Upper Mississippi River Forestry Partnership

The Challenge

In 1986, the United States Congress declared the Upper Mississippi River both a nationally significant ecosystem and a nationally significant commercial navigation system. However, this significant ecosystem is in decline. Each year sediment and nutrients wash off the landscape into tributaries and ultimately into the Mississippi, diminishing the vitality of the natural ecosystem as well as reducing farm income, increasing channel maintenance costs, threatening drinking water supplies, and damaging ecosystems in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Solution

The six Midwest State Foresters expressed interest in working together to improve the Upper Mississippi River watershed, and requested the assistance of the USDA Forest Service Northeastern Area. Consequently, the Upper Mississippi River Forestry Partnership was developed. The goal of the partnership is to improve water quality in the Mississippi River by restoring riparian forests and improving the condition of existing forests throughout the watershed. In addition, the Partnership hopes to help focus and coordinate the numerous efforts underway in the watershed.

Resulting Benefits

As a result of the Upper Mississippi River Partnership, a cooperative, inter-state, multi-agency partnership is targeting expertise on a significant forestry issue that will benefit the health and welfare of millions of Americans. The partnership is already attracting additional resources and assistance. The USDA Forest Service Washington Office has allocated $300,000 to improve threatened neotropical migratory songbird habitat within the watershed. This funding will be made available to communities and organizations within the watershed interested in improving forest habitat, see backside for list of projects funded. In addition, the Northeastern Area and the Midwest state forestry agencies are bringing forestry expertise to the numerous agriculture and conservation groups already working within the watershed.

About half of the 30 million residents of the Basin rely on the Upper Mississippi River and its tributaries for municipal and industrial water supplies. This same region is the source for over 30% of the nitrogen that causes the Hypoxia Zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Upper Mississippi River watershed is an important ecosystem that could be greatly enhanced through improved forestry practices.

Sharing Success

The Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry sponsored "Regional Sustainability Roundtable Workshop" where it highlighted the Upper Mississippi River Forestry Partnership. The findings of the workshop have been published in the report, "Healthy Forests for Healthy Water." In addition, the Upper Mississippi River Forestry Partnership Coordinator and Northeastern Area staff have given numerous presentations regarding the partnership and the importance of forestry in the Upper Mississippi River basin at various venues across the Midwest. Next steps in the Partnership's action plan include developing a resource GIS database, a web site, and a portfolio of partners and activities in the watershed.

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IL—Hanover Bluff Forest and Savanna Restoration Project **Natural Land Institute—$10,375**

The Natural Land Institute will restore 10 acres of upland hardwood forest and 36 acres of savanna on land in the 1,066 acre Hanover Bluff complex1 reducing forest fragmentation and increasing habitat for neotropical migrants and priority forest bird species in the Upper Mississippi River blufflands of northwestern Illinois.

IL—Oak Bluff Savanna Bird Habitat Improvement Project **Peoria Audubon Society—$5,500**

Oak savanna bird habitat will be improved on private land located in the migratory corridor of woodland bluffs of the Illinois River. Overstocked oak-hickory woodland will be thinned and exotics removed.

IL—Wightman Lake Bottomland Forest Improvement Project **Ducks Unlimited—$21,250**

Wightman Lake is 370 acre complex of backwater lake, forested wetland, and flooded cropland along the Illinois River. Ducks Unlimited will restore 20 acres of bottomland hardwood forest and enhance 30 acres of existing forested wetlands. Upon project completion, the land will be transferred to the IL DNR for long-term management and serve as a demonstration site for bottomland forest restoration and wildlife habitat management.

IN—Yellow River Initiative **Arrow Head Country RC&D Council—$5,000**

Information will be provided to Yellow River watershed landowners illustrating the benefits of riparian woodlands and their importance for neotropical migratory birds. These educational programs will lead to an increase in the size and continuity of the riparian forests in the Yellow River watershed.

IA—Expand and Strengthen Iowa's New Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program **Iowa IBA Program—$50,000**

Volunteer bird watchers will implement monitoring protocols for neotropical bird populations and forest habitat condition surveys at 80 potential new Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Iowa. This standardized protocol and baseline data collection is critical to expanding the IBA program in Iowa.

IA—Restoring Upper Mississippi Bird Habitat **IA Nat'l Heritage Foundation & Blufflands Alliance—$38,240**

A four-state collaboration among six non-profit land trusts will deliver a major education initiative about the importance of forest habitat to neotropical bird survival. Concurrently a complimentary forest stewardship component will work with private forest landowners to remove invasives, improving the health of native trees and shrubs.

IA—Driftless Area Initiative to Increase Habitat for Neotropical Migratory Birds **NE IA RC&D—$44,710**

This project encourages multi-state collaboration and cooperation to educate, plan, and support projects that increase and promote forest habitat for neotropical migratory birds in the heart of the Upper Mississippi River Basin. This will be accomplished through workshops, regional planning, and technical support for on the ground natural resource projects.

MN—Closing the Canopy in Metro Wildlife Corridors **Metro Wildlife Corridors Partnership—$50,000**

The Metro Wildlife Corridors is a collaborative of public and non-profit organizations that work to acquire and restore the network of regionally significant habitat for fish, wildlife, and native plant communities in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area by restoring forest habitat or linking regionally significant forests. Invasive species will be controlled and native forest species re-established providing food and cover for priority neotropical migratory and forest bird species.

MN—Managing Private Forests for Songbirds **Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy—$24,800**

The 535 acres of woodlands of the Audubon Northwood facility are managed for enhanced bird and wildlife habitat, ecological restoration, recreation, and education. The grant will support management goals for white oak and white pine regeneration and monitoring for bird population responses. Training and cost-share funds will be provided to forestry professionals for developing and implementing certified forest management plans focusing on forest sustainability for wildlife habitat.

WI—Driftless Area Forest Stewardship Initiative **Southwest Badger RC&D Council—$48,500**

The Driftless Area Forest Stewardship Initiative will increase the amount of private forest land in the Driftless Area under forest management reducing forest fragmentation, improving forest health, and educating landowners about the importance of forest lands in bird conservation. The Driftless Area encompasses three counties in SW Wisconsin. *Partners in Flight* has identified the Driftless Area as having particularly high potential for conserving and enhancing wildlife habitat values.