



Hoosier National Forest Highlights



Contact: Teena Ligman
812-275-5987

Issue 69

March 6, 2013

Wetland Protection and Restoration on the Hoosier National Forest



By: Chuck Boswell, Wildlife Technician

The Hoosier National Forest plays a small but important part in protecting and restoring wetland environments. Wetlands are one of the most endangered ecosystems in the country. Acres have declined drastically since European settlement from land conversion and development. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Midwestern farm belt States of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin account for more than 36 million acres of wetlands lost since the country was first colonized.

What is a wetland?

Wetlands are dominated by hydrophytic, or water-loving, plants which can live in water or hydric (wet) soils. These soils are wet, flooded, or saturated for at least part of the year. Surface water and saturated soils have to exist for a sufficient period of time in most years to influence the plants and soils that occur there.

In Crisis

Indiana Department of Natural Resources conducted a landscape analysis and determined that in the 1780's; 5.6 million acres of Indiana (24 percent of the state's surface area) were wetlands. Surveys completed a century later, in the 1980's concluded that there are now 813,000 wetland acres. Wetlands represent only 3.5% of the surface area of the state. In the last century Indiana has lost 85% of its wetlands and ranks 4th (tied with Missouri) among the 50 states in proportion of wetland acreage lost.

Habitat

Statewide over 7,000 plant species and 900 vertebrate animal species require wetlands at some time in their lives. Nationwide, nearly 35 percent of all rare and endangered animal species depend on wetlands for survival, although wetlands constitute only 5 percent of the nation's land. Indiana has more than 60 wetland-dependent animal species listed as state endangered, threatened, or of special concern. There are also 120 species of wetland plants which are endangered, threatened or rare.

Other Benefits

Wetlands help clean drinking water by removing impurities that would otherwise have to be removed at a water treatment plant. Wetlands assist with flood control by slowing down water that if left unchecked may cause flooding. Best of all they provide a place to view wildlife and plants you will not see anywhere else. A 1996 survey by the USFWS suggests that Indiana wetland habitats generate more than a million days of non-consumptive recreation use each year. Additionally, Indiana duck and goose hunters alone enjoy about 75,000 user days of recreation annually.

Wetlands areas on the Hoosier National Forest

Currently the Hoosier National Forest manages approximately 344 acres of wetlands in 12 wetland complexes. The Patoka wetland is our most recent wetland restoration effort. When complete, this particular wetland will feature a parking area for the public and a short trail to walk to the wetland restoration area which has two vernal ponds. Plans are underway for interpretive signs near the wetland area to provide information on wetlands and the plants and animals that inhabit them. This will be an excellent area to visit in the near future.

Partnerships

The Hoosier partners with Indiana Department of Natural Resources, National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Quail Unlimited to develop and maintain wildlife habitats and wetlands on the Forest.

For more information on wetlands contact Chuck Boswell at cboswell@fs.fed.us or call 812-547-9229.



Northern Cricket frogs at a wetland on the Hoosier National Forest.



Mifflin Wetland north of Hemlock Cliffs.