

Buffalo County Natural Resources Internship Program

2013 Final Report



Peregrine Falcon Chick

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The Buffalo County Natural Resources Internship Program provides a college student studying natural resources hands-on experience in the field they have been studying. The program also allows for important natural resource work to be completed. The program is sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Buffalo County Land Conservation Department (LCD), and the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

During the summer of 2013 I was hired as the intern. I was overjoyed to learn that I was chosen for the position; having lived in Buffalo County my whole life, I was really looking forward to working in the county I love so much. Similar to the 2011 and 2012 internship programs, scholarship dollars were provided by generous contributions from conservation clubs, businesses and private individuals. The contributor list is found at the end of this report. The following is an agency-by-agency overview of accomplishments.

Department of Natural Resources

Wildlife Management

Projects for wildlife management were directed by Gary Wolf who is the wildlife technician for Buffalo County. While I completed a variety of jobs, much of my time was spent leading the massasauga rattlesnake survey.

The massasauga rattlesnake is a state endangered snake and is likely soon to be federally listed as endangered. The Eastern massasauga rattlesnake and its cousin, the timber rattlesnake, are members of the pit viper family. They are the only poisonous snakes found in Wisconsin. Unlike the timber rattlesnake which is found around rock outcroppings on bluffs, the Eastern massasauga is found in lowland hardwood floodplain forests.



The survey took place entirely within the state-owned Tiffany Bottoms Wildlife Area. Tiffany Bottoms has one of the last viable populations of Eastern massasauga rattlesnakes in the state. Tiffany provided a unique opportunity to conduct the survey completely on state-owned lands. The snakes' location also allows the DNR to actively manage Eastern massasauga rattlesnake habitat to aid its population.

The survey consisted of searching known snake holding areas. They were found visually or by listening for their rattle. Once found, the snake was captured, weighed, measured, checked for sex and gravidness, and marked with green paint on its rattle. If we found that individual again, we would know it was previously captured and would leave it be.

Completing the survey proved challenging. Flooding conditions for most of the spring forced us to use a boat to gain access to the snake areas. Poor access continued after boat access became too shallow, while ATV travel was hindered by a wet floodplain. Although access was an issue, we still completed 20 survey days and totaled over 43 search-hours. The survey yielded 10 massasauga rattlesnakes. Five of these snakes were gravid (pregnant) females. An initial comparison with a similar 2010 effort showed a decline in snake numbers; the 2010 survey produced 17 snakes.

Another major summer highlight was banding peregrine falcon chicks with Bob Anderson. Bob is the executive director of the Raptor Resource Project and is one of the people responsible for bringing the peregrine back from the brink of extinction. He is the major reason why we have peregrines nesting on their native cliff faces along the Mississippi River. The non-profit Raptor Resource Project specializes in the preservation of falcons, eagles, ospreys, hawks, and owls. They create, improve, and directly maintain over 40 nests and nest sites, provide training in nest site creation and management, and develop innovations in nest site management



Peregrine Falcon Chick Banding

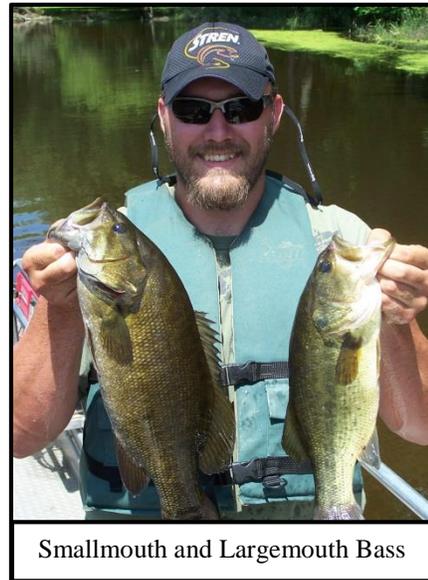
and viewing that bring people closer to the natural world. Their mission is to preserve and strengthen raptor populations, expand participation in raptor preservation, and help foster the next generation of preservationists.

Having worked with birds of prey for many years, getting back to something familiar was a nice break from all the new summer experiences. The peregrines, as they typically do, were nesting on a vertical cliff. Climbers descended to the nest

to retrieve the chicks. Once the climbers reached the chicks, they were placed into a crate that was hoisted to our location. The chicks were sexed, banded and given names. After the leg bands were in place, the chicks were lowered to the climbers and placed back into the nest. On this trip, we banded four females.

Fisheries Management

While working with fisheries management, I was with Brian Brecka, Mississippi River fisheries biologist. On two occasions I was the net man on the shocking boat. The first time we captured as many different species of fish as we could to teach a local Boy Scout troop about the different fish species that live in the Mississippi River. The second time we shocked was to take a yearly gamefish inventory within a habitat improvement project. The project was completed several years ago, and our survey would provide a comparison to previous surveys. We shocked for a specific amount of time and collected all the fish we could. After the time was up, we stopped the boat and recorded species and a measurement for each fish.

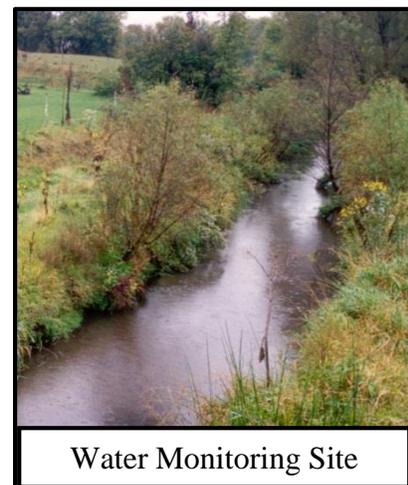


Forestry

The Buffalo County forester, Brent Weaver, also had a project for me to do during my internship. There was a recent planting of swamp white oak, and the deer and the voles were taking their toll on the trees. Along with planting replacement oak, rebar stakes were placed next to every third tree in the planting. The rebar stakes will allow for protective tree tubes to be placed on the trees this fall. This should prevent the deer and voles from eating the trees.

Land Conservation Department

During my time with the LCD, I got the opportunity to work with land conservation technician Brooke Nottestad. We conducted various water monitoring activities that included taking temperature, turbidity and water clarity readings. Another work detail was to man the booth at the Buffalo County fair. This provided not only me, but the department, a unique opportunity. Because I grew up in Buffalo County, I was able to talk conservation to a lot of people that knew me but probably had little interest in resource issues.



Natural Resources Conservation Service

Much of my time spent with the NRCS was under the direction of Todd Mau. Todd is the district conservationist for Buffalo County. A major part of working with the NRCS was conducting Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) compliance checks for reenrollment. This

consisted of walking the field that was up for reenrollment and taking an inventory of the plants that were growing. I would also document anything else questionable in the field. Along with pictures, my findings were provided to the Farm Service Agency who delivers the final decision regarding CRP reenrollment.

Bluff prairie habitat was also a big part of the summer. This habitat type is something unique to the driftless area and something I have had previous experience with. I got the opportunity to partake in the Crawford County prairie tour where we looked at both public and private prairie restoration efforts.

Along with touring prairie habitat, time was dedicated to clearing trees on different prairie sites. Over the years, if the prairies were not subject to fire, they were taken over by woody vegetation. Our tools for prairie restoration included clearing the woody vegetation, treating with an herbicide, and then conducting a prescribed burn. Fire is a very important part to restoring these prairies.



One last highlight working with the NRCS was at the inaugural Trout Day Celebration. Eagle Creek was the location for the event; the area was recently restored and now provided a great trout fishery. The celebration was a great success, with over 100 people in attendance and a good majority of them being kids. There were plenty of activities for everyone to do; fly tying, fly casting, and fishing were each popular.

I would like to thank the agency sponsors and scholarship contributors for the opportunity to take part in this internship. This program is a great tool for interested students to get hands-on experience in the field of natural resources. The memories and experiences I have taken away from this summer are something I will never forget.

2013 Scholarship Contributors

Alma Rod and Gun Club	Fountain City Rod and Gun Club
Bee Forest Products	Madison Fishing Expo
Brunkow Hardwood Corp.	Mississippi Valley Chapter – Whitetails Unlimited
Buffalo County Farm Bureau	Mondovi Conservation Club
Bushy’s Meat Market	Stuart Hagen
Clearwater Chapter – Trout Unlimited	Swan Watch
Durand Sportsmen’s Club	Waumandee Rod and Gun Club
Fountain City Lions Club	