

Electronic Newsletter

November 2006



MMRP Summit; July 12, 2006, Chester, Illinois
Photo: Alan Dooley, US Army Corps of Engineers

The Middle Mississippi River Partnership is a collaboration of federal and state agencies and not-for-profit organizations working to restore and enhance the natural resources of the corridor through public and private resource management, compatible economic development, private lands conservation, and education and outreach to citizens of the region.

This newsletter has been prepared by the Southwestern Illinois RC&D, Inc. on behalf of the Middle Mississippi River Partnership, with funding provided by The McKnight Foundation. The Southwestern Illinois RC&D, Inc. is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Questions, comments, or suggestions on the newsletter should be directed to Steve Black, 618-566-4451, steveblack@rcdnet.net; or Dave Eustis, 618-566-4451, dave.eustis@rcdnet.net.

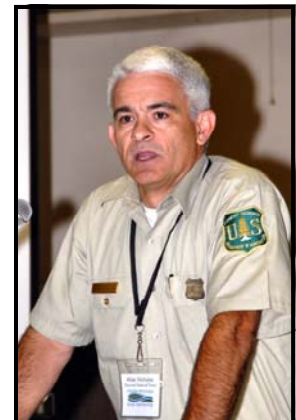
Middle Mississippi River Partnership 2006 Summit

The MMR Partnership Summit was held on July 12th at the American Legion hall in Chester, Illinois. Over 140 people participated in the conference to hear an update on a variety of programs and activities underway in the Middle Mississippi River Corridor. Participants were asked to fill out a survey and questionnaire on their views regarding MMR issues. Respondents provided the following feedback:

- Almost all agreed with the Partnership's Guiding Principles.
- Most agreed that the items of consensus from the 1998 River System Summit were still valid today for the MMR.
- Almost all supported an increased amount of river and floodplain restoration work.
- Almost all agreed that restoring some floodplain lands will have at least some positive impact on the local economy.
- About 40% of the respondents utilized the river or floodplain for economic purposes.
- 28% often used and 64% sometimes used the corridor for recreation purposes.
- Almost all said they learned something from the Summit.

The respondents suggested the following items for the Partnership:

- Promote the river system for recreation and tourism using its natural beauty.
- Cultivate, develop, and recruit new partners for the Partnership.
- Increase the recreation opportunities in the corridor and access to the river.
- Increase information and education efforts to promote issues and opportunities.
- Continue to protect private property rights.



Summit presentations, left to right: Deanne Strauser, US Army Corps of Engineers; Marc Miller, Office of Il. Lt. Governor Pat Quinn; Allen Nicholas, USDA Forest Service. Photos: Alan Doolley, US Army Corps of Engineers

Partnership Elects New Chair, Vice Chair

Robert Cail, Refuge Manager of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Middle Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), was recently elected as Chairman of the Middle Mississippi River Partnership (MMRP). Robert replaces Jenny Frazier, American Land Conservancy, who served as Partnership Chair for the past year.

Robert earned a Bachelors of Science degree in Aquaculture, Fisheries and Wildlife with an emphasis in Wildlife from Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina. Mr. Cail's 15 year federal government career began as a Wildlife Biologist with the Bureau of Land Management in Oregon, working with endangered species such as the Northern Spotted Owl from 1991-1998.

Cail worked for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service starting in the fall of 1998 as an Assistant Refuge Manager at the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge in Cibola, Arizona (1998-2000). In 2000, he accepted the Refuge Manager's position at the Savannah Coastal Complex in Savannah, Georgia (2000-2004). While at Savannah, he was responsible for four National Wildlife Refuges. In 2004, he served as Refuge Manager at the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge in Gulf Shores, Alabama (2005-2006). In January 2006, he migrated to his current position at the refuge.

"I'm looking forward to working with the MMRP Steering Committee members, current Partnership members, as well as forming new partnerships throughout the Middle Mississippi River corridor", says Cail.

Robert's many interests include wetland restoration and promoting diverse riparian forests along the corridor, as well as supporting outdoor recreation. Basin level and site specific River Reach planning will be one of the many focuses this year. Robert can be contacted at the MMRNWR headquarters at 618/763-4420 weekdays from 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM, or at robert_cail@fws.gov.

Terry Wachter, Wetland Reserve Program Specialist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, was elected Vice Chair of the Partnership. Terry began his career with the USDA Soil Conservation Service in 1987 as a Soil Conservation Technician serving Union, Pulaski and Alexander counties in southernmost Illinois. Terry was named the NRCS Project Coordinator for the Mississippi River Corridor Wetlands Project in 1995, a broad partnership effort that enrolled 6,000 acres of 1993 flood impacted lands into the Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program, offering yet another flood recovery option to impacted landowners. His current position with NRCS as a Wetlands Reserve Program Specialist in the region, in many ways, grew from that experience.



Newly elected Chair of the MMRP, Robert Cail, observes tree growth on Horse Island.

Photo: Kevin J. Lowry, USFWS



Wetland Management Workshop Conducted

On Saturday August 5th, 2006 the NRCS Anna Field Office hosted the 7th annual “Wetland Management Workshop for Landowners”. This full-day workshop, sponsored by the NRCS, IDNR, University of Illinois Extension, FWS, and APHIS, was attended by 15 area landowners and 6 hosting agency personnel.



The morning session featured presentations covering moist soil management, control of noxious and invasive plants, and the control of problem wetland wildlife species (muskrat & beaver). The group was treated to a “wetland wumbo” for lunch, courtesy of Mark Guetersloh of IDNR. The gumbo was a delicious combination of turtle, crayfish, duck, and rice.

In the afternoon session, the group visited a Wetlands Reserve Program site near Wolf Lake owned by Cliff McMahan. Mr. McMahan, a board director of the Union County Soil & Water Conservation District, gave a tour of his wetland restoration project and discussed some wetland management techniques that have been successfully applied to manipulate vegetative succession, combat invasive plant species, and establish bottomland hardwood trees. The workshop, which drew local attendees and those from several surrounding counties, was a great success and will be offered again next summer.

Further information on the workshop or the Wetlands Reserve Program can be obtained by contacting Terry Wachter, USDA NRCS, 618-833-5666, or terry.wachter@il.usda.gov.



Helping People Help the Land

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Kidd Lake Marsh Dedication

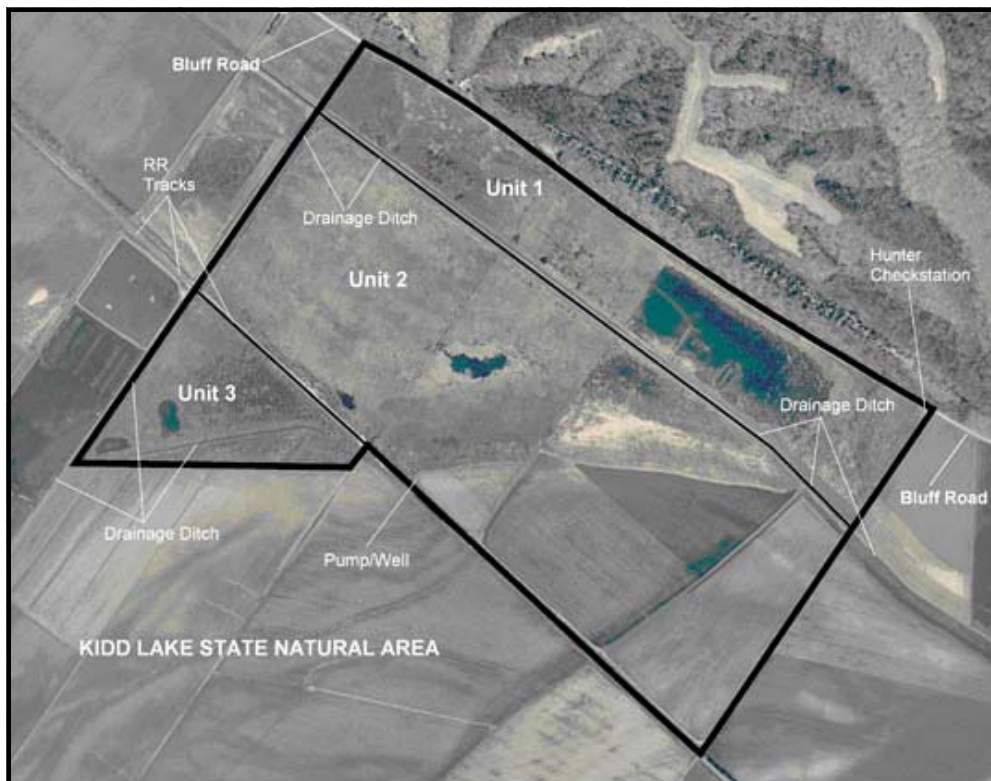
Approximately 25 people attended the recent dedication of Kidd Lake Marsh in western Monroe County (Illinois). Attendees included several IDNR personnel, including Deck Major, Regional Wildlife Biologist, Brian Mahan, Wildlife Biologist, Scott Flood, Regional Lands Manager, Joan Bade, Site Superintendent, Art Neal, Engineer, and Bob Hammel, Carlyle Lake Site Superintendent, as well as Eric Schenck, Ducks Unlimited, local waterfowl hunters, club owners, and landowners.

The event was held to dedicate the recently completed levee between the drainage ditch (see attached aerial photo) and Unit 2. (Levee is only on two sides of Unit 2.) The levee, along with a pump/well which was previously provided by Ducks Unlimited, will allow water to hold in Unit 2 at the 380 elevation, which is the assumed original water level of the lake/marsh.

During the dedication, various individuals and groups were thanked, including Ducks Unlimited and a local group, "Friends of Kidd Lake." These groups' names are included on a new sign which was unveiled during the dedication. A brief history of Kidd Lake, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' involvement, and an outline of the IDNR's management goals for the site were presented by Joan Bade and Brian Mahan during the brief ceremony. Future plans, including a possible pump/well for Unit 1 were also presented to those in attendance.

It is anticipated that once much of the bulrush within Unit 2 dies out due to the higher, more natural water level and the muskrats move in, more open water will result. Ducks should be attracted to the area and begin using it. Since waterfowl hunting is not allowed at the site, it will

serve as a "rest area", something local waterfowlers have requested for years. Further information on this project is available by contacting Brian Mahan, 618-443-2925.



US Army Corps of Engineers Collaborative Planning - Middle Mississippi River

This past summer the St. Louis District of the US Army Corps of Engineers and the MMRP submitted a proposal to Corps Headquarters to conduct a collaborative planning study within the MMR basin. Not surprisingly, given the previous efforts of the Partnership, this proposal was one of five selected to be implemented. Others selected included the Great Lakes, the Delaware River, the Virgin River, and an effort looking at comprehensive water resource planning in 18 Western states. All the study efforts are two years in length.

The Middle Mississippi effort will have a budget of about \$650,000. This collaborative planning effort will focus on three areas: continuing the reach planning efforts started by the MMRP, developing a hydro-geomorphic model (HGM) to help evaluate landscape level ecosystem restoration options for the Middle Mississippi River corridor, and building upon the MMRP Coordination Plan. Building upon the MMRP Coordination Plan will include reaching out to new partners (both traditional and non-traditional), working with the partnership to identify federal, state, and private programs that can be used as restoration “tools” in the MMR, and building upon the goals and objectives identified in the Coordination Plan.

To date, efforts have focused on getting the HGM team up and running. That team met in October to start gathering the data needed for the model. Much of the data will come from the GIS work already completed for the Coordination Plan. We expect the contract for the model work to be awarded in November. The Corps is also preparing a draft Plan of Study, which is laying out the study objectives, milestones, and cost estimates. That document will be run through the MMRP steering committee. We expect that by early 2007 all three efforts will be moving forth in earnest. All will include heavy involvement from the folks within the Partnership. Questions about the study can be directed at either Deanne Strauser, 314-331-8047, deanne.m.strauser@mvs02.usace.army.mil, or Brian Johnson, 314-331-8146, brian.l.johnson@mvs02.usace.army.mil.

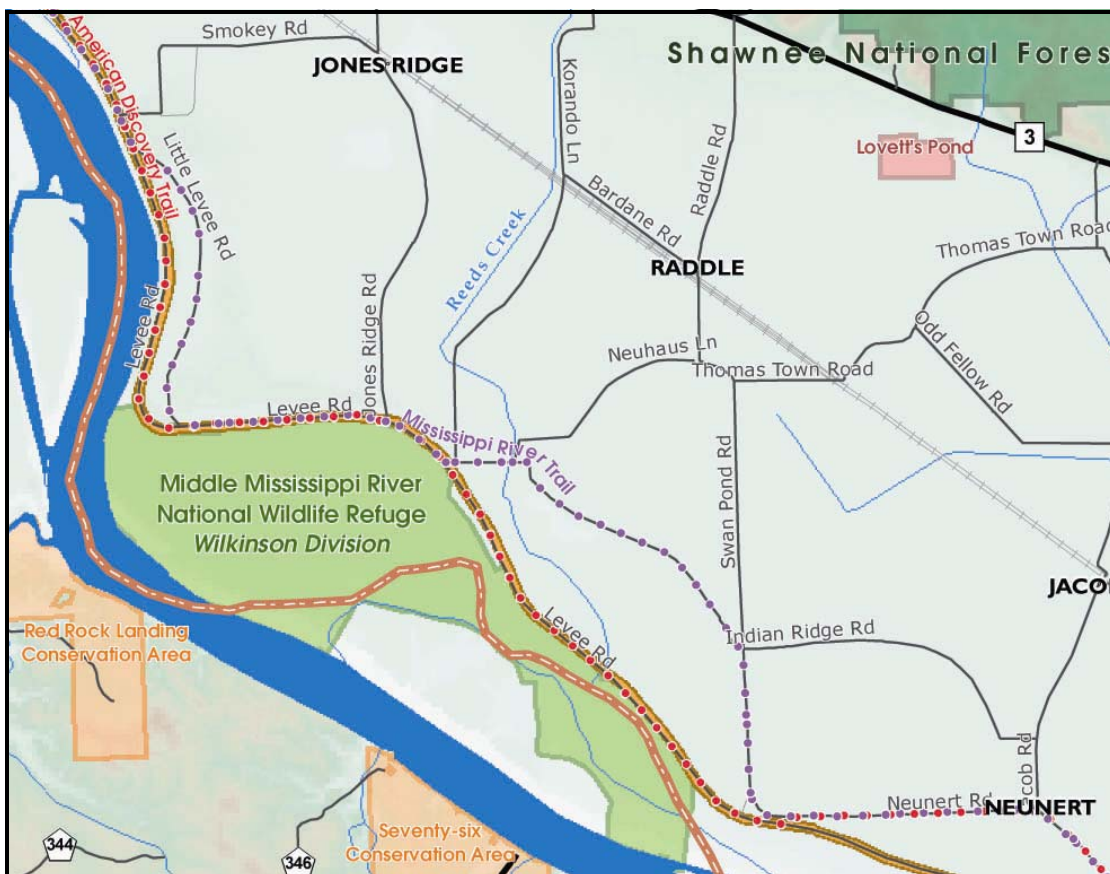
USDA Forest Service - Land Acquisition

The Shawnee National Forest recently acquired 252 acres of Wetlands Reserve Program land in T14 S., R3W, Section 22, south and west of the Sexton Creek Road in Alexander County. This property adjoins existing National Forest within the floodplain. The land includes some restored wetlands and some reforested bottomland forest. The Forest Service plans to work with USDA NRCS on additional wetland and reforestation needs for the property. If partners have any questions on the recent acquisition, please contact Steve Widowski at 618-833-8576, or swidowski@fs.fed.us.

Birding the Bottomlands: “Putting the MMRP on the Map”

Jack Nawrot, of the SIUC Cooperative Wildlife Research Laboratory, is coordinating an effort to introduce the Middle Mississippi River Partnership to the public, using a birding map to showcase public lands as bird observation points. The Southern Illinois Audubon Society is assisting with the project by identifying locations on publicly accessible land where bird species are likely to occur.

These locations and the boundaries of the public land will be displayed on a large, double-sided, folding map, along with information about the MMRP and the natural history of the bottomlands. Southwestern Illinois RC&D is developing the map and graphic design. The Birding the Bottomlands map will cover the portion of the Middle Mississippi River from Rockwood to Thebes. The remaining portion of the corridor may be mapped in the future, pending additional funds. A draft map will be available for review by the partners early in 2007. The final maps will be available for distribution in Spring of 2007. More information on this project can be obtained by contacting Jack Nawrot, 618-536-7766, jnawrot@siu.edu, or Jenny Reiman, 618-566-9493, jenny.reiman@rcdnet.net.



Meeting Announcement– January 18, 2007

The Middle Mississippi River Partnership will meet on January 18, 2007 from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm at the Southwestern Illinois Community College in Red Bud, Illinois. The following are some of the topics to be discussed at that meeting:

- COE Update on Planning Efforts on the MMR
- Discussion on goals and objectives of partners for 2007
- Discussion on legislative tours, summer meeting, and other outreach efforts.
- Discussion on potential new partners
- Conduct regular business meeting

If you have other suggestions for topics for the meeting please send them to Steve Black at steve.black@rcdnet.net More information the details of the session will be distributed to all partners in December.

New Partners

The MMR Steering Committee concurred during the October 23, 2006 teleconference to add the Missouri USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Southwestern Illinois RC&D, Inc. as members of the Partnership. Roger Hansen, State Conservationist for NRCS in Missouri, submitted a letter requesting to be added to the MOU and Dave Eustis, Operations Manager for the Southwestern Illinois RC&D, requested to be added to the MOU. The process of revising the MOU to add these new members is being studied to determine the best way to add new partners with the least complication while still meeting the administrative requirements of the MOU. We want to welcome the Missouri NRCS and the Southwestern Illinois RC&D to the Partnership and we look forward to working with them on future activities.

The Illinois EPA, Audubon Society, and US EPA have also been contacted regarding their interest in becoming Partners with the MMR. A copy of the MOU was sent to each of these organizations to highlight the goals and purposes of the Partnership.

Presentation to Wetland Scientists

Steve Black of the Southwestern Illinois RC&D made a presentation on the MMR Coordination Plan at the annual meeting of the Central Chapter (MO & KS) of the Society of Wetland Scientists on October 16 at the Columbia Bottom Conservation Area in Missouri. Approximately 50 wetland scientists from agencies and the private sector participated in the meeting. The presentation focused on the Coordination Plan that was developed in 2005 by the Partnership and highlighted the goals and objectives that were developed to address the resource concerns in the corridor.