



WETLAND'S GAZETTE

Volume 1, Issue 1

June 2004

New Mead/McMillan Facility to Start Soon

Construction of the new "Mead Wildlife Area Education and Visitor Center" is planned to begin in late May. The project will provide a new administrative and educational facility for the wildlife area through which traditional wildlife management activities and expanding wildlife education programming will take place. The 7000 sq. ft. facility has been in the works for several years and will be a great tribute to the tremendous involvement that we have received from local as well as regional individuals, businesses, corporations, and organizations.

The project will cost approximately \$1.7 million, of which over \$1.3 million has been donated in cash and in-kind donations. The Friends of Mead McMillan has been the principal fundraiser for the project with Dr. Kent Hall leading the charge. The project is scheduled for completion in early 2005.

The building will have a 100-person classroom in the east wing, with an adjacent kitchen and wet-lab. A large visitor lobby will be located in the center of the facility where visitors can obtain information or learn about the wildlife area through numerous interpretive displays. The west wing will provide new offices and a meeting room for wildlife area staff. Students from local school districts will participate in activity-based wildlife and environmental education programs while visitors from throughout the state will have the opportunity to learn more about the wildlife area and its unique history.

Wind and photovoltaic electric generation will be part of an effort to make the facility more environmentally friendly. In addition, geo-thermal heating and cooling, solar hot water, a high energy structural envelope, and other aspects planned into the design by architect, Thomas Brown of Stevens Point will allow the building to become LEED certified.

This is certainly an exciting time for the wildlife area and the Friends that support it. Be sure to swing by and watch the progress throughout the summer and fall. The location of the new facility is just to the east of the present Mead Wildlife Area Headquarters which is located on Hwy S approximately 7.5 miles north of Milladore. We hope to see you!

Tomas I. Meier—Mead/McMillan Project Supervisor.

Groundbreaking



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Mead SWA Is for the Birds: Bluebirds, That Is
By
Dent D. Hall, Ph.D., Friends Board

For the past two years I have directed a research project on Eastern Bluebirds (EABL) for the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society (ALAS) in central WI. One of the best routes for our EABL trail has been that of the Mead SWA. Last year, the Mead area had one of the highest EABL occupancy rates for any route on our trail. For example, a total of 15 boxes out of 27 were occupied (55.6% vs. 45.1% for the entire study of 164 boxes), 3 boxes produced double broods (14.3% vs. 13.1% for the entire study), and the 12 boxes that fledged young produced an average of 5/17 fledglings. This figure is lower than the average for the entire trail (5.95) because predation is worse in the Mead area than on our other routes.

This year we are already off to a great start. On 26 May, 15 Of 27 boxes were already occupied, 13 of them to with a total of 52 eggs (this occupancy rate already matches the 55.6% rate of all last season!). And these observations were taken one week prior to the start of observations last year! Nesting and egg laying are easily two weeks ahead of last year's pace.

How does this route compare so far to the other routes on the trail? So far, 94/174 boxes are occupied (54%), so the Mead route is slightly ahead of the entire trail. But, wait, there is more. The 94 boxes only have 158 eggs in them and Mead has 52 of them. The Mead route has 27/174 boxes = 15.5% but 52 of 158 eggs = 33%, so the Mead Route has double the number of eggs expected for the number of boxes it contains.

This "early nesting" trend was also noticed last year, but this year it is quite pronounced. It does not seem to be weather dependent because the Mead trail is further north than any of the other trails and the Mead area is actually quite cold on a relative basis. One hypothesis is that many birds show up in the area because of the long-term dedication of WDNR employee, Beth Arthur Lane. She maintained a bluebird trail for many years and the ALAS study owes her a debt of gratitude.

Finally, why the earlier nesting? It does not seem to be weather dependent and bluebirds appear to be returning to central Wisconsin at about the same time each year (March 18 for the past two years in Portage Co.).

There are factors that seem important, however. They include these major ones:

- 1) Nest site fidelity: Our boxes were left up over winter. Not only could the nesters from last season return to their nest sites, migrating EABL's could find the boxes on their way south and remember them for an early return to their breeding grounds.
- 2) Retrofitting boxes to make them more appealing to EABL's
 - a) A small board was tacked over the original hole to exclude starlings and so far it has worked.
 - b) A new nest platform was placed in the boxes, elevating the platform from 8" to 5". This means the EABL has to build a nest of only 1/2 to 1/3 the volume of last year. Birds are more likely to adopt the box for nesting if a smaller nest is required. This is probably the most important difference in the appeal of our boxes this year compared to last year.

In summary, it can be said that the Mead SWA EABL trail route has picked up where it left off last year by having as many occupied boxes at the start of the season as it had at the end of last season. Experience tells us that another 5 boxes could be occupied before the end of the season. If so, that would yield a remarkable 81.5% occupancy, among the highest occupancies of any trail or trail route in WI.

The last part of the puzzle is to eliminate predation by raccoons, wrens and snakes. By placing predator guards on each of our boxes and moving them away from ideal wren habitat, we hope to solve this problem.



Mead Breaks Ground on New Education & Visitor Center

The Friends of Mead McMillan sponsored the groundbreaking ceremony of the Mead State Wildlife Area's Wildlife and Education & Visitor Center on October 7, 2003. The ceremony included welcoming remarks by president, Bart Hobson and introductions of several key people who were instrumental in making the project a reality. All of the Mead staff, members of the Friends' Board of Directors, several members of the WI dept. of Natural Resources, and area assembly and senator representatives, made remarks about the significance of having a facility of this nature for the state of WI.

Several other distinguished guests who have played a major role in making the center a reality were introduced by fundraising chairman, Kent Hall. Leading these were Marv and Ruth Schuette who said he wanted to contribute to the new center for his wife, "a real outdoor person" and for his employees at Wausau Homes. Ruth Schuette said she grew up on the Peshtigo River and "they never get the woods out of the girl." George Mead and wife Suzanne Feith, also major contributors, are continuing the family support for the wildlife area through the Mead-Witter foundation. Former WI Senator, Kevin Shibilski, who also was in attendance, was instrumental in guiding state appropriations of \$611,000 for the building.

Also key to the success of the project were additional "in-kind donations." Several were present at the groundbreaking ceremony including Bill Kreske, owner of Wausau Tile where the names of donors will be placed throughout the building, and numerous clubs, organizations and schools who have contributed to "Project Mead."

Tom Meir, who manages the 30,000 acre wildlife area for the Dept. of Natural Resources, said that three years ago about 250 children were getting exposed to outdoor education at the Mead. He says this has now increased to almost 4,000 and continues to grow.

When the new building is complete, it will cover some 6,200 sq. ft. including a 2,300 sq. ft education wing, said architect, Tom Brown. There will be a lot of room for teaching outside the building, too. The area is a mecca for waterfowl and overlooks the Little Eau Pleine valley. It's a mixture of high ground and wetland and is a meeting ground for species from both northern and southern Wisconsin. It is the state's third largest wildlife area and the most diverse.

Environmental awareness is the goal and this building has the message said architect, Brown, as a variety of energy-saving technologies have been included with the building.

The groundwork has now been laid, and the building is beginning to take shape. We hope the youth of today will be able to become more environmentally aware due to the efforts of the education they will receive at this facility.

McMillan Marsh Bike Trail

We are now into the third year of completion of the MM bike trail. Without the cooperation of the Mead/McMillan Wildlife Area, the Marathon County Park Dept., the Marshfield Electric and Water Dept., Town of McMillan the The Friends of Mead/McMillan, Inc., this dream would not have been realized. The trailhead is located just north of Marshfield by the intersection of Meadow Ave. and Mann Rd.

The 6-mile trail takes you on a path not traveled previously by many. Wildlife is abundant for the observer who takes his time to watch and listen. The trail also gives tranquility to those who like to use the trail as an excursive venue. With several benches along the path for taking a break, one can see the true value of this precious resource.

With a trail this close to our area, take time from your busy schedule and bike, jog or walk into an area off the beaten path of blacktop and noise. Visit and enjoy!

Dennis Dieringer—Friends Member

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