



Effects of Flooding at Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge

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In 2012 the region experienced a drastic drought, which despite intuition helped wildlife conservation organizations like Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) that provide habitat for resident animals and migratory birds. The flooding of 2013 has been quite a different scenario.

This time last year Swan Lake, a backwater area of the Illinois River managed by Two Rivers NWR, was lush green with an abundance of food for the expected fall migration

of birds. This year however, because river water levels were so high refuge staff was unable to draw down water in Swan Lake until late July.

A draw down mimics natural water fluctuations and produces quality habitat and food for waterfowl and other wildlife. Without the draw down native plants will have a shorter growing season and a harder time making seed before frost comes.

“Despite the unfortunate effects floods have on human lives, they are a naturally occurring state of rivers and wetlands,” said Biologist Ken Dalrymple. “At the refuge we hope for conditions that provide the best habitat for wildlife but also try to remember that floods are important to the ecosystem of a wetland. Floods are a necessary element in the natural cycle. Periodic flooding stimulates increased aquatic production of macro invertebrates and in a large reproductive year a class of fish species that use floodplain habitat for foraging or spawning.”



This year the refuge was unable to perform many of the standard wetland habitat management practices due to summer flooding. Instead the focus was upland. In prairies the refuge Youth Conservation Corps removed invasive species such as Musk thistle and

Autumn olive and conducted pollinator bee monitoring and small mammal surveys. They also assisted in monitoring water quality in Swan Lake, construction of a concrete fuel containment pad and washed and maintained equipment.

And now, when waters recede the focus turns to repairing roads and other structures and removing flood debris. Signs need to be inventoried and cleaned, boat docks repaired, down trees removed from roads and gravel replaced where it has washed away.

The refuge is open to public use except the Gilead boat landing north of Batchtown, Ill. is closed due to damage to the road and limited resources to fix it at this time. Also, the Gilbert Lake levee is open to walking but has not yet been cleared of flood debris.

The fall migration is a big question of local waterfowl enthusiasts. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists expect waterfowl numbers to remain strong along the Mississippi Flyway this fall. Waterfowl at Two Rivers NWR might not be as abundant as last year. However, the large amount of vegetative production on the refuge in 2012 will still provide seeds and invertebrates for water birds using the refuge as a stopover on their migration south.