Alden Township	\$ 724.00
Polk	Black Brook Township	\$ 576.00
Polk	Town of Farmington	\$ 611.00
St. Croix	Village of Deer Park	\$ 439.00
St. Croix	Cylon Township	\$ 858.00
St. Croix	Town of Star Prairie	\$ 133.00
St. Croix	Town of Hudson	\$ 1119.00
St. Croix	Stanton Township	\$ 4998.00
St. Croix	Richmond Township	\$ 3505.00
St. Croix	Hammond Township	\$ 84.00
St. Croix	Erin Prairie Township	\$ 626.00
St. Croix	Somerset Township	\$ 1804.00
St. Croix	Warren Township	\$ 1356.00
Dunn	Town of Red Cedar	\$ 690.00
Dunn	Rock Creek Township	\$ 154.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$ 17,961.00</b>

## F. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

### 1. General

This year's goal focused on ways to control the mounting brush problem that is occurring on many of the WPA's. This was accomplished by an increase in the amount of mowing, brushing, and spraying than was done in past years. Also, we were able to borrow a hydroaxe and operator for a couple of weeks to work on the Bass Lake and Ten Mile WPAs.

### 2. Wetlands

Work was done to several of the wetlands on Rock Creek WPA in Dunn county by Larry Nieman from Necedah. Two of the wetlands were scraped and a third had a ditch plug installed.

### 3. Forests

The DNR forester completed an inventory of Clapp WPA and the site is being considered as a potential area for oak savannah restoration. A 20 acre field on Oakridge was also evaluated for a potential oak planting.

Two permits were issued for cutting firewood on Star Prairie WPA. Several trees within next years burn area on Ten Mile WPA were cut with a chainsaw in addition to the ones that were cut with the hydroaxe.

### 4. Croplands

Farming agreements drawn up in 1995 for three FmHA tracts proceeded as planned. Haying was conducted on the Merritt easement and corn was planted on the Zimmer easement, both in Barron county. And haying continued on the Cameron easement in Washburn county.

All cooperative farming agreements on WPA's expired in 1996.



## 5. Grasslands

We planted 40 acres of native prairie grasses and forbs at the St. Croix Prairie WPA. The mix included big bluestem, little bluestem, switch grass, Indian grass, sideoats grama, and a native wildflower mix. The field was mowed near the end of July to reduce weed competition.

Our work study student, Chris Hendrickson, mowed over 75 acres of brush (Figure 7) on Oakridge, Hanten, Bierbrauer, and Erickson WPAs. Most of the brush regrowth on Erickson WPA was sprayed with 2,4 D about a month after it was mowed.



Figure 7. Hendrickson mowing the Erickson WPA.

Brush was cut by hand on several WPA's including Oakridge (between 220<sup>th</sup> and the lake), Rock Creek (along edges of break), Deer Park (40 acres burned last spring), Amschler (15 acres in northwest field) and Clapp (east 15 acres).

The region's hydroaxe was used to cut brush on Bass Lake and Ten Mile WPA's. The hydroaxe covered over 70 acres of grassland that had scattered areas of brush encroaching into the grass.

The shorebird management effort was increased on Kerber WPA. The area to the southwest of the large marsh was mowed as in the previous year, but also a section was rotovated to expose the soil. The area will be monitored again in the spring to determine if the tilling is beneficial or not.

#### 6. Other Habitats

The first phase of the native prairie garden around the office was implemented in the fall of 1996 with the planting of several varieties of native shrubs including new jersey tea, red osier dogwood, lowbush blueberry, hazelnut, and grey dogwood. Phase two will be in spring of 1997 when the wildflowers and grasses will be planted.

#### 7. Haying

A cooperator cut and baled the east 80 acres on Kerber WPA for control of Canada thistle. The bales were poor quality and were eventually given away in order to remove them from the property. On Kostka WPA a cooperator baled 18 acres to eliminate weedy encroachment and improve grass vigor. We received 200 square bales from that cutting to use for mulch in restoration projects.

#### 8. Grazing

The east 15 acres of Clapp WPA was broadcast seeded with a prairie grass mix in early spring. The area was then grazed with 15 horses for 30 days (Figure 8). We had plans to graze the area anyway, so we experimented with using the hoof action to embed native seeds as we try to increase native vegetation beyond the scattered patches of native prairie left on the site. Results will need to be monitored in 1997 to determine whether the planting was successful. An agreement was signed by the cooperator to place horses in the central 50 acres in the spring of 1997 to stimulate an old switchgrass field.





Figure 8. This horse is providing an alternative to conventional planting and weed control methods.

#### 9. Fire Management

Over 380 acres were burned on WPA's in 1996. WPA's that were burned included Beyl, St. Croix Prairie, Star Prairie, Alden, Oakridge, Flaters, Rock Creek, and White (Figures 9 and 10). In addition the St. Croix staff assisted the WDNR in burning an additional 275 acres on private and state areas. Firebreaks were constructed in the fall on Erickson, Ten Mile and Lundy WPA's for 1997 burns. At Rock Creek WPA a dozer was used to make a break through the woods that will be burned in 1997.



Figure 9. Burn conducted at Alden WPA.



Figure 10. Prescribed burn at Flaters WPA.



## 10. Pest Control

In July, Manager Delehanty and Technician Gaunitz released between 2000 and 2500 *Galerucella* beetles onto Deer Park WPA to control the purple loosestrife population (Figure 11). A monitoring quadrat was set up and eight study points were established. The beetles were released onto five of the eight points. A baseline vegetation sample was taken and the site will need to be monitored annually to determine the effectiveness of the beetles.



Figure 11. Biological Technician Gaunitz releases *Galerucella* beetles at Deer Park WPA.



Beetles released in 1995 at Clapp WPA to control leafy spurge were monitored in July, 1996. Each of the two release sites were sampled to determine if the beetles survived from the previous year. On site 1 the highest count was on July 2 when 72 were collected. On site 2 the highest count was on July 8 when 4 were collected. Early indications are that the population is beginning to establish itself on site one but site two may not have been as successful. Continued monitoring is necessary to determine if the release was a success or not.

#### 11. WPA Easement Monitoring

We do not have any WPA easements to monitor at this district. Several of the FmHA easements were visited to monitor the progress of the cooperative farming agreements.

#### 12. Private Lands

The 1996 Private Lands season had a slow start as Hericks became more familiar with the program and the area and developed priorities. Repairs to 1995 projects topped the list followed by an emphasis to complete projects with agreements signed in previous years. We also had to address concerns regarding two restored projects and the possibility of removing them. We were able to resolve issues with regards to one project, but the other had to be removed.

Wetland accomplishments for the 1996 work season included 132 basins with a total of 152.5 acres in the counties of Barron, Burnett, Dunn, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix (Figure 12). Acreages range in size from 0.2 to 16.0 with the average being 1.16 acres. Grassland accomplishments included 43 sites for a total of 927.7 acres in Burnett, Dunn, Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix counties.



Figure 12. Karau wetland restoration project in St. Croix county.

The Service cooperated with WDNR on Private Lands efforts in Dunn, Pierce, and St. Croix areas and conducted all contacts in Pepin county. As agreed upon in previous years, WDNR was the primary contact for work in the waterbank townships of Barron, Burnett, Polk and Washburn counties while the Service focused on the non-waterbank townships.

Projects completed by the Service were paid with Private Lands and North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) funds. Ducks Unlimited provided technical assistance surveying one Private Lands site and helped to fund some projects. Larry Nieman brought along a dozer from Necedah NWR and spent a week performing work on Private Lands and WPA projects. Dennis Hall, engineer from the St. Cloud Private Lands Office, provided technical assistance with surveys and plans for a couple of large projects. We are thankful to everyone for their assistance.



A University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point intern student, Eric Allness, was hired by the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association to help with the Private Lands program. His work included everything from landowner contacts, surveys, overseeing contractors, and seeding/mulching completed projects. He also constructed and installed a Clemson Beaver Pond Leveler (Figure 13) as a temporary solution for one of our completed projects. As part of his intern studies, he conducted point count surveys on over half of the points located on the WPAs for the Grassland Bird Survey. His enthusiasm and dedication were greatly appreciated.



Figure 13. Clemson Beaver Pond Leveler.

## G. WILDLIFE

### 1. Wildlife Diversity

A diversity of habitat types are found within the District, including the northern forests, oak\pine barrens, oak savanna prairies, tall grass prairies, and intense agricultural areas. Hence, the wildlife in this region is also diverse with common species like the beaver, ruffed grouse, badger, and white-tailed deer, as well as less common species such as the grey wolf and Henslow's sparrow.

A study conducted by James Evrard and Richard Lillie entitled "Flora and Fauna of Northwest Wisconsin Waterfowl Production Areas" provides a species account for WPAs in St. Croix and Polk counties.

## 2. Endangered and/or Threatened Species

Nine State and/or Federally listed species are known to occur within the St. Croix WMD boundaries. These species include the grey wolf, peregrine falcon, bald eagle, osprey, red-necked grebe, Caspian tern, Forster's tern, trumpeter swan and great egret.

## 3. Waterfowl

The WPA's within the St. Croix WMD serve both as migratory resting and breeding areas for a variety of waterfowl. Species which commonly breed in the District include mallard, blue-winged teal, wood duck, hooded merganser, and Canada goose. Although we still lack data on waterfowl production, 1996 appeared to be a good year. A great diversity of dabbling and diving ducks are seen in the area both during spring and fall migrations.

Each year the WDNR monitors wood duck boxes on some of the WPAs. Preliminary reports for this year indicate a great nesting year for wood duck and mergansers. Final results will be provided when available.

The Vermilion Community College work-study student, Chris Hendrickson inspected mallard/goose nesting structures on St. Croix Prairie, Alden, and Star Prairie WPA's. It appears that nesting attempts were made by mallards on the floating platforms at Alden and Star Prairie, but were not successful. As for the pole structure on the St. Croix Prairie pond, neither tubes nor the goose ring showed any nesting attempts despite the presence of a loafing hen mallard.

A private landowner in Polk county put out three mallard/goose platform structures on his ponds. It appears that one platform successfully hatched all but 2 eggs in one mallard tube, while the other tube on the same platform had 4 eggs which were abandoned. All other platforms showed no activity.

Wood duck boxes and mallard/goose nesting platforms were installed on the Rose Lee WPA as part of a memorial for Josh Juedes by the Senior class from Clear Lake High School (Figure 14).





Figure 14. Classmates of Josh Juedes install wood duck boxes and mallard/goose platforms at Rose Lee WPA in his memory.

#### 4. Marsh and Water Birds

Various species of marsh and waterbirds are common in the St. Croix WMD. Great blue herons, black-crowned night herons, green herons and sandhill cranes have all been observed in the area.

In April, Hericks and VanBeek conducted a Crane survey at Ten-Mile WPA; there were no observations or calls heard during the survey.

#### 5. Shorebirds, Gulls, and Terns

Only a few species of gulls and terns can be found in the area at various times throughout the year. As for shorebirds, a greater variety of species are known to frequent the area.

In past years, a seasonally flooded wetland located on Kerber WPA was identified as one of the best locations in Wisconsin to observe migrant shorebirds. Records have shown that 32 of 33 species commonly found in Wisconsin were observed using the wetland. In order to restore the important qualities of the site, we mowed the reed canary grass in the fall of 1995 to provide an opening that would attract some shorebird use. Results from our attempts were not spectacular, but we did observe the presence of 2 black-bellied plovers and approximately 30 greater yellowlegs using the site.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of June, three black tern survey routes were completed in Polk and St. Croix counties as a cooperative effort for the WDNR, Division of Endangered Resources. Seven terns were observed during the west route survey on Amschler WPA. Three terns were seen on the north route, two at Deer Park WPA and one at a pond between Flaters and Alden WPAs.

#### 6. Raptors

The grassland and open agricultural fields within the district provide good habitat for various species of raptors. Species commonly seen in the area include red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, northern harriers and great horned owls. Cooper's, sharp-shinned and broad-winged hawks are also seen, but less frequently due to their habitat preference and/or presence in the area.

Early in the spring, a sharp-shinned hawk frequented the bird feeder outside the office. We're pretty sure it had no problems catching a bite to eat.

In May, while Hericks was conducting a Level 1 contaminant survey on the Red Cedar WPA, a Northern Harrier was observed incubating three eggs.

#### 7. Other Migratory Birds

A variety of song birds migrate through the area. Some grassland species are able to successfully nest in the available resources provided in the WPA's.

Eric Allness, WWA Intern from UW - Stevens Point, conducted 40 point count surveys on 7 WPAs including Amschler, Bierbrauer, Deer Park, Erickson, Hanten, Kostka, and Three Lakes. At Kostka WPA, Allness observed and heard a Henslow's Sparrow, a species of concern with the Service. A species list is provided in Table 4, taken directly from his report dated October 1, 1996.

Table 4. Species List for all WPAs

Species	# Recorded	Species	# Recorded
Bobolink	182	Eastern Meadowlark	4
Red-winged Blackbird	68	Vesper Sparrow	3
Grasshopper Sparrow	40	Yellow-headed Blackbird	3
Clay-colored Sparrow	39	Chipping Sparrow	2
Eastern Kingbird	14	Northern Harrier	2
Sedge Wren	14	Yellow Warbler	2
Tree Swallow	9	Blue Jay	1
Common Yellowthroat	5	Dickcissel	1
Field Sparrow	5	Eastern Bluebird	1
Savannah Sparrow	5	Henslow's Sparrow	1
American Goldfinch	4	Ring-necked Pheasant	1
Barn Swallow	4	<b>Total</b>	<b>410</b>

Also, two UW - Madison graduate students conducted bird surveys on our new WPA tracts including Rose Lee, Clear Lake, Red Cedar and Rock Creek. They observed a variety of grassland and wetland species. Two of the species observed are considered uncommon during the breeding season, they were the green-winged teal and Virginia rail.

American woodcock and common snipe are also found on various WPA's within the District. The annual FWS Woodcock Survey located in eastern St. Croix county was conducted by Hericks and VanBeek on May 10<sup>th</sup>. The conditions for the survey were ideal with clear skies, calm winds and no precipitation. Disturbance, however, was variable with intermittent traffic, dogs barking, and a chorus of spring peepers at various locations along the route. The survey was almost a wash until we heard three woodcocks peenting on the last stop.

#### 8. Game Mammals

White-tailed deer inhabit all of Wisconsin and are found in noticeable numbers on WPA's and surrounding lands. In addition, muskrat, raccoon, red fox, coyote, mink and black bear can be found on various WPA's.

#### 9. Other Resident Wildlife

A host of wildlife find WPA's an attractive area to live, including striped skunk, opossum, ring-necked pheasants, ruffed grouse, a variety of song birds, various small mammals, and some herps.

A painted turtle decided that the sidewalk by the office was a good spot to deposit her eggs. Little did she know that the sidewalk was planned to be replaced with a wheelchair accessible walkway. The staff's efforts in relocating the nest were unsuccessful, less than 24 hours after moving them, they were predated.

#### 10. Fisheries Resources

WPAs, generally, do not have a great diversity fish species. Some species identified in the St. Croix and Polk county WPAs include the white sucker, fathead minnow, brook stickleback, yellow perch, bluegill, largemouth bass, and walleye.

#### 11. Wildlife Propagation and Stocking

Nothing to report.

#### 12. Scientific Collections

Nothing to Report.



### 13. Marking and Banding

On July 1, District staff assisted WDNR with the capture and banding of Canada geese at Three Lakes WPA. Efforts resulted in 64 geese captured of which 47 were fitted with bands; the remaining 17 were previously banded.

### 14. Disease Prevention and Control

Nothing to report.

## H. PUBLIC USE

### 1. General

All WPA's, with the exception of the Oak Ridge WPA during waterfowl hunting season, are open to hunting, fishing and trapping. The District received significant use during small game and deer hunting seasons. The District office had many visitors requesting maps and information about hunting on WPA's.

On October 6, the staff celebrated the National Wildlife Refuge Week with over 100 people. An open house with guided prairie walks, prairie seed planting for kids, the restoration of a wetland on the WPA, and other activities and refreshments were provided for their pleasure.

### 2. Hunting

Hunting is a popular activity on the District's WPA's. The most sought after animals are waterfowl and white-tailed deer. However, many hunters utilize the areas in pursuit of upland game birds, primarily ring-neck pheasants, and other small game species.

Waterfowl hunters had a tough season despite good breeding populations and apparently good local production. The first few days of the season saw many ducks and many hunters, but after those few days, goose hunters enjoyed more action than duck hunters. Just as the larger marshes froze, a pulse of migrating ducks provided several days of excellent hunting. Mid-season duck hunting was poor.

### 3. Fishing

Fishing occurs on various WPA wetlands. According to the locals, ice fishing is good on Erickson and Bierbrauer WPAs. Flaters WPA is a close third if you take into consideration the activity that we observed last spring (Figure 15).

All of these wetlands occasionally are either completely dry or else at such low levels that fish die from lack of oxygen in the winter. Our recent high water cycle has produced a brief fishing boom.



Figure 15. Locals enjoying crappie fishing at Flaters WPA.

#### 4. Trapping

Some trapping is occurring on WPA's, however, trapping pressure is not significant due to the current low market price for hides. Species taken include muskrat, raccoon, mink, fox and beaver.

#### 5. Wildlife Observation

Many of our WPA's are in close proximity to the Twin Cities area of Minnesota. Therefore, a number of people utilize WPAs for wildlife observation activities. Oak Ridge WPA has been included in the Wisconsin Watchable Wildlife Guide and is a popular area for birdwatchers.

#### 6. Other Wildlife Oriented Recreation

Nothing to report.

#### 7. Law Enforcement

Law enforcement work is minimized because of our small staff, having only one LE officer, and because of a history of effective hunting and fishing enforcement on WPA's by state officers. Wetland district manager Delehanty is the only employee with LE credentials. He occasionally works with the state officers on hunting enforcement. He did not issue any violation notices in 1996.

Twice during the year, our office alarm system was activated by attempted entry after hours. Delehanty and a local deputy sheriff responded to the first case. As it turned out, the attempted entry was by a well intentioned DNR employee returning some borrowed equipment. The second event was apparently an attempted entry by an unknown person which was foiled by the security system. A deputy responded along with assistant manager Hericks who opened the office for the deputy. There was no theft or damage from either incident.

## I. EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

### 1. New Construction

A sink was installed in the mud room that will be used to get water for chemical applications as well as a place to clean various items that should be kept out of the main office area.

Split rail fence was installed at the office by the WCC crew along 95<sup>th</sup> Street and the St. Croix staff installed split rails around the native plant garden area. Barbed wire fence (80 rods), three gates and a parking lot were installed at Rock Creek WPA.

The senior class from Clear Lake high school constructed a parking lot at Rose Lee WPA as a memorial to Josh Juedes.

A collapsible seed bin was constructed for storing prairie seed in the garage.

### 2. Rehabilitation

In order to make the office accessible, the downstairs bathroom was remodeled and the sidewalk was re-graded (Figure 16).

Three wells were abandoned at Rock Creek WPA including a 250' deep irrigation well. Several trailers of garbage and over 100 tires were also removed from the WPA.

Fence repair was completed on Kostka WPA and Clapp WPA (Figure 17). Also, an old fence was removed from the forty line of the St. Croix Prairie WPA prior to planting and several rock piles were also buried with a backhoe.





Figure 16. Construction crew working on the sidewalk at the office.



Figure 17. McConnell constructing new fence at Kostka WPA.



### 3. Equipment Utilization and Replacement

Major purchases made in 1996 included a Truax seed drill, a Donahue implement carrier, a table saw, and a portable diesel fuel tank. Orders were also placed for a one ton pickup truck and a dump truck. We held our first small lot sale for some obsolete furniture and equipment.

We purchased several more furniture items for the office including a kitchen table, a conference table, file cabinets and a book shelf. A security system was also installed to protect the office and garage areas. Gutters were installed to prevent the garage doors from freezing shut.

During the year we rented a backhoe for wetland restoration and to bury rock piles and rented a skid steer for landscaping around the office and installing a culvert at Risberg WPA. We rented a chipper to use on the brush piles at the office and Clapp WPA.



Figure 19. Attempts to rent "Big Daddy backhoe" were unsuccessful, so Marcouiller had to make do with "Junior".

#### 4. Communications systems

We began making purchases to build our radio communications program at St. Croix. In 1996 we purchased two portable Motorola Astro radios that were programmed with the local DNR and law enforcement frequencies. These radios will enable us to communicate with the DNR and the County dispatched on prescribed burns and provide the station's LE officer with a means of field communication in emergency situations. Future plans may include a base station for the office, mobile radios in the field vehicles and several more portable radios.

#### 5. Computer systems

We purchased a fourth computer which included a CD Rom drive and Windows 95. That computer enabled us to have everyone connected to CC Mail and the Internet. We added a new 1 G hard drive and 16 MB of memory to the Dell computer currently being used by Assistant Manager Hericks. All of the station's computers had Filemaker Pro 3.0 installed to bring them up to speed with the new time sheet program that was implemented for pay period one in 1997. Currently all of the computers at St. Croix are using Wordperfect for Windows 6.0 and Filemaker Pro 2.1 and 3.0.

#### 6. Energy Conservation

The attached garage was insulated and sheet rocked following the installation of a heater to allow for more shop work during the winter.

### J. OTHER ITEMS

#### 1. Cooperative Programs

Nothing to report.

#### 2. Items of Interest

In January, Bill Hartwig (RD) and John Christian (GARD-1) visited our facilities and toured some project sites. It was a pleasure meeting them in an informal surrounding to discuss our program.



On April 24, we received a visit from the Office of Inspector General to conduct an audit of the Private Lands program in the Region (Figure 20). A few stations in Wisconsin and Minnesota were selected for the audit and we were lucky enough to be one of them. Anyone who has never been audited should try it. It is unnerving to check two year old accounting records and then travel to a field site to confirm the work was completed. Actually, the inspectors were very pleasant and the process was smooth. They were suitably impressed with both our projects and accounting.



Figure 20. Jim Ruwaldt, Madison Private Lands Office, is seen here with Office of Inspector General representatives during their audit of Private Lands projects in Region 3.

Regional Aviation Manager, Bob Foster provided us with assistance when he piloted Hericks around St. Croix and Polk counties in order to take aerial photos of WPAs and Private Lands project sites.

### 3. Credits

All staff members assisted in writing the report. Editing was conducted by Assistant Manager Hericks. Administrative Assistant VanBeek assembled and distributed the narrative.



#### K. FEEDBACK

When I talk about jobs with my friends and colleagues, both federal and non-federal employees, one recurring theme is feeling unappreciated for their work. What a waste! We worry so much about problems outside our control, yet here is something each of us can control and we seem to be doing a lousy job. Each of us should find frequent opportunities to say "thank you" or "good job" to those we work around. Paychecks entice people to show up for work; good relationships keep people effective and enthusiastic once they arrive.