

**Workshop Summary**  
**Tribal Habitat and Species Workshop**  
**February 19, 2009**  
**Lake of the Torches Resort Casino**  
**Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin**

Bob Jackson of the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs provided welcoming remarks. He stated that the Tribal Great Lakes Habitat Workshop was coordinated with the Circle of Flight Program workshop which took place prior to the Habitat Workshop. Jackson indicated that participants in the workshop would hopefully take home some tools on how to address habitat restoration needs. Victoria Pebbles of the Great Lakes Commission reviewed the objectives and agenda for the workshop.

Mike Greer of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District, provided an overview of the Great Lakes Habitat Initiative (GLHI), which provided the impetus for the 2007 state habitat workshop series, developed regional database of habitat projects (actual and proposed), and a database of habitat funding programs. The GLHI also produced a final implementation plan, primarily directed at the Corps, but also for consideration by other agencies. These products are available online at [www.glhi.org](http://www.glhi.org). Greer noted that the GLHI was a two-year project that has been officially completed, but that the stakeholders involved have continued to work together and are now part of a formal Habitat/Species Subcommittee under the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy (GLRC). Greer completed this overview with a brief description of recent updates underway to improve and link the habitat and projects databases.

John Hummer of the Great Lakes Commission presented updates and enhancements underway for the habitat projects database/repository and the habitat funding database. These enhancements include additional quality control over projects that were previously entered, a more simplified data entry form for habitat projects, a new, more user-friendly web user interface and linkages with the funding database. Regarding this last point, Gauthier provided examples of how users will be able to query the databases to find potential funding sources that match habitat projects. Finally, he indicated that enhancements to the web tools are now fully functional.

Participants then heard from speakers who provided information on programs involving habitat protection and restoration initiatives from a tribal perspective. Bob Jackson presented an overview of the Circle of Flight Program (CFP), including its pros, cons and unmet needs. The CFP has been active for 21 years. The program had received \$11 million per year as an earmark until the early part of this decade. Tribes then went to Congress to get the CFP restored on an annual basis. The program has enhanced or maintained 22,000 acres of wetlands over its life. One of the CFP's recent highlights is the development of an Invasive Species Initiative for noxious weeds. The CFP received \$200,000 from BIA to expand the program this year, which is exclusive to the Midwest. Generally, CFP proposals are easy to complete and can be as little as 1-2 pages.

Reggie Cadotte with Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) outlined some broad scale tribal restoration priorities and gaps. GLIFWC consists of 11 tribes in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin and works to implement and protect tribal treaty rights. Cadotte indicated that he was on the Executive Committee of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, as well as several of its workgroups. He expressed concern to the group that the tribal funding base is continuously being cut, including:

- A 16% drop in the budget for treaty rights implementation/protection;
- A 25% cut management and administration functions; and
- Base fund cuts, making it difficult for tribal members to participate in various habitat partnerships.

In regard to the last bullet point above, Cadotte indicated that tribes have to spend more time going to Congress to fight for base funds, which means less time available for on-the-ground activities and development of grants to move projects into implementation. Cadotte urged participants to enter projects into the GLHI database. He stressed that participants should prioritize projects they put into the database, with a focus on protecting the natural resources they have and manage.

A question was asked relative to the pros and cons of tribal partnerships. Cadotte responded that most partnerships are positive in nature; however, information sharing on sensitive issues can be a con if that information is not used with discretion – such as with archaeological sites. Under the National Registration of Historical Places, archaeological sites are protected. If an information request is received, all site locations and maps are removed.

John Haugland of U.S. EPA Great Lakes National Program Office indicated that tribes have been involved from the start in the GLRC. He also mentioned the Great Lakes Tribal Caucus, which is meant to facilitate tribal participation in the GLRC at all levels, including the Executive Committee, Subcommittee, and all the various working groups. Haugland stressed that the caucus can play a significant role in the tribal communication on Great Lakes initiatives.

Next, three presentations focused on stepping down the GLRC, including restoration strategies at the tribal and local levels. Standing in for Ed Fairbanks, John Haugland provided an overview of Direct Implementation Tribal Cooperative Agreements (DITCA). DITCA's purpose is to enable tribes to play a more direct role in EPA's implementation of federal regulatory programs in Indian country. The program is still in an experimental phase. DITCA has been used to bring together multiple tribes that do not have authority or capacity to implement federal environmental regulatory programs.

Under the Clean Water Act, EPA is exploring the DITCA tool as a possible means to use federally-credentialed tribal wetland inspectors as a means for EPA to implement its federal wetlands authority in Indian country. Victoria Pebbles of the Great Lakes Commission stated there needs to be close coordination between EPA and the Corps to make these projects happen.

Karen Rodriguez of the U.S. EPA Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO) briefly discussed EPA's Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands Consortium. There are 217,000 hectares

of coastal wetlands in a Great Lakes coastal wetlands inventory database. GLNPO funded a number of scientists to work collaboratively to come up with scientifically-defensible coastal wetlands monitoring protocols. A final report of the Consortium is a plan to monitor about 400 coastal wetland sites across the Great Lakes basin. Tribes are needed to participate once implementation begins. Rodriguez added that monitoring equipment is also needed (boats, canoes, etc.)

Rodriguez then presented on the former National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) Great Lakes Watershed Restoration Program, now titled Sustain Our Great Lakes Habitats (SOGLH). The program works with federal agencies that contribute funds to NFWF and provide oversight for the program. The SOGLH program's criteria include projects with restoration and/or protection of habitat activities. In the latest funding round, the company Arcelor Mittal came forward with \$2.1 million over a three-year period to help fund projects. The company also helped review proposals. The U.S. Forest Service also contributed some funds in the most recent funding period. Grants range from \$35-100,000; a 1-to-1 match is required. Tribal members made it clear that a 1-to-1 match is not feasible for them. In response, Rodriguez indicated she would request that tribes be exempted in the future from the match requirements. Overall, the program has doled out \$7.6 million across the Great Lakes basin over three years.

The final "Stepping Down the GLRC" presentation was by Mike Greer who provided an overview of the Joint Ventures program. Joint Ventures is a model that is used to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. He further described efforts underway in Michigan and Wisconsin that establish statewide frameworks to implement habitat restoration goals articulated in the GLRC Strategy. These are examples of how a large regional framework, like the GLRC can be implemented at the local level, with checks, balances and feedback loops.

John Hummer then revisited the web tools with a demonstration of how to use the tools to search for potential funding for specific habitat projects or to view information on particular projects. He asked participants to register in order to update or add records and encouraged participants to query the database. Hummer stressed that the web tools will have more utility the more people enter projects and use its features and fields in their project planning and implementation.

#### Project Presentations

Mic Isham of Lac Courte Oreilles discussed their **Cranberry Marsh Conversion Project**. A former cranberry marsh was not producing well. The project area was cleared of vegetation, a large area was constructed that allowed water to accumulate, which provides an excellent natural habitat for wild rice. The wild rice production is a better fit for the natural ecological functions of the area.

Louis Drift discussed the Bois Forte Nett Lake Wild Rice Restoration Project. This is another project where weedy vegetation had to be removed to allow the natural wetland to regenerate with wild rice. No reseeding was required. The use of an aquatic vegetation cutter—a large piece of equipment that operates in the water—was key to removing the problematic vegetation and preparing the site for regeneration.

## Funding Updates

Federal agency representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service and NOAA provided brief overviews of their habitat funding programs and handed out related materials or pointed participants to relevant web sites.

Key summary points from the workshop included:

- The United States government is required to work directly with tribes on a government-to-government basis.
- A Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council is a successful model for communicating tribal needs to NRCS that can be addressed by NRCS. The committee has received earmarks to develop new conservation practices. This model could be used by other federal agencies to better coordinate with and meet the needs of tribes.
- Tribes are more at risk to environmental hazards because they subsist on natural resources.
- Tribes would like to see the General Permit and Individual Permit process for tribal restoration projects to be structured under a simplified, streamlined procedure that allows exemptions from review by the Corps when there is a partnership with other Federal agencies.
- Balancing immediate community needs with larger policy and regional coordination work is very challenging for the tribes. Many tribal communities have immediate needs related to housing and infrastructure and don't have the human resources to be participate in coordination meetings or task forces or otherwise be actively engaged with external projects. Additional resources are needed so that tribes can participate in regional activities more effectively. However, lobbying for more funding also takes away from doing important work at the community level.
- In its present state, the habitat projects repository can play an important role in enabling easy information sharing about among project proponents that are interested in doing work in a similar area.
- Funding agencies cannot use the repository to get additional information about applicants or the project area for which they have received a funding request, but can use the database for information on potential projects.
- In the future, the repository could automatically be updated as formal grant applications are submitted to individual federal agencies without compromising the individual agency funding processes. This could be done setting up an automated system whereby when online applications for funding are submitted to a funding entity (e.g., federal agency), all non-sensitive data, which is much of the basic data that feeds the project repository (e.g., contact information, project location, type of project, type of ecosystem improvement, etc.) would be automatically captured and entered into the project repository. This would greatly facilitate the entry of data and greatly reduce the individual time spent entering project data into the repository.
- The repository needs someone to oversee the quality of the information—a gatekeeper—that will ensure that projects entered are relevant and viable. Whoever fills this role should also be responsible for providing regular feedback to project proponents to ensure they update the project records.