Highways and Wetlands

By Dennis Hogan

Editors Note: This is the first of two articles on the history of and current wetland restoration activities at Creve Coeur Lake Memorial Park.

Highway construction and the threat of development is nothing new to the Missouri River floodplain in Maryland Heights. Page Avenue, the rerouting of River Valley Drive and the expansion of the Maryland Heights Expressway have all sliced and diced Creve Coeur Lake Memorial Park. St. Louis County’s latest project, the Page–Olive Connector, connects Hwy 141 to the Maryland Heights Expressway. Yet, all of these projects have actually provided some benefit to the Park.

Federal Highway Administration requirements for the Page/364 extension resulted in 1,200 acres being added to the park. A large portion of that included Little Creve Coeur Lake located just south of Page and west of the Maryland Heights Expressway. Both Creve Coeur and Little Creve Coeur Lakes are remnants of an ox-bow lake left by a shift in the Missouri River hundreds of years ago; Little Creve Coeur and the main lake were once connected as one large body of water. Creve Coeur Creek originally flowed into Little Creve Coeur but in the early 1900’s it was re-routed and channelized to flow into the main lake. Over time, upland development deposited enough sediment to separate the lakes.

See Wetlands on Page 4
Board Meetings
Open to All. 2nd Tuesday of Every Month at 7 pm. Powder Valley Nature Center at 11715 Cragwold.

Board recruitment is an ongoing process and requires your interest and our need. If you have thought of serving in such a way, stop by or call one of us.

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Newsletter
Tale Feathers is published monthly. For submissions, comments or corrections, contact Mitch Leachman as noted above.

Trash Bash Recognized by Missouri AG

The Confluence Partnership was selected to receive the 2011 Attorney General's Justice Award for dedication and commitment to environmental protection for its work in organizing the Confluence Trash Bash. Receiving the award on November 21 in Jefferson City were representatives of several lead organizations, including the Confluence, Metropolitan Sewer District, St. Louis Audubon Society and St. Louis County. A Celebration of Justice Reception followed in the Attorney General's office.

Since the first Confluence Trash Bash was held in 2009, over 1,600 community volunteers have collected and disposed of over 61 tons of scrap and trash. The Trash Bash engages community volunteers to improve water quality, provide environmental beautification, and clean and restore native habitat for a variety of migratory birds and other wildlife.

The success of the Confluence Trash Bash would not be possible without the technical and financial support of corporations, government agencies, foundations, civic groups and committed citizens working together. Project partners include: Metropolitan Sewer District, St. Louis Audubon, Great Rivers Greenway District, Missouri American Water, St. Louis–Jefferson Solid Waste, Grace Hill Settlement House, St. Louis County Parks, Missouri River Relief, AmeriCorps, Missouri Stream Team, Eastern Missouri and Piasa Palisades Sierra Club, St. Louis County Clean, Green and Beautiful, Operation Brightside, US Army Corps of Engineers, Municipalities of Berkley, Black Jack, Marylnd Heights, Normandy, St. Louis County, City of St. Louis, Wildwood and Woodson Terrace.

Mark your calendars now for the 2012 Confluence Trash Bash on March 24th. For details about the award and the official press release, visit http://ago.mo.gov/newsreleases/2011/AG_Koster_honors_Justice_Award_winners/.

From left:
Ray Gawlik, St. Louis County;
Dona Anderson, MSD;
Natalie Johnson, Confluence;
Mitch Leachman, St. Louis Audubon; and
Laura Cohen, Confluence.
President’s Message

By Dave Rogles

Regular readers of our newsletter have surely noticed the increased activity by the St. Louis Audubon volunteers, often in cooperation with other organizations, in local projects. These projects focus on Important Bird Areas in the region, such as Creve Coeur Park, and have included surveys, trash cleanup, and tree planting.

We have secured funding for these projects through grants and corporate giving. National Audubon’s TogetherGreen program (funded by Toyota) and Fred Weber Construction have been very generous with their support, and we are in the first stages of expanding our circle of donors. It is exciting to see the increased volunteer participation track the increase in local funding! Our last tree planting at Creve Coeur Park put 200 trees in the ground in a couple of hours.

Conservation minded people know the battle is never over. Locally, we are being held hostage in a budget battle by St. Louis County, threatened by more development in the floodplain, and pilloried by every person seeking to explain their policy failures.

Twenty five years ago the battle was to prevent the Page/364 corridor from crossing Creve Coeur Park. We lost that battle. The battle continues, in the same location. The predicted long term effects – more infrastructure cost, urban sprawl, loss of habitat (both animal and human– think peace and quiet)– have come to pass.

It is usual, at this time of year, to draw attention to our annual appeal, to list our accomplishments, to ask for help. It is even necessary to do those things (see Page 8 for details about our Year-end Appeal). But, more importantly, we need to draw attention to the ongoing nature of the battle. We cannot let the political whims of the moment override our concerns for the future. Please make note of the actions of the St. Louis County Council, of the Maryland Heights city zoning debacle, and make your voice heard.

Lastly, a big shout out to the volunteers and organizations who refuse to be silenced, including the Maryland Heights Residents for Responsible Growth, Missouri Coalition for the Environment, the Open Space Council and many more. Without these groups the battle is long over.

Thanks for all you do!

Field Trips, Etc.

Jan 14th to Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary:
Dave Rogles will lead this half day trip that starts at 9:00 am. Take Hwy 367 north from I-270. Turn right on the last road before the Alton Bridge (at the gas station). Turn right on the next road to the Teal Pond lot.

All field trips are FREE. Reservations not required, unless noted—consult our website for details. For questions, contact Mike Grant at mikecurlew@att.net.
Highways and Wetlands

Though the lakes have provided recreational opportunities since the 1860’s, agricultural has been the mainstay. Every spring farmers would pump the 550 acre Little Creve Coeur area dry to plant crops. Once crops were harvested in the fall, water was allowed to recharge the wetland, providing excellent waterfowl hunting. The following spring, the wetland was again pumped dry, continuing the cycle.

When St. Louis County Parks took ownership, it faced an insurmountable task of managing Little Creve Coeur. Still, the wetland basin recovered quickly once farming ceased; the soil still held many native seeds. Sedges, forbs and trees sprung up, but negative impacts from Page Avenue forced more wetland mitigation. The U. S. Army Corps required MODOT to re-vegetate 50 acres of Little Creve Coeur and create another 25 acres of emergent wetland.

In 2003, the Howard Bend Levee District, seeking material to complete its levee expansion, negotiated to construct a 120 acre emergent wetland and wet prairie just northwest of Little Creve Coeur. The District invested over $500,000 worth of earth-moving, final grading and seeding, at no cost to St. Louis County, in exchange for the fill dirt they removed. Slowly, pieces of a wetland complex were coming together.

Three grants administered by St. Louis Audubon provided over 1,500 native trees planted along the western boundary. An additional Audubon grant provided 20 acres of prairie plantings. Volunteers and Park personnel further enhanced areas by removing unwanted species.

A failed attempt in 2008 to enroll 150 acres into the Federal Wetland Reserve Program left re-vegetation in the hands of Mother Nature. Some species of wetland seed can remain dormant for over 30 years, but, the additional water required to spur their growth was not readily available. The search continued to find the necessary hydrology to re-vegetate and recharge Little Creve Coeur.

The planned Page–Olive Connector offered potential for these improvements. Negative impacts to Creve Coeur Creek and existing wetlands along the proposed route required additional mitigation. The Army Corps desired a mitigation plan that would involve both MODOT and St. Louis County; once again an opportunity to enhance Little Creve Coeur. Cooperative efforts yielded a comprehensive plan approved by the Corps and now nearly complete.

See the January TaleFeathers for details of this latest mitigation project. See the Feb 2009 TaleFeathers for more Park history.


Virginia Rail. One of many at-risk species expected to benefit from a functioning wetland complex.

Al Smith Photo
November Birding

By Josh Uffman

21 people attended the St. Louis Audubon field trip to Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary (RMBS, St. Charles County) on November 26th. Overall, the number of waterfowl seemed down from when I was there earlier in the week. However, there were still at least 4,000 gulls roosting in Ellis Bay, but they all dispersed as soon as daylight broke (prior the start of the fieldtrip).

As a group, we managed 38 species birding from 8 to 11:30. All of the highlight birds continued at their previously reported locations:

- The female Long-tailed Duck was hanging out with the 4 immature/female Surf Scoters in Ellis Bay.
- 4 immature/female Black Scoters were at Lincoln Shields.
- At least 5 Ross’s Geese continued with about 200 Snow Geese in Heron Pond.
- Think we had at least 2 Common Loons, 1 in Ellis Bay and 1 in Teal Pond.
- At least 1 Cackling Goose was amongst the Canadas at Teal Pond.
- At least 1 Cattle Egret continued at the south end of Tricolored Heron Pond.

On my way home, I was happy to get a phone call that the Common Ground-Dove had been re-found on the Blue Grosbeak Trail at Weldon Spring. So, I had to take a slightly different route home after getting permission from my wife. This was a pretty easy bird to find, it was just walking in the middle of the trail, right where the trail splits. It was quite cooperative and allowed for easy viewing.

Thanks to all who came on the trip – I had a great time!
Citizen Science in Action: The 112th Christmas Bird Count

From December 14, 2011 through January 5, 2012 tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists go out on an annual mission – often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season.

Each of the citizen scientists who annually braves snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations – and to help guide conservation action. This year’s count will help scientists understand the impact of the Gulf oil spill on vulnerable species.

From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition -- and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

You need not be an expert or even have experience to participate. However, there are guidelines to follow, so please contact a compiler for the area of your interest, as noted below.

The Clarence Cannon CBC will be Friday, December 30th. It covers a number of interesting areas along Highway 79, centered near Elsberry, Missouri. If you’re interested in learning more, contact Bruce Schuette (basch@centurytel.net), Scott Schuette (sschuette01@hotmail.com) or Eric Schuette (ericschuette@hotmail.com).

The Confluence CBC will be Sunday, January 1st. It covers major parts of St. Charles and north St. Louis Counties. If interested in more, contact Randy Korotev at rlkorotev@GMAIL.COM

For a listing of CBC counts across the State, visit the ASM website at http://mobirds.org/ASM/Calendar.aspx

For general CBC info http://birds.audubon.org/cbc. ◆
Trivia Night a Success

On November 4th, we held our second successful Trivia Night fundraiser at the Kirkwood Community Center! 80 people participated and helped us raise over $1,700 for the education and conservation programs of the Chapter and the community awareness efforts of the Maryland Heights Residents for Responsible Growth.

The raffle and silent auction was generously supported by an array of businesses. They are shown below. Please help us thank them by patronizing their establishments. Also, many thanks to Paul Bauer, Mary Dueren, Paula MacMann, Lisa Nansteel and Bill & Dayna Salsgiver for their donations of prizes.

Also, special thanks to all those that helped make the evening a success—from soliciting donations to helping setup to staffing the event—including Kim Cuddeback, Charlie Deutsch, Polly Freshwater, Karen Meyer, Melissa Moulton, Anne Rankin-Horton, Dave Rogles, Mike Thelen and Mervis William.

Of course, THANKS to those that participated! We greatly appreciate your support. Watch our website and future issues of TaleFeathers for future events. We hope you can join us in the future. ♦

Mid-Winter Open House
Come One, Come All!
St. Louis Audubon Society
Webster Groves Nature Study Society
Sunday, January 22nd
3:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Bring a dish. Beverages will be provided.
Door prizes will be given.

Audubon Center at Riverlands
301 Riverlands Way
West Alton, MO 63386

Come early and check out the Eagles and Trumpeter Swans. The Center and its exhibits will be open during the social.
For Center info, including volunteer needs http://riverlands.audubon.org/.

Take Hwy 367 north from I-270. Turn right on the last road before the Alton Bridge (at the gas station). Continue ¾ mile to Center on your left.
St. Louis Audubon Society

Year-end Fundraising Appeal

We believe the Audubon approach to education and conservation is essential to our community and needed now more than ever. We have expanded our efforts, but maintain a “no charge policy for our services. Nearly all programs are staffed by volunteers, and we constantly review them to reduce expenses and maximize efficiency.

Your past support has made much of our success possible. Help us continue to connect our kids and our communities to nature. If you share our passion, please send your gift today.

Make checks payable to:
St. Louis Audubon Society
Mail Checks to:
St. Louis Audubon Society
P.O. Box 220227
St. Louis, MO 63122-0227

Mission: to create a community connection to nature through education and conservation.

Donations at the $60 level or higher will receive a Birds of Forest Park note card set as our gift, with images from Edward Crim’s Forest Park 365 project.

Thank you so much for your interest and support!

Donations are fully tax-deductible
St. Louis Audubon is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charity

☑ $250 ☐ $100 ☐ $60** ☐ $30 ☐ Other_______

** Donations at the $60 level or higher will receive a Birds of Forest Park note card set as our gift, with images from Edward Crim’s Forest Park 365 project.

St. Louis Audubon Society
P.O. Box 220227
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