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Major restoration at Lower Drummond Prairie complete

Wetlands Initiative and U.S. Forest Service partner to restore rare habitat

CHICAGO (March 16, 2010)--Major restoration of 109 acres of rare wetland and prairie habitat at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie has been completed under an award-winning public-private partnership that gathers private funds and technical expertise to help restore public lands.

The Wetlands Initiative, a Chicago-based conservation organization, recently completed its two-year commitment to raise \$300,000 and provide technical expertise for restoration at the U.S. Forest Service's Lower Drummond Restoration Project, one of four sites at Midewin that the Initiative and the Forest Service have worked to restore together.

Midewin, approximately 55 miles south of Chicago, was established as the nation's first tallgrass prairie in 1996 after the U.S. Army decommissioned the Joliet Arsenal at the site. When the arsenal was first established in 1940, it was considered the largest and most sophisticated munitions plant in the nation. Millions of tons of TNT were produced at the plant.

Today Midewin is one of the nation's largest efforts to reverse the loss of its historic prairie and wetland ecosystems. In the future, the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie will have more than 19,000 acres of restored native habitat.

At the Lower Drummond Project, the Initiative and Forest Service staff restored dolomitic wetlands and prairies—rare habitats that form where thin soils cover dolomitic limestone.

"There is very little of this dolomitic prairie-wetland left in the world, because it is an extremely rare habitat and much of it has been destroyed," said Sullivan.

Prior to restoration, the area had been drained to support row crops and pasture and then abandoned. The resulting landscape was full of agricultural weeds and invasive species.

"A 25-foot-wide ditch cut through a deep water prairie-wetland complex, draining the area of all water," said Gary Sullivan, senior restoration ecologist at the Wetlands Initiative. "To restore the natural hydrology, we filled the ditch and broke miles of tile. These areas now hold water, and wetland vegetation is flourishing and expanding."

Key restoration activities included re-establishing natural hydrology, removing invasive species, and installing more than 100 species of native plants by planting plugs and spreading seeds. Other species

will re-establish themselves, Sullivan said, as seeds spread naturally or sprout from the dormant seedbank.

The newly-restored habitat at Lower Drummond is expected to support the federally endangered leafy prairie clover. The rare plant has been grown elsewhere on the Midewin property and can now be re-established at the Lower Drummond site.

“The Wetlands Initiative has been a key partner in restoration work at Midewin,” said Wade Spang, prairie supervisor at Midewin. Their contributions have helped restore areas that the Forest Service would not have been able to restore alone.”

The Lower Drummond Project was supported by grants from the Grand Victoria Foundation, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service, Alliance Pipeline, the Dow Chemical Company Foundation, Enbridge Energy Company, Chicago Wilderness, and the Ecolab Foundation.

With the completion of work at Lower Drummond, the Initiative finishes its third Midewin project. The other two—the Blodgett Road and the South Patrol Road sites—total more than 800 acres of wetlands and prairies.

This spring, the Initiative-Forest Service partnership will continue restoration at a fourth project, called the Grant Creek Restoration Project. The 634-acre project will connect previous restoration areas.

“With the Grant Creek project, we’ll bring together new and previously restored habitat to create one of the largest collections of dolomitic wetland-prairie habitats in Illinois,” said Gary Sullivan, TWI’s senior ecologist. “This will provide critical habitat for many of the 32 rare and sensitive species at Midewin, some of which are endangered.”

Many areas of Midewin are open to the public. Visitors can enjoy more than 22 miles of open trails, escorted tours, volunteer events, and deer and turkey hunting. The Forest Service’s Welcome Center is located at 30239 S. Route 53 in Wilmington. For more information, visit [www. fs.fed.us/mntp](http://www.fs.fed.us/mntp).

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The Wetlands Initiative is a Chicago-based nonprofit organization founded in 1994 and dedicated to restoring the wetland resources of the Midwest to improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat and biodiversity, and reduce flood damage.