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WMI Outdoor News Bulletin

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Aquatic Nuisance Species and Predator-Prey workshops at North American Conference:

Considerable interest is being generated for the **Communicating Effectively about Aquatic Nuisance Species** and **Predators and Prey: Integrating Management to Achieve Conservation Objectives** workshops on Monday, March 19, and Tuesday, March 20, respectively, at the 72nd North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, in Portland, Oregon.

Because of spatial limitations at both workshops, it is very important that prospective participants notify the workshop planners of the intention to attend. *A limit on the number of*

participants may need to be imposed, so interested persons should notify the planner of each of intention to attend, as soon as possible.

For the Aquatic Nuisance Species workshop, the planner is Amber Pairis, apairis@fishwildlife.org.

For the Predators and Prey workshop, the planner is Bob Byrne, bbyrne@sci-dc.org.

For information about the workshops and other meetings, sessions and events at the 72nd North American, go to www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org.

Ruffed grouse have a plan:

After three years of work by more than 50 natural resource professionals in the United States and Canada, the Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan for North America has been completed, reports the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI). The Plan is designed to provide wildlife and habitat managers' with guidance on how much grouse habitat is needed within ruffed grouse range to stabilize grouse numbers at 1980 levels. The Plan complements the other bird conservation planning efforts accomplished under the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

"The ruffed grouse is one of North America's most widely distributed upland game birds and is hunted annually by approximately 1 million sportsmen and women," said Dan Dessecker of the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS). "The Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan is intended to help secure a bright future for this incredible bird and the hunters who pursue it with such passion."

The ruffed grouse is a so-called "edge species," and is found primarily in early successional deciduous and mixed-forest habitats.

The Plan documents trends in ruffed grouse populations and habitats between 1980 and the present, and it outlines management recommendations to maintain populations and habitats at 1980 levels. Farm abandonment throughout much of the eastern United States in the early- to mid-20th Century may have allowed ruffed grouse populations to reach densities higher than historical norms during this period. Therefore, 1980 was selected as the base year because it likely represents a point in time when abandoned lands had moved beyond the early successional stage.

The authors of the Plan were challenged by the absence of a range-wide population monitoring database for ruffed grouse. Instead, the Plan bases grouse population estimates on the availability of forest habitats and expected grouse densities to be found in those habitats. Because of the consistency used by the planners in estimating grouse populations, comparisons were available between regions and between time periods.

Results of this comparison show that ruffed grouse numbers are relatively stable in the Great Lakes states but declining throughout much of the eastern United States, as eastern forests mature. On the other hand, substantial increase in young forests through harvest of mature forests in portions of eastern Canada have likely led to increases in ruffed grouse populations on these landscapes.

Ruffed grouse are not as numerous in the West as in the East, but are found there primarily in aspen and other deciduous forest land. The vast, hillside, coniferous forests of the West support ruffed grouse at relatively low population densities. Due in part to recent large-scale fires throughout the western U.S. and Canada, the amount of early successional forest habitat has increased there and, so too, have ruffed grouse.

At the northern edge of the species' range in Alaska, ruffed grouse populations appear to be reasonably stable. Here, too, recent wildfires have created vast areas of young forest, some of which are developing into quality ruffed grouse habitat.

In total, disregarding the regional differences in population trends, the estimated range-wide ruffed grouse population has increased from 3.6 million in the 1980s to 3.7 million in 2005.

One issue affecting the ability of wildlife management agencies to outline and implement ruffed grouse conservation strategies effectively is a lack of basic information on ruffed grouse populations in some regions. Few states or provinces annually gather data on spring breeding populations, reproductive success, and hunter effort and harvest. These informational gaps complicate efforts to assess accurately grouse population response to changes in habitat conditions or hunting regulations.

The Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan clearly outlines the relationship between ruffed grouse and young forests. It also reveals serious ramifications to ruffed grouse numbers if young forest habitats are eliminated or allowed to mature in some regions. Other bird conservation planning efforts, such as the American Woodcock Conservation Plan, the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative and those for songbirds, carry the same message. Only by providing a full array of managed forest habitats, from early succession to old-growth, can the needs of all forest wildlife be met.

Financial support for development of the Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Ruffed Grouse Society, Wildlife Management Institute, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The Plan was edited by Dan Dessecker, RGS, Gary Norman of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and Scot Williamson, WMI.

The Plan may be viewed or downloaded at www.ruffedgrousesociety.org. For more information, contact Dan Dessecker, RGS, at 715-234-8302. (sjw)

Cellulose may soon take the starch out of ethanol:

With unprecedented growth in demand for corn to produce ethanol and for soybeans to produce biodiesel fuel, prices being paid for both commodities are approaching record levels. High demand and prices for these row crops could result in the reduction of farmland acres devoted to wildlife habitat, according to the Wildlife Management Institute.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated that the amount of corn used to make ethanol will increase 34 percent, to 2.15 billion bushels, in the marketing year that began September 1, 2006. In addition, the agency predicted a 17-percent increase in the use of vegetable oils for fuels, including soybean oil, to 21.6 million tons during 2007.

While the temptation to cash in on these high commodity prices may be too much for some producers to resist, despite the cost to conservation and wildlife, corn and soybean-driven energy production is likely to be a fairly short-term phenomenon. According to a U.S. Energy Department report, if the nation's entire corn crop were devoted to energy production, it would only replace about 15 percent of the country's petroleum use.

In addition to this relatively low maximum potential, there are several other problems associated with large-scale use of corn and soybeans for energy production. First, conversion of wildlife habitat and conservation cover crops to row crops will have adverse impacts on wildlife and water quality. Second, diversion of these crops from the nation's food supply to energy production very likely would drive up the cost of food. Third, corn ethanol and soybean biodiesel production are carbon positive, i.e., their production adds carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, further contributing to global warming. And fourth, ethanol production from corn is not very efficient; it takes nearly as much energy to produce a unit of fuel from corn as is generated by the process. These shortcomings have some policy makers looking at other alternatives for renewable sources of energy.

One of the most promising options is to make ethanol from cellulose rather than from starch, which is the way ethanol currently is produced. The Institute of Agriculture at the University of Tennessee projects that the technology to produce cellulose-based ethanol on a commercially viable basis will be in place by 2012. Wood chips, switchgrass and mixtures of various grasses and forbs have all been promoted as feedstock for cellulose-based ethanol production.

Using cellulose to produce ethanol has a number of advantages over the current corn/starch-based process. For one thing, it would have less impact on the supply of grains and row crops that are the basis for the U.S. food supply. For another, it appears that cellulose-based ethanol production has the potential to be much more energy-conversion efficient than are starch-based operations. Scientists at Battelle Laboratory in Columbus, Ohio, found that net energy-conversion rates of switchgrass were nearly three times higher than those of corn for ethanol production.

In addition, there appears to be some significant advantages to a cellulose-based approach for wildlife and the environment. Researchers at the University of Minnesota demon-

strated that diverse mixtures of prairie flora planted on degraded agricultural lands are carbon negative. Prairie plants store more carbon in their roots and the soil than is released by the fossil fuels needed to grow and convert them to biofuels. The researchers also showed these prairie mixtures compared quite favorably to corn and monocultures of switchgrass in terms of bio-energy production on the degraded tracts of agricultural lands.

Using diverse stands of grasses and forbs on less than prime agricultural lands, coupled with wildlife-friendly management—such as leaving adequate stubble height after harvesting operations, to promote nesting the following spring—could be a relatively practical approach to addressing the country's energy needs in a way that enhances wildlife habitat rather than undermine hard-gained conservation practices in place. (pmr)

Proposal for year-round drilling on critical big game range gains momentum and contention:

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management has released a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) that would allow year-round drilling for energy resources on the Pinedale Anticline Project Area (PAPA) in Wyoming, reports the Wildlife Management Institute.

The SEIS is supplemental to a 2000 plan that addressed expected drilling on the area. PAPA is located southeast of the city of Pinedale and, according to BLM, contains an estimated 21 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The number of wells on public lands in the 12,278-acre area is expected to total about 4,399. Also, according to BLM, about 450 wells already have been drilled.

In the past, if a company desired to drill on public lands from November 15 to April 30—a critical time of the year for mule deer and pronghorn—federal regulations required a request for a waiver from BLM. Waivers often were granted, but year-round drilling on big game ranges has not been a common practice.

The SEIS outlines alternatives that would permanently allow for year-around drilling in certain areas and under specified conditions. The preferred alternative not only specifies certain areas where it could occur, but also where it would not occur. A core area defined by BLM ostensibly would control spatial disturbance of wells over time, maximizing development in some areas and minimizing it in other areas, especially in portions of big game crucial winter ranges.

Energy companies claim the seasonal restrictions on their access to drill sites on public land are not necessary and unduly limit the companies' ability to extract the energy resources. They further argue that concentrating drilling in the core area will leave more areas open and undisturbed for wildlife.

This prospect of year-round drilling on the PAPA has raised the ire of several environmental and conservation organizations. They contend that it is likely to further stress area big game animals already vulnerable to harsh weather conditions and the habitat limitations of existing wells and service roads. To make matters worse, those opposed to year-round drilling cite the region's protracted drought and poor forage conditions, which would only be exacerbated if the proposal is approved. Furthermore, they observe, BLM acknowledges in the SEIS that the proposals outlined in the document likely would have an adverse effect on wildlife.

To review the SEIS see: www.wy.blm.gov/nepa/pfodocs/anticline/seis/index.htm. Comments can be submitted electronically at WYMail_PAPA_YRA@blm.gov. Include "Pinedale Anticline SEIS" in the subject line. BLM is accepting comments on the SEIS until February 12, 2007. (lhc)

Reports of National Bison Range agreement demise prove to be greatly exaggerated:

Just 18 days after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) terminated its controversial agreement with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) to conduct management actions on Montana's National Bison Range Complex, Department of the Interior officials announced their intention to "reestablish a working relationship" between the two parties, reports the Wildlife Management Institute.

Following the requirements of the Tribal Self-Governance Act, the Service had entered into an Annual Funding Agreement (AFA) with the CSKT in 2005-2006 that turned over roughly half of the budget and staff positions at the Bison Range complex of national wildlife refuge lands for the CSKT to carry out biological (including habitat management), fire, maintenance and visitor-service programs.

The Service terminated the 18-month-old Bison Range AFA for reasons that included: (1) failure to comply with Service bison management standards; (2) failure to meet Service monitoring and reporting standards and protocols; (3) failure to complete biological study plans; (4) submission of biological reports with subjective conclusions not supported by data or literature review; (5) creation of a work environment characterized by harassing, offensive, intimidating and oppressive behavior on the part of CSKT employees; and (6) creation of unsafe conditions for Service and CSKT employees. The Service's action was strongly supported by many of the nation's leading conservation organizations.

Deputy Secretary of the Interior Lynn Scarlett, Service Director Dale Hall, and Associate Deputy Interior Secretary Jim Cason announced that they envision establishing a new AFA with the CSKT for Fiscal Year 2007 that contains substantially the same terms as the 2005-2006 agreement. At the same time, they agreed that any plans to attempt to phase in full tribal management of the refuge lands should be suspended.

Scarlett, Hall and Cason also said that they had agreed to: (1) draft a National Bison Range operations plan that will clearly spell out the mission, goals, objectives and tasks envisioned for the Bison Range for the next five years; (2) continue acting on Equal Employment Opportunity complaints that have been filed by Service employees and seek appropriate personal relief for legitimate grievances; (3) retain an ombudsman to work at the Bison Range to assist senior Interior officials with identification and resolution of any problems or conflicts related to management and operation of the range; and (4) undertake the drafting of a decision document that would critically examine all long-term options for the most effective management of the range.

Conservation groups maintain that flaws in the 2005-2006 AFA threaten to continue to cripple administration of the National Bison Range lands and provide a template for future agreements that would be damaging to the National Wildlife Refuge System as a whole. They have urged the release for public review and comment of a draft Service policy on AFAs to ensure that any future agreements with tribal governments successfully complement the mission and purposes of individual refuges and the entire National Wildlife Refuge System. (rpd)

76th (2011) North American Conference slated:

The Westin Crown Center Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri, will host the 76th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, officially from March 15 to 18, 2011.

The 76th Conference will feature celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Wildlife Management Institute, founded in 1911 (first, as the American Game Protective and Propagation Association), and the administrator of the annual North American Conference since its inception in 1915.

The North American was last held in Kansas City in March 1983. It is indelibly remembered by veteran attendees for its banquet entertainment—most notably the entire drum and bugle corps of the Kansas City Marching Cobras in the ballroom of the Radisson (now Marriott) Muehlbach Hotel. The otherwise-celebrated Cobras reportedly will still be performing in 2011...but not at the 76th Conference.

Just last month, the site of the 75th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference was announced—Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for the official dates of March 23-26, 2010.

Moguls may preempt habitat for threatened lynx:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is reviewing public comments on a proposal that would permit the development of a private ski resort on lands overlapping valuable lynx habitat on and around Battle Mountain near Minturn, Colorado, reports the Wildlife Management Institute.

The Ginn Company, a private Florida-based real estate developer, plans to construct a luxury resort, skiing area and 1,700 housing units on recently purchased lands that include several thousand acres of mature spruce and fir forest plus shoreline along both sides of the Eagle River. The development would impact approximately 4,800 acres surrounded by the Eagles Nest and Holy Cross wilderness areas.

A notice issued by the Service in the *Federal Register* in November 2006 announced that, in conjunction with the Ginn Company, it would be (and currently is) gathering necessary information to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) of the proposed development site. Four species are slated to be included in the HCP—bald eagle, slender moonwort, boreal toad and lynx. Lynx were reintroduced to Colorado in 1999 and are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Local conservation organizations contend that the development would eliminate an important wildlife corridor between the wilderness areas that provide critical habitat for lynx and other species. According to the November *Federal Register* notice, the Service will consider the option of granting the Ginn Company an Incidental Take Permit. Issuance of such a permit would cover any incidental lynx death associated with the construction and management of the resort, including increased traffic on Interstate 70 (I-70) and Colorado Highway 24.

"We are very concerned with how the potential increase in traffic would impact lynx and other wildlife," said Julia Kintsch, program director for the Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project. Her conservation organization currently monitors wildlife use of I-70 underpasses just north of the proposed Battle Mountain development site. Kintsch explained that the development could produce a "barrier effect"—fragmenting habitat within extant home ranges of lynx and other wide-ranging wildlife.

Possible mitigation strategies proposed for the Battle Mountain HCP include, "(1) creation of suitable winter forage habitat for lynx; (2) designing and implementing a traffic management plan to address increased vehicular traffic; (3) creating a fund for habitat protection and enhancement opportunities in the Eagle River Basin; and (4) financial support of Canada lynx reintroduction programs by the Colorado Division of Wildlife."

A draft of the EIS for the HCP will likely be available for public review sometime this spring. To examine the FWS notice of intent in the *Federal Register*, visit www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-IMPACT/2006/November/Day-14/i19142/htm. (mcd)

WMI launches new Website:

The Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) has launched its new Website, still located at www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org. The contemporary look is more straightforward and easier to navigate. As the WMI mission statement indicates: "Although methods of operation have changed since the Institute's inception, the objectives remain essentially the same." The new Website, produced with the considerable assistance of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, is one of those changed operational methods. It was undertaken to improve WMI delivery of useful, user-friendly information to the benefit of wildlife resources, its professional management and responsible uses.

On the Website is timely information about the 72nd North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, March 20-24, 2007, in Portland, Oregon. The information will be updated weekly or so until the event in March.

Also offered are important links to several programs that WMI participates in, such as the Mule Deer Working Group and the Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow Program. As before, the latest "Outdoor News Bulletin" and issues for the past year are accessible. And the most recent information on WMI publications is available. Several Webpages are still under construction, but scheduled for completion soon.

Please feel free to offer your feedback to the Webmaster [info@wildlifemgt.org]. (jr)

Worth reading:

I normally don't pay much attention to testimonial puffery on the covers of books, but of John Vaillant's *The Golden Spruce* (2005), one reviewer wrote: "Absolutely spellbinding." I can't improve on that assessment. If you so much as peruse the Prologue, you will finish the book soon thereafter.

Also on the jacket of this book is the subtitle: "A Story of Myth, Madness and Greed." That's overblown. This book actually is a story of theft.

The protagonist of this masterfully knitted work is a 300-year-old, 165-foot tall, infertile, one-in-a-billion, improbably chlorotic, perfectly conformed Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis aurea*), K'iid K'iyaas, the famed "ooh-ahh" tree of Haida Gwai (the Misty Isles), better known as the Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia. Haida Gwai is "the Place of the People"—native Haida, and more precisely, the Tsiij git'anee clan. The golden, nearly luminescent spruce grew in a coniferous jungle near a bank of the Yakoun River on Graham Island, home until 1908 of Dawson's caribou, the only rainforest dwellers of its species and now-extinct victims of a tapped-out sea otter economy and the juggernaut of Eurasian "civilization."

The book's main antagonist is a logger, timber cruiser, surveyor, logging road builder, indefatigable eccentric described by friends as helpful and a "hell of a nice guy," and described by himself as cynical. His name is Grant Hadwin and, for reasons complex and convoluted, he stole the mythology, symbolism and "reassuring constant" of the "perpetual tree," venerated by the Haida, marveled by other locals, and protected by the various timber interests that, over time, held logging rights to its surrounding forest.

But there are other antagonists. Most noteworthy among them are loggers—the fallers, chokermen, whistlepunks, donkey punchers, high riggers, gyppos, bush apes and caulk-booted others of the dangerous trade. At the urging of their employers and with government sanction, these mostly fearless, somewhat fatalistic and rarely circumspect sawyers reduced much of the islands' and interior blanketing of huge and ancient Douglas-fir and spruce to stump-riddled and eroded clearcuts. Another is the logging profession—the "terrestrial whaling" culture and its tradition of unsentimentally pragmatic forest clearing for wood products, convenience and short-term security. Another is capitalism, which has myopically traded off the diversity and "soul" of old-growth forests for alleged cutting efficiency and cost effectiveness. And yet another antagonist is the genetic wiring of the human mind, evolving or devolving conscience across the line of no-return, self-righteous zealotry, paranoia and demonism.

The Golden Spruce is far more than "a work of nonfiction." It is an intricate, 256-page web of history, dendrology, ethnology, forestry, meteorology, conservation, oceanography, environmentalism and aberrant psychology. It is a tragedy of a lost symbol, a lost soul, a lost landscape, of multidimensional theft and of what the Haida called "gagiid."

This is John Vaillant's first book, but he is no amateur scribe. Readers are likely to find a style mindful of the topics and literary skills of Robert Pike, Jared Diamond and Jack Olsen. But there is something else of unique intrigue in the narrative. In its meticulous reconstruction, the author's objectivity seems to flag under the weight of the factors of apostasy that very likely made a thief of Grant Hadwin. Fascinating stuff..."entirely spellbinding."

The Golden Spruce, winner of the Governor-General Literary Award for Nonfiction, is available in paperback for $14.95 from W.W. Norton and Company (www.wwnorton.com).

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