

The Otter's Tale

Newsletter of the Friends of Pool 9

April, 2007



President's View

Another Year Begins

The ice has moved out and the warm temperatures of spring are gradually replacing the cold and snowy days of winter. The migration is already in full swing. If you haven't had a chance to peruse the backwaters of the Mississippi yet, you're missing one of nature's true spectacles.

It was exactly a year ago that Phyl and I motored slowly down a slough below the Highway 82 dike connecting Black Hawk Bridge and the Wisconsin shore. The slough empties into a series of shallow lakes and ponds known as the Chain of Lakes and Goose Carcass Lake.

As we drifted silently round a tall-grass point literally thousands of ducks, geese, swans, herons, and cranes lifted noisily into the north wind. The sight and sound was breathtaking, adding true meaning to the word cacophony. Quacks, honks, whistles, and deep-throated sawing or grinding sounds blended together as if a symphony were playing to us. It must be an exciting time as our feathered friends greet one another, find partners, and establish territories for the upcoming nesting season. It seems that the one that speaks the loudest gets his choice of both partner and area. It was nature at the finest moment, and in a few days moves farther to the north. Make plans for an early spring trip down Old Man River and you'll be pleasantly surprised with the diversity and abundance of wildlife.

Your Board of Directors is likewise excited about their plans for the up-coming year. Phyl and I represented you and the entire Upper Mississippi River Refuge in Washington, D.C. recently. We carried the message that the Refuge System is an extremely valuable asset to the American public and has been critically under funded in recent years and needs a big boost to get back on track. (See the article later in this issue.)

A Pool 9 clean up (April 21) is again in the picture, with special focus on the Reno Bottoms area. Tim Loose and Jon Stravers welcome your participation in their eagle and hawk surveys. Kee Middle School is planning a one day river adventure (early May), and Tim will need help with his two-day mega event, involving 500 students in river awareness activities as well. The Leave No Trace Campaign is beginning to take shape and will need volunteers to inform Refuge users of its value. We're also planning to locate porta-potties at both Big

Slough and Village Creek Landings, continue to monitor and clean our area beaches, have our annual meeting of Friends in July, work on beach restoration at the upper end of the pool, and organize and offer the popular Fall Birding Festival.

Wow, sounds like another great year on the river. Remember to take time to enjoy the serenity and peacefulness of our beautiful Mississippi in your own way. See you on the river...

John

Pool-wide Clean-up Day Saturday, April 21, 2007

By Ric Zarwell, member, Friends of Pool 9 Board of Directors

The 2007 Pool-wide Clean-up Day has been scheduled for Saturday, April 21st. All Friends members and other volunteers are invited to pitch-in and assist. After the highly successful 2006 pool-wide clean-up, you should make plans for a very busy, beneficial and enjoyable day on the 31-mile stretch of Mississippi River between Lock & Dam 9 and Lock & Dam 8.

Everyone is asked to sign up in advance by contacting their site coordinators. These leaders will have all of the information that you'll need. The site coordinators are: Genoa area, Mark Clements (608) 689-2800; Ferryville & Lynxville area, Mark Schneden (608) 874-4478; New Albin area, Al Wuennecke (563) 544-4929; Lansing area, John Verdon, (563) 538-4836, Glen Springer (563) 538-9232, Brent Darling (563) 538-4489; and Heytman's Landing area, LaDonna & Dave Noelting (563) 586-2873.

A lunch will be provided as it was in 2006, when the half-day effort achieved great success. Mark your calendars now. The 2007 Pool-wide Clean-up Day is scheduled to occur before vegetation growth conceals trash and litter, and the mosquitoes come out in force.

Friends members are asked to invite their neighbors and pals to pitch-in. Everyone can spare a half-day to improve our great section of the river.



Stan Hagensick of Lynxville, WI, during the June 2006 Pool-wide Cleanup.

Leave No Trace

by Wildlife Refuge Specialist Tim Loose

During the past year, I've always closed out the newsletter with a simple quote . . .

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world . . . Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

I hope you've noticed it! As I reflect on the past year, I can not help but feel a sense of wonder and respect for the many accomplishments of the Friends of Pool 9. You are that small group of thoughtful, committed individuals who are changing the world, or at least our little corner of it! We've worked together to improve the beaches, clean up the backwaters, and to open the communication lines between the resource agencies managing the river and you our stakeholders.

Our work is not over, so we will continue to move forward with these issues in Pool 9. At the same time we will be launching a new effort. An effort that I feel will help propel the Friends of Pool 9 into an important leadership role on the River. That effort is the promotion of the Leave No Trace Philosophy.

Leave No Trace is not a complex set of rules, but simply a set of principles that when understood and utilized can help all of us minimize the impact we have on the environment. The seven principles of Leave No Trace are:



- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors
- Leave What You Found

Please take the time to learn about these principles and how you can apply them on the River. There will be new signs and leaflets going up late this spring at nearly every public access on the pool. The signs will include an open invitation from the Friends of Pool 9, to all visitors, to help preserve the beauty and character of this magnificent River by Leaving No Trace.

"Our enemies are not the people who are against what we are doing, our enemies are the people who don't care what we are doing."

-Unknown

THE PADDLEFISH

by Tim Loose

If I were to ask you if you had ever seen a spoonbill, spadefish, or duck-billed cat, chances are you might look at me and wonder what I was talking about. These are all nicknames for the paddlefish or "pelefish" as it was called by Hernando Desoto, the first European explorer to cross the Mississippi River in the 16th Century. "Pele" or "spatula" is a very appropriate reference to the elongated paddle shaped snout of the paddlefish.

In comparison with other North American fish, the paddler is anything but common. Paddlefish skin is tough, smooth and scaleless, except for the upper lobe of the tail, where a trace of primitive diamond-shaped scales are found. Its skeleton is mostly cartilaginous and it has a notochord (fore runner of the spinal vertebrae). The jaws of young paddlefish are finely toothed but the teeth are lost by adulthood. And then there's that snout. A nose that even Jimmy Durante would be envious of!

Below the snout is a large mouth, that when opened looks like a yawning hippo. And its usually open, since a paddlefish feeds by sucking in vast amounts of water enriched with plankton (microscopic plants and animals which are seldom larger than the period at the end of this sentence). The plankton are then filtered through an intricate, comb-like arrangement of gill rakers which serves the paddlefish as baleen does whales.



Paddlefish are among the oldest and largest freshwater fish. Fossil records date their first appearance somewhere between 300 and 400 million years ago . . . about 50 million years before the first dinosaurs appeared on earth. Did you know the largest paddlefish on record was speared in Lake Okoboji, Iowa in 1916? It weighted over 198 pounds.

Paddlefish were once abundant in the Mississippi valley, but over-harvest and changes in environmental conditions, have reduced its numbers. If you are lucky, every now and then you might catch a glimpse of one. To learn more about the paddlefish, I would encourage you to search the web, where there is lots of good information on their behavior, reproduction, and the challenges they face.

Dinner and Awards Banquet For Volunteers Given by US Fish & Wildlife Service

US Fish and Wildlife Service staff at the McGregor District office (Tim Yager, Clyde Male, Tim Loose, Neil Henkenius, Cathy Henry, Dixie Palmer) prepared and presented an appreciation banquet for the volunteers of Pools 9 & 10, Upper Mississippi River Refuge. Approximately 100 area volunteers and staff enjoyed roast turkey, with all the trimmings Saturday evening at the Kerndt Community Building in Lansing. At a recognition program that followed, McGregor District Manager Tim Yager commented that "it was something that needed to be done to show our appreciation to the volunteers for their commitment and effort to assist the Service in maintaining the Upper Mississippi River Refuge."

Tim Yager selected Larry Clanton and Larry and Sandi McClellan as McGregor District Volunteers of the Year for their efforts. Friends of Pool 9 Charter Board members were recognized, their names engraved on a plaque to be displayed in the community. Member volunteers and sponsors were thanked for their efforts and contributions in the beach restoration projects, the clean up of Pool 9, and the fall birding festival.

Sue Stirn was recognized as the Friends of Pool 9 Volunteer of the Year for her "commitment, persistence, and determination to get things done and bring together all parties in a cooperative effort." She received a desk plaque and her name has been inscribed on a wall plaque to be displayed also.



L to R, John Verdon, Sue Stirn. John presented Sue with the Friends of Pool 9 Volunteer of the Year Award.

Tim Loose was praised for hundreds of hours of time given to the benefit of the Friends of Pool 9 and the projects undertaken by the group this past year. John Verdon stated that "without his guidance, hard work, and involvement this Friends group quite frankly, would not be in existence. Because of his wisdom and caring personality the group has become a prominent factor in the activities of Pool 9."

Verdon, President of the Friends of Pool 9 group also thanked the US Army Corps of Engineers, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources, and US Fish and Wildlife Service for their cooperation and willingness to work with the local Friends group.



L to R Tim Loose, John Verdon, Ken Steiber at US F&W Awards Banquet. Verdon and Steiber presented Loose with a bonfire tripod grill (shown rear left) constructed by Steiber in appreciation of Tim's time and commitment to the Friends of Pool 9.

He stated that cooperation and trust between all parties involved has forged a relationship never

before attained in this area. Tim Yager agreed with Verdon by saying, "Together we can do great things."

Tim Loose recognized President Verdon for his commitment and leadership to the Friends of Pool 9 and awarded him "Man of the Year" status. John and wife Phyllis will be traveling to Washington, D.C. to represent concerns of the Friends of Pool 9 and the entire 261-mile long Upper Mississippi River Fish and Wildlife Refuge, at a meeting of the National Wildlife Refuge Association and elected government officials.

Friends of Pool 9 Goes to Washington

Friends of Pool 9 President John Verdon, and wife Phyllis, spent March 2-5, 2007 in Washington, D.C. representing the Friends of Pool 9 and the entire 261-mile long Upper Mississippi River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge.

Following two days of informational workshops they went to Capitol Hill to carry the message to Congress that our National Refuge System is under siege. Funding levels for the nations 547 refuges has been static (or has received only minor increases) for the last four years, while inflation and operational costs continued to rise. The Midwest Region (of which we are part) has implemented a reduction in staff of 20% (71



John and Phyllis Verdon stand on the Capitol steps before embarking on lobbying ventures to the House and Senate Office Buildings.

positions) by the end of 2008 if nothing is done to correct the situation. An increase of \$61 million is necessary, bringing the funding level for Fiscal Year 2008 to \$451.5 million.

The Verdon's talked with Congressman Ron Kind's staff as well as Congressman Tom Latham's. They met with Senior Senator Chuck Grassley and discussed the critical situation our national refuges are in. The U.S. National Fish and Wildlife Refuge System funding level is set by Congress and has been greatly under funded the past three years and will see only a minor increase in FY 2007.

They also had a chance to visit with Dale Hall, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, informing him of our 300 member grassroots group trying to make a difference on the Upper Mississippi River. And the value of the eagle roosting trees bordering the proposed railroad expansion at the Alliant Power Plant in Lansing.

President Verdon said, "The trip to Washington was a whirlwind that helped me realize the importance and impact small town individuals can have on the political process. Phyl and I felt honored and privileged to represent our organization and friends from the Upper Mississippi and the heartland of America."

Friends of Pool 9
P.O. Box 455
Lansing, IA 52151



JACKSON ST. 708 N. Jackson St.
Charles City, IA 50616
P R E S S 866-508-3257

Friends Shirts and Caps Now Available for Order

With the help of Riverland Expressions in Lansing, the Friends of Pool 9 now have a very attractive denim shirt and brushed twill cap available. If you would like to show your pride and support for the Friends of Pool 9, you may order one or both of these. Caps cost \$10 and come with an adjustable strap. The shirts are available in both short and long sleeve styles and your choice of tan or faded blue. Cost is \$20 per shirt.



These are being sold at cost. Shirts come in standard sizes S-XL. Add \$2 for XXL sizes. To place an order send a check made out to the Friends of Pool 9, PO Box 455, Lansing, IA 52151. Once we have a consolidated order of 6 or more shirts or caps we will get your order processed. Shirts will be available for pickup during any of the calendar of events listed on the back page of the newsletter or as arranged.

Calendar of Events:

Pool Wide Cleanup Day - Saturday, April 21st

Leave No Trace Training

Tuesday/Wednesday Evening - June 19th and 20th

Annual Membership Picnic and Business Meeting

Saturday, July 14th

6th Annual Rivers and Bluffs Fall Birding Festival

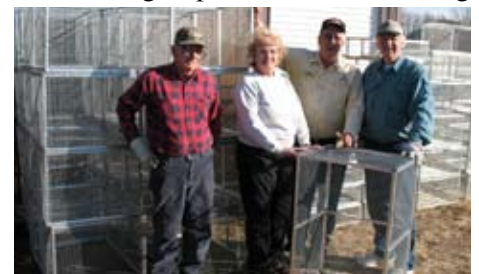
November 9-11, 2007

Members Construct Mussel Cages

Area Friends of Pool 9 members assisted with mussel cage construction at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery on February 24, 2007.

The FOP9 group was part of a volunteer work force of twenty that gathered at GNFH to help in the construction of dozens of wire cages for the propagation of the endangered Higgins eye pearly mussel. The cages will offer refuge for the small mussels as they grow until their release into the river. The project is one part of a restoration program to reestablish the endangered species in the Mississippi River.

The group enjoyed working with Fisheries staff, brats and burgers on the grill, and the camaraderie of working with other volunteers from the area. Fisheries Biologist, Roger Gordon thanked the Friends of Pool 9 group for their outstanding support, and without the group's help they would not have completed the dozens of culture cages required for this year's project.



L to R Friends of Pool 9 members Jim Baugher, Karen Hutson, Don Thran, and John Verdon behind one of the mussel cages built that day.