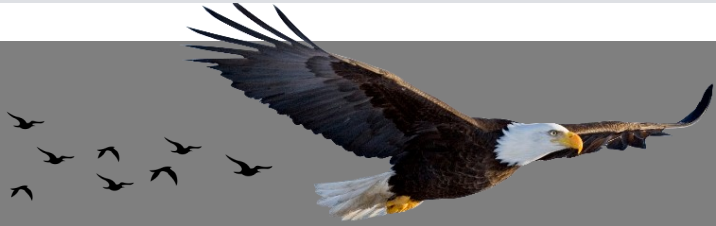




# ANNUAL REPORT 2019



# Leaders in Conservation



TO EDUCATE &  
**CONSERVE**

# 9



Meet the ONWR staff: L-R: Morgan Donaldson (Seasonal Bio-tech), Jeff Finn, Joshua Booker (Zone Biologist stationed at Ottawa NWR), Justin Woldt, Ramsay Houze, Chuck Shier, Scott Bryant, Ron Huffman, Jason Lewis, Rebecca Lewis, Buck Buchanan

# Employees

It's crazy to think that there are only eight full-time and one part-time United States Fish and Wildlife Service employees here year-round to manage the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The help of volunteers, interns, and seasonal staff is absolutely critical to conservation and habitat management efforts.



## REFUGE STAFF

Jason Lewis, *Refuge Manager*  
Ron Huffman, *Refuge Biologist*  
Jeff Finn, *Private Lands Biologist*  
Justin Woldt, *Visitor Services Manager*  
Rebecca Lewis, *Visitor Services Specialist*  
Scott Bryant, *Administrative Assistant*  
Chuck Shier, *Maintenance Mechanic*  
Ramsay Houze, *Maintenance Worker*  
Buck Buchanan, *Laborer*

## FRIENDS STAFF

Aimee Arent, *Executive Director*  
Elizabeth Kuenzer, *Nature Store Clerk*



# 3

# Refuges

# Your National Wildlife Refuge



The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex consists of three National Wildlife Refuges:

## Ottawa NWR:

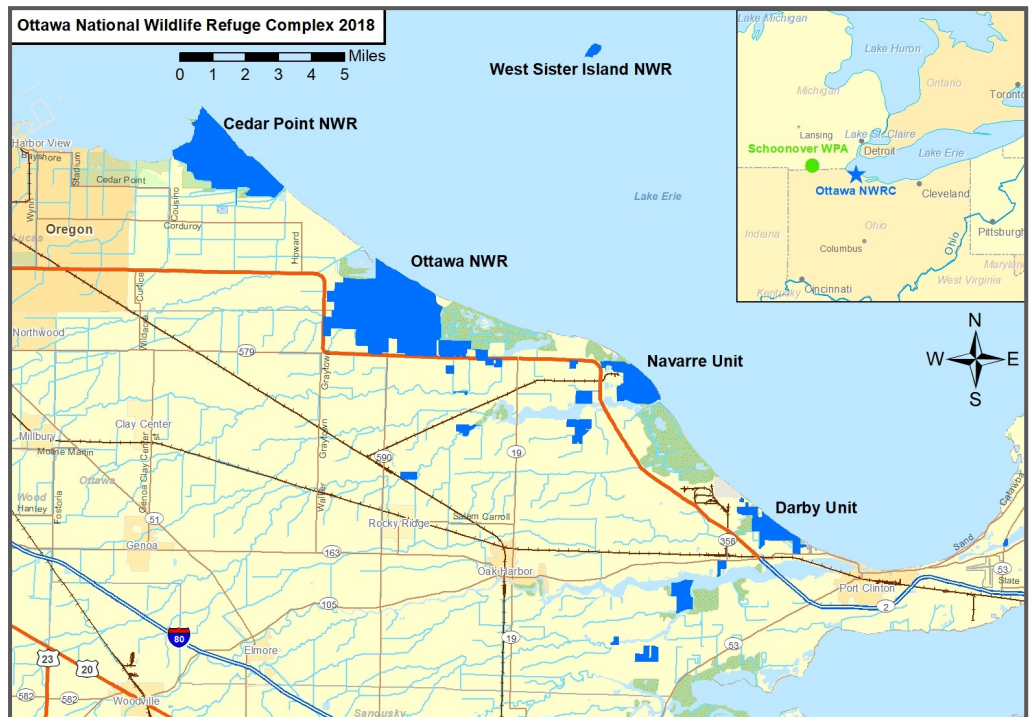
Located between Toledo and Port Clinton, this 7,522 acre refuge is managed for waterfowl, shorebirds, neotropical migrant songbirds, and a variety of plant and animal species. The three story Visitor Center and hiking trails are located here. A number of satellite properties are also part of this refuge.

## Cedar Point NWR:

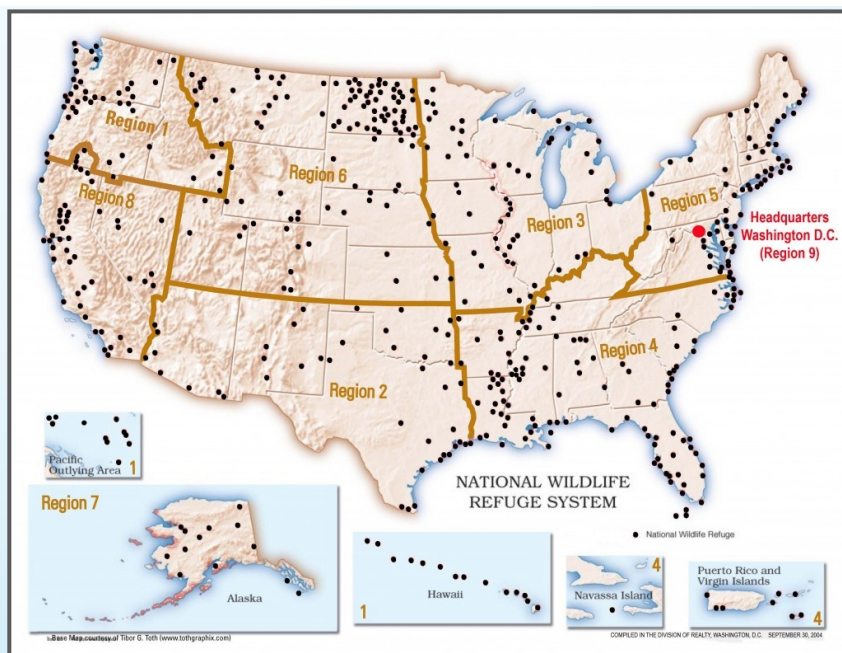
Cedar Point NWR's 2,616 acres comprise the largest contiguous marsh on Lake Erie (US). Aside from a designated fishing and kayaking area, access is by guided tour or permit only.

## West Sister Island NWR:

This 82 acre island is situated in Lake Erie, about 9 miles from shore. It is the largest Great Blue Heron and Great Egret rookery in the U.S. Great Lakes. Access is by permit only.



# Part of a Larger System



Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge is part of a much larger National Wildlife Refuge System. Known as one of America's greatest conservation success stories, the system has protected and restored habitats for hundreds of species including fish, plants, animals, and migratory birds.

Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge is part of Region 3 of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Also known as the Midwest Region, Region 3 encompasses eight states and four out of five U.S. Great Lakes.

For more information about the National Wildlife Refuge System, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and conservation priorities, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

# From the Manager's Desk



The end of a year is a time to reflect on the conservation successes of the past 12 months and to celebrate our accomplishments. What an incredible 2019 we had! Refuge staff, volunteers, Friends members and many other partners and donors all came together this year to help deliver our promise to the American people.

Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." These groups came together to make impactful change to support the Refuge.



Refuge Manager Jason Lewis with Secretary of the Interior, David Bernhardt and Assistant Refuge Manager, Eddy Pausch.

As the Refuge Manager, I am honored to work with such an inspiring group of conservation champions who are leading the way to conserve, restore, enhance, and protect fish and wildlife and their habitats throughout the refuge. Their collective efforts were

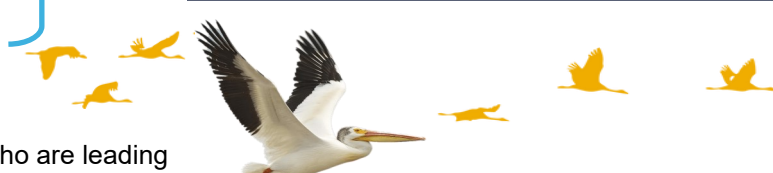
illustrated by the many accomplishments and support of refuge programs throughout the year.

With all of our success in 2019 there was some sadness. The year saw the departure of two conservation icons: Joshua Bauer, Federal Wildlife Officer and Eddy Pausch, Deputy Manager. Joshua took a new position in Savanna, IL to be closer to his home state of Iowa. Joshua was a true leader, inspiring us all through his engaging personality and passion for the resource. Eddy spent 14 years at Ottawa delivering on his promise; his work has set the foundation for much of the work that we will support for years to come.

I deeply appreciate the dedication and hard work of the Refuge staff, volunteers, Friends group, and everyone else who supported the refuge in 2019. I am so proud of what we have accomplished this year and I am equally excited about the outlook for 2020.



Jason P. Lewis  
Refuge Manager



**HOSTED**  
*Department of the Interior*  
**Secretary David Bernhardt**

for the announcement of the new hunting and fishing rule which opened 1.4 million acres to hunters and anglers cross the United States.



**OPENED 400+**  
*refuge acres*  
**FOR FISHING**



**REFUGE VISITATION**  
*reached an all-time high*  
with **344,965**  
**VISITS**

# Letter from the President



So many amazing things have happened in the last year and it is all because of the members and supporters of the Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

With the help of an amazing group of volunteers, our organization has worked to purchase two new properties for the refuge and helped open recreational access at many other properties. The work on the Wildlife Drive and Visitor Center Fishing Access are a testament to the passion people have for this beautiful national wildlife refuge complex. It has been my privilege and honor to serve as President for the past two years and to represent and guide this talented group of board members.

I am excited to see what the future holds for the refuge and I look forward to continuing to serve as the Vice President. As I turn the reins over to our new President, Pete Schwager, I look forward to continued success. We as board members merely guide the group, but our members, supporters and volunteers are the force that keeps us moving forward!



**Dr. Jenni Biegala**

2019 Friends Board President



Friends Board Members: (L-R) Kris Johnston, Pete Schwager, Mary Willoughby, Bill Baker, Executive Director Aimee Arent, Jim Krieger, Nancy Dunlap, Ron Overmyer, Carol Fingerhut, Jenni Biegala, Jake Worthington, Shirley Haar, Melanie Bowen-Greenwald

## **A Message from Incoming President, Pete Schwager**

I personally invite you and your family to come out and enjoy all that the refuge has to offer. From the Wildlife Drive and many hiking trails to our outstanding Visitor Center, we have many opportunities to share your love of nature throughout the year.

We hope to see you at our special events throughout the year including:

- Spring Migration
- West Sister Island Sunset Cruise
- Discover Ottawa 5K
- Cars for Critters
- Howl-o-ween
- Holiday Open House

Please keep in touch by visiting our website [www.friendsofottawanwr.org](http://www.friendsofottawanwr.org), and following us on Facebook and Instagram.

**The best part of the refuge is the peacefulness that comes from nature herself. Enjoy Ottawa in 2020 – you will not regret it.**



**Pete Schwager**

2020 Friends Board President



## **2019 BOARD MEMBERS**

Dr. Jenni Biegala, *President*  
Bill Baker, *Vice President*  
Shirley Haar, *Secretary*  
Ronald Overmyer, *Treasurer*  
Nancy Dunlap  
Jake Worthington  
Melanie Bowen-Greenwald  
Andrew Rospert  
Carol Fingerhut  
Mary Willoughby  
Kris Johnston  
Jim Krieger  
Kendra Foust

# From the Refuge Admin



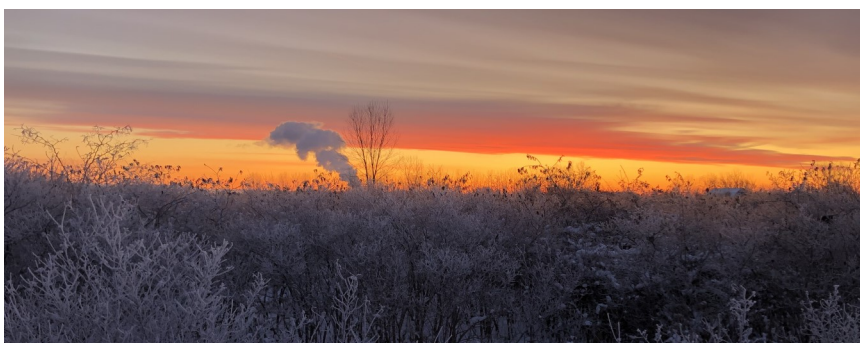
My name is Scott Bryant, and I am the newest addition to the Ottawa NWR family, taking over the job of Administrative Officer. My role is to balance the budget, process payroll, order supplies, keep the lights on, and anything else the refuge manager needs me to do.

“The bulk of our appropriated funds are used for routine day to day operations, not leaving much to use for extras. Without the support of our Friends group, we would be able to perform only minimal essential work to complete the mission.”



## Here is the breakdown of the expenditures for 2019:

- **Maintenance:** \$135,000, including repairs for structures, vehicles, and equipment
- **Supplies:** \$88,000, including office and field supplies, visitor/volunteer services supplies for all programs
- **Fixed Expenses:** \$68,000, including phones, water, propane, trash removal, etc.
- **Fuel:** \$27,000 to fuel vehicles and equipment for all programs



The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex had an operating budget of \$318,000 for 2019.

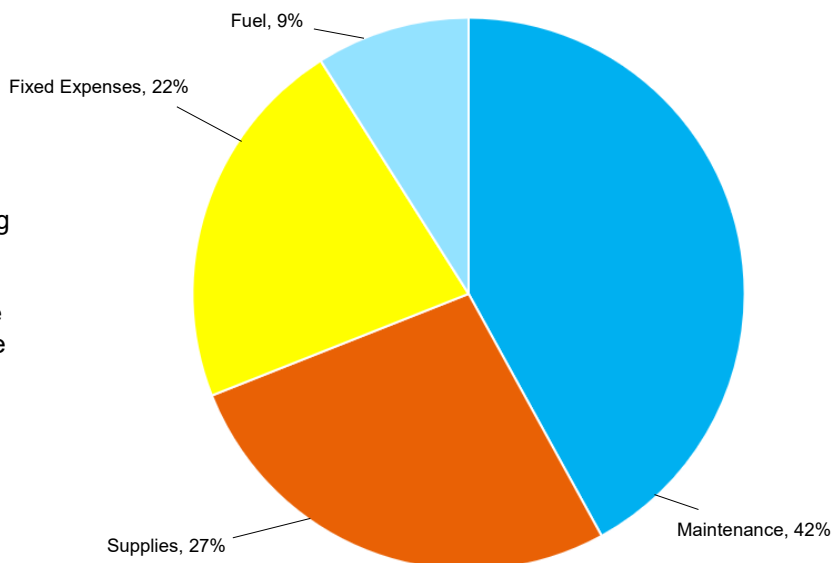


Scott Bryant

Administrative Assistant

Without the generous donations that we receive from the Friends group, and the work performed by countless volunteers, we wouldn't be able to accomplish our mission! By working together, we have successfully installed ADA accessible fishing platforms, made improvements to our wildlife drive, repaired our boardwalk, added water recreation access, as well as installed interpretive signage, and increased trail maintenance at some of our satellite properties. **All of these tasks are completed with the help of our Friends group and volunteers, working side by side with refuge staff.**

Thank you all for your support of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge!



# Friends Financials



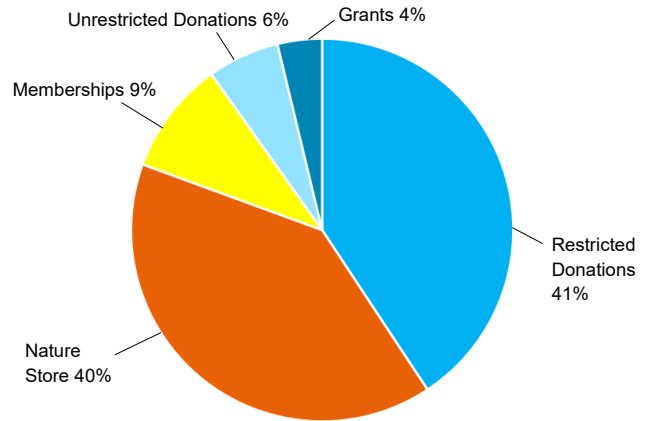
## 2019 Revenue & Expenditures

Government funding does not cover all that is necessary to manage a refuge. As a result, wildlife refuges depend on “Friends” groups like Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge (FONWR) to fill in the gaps, providing financial and volunteer support. In 2019, support of Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge through all revenue streams totaled \$325,521.

**A total of nearly \$70,000 went directly to helping the Refuge Complex and community in the areas of conservation, wildlife protection, research, law enforcement, and education.** Refuge support includes items such as visitor access and maintenance projects, intern stipends, and field trip transportation.

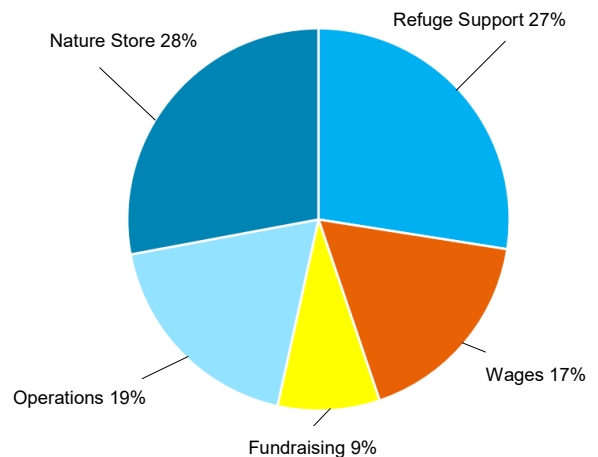
This year, the Friends were proud to purchase two parcels of land: the 40-acre Fox Unit and a .56-acre parcel that will become part of the Kontz Unit. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is planning to purchase these properties from the Friends to become part of the Refuge complex. (Read on for more information about these projects and the *Joan and Richard Kimple Conservation Fund* for land acquisition and restoration.)

## 2019 FRIENDS REVENUE



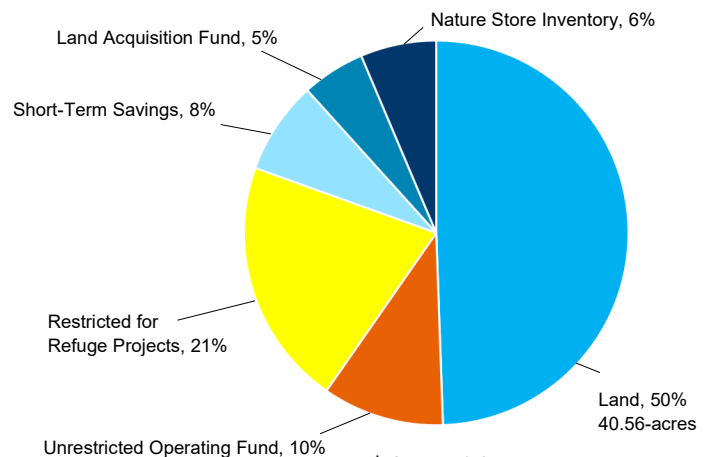
\$325,521

## 2019 FRIENDS EXPENSES



\$250,390

## 2019 FRIENDS ASSETS



\$475,736

GENERATED  
**\$325,520**  
*an increase of*

↑

**32.7%**  
*over 2018*

ACQUIRED

40.56

*acres of land*

TO BE RESTORED

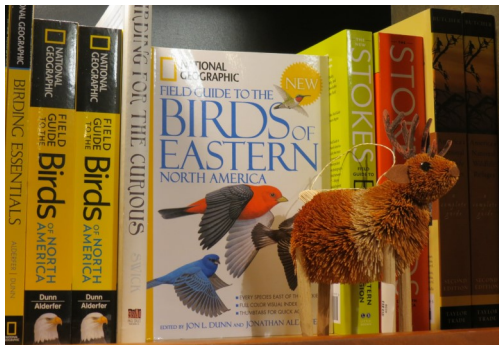
& GAVE

\$68,831

*towards other*

REFUGE PROJECTS

# The Rookery Nature Store



The Rookery Nature Store had a difficult start to 2019 with the longest government shutdown in history closing the Visitor Center from December 22, 2018 to January 25, 2019. **With your help, The Rookery still reached a new record of \$113,549 in gross revenue as of December 31.** This increase can be contributed to the record visitation throughout the year and new site-specific designs. Thank you to all of our fantastic volunteers for helping us to have such a successful year!

We hope that you will visit us soon and see all that The Rookery has to offer.

## WHY DO YOU VOLUNTEER?



2019 Nature Store Clerk, Liz Kuenzer (pictured left) preparing inventory with volunteer Dominique Bustos



**Dominique Bustos**

FWS and Friends Volunteer

“On March 5, 2019 I decided to apply to volunteer at the refuge. Looking back now I can tell you that it is on my list as one of the best decisions I made in 2019. At the time my daughter was away for her first year of college. I am a single mom with one child so I found myself with a lot of free time on my hands. It only made sense since I love animals that I find a way to volunteer my extra time with them. After a quick internet search I found the refuge. While my volunteer work focuses on the Nature Store and not directly working with animals, I still am very happy I get to engage with so many visitors and patrons of the refuge who stop in with interesting stories about wildlife. Additionally, volunteering has been a bright spot in my week because it has given me the opportunity to meet and work with some pretty amazing people who I consider friends. **There are plenty of good vibes and positive things happening at the refuge and I am extremely grateful that I get to be a part of such a wonderful and welcoming group.** It’s impressive how hard the staff work to provide year-round family friendly events to introduce people to wildlife and help them appreciate nature. I look forward to seeing new faces, meeting new people, and continuing my volunteer time in 2020.”

“I was two years post a physical injury that had me pretty much side lined from doing anything when one of the board members of Friends of ONWR approached me about an immediate need for volunteers at the Visitor Center. Timing was perfect as I was starting to itch to get back into some volunteer work. A meeting was set up to meet a few of the staff members ... this was the first time I had ever been to the refuge. Wow, I was amazed at what I had been missing! **I have always had a passion for wildlife and nature, so I was “all in” from that initial meeting!** After getting a better understanding of what the refuge is all about and how few employees there are to keep it running, that just solidified my desire to help out.

The staff are wonderful people and I love meeting and chatting with the various people who come in to enjoy the refuge. It makes me feel good to know that I can help the refuge employees by filling in and letting them focus on what they need to! There are so many opportunities at the refuge in which to volunteer, so I look forward to learning and continuing to help. I also look forward to being a part of the flurry during the spring bird migration which I have never witnessed!”



**Linda Patterson**

FWS and Friends Volunteer



# Land Acquisition and Restoration



The 40-acre Fox Unit is located just across State Route 2 from the Visitor Center. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquired the adjacent Genzman Unit in 2019. It is located directly east of the Fox Unit, and is the 37-acre flooded field visible in this photo. Aerial photo courtesy of Marcus Clarke, Jr.

## THE FOX UNIT, 40-ACRES



In April 2019, the Friends worked with Barbara Ann Fox and daughter Bethany (Curtis) Kalina to secure their first land purchase, the 40-acre Fox Unit located near the Ottawa NWR Visitor Center. The parcel includes an 8-acre intact Great Black Swamp woods. Restoration plans include restoring wet prairie and shrub habitat which should be excellent for birds and wildlife. The long-term plan is to open the property for public recreation including a parking area and hiking trail. The restoration work will be financed in part by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency under provisions of the U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Restoration work is expected to be completed by December 2021.



THEN AND NOW

Above: The late Charles Fox with the original farmhouse. Below: Bethany, mother Barbara, and son Karl on the Fox Unit.



Our family was so excited to sell our father's farm to the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. We were always hoping to preserve the "farm" in some way and this presented the perfect opportunity! The opportunity to leave a legacy, contribute to the Refuge, to protect wildlife and to restore the farm back to its natural state.



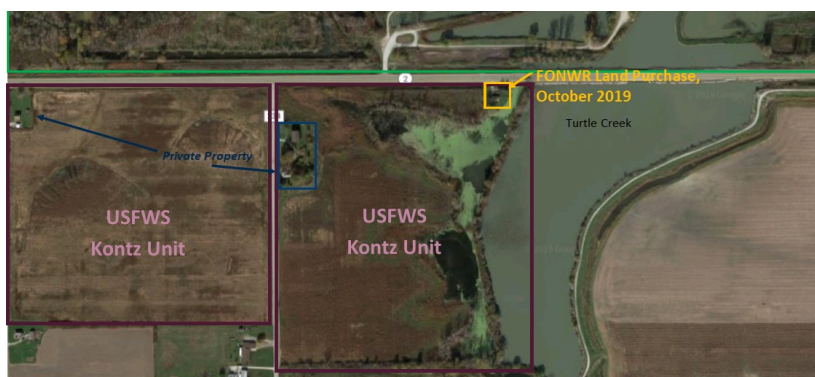
Bethany Kalina

Daughter of Charles and Barbara Fox

Since 2013, the Friends group has managed a growing fund for land acquisition with the intention of working with refuge staff to identify and purchase land significant to the refuge from willing sellers. Thanks to six years of planning and securing several sizable donations from interested supporters, the Friends group has made this dream a reality.

The **Joan and Richard Kimple Conservation Fund** is a revolving fund that allows the Friends to assist the refuge with the purchase of land and restore existing refuge parcels from Toledo to the Sandusky Bay. Both of the properties purchased by the Friends in 2019 will be sold to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service once government funding is secured. The proceeds from the land sale will be used for future land purchases and additional restoration projects.

## KONTZ ADDITION, 56-ACRES



The Friends purchased this parcel in October 2019. It is located next to the state fishing access on Route 2 near the Route 19 intersection. It will become part of the refuge's Kontz Unit. The purchase of this property from Michael Vickery was facilitated through a donation by Ellsworth and Jennifer Shriver in honor of Jennifer's father, Richard Kimple.

# Interns: Leaders of Tomorrow



A photo of 2019 seasonal staff members (L-R) Morgan Donaldson, Holly Walp, and Courtney Lopez after moving fish from a drained pond.

## Q- Tell me about your background!

**A-** I am from Middleburg, Florida, which is a small town in north central Florida, and I started off going to my community college because I didn't know what I wanted to do. I worked all through community college to save money. I ended up going to the University of Florida and I graduated with my degree in natural resource conservation and I minored in wildlife ecology.

## Q- What got you into conservation?

**A-** I grew up a small game hunter with my dad, so I love to be outside. I have a twin brother too, so naturally we hung out a lot and all the things that little boys do, I just did too. I was a girl scout for almost 11 years, and my brother was a boy scout, so I would go to girl scout meetings on Monday nights and boy scout meetings on Tuesday nights and they just included me like part of their pack. I built bird houses when they built bird houses and I went camping when they went camping.

## Q- What was your internship like?

**A-** I coordinated the deer and waterfowl hunts which took place on the refuge and are done through a lottery drawing.

## Q- How did your internship prepare you for your future?

**A-** It was super key that I got that internship, it changed everything for me because I went from working on private lands and not knowing anything about public lands to being fully involved with coordinating public use. I feel like I got fully immersed in being a public land owner. Whether you're a recreationist, a bird watcher, a kayaker, a hunter or fisherman, you are a public land owner.

Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge supports six to ten 13-week intern stipends each year, promoting the next generation of conservationists. Interns gain a variety of skills from maintenance and biology to visitor services, all under the leadership of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service staff.

The living stipend awarded by the Friends is often what makes it possible for interns to pursue their passion. Most interns are college students involved with Biology, Conservation, or Environmental Studies programs. Interested in supporting intern stipends and helping us in our mission to assist the next group of conservation leaders? Visit our website to learn more!

**Meet Holly Walp, a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service employee who began her career as a Friends sponsored intern.**



## Holly Walp

2018 Hunt Program Intern  
2019 Refuge Bio-Tech

## Q- What are your future plans?

**A-** I fell in love with Northwest Ohio and would really like to find a way to stay here. I am definitely interested in hunting and fishing, but right now I am doing invasive species work and I'm definitely interested in a little bit of everything. So my goal is to find a role that I can continue to successfully contribute to conservation in.

## Q- Anything you'd like to add?

**A-** I wish I would have known about Fish and Wildlife and the refuge system to get involved earlier. And I know there are people like me who just have no clue that this is public land that they are the co-owners of.



# Citizen Science



The highlight of this year was the successful nesting of Eastern Bluebirds at Grimm Prairie. Six eggs were laid and six birds successfully fledged the nest. While there have been a few nest attempts in the past, it is believed that this is the first confirmed, successful nest! Even though there is plenty of suitable habitat for Eastern Bluebirds at Ottawa NWR, there is usually too much competition from Tree Swallows for the available nest boxes. This year, we witnessed the Bluebirds fighting off the tree swallows AND even house sparrows! When we cleaned out the box, we discovered a house sparrow egg in the bottom! It was quite a feat for the normally passive bluebirds.



## Bluebirds



Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge has two sets of purple martin rigs, one near the Wildlife Window and the Visitor Center, and another near the Trail Head parking lot.

There were a total of 453 purple martin eggs laid this year and 367 young fledged. There were some unfortunate losses at the Trail Head rigs, most likely from snake predation. We will make some adjustments for next season.

## Purple Martins



We had a good year with our nesting efforts, despite mother nature's fury. The Tree Swallow grid at Stange Prairie was under water all season. At some points, it was almost 12 inches deep! We had a total of 117 Tree Swallow eggs which resulted in 88 young successfully fledging.

—Info on bluebirds, martins and swallows submitted by Mike, Dawn, and Trevor Zook, Purple Martin Landlords

## Tree Swallows

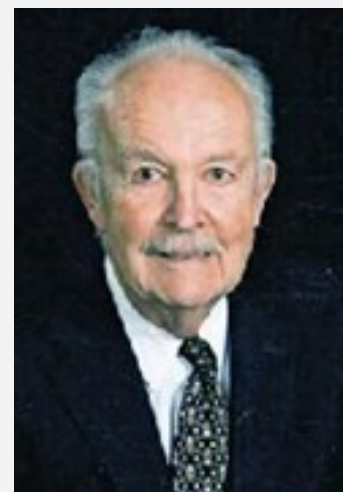


## In Memory of Edwin Pierce

**September 14, 1937 - July 31, 2019**

We are so saddened by the loss of Edwin Pierce. Ed was a staple of the monthly bird survey at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and a supporter of Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge since the very beginning. If not for his efforts in working through the process of establishing the group as a 501c3 nonprofit, we may not exist today.

Through nature often comes the best healing. Join us for the monthly bird survey held on the first Sunday of the month to help carry on his conservation legacy.



# Challenges of Failing Infrastructure

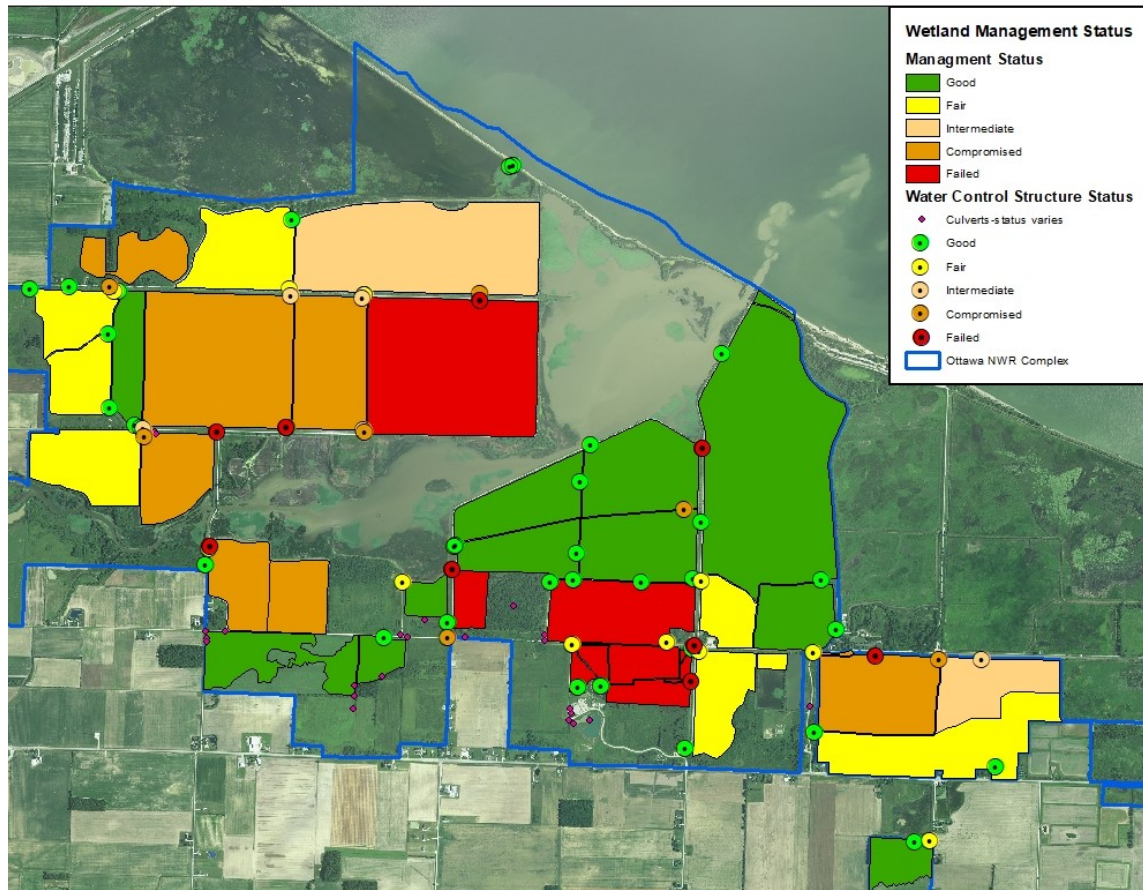
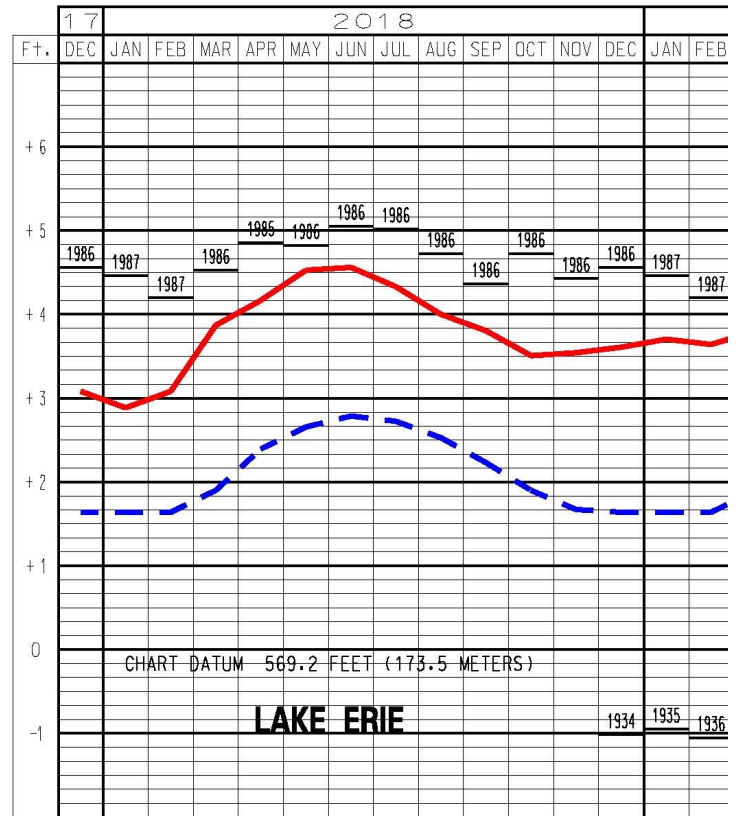


## Water Management

As you may know, water in the refuge marshes is managed through a series of dikes, culverts, and pumps with the ultimate goal of being able to manage water to provide habitat for Ottawa's flora and fauna. This water management was extremely challenging in 2019. Lake Erie continued the trend of an increasing lake level, and set new record highs for the five-month period from May through August. A new all-time record high for Lake Erie of 574.62' was set in June, 2.6' above the long-term average lake level for the month of June. Biology and maintenance staff spent considerable time pumping water for flood mitigation in an effort to protect critical infrastructure. In addition, we managed water levels on 3,555 acres of wetlands to provide essential habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.

Failing water control structures and pumps have greatly impacted wetland management on the Ottawa NWR complex. Many of the original water control structures were installed in a short period of time in the 1970s and '80s, and are reaching the end of their serviceable life. Currently, five pumping stations are in critical condition and will be prioritized within our limited refuge maintenance budget for repairs over the next few years.

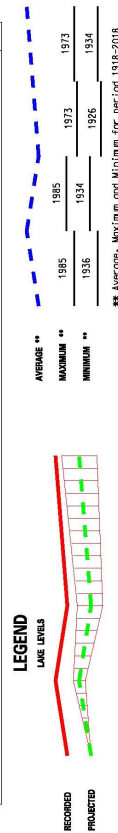
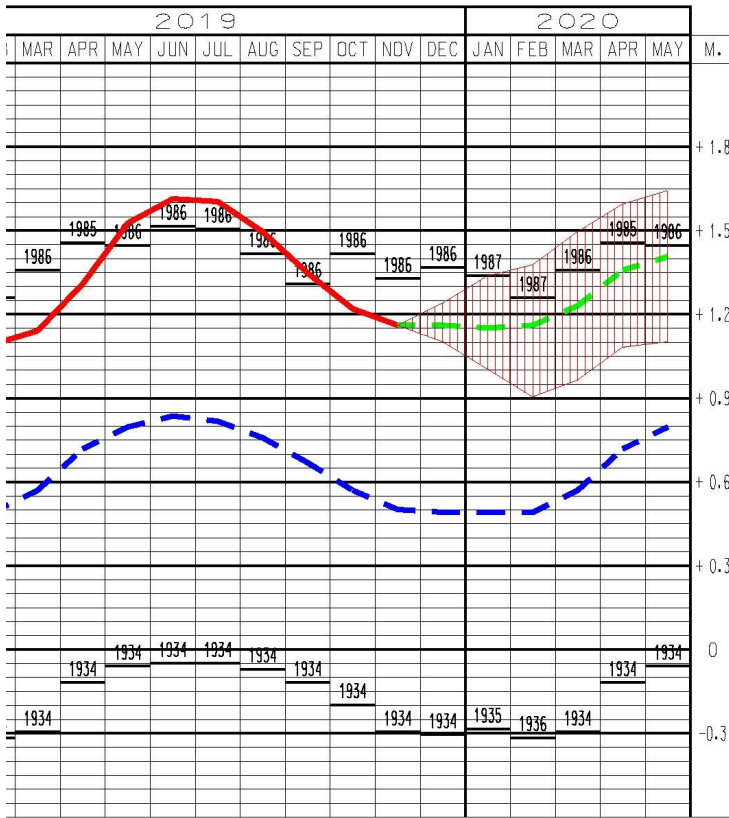
LAKE ERIE WATER LEVELS — DECEMBER 2019



Normally these projects would be funded out of FWS deferred maintenance dollars, but with a national FWS backlog of \$1.4 billion dollars and limited budget appropriations, Ottawa NWR Complex has not received any funding for deferred maintenance projects since 2011.

*This management status map depicts a ranking of wetland units from good to failed based upon water control structure condition and our capacity to achieve wildlife management objectives.*

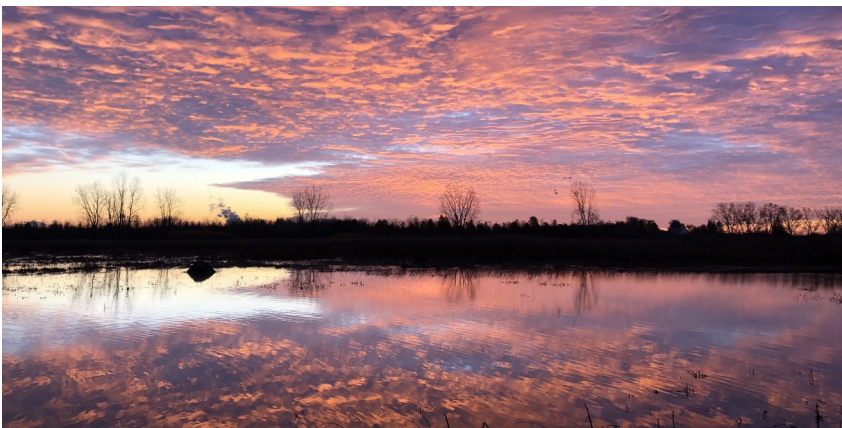
# & the Impacts of Rising Water



## Habitat Management and Restoration

The Ottawa Refuge Complex received special funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to connect wetland habitats to lake hydrology. The wet spring led to challenges, adjustments, and delays to GLRI restoration projects.

- ◆ Schiller property, Rocky Ridge Rd, Limestone, OH: the removal of the farm pond constructed in the Toussaint River floodplain was completed, along with planting of container trees in the floodplain zone. Ground cover and tree seedling planting was delayed.
- ◆ Weber property, Toussaint South Rd, Oak Harbor, OH: wetland restoration is in progress with installation of a water control structure and well this winter, along with ground cover planting.
- ◆ Ground cover and trees will be planted on the Genzman (SR 2 near Visitor Center), Buehler (near Middle Toussaint Unit on N. Toussaint South Rd), and Fox (SR 2 near Visitor Center) properties in 2020.



All five of these projects are restoring agricultural fields to native habitats. GLRI restoration projects in the planning and design phases for Navarre Marsh and Cedar Point Pool 2 will enhance wetland management, provide fish passage, and provide water quality benefits.

Special thanks to Ducks Unlimited for their continued support to implement these and many other projects.

| GLRI RESTORATION PROJECTS |             |             |              |              |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Acres Restored            |             |             |              |              |
| LOCATION                  | Wetland     | Prairie     | Forest       | TOTAL        |
| Weber                     | 32.4        | 8.1         | 5            | 45.5         |
| Schiller                  |             |             | 47.8         | 47.8         |
| Genzman                   | 8.5         | 24.6        |              | 33.1         |
| Buehler                   |             |             | 37.7         | 37.7         |
| Fox (FONWR)               |             | 18.7        | 10.8         | 29.5         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>40.9</b> | <b>51.4</b> | <b>101.3</b> | <b>193.6</b> |



Ron Huffman  
Refuge Biologist



# Maintenance Updates



Chuck Shier

Maintenance Mechanic

The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge maintenance team consists of two permanent staff, Ramsay Houze and Chuck Shier, but relies on the help of volunteers to complete the work. Two critical volunteers, Mike Bohling and Greg Sanderson assist the refuge maintenance program each week, volunteering a combined total of 539 hours in 2019!

Though 2019 started off with a month long shutdown, it's still been a great year. One would think it would be a huge thorn in the side of the maintenance operation but with the help of our volunteers and staff we got right back on track.

Some of the top priorities this year included:

- Prepare roads/trails for the crowds of the Biggest Week in American Birding
- Wrap up the HVAC renovation in the Visitor Center
- Repair and replace five water control structures and the pump structure at the Darby Unit
- Rebuild a rotted section of the Ottawa boardwalk
- Replace screw gates on our moist soil pump
- Aid other programs to complete our shared mission

The refuge maintenance staff would also like to thank everyone who helped the Friends secure over \$17,000 to purchase a new tractor for volunteers to help us maintain the trails! Volunteers are essential to this program, and the tractor will be a huge help.

**MAINTAINED**

**75** miles

OF ROADS, DIKES  
& HIKING TRAILS



**HAULED** **2,042**



tons of stone

The refuge ROCKS! Maintenance staff hauled **4,084,000 lbs** of stone to protect the refuge dikes from water erosion, and make sure the trails and Wildlife Drive were safe to use.

**DROVE**

**11,266** miles

IN EQUIPMENT THAT  
REQUIRES A CDL

**LOGGED** **1,040**  
equipment hours

**&** **2,344**   
volunteer hours



Maintenance Worker Ramsay Houze, Refuge Biologist Ron Huffman, and FWS volunteer Mike Bohling work together to replace water control structures at the Darby Unit near Port Clinton, Ohio.

# Invasive Species Management



Invasive Strike Team members Holly Walp and Morgan Donaldson showcase invasive Dames Rocket plants they removed from satellite properties.

## GLRI STRIKE TEAM Invasive Species Accomplishments

| Treatment          | 2018 acres   | 2019 acres    | Total acres |
|--------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| Aerial Herbicide   | 537.5        | 200           | 737.5       |
| Ground Herbicide   | 92           | 447.5         | 539.5       |
| Prescribed Fire    |              | 124           | 124         |
| Water Management   |              | 221           | 221         |
| Mechanical         |              | 43            | 43          |
| <b>Total Acres</b> | <b>629.5</b> | <b>1035.5</b> | <b>1665</b> |

In 2018, the refuge received a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant to treat invasive plant species on federal, state, and private lands and hire an invasive species position. In 2019, a three person invasive species strike team was hired consisting of Holly Walp, Owen Segard, and Morgan Donaldson. This incredible team far exceeded the grant target of 850 acres treated. They addressed a number of species and locations that the refuge normally does not have the capacity to treat. In addition, remaining grant money will fund a position for follow up treatments in 2020.

### SPECIES TREATED:

- Poison Hemlock
- Star of Bethlehem
- Autumn Olive
- Bush Honeysuckles
- Thistles
- Teasels
- Yellow Flag Iris
- European Frog Bit
- Flowering Rush
- Purple Loosestrife
- Tree-of-heaven
- Japanese Stiltgrass
- Spotted Knapweed
- Phragmites
- Common Buckthorn



#### Legend

- Strike team treatments



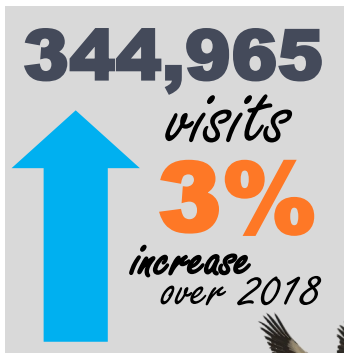
The Marsh Master is one of the many tools used to control invasive species at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

# Visitor Services



The Visitor Services program at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge strives to ensure visitors have a safe and enjoyable visit. They operate the Visitor Center, facilitate environmental education and interpretive programs, create kiosks and signs, manage the refuge website and Facebook page, oversee visitor access projects, and work with exceptional volunteers. The Visitor Services team consists of two employees, Rebecca Lewis (Visitor Services Specialist) and Justin Woldt (Visitor Services Manager), and a myriad of wonderful volunteers and interns. Their efforts lend visitors exceptional opportunities at the refuge.

Here are some of the highlights from an extraordinary 2019.



One of the most interesting wildlife reports of 2019 was of a limpkin near the Trail Head Parking Lot! Visitors flocked to the refuge to view the bird as it ate snails in the refuge wetlands for weeks.



My favorite part of 2019 was working with partners on the Portage River Water Trail committee. The water trail will extend from Pemberville to Lake Erie. Sections of the Ottawa Refuge Complex including satellite properties like the Marinewood Unit will be included in the water trail. We look forward to providing this additional opportunity for our visitors in the coming years.



**Justin Woldt**

Visitor Services Manager





# Increasing Public Access



In 2019, the Service acquired two new properties totaling 169.63-acres. These new properties, Dellinger (96.44-acres) and York (73.19 acres), are proposed to be opened for public use next year. Dellinger will become part of the Turkey Run Unit on W. Little Portage East Rd, south of Oak Harbor.

*Photo: Jali Wojdyla participates in the youth deer hunt (Jason Wojdyla)*

## Federal Acquisitions



The Wildlife Drive Improvement Fund was a great success. The Friends raised 25k in six weeks to create early exits and establish pull-offs along the route. These upgrades will result in better vantage points and improved access through the refuge's iconic drive.

*Photo: Wildlife Drive Kiosk shares information with visitors before they begin the route.*

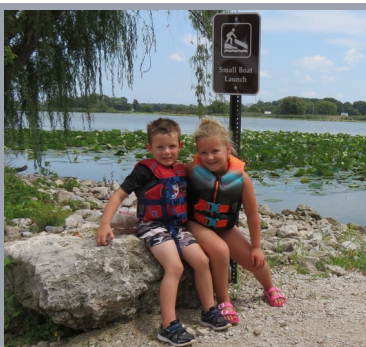
## Wildlife Drive



The Visitor Center Fishing Access project resulted in the development of three fishing decks to support family fishing. This project was made possible through grants from three local community foundations, individual donors, the Union Sportsmen's Alliance, and UAW Local 12 and USFWS volunteers.

*Photo: Luke Tolliver (Erie Concrete) and Eddy Pausch (Assistant Refuge Manager) discuss plans for the Visitor Center Fishing Access.*

## Visitor Center Fishing Access



The West Harbor Landing fishing/observation deck was completed on Catawba Island. The project included a parking area, two-panel kiosk, kayak launch, and bench seating with more public use amenities to come in 2020.

*Photo: Even the youngest visitors enjoy the kayak launch at West Harbor Landing!*

## West Harbor Landing



Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge planted 20-acres of trees on the Marinewood Unit, and the area was officially opened for public use in Fall 2019. This restored golf course will be one of the next big projects. We look forward to sharing more updates as plans finalize.

*Photo: Coneflowers make the retired golf course come alive at the Marinewood Unit.*

## Marinewood

# Research Projects



1. Implementing a Great Lakes Basin-Wide Coastal Wetland Monitoring Program. *University of Windsor*
2. Amphibian and Reptile Survey of Ottawa and Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuges. *Toledo Zoo*
3. Northern Pike Research in Western Lake Erie. *Bowling Green State University*
4. Responses of Colonial Wading Bird Populations (Black-crowned night-heron) to Management within the Lake Erie Marsh Focus Area. *Ohio State University*
5. Point count bird surveys of Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge. *Toledo Naturalist's Association*
6. Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Monitoring Program, breeding frog and bird surveys. *Central Michigan University*
7. Population Ecology and Habitat Relationships of Sora and Virginia Rails in Northwestern Ohio. *Ohio State University*
8. Common Tern nesting platform monitoring and banding. *Winous Point Marsh Conservancy*
9. Spring and fall songbird migration monitoring, Darby unit of Ottawa NWR.
10. Effects of harmful algal blooms on aquatic wildlife health (frogs and turtles). *University of Toledo*
11. King Rail Migration, Breeding Home Range, and Habitat Use in Lake Erie Coastal Wetlands. *Central Michigan University*
12. Migrational movements and habitat usage of migrant passerines in the Great Lakes Region: Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Ohio. *Black Swamp Bird Observatory*
13. Habitat usage of breeding passerines in the Great Lakes Region: Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Ohio. *Black Swamp Bird Observatory*
14. Monitoring of nutrient and turbidity during seiche events between Lake Erie and the Cedar Point wetland. *U.S. Geological Survey*
15. Monitoring stands of native and invasive *Phragmites australis*. *U.S. Geological Survey*
16. Impacts of Nutrient Loads on Invasion Potential of *Butomus umbellatus* (Flowering rush). *Bowling Green State University*.
17. Tracking down tempests: The detection and analysis of sediment deposits from storm-induced flooding along the Great Lakes' coasts. *University of Michigan-Dearborn*
18. Early Detection and Rapid Response to Aquatic Invasive Plants in Ohio's Lake Erie Basin. *Cleveland Metroparks*
19. King rail microhabitat use and call-response rate. *Winous Point Marsh Conservancy*
20. Evolution of jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) to control the invasive garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*). *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*



## **Blanding's Turtle Research at Ottawa Refuge**

In 2019, the Toledo Zoo and the Ohio Biodiversity Conservation Partnership put in a total of 10,097 trap nights at 37 sites across northern Ohio, surveying for Blanding's Turtles. These efforts resulted in the capture of 190 Blanding's Turtles as well as 634 Snapping Turtles and 2,000 Painted Turtles. To the best of our knowledge, this represents the largest turtle dataset in the state.

Blanding's Turtles were observed on all the USFWS properties we surveyed and we identified a local hotspot that will be targeted for a long-term assessment. We had a fantastic first year and look forward to expanding upon this in 2020. This project is funded by the USFWS Competitive State Wildlife Grants program and also includes partnerships with the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, Purdue University – Ft. Wayne, Michigan DNR, and Ohio DOW.

We are asking the public to help us identify potential survey sites and all Blanding's Turtle sightings can be reported to:

[turtles@toledo zoo.org](mailto:turtles@toledo zoo.org)

**Matt Cross, Ph.D.**

Conservation Biologist  
Toledo Zoo



# Partners for Fish and Wildlife



## Program Updates

As you may know, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Service Program is the USFWS program that assists private landowners with habitat restoration projects. With all of the flooding and rain, we were able to complete six different projects that restored 175 acres of wetland and 42 acres of grassland. Leveraging other funding to get projects done is becoming more and more important. In 2019, we were able to use the \$22,000 of funding we received to leverage \$285,500 in other state and federal funds to help complete our projects. We are currently working on several other wetland projects that are refuge neighbors. These projects should be completed in 2020. The program is proud to have had over 1000% matching funds and in kind contributions for Partners projects in 2019.

**Despite having another all-time low budget for restoration projects, we were able to partner with other agencies and organizations like Ohio Division of Wildlife, Ottawa County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Ducks Unlimited to make our funding go much further.**



This is a snapshot of our primitive camp along the mighty Yukon River. The Yukon makes the Mississippi River look dainty! You can see the fire in the background. By the end of our stay, the fire had reached our camping spot, so it was good timing to leave.

## Special Duties

As the Private Lands Biologist, I assist with a wide array of activities both on and off refuge. I was fortunate enough to take a crew of firefighters to Alaska early this summer as a Crew Boss for Ohio Interagency Wildfire team. We were right near the Arctic Circle helping local villages protect their outlying fishing camps and cabins from nearby wildfires. It was a very rewarding trip. I was also fortunate enough to assist Agassiz Refuge

complete prescribed burns on several thousand acres in Northern Minnesota. I did a number of public presentations, one of which included a wetland restoration workshop for newer natural resource professionals.



Jeff Finn climbs to place a fostered eaglet into a nest on Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

## Eagle Release

This summer I was also involved with an eagle release. On July 3, 2019, partners from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ohio Division of Wildlife, and Back to the Wild animal rehabilitation center worked together to save an eaglet.

The young eagle had been separated from its parents and due to flooding it was not possible to return the eaglet to its own nest. She was too young to be on her own so we worked together to find a solution. The eaglet was introduced to a foster nest on Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, and accepted into the family. It's amazing what can be accomplished when partners work together for conservation.



Jeff Finn (center) pictured with partners from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ohio Division of Wildlife, and Back to the Wild who worked together to release a rehabilitated bald eagle on Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.



**Jeff Finn**  
Private Lands Biologist

# Thank you for your support in 2019!



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*Together, anything is possible.*



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# Hope for the Next Generation



*A stunning sunrise over Crane Creek, taken from the Wildlife Drive by photographer Tony Everhardt.*

As you have read throughout this report, 2019 was quite a year for the Refuge and the Friends. For me, one of the most meaningful moments of the year occurred in early August.

I was in Oak Harbor with my father for a kayak excursion on the Portage River. Most of the town was just waking up when we arrived. It was not long after dawn when we started to unload gear, but there were already two boys there waiting by the water with their fishing poles. They were very polite and moved their bike and wagon aside as we launched our boats. They told us that they were waiting for some friends to come with bait and that they were excited to catch fish.

We paddled all morning taking in the tranquility of the river. Herons, eagles, and deer watched us as we explored. On our way back around lunchtime, we heard excited shouts come from the launch. I almost wondered if one of them had fallen in! But when we neared the launch, we found four young fellows fishing happily. The youngest boy noticed our arrival first and told the others to clear a path for us. They showed us their catch for the day - including a whopper of a catfish which I'm sure was the cause for commotion that we heard earlier in the day.

I was awestruck by this group of youngsters. In a world of technology and endless distractions these fellows were up at first light to fish. They were polite and courteous. They were poking sticks in the rocks and getting their feet wet. They were enjoying everything August is supposed to represent to a kid enjoying their last taste of summer freedom.

**And then I realized that this is what our nonprofit represents to me: hope for the future of wildlife and habitat conservation.**

Friends, thank you all for your support of everything that we do to protect Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Without your help we wouldn't be able to bring bus loads of kids on field trips to the refuge or provide intern stipends to support staff and refuge projects. We wouldn't be able to build access points or provide free bait and poles for kids to learn to fish. Without you we wouldn't be able to support habitat restoration projects and enhance the wetlands to support water quality in Lake Erie. You are helping to make the world a better place every time you support your refuge.

To all of you who have raised your children in nature - thank you for creating outdoor enthusiasts for life. After all, kids don't remember their best day of television, but the fight that catfish must have put up will stay fresh in their minds for years to come.



**Aimee Arent**

Friends Executive Director

# Pelicans in Ohio?

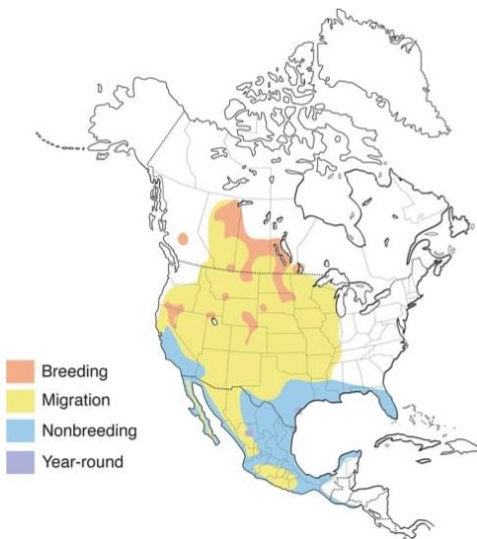


Over the past five years, American white pelicans have become a frequent sight in the Ottawa NWR marshes. In 2019, pelicans were spotted on the refuge well into the fall. **And what's more interesting - they are breeding in Lake Erie!**

Historically, white pelicans nest in North and South Dakota, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, but new research has shown that they are spreading eastward.



*Pelicans with chicks hatched on Big Chicken Island on the Ontario, Canada side of Lake Erie. Photo by ONWR volunteer, Dorothy Baker.*



Range map provided by [Birds of North America](#)

The first documented nest in Lake Erie was in 2016 on Big Chicken Island and Middle Sister Island in Canadian waters. It is the first known nesting for the species in the lower Great Lakes. We invite you to keep an eye to the sky when visiting Ottawa NWR. Look for the tell-tale black wing-tips on large white birds as they fly.



## COVER PHOTO

*Special thanks to wildlife photographer, Timothy Chio for providing the cover photo for this report showcasing white pelicans at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.*

# Annual Report Sponsors



The 2019 Annual Report was funded by like-minded people passionate about nature and wildlife. These conservationists from near and far are working to spread awareness of the refuge.

**Aimee & Greg Arent**  
Graytown, Ohio

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Rhineland, Wisconsin

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**Judy & Tim McKenna**  
Port Clinton, Ohio



*"Breakfast" by Kenneth McFarlan  
Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Photography Contest: 2019 Best of Show*



# NATIONAL Wildlife Refuge ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1975, the Refuge Association's mission is to conserve America's wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect and enhance the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries.

The Refuge Association works to build a strong constituency for wildlife, gives wildlife a voice on Capitol Hill, and protects the integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

NWRA's leadership has resulted in an incredible impact on the Refuge System, including a \$26 million increase for Refuge System funding for FY2020.

[www.refugeassociation.org](http://www.refugeassociation.org)

**Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

- Refuge Land
- Non-Refuge Land
- State Land
- Water
- Road

Boundaries posted on the field supersede all boundaries shown on this map. 10-14-19

# Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex



**TOLEDO ZOO & AQUARIUM CONSERVATION**

## IF YOU SEE THIS TURTLE...

**PLEASE, LET US KNOW**

**Biological Research**  
HAVE YOU SEEN A BLANDING'S TURTLE?

Help a researcher...  
**Report a Turtle!**

Website: [www.toledozoo.org/conservation](http://www.toledozoo.org/conservation)  
Email: [turtles@toledozoo.org](mailto:turtles@toledozoo.org)  
Phone: 419-385-5721 x2156

This is a Blanding's Turtle, a rare species of turtle found throughout Michigan and northern Ohio. Researchers at the Toledo Zoo, The Ohio State University, Michigan Natural Features Inventory and Purdue University Fort Wayne, are studying the distribution, habitat and genetics of Blanding's Turtles. **We need your help!** If you see a Blanding's Turtle, email us (with photos if possible) at [turtles@toledozoo.org](mailto:turtles@toledozoo.org) or call 419-385-5721 x2156. Thank you!



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